Writing Your CAREER Proposal

2015 NSF CAREER Proposal Writing Workshop
Northeastern University
April 27-28, 2015

Workshop Goals
Provide potential CAREER awardees with recommendations on developing a competitive CAREER proposal
- What is a CAREER proposal? Who is eligible? The larger context, DOs and DON'Ts
- Setting research and education objectives
- Finding a home
- Writing the summary
- Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts
- The NSF merit review process
- Ethics
- Supplements
- Progress/final reports
- Getting involved

CAREER Program
“A Foundation-wide activity that offers the National Science Foundation’s most prestigious awards in support of junior faculty who exemplify the role of teacher-scholars through outstanding research, excellent education and the integration of education and research within the context of the mission of their organizations.”

CAREER Award
- Funds the academic career development of new faculty (it is not a research award)
- “The intent…is to provide stable support at a sufficient level and duration to enable awardees to develop careers as outstanding researchers and educators…”
- Duration: 5 years
- Min amount: $500,000 in ENG
- Deadline for Engineering: July 22, 2015 (for other directorates, see solicitation)

What’s New for 2015?
- Solicitation NSF 15-555
- Largely the same as 2014
- Minimum grant size in ENG, $500K
- Letters of intent to collaborate are now to conform to the single-sentence format described in the Proposal Preparation instructions
- Proposals must be submitted in accordance with the revised Proposal & Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG), NSF 15-1

Eligibility
- PI must be from a university or 2/4-year college, accredited and with campus in US, or non-profit, non-academic organization (museum, observatory, research lab)
- Untenured Assistant Professor < Oct. 1
- Must hold doctorate degree < deadline
- Assistant Professor or equivalent
- No citizenship requirements (except PECASE)
- Employed in tenure track position
- Limit 3 applications
CAREER Proposal Writing Workshop

You

- Who are you?
  - Your expertise/interests
  - Your career/life goals
  - Your position/resources
- Your proposal should fit into your life plan

What is your life plan?
Do you need to develop a strategic plan?

Your Strategic Plan

- A strategic plan has three parts:
  - Where are you today?
  - Where do you want to be in the future (5, 10, 20 years from now)?
  - How do you get from here to there?

A strategic plan is a roadmap for your life

Your Proposal

- Should advance you toward your life goals
  - Should be a stepping stone to the next thing
  - Should be compatible with your institution's goals
  - Should represent a contribution to society at large

Test: If you accomplish your objectives, are you better off for the effort?

DOs

- Have a strategic plan
- Build on your strengths
- Differentiate this proposal from your Ph.D. thesis work and other sponsored work
- Perform a thorough literature search and exploratory research before writing the proposal
  - Journal articles (update with personal contact)
  - Read the NSF Grant Proposal Guide (GPG)
- Establish and keep your contacts

DON'Ts

- Rush
- Wait until last minute (1 month) to contact program directors
- Make the proposed work (research and education) too broad
- Make the proposed work too narrow
- Ask for too much (or too little) money
- Ignore rules (Grant Proposal Guide) and misc. items - violation of the GPG requirements will result in return without review
- Submit your proposal late

Proposal Basics

- Write to the reviewers (not to me and not to yourself)
- Your proposal will be judged by the reviewers
- Reviewers want to know four things:
  - What is it about (the research objective)?
  - How will you do it (the technical approach)?
  - Can you do it (you and your facilities)?
  - Is it worth doing (intellectual merit and broader impacts)?
- This is, basically, all the proposal needs to convey - but it needs to convey this
Getting a Research Topic

**Beware!**

The CAREER award is **NOT a research award**

The CAREER award is a career development award.

Your proposal must reflect this focus.

**NSF Funds Fundamental Research**

- We look for proposals that
  - Are innovative and push the frontiers of knowledge
  - Contribute to national needs and priorities
  - Go beyond marginalia
  - Integrate research and educational goals well
  - Actually involve research, not development
- We do not support (except as incidental to the goals of the award)
  - Developmental efforts
  - Computer programming
  - Design of...
  - Commercialization

**The CAREER Research Topic**

- The CAREER proposal is **not a research proposal**
- The CAREER proposal is a proposal detailing how you will spend $500,000 to enhance your career development
- Your career involves a research path, not a research project
- Determine your research path - your lifelong research goals - and then identify milestones toward your goals
- Detail the first one or two as the research projects for your CAREER proposal

**Your CAREER Research Path**

- Lifelong research goals
  - Don’t end with a single project
  - May never end
  - Have broad application
- Examples:
  - To improve our ability to make engineering decisions under uncertainty and risk
  - To perform large-scale modeling of engineering systems thereby enabling better system optimization
  - To improve our understanding of material removal mechanisms enabling improvements in machining operations

**The Selected Research Topic**

- It must be research
- It must not have been done before
- It must be significant
- There must be higher than probability zero that you can do it (no perpetual motion machines, no fuzzy logic)
- It must lend itself to a viable research plan - there is a research methodology
- You must have access to the facilities to accomplish the research
- It should fit into your strategic plan
What is Research?

• Research is the process of finding out something that we (everyone) don't already know
• Scientific research builds upon the extant knowledge base and it is methodical, repeatable and verifiable
  - Methodical - you can specify in advance of the research a method to accomplish your objective
  - Repeatable - not a "strange" (random) event
  - Verifiable - tangible evidence

What is Research?

• Research is the process of finding out something that we (everyone) don't already know
• Scientific research builds upon the extant knowledge base and it is methodical, repeatable and verifiable

Question: Exactly what will your research contribute to the knowledge base?

Groundwork

• Know your field:
  - What is the current state-of-the-art
  - Who are the top ten researchers
  - What are they doing right now
  - Where do they get their funding
  - What do they consider to be the key research issues
  - Who would likely review your proposal
  - What are the grant opportunities

Ref: Research 101 for Engineers

The Research Objective

• This is probably the hardest part of the proposal
• Examples of what not to write:
  - The research objective of this project is to create novel new transformational knowledge.
  - The objective of my research is to provide a quantum leap in the design of anti-gravity boots.
  - The objective of this project is to develop an integrated modeling tool for the hardening process.
  - The goal of this project is to develop innovative advances to enhance wire sawing processes.
  - Rapid prototyping machines are an important part of the vast array of tools. It is very important that we improve these machines. Rapid prototyping will form the backbone of manufacturing in the future.

The Research Objective

• How to do it right:
  - The research objective of this project is to measure the cross-section of the muon-nutrino interaction at 5 GeV accurate to 5%.
  - The research objective of this proposal is to test the hypothesis that physical phenomena x,y,z dominate the chip formation process in the machining of brittle materials.
  - The research objective of this project is to account for uncertainty in engineering design decision making through the application of utility theory.
The Research Objective

A well-stated objective leads one directly to the approach that must be taken to accomplish the objective.

Four acceptable ways to do it right:
- The research objective of this proposal is to test the hypothesis \( H \).
- The research objective of this proposal is to measure parameter \( P \) with accuracy \( A \).
- The research objective of this proposal is to prove conjecture \( C \).
- The research objective of this proposal is to apply method \( M \) from field \( Q \) to solve problem \( X \) in field \( R \).

Hypothesis Testing

If you are going to do an hypothesis test, you need to learn to do it right:
- You must state a testable hypothesis—one for which you can write a plan.
- Recognize that you can falsify the hypothesis or fail to prove it—generally a well stated hypothesis cannot be proven true.
- The test of the hypothesis needs to be well planned.
- Ref: Karl Popper

Hypothesis Example

Force is proportional to rate of change of momentum (\( F = ma \))

The model fills the space.
Each data point is a point, \( n \) points fill nothing.
One valid outlier disproves the hypothesis.
Ergo, we only disprove hypotheses.
We accept an hypothesis only after repeated attempts to disprove it fail.

Poorly Stated Scientific Hypotheses

- By adding nanoparticles to aluminum, I can make it stronger.
  - Not falsifiable.
- The addition of additives to steel will make it better.
  - Not falsifiable.
- God exists.
  - Cannot construct a plan to test the hypothesis.

The Research Objective

Do not use words that mean "not research":
- Develop
- Design
- Optimize
- Control
- Manage

Use of words such as these gives the reviewers the impression that you are not doing research, there is no innovation, nothing is new, etc. — your ratings will be lower.
The Research Objective

- Doing it right:
  - Frame your research: "My research goal is..."
  - Then: "As a step toward this goal, the research objective(s) of this CAREER proposal is(are)...
  - Limit: 25 words or less
  - Be specific about your research objective
  - Note – if you are specific, the research methodology will follow directly
  - Be sure your statement is comprehensible
  - Put it up front – sentence one, paragraph one, page one
  - Do not give a weather report or state-of-the-union address

Beyond the Research Objective

- Your proposal must address four critical questions that reviewers will face:
  - What is the proposal about?
    » Be sure to include clear statements of both research and educational objectives
  - Will the proposed approach accomplish the stated objectives?
    » Be sure the reviewers are evaluating your approach based on your objectives
  - Can the PI carry out the proposed approach?
    » Preliminary results and previous work argue this
  - Is it worth doing?
    » Make the argument through the intellectual merit and broader impact statements

Finding a Home

- Is your "research" research?
  » If it isn’t, it doesn’t belong at NSF
- If the answer is "no," skip to the end, look for support from other sources
- If the answer is "yes," what is your research objective?
  » The right NSF home for your research depends on your research objective, not on the application of your research results
  » Be prepared to answer the question: "What is your research objective?" (25 words or less)

NSF does not support applications studies

Your Funding Base

- NSF should not be the sole source of funding for your area of research
  - Internal support
  - State support
  - Industry support
  - Other Federal agency support

List the potential funding sources for your research area

NSF is Organized Around Research Topics

- National Science Board
- Director
- Associate Director for Science Policy
  - Directorate for Administration
    - Directorate for Education and Human Resources
  - Directorate for Engineering
    - Directorate for Geosciences
  - Directorate for Biological Sciences
  - Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences
  - Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering
  - Directorate for Social Sciences
  - Directorate for Innovation and Partnerships
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ENG Organization

Office of the Assistant Director
Deputy Assistant Director (OAD)
Senior Advisor Nanotechnology

Emerging Frontiers in Research and Innovation (EFRI)
Civil, Mechanical, and Manufacturing Innovation (CMMI)
Chemical, Bioengineering, Environmental, And Transport Systems (CBET)
Electrical, Communications and Cyber Systems (ECCS)
Industrial Innovation and Partnerships (IIP)
Engineering Education and Centers (EEC)

The Next Step

• Look up NSF’s web site: www.nsf.gov
  – Check out research programs, read what research topics they support
• Then call the appropriate program officers
  – Be prepared to answer the question: “What is your research objective?” (25 words or less)

NSF does not support applications studies

Should I Meet My Program Director?

• Why? What do you intend to gain?
• Or is your goal to schmooze? (It doesn’t help)
  – Don’t even think about taking your program officer to lunch
• If you decide to meet:
  – Be prepared to listen (you don’t learn by talking)
  – Be prepared with questions
  – Remember, the program director is not the panel!
  – You can get a free trip to NSF (more later)

Important Questions

• Does my research objective fit well with your program?
• What is your funding policy for CAREER awards? What is the maximum size of your CAREER awards? (Remember, the minimum is $500,000)
• How are CAREER proposals submitted to your program reviewed?

Questions You Shouldn’t Ask a Program Director

• Is NSF interested in my topic?
• So, will you fund my research?
• Is this a good research topic?
• What research topic do you think I should work on?
• What are my odds?
• But this is my last chance, what can I do?
• If I send a copy of my proposal to you, will you help me edit it?

Catch 22

• My research doesn’t fit in any single NSF program, how about joint submission/review?
  – Did you formulate a clear research objective?
  – Is your research objective too broad?
  – Do you want to consider focusing your scope?
• Suppose my research really does span multiple programs?
  – Contact all relevant program directors
How Could a Meeting Help?

- Your program director can:
  - Give advice on proposal submission
  - Help you understand the review of a previous proposal
  - Point you to resources you can use to help write a better proposal next time
  - Give general guidance on good proposal writing
  - Give you ideas for collaborations

Program directors look forward to constructive meetings with PIs

Could a Meeting Help?

Note - you learn by listening, not by talking. So shut up and listen.

Writing the Summary

- The most important statement is the statement of your proposed objectives
  - It should be at the very beginning
  - Do not begin with a weather report: “The sky is falling. Tools are breaking. Designs are failing…”
  - Do not begin with a state-of-the-union address: “The U.S. lags in the development of a strong manufacturing base…”
- Remember, this is not a tech paper, it is not a murder mystery (where we find out what the objective is on page 15)
- Your Intellectual Merit and Broader Impact statements are important

Writing the Summary

- First paragraph
  - My long-term research goal is...
  - In pursuit of this goal, the research objective of this CAREER proposal is...
  - The research approach is...
- Second paragraph
  - My long-term educational goal is...
  - In pursuit of this goal, the educational objective of this CAREER proposal is...
  - The educational approach is...
- Third and fourth paragraphs
  - Intellectual Merit
  - Broader Impacts
- Anything else will lower your rating
- Use the template

The Summary Page

- Use only 12 point font (approved fonts only)
- Do not use figures or tables as filler - everything should contribute
- Everything should be legible - do not use 2-point font on figures or tables
- Be sure to explain exactly what is your contribution to the knowledge base
- Use only the required format
- Be sure to include a discussion of the broader impacts of the proposed work under the heading “Broader Impacts of the Proposed Work”—now required (GPG)
Tips on Proposal Writing

- Letters of collaboration must be in the specific form noted in the solicitation.
- Don’t cut and paste together your new proposal from old declined proposals.
- Submit your proposal early, download it, proofread it and correct it if necessary before the deadline.

Important Concept

The reviewers read your proposal, not your mind.

Mentoring for Postdoctoral Researchers

- All proposals submitted after April 6, 2009, that include funding to support postdoctoral researchers must include as a supplementary document a 1-page description of the mentoring activities that will be provided for such individuals.
- Mentoring activities may include:
  - Career counseling;
  - Training in preparation of grant proposals;
  - Publications and presentations;
  - Guidance on ways to improve teaching and mentoring skills;
  - Guidance on how to effectively collaborate with researchers from diverse backgrounds and disciplinary areas; and
  - Training in responsible professional practices.

Mentoring for Postdoctoral Researchers (Cont’d)

- Proposed mentoring activities will be evaluated as part of the merit review process under the Foundation’s broader impacts merit review criterion.
- Proposals that do not include a mentoring plan will be returned without review.

Data Management Plan

- Proposals must include a supplementary document of no more than two pages labeled “Data Management Plan,” which may include:
  - the types of data, samples, physical collections, software, curriculum materials, and other materials to be produced in the course of the project;
  - the standards to be used for data and metadata format and content (where existing standards are absent or deemed inadequate, this should be documented along with any proposed solutions or remedies);
  - policies for access and sharing including provisions for appropriate protection of privacy, confidentiality, security, intellectual property, or other rights or requirements;
  - policies and provisions for re-use, re-distribution, and the production of derivatives; and
  - plans for archiving data, samples, and other research products, and for preservation of access to them.

Follow the NSF Guidelines

- Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG)
- Grant Proposal Guide (GPG)
- Program Solicitation
- Budget guidelines
Grant Proposal Guide (GPG)

- Provides guidance for preparation and submission of proposals to NSF;
  - Allowable fonts, margins, page limits, bio format, etc.
  - Process for deviations from the GPG (there will be none)
  - Process and criteria by which proposals will be reviewed
  - Reasons why a proposal may be returned without review
  - Reconsideration process
  - Process for withdrawals, returns & declinations
  - Award process and procedures for requesting continued support
  - Budget line item definitions
  - Process for submission of collaborative proposals (subawards and multiple proposals)

Search on GPG

Award Search Capabilities

Award Data

Award Abstracts
Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts

**Intellectual Merit**
- The Intellectual Merit is the contribution that your research makes to the knowledge base of the field of science or engineering
- Questions:
  - What is already known?
  - What is new?
  - What will your research add?
  - What will this do to enhance or enable research in your or other fields?
- Why is your research important for the advancement of your field?

**Broader Impacts**
- The Broader Impacts focuses on the benefit to society at large as a result of your research results
- Means to benefit society include:
  - Economic/environment/energy
  - Education and training
  - Providing opportunities for underrepresented groups
  - Improving research and education infrastructure

The key issue is how your research results will be applied — why would the general public care?

**Summary Template**

Overview: My research goal is... In pursuit of this goal, the research objective of this CAREER proposal is to test the hypothesis that the propensity of a tree to break is directly proportional to how many monkeys are in the tree. The approach will be to take a sample of ten trees and load them with monkeys until they break...

My educational goal is... In pursuit of this goal, the education objectives of this CAREER proposal are... The approach to accomplishing these objectives will be...

**Intellectual Merit**
- It is important that we know how many monkeys can climb a tree before it breaks because this affects our perceptions of monkey procreation and... The Snerd Theory holds that tree size limits monkey procreation. This study challenges that theory with the notion that... If the objective hypothesis is correct, therefore, it will transform our approach to...

**Broader Impacts**
- Monkeys are used in medical research. By knowing how many monkeys can fit in a tree, we will be able to provide more monkeys for such research thereby advancing medical science more quickly and improving the quality of life. Also, by watching the monkeys get hurt when the tree breaks, graduate students will be less likely to climb trees, thereby increasing their probability of graduating.

**Education**
- Undergraduate
  - Curriculum
  - Projects (REUs)
- Graduate
  - Curriculum
  - Conferences
  - Involvement with industry, national labs
- Networks, partnerships
- K-12 outreach (RETs)
- Museum projects
- Should not be a boiler plate, pick and choose

**IM and BI Statements**
- They are required
- Your proposal will be rated based on them
- But:
  - What are they?
  - What should you include?
  - How should they shape your proposal?
You can download this document for free from: http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/handbooks_manuals/aviation/aviation_instructors_handbook/

PIs are strongly encouraged to describe how the impact of the educational activities will be assessed or evaluated.


Your goals, objectives and approach should drive the proposal, not the need for Intellectual Merit and Broader Impact statements.

Stupid things people do to get their proposal returned without review (RWR)
- Failure to include CAREER solicitation number on cover sheet
- Failure to meet eligibility requirements
- Failure to follow the template in the Project Summary
- Failure to adhere to proposal format requirements
- Failure to differentiate from other supported work
- Failure to address results from prior NSF support (if appropriate)—all required info, Intellectual Merit & Broader Impacts addressed under separate headings, list of products (pubs with full citation)
- Failure to include section: “Broader Impacts of the Proposed Work”

- Failure to adhere to required bio format
- Failure to include Departmental Letter—must be less than 2 pages, must include indication that PI’s activities are supported by and integrated into departmental goals, relationship between PI’s goals and departmental goals, statement of eligibility
- Adding letters of support
- Failure to include letters of collaboration using specific language specified
- Including unauthorized appendices
- Failure to distinguish proposed work from a proposal already under review
Return Without Review

- Stupid things people do to get their proposal returned without review (RWR), continued
  - Failure to adequately revise a previously declined proposal
  - Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing
  - Failure to submit prior to the deadline

Take the Oath

- I hereby promise that I will:
  - Read the solicitation and Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) before I write my proposal
  - Identify and comply with all "musts" in the GPG and solicitation
  - Comply with the requirements and the intent of the requirements
  - Submit my proposal prior to the deadline (4:59:59 PM local time)

- I hereby promise that I will not:
  - Fail to follow the proposal preparation requirements
  - Fail to proofread my proposal, downloaded from NSF, after submission but prior to the deadline
  - Trust my SRO to do everything right

The NSF Merit Review Process

Proposal Processing Timeline

Deadline or Target date
Compliance check and assignment to program
Program-to-program trades
Set up panels or send out for ad hoc review
Conduct panels
Review panel results/make decisions
Document recommendations
DD concur

Time, months

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Merit Review

- Process: ad hoc only, panel only, combination
- Reviews obtained from non-conflicted experts—at least three required, more typical
- Ad hoc only: PD makes funding recommendation to DD
- Panel: Panel makes recommendation to PD, PD makes funding recommendation to DD
- DD concurs on recommendation—end of process for declinations
- DGA makes an award

Ethics

- Process: ad hoc only, panel only, combination
- Reviews obtained from non-conflicted experts—at least three required, more typical
- Ad hoc only: PD makes funding recommendation to DD
- Panel: Panel makes recommendation to PD, PD makes funding recommendation to DD
- DD concurs on recommendation—end of process for declinations
- DGA makes an award
Research Ethics

- Persons submitting proposals to the Federal government are held to high standards of conduct.
- Misbehavior can be dealt with quite severely:
  - PI may be barred from submission to NSF for 1-5 years.
  - May be barred from proposal review.
  - At least two cases of jail time (Grimes case, 41 months in Federal prison).
  - Maximum $250,000 fine, 5 years in prison.

Major Forms of Misconduct

- Plagiarism—uncited reproduction of the work of others.
- Falsification—intentional misrepresentation of data or results (progress reports).
- Fabrication—making up data.
- Double charges—billing the government twice for the same work, e.g., accepting funding from two different Federal agencies for the same work.

Plagiarism

- “It’s only a proposal. It’s not like it’s a publication.”
- “The reviewers are smart enough to know what is my work and what is someone else’s.”
- “My English teacher told me it’s not plagiarism if I change every seventh word.”
- “It’s not plagiarism; it’s just bad citation.”
- “It got funded before.”
- “I didn’t have space for all the citations.”
- “I didn’t do it. My grad student/undergraduate/postdoc/grant writer/faculty colleague/secretary/Co-PI/SRO/AOR/VP of Research/Dean/spouse wrote that section.”
- “It was ‘an act of lamentable carelessness’ and therefore not misconduct.”
- “Severe acid reflux.”

Actual PI Responses

- “It’s only a proposal. It’s not like it’s a publication.”
- “The reviewers are smart enough to know what is my work and what is someone else’s.”
- “My English teacher told me it’s not plagiarism if I change every seventh word.”
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- “It was ‘an act of lamentable carelessness’ and therefore not misconduct.”
- “Severe acid reflux.”

Inappropriate Use of Grant Funds

- Padding travel
- Commingling funds
  - Don’t mix business and pleasure expenses
  - Don’t mix grant funds and personal business expenses.
- Charging for time not spent on a grant.
- Billing items to your grant that shouldn’t be billed to the grant.
- Billing alcohol or entertainment to a grant.
- Charging give-aways to a grant.

Charging Twice for the Same Work

- Chemical & Engineering News, Feb. 13, 2012—Federal prosecutors have charged a leading materials scientist with wire fraud, making false statements, and money laundering. The researcher, Craig A. Grimes, formerly an electrical engineering professor at Pennsylvania State University, defrauded federal agencies of some $3 million in research grants, the prosecutors say… Prosecutors also say Grimes applied for and accepted an ARPA-E grant for his solar work, while failing to disclose that the National Science Foundation had already funded the same research. Both agencies prohibit such grant duplication.
- Grimes is doing 41 months in Federal prison.
Morgan State University Professor Sentenced To 3 Years In Prison In Scheme To Defraud The National Science Foundation And For Obtaining Kickbacks From Student Stipends

Fraudulently Obtained $200,000 and Attempted to Obtain Another $500,000 through a National Science Foundation Small Business Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 29, 2014

Baltimore, Maryland - U.S. District Judge Ellen L. Hollander sentenced Manoj Kumar Jha, age 47, of Severn, Maryland, today to three years in prison followed by three years of supervised release for wire fraud, mail fraud, falsification of records, and theft of government property in connection with a scheme to fraudulently obtain research grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and kickbacks from students’ stipends. Judge Hollander also entered an order requiring Jha to pay $105,726 in restitution.

CONFIDENTIALITY FOR PANELISTS

- Breach of confidentiality—never divulge confidential information (NSF Form 1230P)
  - Ideas conveyed in proposals
  - Names of panelists
  - Names of PIs
  - Never use information that you received in confidence

Plagiarism is bad, plagiarism from a proposal you reviewed is a breach of confidence—much worse

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

- It is generally against the law for an employee of the Federal Government to represent a third party to the Government
- Persons working at NSF may not write letters advocating awards for specific PIs

MULTIPLE PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

- It is permissible to submit multiple proposals to do the same thing to different Federal agencies
  - But it is not permissible to submit the same proposal to multiple NSF units
- It is not acceptable to accept more than one
- If you submit multiple proposals for the same or similar work, be careful to distinguish the uniqueness of each and, if appropriate, accept funding only once

FALSIFICATION AND FABRICATION

Falsified or fabricated annual reports may constitute a felony
Research Ethics Training

- As of January 4, 2010:
  - Certification Regarding Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR): The AOR is required to complete a certification that the institution has a plan to provide appropriate training and oversight in the responsible and ethical conduct of research to undergraduates, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers who will be supported by NSF to conduct research.

Sticky Issue

- Suppose you collaborate with another faculty member, write a proposal and get an award, then later find that your collaborator plagiarized materials that are in the proposal
  - You should
    - Consult with your institutional ethics person
    - Report the matter to the NSF Inspector General
    - Continue to work on the grant
  - You generally will not be held accountable for another faculty member’s bad behavior

References

- Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)
- Research Misconduct

Misconduct—a Recent Case

- A former Iowa State University professor has pleaded guilty to two felony counts of making false statements to the National Science Foundation (NSF), federal prosecutors announced Tuesday. Palaniappa Molian, of Ames, pleaded guilty Friday to the charges in a written plea agreement with federal prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Iowa.
- ISU officials confirmed Tuesday that Molian was a professor in the College of Engineering beginning in 1982, and retired on Dec. 31, 2013.
- In December 2009, “Molian claimed in a requested reimbursement that he traveled to Boston, Mass., to work on an Iowa State University National Science Foundation grant research experiment,” according to a press release issued Tuesday by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Iowa.
- Molian admitted in the plea agreement that “he did not perform any work on the grant research experiment in Boston, and that he traveled to Boston for unrelated reasons,” the press release said.
- The reimbursement expense voucher Molian filed for the trip to Boston was for $1,223.37, court documents that were unsealed Friday show.
- Molian also pleaded guilty to submitting a Small Business Innovation Research Program Report to the NSF in July 2010, seeking approximately $20,000 in laser rental costs, “when he had access to a laser at no cost,” the press release said.
- The laser costs claimed in the Final Report were false and (Molian) spent the excess grant funds on unrelated personal expenses,” court documents show.
- The plea agreement also states that Federal prosecutors agreed Molian will not be charged in the Southern District of Iowa for any other federal criminal offenses arising from or related to the investigation.
- Molian has agreed to pay restitution “for all relevant conduct,” according to the terms of the plea agreement. The amount of restitution will be determined by a judge.
- Molian will also be required to pay a mandatory special assessment fee of $200 at or before sentencing.
- The maximum sentence for making a false statement to a federal agency is five years imprisonment and a maximum fine of $250,000.

Parting Thoughts

- Remember, if your grad student writes your proposals, you are responsible for their content, and you are the person in trouble if there is a breach of ethics
- You have worked hard to establish your career, don’t ruin it by a breach of ethics

Supplements

- Research Ethics Training
- Sticky Issue
- References
- Misconduct—a Recent Case
- Parting Thoughts
Beyond the Award

- Beyond the award there are supplements
  - REU (Research Experience for Undergraduates): nominally one student per award (two, provided one is from an under-represented group), does NOT include equipment
  - RET (Research Experience for Teachers): $10,000 to involve a K-12 teacher in your research

Supplemental Requests

- Contact your program director first!
- Must be submitted via FastLane
- Must include a budget
- Should be submitted early in the fiscal year (while we still have money) or to meet announcement deadlines

Don't even think about asking for a supplement if you're not up to date on your progress reports

Progress/Final Reports

- Annual reports are required for ALL grants (standard or continuing)
  - This includes: unsolicited, CAREER, MRI, special initiatives, ...
  - This includes grants that are beyond their initial active period, i.e., grants that are in a no-cost extension period
- Annual reports must be submitted via research.gov 90 days PRIOR to anniversary (or by May 1st, whichever is sooner, for continuing grants)
- Annual reports should be submitted in the order in which they are due

Annual Reports

- No annual report = no increments, no supplements, no no-cost extensions, no new awards (for PIs or Co-PIs)
- Be sure to use research.gov format — pdf attachments are ok
- REU supplement during reporting period - make sure to report activity under role of Research Experience for Undergraduates in PARTICIPANT section (this is different than role of undergraduate student)

Final Reports

- All grants require a final report and a project outcomes
- All final reports and project outcomes must be filed using research.gov
- Final reports are due not later than 90 days after the expiration date of the grant
- PENALTY!!! You cannot get another grant or a supplement if you or a co-PI have an overdue final report
- Warning – the grant is over when the final report is approved
Annual and Final Reports

- Annual and final reports are your official statements to the government regarding your progress and contributions to the field
- You must be precise and honest
- Falsification or fabrication is a form of misconduct: The maximum sentence for making a false statement to a federal agency is five years imprisonment and a maximum fine of $250,000

Warning!!!

NSF money expires at the end of the sixth fiscal year after the year in which the award was made (not necessarily the year of the start date), you cannot spend after that

Getting Involved

Be A Reviewer

- Proposal review is an important service to your community
- There's no better way to see how the system works
- There's no better way to understand what makes a winning proposal
- If you think the system is unfair, try being part of it

How to Volunteer

- Contact your program director
- E-mail a brief (1-page) bio to your program director
- Be sure to include your contact information
- Indicate your areas of expertise

This will get you an expense-paid trip to visit your program director

12 Steps to a Better Proposal

1. Know yourself - strengths/weaknesses
2. Know the program from which you seek support
3. Read the program announcement and GPG
4. Formulate clear and appropriate research and education objectives
5. Develop a viable plan to accomplish your stated objectives
6. State your objectives up front in your proposal
7. Frame your project around the work of others
12 Steps to a Better Proposal

8. Grammar and spelling count
9. Format and brevity are important
10. Know the review process
11. Proof read the proposal before you submit it
12. Submit your proposal early and proofread it after you submit it

Writing a good proposal takes common sense and effort—it's not magic

Questions

- It's always better to ask before you submit a proposal than after you get the reviews
- Remember, we're from the government, and we're here to help

http://www.nsf.gov