



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A03050027

Page 1 of 1

We were informed that five PIs¹ submitted an NSF proposal² containing plagiarized text³ describing a piece of equipment⁴ allegedly copied from the manufacturer's web site.⁵ We found similar language on two institutions web sites.⁶ We asked the lead PI⁷ to provide us with an explanation for the text and, if it had been copied from one of the sources, to identify it.

The PI stated that the material had been copied, but not from any of the potential sources identified. The text was copied from the manufacturer's instruction manual for the instrument.⁸ In the PI's view, the allegation was frivolous and the verbatim-copied text was not plagiarism because the PI had used the Trademark (™) and Registered (®) symbols with the name of the equipment. The PI explained that the text was constrained by the extremely technical nature of the description and the PI had not wanted to mislead the reader by substituting other language. The PI added that the proposal's description of a second piece of equipment⁹ also came from the manufacturer's literature.

In response to our inquiry, the PI provided the source documentation for the text describing the second piece of equipment. It is similarly constrained by its highly technical nature.

We concluded that the small amount of copied text is extremely constrained by the technical nature of the description and is not within the portion of the proposal in which the PIs made their argument for NSF support. We concluded that through the process of our inquiry the PI has developed a clearer understanding of how to handle such text. There was no need to pursue this matter further. We strongly encouraged the PI to more carefully observe the high scholarship standards expected by NSF in proposal submissions.

This case is closed and no further action will be taken in this matter.

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