

## § 689.2

education and results from such proposals.

(b) *Research misconduct* does not include honest error or differences of opinion.

### § 689.2 General policies and responsibilities.

(a) NSF will take appropriate action against individuals or institutions upon a finding that research misconduct has occurred. Possible actions are described in § 689.3. NSF may also take interim action during an investigation, as described in § 689.8.

(b) NSF will find research misconduct only after careful inquiry and investigation by an awardee institution, by another Federal agency, or by NSF. An “inquiry” consists of preliminary information-gathering and preliminary fact-finding to determine whether an allegation or apparent instance of research misconduct has substance and if an investigation is warranted. An investigation must be undertaken if the inquiry determines the allegation or apparent instance of research misconduct has substance. An “investigation” is a formal development, examination and evaluation of a factual record to determine whether research misconduct has taken place, to assess its extent and consequences, and to evaluate appropriate action.

(c) A finding of research misconduct requires that—

(1) There be a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community; and

(2) The research misconduct be committed intentionally, or knowingly, or recklessly; and

(3) The allegation be proven by a preponderance of evidence.

(d) Before NSF makes any final finding of research misconduct or takes any final action on such a finding, NSF will normally afford the accused individual or institution notice, a chance to provide comments and rebuttal, and a chance to appeal. In structuring procedures in individual cases, NSF may take into account procedures already followed by other entities investigating or adjudicating the same allegation of research misconduct.

(e) Debarment or suspension for research misconduct will be imposed

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only after further procedures described in applicable debarment and suspension regulations, as described in §§ 689.8 and 689.9, respectively. Severe research misconduct, as established under the regulations in this part, is an independent cause for debarment or suspension under the procedures established by the debarment and suspension regulations.

(f) The Office of Inspector General (OIG) oversees investigations of research misconduct and conducts any NSF inquiries and investigations into suspected or alleged research misconduct.

(g) The Deputy Director adjudicates research misconduct proceedings and the Director decides appeals.

(h) Investigative and adjudicative research misconduct records maintained by the agency are exempt from public disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552) and the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552a) to the extent permitted by law and regulation.

### § 689.3 Actions.

(a) Possible final actions listed in this paragraph (a) for guidance range from minimal restrictions (Group I) to the most severe and restrictive (Group III). They are not exhaustive and do not include possible criminal sanctions.

(1) *Group I actions.* (i) Send a letter of reprimand to the individual or institution.

(ii) Require as a condition of an award that for a specified period an individual or institution obtain special prior approval of particular activities from NSF.

(iii) Require for a specified period that an institutional official other than those guilty of misconduct certify the accuracy of reports generated under an award or provide assurance of compliance with particular policies, regulations, guidelines, or special terms and conditions.

(2) *Group II actions.* (i) Totally or partially suspend an active award, or restrict for a specified period designated activities or expenditures under an active award.

(ii) Require for a specified period special reviews of all requests for funding