NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-19-0032-O

We received an allegation of plagiarism claiming material from an awarded NSF proposal (the Award) was copied into two declined proposals submitted to NSF by an Institution. The Institution became aware of the allegation and conducted an investigation. The Award was originally provided by a grant writer to the PI of the declined proposals. The PI then provided the Award to her former administrative assistant (FAA), saying the FAA should use it as a template. The PI asserted that her FAA copied the material from the Award into the first proposal, and the PI then reused that material in the second proposal, unaware it was copied. The Institution concluded the FAA was responsible for the plagiarism.

After reviewing the Institution's report, we contacted the FAA and asked if she had comments on the report. She denied being responsible for the plagiarism and provided evidence supporting her position. To resolve the matter, we conducted our own investigation. We interviewed the FAA, obtained written statements from the PI, and reviewed documentary evidence both provided. The FAA, who was a former student at the Institution, asserted she did not insert the copied text, while the PI continued to assert that the FAA inserted the copied text. Our review of the evidence could not definitively identify who was responsible for the plagiarism. Our review, however, determined that both the FAA and the PI lacked grant-writing experience and were at an institution that lacked grant-writing support.

Although we could not identify who plagiarized the material by a preponderance of the evidence, the PI, who entrusted the FAA to assist in the proposal writing without providing adequate training and with little to no oversight, is ultimately responsible for the content of the proposal. Therefore, we sent the PI a warning letter reminding her of her responsibility to adequately cite material contained in her NSF proposals and her responsibility to provide oversight of proposal preparation when working with others. Accordingly, this case is ***closed*** with no further action taken.