



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-20-0043-O

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We received allegations that a reviewer (Reviewer) participating in a site visit of an NSF-funded center (Center) did not disclose that her company (Company) had been negotiating with the Center to sell it equipment. We learned that when asked to participate in the site visit, the Reviewer asked the Program Director (PD) about her potential programmatic conflicts because she was familiar with the project and was concerned that it was not using the optimum equipment. She also stated her research could be viewed as competing with the Center's. The PD responded that having a challenge could be constructive, so his invitation stood. Before the site visit, the Reviewer completed a Conflict-of-Interests form (Form—NSF Form 1230P). The Reviewer made four disclosures on the Form. Three were about potential research conflicts discussed with the PD, and the fourth was that her husband had a Company that delivered equipment to researchers. Additionally, the PD asked the review panel at least twice before the site visit to disclose anything that would affect their impartiality to conduct the site visit review. The Reviewer made no further disclosures.

We reviewed the Company's webpage and found that the Reviewer was listed as a co-founder and board member of the Company. We also identified evidence that others involved with the Company had been negotiating with the Center to sell it equipment, until their bids were declined the Friday before the site visit was to start on Monday. We interviewed the Center PI who confirmed the Company's interactions with the Center.

Based on the evidence, we recommended NSF take appropriate action and inform us of the outcome. NSF initially barred the Reviewer from serving as a reviewer, advisor, or consultant to NSF for 2 years due to her failure to disclose the full extent of her business relationship with the company on her Form 1230P. Although this decision was considered final and there was no appeal process, the Reviewer nevertheless appealed it through her attorney. NSF accepted the appeal and stayed its action; it subsequently agreed to take no action against the reviewer.

Accordingly, this case is **closed** with no further action taken.