

## Closeout for M99040023

On April 20, 1999, a National Science Foundation (NSF) program officer<sup>1</sup> received a plagiarism allegation from an NSF confidential peer reviewer.<sup>2</sup> The NSF peer reviewer provided copies of two nearly identical proposals submitted to NSF and a foreign funding agency.<sup>3</sup> The foreign agency proposal was submitted by a scientist employed in a foreign country (foreign subject).<sup>4</sup> The NSF proposal was submitted by a scientist employed in the United States (resident subject).<sup>5</sup>

A close examination of these proposals confirmed substantial similarities in the written text, figures, and figure captions. The bibliographies of these proposals contained several references to joint publications by the two subjects in the past five years. However, although the NSF proposal identified the foreign subject as a consultant and requested some consultant fees and foreign travel expenses, this proposal did not refer to the foreign subject's proposal that had been submitted to the foreign funding agency. The foreign subject's proposal did not list the resident subject as a cooperating investigator or reference the resident subject's NSF proposal in several questions regarding additional funding sources. In addition to the possible plagiarism concerns of the NSF peer reviewer, after reading these nearly identical proposals, OIG became concerned about a possible attempt by the subjects to secure duplicate funding for a single research project.

In a written response to OIG's request for additional information regarding these proposals, the resident subject stated that these proposals were a joint effort to secure funding. According to the resident subject, the NSF FastLane application did not provide a place "to explain the nature of my collaboration with [the foreign subject] and whether or not he is applying for funding on the same project." In particular, the resident subject did not believe that Section G of the NSF application requiring a list of Current and Pending Support for all Principle Investigators and Senior Personnel applied to the foreign subject.

The foreign subject responded by stating that each scientist planned to perform complimentary experiments and share data via internet. The foreign subject did not list the resident subject on the foreign agency proposal because no foreign agency funding would be spent on the resident subject.

In a subsequent conversation with the resident subject, OIG learned that the foreign funding agency asked the foreign subject similar questions about the resident subject's role in the research project. The foreign agency subsequently funded the foreign subject's proposal.

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<sup>1</sup> [footnote redacted]

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The Current and Pending Support form along with NSF's Grant Proposal Guide definitions of Principal Investigator and Senior Personnel clearly indicate the resident subject should have provided a description of the nature of the collaboration with the foreign subject in the NSF proposal. Accordingly, OIG suggested an immediate amendment to the NSF proposal discussing the foreign subject's role in the research project along with a statement about the foreign agency funding.

The resident subject submitted an amendment to the NSF proposal complete with a cover letter addressed to the NSF program officer with a cover letter that addressed our concerns about plagiarism or intellectual theft by acknowledging joint collaboration on a draft proposal. In response to OIG concerns about a possible attempt to secure duplicate funding for a single research project, the resident subject attributed the failure to list the foreign subject on the Current and Pending Support form as the honest mistake of a young researcher. In addition, the resident subject stated that all NSF funding requested for the foreign subject would provide salary and travel expenses for the foreign subject's future visits to the resident subject's laboratory. This NSF funding would not provide equipment, supplies or student funding for the foreign subject's laboratory. In the NSF proposal amendment, the resident subject clearly described all future parallel research projects along with the independent research projects scheduled for each laboratory.

The cover letter and NSF proposal amendment submitted by the resident subject address all OIG concerns involving possible plagiarism, intellectual theft or an attempt to secure duplicate funding for a single research project. Accordingly, this case is closed.

Cc: Integrity, IG