



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A06040010

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We received an allegation that 6 previously declined NSF proposals<sup>1</sup> were available on a graduate student's<sup>2</sup> website, whose advisor<sup>3</sup> served as an NSF panelist for all 6 declined proposals. We opened an inquiry to determine why these declined NSF proposals were placed on a public website, whether the advisor gave the graduate student access to these NSF proposals, and if so, for what purpose.

We spoke to the graduate student and learned that he had received the proposals from his advisor for the purpose of reviewing certain sections within his area of expertise. He stated that while he did not recall the specifics with respect to these declined proposals, it was a fairly routine task for him to answer specific questions for his advisor regarding research issues within his area of expertise. However, he denied writing the actual reviews. The graduate student was surprised to learn that these proposals were available via his website, as he had only placed them on his internal drive to which only he should have had access. He noted that this was an IT security problem and that he would follow up with IT regarding this problem. He agreed to take the proposals off of his internal drive immediately after our discussion.

We then contacted the advisor to inform him that these proposals were made available to the public and to ask him if he provided these proposals to his graduate student, and if so, for what purpose. We also asked him to address whether he requested permission of the NSF Program Director (PD) before doing so, as required by the NSF Form 1230P, Conflict-of-Interests and Confidentiality Statement for NSF Panelists that he signed.

The advisor cooperated fully, appeared to understand the gravity of the situation, and responded that he did not realize that any proposals were available on a public website, and that he deeply regretted the breach of confidentiality. He stated that while he did not remember the specific circumstances by which he provided these proposals to his graduate student, he normally did so in order to research specific issues outside of his area of expertise. After reviewing the confidentiality statement that he signed as a panelist, he apologized for having breached that agreement by providing the proposals to his graduate student without permission from NSF. He now recognized that this was wrong and promised not to do so again. He stated that he wrote all of the reviews, and that the graduate student's role was limited to researching specific issues or concepts included in the proposals.

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<sup>1</sup> Redacted

<sup>2</sup> Redacted

<sup>3</sup> Redacted



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After consulting with the NSF PD,<sup>4</sup> we concluded that the advisor is now well aware of his duty to maintain proposals that he reviews in strictest confidentiality. In addition, he clearly understands that he must request and obtain permission from NSF before sharing any such proposals with his graduate students or other colleagues in the future.

We sent a letter to the advisor reiterating his obligations as NSF panelist. No further OIG action is warranted.

Accordingly, this case is closed.

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<sup>4</sup> Redacted