NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A05040013

We received an allegation[1] that a PI[2] made a false statement to NSF regarding a submitted proposal.[3] Specifically, the allegation was that the PI originally stated that the NSF proposal, submitted to NSF Biological Sciences (BIO) Directorate, was duplicative of that submitted to another Federal agency.[4] The box on the NSF proposal cover page inquiring if the proposal was also submitted to another agency was check "yes." In response to the NSF science assistant[5] questions, the PI asserted that the check box was an error and the two proposals were different. The PI then entered a proposal revision in FastLane changing the "yes" to a "no."

After receiving the FastLane change, the Program Officer (PO)[6] asked the PI for a copy of his submission to the other agency. Upon comparing the two proposals, the PO concluded that the proposals were duplicative and contacted the PI. The PI explained if the two were funded he intended to carefully segregate the projects. Ultimately, the PI withdrew the NSF proposal.

Our review of the two proposals showed that 90% of the NSF project description was identical to the other agency proposal. The remainder consisted of materials specifically required in NSF proposals. In response to our inquiry, the PI stated that he had checked the cover page box "yes" because he thought the proposals were "substantially similar." He said the science assistant had misunderstood his response, and he had not changed the cover page for improper purposes. He said the proposal described two separate projects, one he hoped to fund with NSF money and the second with "additional support." He suggested that his latter comment was an "allusion" to support from the other agency.

We informed the PI that the two proposals were duplicates of each other not merely "substantially similar." We advised the PI that the PO makes decisions about efforts to be funded and if a PI changes those efforts, the PI is required to submit a change of scope request that must be approved by the PO. Further, the PI's "allusion" to other agency support could reasonably been interpreted to mean additional support from either agency.

Despite the PI's claim that the two proposals were merely substantially similar, and that he alluded to his plans to segregate the projects, the NSF proposal was withdrawn prior to review. After sending a letter of warning to the PI to be more careful in the future, we closed our inquiry.

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[1] Redacted.
[2] Redacted.
[3] Redacted.
[4] Redacted.
[5] Redacted.
[6] Redacted.