

Closeout for M99080042

On July 22, 1999, the Office of Inspector General learned of a possible conflict of interests (COI) involving an employee¹ of another federal agency (the subject) serving as part of the management team conducting a panel review of an interagency project² partially funded by NSF. The federal agency that employed the subject did not provide funding to the interagency project. The subject was serving on the management team because of his employment at the other federal agency but could not cast a vote on the panel review.

After a standard request by the program manager³ for all panel members and management team members to disclose any possible COI, the subject did not disclose a past academic relationship with a Principal Investigator (PI)⁴ who submitted a proposal⁵ to this panel. At the panel review, the subject advocated this PI's proposal and criticized competing proposals. After learning of the possible COI, the program manager sent all proposals from this panel review to a second panel which did not contain any members of the original panel. The second panel essentially confirmed the final scores of the original panel.

After consulting with NSF's Office of General Counsel and considering the applicable COI regulations, our office concluded the subject's advocacy of the PI's proposal could have been considered inappropriate according to NSF COI regulations, if the subject were an NSF employee, but were not addressed in the other agency's COI regulations. The Office of Inspector General cautioned the program manager to recognize that different federal agencies may be subject to different COI regulations. In the future, the program manager should consider addressing this issue in interagency panels. This case is closed.

¹ [footnote redacted]

² [footnote redacted]

³ [footnote redacted]

⁴ [footnote redacted]

⁵ [footnote redacted]