



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A03030013

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The case allegation is breach of reviewer confidentiality. The complainant¹ served on an NSF panel, and shortly after his return home was contacted by an individual² (the caller) by email to solicit his opinions of the review process at NSF. The complainant knows the caller only by reputation; they share a mutual interest in education reform. The complainant believes that he and the caller may have divergent views on proper direction for educational reform.

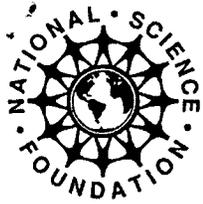
In describing his panel service for NSF, the complainant stated that a list of all panel reviewers was distributed to the collected panelists (approximately 100 people) at an initial gathering. This list included the names of all reviewers serving on the 9-10 concurrent program panels, and therefore included names of members of those panels other than his own. The existence and distribution of this list to all panelists was subsequently confirmed by NSF program officers. The program officers³ also discussed the presence in their community of two divergent groups of educational reformers, and the sometimes contentious nature of interactions between them. The program officers implied that distribution of the complete list of panelists was an effort to defuse any charge of favoritism. The program officers, through unknown means, were aware of the allegation, and the identity of the complainant. As a result, the program officers discontinued their distribution of comprehensive lists of panelists at later meetings of the program panels.

The caller is not the subject of this case, as it was unclear that restrictions of NSF reviewer confidentiality were known to him at the time that contact with the complainant was made. The caller did subsequently serve on an NSF panel in the same overall program as the complainant, and signed the confidentiality agreement at that time, as was made clear when the caller was contacted by phone to gather additional information on this case. The caller stated that he was informed of the complainant's service on the NSF review panel by someone (the purveyor) who served on one of the panels that met at the same time as the complainant's. The purveyor recognized the complainant's name from the list that had been included with the panelist's package. The caller emphasized that the purveyor had not served on the same panel as the complainant, and had had no personal interaction with the complainant at the meeting. The caller declined to identify the purveyor. However, the caller volunteered to contact the purveyor and suggest that the person contact NSF OIG directly by email or by phone to discuss the issue. However, such contact has not occurred, and the identity of the purveyor remains unknown.

¹ redacted.

² redacted.

³ redacted.



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The purveyor could be any one of the approximately 100 panelists that received the list at the initial meeting of the reviewer cohort. The program officers have discontinued their practice of distributing a comprehensive reviewer list. The caller is also aware of the confidentiality restrictions, both from subsequent personal service on an NSF panel, and as a result of the phone conversation with NSF OIG. A follow-up letter to the caller with a reiteration of those restrictions will be generated. Although it cannot be assured, the same message will likely be transferred to the purveyor, emphasizing the confidentiality agreement that the purveyor presumably signed as a reviewer. These actions are sufficient to protect NSF'S interests.

Accordingly, this case is closed.