

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT**  
**NASA Astronaut Candidate Selection Qualifications Inquiry**  
**OMB CONTROL NO. 2700-0156**

**Type of Information Collection:** Extension of a Currently Approved Information Collection

**A. JUSTIFICATION**

**1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.**

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Astronaut Selection Office (ASO) is responsible for selecting astronauts for various United States Space Exploration programs. The program is managed at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston, Texas 77058.

When evaluating an applicant for the Astronaut Candidate Program, it is important that the ASO have the benefit of qualitative and quantitative information and recommendations from persons who have been directly associated with the applicant over the course of their career.

On average, over 8,000 applications are received for each Astronaut vacancy announcement (released via USA Jobs.). After a thorough application review process, which includes NASA Astronauts participating as subject matter experts, approximately 450 applicants are placed in the 'highly qualified' rating category. Only then is information obtained from external references identified by the applicant. Each applicant provides the ASO with a list of two (2) key references (current and most recent previous supervisor), totaling 900 responses.

**2. Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. 1**

The information collected will be used by the NASA Astronaut Selection Office and NASA Human Resources personnel, as part of the candidate selection process, to gain insight into the candidates' work ethic and professionalism, as demonstrated during previous employment activities. Respondents include the candidate's previous employer(s) or direct-reporting manager, as well as same-level co-workers.

The information will be collected using electronic, web-enabled hypertext markup language (HTML) forms (web pages). Respondents who do not have ready access to a computer terminal or prefer not to use a computer, may elect to complete a paper version of the form and submit it to the JSC ASO via the United States Postal Service (USPS).

The information will be collected one (1) time per candidate during the selection period (tentatively scheduled annually). Upon completion of the selection process, the information will become a permanent part of the candidates' archived application package.

The collection of information, associated with individuals who successfully complete the program and are subsequently designated as "Astronauts", will become a permanent part of the Astronauts' Official Personnel File (OPF), and ultimately designated as a National Archive.

The information collected will not be disseminated to the public as collected; however, it may be used to support information that could potentially be disseminated to the public.

The information will be handled as Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU)/Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI), and is subject to exclusion from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Astronaut candidate records are managed via NASA Records Retention Schedule 8/35. They are treated as permanent records and transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA.)

The System of Record Notice (SORN) was published in the Federal Register as *NASA 10ACSR - Astronaut Candidate Selection Records*, Document Citation 80 FR 79937, Volume 80 Number 246 and can be viewed at: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2015-12-23/pdf/2015-32289.pdf>

**3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques or other forms of information technology.**

The intended method of collection is electronic. Because of the sensitivity of the information collected, connection to the Internet form will be protected using no less than 128-bit secure socket layer (SSL) encryption, compliant with Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) 140-2 requirements.

Once collected, the information will be stored in a secure database, managed by Microsoft Structured Query Language (SQL) Server 2016 (SP2-CU8), which utilizes transparent data encryption (TDE). TDE enforces system-level encryption while the data is “at-rest” (stored) within relational database management systems (RDBMS). The data is decrypted only for presentation/display following an authorized query/request.

If for some reason a respondent can only submit information by paper, a paper response will be accepted. More detail is provided in item 12 below.

**4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.**

The information is collected directly from respondents, on an on-demand basis. The reference information collected is not available from other sources within NASA, from other government sources, or from outside sources.

**5. If the collection of information involves small businesses or other small entities, describe the methods used to minimize burden.**

The collection of this information will not involve or otherwise affect small businesses or other small entities.

**6. Describe the consequences to the Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.**

The ability of the NASA Astronaut Selection Office (ASO) to adequately assess the experience and qualifications of Astronaut candidates will be adversely impacted if the information is not collected. References enable the collection of both factual and objective information.

Per the Office of Personnel Management, reference checking is an objective evaluation of an applicant's past job performance based on information collected from key individuals (e.g., supervisors, peers, subordinates) who have known and worked with the applicant. Reference checking is primarily used to:

- Verify the accuracy of information given by job applicants through other selection processes (e.g., résumés, occupational questionnaires, interviews)
- Predict the success of job applicants by comparing their experience to the competencies required by the job
- Uncover background information on applicants that may not have been identified by other selection procedures

**7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines.**

There are no special circumstances. The collection of information is conducted in a manner consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.6.

**8. Provide information on the PRA Federal Register Notice that solicited public comments on the information collection prior to this submission.**

The 60-day FRN, Notice 19-071, Volume 84, No 205, was published on October 23, 2019. No comments were received.

The 30-day FRN, Notice 20-004, Volume 85, No 018, was published on January 28, 2020.

**9. Explain any decisions to provide payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

No payments or gifts are provided to respondents.

**10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.**

As part of the reference request process, each respondent is assured (via an Internet form notice window/text box) that the voluntary information they provide shall remain confidential.

In specific cases, the NASA Astronaut Selection Office (ASO) considers the collected information to be “performance evaluations” and part of the candidate’s application package, and thus protected from disclosure to the public. However, a copy of the collected information may be provided to the applicant, if the applicant requests the information in writing, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1999, 5 U.S.C. § 552, as amended.

As required by the Federal Information System Management Act of 2002 (FISMA), and in accordance with NASA Policy Directive (NPD) 2810.1D, *NASA Information Security Policy*, the information system used to collect the information from respondents fully complies with guidelines defined for a system having a Moderate impact on the overall risk to the agency.

The information system used to collect the information from respondents has been configured to meet or exceed all security control requirements, commensurate with a “moderate-impact” system, as set forth in National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Special Publication (SP) 800-53 Revision 3, *Recommended Security Controls for Federal Information Systems and Organizations*.

Refer to item 3 above for additional technical details regarding the protection of the confidentiality of the collected information.

**11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.**

Questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private, are not included in this information collection.

**12. Provide an estimate in hours of the burden of the collection of information.**

<b>Category of Respondents</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Participation Time</b>	<b>Burden Hours</b>
Individuals	900	20 minutes	300

**13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to the respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection (excluding the value of the burden hours in Question 12 above).**

Using the US average hourly earnings of \$28.44 (source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics [Economic News Release dated 2/13/2020](#)), the cost of a respondent filling out and submitting the questionnaire online is calculated to be:

$$\$28.44/\text{hour} \times 0.3 \text{ hours} = \$8.53 \text{ per respondent} \times 900 \text{ respondents} = \$7,677$$

In the event a respondent lacks (or chooses not to use) an Internet connection to complete the web form and elects to submit a paper-based response, the NASA Astronaut Selection Office

(ASO) estimates that the collection of information will present each affected respondent with a one-time cost burden of no more than the cost of a postage-stamped envelope (As of December 2019, approximately \$0.55).

Over the past three years, an average of 868 references were submitted via the USPS/mail services annually. Therefore, we project the annual cost burden to respondents who elect to submit references by mail will be \$477.40, based on a First Class postage rate of \$0.55 per mailing.

By using existing, available computer hardware, software, and services, NASA estimates a zero cost (\$0.00) burden to record-keepers. This information collection is designed for an electronic response, using an Internet web form.

**14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.**

The NASA Astronaut Selection Office (ASO) estimates approximately \$50,905.00 in annualized cost, representing contractor labor costs for database management and server hardware maintenance.

**15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.**

Not applicable.

**16. For collections whose results will be published, outline the plans for tabulation and publication.**

The collection results will not be published.

**17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons why display would be inappropriate.**

The NASA Astronaut Selection Office (ASO) will display the expiration date established by OMB within the burden statement.

**18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.**

NASA takes no exception to the provisions under 5 CFR 1320.9.

**B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS**

This information collection does not employ any statistical methods.