



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A11050034

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We assessed an allegation of potential conflicts of interest in NSF's evaluation of proposals (technically, "expressions of interest") solicited for potential future uses of excess NSF equipment¹ used in previous research and scheduled for disposal. Experts² from a large external organization³ were asked to perform an initial technical assessment of the submitted proposals. The potential conflict arose because the organization itself was listed as a partner in one of the proposals.⁴

We interviewed the NSF Program Officer⁵ to gain a perspective of the process of solicitation and assessment. We concluded that the solicitation of the technical evaluation from the participating organization did not constitute an unmanageable conflict of interest, and that the effects were mitigated by the organizational separation between the personnel conducting the technical evaluation and the personnel involved in the organization's proposal. We note that additional information from each of the proposers was sought by NSF Program Officers, who combined that information with the technical evaluation, and who independently made the final determination. We found no evidence that any proposal was inappropriately excluded from consideration, or evaluated on anything other than the announced criteria, or that conflicts of interest tainted the outcome.

This case is closed with no further action taken.

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² The specific individuals performing the technical evaluation were scientists with direct previous experience in operation of the equipment for NSF-sponsored research.

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