



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A14080042

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Closeout

We reviewed an allegation that a PI¹ (Subject) on an NSF Award² received that award through submission of a former colleague's³ (Original Author) proposal⁴ without the Original Author's permission or credit to him as the original author.

A review of the PO's uploaded email documentation in the records for the original proposal revealed that the cognizant Program Officer (PO) had asked the Original Author to address a couple of issues before the PO could approve funding. Shortly thereafter, the Original Author informed the PO that he was going to leave the university and asked if he could transfer the proposal/award to a new institution. The Original Author also asked whether the institution he was leaving could replace him with another PI without his consent. The PO replied that the proposal (as is typical for proposals in that particular award program) was "highly context- and institution-specific" but advised the Original Author to use the knowledge and experience to "submit a new proposal from another institution." He also reminded the Original Author that "NSF makes awards to institutions, and they have the prerogative to change PIs while a proposal is under consideration or after an award."

Further, the PO also included in the formal record a statement about his conclusion that the nature of this award precluded transfer even if the submitting institution had been willing to allow transfer to a new institution. He reiterated that institutions always have the right to request PI changes for their awards.

At approximately the same time, the University submitted a written request for a change of PI to replace the Original Author with the Subject, which the PO approved. The Subject then submitted a written document addressing the aforementioned issues. Ultimately, the PO concluded that the document did not fully address all concerns and decided to decline the proposal, but advised the Subject to revise the proposal to more satisfactorily address the few remaining concerns and have the University resubmit the proposal again. It did so, with a somewhat modified research team (and new proposal number), and the proposal was awarded.

We conclude that the University followed conventional procedures with regard to PI replacement with PO approval. The PO also explicitly stated that the grant would not have been

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eligible to transfer to any new institution of the Original Author's. Further, the Subject was expressly encouraged to resubmit after taking more time to address proposal issues. We find that the Subject's lack of acknowledgement of the Original Author within the body of the revised grant proposal is a departure from accepted practices, but does not rise to the level of research misconduct. We will send the Subject a letter of Questionable Research Practice, reminding her to follow proper attribution practices.

This case is closed with no further action taken.