

Outreach

Outreach Activities

OIG Outreach Planning and Evaluation

We have conducted Education and Outreach activities of various types since the inception of the office. In 1999, we committed to developing a strong and significantly expanded Education and Outreach program. As part of our ongoing effort to focus that commitment, we developed an Education and Outreach Plan during this semiannual period. In it, we discuss the current status of our outreach efforts, describe our goals and strategies, identify our partners and the messages we wish to communicate, and outline the methods we will use to accomplish our goals. Our goals, which are based on the OIG Strategic Plan, are to:

1. Ensure the integrity of financial, administrative, and research systems;
2. Detect fraud, waste, abuse, and research misconduct;
3. Maintain current information about the communities we serve to help us focus on matters of substantive concern;
4. Make it easy for the communities we serve to contact and interact with us.



OIG Staff consider a proposal for the Education and Outreach plan.

The strategies we plan to use to accomplish our goals are to build strong relationships with key partners, create a baseline of partner needs and expectations, and inform our partners about OIG resources, programs, and materials that may be valuable to them.

In June 2001, we presented this plan to the Audit and Oversight (A&O) Committee of the National Science Board (NSB). The A&O Committee requested that the OIG also provide a description of how

it would assess the effectiveness of its Outreach work. We consulted with the NSF Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication (REC) in the Education and Human Resources (EHR) Directorate to consider evaluation methods appropriate for our needs.

As a result, we will divide our evaluation into three stages: planning evaluation, formative evaluation, and summative evaluation. We will evaluate how well our Outreach Plan is understood at an Outreach Retreat for OIG staff in October 2001. At that retreat we will discuss the effectiveness of our existing evaluation tools, including our evaluation forms and summary forms, and what additional evaluation tools we should use to evaluate the implementation and progress of our Outreach work. We plan to conduct a summative evaluation at the end of FY 2005, at which time, our Outreach Plan will have been in place for 5 years. We believe it will be appropriate at that point to consider the impact of the project and determine future steps.

(Our Strategic Plan is available at oig.nsf.gov/stratplan.pdf.)

International Cross-Cultural Exchanges

During the summer we hosted visitors from the governments of South Africa and Japan with whom we discussed a variety of audit and investigative policies and procedures. The South African government is interested in setting up an internal audit function to review business practices in its research facilities and institutions, primarily to help prevent and detect fraud. Japan's representatives from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) are interested in establishing audit procedures that will improve their ability to assess internal controls. As Japan revitalizes its research focus to address evolving program demands and priorities, METI is seeking ways to improve accountability of awardees. Both nations are interested in procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in science.

Presentations Emphasize Accountability, Integrity

In early August the IG participated in the leadership retreat sponsored by the Society of Research Administrators International (SRA). Founded in 1967, SRA International is a non-profit association dedicated to advancing the profession and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of research administration. The IG presented the keynote address to the group and focused on issues of future accountability, including the importance of data-driven performance based reporting, fiscal integrity related to grant and contracts, and research integrity. The IG emphasized

the importance of balance in establishing accountability measures stressing that research and business interests should complement, not conflict. SRA is interested in developing a career path for research administrators with a focus on requisite educational courses and continuing training.

At the Northeast Conference on College Cost Accounting, we presented an overview of the type of audits that we conduct at universities, emphasizing areas of concern to us such as cost-sharing. The conference provided an opportunity to share and discuss common issues. In addition to learning about NSF's audit approach and policies, attendees were also interested in our interpretation of specific issues contained in Office of Management and Budget circulars.

The National Center for Atmospheric Research and the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research invited the Inspector General to address scientists in Boulder, Colorado on the importance of accountability in research. Scientists and administrators from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the University of Colorado, and the Colorado School of Mines also participated in the session. The IG spoke about misconduct policies and procedures, research compliance, and financial auditing principles.

The presentation emphasized the Federal government's interest in these topics and how the government engages in oversight. Institutional responsibilities and the role of institutional management were also discussed. The NSF IG was joined by the Deputy IG from the Department of Commerce who spoke about the purpose and importance of the Chief Financial Officer Act and the Government Performance and Results Act.



Attending a meeting of research scientists at UCAR are: William Suhre, Department of Commerce; Richard Anthes, UCAR; Kathy Schmoll, UCAR; the Inspector General; and Ed Blansitt, Department of Commerce.

Research Ethics and Allegations of Misconduct in Science

We continue to seek feedback from institutions to improve the assistance we provide in the deferral of misconduct cases by conducting post-deferral visits. Once OIG learns of an allegation of misconduct, it usually “inform[s] the awardee institution of the alleged misconduct and encourage[s] it to undertake an inquiry” or “defer[s] to the inquiries or investigations of the awardee institution or of another Federal agency” (45 CFR 689.4; see also 45 CFR 689.5). Once the institution completes its investigation, OIG performs an independent assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the report and submits a recommended disposition to NSF (45 CFR 689.8). Once the institution completes its investigation, OIG performs an independent assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the report and submits a recommended disposition to NSF (45 CFR 689.8). Recently at a post-deferral visit to a private university in Washington, D.C., we learned that the university found our assistance helpful in explaining exactly what NSF needed and in assisting them in planning their process. Representatives also said that the experience made them aware of the need to implement changes in the university’s policy.

In different sessions, one hosted by the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) and another by University of South Alabama (USA), we presented an overview of NSF and OIG, described how we investigate allegations, and engaged the audience in case studies. In the UTMB session for administrators and faculty, we were afforded the opportunity to discuss the UTMB policies on allegations and provide some issues for consideration. We also learned that grantees are seeking additional guidance from NSF regarding the roles and responsibilities of co-principal investigators.

We also strive to reach new audiences that interact with NSF. Therefore, we were pleased to participate with NSF’s Office of General Counsel in a two-day workshop on “Legal Issues and Strategies for Responding to Research Misconduct Allegations” co-sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Office of Research Integrity at the Department of Health and Human Services. We moderated a workshop panel on “Preparing the Investigation Report and Disclosure Responsibilities.” Because many of the attendees were attorneys from university offices of legal counsel, this workshop enabled us to reach an audience we do not normally reach.

We continue to make presentations on research misconduct issues and about the OIG. They include:

- a meeting on Teaching Responsible Conduct of Research sponsored by the organization Public Responsibility in Research and Medicine and two meetings of the Society of Research Administrators.
- a professional development seminar for advanced doctoral students in psychology.

Programs for NSF Employees

We continue to reach out to NSF employees by routinely participating in training programs for new employees as part of division-specific orientations and program managers seminars. In orientation programs for NSF's directorates of Education and Human Resources (EHR) and Mathematics and Physical Sciences (MPS) and the Program Managers Seminars, we briefed new program officers on the issues they are required to bring to our attention and provided several case studies dealing with issues such as plagiarism, data sharing, and conflict of interests, to illustrate how our office handles these matters. We also stressed attention to the award administration problems we encounter during financial audits. This work enables us to raise awareness of fraud, waste and abuse issues among new employees as well as interact on a one-to-one level, in an informal setting, with other NSF employees.

Regular contacts with staff also arise from our support of NSF's on-going conflicts of interest training. We encourage NSF employees to use agency procedures to address all potential conflicts and to understand the consequences of not doing so. In addition, as part of our ongoing liaison program, we have met with NSF divisions to discuss our office's role in ensuring the integrity of NSF's award system. We find that our ongoing discussions result in an increased awareness regarding potential problem areas and subsequent referrals of allegations to our office.

We have also invited representatives from several NSF offices to give presentations about their offices at our monthly staff meeting. During this period, we have hosted representatives from the Budget Operations and Systems Branch, the Office of Budget, Finance, and Award Management, the NSF Library, and the Office of Legislative and Public Affairs. We find that we learn new information and obtain a good perspective on various NSF offices.

Cooperative Work with NSF and Other Agencies

We continue to assist NSF and work with other Federal agency and OIG staff in the implementation of the OSTP policy on research misconduct. We serve as the liaison between the OSTP agency Implementation Group and the Inspectors General community. The NSF IG is Chairperson of the PCIE/ECIE Misconduct in Research Group. This group completed a supplement to the Quality Standards for Investigations brochure which provides guidance on the conduct of research misconduct investigations.

In addition, in this semiannual period we have worked with NSF to present information to the NSF grant community regarding NSF policies and procedures and the importance of adhering to NSF guidance and rules. We presented a portion of the Grants and Administration section of NSF's Regional Grants Seminars. We attended a conference for awardees of the Rural Systemic Initiative program in EHR, whose awardees include school systems, tribal governments, and other organizations that often have limited experienced in administering Federal awards.

In conjunction with NSF's Office of Contracts, Policy, and Oversight, we presented an NSF Update session at the Society of Research Administrators (SRA) Joint Northeast and Midwest Sections Meeting.