

2.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was initiated during the summer of 1993 by mailing a 16-page questionnaire to all 557 ERIP participants. The questionnaire was divided into sections that dealt with:

- technology description
- contact and inventor information
- distribution strategy
- development timeline
- field tests and demonstrations
- sales data and licensing revenues
- employment
- spinoff technologies
- sources of funding
- technology characteristics
- ratings of types of ERIP assistance
- additional comments

(A blank copy of the questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A.)

While most of these lines of inquiry have been pursued over several years as part of the ERIP evaluation effort, several of them represent either new treatments of issues considered years ago, or entirely new issues for the evaluation effort. The role of field tests and demonstrations in technology commercialization is one example of a new issue for the impact evaluation. While a series of case studies on experiences with demonstration was conducted for the ERIP in 1992, this is the first time that the ERIP evaluation questionnaire has sought data concerning field tests and demonstrations. Similarly, the 1993 impact evaluation solicited ratings of the value of different types of ERIP assistance. Previous case studies of ERIP-supported inventions have asked for feedback on the performance of the program. However, this impact evaluation represents the first time that systematic ratings of ERIP assistance have been obtained from large numbers of ERIP participants.

Those 343 participants who had been interviewed during previous evaluations were sent a questionnaire that was completed, as much as possible, from information in the existing ORNL database. The 214 participants who had not been included in any of the previous impact evaluations were mailed a questionnaire that was blank except for the information on the contact, inventor, and a technology description obtained from DOE and NIST files. Thus, all of the questionnaires covered the same topics, but they differed in terms of the amount and types of data that they contained when mailed to each respondent. In addition to collecting new data, the mail survey offered an opportunity for previously interviewed ERIP participants to review the data collected from them during earlier evaluations.

After the one-month deadline for return of the mail survey, nonrespondents were mailed a second questionnaire. A national residential telephone directory on CD ROM¹ was used to locate approximately ten inventors who had moved since the Program last contacted them. In addition, letters to Postmasters regarding 32 returned questionnaires resulted in 6 completed surveys.

Altogether, 191 of the 557 participants returned their questionnaires by mail as a result of these two mailings. An additional 6 respondents completed their survey by telephone, bringing the total number of respondents to 197 (Table 2.1). The response rate for the promising inventions (60

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