



**National Science Foundation
Directorate for Education and Human Resources**

Division of Graduate Education

**Program Response
Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT)
Committee of Visitors Report**

September 2005

The IGERT program staff wishes to thank the Committee of Visitors (COV) for its insightful and comprehensive report on the IGERT program. This report while complimenting the program and its management also makes several suggestions. This document provides the staff response to the COV suggestions.

PART A. INTEGRITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE PROGRAM'S PROCESSES AND MANAGEMENT

COV Suggestion 1: The program management team might discuss whether it would be possible to pare down the number of full proposals that are submitted for full review and/or provide more directive feedback to PIs at each level of the review stage. [Note: In the most recent proposal jackets that were examined, it appeared that more careful reviews were indeed being provided to the PIs. So this issue may be moot thanks to the new leadership.]

Program response: Current guidelines already restrict institutions to a maximum of two full proposal submissions per cycle regardless of the number of invitations to the institution. The number of full proposals cannot be reduced without imposing further restrictions. The review quality and consistency are being reviewed by DGE and a sub-committee of the ICC.

Proposal pressure is very high in the preproposal competition. This issue was discussed within DGE and at the ICC resulting in a new policy recommendation to restrict institutions to a maximum of four preproposal submissions per cycle. The FY 2006 solicitation (under development at the time of this writing) incorporates this new policy.

COV Suggestion 2: The program managers need to continue to emphasize communicating the explicit reasons for accepting or declining a proposal, much as we are seeing in the most recent proposal jackets.

Program response: We will continue to enhance the clarity of reasons for actions taken.

COV Suggestion 3: Now that this program is six years old, it may be appropriate for the program management team, perhaps in consultation with an ad hoc group of advisors, to revisit the program-specific criteria and assess whether adjustments might be appropriate.

Program response: We agree with the COV that it is an appropriate time for revisiting program-specific issues. Discussions have already begun within DGE and at the ICC and a preliminary analysis & action plan (AAP) will be developed soon outlining next steps.

COV Suggestion 4: Another issue for the management team to discuss is whether the size and duration of projects will begin to vary in the future. By the time the next COV is convened, the program will have accumulated a significant track record that will allow better and more longitudinal assessment and may well lead to the necessity of a strategic planning process for IGERT.

Program response: The size and duration of IGERT projects will be considered in the AAP development mentioned earlier.

COV Suggestion 5: As the EPSCoR management team is in the process of considering what the future composition of its programs might be, it may be worthwhile to explore whether a co-funding mechanism between IGERT and EPSCoR might be possible.

Program response: In the existing model EPSCoR occasionally provides first year funding for one or two IGERTs upon recommendation of DGE and availability of funds. Further strengthening the partnership with EPSCoR is certainly of interest to us and will be explored.

COV Suggestion 6: We believe that continued vigilance and more and/or different efforts need to be made to improve in the area of underrepresented participation. There are clear efforts being made to address this issue and we encourage these to continue.

Program response: Agree. A diversity sub-committee of the ICC was established last year. This sub-committee has developed a first set of recommendations that are being incorporated in the 2006 solicitation. We will continue to develop and explore new ideas for broadening participation of underrepresented minorities, women and people with disabilities in IGERT projects. Strategies to work closely with HRD, AGEF, LSAMP, etc., will be explored in the AAP.

COV Suggestion 7: There is clearly enough work for two directors, as is currently in place. We urge that this practice be continued, especially if one of the directors is a rotator. This provides excellent continuity and distributes the workload in a more manageable fashion.

Program response: Staff agree that two program directors is optimal for the program and we'll do all we can to continue in this track.

COV Suggestion 8: Program managers may wish to consult with appropriate advisory boards and/or agency-wide managers on how to deal with the need to balance constrained budgets with emerging priorities. IGERT is an experiment with tremendous potential for driving meaningful institutional change and its progress and evolution need to be managed with great care.

Program response: Agree. The program anticipates operating under a flat or declining budget for two years. With the stipend increase (to \$30,000/year) mandated by congress two years ago, the flat budget is resulting in fewer students per award. A reduced budget (FY 2007 guidance level) will result in fewer awards per cycle. DGE will work with the EHR leadership on this issue.

PART B. RESULTS OF NSF INVESTMENTS

COV Suggestion 9: We urge the program directors to consider developing a set of "best practices" for People development that can be shared among institutions. Such practices could include how to recruit and retain underrepresented groups to STEM fields and how to provide training experiences that allow students to enter the global marketplace.

Program response: Abt Associates have been contracted to conduct an "impact of IGERT" study. The final report will be made available to DGE in early 2006. We will consider developing a follow-up strategy that will include the COV suggestion.

COV Suggestion 10: The nature and importance of the IGERT projects described here indicate the need for significant interaction with the national and global industrial sector. We urge the Foundation to direct the PIs, where appropriate, to be certain that industry partners are well represented on individual IGERT advisory boards.

Program response: There is a significant interaction with industry in many IGERT projects via advisory boards, student internships, and research. The panels seek out opportunities to comment and advise PIs to establish / sustain industry linkages. The program agrees with the COV suggestions and will continue to emphasize the importance of industry partners and panelists.

COV Suggestion 11: It may be beneficial to applicants to clarify what exactly is meant by "tools." At present the indication is that these refer to facilities and other infrastructure, which leads applicants to include in their proposals requests for equipment (computers, microscopes). The COV agreed that this is a broad

concept that in many ways is tied to innovation, and that tools such as new courses, videoconferencing, and web-based instruction and research should be encouraged and are legitimate examples for the “Tools” goal.

Program response: We fully agree with the COV’s broader interpretation of tools and their important role in the increasingly “flattened” world we live in. We will use formal and informal ways to communicate this interpretation to the IGERT community.