

Transparency, Accountability and Portfolios

ENG AC

April 24, 2014

Peter Arzberger, OD

Mark L. Weiss, DD/BCS



NSF: Steward of Public Funds and Trust

- Long-standing Core NSF Value: Dedication to Excellence
 - Optimally invest the resources entrusted to us
 - NSF is committed to the principles underlying open government including transparency
 - Achieve management excellence through accountability
- Particularly important in time of fiscal constraints and increased public interest in federal investments, to
 - Demonstrate that NSF investments aligned with Strategic Mission of advancing the progress of science;
 - Make investments that lead to results and resources that are useful to society



A Little History

- ADs have been discussing how to present and justify decisions about awards for some time.
- Office of the Director established internal Transparency & Accountability Working Group (TAWG) ~ 1/1/14
- TAWG charged to assess how the Foundation is currently handling portfolios, communication, training, evaluation and other topics related to transparency and accountability;
- Seek input on these activities from staff at all levels and across the Foundation.



Abstract and Title

- Public Face of NSF's Investments
 - Clarify that the abstract and title are NSF documents
- Reorganize structure of abstract
 - Non-technical explanation:
 - Project's significance and importance
 - Serves as a public justification for NSF funding.
 - Understandable to an educated reader who is not a scientist or engineer
 - Technical description:
 - States the goals and scope of activities, research methods and potential contributions
 - May be a modified version of the project summary



Context of Our Decisions

- Decisions are not made without a context
- Context can provide justification for award actions
- Program Director charged by policy with developing a balanced portfolio*
- But what is a portfolio at NSF? And how do we think about balancing it?



A definition

- A portfolio can be defined as a collection of activities that are linked together via a logical connection.
- Connection may be:
 - thematic intellectual/scientific connection
 - disciplinary, interdisciplinary, methodological etc.
 - cross-cut intellectual questions by contributing to another goal, e.g.;
 - broadening participation, enhancing research experiences for undergraduates, providing for international collaborations, etc.



Portfolios: Further

- Portfolios can be characterized in terms of:
 - disciplinary fields (archaeology, sociology)
 - intellectual frontier (complexity theory)
 - actual awards at a given time--a snapshot
 - aspirational goals--view of an imagined future
- Can and should be hierarchical:
 - program→division→director→NSF
- Uses:
 - Strategic planning at each level
 - Resource distribution
 - Financial
 - Human resources
 - Context for decision and institutional memory



How to think about...

- Directorate portfolios
 - Developing
 - Communicating
 - Utilizing
 - Investing
 - People
 - Dollars
 - Evaluating

