



FACILITY FOR RARE ISOTOPE BEAMS

January 2026

History

History of FRIB (since 2008)

Since the early 1990s, nuclear physicists had been discussing the need for a facility to produce intense beams of rare isotopes. A Nuclear Science Advisory Committee (NSAC) taskforce presented its recommendations on how to proceed to the National Science Foundation (NSF) and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in 1999. It closely reflected a plan for rare isotope beam production proposed by Michigan State University (MSU). The National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory (NSCL) leadership and scientists saw this as their next opportunity and immediately began developing detailed design plans. By year's end, they made a presentation to NSF and DOE on the benefits of siting the new facility at MSU, which included a proposal for in-flight fragmentation. After a rigorous competition, the DOE Office of Science (DOE-SC) awarded FRIB to MSU in 2008.

The partnership to create, build, and operate the \$730 million Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB) has delivered a world-unique DOE-SC user facility that ensures the nation's continued competitiveness in nuclear science through provision of unprecedented discovery potential. FRIB was technically completed in January 2022, on budget and ahead of the planned completion (Critical Decision 4) in June 2022. User experiments commenced 9 May 2022. FRIB hosts scientists who conduct experiments, extend the frontier of nuclear science, and help define the next frontier and the next reinvention needed to reach and transcend it.

Since 2020, the DOE Isotope Program has provided funding for FRIB's isotope harvesting project to establish the capability and now supports operations and research. The project was completed in December 2024.

In 2022, FRIB opened the FRIB Single Event Effects (FSEE) Facility, which uses energetic and penetrating heavy-ion beams to measure the response of electronic components to such ions.

DOE-SC awarded a cooperative agreement to establish and operate the High Rigidity Spectrometer (HRS) at FRIB in 2023. HRS will have a significant benefit for FRIB's scientific program, extending the scientific reach to neutron-rich isotopes by a combined production-rate and luminosity increase of up to a factor of up to 100.

In 2023, the federal government funded MSU to establish the K500 Chip Testing Facility at FRIB, which supports the refurbishment of the world's first superconducting cyclotron—built at MSU in the 1980s—into a heavy-ion chip testing facility. In 2024, the MSU Board of Trustees authorized construction of a highbay addition to the K500 Chip Testing Facility.

Learn more at frib.msu.edu

Laboratory History



1961

MSU Cyclotron Laboratory



1977

MSU/NSF Heavy Ion Laboratory



1980

National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory (NSCL)



2022

Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB)

MSU History of Nuclear Physics (1958-2022)

The development of MSU's prowess in nuclear physics began when MSU President John A. Hannah seized upon the idea that developing a major program in physics could be a cornerstone of his strategy for growth and diversification of the university. In 1958, Henry Blosser came to MSU to build a uniquely powerful cyclotron. Blosser assembled a remarkable team, and together they succeeded in designing, building, and funding MSU's first cyclotron, the K50, completed in 1965 and used for nuclear physics research with proton beams.

This launched a tradition not only of academic excellence in nuclear physics but of visionary anticipation and response to the quickly advancing frontiers of nuclear science. While 1965-1979 was the K50 era at MSU, by 1973 Blosser and his team were already envisioning what would be required next. They soon began working on acquiring funding, designing, and preparing to build a superconducting magnet, which was the cornerstone for the next generation cyclotron, the K500. Funded by NSF, completion of the K500 in 1982 initiated the superconducting cyclotron era, and the MSU Cyclotron Laboratory became a national user facility for research with heavy ions.

Long before the K500 was complete, the team was planning the next generation, a coupled superconducting cyclotron system which would add a K1200 post-accelerator to the K500. Their proposal was selected in 1978 by the newly created NSAC to NSF and DOE for development as NSCL. The K1200 was completed in 1988 and by 1990 was operating with the A1200 fragment separator to produce beams of rare isotopes through inflight fragmentation of heavy-ion beams. Plans were already in motion that led in 2001 to the coupled cyclotron facility with the A1900 fragment separator—the most powerful rare isotope facility.

NSCL operated as an NSF user facility for four decades. In May 2022, the final NSCL experiment was completed, nearly 40 years after the first NSCL experiment in September 1982.

MSU's International Standings

MSU is a member of the Association of American Universities, an organization of 71 American research universities; ranks 30th among public universities and 63rd overall out of nearly 1,500 United States colleges and universities in the 2025 *U.S. News & World Report* "Best National Universities" ranking; and ranks 122nd out of nearly 1,800 universities in the world in the 2026 Times Higher Education World University Rankings. MSU's nuclear physics graduate program is a top-ranked program nationally, according to *U.S. News & World Report*.

Progression of Accelerator-Based Nuclear Science Experimental Capability at MSU

1965

K50 (cyclotron for protons)

1977

Superconducting magnet

1982

K500 (superconducting cyclotron for heavy ions)

1988

K1200 (superconducting cyclotron for heavy ions)

1990

A1200 beams (in-flight separated rare isotopes)

2001

Coupled cyclotron facility (the most powerful rare isotope facility until 2007)

2005

LEBIT – Low Energy Beam and Ion Trap (stopped rare isotopes)

2014

ReA3 (reaccelerated rare isotopes)

2021

ReA6 (reaccelerated rare isotopes)

2022

FRIB Single Event Effect Facility (chip testing)

2022

FRIB (fast, stopped, reaccelerated rare isotopes)

2024

Isotope harvesting program (extra, unused isotopes for research)