

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
INFORMATION QUALITY GUIDELINES¹

Oversight Management Responsibility

The Counsel to the Inspector General (Counsel) and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer for the Office of Investigations (OI) (FOIA/OI) will be responsible for receiving and responding to requests for corrections. Counsel will be responsible for producing the annual report to NSF for inclusion in its report to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Deputy Inspector General will be responsible for considering and responding to requests for reconsideration of requests for corrections.

Standards for Disseminated Information²

The National Science Foundation (NSF) Office of Inspector General (OIG) has standards of quality that assure utility, objectivity, and integrity. Statistical information disseminated by OIG is based on sound statistical methods and the principle of transparency. For purposes of these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

Utility means that the information to be disseminated is useful to its intended users including the public.

Objectivity means that disseminated information is substantively accurate, clear, complete, and presented in an unbiased manner.

Integrity means that information is protected from unauthorized access, corruption, or revision to ensure that disseminated information is not compromised through corruption or falsification.

Sound statistical methods means that methods are used to produce information that is accurate, reliable, and unbiased.

¹ OMB issued government-wide guidelines under section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for FY 2001 (Public Law 106-554) to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility and integrity of information disseminated by Federal agencies. OMB's final guidelines were published in the Federal Register at 66 FR 49718 on September 28, 2001, and updated at 67 FR 369 on January 3, 2002. A supplemental version of the guidelines was published in the Federal Register at 67 FR 8452 on February 22, 2002. Each Federal agency is responsible for issuing its own section 515 guidelines. NSF issued information quality guidelines that became effective on October 1, 2002. These guidelines are supplemental to the NSF guidelines. In accordance with the intent of the OMB guidelines, the OIG guidelines -- like NSF's -- focus primarily on dissemination of OIG substantive information (i.e., reports, studies, and summaries), rather than information relating to basic OIG operations.

² Information that is subject to OIG's Information Quality Guidelines includes: Statistical information produced and disseminated by the OIG in support of audit reports, studies, and summaries prepared for dissemination to inform the public about the operation of NSF programs and/or the use of NSF funds; investigation reports and closeout memoranda disseminated in redacted form (consistent with Freedom of Information and Privacy Act restrictions) by OIG for similar purposes; and management implication reports.

Transparency refers to a clear description of the methods, data sources, assumptions, outcomes, and related information that will allow the data user to understand how the information disseminated was produced.

Information means any OIG substantive materials (i.e., reports, studies, and summaries) that contain communications or representations of knowledge such as facts and/or data in any medium or form that is disseminated to the public.

Dissemination means OIG initiated or sponsored distribution of information to the public.

Application of Standards of Quality by the OIG

OIG Audits

The OIG Office of Audit (OA) is responsible for independent audits of NSF programs, systems, and financial statements as well as audits of entities doing business with or receiving benefits from NSF. OA audits are posted on the OIG website.

OA has standards and review procedures in place that assure that information disseminated to the public is reviewed for objectivity, utility, integrity, the use of sound statistical methods, and transparency of methods, sources, assumptions, and outcomes.

OA adheres to *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States (the Yellow Book), which prescribes generally accepted government auditing standards. Further, OA undergoes management and independent peer reviews on a recurring basis.

In addition, each audit is subject to extensive review within OA. Audits of NSF operations and programs (internal audits) are reviewed by OIG senior management. Also, a copy of each internal and external audit report is provided in draft to the NSF component or outside entity organization that is the subject of the audit for review and comment prior to final dissemination. The audited entity's comments are published in the final report.

Prior to posting on the OIG website, the report is reviewed by Counsel to assure compliance with the Privacy Act, the FOIA, Trade Secrets Act, Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002, Federal Financial Management Improvement Act, E-Government Act of 2002, and the NSF Act.

OIG Investigations

The OIG Office of Investigations (OI) is responsible for independent investigations of NSF programs and employees, persons or entities doing business with or receiving benefits from the NSF, and the employees of such entities. Closeout Memoranda, which are brief descriptions of the matter investigated and its outcome, are posted on the OIG website. Reports to NSF about management issues are also posted on the OIG website.

OI adheres to the *Quality Standards for Investigations*, promulgated by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, which prescribe professional standards for

conduct of IG investigations. Further, OI undergoes both management and independent peer reviews on a recurring basis.

In addition, each investigation is subject to extensive review within OI. OI has standards and review procedures in place that assure that information disseminated to the public is reviewed for objectivity, utility, integrity, the use of sound statistical methods where appropriate, and transparency of methods, sources, assumptions, and outcomes. All investigations are reviewed by OIG senior management. Copies of reports of investigation pertaining to substantiated research misconduct and employee misconduct are provided in draft to the subject or subjects of the investigation for review and comment prior to referral to decisional authorities. The comments of the subject or subjects are addressed in the final report.

Prior to posting on the OIG website, documents are reviewed by the case attorney or the FOIA/OI to assure compliance with the Privacy Act, the FOIA, and the Trade Secrets Act.

Information Correction Request and Appeal Process

Background. OIG has developed a procedure to allow affected persons to seek correction of information maintained by disseminated by OIG that allegedly does not comply with OMB or OIG guidelines. To seek correction of covered information, individuals must follow the procedure described below.

Submitting a Request for Correction. All requests for correction of OIG information must be submitted by letter to the Office of Inspector General, ATTN: Counsel to the Inspector General, 4201 Wilson Blvd, Room 1135, Arlington VA 22230, or by fax to (703) 292-9159, or by e-mail to oit@nsf.gov. Requests for Correction must include:

- A statement that the request for correction of information is submitted under the OIG's Information Quality Guidelines.
- Requestor contact information, including the name, mailing address, telephone number, fax number (if any), e-mail address (if any), and organizational affiliation (if any) of the person requesting the correction.
- Description of information to be corrected, including name of the OIG report or data product, date of issuance or other identifying information such as the URL of the web page(s), and a detailed description that clearly identifies the specific information contained in that report or data product for which a correction is being sought.
- Explanation of noncompliance with OMB and/or OIG Information Quality Guidelines. This should include an explanation that describes how information fails to meet either the OMB or OIG Information Quality Guidelines.
- Explanation of the impact of the alleged error on the requestor. An explanation that describes how the alleged error harms the requestor or how a correction would benefit the requestor. OIG may reject claims and need not respond substantively to requests from persons who fail to establish that they are affected by the subject information.

- Recommendation and justification for how the information should be corrected. An explanation that gives the requestor's specific recommendations for how the information should be corrected and that describes the requestor's position as to why the OIG should adopt those recommendations.
- Supporting documentary evidence, such as comparable data or research results on the same topic, which will help in evaluating the merits of the request.

Requestors should be aware that they bear the "burden of proof" with respect to the necessity for correction as well as with respect to the type of correction they seek. OIG will base its decision on the merits of the information provided by the requestor and will not attempt to contact the requestor to obtain additional information when the submission by the requestor is incomplete.

OIG Review of the Request for Correction

Requests for correction of OA or general OIG information covered by these guidelines will be processed by Counsel; requests for correction of covered OI information will be forwarded to and processed by FOIA/OI. OA or OI, as appropriate, will conduct a review of the information being challenged, the processes that were used to create and disseminate the information, and the conformity of the information and those processes with both OMB's and OIG's Information Quality Guidelines. The results of the OA or OI review will be submitted to Counsel or FOIA/OI, as appropriate, who will determine what correction, if any, is warranted.

Corrective action will be determined by the nature and timeliness of the information involved and such factors as the significance of the error on the use of the information, the magnitude of the error, and the cost of undertaking a correction. OIG is not required to change or in any way alter the content or status of information based only on the receipt of a request for correction.

If OIG did not disseminate the information recently (i.e., within one year of the request), OIG may regard the information as stale for purposes of responding to a correction request. OIG need not respond substantively to requests that are frivolous or repetitive, that concern matters not covered by the guidelines,³ or that are from a person not affected by the information.⁴

³ Information that is not subject to OIG's Information Quality Guidelines includes:

- Distribution limited to government employees, or agency contractors or grantees;
- Intra- or inter-agency use or sharing of government information;
- Responses to requests for OIG records under the FOIA, the Privacy Act, or other similar laws;
- Distribution limited to correspondence with individuals or persons regardless of the media used;
- Archival records;
- Public filings, including material filed by the OIG in public dockets;
- Information relating to subpoenas, litigation (including briefs and other information submitted to a court), administrative enforcement proceedings, civil rights and personnel complaints and reviews, debarment and suspension matters, press releases, and Merit System Protection Board matters;
- Information pertaining to basic OIG operations, including outreach publications and the Semi-Annual Report;
- Procedural, operational, or policy manuals, and management information produced for internal use;
- Views or opinions, where the presenter makes clear that what is being offered is someone's opinion rather than fact or OIG's views;
- Research data, findings, reports and other materials published or otherwise distributed by employees or by agency contractors or grantees that are clearly identified as not representing OIG's views;

OIG Response to the Request for Correction

After a final determination on a request for correction has been made, the requestor will be notified by letter, e-mail, or fax. The response will explain the findings and the actions to be taken (if any) in response to the request.

OIG will normally respond to requests for correction of information within 30 working days of receipt. If the request requires more than 30 working days to resolve, OIG will inform the requestor that more time is required, and indicate an estimated decision date.

Request for Reconsideration of OIG's Decision

If the requestor disagrees with OIG's denial of a request or with corrective action OIG intends to take, the requestor may file a request for reconsideration with the Deputy Inspector General (DIG). Persons desiring to file a request for reconsideration should submit the request by letter, fax, or e-mail. Persons requesting reconsideration should also submit written material to support their case for reconsideration.

Requests for reconsideration must be filed with the OIG (postmarked or shipped by an overnight delivery service, or transmitted by e-mail or fax) within 30 calendar days of the date that OIG transmitted its decision on the original request for correction. Requests for reconsideration that are received by the OIG after the 30 calendar day deadline will be denied as untimely.

OIG Review and Response to the Request for Reconsideration

The DIG will review the information in question, the material submitted in support of the request for reconsideration, the material submitted with the original request for correction, and the OIG response to that request. The DIG will then arrive at a decision.

After the DIG has made a decision on the request for reconsideration, OIG will respond to the requestor by letter, e-mail, or fax. The response will explain the DIG's decision and the action the OIG will take (if any) in response to the request for reconsideration.

OIG will respond to all requests for reconsideration within 30 working days of its timely receipt.

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- Hyperlinks to information that others disseminate, as well as paper-based information from other sources referenced, but not approved or endorsed, by the OIG; and
 - Information presented to Congress as part of legislative or oversight processes, such as testimony of OIG officials, and information or drafting assistance provided to Congress in connection with proposed or pending legislation that is not simultaneously disseminated to the public.

⁴ Most of the investigation reports and closeout memoranda disseminated by OI conceal the identities of subjects, witnesses, and investigators by means of text redactions to protect the privacy of such persons and prevent them from being associated with an OIG investigation that did not result in a federal or state conviction, a civil settlement, or a debarment. Parties whose identities are concealed are presumed to be unaffected by the information made available to the public. Furthermore, subjects who have been allowed to review and comment upon draft reports of investigation are similarly presumed to be unaffected by the information made available to the public (the final report of investigation).

Annual Report

Beginning in December, 2012, OIG will submit an annual report to OIRM for further reporting to OMB by January 1 on the number and nature of complaints received by OIG regarding its compliance with Sec. 515 of Public Law 106-554 and how those complaints were resolved.

Date Last Revised: December 2011