NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences
Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate

Tips and Guidelines on the Submission of Effective Annual, Final, and Project Outcomes Reports

Project reports are a very important component in the management of awards at NSF, and your reports become part of the permanent record for your award. The purpose of these guidelines is to inform PIs about how project reports are used at NSF, and how to write them.

(1) Why do I need to submit annual and final reports for my award?

Regular reporting on the progress of your NSF award is one of the obligations under the terms and conditions of your award from NSF. Failure to provide NSF with timely and accurate reports will prevent you and any of your co-PIs from receiving additional awards, including the release of a continuing grant increment (CGI) on your award. In turn, it is the obligation of the NSF Program Officers (PO) to respond to a submitted report in a timely manner.

Project reports are a critical communication between you and the program(s) that manages your award. Project reports inform Program Officers about your progress, successes achieved, discoveries made, as well as impediments that you have encountered and your plans for overcoming impediments. Your project report is:

- an essential resource when Program Officers are looking for program highlights;
- a permanent record of the work that has been supported by NSF;
- used by outside reviewers to evaluate NSF programs; and
- can be used by NSF to assure Congress and the American taxpayers that NSF is addressing its mission and goals.

(2) What are the differences between annual, interim, final and project outcomes reports?

An **Annual Report** must be submitted and approved every year of an award and must describe the activities of the project during the year of the reporting period.

A **Final Report** must be submitted and approved at the end of the project, even if an annual report was submitted not long before. It should cover the activities during the last year of the award.

An **Interim Report** can be submitted at any time during the life of the award to inform NSF of activities related to the funded project such as significant publications or a completed dissertation. PIs are cautioned not to confuse Interim Reports with Annual Reports; Interim reports do not fulfill your annual reporting requirements. For example, the submission and review of an Interim Report does not release a continuing grant increment, whereas the successful submission and approval of an Annual Report does.

A **Project Outcomes Report** must be submitted at the completion of the project. This report should be submitted through Research.gov (*not* through FastLane) and is not subject to approval by NSF Program Officers, although they may be consulted in the process. This report is for the general public and should be written in a manner that is accessible to a broad audience. For more information see item (11) below and http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/porfaqs.jsp.

(3) When are reports due, and when are they considered overdue?

NSF sends out automatic requests for reports when these have become due. Be sure to pay attention to these requests.

A reporting requirement is considered to be satisfied only after a submitted report has been approved by your Program Officer. It is your responsibility as a PI to ensure that you have allowed enough time for the Program Officer to approve your report. If you submit a report that is incomplete and/or has to be returned to you for any changes, the reporting requirement will not be satisfied until your revised report has been submitted and approved.

Unless otherwise specified in the award, **annual project** reports should be submitted at least 90 days prior to the end of the current budget period to allow adequate time for the Program Officer to review and approve the report. As reflected in the FastLane Project Report System, the report is considered due during the 90 day period. The report becomes overdue the day after the 90 day period ends. Failure to submit timely reports will delay processing of additional funding and administrative actions, including, but not limited to, no cost extensions. Annual reports are required for every 12 month period of the total award.

Within 90 days following expiration of an award, a **final project** report must be submitted electronically via the NSF FastLane System. As reflected in the FastLane Project Report System, the report is considered due during the 90 day period. The report becomes overdue the day after the 90 day period ends. A final report replaces an annual report only if the expiration date for your award coincides with the project's award anniversary. If it does not, then an annual report will be due for the 12-month period following the previous report period.

If you have any questions about when your report is due, contact your Program Officer for guidance.

Please be aware that if the anniversary date of your award falls close to the end of the federal fiscal year (September 30), and you have a continuing grant and are due a Continuing Grant Increment (CGI), then it is highly recommended that you submit your annual report early so that it can be approved and the process of releasing your CGI can occur before the end of the fiscal year.

You should also be aware that changes to the award expiration date resulting from a no-cost extension will affect your reporting requirements. If you request an extension beyond the initial expiration date, you will need to submit an annual report for the year preceding the extension period. FastLane will automatically add this additional annual report to your reporting module and will reset the due date for your final report as soon as the extension has been approved. **Do not** submit a final report if you plan to request a no-cost extension, because an approved final report will close your award.

(4) What should you put in your report?

The NSF FastLane reporting function comprises a template that you should follow. You should fill in as many of the sections of the report template as are relevant to your project, but be sure to limit your reporting to **only those activities that were supported by the NSF award**.

Your report must stand on its own, such that a Program Officer need not refer to your proposal in order to understand the relationship between your report and the funded project. Effective reports include a succinct statement describing the originally proposed project (hypotheses, goals, strategies, and methods) at the beginning of the Activities and Findings section. Effective reports make links between the original hypotheses, goals, and/or strategies described in your proposal and the various findings and completed activities from the reporting period. The content of your report, including PDF attachments, should not depend on access to internet hyperlinks. Attachment of published papers is not acceptable in lieu of completing the Project Report template.

Please write a report that is as succinct, complete, and accurate as possible.

Project Outcomes Reports (PORs) are different in that their audience is the general public and not Program Officers at NSF. Please see item (11) below for more on PORs.

(5) What happens if my Project Report is returned to me by my Program Officer?

The Program Officer will give feedback about what you need to do in order to get your Project Report into shape for approval. Work with your Program Officer in a timely manner to provide an accurate and complete report.

(6) What if I need to change the scope of my project?

A change in scope in your project requires submission of a "Change in Scope" request via FastLane. Your Program Officer must review it and will determine whether or not to approve it.

If you have a question about whether changes in your project involve a change in scope, contact your program officer. A change in scope without approval can result in action on the part of NSF.

(7) What is the Program Officer looking for in addition to my activities and findings report?

Program Officers check whether you acknowledged NSF in the publications that you list in your report and attribute to the research conducted during the reporting period of the award. Acknowledgment of NSF in supported publications and presentations is a condition of your NSF award. On the other hand, do not acknowledge NSF if the publication was based on work outside the scope of your award from NSF.

If there have been any changes in the use of human subjects in your award, such as a change in methods that entails a change in your IRB approval, then a modified IRB needs to be filed with NSF.

(8) What should I do if the FastLane reporting function does not accept an entry for a presentation or contribution to a conference or its proceedings?

Because the FastLane reporting function will only allow you to enter publications in conference proceedings if the conference is listed in its database, FastLane may not accept a publication in the publication reporting fields. If this is the case, you can enter the relevant information in the Activities and Findings section of your report.

(9) Can I leave information that I supplied for previous reporting periods in the Annual Report for the current year?

The FastLane reporting function accumulates components from previous reports for a particular project. It is not necessary to delete information from your previous report, but it may be necessary to update that information so that the report clearly identifies which reporting components (e.g., project personnel, activities and findings) correspond to the current reporting period, and which to previous reporting periods.

(10) If my award was made as part of a collaborative proposal, what are my reporting requirements?

Collaborative proposals from separate institutions have two or more PIs (at least one from each institution). PIs from each institution must submit annual and final reports. These reports may be coordinated by including reporting elements that are common to all collaborators (e.g., the summary of project goals, hypotheses, shared methods, etc.). However, each report should also be careful to identify the research participants, activities and findings that are specific to the collaborative component that the reporting PI oversees.

(11) Is my final report the same as the project outcome report that I am being asked to provide?

NO! Project Outcomes Reports (PORs) are a separate requirement for all awards made or that received funding increments or supplements on or after January 4, 2010. PORs should be submitted by the PI directly through Research.gov (not FastLane) and should consist of a brief summary, prepared specifically for the public (which can include Congress and its staff), on outcomes of the funded project. These reports should be written in an accessible language and make a clear argument as to why the findings of the research are of interest to American taxpayers.   A full set of FAQs with regard to the POR can be found on the Policy Office website at: http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/index.jsp

(12) Other recommendations (dos and don'ts):

•Do include discussion of any impediments that altered or interfered with the progress of your funded project, and how you plan to address them;
• Do include information about the contribution to the research project for each listed member of the research team, including senior personnel, post-docs, graduate and undergraduate students and other participants. (To do so you will have to use the editing function for the participants' entry in the reporting module.);
• Do revise reporting fields when needed in order to ensure that the information is accurate and up-to-date;
• Do proofread your report and turn off smart quotes and other automatic formatting in WORD, as these are converted into question marks in the FastLane conversion to PDF process. Internet Explorer provides the best browser interface; MAC users should be aware of formatting conversion issues;
• Do list conference presentations and other presentations that result from the research.

• Don't give a step by step listing of your data analysis;
• Don't provide all the results of your statistical analysis – summarize instead!;
• Don't leave blank sections for which you can report something;
• Don't upload your article(s) or your dissertation (for DDRIGs) as a replacement for your report;
• Don't list publications or presentations that report activities and findings that were not supported by the award;
• Don't upload copies of unpublished manuscripts.

For answers to further questions about NSF reports, please contact your Program Officer.