

CORE QUESTIONS and REPORT TEMPLATE for FY 2014 NSF COMMITTEE OF VISITOR (COV) REVIEWS

Guidance to NSF Staff: This document includes the FY 2014 set of Core Questions and the COV Report Template for use by NSF staff when preparing and conducting COVs during FY 2014. Specific guidance for NSF staff describing the COV review process is described in the “COV Reviews” section of NSF’s Administrative Policies and Procedures which can be obtained at <https://inside.nsf.gov/aboutnsf/hownsfworks/rolesresponsibilities/Pages/Committee-of-Visitors.aspx>¹.

NSF relies on the judgment of external experts to maintain high standards of program management, to provide advice for continuous improvement of NSF performance, and to ensure openness to the research and education community served by the Foundation. Committee of Visitor (COV) reviews provide NSF with external expert judgments in two areas: (1) assessments of the quality and integrity of program operations and program-level technical and (2) managerial matters pertaining to proposal decisions.

The program(s) under review may include several sub-activities as well as NSF-wide activities. The directorate or division may instruct the COV to provide answers addressing a cluster or group of programs – a portfolio of activities integrated as a whole – or to provide answers specific to the sub-activities of the program, with the latter requiring more time but providing more detailed information.

The Division or Directorate may choose to add questions relevant to the activities under review. NSF staff should work with the COV members in advance of the meeting to provide them with the report template, organized background materials, and to identify questions/goals that apply to the program(s) under review.

Suggested sources of information for COVs to consider are provided for each item. As indicated, a resource for NSF staff preparing data for COVs is the Enterprise Information System (EIS) –Web COV module, which can be accessed by NSF staff only at <http://budg-eis-01/eisportal/default.aspx>. In addition, NSF staff preparing for the COV should consider other sources of information, as appropriate for the programs under review.

For programs using section IV (addressing portfolio balance), the program should provide the COV with a statement of the program’s portfolio goals and ask specific questions about the program under review. Some suggestions regarding portfolio dimensions are given on the template. These suggestions will not be appropriate for all programs.

Guidance to the COV: The COV report should provide a balanced assessment of NSF’s performance in the integrity and efficiency of the **processes** related to proposal review. Discussions leading to answers of the Core Questions will require study of confidential material such as declined proposals and reviewer comments. **COV reports should not contain confidential material or specific information about declined proposals.** The reports generated by COVs are made available to the public.

We encourage COV members to provide comments to NSF on how to improve in all areas, as well as suggestions for the COV process, format, and questions. For past COV reports, please see <http://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/activities/cov/>.

¹ The COV Reviews section has three parts: (1) Policy, (2) Procedures, and (3) Roles & Responsibilities.