

Transparency and Accountability

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO PRESIDENTS OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND HEADS OF OTHER NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION AWARDEE 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 this 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, ensuring these primary sources of public information clearly articulate the broader context and funding justification. While our program officers 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 continuing support for NSF and the nation's science and engineering research and education enterprise.

Cora Marrett
Acting Director

National Science Foundation
Office of the Director
Arlington, VA 22230

Notice No. 136
2014

March 28,

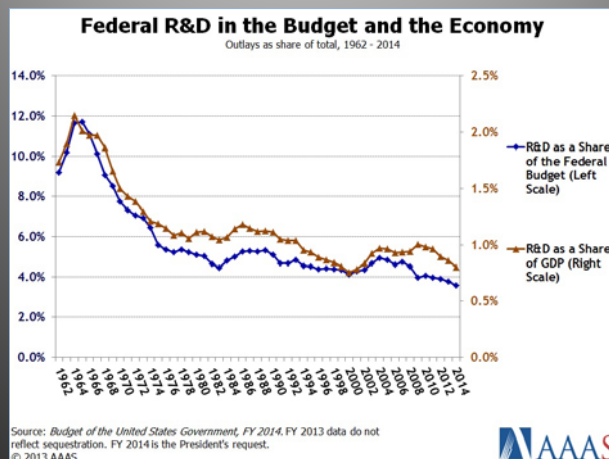
**IMPORTANT NOTICE TO PRESIDENTS OF UNIVERSITIES AND
COLLEGES AND HEADS OF OTHER NATIONAL SCIENCE
FOUNDATION AWARDEE ORGANIZATIONS**

Subject: NSF Abstracts and Titles

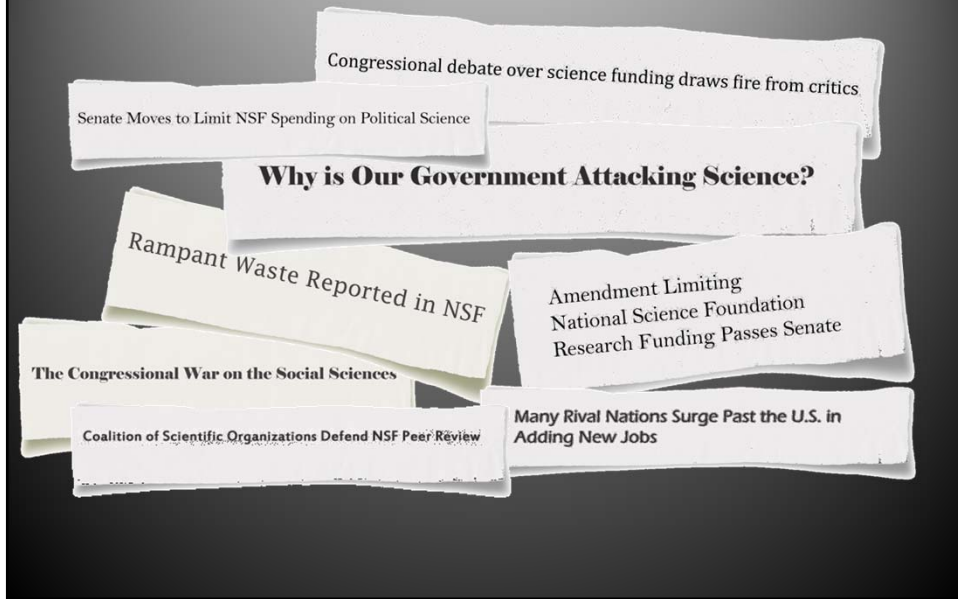
Since the issuance of the December 11 2013 Important Notice to the Community (IN-135) that announced our focus on transparency and accountability, we have developed and are now implementing an approach for addressing the two primary areas of the initiative.

- The first is improving public understanding of our funding decisions through our award Abstracts and Titles.
- The second is ensuring that the broad areas of supported research (or portfolios) are aligned to the national interest, as defined by NSF's mission, "...to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; to secure the national defense..."

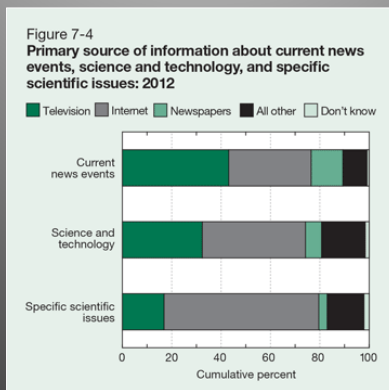
Issue: Changing Budget Landscape



Issue: Public Scrutiny



Issue: Media Landscape



Source: Science & Engineering Indicators 2014

Issue: Society Needs



Natural hazards



Climate change



Energy



Food and drug safety



Cybersecurity

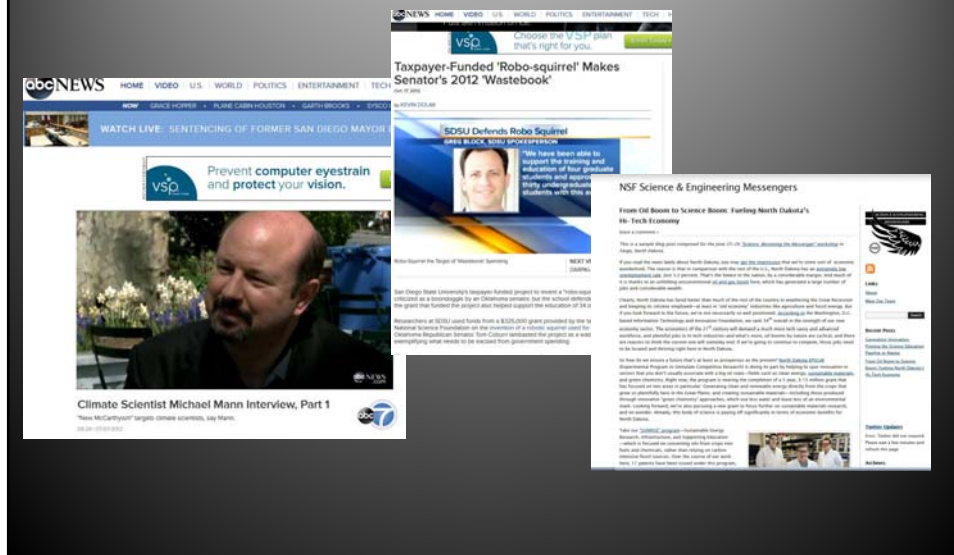


Youth violence

Pressure From All Sides!



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

