

## CLOSEOUT FOR M-96110038

On 6 November 1996, OIG received a copy of a letter<sup>1</sup> from a complainant<sup>2</sup> in which he expressed concerns about the general management and review of NSF proposals, including his own. As an owner of a small business, the complainant claimed that NSF discriminates against PIs who are similarly affiliated with small, non-academic organizations. He claimed that this discrimination was the consequence of NSF's view that a "university [was] the only place where basic (fundamental, important) research [was] ever possible." OIG decided to review the complainant's most recent NSF proposals to determine if NSF had evaluated them appropriately.

OIG found the complainant had submitted six proposals to one NSF Program<sup>3</sup> over the last 3 years. Three of these proposals (#1, #2 and #3) were declined,<sup>4</sup> and three (#4, #5 and #6) were determined to be inappropriate.<sup>5</sup> NSF informed the complainant of each of these decisions in writing.

The Declined Proposals (#1, #2, #3): All three proposals were reviewed according to the NSF Program's guidelines, including external and panel reviews. In each case, the panels, the external reviewers, and the Program agreed that the proposals should not be funded.

The Inappropriate Proposals (#4, #5, #6): OIG determined that the Program reviewed proposals #4, #5 and #6 according to the guidelines described in the relevant Program Announcements.<sup>6</sup> Each Announcement conveyed the same idea: that "[p]roposals will be

<sup>1</sup> The letter was addressed to [REDACTED]

<sup>2</sup> The complainant [REDACTED] is the owner of a small business, [REDACTED] located [REDACTED]

<sup>3</sup> This is the NSF [REDACTED]

<sup>4</sup> NSF proposal [REDACTED] (#1), entitled [REDACTED] was submitted by the complainant along with three co-PIs [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] NSF proposal [REDACTED] (#2), entitled [REDACTED] was submitted by the complainant with the same three co-PIs as on [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] NSF proposal [REDACTED] (#3), entitled [REDACTED] submitted by the complainant as the sole PI.

<sup>5</sup> NSF proposal [REDACTED] (#4), entitled [REDACTED] was submitted by the complainant with co-PIs, [REDACTED] NSF proposal [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (#5), entitled [REDACTED] was submitted by the complainant as the sole PI. NSF proposal [REDACTED] (#6), entitled [REDACTED] was submitted by the complainant as the sole PI.

<sup>6</sup> The complainant submitted his proposals over a 3-year period: [REDACTED] Over this period the Program Announcement was revised three times. Consequently, one of three successive Program Announcements (NSF [REDACTED] NSF [REDACTED] and NSF [REDACTED] was in effect at the time the complainant submitted his proposals to the NSF Program.

## CLOSEOUT FOR M-96110038

screened to determine responsiveness to the specific requirements of the solicitation. Proposals passing this screening will then be evaluated to determine the most promising approaches." (NSF [REDACTED] page 12.) In each case, the NSF program officer determined that the proposal did not pass the "screening," and, therefore, was considered inappropriate. OIG noted that the Program Announcements for these six proposals specifically targeted small, non-academic organizations and, in fact, contained guidelines restricting university participation in these awards.

OIG determined that the Program processed and reviewed the complainant's six proposals according to the guidelines in the appropriate Program Announcements and that there was no evidence of any bias against the complainant because of his affiliation with a small, non-academic organization.

This case is closed and no further action will be taken.

cc: staff scientist, AIG-Oversight, legal, IG