

National Science Foundation
Office of the Director
Arlington, VA 22230

Notice No. 136

March 28, 2014

**IMPORTANT NOTICE TO PRESIDENTS OF UNIVERSITIES AND
COLLEGES AND HEADS OF OTHER NATIONAL SCIENCE
FOUNDATION AWARDEE ORGANIZATIONS**

Subject: NSF Abstracts and Titles

Since the issuance of the December 11, 2013 Important Notice to the Community (IN-135) that announced our focus on transparency and accountability, we have developed and are now implementing an approach for addressing the two primary areas of the initiative.

- The first is improving public understanding of our funding decisions through our award Abstracts and Titles.
- The second is ensuring that the broad areas of supported research (or portfolios) are aligned to the national interest, as defined by NSF's mission, "...to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; to secure the national defense..."

In this notice, I want to clarify the NSF policy on award Abstracts and Titles. We are acting to ensure that our award Abstracts and Titles clearly convey to the public justification for our actions.

First, NSF abstracts are the public face of NSF investments and decision-making and they can be used to immediately address a specific area of interest from those outside of the NSF regarding what projects are supported and why. By providing clearer articulation of our actions we will benefit the scientific enterprise and better communicate the value and excitement of what we do.

An NSF award abstract, with its title, is an NSF document that describes the project and justifies the expenditure of Federal funds.

There are two major components of the NSF Abstract:

- A nontechnical description of the project that states the problem to be studied, and explains the project's broader significance and importance, that serves as a public justification for NSF funding. This component should be understandable to an educated lay reader. It may include such information as the theoretical or analytical foundation of the proposed research, the fundamental issues that may be resolved by the research, the

- project's relation to NSF's mission, the project's place in the context of ongoing research in the field, the project's potential impact on other fields, and the prospect that it will lead to significant advances or the integration of related lines of inquiry.
- A technical description of the project that states the goals and scope of the research, and the methods and approaches to be used. In many cases, the technical description may be a modified version of the project summary submitted with the proposal.

Thus, an NSF award abstract which is intended for a broad audience may differ from the Project Summary that is submitted as part of a technically reviewed proposal.

Furthermore, the title of an NSF supported project must describe the purpose of the research in nontechnical terms to the fullest possible extent.

Your appreciation of the role of the NSF abstract and title is essential.

We thank you for your understanding. As always, we welcome your input.

Cora B. Marrett Acting
Director