

## Closeout for M00040018

On April 20, 2000, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) received a letter from a complainant<sup>1</sup> (the complainant) alleging improper hiring practices in connection with a National Science Foundation (NSF) vacancy announcement.<sup>2</sup> According to the complainant, NSF selected a candidate<sup>3</sup> (the selected candidate) who did not possess the requisite qualifications identified in the vacancy announcement. In particular, the complainant alleged the selected candidate did not possess the required scientific background. According to the complainant, NSF selected this candidate because of a past employment history with NSF. In the past two months, the complainant sent letters containing the same allegation to NSF's Office of Human Resources (HRM) and the Office of General Counsel (OGC). In a recent response letter to OGC, the complainant alleged age and sexual discrimination as additional factors in the selection process.

After considering the complainant's allegation, OGC and HRM found no improprieties in the advertisement, basic qualifications review, the quality ranking of the candidates, or the final selection.

After receiving the complainant's letter, OIG requested expert assistance from NSF's Office of Equal Opportunity Programs (OEOP) to examine the fairness of the selection process with respect to the complainant and the selected candidate. According to OEOP's review, only one of six questions concerning Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs) in the vacancy announcement required scientific expertise. The five remaining KSAs concentrated on management, logistics and people skills. An NSF Staffing and Classification Team Leader<sup>4</sup> questioned an HRM employee<sup>5</sup>, several panel members<sup>6</sup> and the NSF program office<sup>7</sup> about the complainant and the selected candidate. According to OEOP, the complainant provided only short, incomplete responses to the KSAs and ranked nearly last in the quality ranking of all candidates.

The NSF program office originally offered the position to a female candidate, who subsequently declined the employment offer. So, the NSF program offered the position to the selected candidate. The NSF program office believed the selected candidate possessed the optional equivalent experience to the scientific background requirement along with the management and logistics backgrounds. The panel members acknowledged familiarity with the selected candidate's past employment history with NSF, but did not assign any particular importance to this fact.

After considering OEOP's information, our office does not believe the advertisement, basic qualifications review, the quality ranking of the candidates, or the final selection contained any element of fraud. Accordingly, this case is closed and no further action will be taken by our office.

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