Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center
Thurgood Marshall College Fund

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Advancing America's Research Enterprise

A National Assessment of Research Capacity and Future Readiness at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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The Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) is America's largest organization exclusively representing the Black College community since 1987. TMCF is a charitable, non-profit (501(c)(3)) corporation and membership organization whose membership consists of all our nation's publicly supported bachelor's degree-granting Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), nine associate degree-granting Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs), four private HBCUs, three Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) and one technical college. TMCF's membership also includes 38 Historically Black Graduate Institutions (HBGIs), six law schools, two medical schools, six pharmacy schools, and one veterinary school. TMCF represents and supports over 375,000 students attending its 57 member schools, positioning TMCF as a leading advocate and resource for the public HBCU ecosystem.

The Thurgood Marshall College Fund significantly impacts students' lives by offering a comprehensive pathway from high school to career. TMCF's efforts are particularly crucial given the unique challenges Historically Black College and University students may encounter. Through various programs and support systems, TMCF transforms the lives of thousands of students annually, making a substantial difference in the educational and professional landscape by fostering academic excellence, leadership development, and career readiness. Our work directly contributes to building a diverse and skilled national workforce.

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The Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center (Payne Center) at Thurgood Marshall College Fund conducts rigorous, evidence-based research and develops innovative programs to address systemic challenges, inform policy discussions, and improve outcomes for populations facing barriers to opportunity. The Payne Center is dedicated to developing sustainable solutions to societal challenges through collaboration with diverse stakeholders. It generates research-driven strategies and interventions to address societal issues, with a focus on the unparalleled contributions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Advancing America's Research Enterprise is the eighth publication of the Payne Center, reflecting our commitment to providing actionable insights that strengthen public HBCUs and, by extension, the nation. Our research provides the empirical foundation for understanding the critical role public HBCUs and their presidents play in securing America's future.

Researching Solutions, Empowering Change.

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Executive Summary

As the United States advances as a global leader in scientific innovation, there remains an opportunity to better align resources with its highest priorities (National Science Board, 2026). This report contributes to that effort by offering a clearer understanding of how to strengthen institutional capacity and impact moving forward. It presents findings from an original, nationally administered survey assessing research readiness across a network of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), highlighting key challenges, assets, and opportunities for growth. *Advancing America's Research Enterprise* asserts that HBCUs are engines of innovation and catalysts for advancement in American science.

This comprehensive national assessment, conducted by the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center at the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) and funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), examines the research capacity and future readiness across 44 four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities and three Predominantly Black Institutions, including the highest research-classified institutions in this sector, as reflected in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (American Council on Education, 2025). These 47 institutions include public non-Land-Grant universities, public 1890 Land-Grant institutions, and a small number of private institutions — each contributing distinctively to the national research enterprise (see Appendix). Additionally, the institutions represented in this report span five U.S. regions and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These institutions are, by affiliation, primarily member institutions of TMCF, and demonstrate high research ability and national potential.

The findings of *Advancing America's Research Enterprise* build on a flagship publication, *The American Dividend: Public HBCUs Powering National Strength and Opportunity* (Brown et al., 2025). The 47 institutions assessed in this report are strategic national assets already generating an outsized "American Dividend" through research productivity, STEM workforce development, and economic mobility.

These institutions secure more than $843 million in annual federal research funding, including a minimum of $143 million from the National Science Foundation (NSF). However, even among these high-performing Historically Black Colleges and Universities, research institutions remain comparatively underfunded, indicating significant opportunity for NSF to further expand its investment and impact. As a result, this report serves as an investment prospectus based on clear evidence of opportunity. The data show that targeted, strategic investment in these institutions is not charity; it is a matter of national self-interest that can yield measurable returns for the country.

This report provides the evidence and clear, actionable insights for federal agencies, policymakers, philanthropies, institutional leaders, and other stakeholders to unlock that potential.

INTRODUCTION: A MANDATE FOR LEADERSHIP

In April 2025, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14283, establishing the "White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at HBCUs." This executive action signified a formal, presidential recognition that HBCUs are strategic national assets. As the nation's leading organization representing public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) plays a central role in advancing this national imperative. This report, *Advancing America's Research Enterprise*, further fulfills a core part of that mandate.

It is a rigorous, data-driven assessment of the 47 institutions in this study (see Appendix), a sample that includes four-year public and private HBCUs forming the core of this distinct research enterprise. This study, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), provides a precise, institution-specific analysis of research-ready capacity. It offers a data-informed response to the question: what is the current state of research infrastructure at the institutions best positioned to contribute most? It also helps identify the targeted investments needed to unlock these institutions' full potential for the nation.

The 47 institutions assessed in this report include some of the nation's most research-ready HBCUs, as reflected in their Carnegie classifications, alongside institutions with significant potential for continued research capacity development.

The institutions surveyed here do not represent the full HBCU ecosystem of 101 federally designated institutions. While all but one of these schools are affiliated with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, they are included in this analysis based on demonstrated research capacity, readiness, and national potential rather than organizational membership. Additionally, affiliated Predominantly Black Institutions were included because of their demonstrated and emerging research capacity. Where data from these institutions align with or diverge from broader patterns in the HBCU landscape, those relationships are noted throughout the report. However, the primary purpose of this report is to provide the most accurate and actionable portrait of institutions positioned for immediate growth.

The findings presented here are not abstract. They serve as a strategic guide, detailing both the extraordinary achievements and the specific structural barriers facing the institutions that form the backbone of the HBCU research enterprise. This report makes the compelling, evidence-based case that investing in these HBCUs is the most direct and effective path for federal government agencies to realize the promise of Executive Order 14283 and acknowledge the high-yield contributions afforded by Historically Black Colleges and Universities participating in rigorous science-centered research.

RESEARCH-READY HBCUs: A FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL STRENGTH

Our analysis is anchored in the "American Dividend" framework established by Brown et al. (2025), which reframes the conversation around HBCU investment from a deficit-based narrative to a rigorous, asset-based analysis of what America gains from its public HBCUs. The institutions in this assessment are the primary engines of this dividend. While the sample in this report includes both public and private HBCUs, as well as Predominantly Black Institutions, the findings and implications presented here both reinforce and extend the broader themes outlined in the *American Dividend*.

Educational Access and Workforce Development

HBCUs are the nation's premier engines of upward mobility for underrepresented populations. They enroll hundreds of thousands of students from diverse backgrounds and graduate a disproportionate share of the nation's future STEM professionals. HBCUs overall serve over 375,000 students with tuition averaging far below the national average (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2004-2023). Over 60% of HBCU students receive Pell Grants (NCES, 2023a). HBCUs provide the undergraduate foundation for 30% of first-generation Black STEM Ph.D. recipients at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Einaudi et al., 2022; Upton & Tanenbaum, 2014). These institutions are the primary pipeline for a diverse and essential national workforce.

Economic Mobility and National Strength

The economic returns on HBCU investment are profound and documented. Nearly 70% of HBCU graduates achieve middle-class or above (Castillo, 2023; Nathenson et al., 2019). Some 53% experience upward social mobility — a rate 50% higher than graduates of Predominantly White Institutions (Nathenson et al., 2019). HBCUs generate over 136,000 jobs both on- and off-campus, providing substantial regional and national economic impact (Leadership Brainery, 2025; McClendon et al., 2024).

Research and Innovation

The over $843 million in annual federal funding secured by the 47 institutions in this assessment represents the baseline level of federal research investment currently supporting their work. These institutions conduct critical research in areas of national priority including health disparities, advanced manufacturing, climate resilience, and cybersecurity. They are already classified as Research Colleges and Universities or higher at notable rates, forming a strong foundation for further growth. However, with more strategic and appropriately aligned funding allocations from federal agencies, these national priority areas could be significantly expanded, enabling these institutions to scale their research capacity and deepen their impact on solving national challenges.

Public HBCUs serve nearly 80% of all HBCU students but receive significantly less federal funding per student than private HBCUs (Brown et al., 2025). The average reported public HBCU endowment in 2024 ($41 million) was nearly one-third that of private HBCUs ($133 million), despite serving three times as many undergraduate students (CollegeNet, 2024). A substantial majority of the institutions surveyed here are producing substantial research outputs within this constrained resource environment. This efficiency is remarkable; however, it also represents a massive national opportunity. The forthcoming recommendations are uniquely applicable to the participating institutions represented in this study. Every dollar strategically invested in these institutions' research infrastructure will generate a disproportionately high national return. This is a solvable imbalance that can be addressed through strategically aligned investment in public research-ready institutions.

Assessing America's Research-Ready HBCUs

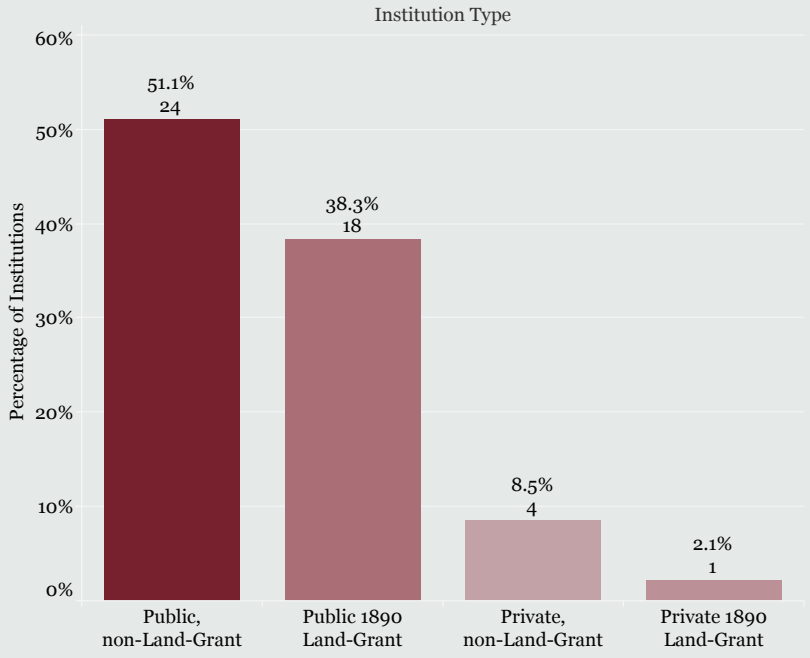
The findings from this focused, intentional, NSF-funded national assessment of 47 institutions identified the research capacity and potential of America's HBCUs. The study primarily focuses on research-active HBCUs with Carnegie research classifications, but not exclusively. The sample also includes HBCU institutions that have demonstrated clear intent to develop stronger research capacity, along with three Predominantly Black Institutions. While this report focuses on data from the Carnegie designated institutions, context from non-designated institutions helps clarify broader dynamics in the HBCU research ecosystem. The forthcoming recommendations are uniquely applicable to the participating institutions represented in this study.

Institutional Type

The diversity within this group of institutions reflects important variation in institutional structure and research capacity. To understand the distinct needs, opportunities, and strategic potential of identified research-ready institutions, the data is disaggregated by institutional type (see Figure I-1). This distribution provides a clearer picture of how research activity, capacity, and infrastructure are organized across these institutions.

Figure I-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Institutional Type



Public, Non-Land-Grant Institutions (51.1%)

These 24 institutions represent the traditional model of the public HBCU — state-supported universities combining teaching and research missions. They serve as cultural and economic anchors in their regions and include both major research universities and comprehensive regional institutions.

Public 1890 Land-Grant Universities (38.3%)

These 18 institutions (excluding Tuskegee University) carry a unique and legally defined federal mandate to conduct research and extension in agriculture, natural resources, and related fields. The 1890 designation provides specific access to USDA and other federal agricultural funding streams. This segment represents the largest concentration of mission-specific research expertise within the institutions assessed and includes some of the most research-intensive HBCU campuses in the nation.

Private Institutions (10.6%)

While small in number, the five private institutions add specialized research profiles of exceptional national significance. They include Howard University — the sector's sole R1 doctoral institution — Hampton University, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, Clark Atlanta University, and Tuskegee University, institutions with focused expertise in biomedical research, engineering, aerospace science, and professional graduate programs. These private HBCUs demonstrate that when investment and ambition converge, HBCU campuses rival the research output of any institution in the nation.

Carnegie Classifications

Research intensity, areas of focus, and student populations vary across institutions in this assessment, providing a clearer depiction of current capacity and future potential. Understanding this distribution is essential for designing targeted investments that reflect institutional differences rather than applying uniform approaches. As demonstrated in the data, HBCUs are not monolithic; while these institutions include a range of Carnegie Classification designations, all institutions demonstrate some level of research capacity, with many actively engaged in research development and others positioned for advancement into higher research activity categories. These distinctions are largely contingent upon the level and consistency of external support, including access to federal funding streams such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies, as previously noted. This variation enables more precise allocation of resources, ensuring that support is aligned with existing strengths, specific infrastructure needs, and pathways for scalable research growth.

It also helps identify where modest investments can yield outsized gains, particularly in strengthening research administration, expanding faculty capacity, and enhancing facilities. In addition, this level of granularity supports more effective prioritization of federal funding by distinguishing between institutions with established Carnegie Research Activity designations, those in earlier stages of research development, and those transitioning toward higher research intensity. The designation, while determined based on various components, improves the efficiency and impact of investment decisions and strengthens the overall effectiveness of the national research ecosystem.

Figure I-2

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Carnegie Research Activity Classification

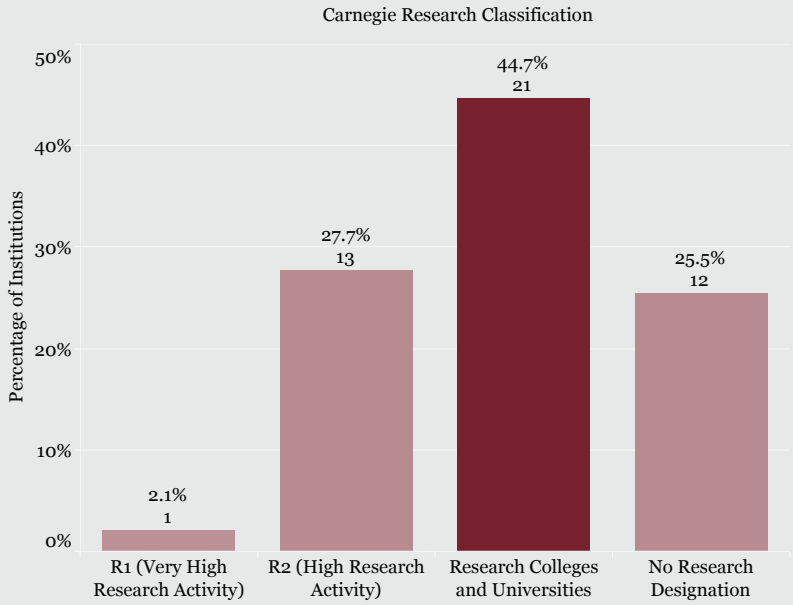


Figure I-3

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Carnegie Award Level Focus Classification

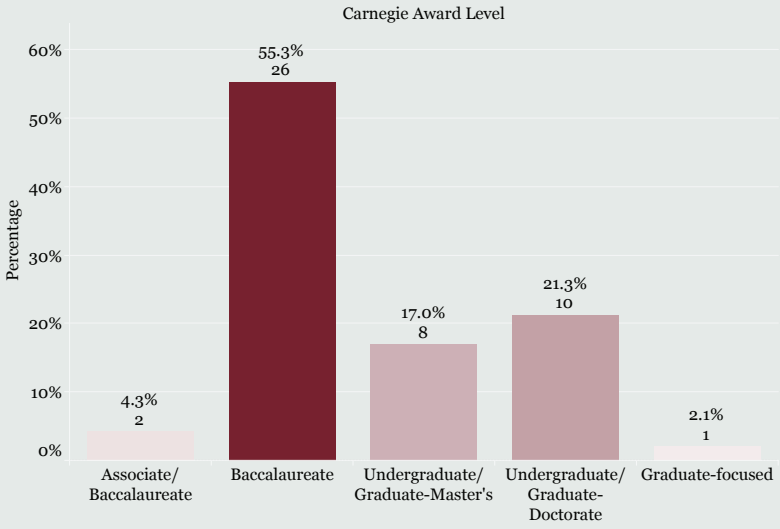
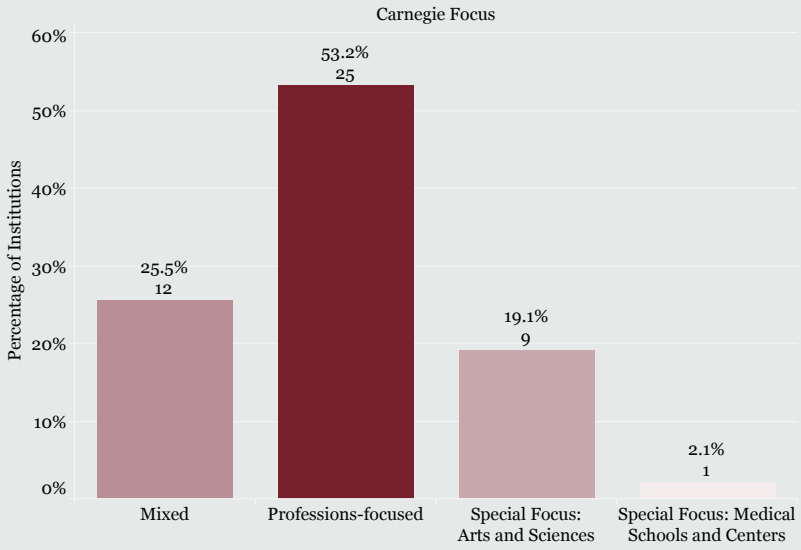


Figure I-4

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Carnegie Academic Focus Classification

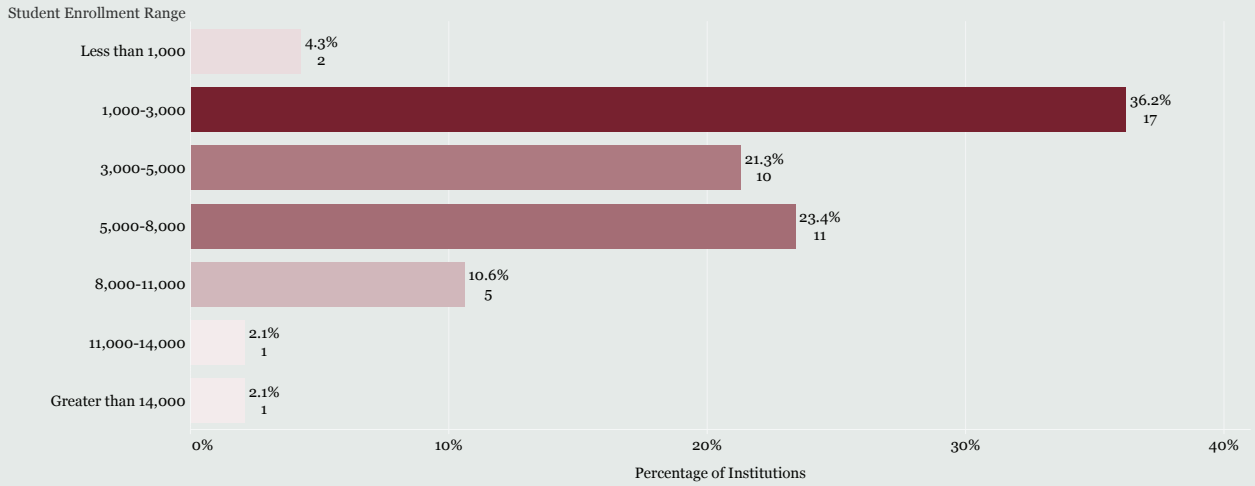


This data yields a critical strategic insight: among the institutions in this assessment, one holds an R1 designation and 13 hold R2 designations, indicating that HBCUs can achieve and sustain high levels of research activity when adequately resourced. Almost three-quarters (74.5%) of institutions are classified as Research Colleges and Universities or above, demonstrating substantial existing graduate program capacity, which is an essential precondition for research expansion. These institutions are not starting from zero; they are operating at significant research capacity already. Strategic investment designed to help mid-tier institutions advance their Carnegie Research Activity Classification would unlock significant, near-term national research capacity.

While useful, Carnegie Classification has methodological limitations when applied to the assessment of HBCUs. It relies on measures such as total research spending, doctoral degree production, and faculty research output, which reflect structural funding and resource disparities described in this report. Many of the institutions assessed perform research that is characteristic of higher classifications, but they lack the metrics required for advancement because they lack adequate research administration, have insufficient faculty research time, and operate with infrastructure deficits. This is not a reflection of research capacity but rather a reflection of resource constraints, which strategic investment could significantly address.

Figure I-5

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Student Enrollment



Institutional Scale and Capacity

The institutions in this sample fall exclusively into either the Small (20 institutions, 42.6% of sample) or Medium (27 institutions, 57.4%) Carnegie Classification categories, but examining student populations more closely provides greater insight. About 80.9% of institutions serving 1,000–8,000 students occupy a strategic point of advantage for research development: large enough to support viable graduate programs and specialized research facilities, yet agile enough for rapid strategic pivots and institutional change. These relatively medium-sized institutions are often prime candidates for catalytic, targeted investment. Larger institutions (8,000+ students) benefit from their size, making research operations more efficient. However, they may require different investment strategies due to their complexity. Smaller institutions can develop powerful, focused research niches and leverage undergraduate research participation as a distinctive strength.

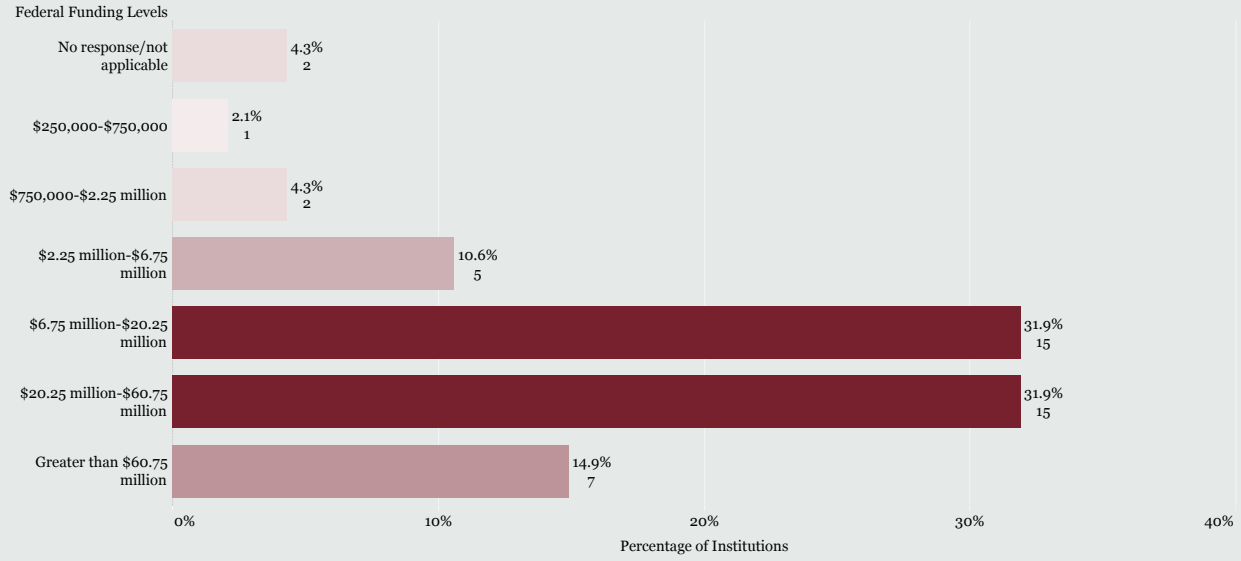
SECTION 1

The Federal Research Portfolio

The collective research power of the institutions in this assessment is not theoretical — it is empirical, measurable, and already delivering a substantial return for the nation. By conservative calculation, the 47 surveyed institutions secure at least $843 million in annual federal research funding. However, this funding is highly concentrated, and that concentration pattern reveals both a challenge and a massive strategic opportunity.

Figure 1-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Annual Federal Research Funding Level



The Concentration Pattern and Strategic Opportunity

The distribution of surveyed institutions by annual federal research funding level is presented in Figure 1-1. This figure illustrates a concentration of federal research funding within a relatively small number of institutions, revealing a steep internal funding hierarchy across the sample. The seven institutions in the top funding tier (receiving over $60.75M annually) represent only 15% of surveyed institutions but account for an estimated 50% of total federal research funding.

The institutions in the two highest funding tiers combined, those receiving $20.25M and above, account for approximately 86.5% of total federal research funding while comprising only 46.8% of respondents.

This concentration reflects how research capacity scales under sustained investment and adequate infrastructure. It demonstrates the level of output that is achievable when institutional conditions align with the requirements of competitive federal research funding. However, this level of performance is concentrated in a small number of institutions, pointing directly to the structural barriers documented in the sections that follow.

The real strategic opportunity lies in the 20 mid-tier institutions currently receiving between $2.25M and $20.25M annually. These institutions have already proven their federal competitiveness; they have active grants, engaged faculty, and research programs in motion. With targeted investment in research administration capacity and faculty support, they represent the single greatest opportunity to rapidly and substantially expand the nation's HBCU-led research enterprise in the near term.

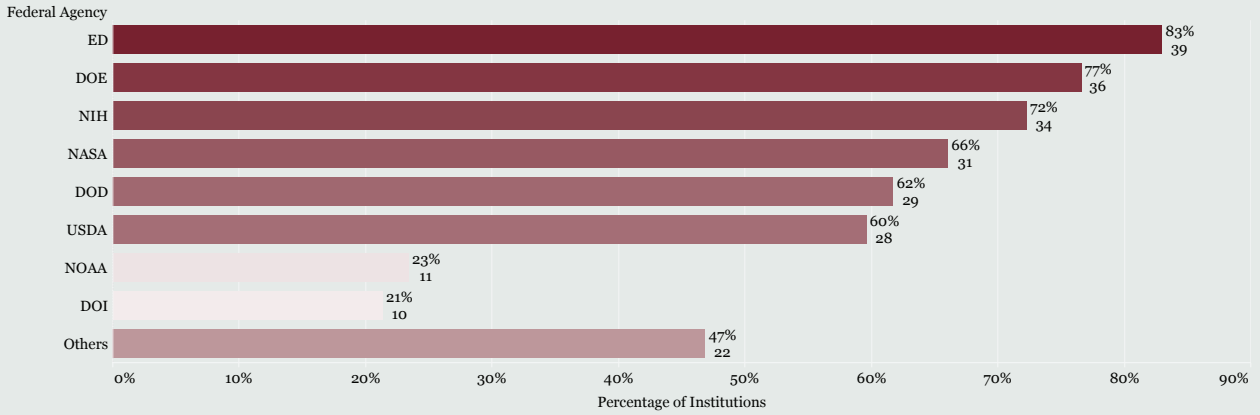
At the lower end of the spectrum, the three institutions receiving less than $2.25M annually represent a different set of challenges. They are predominantly smaller institutions or campuses earlier in their research development trajectory. Helping these institutions build foundational research capacity requires different strategies: focused research niche development, undergraduate research integration, strategic partnerships with larger institutions in this study, and intensive technical assistance in proposal development.

Federal Funding Sources: A Diversified Portfolio

The institutions in this assessment engage with the full spectrum of federal research agencies in addition to the National Science Foundation as will be discussed, demonstrating their broad relevance to national priorities well beyond any single domain.

Figure 1-2

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions with Active Grants or Contracts by Federal Agency



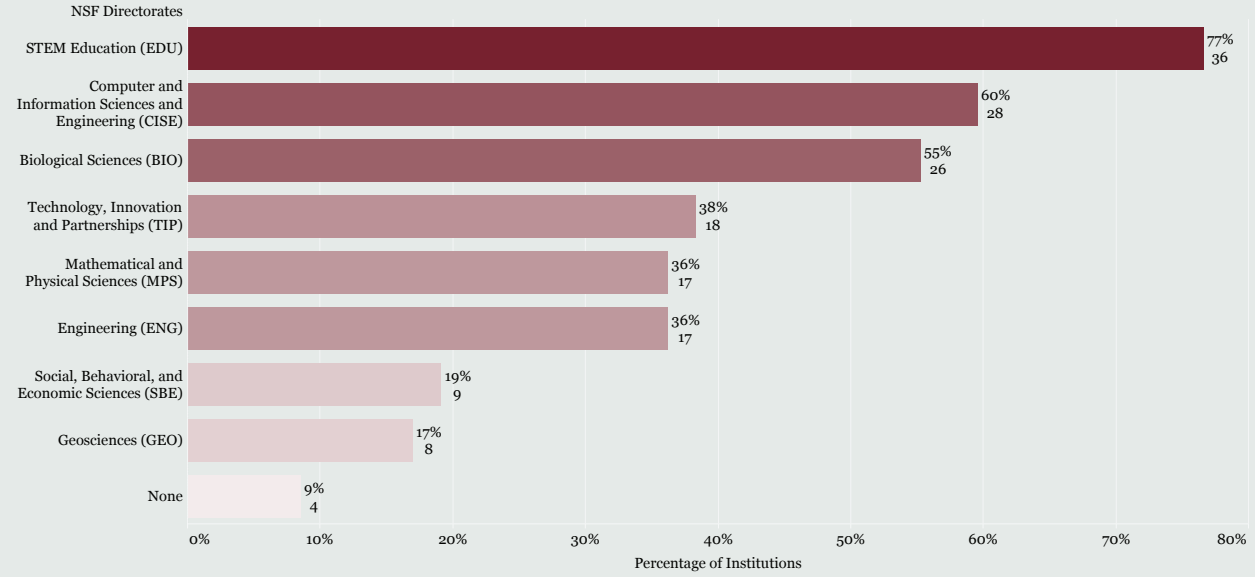
The high engagement with the Department of Education (ED) underscores the longstanding federal recognition of Historically Black Colleges and Universities' value in access, workforce development, and educational innovation. The strength in National Institutes of Health (NIH)–funded biomedical research, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) space and earth science missions, and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) agricultural research (concentrated particularly at the Public 1890 Land-Grant institutions in this study) showcases deep, mission-aligned expertise that is irreplaceable. The presence of Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Energy (DOE) funding further indicates growing capacity in defense-relevant and energy research. The geographic distribution of these institutions across all regions of the United States further positions them as vital anchors for distributed, regional innovation ecosystems.

NSF Directorates: Where HBCUs Excel and Opportunity Awaits

An analysis of the NSF directorates with which surveyed institutions reported engaging reveals both a clear concentration in critical areas of America's research enterprise and notable gaps that need to be addressed.

Figure 1-3

Prevalence of Active NSF Directorate Engagement by Surveyed Institutions



The data first and foremost highlight expertise in areas essential to the nation's current and future research excellence. More than three-quarters (77%) of surveyed institutions actively engage in STEM Education (EDU) research with NSF support—reflecting HBCUs' historic strength in and commitment to supporting generations of professionals who have been continuously underrepresented in these fields. While less prevalent, nearly three-fifths of institutions engage with NSF in Computer and Information Sciences and Engineering (CISE; 60%) and Biological Sciences (BIO; 55%), aligning with NSF's strategic priorities for advancing U.S. capabilities in computing and biological research. Further engagement in these key areas is certainly possible, but these schools are already addressing major national research priorities.

At the same time, this concentration reveals an opportunity for these institutions to diversify their NSF-supported research. The majority of the sample already engages with technology through computer sciences, but this can be enhanced and expanded—as evidenced by the more limited engagement with the Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP) directorate (38%). Similarly low levels of engagement appear in Engineering (ENG; 36%) and Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MPS; 36%), despite the strong emphasis on STEM Education (EDU) across most of these schools. The narrow scope of NSF-supported research is further underscored by the sparse connections in the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE; 19%) and Geosciences (GEO; 17%). These findings point to a clear path forward for these institutions and their supporters: diversify research portfolios, deepen collaboration with NSF, and strengthen institutional research activity.

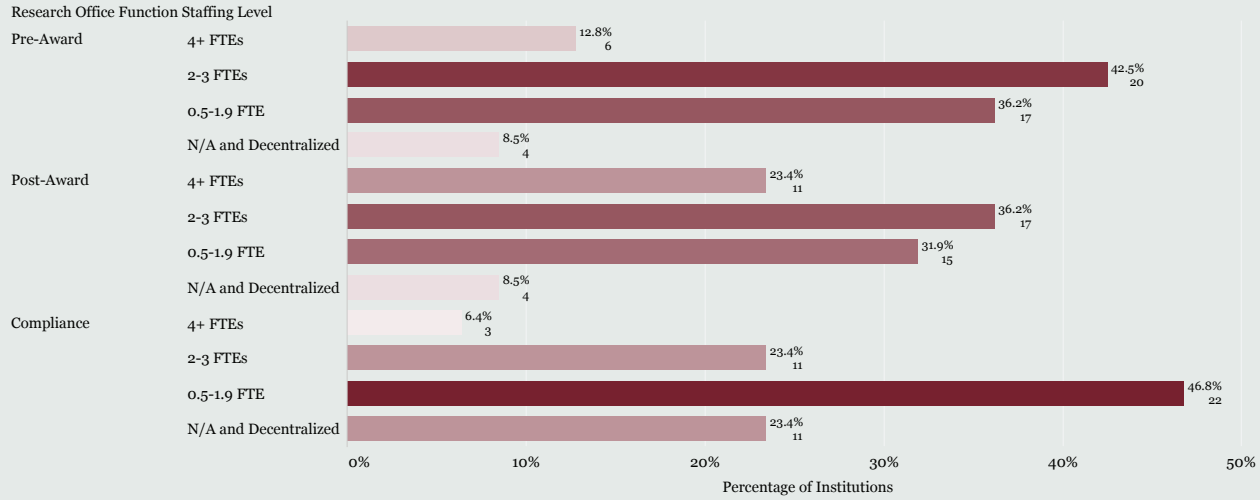
SECTION 2

The Research Administration Crisis

Of all the barriers limiting the research capacity of the institutions in this assessment, the crisis in research administration infrastructure is the most acute, the most consequential, and the most immediately addressable through targeted investment. At well-resourced research universities, sophisticated Offices of Sponsored Programs (OSPs) employ dozens of professionals with specialized expertise covering every aspect of the grant lifecycle, from opportunity identification and proposal development to post-award financial management, compliance, and reporting. At many of the institutions surveyed, the reality is starkly, damagingly different.

Figure 2-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Office of Sponsored Programs Staffing Levels



Research administration encompasses three critical and interdependent functions: Pre-Award (proposal development, budget preparation, sponsor communication, and submissions management); Post-Award (financial oversight, progress reporting, compliance documentation, and subrecipient management); and Compliance and Reporting (regulatory compliance, effort certification, audit preparation, federal reporting, and risk management) (Office of Management and Budget, 2023). All three functions are understaffed at most of the institutions in this study.

The data is alarming. In this study, 36.1% of assessed institutions operated with three or fewer research administrators irrespective of award stage. While considering the overlap in roles among respondents, the finding still reflects alarming structural constraints in research administration staffing. To understand the severity of this figure, consider that a single large federal grant can require dozens of hours of pre-award development and hundreds of hours of post-award management annually. An institution managing a portfolio of 50 active grants with two or three total research administration staff faces an operationally unsustainable workload. The consequences cascade throughout the research enterprise:

- **Pre-Award Crisis:** The data reveal 87.2% of the institutions in this study are operating with 3 or fewer pre-award FTEs, proposals are submitted with minimal editorial support, budgets are developed without specialized assistance, and funding opportunities across dozens of federal agencies are systematically missed because no one is tasked with monitoring them. The result is a direct suppression of proposal volume and competitiveness. This is a solvable crisis, and solving it is what it looks like when a nation invests in its own scientific future.
- **Post-Award Underutilization:** At many campuses, limited staff capacity for managing complex compliance requirements has measurable downstream effects: grants go underutilized, spending falls short of allowable rates, and subcontract administration suffers. This means that these institutions are not only securing less funding than their capacity would suggest — they are also not fully utilizing the funding they do secure.
- **Compliance Vulnerability:** The risk of audit findings, regulatory violations, and institutional liability is exceptionally high. With 93.6% of surveyed institutions reporting three or fewer compliance FTEs, and a striking 23.4% reporting decentralized compliance structures, these structural gaps present a significant regulatory oversight concern.

The resulting effects on research capacity are not a matter of institutional efficiency but a structural disadvantage that cannot be overcome through faculty dedication or institutional commitment alone. Addressing this crisis through dedicated, sustained funding for OSP staffing and systems must be the highest priority for any federal capacity-building investment in these institutions. This barrier is not fixed but the result of policy choices, and policy choices can be changed.

SECTION 3

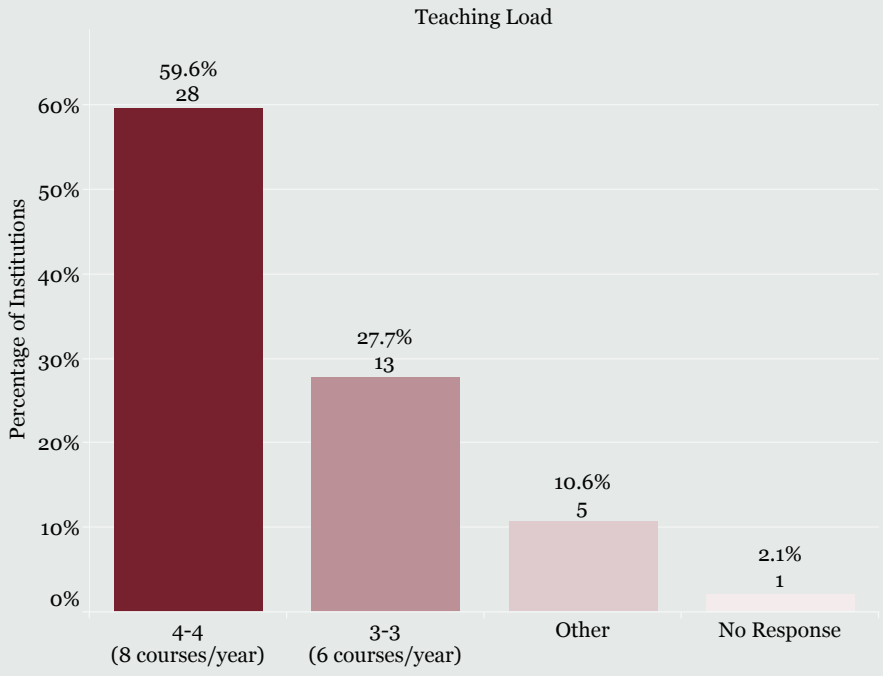
Faculty Capacity

The research findings reveal that faculty time is a fundamental resource for research. Research demands sustained intellectual engagement, creative problem-solving, experimental design and execution, data collection and analysis, manuscript preparation, grant proposal development, and mentoring of research students. All require substantial, uninterrupted time investment. Research productivity correlates directly with time available for research — a relationship documented across decades of higher education research and confirmed by every institution in this survey.

The teaching loads at the institutions in this assessment represent a systematic, documented barrier that directly and measurably suppresses research productivity. Research-intensive universities typically assign research faculty 2-2 or 2-1 teaching loads; however, most institutions have heavier loads.

Figure 3-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Average Teaching Load for STEM and Research Faculty

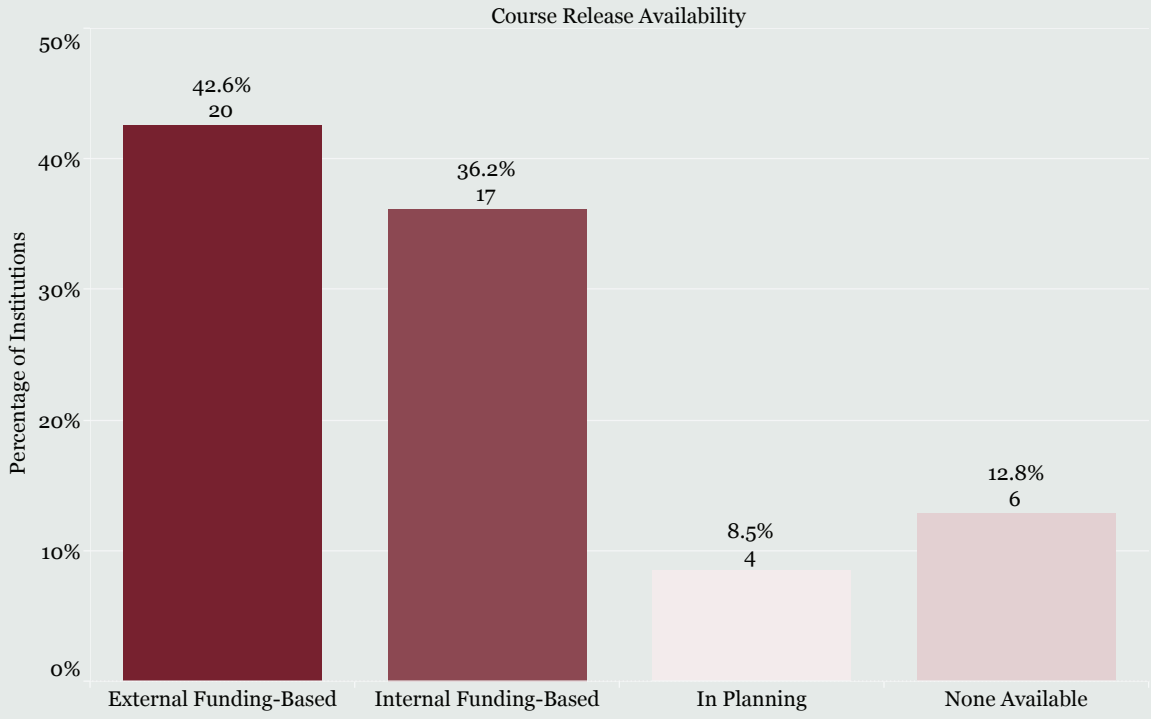


The finding is stark, and its implications cannot be understated: 87.3% of the institutions in this assessment have STEM and research faculty teaching 3-3 or 4-4 loads. Considering that teaching demands time and energy far beyond merely instructing, such as lesson planning, office hours, grading, and more, regularly teaching the 4-4 standard at 59.6% of these institutions would naturally and substantially eat away at any faculty member's capacity to engage in research, scholarship, and service. This is categorically insufficient for competitive federal grant activity, which requires sustained blocks of time for conceptualization, literature review, experimental work, data collection, writing, and revision.

This creates a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle that is one of the most powerful structural barriers in the HBCU research ecosystem: heavy teaching loads leave insufficient time to write competitive grant proposals; without funded grants, there are no external funds to buy out teaching time; without course releases, there is no time to write competitive proposals. The cycle perpetuates itself, and breaking it requires deliberate, sustained intervention. But make no mistake: this cycle can be broken. It requires only the will and the resources — and the return on that investment will be measured in discoveries, degrees, and decades of American scientific leadership.

Figure 3-2

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Course Buyout Policy Availability



While 78.8% of surveyed institutions report having formal course buyout or release policies, the existence of a policy does not translate into widespread utilization. Many institutions report that buyout rates are prohibitively high relative to grant budgets, that departmental culture discourages buyouts due to concerns about course coverage, or that the policies are available in principle but rarely implemented in practice. The gap between policy availability and actual utilization represents a critical implementation challenge that institutional leaders and federal funders must address directly.

The implications of these findings must be stated directly. At institutions where 3-3 and 4-4 teaching loads remain the norm, faculty research productivity is constrained not by commitment or talent, but by limited time to sustain competitive research activity. The resulting imbalance is not simply a workload issue; it is a structural barrier that restricts proposal development, publication, graduate mentorship, and long-term research growth. While course release mechanisms exist at some institutions, the data suggest they are often insufficiently resourced or unevenly implemented to address this challenge at scale. Addressing faculty capacity through sustained support for teaching load reduction and protected research time must therefore be understood as a core priority in any comprehensive research capacity-building strategy. This constraint is not immutable; it can be addressed through coordinated action in policy, funding, and institutional practice.

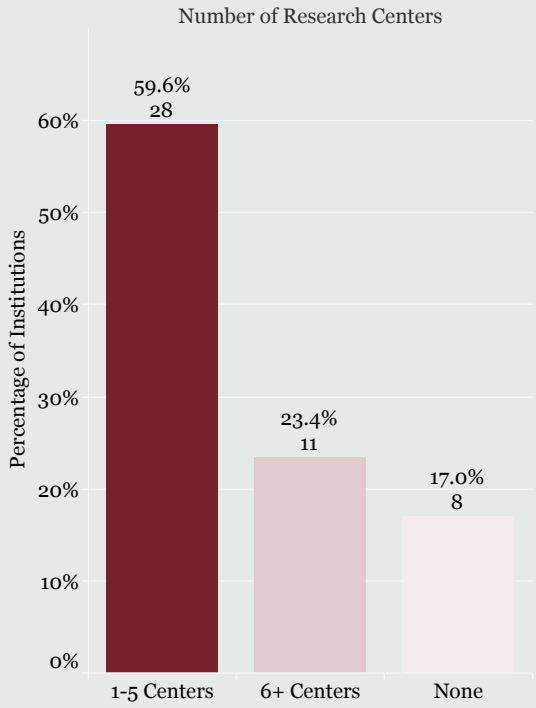
SECTION 4

Identifying Infrastructure and Institutional Readiness

The capacity for institutions to conduct rigorous research is defined less by an absence of capability than by uneven access to the tools, systems, and facilities required to scale existing strengths into sustained federal competitiveness. The availability of physical research infrastructure, including laboratories, instrumentation, computing facilities, and specialized research spaces, is the foundation upon which competitive research programs are built. The data on research infrastructure at the 47 institutions represented in this assessment reveals a landscape of significant existing capacity coexisting with critical, well-defined gaps. These are precisely the types of constraints that can be addressed through targeted, incremental investment with immediate downstream effects on grant proposal competitiveness and award capacity.

Figure 4-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions by Number of Research Centers



The infrastructure picture is mixed but strategically important. Many of the institutions assessed possess significant laboratory and research space. Several have modern facilities that are competitive with peer institutions. However, critical gaps in specialized instrumentation, high-performance computing, and facility modernization create barriers to competitiveness in specific, high-priority research areas. These are not insurmountable barriers — they are investment opportunities with clear, measurable returns.

Beyond limited research centers, many of these institutions experience a number of other research infrastructure and technology obstacles. For example, security infrastructure presents an additional and distinct barrier. With only 10.6% of these institutions currently possessing SCIF (Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility) capabilities, the vast majority are effectively excluded from classified and defense-related research funding — a massive and growing segment of the federal research portfolio. Software used for grant management presents an additional hurdle for some institutions; 36% of institutions reported having only basic spreadsheets instead of robust systems such as Cayuse or InfoEd to track and report on grants while three institutions did not have any grant management platform. While spreadsheets may be suitable depending on the circumstance, this can cause additional work and strain on institutions if they rely on only this to grow research activity.

As will be discussed, almost 81% of institutions surveyed specifically cited infrastructure limitations as a major barrier in securing increased federal research funding. Every barrier documented is solvable, and resolving these issues represents a concrete step toward a more distributed and inclusive national research enterprise that strengthens both national security and economic competitiveness. The next section examines federal engagement strategies, particularly through the National Science Foundation, the CREST program, and broader relationship-building mechanisms, as key levers for translating existing institutional readiness into sustained research growth and long-term success.

SECTION 5

NSF Engagement and Strategic Relationships

The National Science Foundation occupies a unique position in the federal research ecosystem for HBCUs. Through programs specifically designed to build institutional research capacity, most notably the CREST centers (Centers of Research Excellence in Science and Technology) program and the HBCU-UP (HBCU Undergraduate Program), NSF provides the kind of sustained, capacity-building investment that is transformative for the institutions in this assessment.

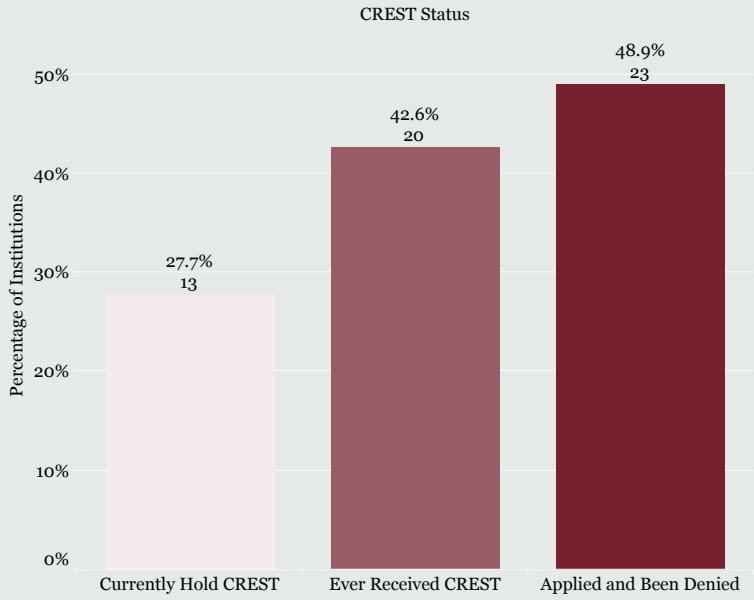
NSF funding is often structured to support long-term infrastructure development, faculty research pipelines, and student training in ways that extend beyond short-term project grants, thereby shaping the foundational research capacity of HBCUs. The reliance on such targeted federal programs also reveals structural disparities in how research funding is distributed across higher education, with HBCUs frequently depending on capacity-building initiatives rather than large-scale competitive grants available to well-resourced institutions. Broadly understanding NSF's role provides insight into both the progress and limitations of HBCUs' integration into the broader innovation economy, highlighting how federal investment strategies directly influence their ability to compete, innovate, and sustain research excellence.

CREST Program Engagement

The CREST program is NSF's premier mechanism for building institutional-level research capacity within the HBCU sector. CREST Center awards represent some of NSF's most significant investments in HBCU research infrastructure and STEM capacity development. For example, the 2023 CREST funding opportunity announced $8 million in anticipated support (NSF, 2023). The findings on institutional engagement with this program are both encouraging and concerning.

Figure 5-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions' CREST Grant Activity and Outcomes



The data reveals a powerful story of unmet demand. While 42.6% of these institutions have ever received a CREST award, only 27.7% currently hold an active award, indicating that many institutions had CREST centers that ended without renewal, likely due to challenges in demonstrating sufficient progress or developing competitive renewal proposals under conditions of limited research administration support.

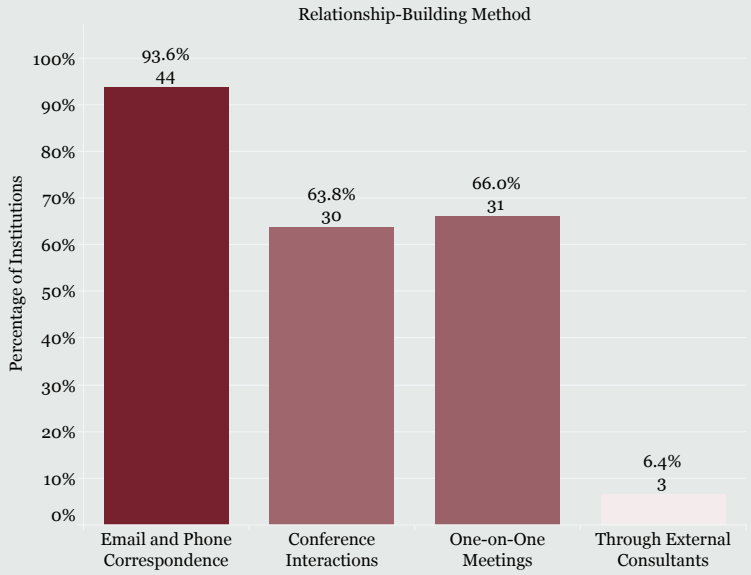
Most significantly, 48.9% of the institutions assessed have applied for a CREST award and been denied. It is an unambiguous signal of profound unmet demand — and a clear indication that targeted proposal development support would be transformative. Many denied CREST proposals likely had strong core research ideas but failed in the technical and procedural elements most dependent on research administration infrastructure: insufficient preliminary data demonstrating research feasibility, inadequate evaluation plans, unclear sustainability strategies, and weak management structures. Technical assistance addressing these specific, well-documented weaknesses in CREST proposal development could substantially improve success rates across the institutions surveyed. The research ideas are there. The ambition is there. What is missing is the infrastructure to translate vision into funded reality — and that is precisely the gap this report calls on the nation to close.

Program Officer Relationships: A Strategic Asset Requiring Investment

Strategic relationships with NSF program officers are a proven, well-documented driver of proposal success and funding growth.

Figure 5-2

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions' Methods for Maintaining NSF Program Officer Relationships



While 93.6% of these institutions maintain at least email and phone contact with NSF program officers, fewer engage in higher-impact, relationship-deepening interactions. Only 66% have pursued one-on-one meetings, and only 63.8% have leveraged conference interactions, the modes of engagement that build substantive, ongoing relationships most directly linked to competitive proposals. Geographic distance from NSF headquarters, limited institutional travel budgets, and the demanding teaching loads documented earlier all contribute to this gap.

Most critically, 44.7% of the institutions (21) assessed report having no formal training for department chairs and principal investigators in NSF officer relationship-building. An additional 46.8% of the institutions (22) engage in such training only occasionally. As a result, relationship-building, one of the most effective strategies for improving proposal competitiveness, is not consistently institutionalized as a strategic function but instead depends on individual initiative. Expanding systematic, recurring training for HBCU faculty in program officer engagement and National Science Foundation relationship-building would likely yield significant and near-term improvements in proposal competitiveness.

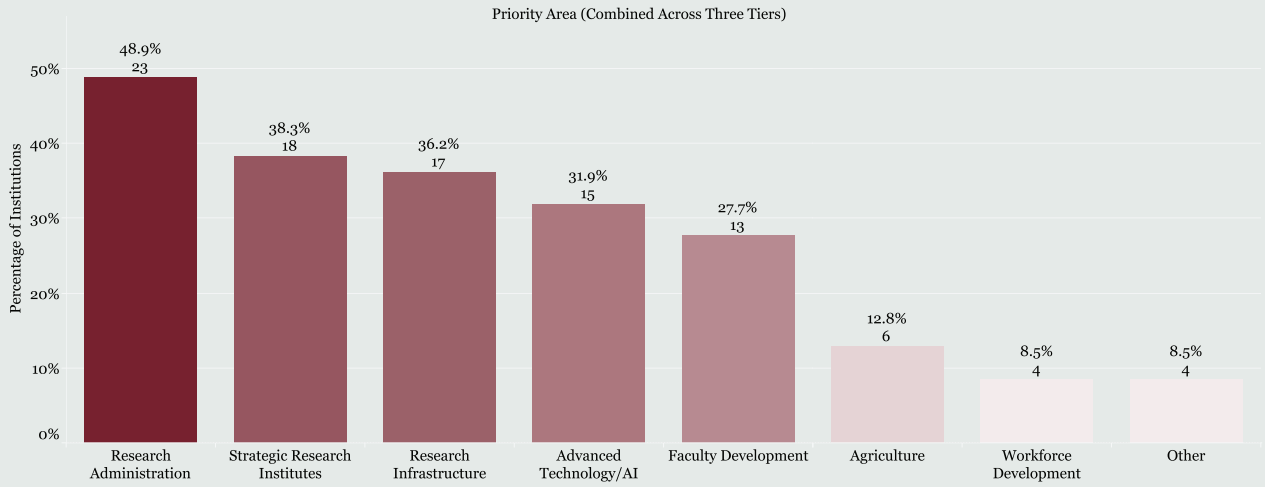
SECTION 6

Capacity-Building Priorities

When institutional leaders were asked to identify their top strategic priorities for research capacity-building over a 12- to 18-month horizon, the responses were clear, consistent, and operationally grounded. These are not aspirational statements or abstract planning exercises; they reflect institutional assessments based on day-to-day constraints, staffing realities, and immediate barriers to research productivity. Taken together, they provide a direct, evidence-based account of where targeted investment would generate the most immediate and measurable gains in research capacity and competitiveness, while also revealing the specific structural blockers that limit institutional progress across funding, staffing, infrastructure, and proposal development systems. Figure 6-1 presents the distribution of these priorities across the sample, highlighting the relative concentration of institutional demand across key capacity-building areas and revealing where constraints and investment needs are most consistently reported.

Figure 6-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions' Strategic Capacity-Building Priorities



Institutional Type Variations: One Size Does Not Fit All

While research administration is the dominant priority across all institutional types, the second-tier priorities vary in ways that are strategically important for any funder seeking to maximize impact.

- **Small Carnegie-Classified Institutions Prioritize:** Administration (95%), Strategic Institutes (60%), and Infrastructure (40%). These institutions seek to fulfill foundational capacity needs, the building blocks from which research growth can begin (n=20).
- **Medium Carnegie-Classified Institutions Prioritize:** Advanced Technology/AI (66.7%), Administration (63%), and Infrastructure (51.9%). These institutions seek both to establish a solid research foundation and move into expansionary capacity investments (n=27).
- **R2 Institutions Prioritize:** Infrastructure (69.2%), Administration (53.8%), and Advanced Technology/AI (53.8%). Whether small- or medium-sized by Carnegie Classification, these institutions with an already-established foothold seek the equipment, space, personnel, and technology to enter the next level of research competitiveness and are positioned for the highest-impact growth (n=13).

This data provides a precise, institution-specific roadmap for funders. One-size-fits-all approaches will fail. Investment must be flexible, tiered, and targeted to each institution's specific stage of research development.

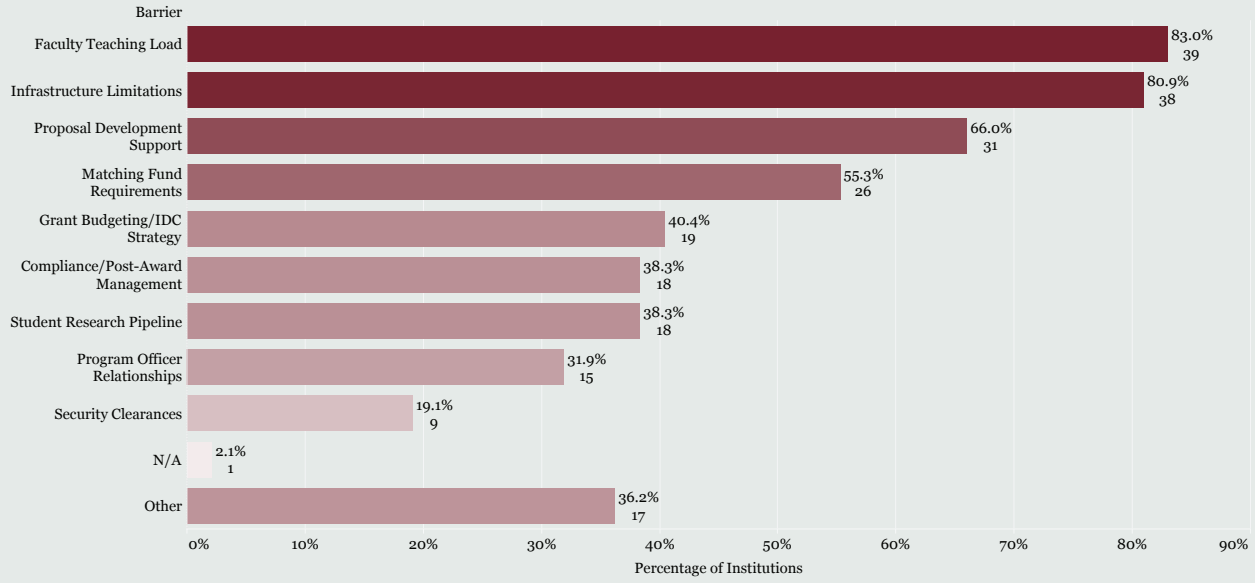
SECTION 7

Understanding Research Barriers

The barriers that the institutions in this assessment identified as limiting their federal research growth are not isolated factors. They are deeply interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and collectively constitute a structural constraint that no individual institution can resolve without external, coordinated intervention. Together, they shape the conditions under which research capacity is developed, sustained, and scaled, influencing both proposal competitiveness and long-term institutional growth trajectories. Figure 7-1 illustrates a consistent pattern of these constraints across the sample. The barriers identified are not independent issues; rather, they operate as an interconnected system that compounds over time, reducing institutional flexibility and limiting the ability to respond to federal funding opportunities at scale. This systemic interaction between instructional workload, infrastructure deficits, and administrative capacity gaps underscores that incremental or isolated fixes are insufficient. Instead, the data point to the need for coordinated, multi-level investment strategies that address these constraints as a unified structural challenge rather than discrete problems.

Figure 7-1

Distribution of Surveyed Institutions' Major Barriers to Increased Federal Research Funding

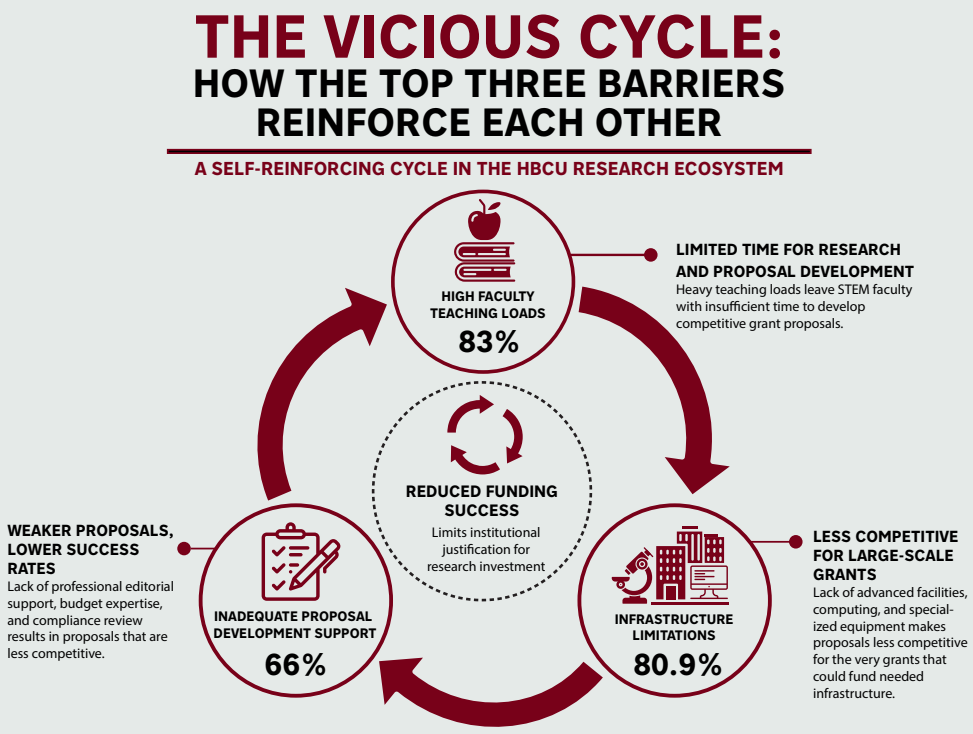


The Vicious Cycle: How the Top Three Barriers Reinforce Each Other

The top three barriers identified in the data operate as a reinforcing structural cycle that constrains research competitiveness across the institutions assessed (see Figure 7-2). High faculty teaching loads (83%) significantly reduce the time available for STEM faculty to develop competitive grant proposals, limiting the sustained focus required for high-quality proposal development. Infrastructure limitations (80.9%) further reduce competitiveness by constraining the ability to pursue large-scale, complex research awards that require advanced laboratories, computing systems, or specialized equipment. Inadequate proposal development support (66%) compounds these challenges by limiting access to professional grant writing, budget development, and compliance expertise, resulting in lower proposal competitiveness even when strong research ideas exist. Together, these constraints reinforce one another by reducing both the capacity to apply for funding and the ability to secure it, thereby limiting institutional advancement within federal research funding systems.

Figure 7-2

Barriers to Increased Research Competitiveness



The barriers create a dynamic in which limited funding success reduces the institutional justification for research investment, which perpetuates the very conditions that suppress funding success. Breaking this cycle requires coordinated, multi-point improvements.

Matching Fund Requirements: A Regressive, Structural Barrier

Matching fund requirements constitute a distinct and particularly regressive barrier for a majority of the institutions in this study. Federal funding agencies — including NSF, NIH, USDA, and DOE — commonly require institutional cost-sharing ranging from 10% to 50% of total project costs (Office of Management and Budget, 2023). For financially constrained campuses, these requirements are frequently prohibitive, forcing institutions to pass up otherwise winnable, competitive grants.

The burden falls disproportionately on the institutions with the fewest resources: 61% of less research-involved institutions (i.e., Carnegie Classification of Research Colleges and Universities or no Research Activity designation) in this study cite matching fund requirements as a barrier, compared to 43% of R2 institutions. This is a structural barrier that operates within a funding system ostensibly designed to support these institutions. Policymakers and federal agencies should examine matching fund requirements in HBCU-targeted programs with a specific view toward eliminating or substantially reducing this barrier.

Beyond the Top Barriers

It is important to note the additional barriers cited by 31.9% to 40.4% of institutions — Grant Budgeting and IDC Strategy, Compliance and Post-Award Management, Student Research Pipeline, and Program Officer Relationships — are all secondary consequences of the primary staffing and resource deficits documented in this report. They are symptoms of the same underlying disease: systematic underinvestment in research administration infrastructure. Address the root cause, and these secondary barriers begin to resolve.

Security Clearances (reported by 19.1% of institutions) represent a distinct and growing barrier. With only 10.6% of the institutions assessed currently possessing SCIF capabilities, the vast majority are effectively excluded from an entire category of DoD, Intelligence Community, and classified federal research funding. Dedicated support for SCIF development and security clearance processes at strategic HBCU campuses represents a high-impact, high-return investment opportunity.

SECTION 8

The Vision

The institutions in this assessment are not passive recipients of circumstance. They are actively, ambitiously, and strategically planning to transform their research enterprise. The five-year visions (2025–2030) articulated by institutional leaders are not incremental — they are transformational. And they are achievable if the structural barriers documented in this report are addressed through coordinated investment.

Aggressive Funding Growth

29.8% of the assessed institutions (14) report explicit goals to increase their current levels of federal research funding within five years. These same institutions emphasize the importance of diversifying their funding portfolios through increased engagement with industry partners, philanthropic organizations, and state or regional funders — reducing dependence on federal sources while maintaining federal engagement as the core of their research enterprise.

Carnegie Classification Advancement

14.9% of the institutions (7) assessed have explicitly identified advancing their Carnegie research classification as a primary strategic objective. Given that Carnegie classification advancement requires precisely the investments this report recommends — increased research expenditures, expanded doctoral programs, reduced teaching loads — this goal and the capacity-building agenda are directly aligned.

The Critical Insight

Institutional leaders at these institutions consistently emphasized that meaningful progress requires coordinated, simultaneous investment across multiple dimensions of research infrastructure, faculty capacity, and administration. These are not independent priorities but interdependent components of a growth model that can only succeed if addressed in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

Cross-Cutting Strategic Priorities

Across the institutions in this study, institutional leaders identified a coherent set of interdependent strategic investments necessary to achieve these goals:

- **Faculty Capacity:** Cluster hiring in priority research areas and systematic teaching load reduction for research-active faculty.
- **Research Centers:** Development of 3–5 signature, interdisciplinary research centers aligned with institutional strengths and federal funding priorities.
- **Graduate Programs:** Expansion of doctoral programs, research assistantships, and fellowship support.
- **Research Administration:** Increased OSP staffing, implementation of modern grants management technology, and expanded internal proposal review processes.
- **Industry Partnerships:** Development of corporate research collaborations, technology transfer mechanisms, and entrepreneurship support infrastructure.

An Aspirational Vision for America

An America where North Carolina A&T, Prairie View A&M, and Morgan State are as closely associated with scientific discovery as MIT or Stanford is entirely within reach. This outcome does not require these institutions to become something different; it requires the nation to invest in what they already are. HBCU researchers can lead the nation's response to climate change, disease, and the computing revolutions that will define the 21st century and beyond. A generation of scientists, trained at these institutions, can stand at the frontier of every field that shapes humanity's future, not as exceptions but as the natural result of a nation that chooses to fund its own potential.

SECTION 9

The Case for Federal Strategic Investment

The data assembled in this report is more than a collection of findings. It is an investment prospectus for the nation, which suggests that investing in the research infrastructure of these institutions is among the highest-return investments the federal government can make in American scientific leadership.

Investment in research infrastructure is not a matter of supplemental support but a core component of national strategy for long-term strength, resilience, and competitiveness. When viewed collectively, the evidence indicates that targeted federal investment could significantly expand research output, strengthen the national STEM workforce pipeline, and enhance U.S. competitiveness in critical fields.

This report situates that evidence within a broader policy framework and outlines why addressing these constraints represents a high-impact opportunity for federal action.

The Equity and Excellence Convergence

This data demolishes the false dichotomy between equity and excellence. The institutions in this assessment already demonstrate exceptional research excellence, including 13 R2 institutions, one R1, more than $843 million in annual federal funding, and deep engagement across every major federal research agency, under conditions of systematic resource constraint. The fact that they have achieved this level of research output with inadequate research administration infrastructure, unsustainable teaching loads, and aging physical infrastructure is a testament to institutional commitment and faculty dedication. But it is also a measure of the enormous additional output that would be generated with strategic, targeted investment.

Ensuring that these institutions have the resources commensurate with their mission and demonstrated capacity is simultaneously a matter of national fairness and a strategic imperative for American competitiveness. These are not competing goals; they are the same goal.

The American Dividend Framework as National Policy

The "American Dividend" framework (Brown et al., 2025) provides the policy rationale for understanding HBCU investment not as support for a subset of American higher education, but as investment in a core national asset. The returns are documented, measurable, and growing. An increase in federal research investment will yield:

• **Direct Research Returns:** More research funded, more discoveries made, more innovations developed.

• **Workforce Returns:** More STEM PhD recipients, more diversely trained scientists and engineers entering critical national workforce pipelines.

• **Economic Returns:** Stronger regional innovation ecosystems anchored by HBCU campuses, greater industry engagement, expanded technology transfer.

• **Strategic Returns:** Enhanced American global competitiveness in AI, quantum computing, advanced biotechnology, and clean energy through the full mobilization of diverse talent currently operating below potential due to resource constraints.

SECTION 10

Strategic Recommendations and Implementation Pathways

The findings of this report translate directly into concrete, implementable recommendations for each of the key stakeholder groups positioned to unlock the potential of the HBCUs assessed in this study. The data point to a consistent and actionable set of constraints and opportunities that shape the research capacity of the 47 institutions assessed. Across institutions, the primary barriers are not related to intellectual or scientific potential, but to structural limitations in research administration, staffing capacity, infrastructure, and sustained access to federal research investment. These conditions vary by institution but collectively reflect system-level gaps that can be addressed through targeted interventions at the federal, institutional, and philanthropic levels. The recommendations that follow are directly derived from the survey data and are organized to reflect the distinct roles of each stakeholder group in strengthening research capacity, improving competitiveness for federal funding, and accelerating long-term institutional growth within the national research ecosystem.

For Federal Agencies (e.g., NSF, NIH, DOD, DOE, USDA)

1. Address the Research Administration Crisis Directly and Immediately

The single most impactful action any federal agency can take is to create a dedicated funding stream for "HBCU Research Administration Capacity-Building." This should specifically fund:

- OSP staffing expansion to sustainable levels (target: 1 pre-award FTE per $10–15M in active federal funding).
- Implementation of modern grants management systems (e.g., Cayuse, InfoEd).
- Professional development and training for research administrators.
- Administrative supplements to existing awards in order to support expanded OSP capacity.

Expected Outcome:

Substantial increase in proposal submissions and improvement in proposal success rates.

2. Expand Targeted Research Programs

- Increase HBCU-specific allocations in major grant programs (targeting 15–20% of directorate budgets).
- Significantly expand the CREST program in both funding levels and number of awards. Currently, the 48.9% denial rate among these institutions indicates a significant unmet demand.
- Create "Capacity-Building Partnership" grants that formally link HBCUs with R1 and major research universities for proposal mentorship, collaborative research, and shared infrastructure.

Expected Outcome:
Notable increase in federal funding for these HBCUs within three years.

3. Unlock Defense and Classified Research Potential

Provide dedicated DoD/Intelligence Community funding specifically for these HBCUs to develop SCIF infrastructure and navigate the security clearance process. Currently, only 10.6% of the institutions assessed possess SCIF capabilities. Expanding this to a critical mass of strategically positioned HBCU campuses would unlock access to a massive, largely untapped federal research funding stream.

Expected Outcome:
Unlock DoD and Intelligence Community research funding potential for these institutions.

4. Expand Graduate Training Pipelines

Increase support for graduate students at these institutions through targeted fellowships and training grants:

- Expand NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program with dedicated HBCU targeting.
- Expand NIH T32 training grants with HBCU-specific allocations.
- Expand Department of Education graduate training programs.
- Support research assistantships through fellowship program funding.

Expected Outcome:
Increase HBCU PhD production in targeted STEM fields.

For the Institutions Assessed

1. Prioritize Research Administration as a Strategic Investment

Make the strategic decision and the accompanying budget commitment to expand OSP staffing to sustainable levels. The return on this investment exceeds that of virtually any other institutional research expenditure. Target staffing levels:

- Pre-Award: 1 FTE per $10–15M in federal funding.
- Post-Award: 1 FTE per $12–18M in active awards.
- Compliance: Minimum 1 dedicated FTE per $20M in federal funding.

Implementation pathway: Recruit experienced OSP professionals; implement modern grants management technology; develop internal proposal review processes; establish regular faculty training in proposal development.

Proposed Budget:
$300K–$500K annually per institution for pre-award and post-award expansion.

2. Protect Faculty Research Time Through Strategic Teaching Load Reduction

Develop and implement a clear, phased plan to reduce teaching loads for research-active faculty. Even modest reductions — from 4-4 to 3-3, or from 3-3 to 2-3 — can transform faculty research capacity and proposal competitiveness.

Implementation pathway: Begin with voluntary participation among the most research-productive faculty; use external grant salary support to offset course release costs; institutionalize internal course release funding from IDC recovery; implement "Research Faculty" designations (75% research, 25% teaching) for highest-performing researchers.

3. Develop 3–5 Signature Research Centers

Conduct an internal research strength assessment to identify areas of existing faculty expertise aligned with federal funding priorities. Convene interdisciplinary teams around these strengths. Develop center-level proposals — including CREST applications — and build the industry partnerships that sustain centers beyond initial federal investment.

Expected Outcome:
Sustained and substantial center-level funding for the institution.

4. Create a Strategic Infrastructure Modernization Plan

Develop a 5-year roadmap for laboratory modernization, advanced instrumentation acquisition, high-performance computing infrastructure development, and specialized facility construction, identifying potential federal, state, philanthropic, and bonding funding sources for each phase.

5. Engage in Cross-Institutional Coordinated Research Efforts

The highlighted strengths, barriers, and aspirations of research-ready institutions highlight a significant potential for these schools to support one another in mutual research development. The HBCU Research Infrastructure and Scientific Ecosystem Alliance (HBCU-RISE) being developed by the Thurgood Marshall College Fund offers one pathway to achieve exactly this aim. By organizing collaborative research hubs, aligning institutions with NSF directorates and related federal opportunity areas, and supporting shared infrastructure, proposal development, and multi-institutional partnerships, HBCU RISE provides a practical framework for translating the findings of this report into sustained action. It also offers a mechanism for matching institutional strengths to national scientific priorities in ways that strengthen both individual institutions and the broader research ecosystem.

For National Policymakers and Philanthropists

1. Commit to Sustained, Multi-Year Funding Cycles

Move decisively beyond one-off, project-based grants. These institutions require 5- to 10-year funding commitments to make strategic hires, implement research management systems, build partnerships, and transform the institutional cultures that sustained research growth demands. Short-term grants produce short-term results. Long-term investment produces transformation.

2. Invest Specifically and Directly in These Institutions

Recognize that the 47 institutions assessed in this report (see Appendix) include the most research-ready, most strategically positioned HBCUs in the nation. They are the institutions most likely to translate capacity-building investment into measurable, near-term national returns. Targeting philanthropic investment here will yield the fastest and most significant national impact.

3. Establish Clear Accountability Metrics and Public Reporting

Require annual reporting on key research enterprise metrics — federal funding growth, proposal submission rates, proposal success rates, PhD production, Carnegie classification advancement, and industry partnership development — and make this data publicly available. Clear metrics create accountability, enable course-correction, and demonstrate to Congress, the public, and future funders the measurable impact of their investments.

4. Invest in Regional Innovation Ecosystem Development

Position these institutions as anchors for regional innovation ecosystems by linking them with R1 and R2 institutions, community colleges, and industry partners in their regions. Develop regional research clusters in strategic sectors. Connect workforce development programs with specific employer needs. Distributed research capacity strengthens both the nation and the regions where these institutions serve as economic and cultural anchors.

CONCLUSION

THE PATH FORWARD

This comprehensive national assessment of 47 research-ready Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) was conducted by the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center at the Thurgood Marshall College Fund. Supported by funding from the National Science Foundation, the study evaluates institutional capacity and infrastructure to present an empirical, data-driven case for immediate, strategic, and sustained national action. By documenting the current landscape of HBCU research ecosystems, this report provides a strategic baseline for policy interventions designed to maximize the "American Dividend" of innovation and equity. The data unequivocally provides a mandate for change, shattering the myth of limited capacity and replacing it with the undeniable reality of proven, high-impact performance. The data presented in this report outlines the facts as they pertain to HBCU research readiness and potential return on investment. With this evidence base in mind, now is the time to turn toward actionable steps that will position this nation as an even stronger global leader in research, innovation, and scientific advancement.

We Know These Institutions Are Research Powers.

The 47 institutions assessed already secure over $843 million in annual federal research funding. Collectively, they include one R1 and 13 R2 Carnegie research classifications. They are actively engaged with NSF, ED, DOE, NIH, NASA, DOD, USDA, NOAA, DOI, and others. They are delivering an "American Dividend" in research, workforce development, and economic mobility, every single day, despite systematic structural constraints. This is not potential. This is current performance, achieved under conditions that would suppress the output of any institution.

We Know the Structural Barriers — Precisely and Completely.

The research administration crisis is not a mystery. The teaching load problem is not speculative. The infrastructure gaps are not insurmountable. They are clearly documented in this report, with specific data points, clear patterns, and institution-by-institution variation. They are policy choices that can be changed. They are not inherent conditions of the higher education landscape; they are consequences of the current funding environment, and they can be fixed.

We Know That Strategic Investment Yields Measurable Returns.

The path to unlocking the full research potential of these institutions is clear, specific, and evidence-based. Investing in OSP staffing, protecting faculty research time, modernizing infrastructure, and expanding graduate pipelines will directly, predictably, and measurably translate into more research proposals submitted, more research awards won, more innovations developed, and more highly trained STEM professionals entering national workforce pipelines.

The Thurgood Marshall College Fund, through the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center and with the essential support and partnership of the National Science Foundation, has provided the evidence. The survey has been conducted. The data has been analyzed. The barriers have been named. The recommendations are clear.

The question now before federal agencies, Congress, philanthropic organizations, and institutional leaders is not whether this investment is justified by the evidence, but whether the nation is willing to act with the urgency required to fully leverage the research capacity, innovation potential, and diverse STEM talent these institutions already possess.

HBCUs and America at large are presented with a critical moment to act on the evidence outlined in this report. The nation is now faced with 47 institutions producing more than $843 million in federally funded research under conditions of chronic underinvestment. Our nation must decide whether to invest or to look away. It is a choice between strengthening demonstrated capacity or continuing to defer its full realization.

We have the facts.
We have the evidence.
We have the roadmap.
Now let us advance America, because the nation's future depends on it.

"The future strength of our nation is inextricably linked to the full realization of the potential within public Historically Black Colleges and Universities."

M. C. Brown II, Ph.D.
Executive Director & Research Scientist
Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center
Thurgood Marshall College Fund

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METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this report draw on a nationally administered institutional survey conducted with funding support from the National Science Foundation, examining research capacity and infrastructure across a targeted sample of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). The study included 47 four-year institutions, comprising 44 HBCUs and three PBIs, and representing primarily member campuses of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, along with one non-affiliated institution. These institutions span 22 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and include public and private, land-grant and non-land-grant classifications. Data were collected through the ABC-NSF Institutional Self-Assessment designed by the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center staff in collaboration with the TMCF ABC-NSF advisory committee, distributed in 2025 to TMCF member institutions and in 2026 to one non-affiliated institution, and gathered both quantitative and qualitative information on research infrastructure, faculty capacity, administrative systems, federal funding portfolios, technology, facilities, graduate education, and strategic priorities. Survey items were developed in consultation with HBCU research leaders, federal program officers, and higher education experts to ensure relevance and rigor. The resulting findings reflect a subset of research-ready institutions and are intended to provide authoritative insights specific to this group, rather than to all federally designated HBCUs.

APPENDIX

LIST OF PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

The following 47 four-year institutions were surveyed for this study and report. All but one are Thurgood Marshall College Fund member institutions and all but three are Historically Black Colleges and Universities with the remaining being Predominantly Black Institutions. Institutions are listed alphabetically, along with their locations, within a classification used throughout this report (i.e., public/private and Land-Grant/non-Land-Grant).

Public, Non-Land-Grant Institutions (24)

1. Alabama State University (Montgomery, Alabama)
2. Albany State University (Albany, Georgia)
3. Bluefield State University (Bluefield, West Virginia)
4. Bowie State University (Bowie, Maryland)
5. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania (Cheyney, Pennsylvania)
6. Chicago State University (Chicago, Illinois)
7. Coppin State University (Baltimore, Maryland)
8. Elizabeth City State University (Elizabeth City, North Carolina)
9. Fayetteville State University (Fayetteville, North Carolina)
10. Grambling State University (Grambling, Louisiana)
11. Harris-Stowe State University (St. Louis, Missouri)
12. Jackson State University (Jackson, Mississippi)
13. Lincoln University of Pennsylvania (Lincoln University, Pennsylvania)
14. Medgar Evers College, CUNY (New York City, New York)
15. Mississippi Valley State University (Itta Bena, Mississippi)
16. Morgan State University (Baltimore, Maryland)
17. Norfolk State University (Norfolk, Virginia)
18. North Carolina Central University (Durham, North Carolina)
19. Savannah State University (Savannah, Georgia)
20. Texas Southern University (Houston, Texas)
21. University of the District of Columbia (Washington, DC)
22. University of the Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands)
23. Winston-Salem State University (Winston-Salem, North Carolina)
24. York College, CUNY (New York City, New York)

Public 1890 Land-Grant Institutions (18)

1. Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University (Normal, Alabama)
2. Alcorn State University (Lorman, Mississippi)
3. Central State University (Wilberforce, Ohio)
4. Delaware State University (Dover, Delaware)
5. Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (Tallahassee, Florida)
6. Fort Valley State University (Fort Valley, Georgia)
7. Kentucky State University (Frankfort, Kentucky)
8. Langston University (Langston, Oklahoma)
9. Lincoln University of Missouri (Jefferson City, Missouri)
10. North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (Greensboro, North Carolina)
11. Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University (Prairie View, Texas)
12. South Carolina State University (Orangeburg, South Carolina)
13. Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)
14. Tennessee State University (Nashville, Tennessee)
15. University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (Pine Bluff, Arkansas)
16. University of Maryland Eastern Shore (Princess Anne, Maryland)
17. Virginia State University (Petersburg, Virginia)
18. West Virginia State University (Institute, West Virginia)

Private, Non-Land-Grant Institutions (4)

1. Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (Willowbrook, California)
2. Clark Atlanta University (Atlanta, Georgia)
3. Hampton University (Hampton, Virginia)
4. Howard University (Washington, D.C.)

Private 1890 Land-Grant Institution (1)

1. Tuskegee University (Tuskegee, Alabama)

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