Transparency and Accountability

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO PRESIDENTS OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND RECES OF OTHER NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION AWARDING ORGANIZATIONS

Subject: Transparency and Accountability at NSF

As a public agency, the National Science Foundation builds and sustains trust for our mission through the transparency of our processes and the accountability of our organization. Periodically, as a learning organization committed to continuous improvement, we review our processes to ensure that they continue to engender trust.

A recent review by NSF senior leadership in consultation with the National Science Board affirmed our fundamental principles and identified opportunities for improvements in two areas to enhance our public stewardship.

One area is our accountability for ensuring that our investment decisions support the national interest, defined by NSF’s mission “to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; to secure the national defense.” To strengthen this alignment, our directorates and offices are examining process improvements for defining research priorities and objectives at all levels of the organization and at all stages of merit review. As a result, the community should benefit from greater understanding and knowledge of the priorities and objectives of our research programs. We would certainly welcome the community’s thoughts and suggestions in this regard.

A second area is communications regarding our investment decisions. In the current fiscal environment, it is more important than ever to justify the expenditure of public funding. We believe we can enhance our public communications of what we are funding and why it is important. The immediate focus will be on improving our research abstracts, entering these primary sources of public information clearly articulate the broader context and funding justification. While our program offices are responsible for preparing abstracts, this often involves input from principal investigators, and so we will be directly engaging the community in this effort. Of course, one of the most effective outreach mechanisms for improved communication is through our community, and we look forward to working with you as we identify other mechanisms to strengthen our public message.

From an implementation perspective, our efforts may result in the adoption of new policies and improved processes, which we will share with the community. We expect that, over time, this increased focus on transparency and accountability will improve our processes, strengthen our research programs, enhance our communications and advance the national interest.

Thank you for your continued support for NSF and the nation’s science and engineering research and education enterprise.

Cecia Murrin
Acting Director
Issue: Changing Budget Landscape

Federal R&D in the Budget and the Economy

Source: Budget of the United States Government, FY 2014, FY 2013 data reflect actual and projected, FY 2014 & 2015 data is the President’s budget.
Issue: Public Scrutiny

- Congressional debate over science funding draws fire from critics
- Senate Moves to Limit NSF Spending on Political Science
- Rampant Waste Reported in NSF
- Why is Our Government Attacking Science?
- The Congressional War on the Social Sciences
- Coalition of Scientific Organizations Defend NSF Peer Review
- Amendment Limiting National Science Foundation Research Funding Passes Senate
- Many Rival Nations Surge Past the U.S. in Adding New Jobs

Source: Science & Engineering Indicators 2014

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Issue: Media Landscape

![Chart showing media landscape with percentages for different information sources: Television, Internet, Newspapers, All other, Don't know. Categories: Current news events, Science and technology, Specific scientific issues. Source: Science & Engineering Indicators 2014.]

Source: Science & Engineering Indicators 2014
Issue: Society Needs

Natural hazards
Climate change
Energy
Food and drug safety
Cybersecurity
Youth violence

Pressure From All Sides!

public scrutiny
competition
funding levels
media
public interest
perceptions
Imperative: Create a Context and Narrative for Public and Policymakers

Abstracts & Titles

“describe the project”

“justify the expenditure”

“layman’s language”

“public record”

“purpose of the research”

Property of NSF
Content and Format Guidelines

• Title: In no more than 180 characters, adequately describe the purpose of the research in nontechnical terms to the fullest possible extent

• Opening: A general statement written for public audiences

• Technical Description of Project: Subsequent paragraph written for a scientific audience