



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A-03050026

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We received an allegation that an NSF proposal¹ contained figures/images plagiarized from published papers.² Our initial review noted that the figures in question in the proposal cited one of the co-PIs as the source. Further, according to the proposal headings, the section of the proposal in which the alleged copied figures appeared was authored by this same co-PI. Consequently, we considered this co-PI as the subject.³ Finally, we observed that the subject submitted two earlier NSF proposals⁴ as the sole PI, each of which contained the exact same figures, appropriately and accurately cited.

We wrote to the subject who responded that, as a result of her move to a new institution, she joined a new research team. As a member of the new team, she was asked to participate in the NSF proposal. Consequently, she provided the section of the proposal that included the questioned figures. She said that, because she would be traveling when the proposal was to be prepared and submitted, she provided the PI on the proposal the text and figures for her section before she left. This material came from one of her earlier NSF proposals, in which she appropriately cited the figures. She said that, in reviewing the material she provided the PI, she realized that the version she gave him was not the final version from the proposal, but a version without citations. The PI called her while she was away asking about the citations. She did not have a copy of the proposal to review and, inadvertently, provided the wrong information.

At the subject's request, the PI provided an explanation as well. He confirmed the subject's information. Further, he included copies of emails to others that showed his attempts to get the appropriate citations for the subject's section. In the end, the PI explained that he elected to insert the citation to the subject in the figures.

We determined that the subject's explanation, corroborated and documented by the PI, showed that this was an honest error. This case is closed and no further action will be taken.

¹ NSF proposal [REDACTED], entitled "[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]" was submitted by [REDACTED] (PI), [REDACTED].

² Paper 1 [REDACTED]. Paper 2 [REDACTED]

³ [REDACTED]

⁴ NSF proposal [REDACTED], entitled "[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]" was submitted by [REDACTED] NSF proposal [REDACTED], entitled [REDACTED] was submitted by [REDACTED]