NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A05070053

This case arose from an allegation of intellectual theft[1] regarding a proposal (the subject proposal).[2] It was alleged that language and ideas in the proposal were drawn from another funded proposal.[3] Our review of the subject proposal found multiple sections that appeared similar to the alleged source proposal. In addition, the subject proposal appeared to have some of its structure drawn from the source proposal. The structure in question was not dictated by the program announcement or other source that appeared common to the two proposals.

In response to our inquiry, the five PIs told us that two of the PIs, subjects 1 and 2, were the principal authors of the subject proposal. The subjects said they had immediately contacted the source proposal PIs and extended their apologies. Subject 1, acknowledged that he was the lead author. Subject 2 stated that he had obtained the source proposal from the PIs of that proposal. Both subjects explained that they had the written permission from the PIs of the source proposal to use it in the construction of the subject proposal. They provided e-mails demonstrating an active conversation between the subjects and the PIs of the source proposal during the development of the subject proposal. The subjects acknowledged that they had also failed to provide necessary citations to the publications of another author.[4]

Subject 1 stated he "utilize the [source proposal] but only to a limited extent" and said he "fail[ed] to exercise the necessary thoroughness in preparing the final version of our proposal."[5] He stated that he "did not include [the other author's] publications in our references for the same reason: a "referencing error . . . in preparing the final version of our proposal."[6] He characterized his citation failures as a "careless editing mistake, but nothing more than that."[7] He "acknowledge[d] that . . . [he] did not take sufficient care to ensure that all of the necessary references were included,"[8] that his proposal preparation process "failed miserably"[9] when

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1 [redacted]
2 [redacted]
3 [redacted]
4 [redacted]
5 Id.
6 Id.
7 Subject 1's [redacted]
8 Id.
9 Id.

preparing a muti-institutional submission, and that he had permanently changed the way he prepare proposals. Subject 2 characterized the citation omissions as a "single unfortunate and inadvertent editing mistake"[10] and offered preparation haste as the reason for providing the citations. He stated that the references had been "inadvertently left out."[11]

We determined there was no need to pursue this case further. The subjects had contacted and apologized to the source proposal PIs for their unacknowledged use of the source proposal. The mitigating circumstance in this case is that the subjects had the written permission of the PIs to use their materials. In closing this case, we discussed with the subjects the errors in their reasoning and strongly encourage the subjects to adopt approaches that would be designed to assiduously acknowledge the contributions of others in their work, stating that such care, would avoid allegations of plagiarism and intellectual theft. We reminded the subjects that in circumstances such as this failure to carefully acknowledge the intellectual contributions of others can damage not only their reputations with their colleagues, but also the reputations of those associated with their efforts. We reminded them that proposal preparation haste is an inadequate reason for failing to take one of the most important steps in written and oral communications: appropriately crediting sources. We reminded them that the free exchange of ideas within the research community relies on three essential elements: obtaining permission to use another's intellectual property, carefully distinguishing the other researcher's material from your own within oral or written presentations, and finally, providing adequate acknowledgment to the original author.

We provided them with NSF's expectations articulated in *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG) that:

> NSF expects strict adherence to the rules of proper scholarship and attribution. The responsibility for proper attribution and citation rests with authors of a proposal; all parts of the proposal should be prepared with equal care for this concern. Authors other than the PI (or any co-PI) should be named and acknowledged. Serious failure to adhere to such standards can result in findings of research misconduct.[12]

Accordingly, this case is ***closed***.

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[10] Subject 2's [redacted].
[11] Subject 2's [redacted].
[12] *Grant Proposal Guide*, Section I.D.3.