

Closeout for M97100032

On January 22, 1997, an NSF program manager¹ forwarded a letter to OIG from the complainant.² In his letter, the complainant requested information from the program manager in connection with a (declined) proposal submitted to NSF by faculty members in the complainant's department.³ The complainant was not listed as a PI or co-PI on the proposal, but was to provide technical support for certain aspects of the project. The complainant alleged that his university had retaliated against him because he complained that his contributions to the project had been misrepresented. The complainant had requested information from the program manager because the program manager had conducted a site visit at the complainant's university in connection with the submitted proposal. The program manager told the complainant he had no information to provide him that met his request, and suggested he discuss any misconduct-in-science matters with OIG.

OIG spoke with the complainant who thought the university had orally misrepresented the extent of his participation in the project either before or during NSF's site visit. He alleged that the university terminated his contract when he "blew the whistle" by complaining. He said he was seeking information from the program manager, but the program manager had not provided any. OIG determined that the complainant's original letter was more properly handled as a Privacy Act request, forwarded it to NSF's Privacy Act Officer (PAO),⁴ and told the complainant to contact the PAO.

The PAO responded to the complainant and informed him that "the only personal information, about [him], in that file is the vitae provided with the proposal submission. . . . there are no other records maintained that contains personal information about [him]." The complainant then alleged to OIG that NSF, through the program officer, was engaged in a "cover-up" because it would not provide him with the information he sought. He also alleged that the program officer had discussed his involvement with the project, and the university's alleged misrepresentation of his involvement with the project, with the media. OIG requested that he provide any evidence he had to support his allegations.

The complainant then informed OIG that the program manager was not being honest about his description of the site visit, and provided OIG with the names of two university panelists who participated in the site visit. He alleged the panelists should recall a conversation in which he was misrepresented that took place during a particular event during the site visit.

¹ (footnote redacted).

² (footnote redacted).

³ (footnote redacted).

⁴ [REDACTED] was in the Policy Office of the Division of Contracts, Policy, and Oversight in the Office of Budget, Finance, and Award Management.

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On October 20, 1997, OIG opened this case to look into the complainant's allegations of an NSF "cover-up" as an oversight matter. OIG confirmed with the program that the names of the two university panelists were the same as the names the complainant provided. OIG interviewed the program manager (again) and both panelists. Neither the two panelists nor the program manager remember any conversations with anyone (including the media) either with or about the complainant before or during the site visit. After the site visit, both panelists said they had been contacted by the complainant. Neither the panelists nor the program manager attached any significance to the event the complainant mentioned, and none of the three recalls any conversation in which the subject was mentioned. Specifically, neither the panelists nor the program manager recalled ever hearing anyone make the particular misrepresentation the complainant alleged.

OIG concluded there is no evidence that the program manager was involved in a "cover-up" or that he handled any aspect of the site visit, either before, during, or afterward, inappropriately. The PAO confirmed that there are no documents in NSF's records that relate to the complainant's allegations and that the complainant was offered the one document (his vitae) that was responsive to his Privacy Act request. This inquiry is closed and no further action will be taken on this case.

cc: Legal, AIG-Oversight, IG