NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A10110081

A reviewer noted the PI[1] of an NSF proposal (proposal 1)[2] had used the same image (Fig. A) from a previous NSF proposal (proposal 2),[3] but had identified the images differently in the two proposals. We reviewed proposals 1-2, as well as other recent proposals submitted by the PI. We found that same or similar figures in seven other NSF proposals. Particularly concerning was the Subject's reuse of Fig. A in another proposal (proposal 3),[4] where it was described as a different material.

We contacted a subject matter expert to review the material. Based on his analysis, we concluded the issue was sufficiently serious to warrant an Inquiry and we referred the Inquiry to the PI's home institution (the University). We reviewed the PI's response to the Inquiry and provided it to our expert for review. We jointly concluded the PI's response raised more concerns instead of alleviating the existing concerns. We referred the matter back to the University and requested an Investigation.

The University formed an investigation committee (IC) of researchers from other universities to avoid the conflicts and have the necessary technical expertise. The IC concluded the PI had physical samples, and images from some of those samples. However, some original images of those samples were missing. The equipment the PI used to image the samples is old and damaged and did not include any identifying information on the images; thus, the images had to be labeled by hand. After interviewing the PI and reviewing his lab, the IC concluded, based on a preponderance of evidence standard, that the PI carelessly mixed up images during the proposal preparation of proposal 2, and made a series of copy-and-paste mistakes that resulted in mislabeled and repeated images in multiple proposals.

We accept the University's conclusions that the PI did not commit research misconduct, but conclude the level of sloppiness exhibited by an experienced researcher warrants a warning letter to the PI. Accordingly, this case is ***closed***.

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[1] [redacted].
[2] [redacted] was submitted by the University and was declined.
[3] [redacted] was submitted by the University and was declined.
[4] [redacted] was submitted by the University and was declined.