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This case was brought to OIG on April 8, 1994 by [REDACTED] Director of the Division of [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], Program Director for [REDACTED] in the division. The program director had received a [REDACTED] 1994 letter from [REDACTED] (the complainant) of the Department of [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] University. In it, the complainant recounted events that raised the possibility of misconduct in science by [REDACTED] (the subject) of the Department of [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] University.

The complainant had received a telephone call from the program director regarding his proposal, entitled [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] are listed as co-PIs.). The program director informed the complainant that the program had recommended that the proposal be declined. The complainant asked which scientists the program had recommended for funding, and the program director named several successful applicants. Among these was the subject, who had submitted a proposal entitled [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is listed as co-PI.).

Upon hearing this information, the complainant expressed surprise and concern, stating that the subject was a co-investigator on his proposal and had not indicated that he was submitting his own proposal. In his subsequent letter to the program officer, the complainant described his prior relationship with the subject and characterized himself as "puzzled" that the subject had submitted a competing proposal to develop closely related equipment without informing the complainant. The program officer called the subject to ask about the relationship between these two proposals and the subject told him that they were technically different.

The program officer and division director were uncertain whether the complainant's letter implied an allegation of misconduct in science and referred the matter to OIG. They noted that there were technical differences between the two proposals but were uncertain how material those differences were. They also pointed out that the proposal recommended for decline was considerably more costly. They stated that they were unsure whether the complainant was alleging that the subject had stolen ideas from the complainant's proposal draft and, after making minor modifications, submitted a proposal derived from the complainant's work that did not give that work due credit.

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OIG called the complainant to determine whether he was alleging misconduct in science. The complainant responded that he was not. The complainant stated that he had discussed their common research interests with the subject and explained that in his view the subject's work was original, did not derive from the complainant's proposal, and, although it built on scientific contributions in this area that the complainant had made a decade earlier, took this work in substantially different and technically innovative directions. OIG examined the two proposals and confirmed that they were different in ways the complainant had identified and that appeared to be substantial.

When OIG received the original information about this case, we informed the program officer that it was against NSF policy to let scientists know the status of other applicants' proposals and that only the information that an award had in fact been made was publicly available. We noted that program recommendations do not necessarily lead to awards and that no useful purpose is served by informing competing scientists about those recommendations.

There is no allegation of misconduct here and no evidence of misconduct. This case is closed and no further action will be taken.

cc: Staff Scientist, Deputy AIG-Oversight, AIG-Oversight, IG