the DETAILS

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what's inside

Updates

2007 Annual Employee Survey

NSF recently completed the analysis of its first Annual Employee Survey (AES), which was conducted in Fall 2007. Federal agencies are required to administer the survey every two years, using a subset of questions from the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS), to assess employee satisfaction and attitudes about leadership and management practices that contribute to agency performance. Dr. Bement and Dr. Olsen shared results of the survey with NSF staff at the end of February and with the National Science Board at the end of March.

Findings from the 2007 survey suggest that NSF employees are pleased with their work environment and continue to view the Foundation in a positive light. These results were largely consistent with the 2006 survey and continue the positive trend the Foundation has seen since the first mandated FHCS survey was conducted in 2002. While NSF respondents expressed the opinion that they are very busy, 57% feel their workload is reasonable, 93% of believe the work they do is important, and 77% answered favorably to the question, "Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job?"

Responses to all 40 questions can be found in the 2007 AES Trend Analysis document posted on the NSF website.

Administrative Functions Study Management Pilot Update

The year-long Administrative Functions Study (AFS) Management Pilot, which began in October 2007, recently passed the 6-month milestone. Four Directorates – BIO, ENG, GEO and MPS – have partnered with each other and OIRM to test the administrative management component of a new career model for administrative professionals in the research Directorates. The model introduces new administrative positions – Program Support Managers (PSMs) and Operations Specialists (OSs) – identifies potential career paths for these employees, and better aligns administrative functions in support of NSF's mission and strategic goals.

Participants report the following **benefits** of the pilot: *opportunities to network with others in the pilot Directorates*, *sharing "best practices" with their peers*, and *using their peers as a resource when dealing with challenges*. PSMs report that they have *more time to focus on staff supervision and mentoring* and believe the training they've received has been beneficial in their new role. Two of the main **challenges** reported by OSs: *helping Division staff adjust to their new role* and *learning their new duties*. OSs report, however, that they have enjoyed taking on new duties that they otherwise would not have the opportunity to learn.

Throughout the pilot, data are collected to determine the extent to which the PSM and OS positions are working and whether each Directorate is meeting its objectives. Data from the March collection are currently being analyzed by the AFS Evaluation Team. The next data collection will begin in June, a final evaluation will be conducted upon the completion of the pilot, and the results are expected to be published before the end of the year.

Post-Award Monitoring Keeps Advancing
Post-Award Administration

NSF continues to refine its post-award financial and administrative monitoring program. Within the last three years, the Office of Budget, Finance, and Award Management (BFA) has established the Division of Institution and Award Support to lead the Agency's cradle-to-grave award administration efforts; significantly increased staff and contractor expertise specifically dedicated to post-award activities; and continued to incorporate government-wide best practices throughout its efforts. Through a combined set of activities (on-site reviews, business system reviews, desk reviews, transactional testing), NSF if confident in its ability to ensure exemplary stewardship of taxpayer investment. Over the past several years, we have worked diligently to develop a comprehensive and structured post-award monitoring program. The benefits of this program include the following:

• Using the sound and cost-beneficial approach of a risk assessment model allows us to focus monitoring resources on the 25% of NSF's awardees that manage 93% of the award dollars. In this way, we ensure stewardship over Federal funding and manage burden on the community. We have used a mixed protocol of desk reviews, on-site visits, and financial transaction testing that further targets the Foundation's resources in this endeavor.

• NSF now detects potential problems earlier in the award life cycle, and we can assist organizations in addressing deficiencies that impact their ability to adequately manage Federal funds and thus possibly avoid negative audit findings.

• With our more holistic perspective, we are able to mine monitoring results for "lessons learned" that help form both ours and the institutions' policies and practices around sound stewardship.

Our Award Monitoring and Business Assistance Program (AMBAP) is increasingly recognized as a standard of excellence across the Federal Government, consistent with the Foundation's reputation for first-class management. For example, (1) during our initial development of the AMBAP, NSF benchmarked other Federal agencies and found that nothing comprehensive existed; (2) during recent OMB Circular A-123 training conducted by OMB and a private sector CPA firm, the firm mentioned NSF's AMBAP as a "gold standard;" attendees included 60-80 people from various Federal and State entities, and several NSF staff; (3) NSF's financial statement auditors informed us that they have been advising other Federal clients to consider implementing a similar program for monitoring awards; and (4) a number of Federal agencies have benchmarked NSF.

Specific 2007 Achievements:

• Continued implementation and refinement of the AMBAP; the program provides disciplined and comprehensive post-award monitoring for NSF's high-risk and medium-risk awards. In FY 2007, staff conducted 22 AMBAP site visits; in addition, 115 desk reviews were completed and 38 are in progress, as of September 26, 2007.

• A database system was developed to enhance the tracking of post-award monitoring site visit and desk review activities.

• Submission of Indirect Cost Rate proposals from potential awardees has been streamlined.

• NSF's first, unified set of standard operating procedures for post-award monitoring now includes upgrades of site visit protocols and templates designed to elicit consistent and comprehensive information. The desk review protocol has been developed and implemented. Protocols for follow-up activities have been completed and are currently being implemented for both site visits and desk reviews.

Future plans include, full implementation of the database and analytical tools, analysis of the survey feedback, and continued assessment and refinement of the AMBAP activities.

eJacket: Division Director (DD) Concur

eJacket provides NSF staff with web-based capability to perform many essential business functions related to proposal and award processing. Currently, program staff cannot complete the award recommendation within eJacket; instead, they must exit eJacket and use the Proposal and Reviewer System (PARS) when recommending a proposal for award.

The DD Concur initiative will allow proposals to be processed entirely by electronic means. Program Officers, Administrative Reviewers, and Division Directors will be able to process all recommendations in eJacket. DD Concur will be completed via electronic signatures – no more signing off on paper! The initiative will also allow the ability to update award-related proposal data via proposal data maintenance and to forward/approve co-funding line splits so co-funding programs can electronically sign off on their funding.

Initial planning for DD Concur began in April 2008. BFA's Division of Institution and Awards Support (DIAS) and Division of Grants and Agreements (DGA), and the Business Applications Requirements Review Board, which has representatives from all Directorates, will provide detailed requirements and feedback for this initiative.

Reviewer Management

The highly anticipated Reviewer Management initiative is about to kick off! Based on excellent feedback gathered during a set of "Road Shows," which spanned from Fall 2007 to Spring 2008, we've determined the highest priority tools and services that will become available. They are:

– **Reviewer Identification (Find a Reviewer!)** will include the ability for Program Officers (POs) and support staff to conduct a detailed search for Reviewers through the *Web of Science*® databases. This search will also provide easier identification of Conflicts of Interest. By using an external database, we will broaden the pool and diversity of Reviewers currently available.
– **Online Profile Update** will allow NSF Principal Investigators to update expanded personal profile information to capture new data relevant to finding qualified and exceptional Reviewers.
– **Volunteer to Be a Reviewer** will allow non-NSF Principle Investigators to let their intentions be known! Through Research.gov, people interested in becoming Reviewers for NSF will be able to volunteer via a web form.
– **NSF Internal Data Search** will scan existing NSF data (including proposals) to find Reviewers based on selected keywords and relevance. The internal and external *Web of Science*® searches will be combined so that POs and support staff will be able to search both sources of data at one time.

In May and June 2008, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, in coordination with BFA will hold four information sessions to review results from Directorate and Office focus groups and work with program staff to gather requirements for high priority services.

NSF Launches Research.gov

In December 2007, NSF launched Research.gov, an exciting new initiative that modernizes FastLane and provides a menu of modern grants management services and the latest information for NSF staff and the external research community. OMB selected NSF to lead a grants management consortium for research because of our high standards, performance and successful track record with FastLane.

Research.gov is an important opportunity for NSF to continue its leadership in the grants community. It also provides proven NSF business processes on a modern technology platform and raises the bar for electronic grants management services available to the research community. The initial release of Research.gov offers publicly-available services:

- **Research Spending and Results Search**: Find out where Federal research grant dollars are going. Search awards by a number of elements including awardee and congressional district.
- **Research Headlines**: View research news and articles from NSF and its partner agencies.
- **Policy Library**: Find agency policies, guides, terms and conditions, and instructions that applicants and agencies need to conduct grants business.

In January 2008, during a series of Research.gov town hall meetings, NSF staff expressed their desire for Research.gov to offer new and improved services for internal staff. In response to those requests, the Office of Information and Resource Management (OIRM) and BFA will work with NSF Program Staff to define and incorporate these new services into Research.gov.

Beginning this Fall, Research.gov will offer a Program Desktop that offers tools for program staff to find information and manage their grant portfolios. The initial release will include reviewer management and proposal management services and subsequent releases will provide portfolio management tools. NSF is also planning to transition legacy application functions to the modern Research.gov technology platform to improve service delivery and user experience.

In February 2008, NSF introduced the Grants Application Service to a limited audience of 31 grantee institutions, enabling researchers and sponsored program officers to view the status of proposals for NSF and USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). This summer, NSF will launch this service for all institutions. Leading up to this launch, NSF will invite additional institutions to participate on a rolling basis.

In March 2008, NSF entered into Research.gov Partnerships with NASA and DoD, and is in the process of signing an agreement with USDA/CSREES. Other agency news: NASA plans to include its award data in Research Spending and Results; Defense Research plans to pilot Grants Application Status Service with Army Research Office, Air Force Office of Scientific Research, and Defense Threat Reduction Agency followed by Office of Naval Research and DARPA in a later phase; and, USDA/CSREES is partnering on the Grants Application Status service.

Security and Privacy Corner

Protecting Personal Information

We know that NSF employees transport personal information in a variety of ways – traveling to a conference with their laptop, logging in from a hotel room while on a business trip, and carrying a business file on a memory stick in their pocket as they catch the Metro for a meeting, just to name a few scenarios. Information is mobile these days – it's so easily portable and accessible that we hardly think about it. But sometimes we work with sensitive business information that includes personal information about employees or customers – and personal information needs extra protection.

It's not uncommon to hear news reports about the loss of personal information. But less frequently discussed are the numerous safeguards that organizations, including NSF, have put into place to prevent such losses. Safeguarding of personal information in files and on mobile devices is not just required NSF policy; it's also a good business practice. NSF has two important initiatives to protect personal information: Data Encryption and *SSN Be Gone*.

Data Encryption

We're progressing in our efforts to encrypt mobile storage devices that store NSF data, including laptops, BlackBerries, and memory sticks.

Laptop encryption has been the first priority. We've encrypted a large number of NSF-owned laptops and for the past month, we have been working with Directorates and Offices to get any remaining laptops encrypted. Laptop encryption only takes a few hours and is usually completed overnight to minimize inconvenience.

In April 2008, we implemented an encryption program for all BlackBerry handhelds. All BlackBerry users were asked to create and use a password, which will seal the encryption for the handhelds and ensure protection of private information if a BlackBerry is lost or stolen. In the near future, we'll be providing NSF staff with information on protecting other mobile devices, such as memory sticks.

SSN Be Gone

To ensure the security of customer and employee personal information, NSF initiated the *SSN Be Gone* project in 2007. This effort identifies all NSF business processes, which use Social Security Numbers (SSNs), and replaces SSNs with an alternate identifier where possible.

We've completed Phase I, in which all FastLane customers were assigned a unique NSF Identification Number (NSF ID) to replace the SSN previously used for logon. Customers who still logon with SSNs are reminded that they will need to use the NSF ID beginning in Summer 2008.

Once the initiatives described above are complete, NSF will have completed two important steps in ensuring the security and privacy of personal information.

NSF Unified Password

Historically, NSF customers have had two separate NSF passwords: Integrated Time and Attendance System (ITAS) and Local Area Network (LAN) passwords.

ITAS passwords provide access to many of NSF's corporate applications including eJacket, Awards, Financial and Accounting System (FAS), Proposal and Reviewer System (PARS), Guest Travel, Inside FastLane, while LAN passwords are used to log on to workstations and to access other applications such as Outlook Web Access (OWA), Remote LAN Services (RLS) and the NSF Conference Room Scheduler.

In the coming months, NSF will be simplifying the sign-in process, allowing employees to use one password to access most NSF corporate applications and systems. The ITAS password will be retired, and the LAN password will provide access to many of these NSF applications.

Update on New Federal Identification Card

NSF employees, Intergovernmental Personnel Act employees (IPAs), and contractors have been receiving new Federal identity cards that are similar in appearance and functionality to ID cards issued across the Federal government. As required by Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) - 12, which was signed by the President in August 2004, all government agencies must issue the new cards to provide a secure and reliable form of identification for all Federal employees and contractors by October 27, 2008.

As of the end of April, over 1,166 cards have been issued at NSF. This represents about 55% of the cards that need to be issued by October 2008.

It is important to note that the new ID cards do not work with the current physical access control system (PACS) and cannot be used to pass through NSF's card readers and optical turnstiles. We are planning to upgrade the PACS, which will provide several enhancements over the current system: compatibility with the use of the new Federal identity cards, and allowance of new cards to be used in NSF space in both Stafford I and II (after-hours access to Stafford II will still require use of the Data Watch card).

We are developing the requirements and specifications for the new PACS and working with the building security experts and our HSPD-12 systems integrator. An award is expected to be made before the end of the year.

We welcome your feedback!

For more information about these articles, or should you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please contact:

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