



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-16-0064-O

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We initiated this investigation pursuant to an allegation that an NSF Principal Investigator (PI) received awards from foreign sources to fund research projects that duplicated research being carried out in the PI's NSF award. We obtained and reviewed university records, interviewed the PI and the Program Officer (PO) for the award, subpoenaed the PI for the foreign award documents, and enlisted the assistance of a subject matter expert. Our expert opined that two of the foreign awards were so similar to the NSF award as to constitute identical research.

Based on these findings, we contacted the university that was responsible for the NSF award at the time the foreign awards were made, requesting its views on the failure to notify NSF of the foreign awards and the effect on the NSF award funds expended at that university. We learned that the university did not know of the foreign awards until almost a year after receipt by the PI, and when it did become aware, it carried out an internal inquiry into the matter, which was inconclusive as to the duplicative nature of the research (the university did not have access to the foreign awards) and which accepted the explanations of the PI about the differences in the awards in finding no other significant misconduct worthy of further inquiry. We concluded the university's actions were reasonable under the circumstances.

We also learned from the university that the foreign awards provided funding for travel, workshop organization, and equipment, for which the NSF award also budgeted over \$20,000 in funding. We contacted the PO for an assessment of this new information. The PO viewed the additional travel and workshop funding as beneficially increasing the opportunities to promulgate the research, rather than as duplicating NSF funding for the same ancillary research activities.

We concluded that the only mechanism available to NSF for dealing with the duplication in funding for the primary research was termination of the NSF award (which remained open at a transferee university, with approximately \$14,000 in unexpended award funds). OIG recommended that NSF terminate the award. NSF accepted OIG's recommendation and terminated the award.

This case is closed with no further action taken.