



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

NSF Regional Grants Conference NSF Policies & Procedures Update

October 17-18, 2011

Hosted by: The University of Texas at Austin • Austin, TX



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

Panelist

Jean Feldman

Head, Policy Office, Division of Institution & Award Support,
Office of Budget, Finance & Award Management



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

Ask Early, Ask Often!



Coverage

- Update on revision of NSF Merit Review Criteria by NSB
 - NSF Merit Review Working Group Process Activities
 - NSF's Career Life-Balance Initiative
 - NSF Implementation of the Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR)
-



NSB Task Force on Merit Review

- Established Spring 2010, charged with “examining the two Merit Review Criteria and their effectiveness in achieving the goals for NSF support for science and engineering research and education”
 - Focusing on:
 - How criteria are being interpreted and used by PIs, reviewers, and NSF staff
 - Strengths and weaknesses of criteria
 - Impact of criteria on how PIs develop projects
 - Role of the institution
-



Sec. 526 of America COMPETES Reauthorization Act (ACRA) of 2010

- Instructs NSF to have a Broader Impacts review criterion to address eight broad national goals
 - Further instructs NSF to develop and implement a policy for this criterion that:
 - Provides for education about the policy
 - Clarifies that BI activities shall either draw on proven strategies and existing programs/activities; or for new approaches, build on current research
-



Current Status

- Task Force proposed a set of principles and revised review criteria at the May NSB meeting
 - Dear Colleague Letter released on June 14, 2011 requesting input on the revised criteria
 - Nearly 280 comments received, nearly two-thirds from university faculty
 - Concerned that intent of broader impacts concept was weakened
 - List of national goals was problematic
-



Next Steps

- Task Force met in September to discuss new revisions
 - Will be preparing its full report over the next few months
 - Plan to present full report and recommendations at December NSB meeting
-



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

Reëxamining the Merit Review Process:



The NSF Merit Review Process Working Group





In a nutshell....

- New internal NSF Working Group created by Dr. Suresh
 - Looking for potential enhancements to the merit review process that:
 - Reduce the burden on reviewers & proposers;
 - Stimulate the submission of of high-risk/game-changing ideas;
 - Ensure that the process identifies/funds an appropriate portion of high-risk, game-changing ideas; and
 - Increase the quality of the reviews.
-



In a nutshell (cont'd)

- Developing:
 - A design for a program of pilot activities
 - A framework for evaluating past and future pilots
 - Engaging:
 - NSF staff and the research community in developing, testing and assessing novel methods of proposal generation and proposal review
-



Experiments Conducted to Date

- Represent $< 1\%$ of proposals reviewed by NSF
 - Focus on review process and NOT on merit review criteria
 - Directed towards specific goals or questions
 - Limited experience to date ($n < 5$)
 - Evaluation of results pending
-



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

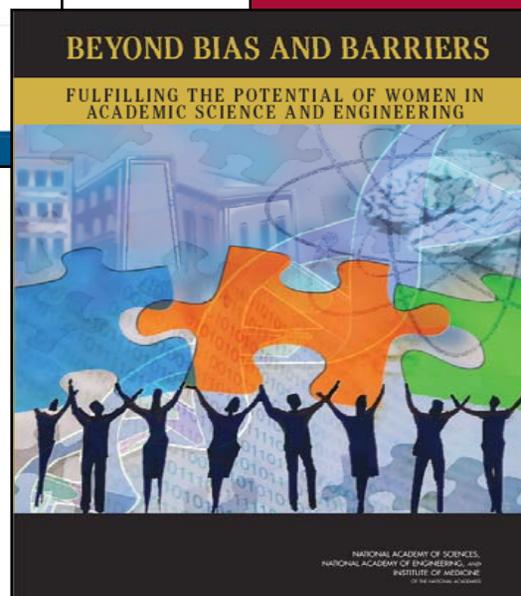
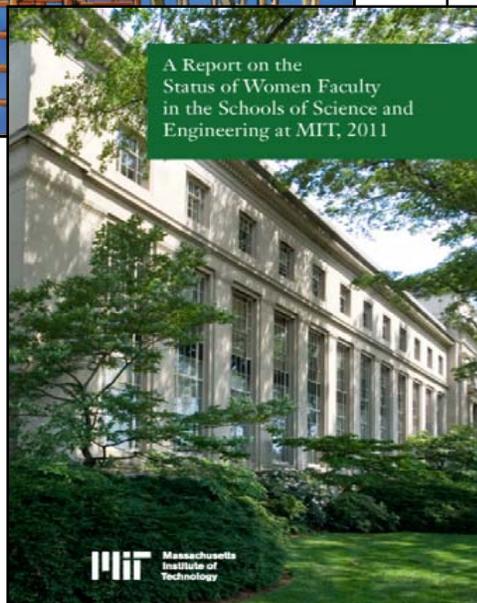
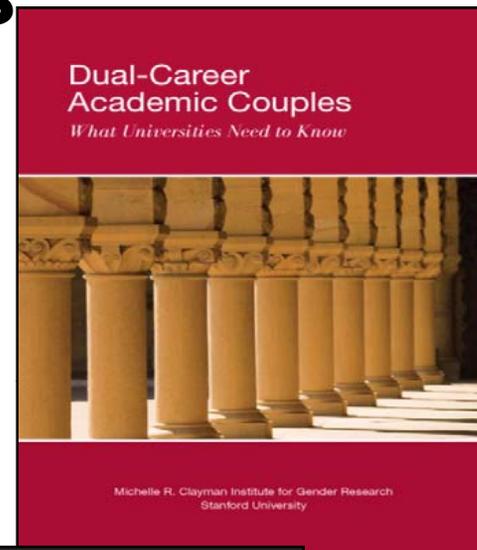
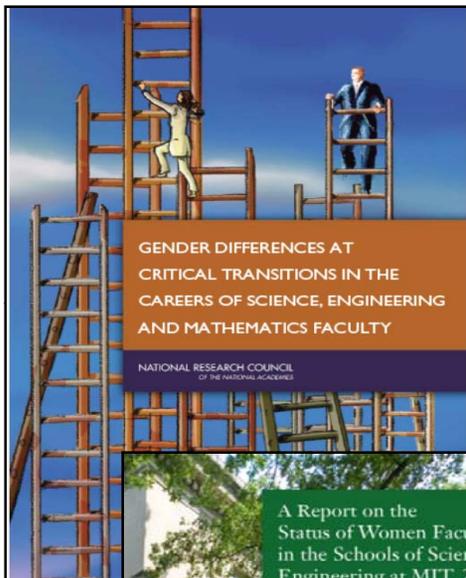
Career - Life Balance Initiative





National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

Representative External Drivers





Career-Life Balance Initiative

Why?

- To assure an excellent U.S. STEM workforce, by creating a coherent set of career—life balance policies and program opportunities that take into account the career-family life course.
- To reduce the rate of departure of women from the STEM pathway, taking advantage of the large production rate of highly capable women graduates.

Why Now?

- “To renew and strengthen U.S. leadership in STEM talent development and “to expand STEM education and career opportunities for underrepresented groups, including women” (*Educate to Innovate*)
 - Global competitiveness
-



Career-Life Balance Initiative

NSF Plan

- Agency-level pathway approach across higher education and career levels (i.e., graduate students, postdoctoral students, and early career populations).
 - Initial focus on career—life balance opportunities such as dependent care issues across the pathway (i.e., postdoctoral fellows and early career faculty).
 - Initial Programs: CAREER and NSF postdoctoral programs.
 - Also expand later to GRF, ADVANCE, and others.
-



Career – Life Balance Initiative: Implementation

Leadership

- Expand best practices NSF-wide across the pathway
 - Defer award start date for child birth/adoption
 - No cost extension for parental leave
 - Accommodate career—life balance opportunities such as approval for use of research technicians, where appropriate
 - Enhance program management
 - Educate/train program officers, reviewers & panelists
 - Revise program solicitations; issue FAQs & announcements
 - Promote family-friendliness for panel reviewers
-



Career – Life Balance Initiative: Implementation (Cont'd)

Leadership (Cont'd)

- Support research/evaluation on women in STEM issues
 - Promote Federal policy -- Title IX
 - Lead by example to become a model agency for gender equity
-



Career – Life Balance Initiative: Implementation (Cont'd)

Partnerships

- With institutions of higher education
 - Supporting & promoting institutions' best practices
 - Extending the tenure clock; dual career opportunities
 - With Federal agencies
 - Exchange best practices
 - Better harmonize family-friendly policies & practices
 - Issue joint statements
-



Career – Life Balance Initiative: Implementation (Cont'd)

Partnerships (Cont'd)

- With the Administration
 - Revisit key policies (e.g., international travel)
 - With Congress
 - Hearings, briefings
 - With professional associations/societies; for example <http://www.aau.edu/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=12646>.
-



Career – Life Balance Initiative: Implementation (Cont'd)

Communications

- NSF Important Notice to College/University Presidents
- NSF webpage and program-specific webpages
- NSF webinars
- Strengthening career-life balance opportunities through broader portfolio of NSF activities

See <http://www.nsf.gov/career-life-balance/>



Promoting Career – Life Balance Opportunities

“Federal agencies and research universities need to take concerted action to provide a suite of family responsive policies and resources for America’s researchers to change the problems [cited] and keep young researchers in the pipeline to fast-track academic careers in the sciences.”

-- *Staying Competitive, 2009*



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

NSF Implementation of the



Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR)





RPPR Background

- Brief History of the RPPR
 - The RPPR is the result of an initiative of the Research Business Models (RBM) Subcommittee of the Committee on Science (CoS), a committee of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC).
 - One of the RBM Subcommittee's priority areas is to create greater consistency in the administration of federal research awards through streamlining and standardization of forms and reporting formats.
 - Upon implementation, the RPPR will be used by federal agencies that support research and research-related activities. It is intended to replace other performance reporting formats currently in use by agencies.
 - Agencies were required to post an implementation plan within nine months of the issuance of the OSTP/OMB Policy Letter
-



RPPR Components (as approved by OMB/OSTP)

- Cover Page Data Elements
 - Mandatory Category
 - Accomplishments: What was done? What was learned?
 - Optional Categories
 - Products: What has the project produced?
 - Participants & Other Collaborating Organizations: Who has been involved?
 - Impact: What is the impact of the project? How has it contributed?
 - Changes/Problems
 - Special Reporting Requirements
 - Budgetary Information
 - Appendix 1: Demographic Information for Significant Contributors
-



NSF Implementation

- NSF plans to:
 - Utilize the following components as part of an NSF-wide standard format:
 - Mandatory Category:
 - Accomplishments: What was done? What was learned?
 - Optional Categories:
 - Products: What has the project produced?
 - Participants & Other Collaborating Organizations: Who has been involved?
 - Impact: What is the impact of the project? How has it contributed?
 - Changes/Problems
 - Special Reporting Requirements (where applicable)
 - Appendix 1: Demographic Information for Significant Contributors
-



NSF Implementation (cont'd)

- NSF will offer a new project reporting service on Research.gov which implements the RPPR format, replacing NSF's annual, interim, and final project reporting capabilities in the FastLane System
 - The project reporting service will provide a common portal for the research community to manage and submit annual, interim, and final progress reports
 - One of the key drivers in development of the project reporting service is the reduction of PI and Co-PI burden through use of more innovative mechanisms to pre-populate parts of the report
-



Benefit to PIs

- Designed to highlight most immediate requirements
 - Leveraging new data sources to reduce burden
 - Secure mechanism for creating and managing Other Authorized Users
 - More structured collection of the project reports data for enhanced NSF use
 - Will adopt federal-wide data dictionary to increase consistency of implementation across agencies
-



Leveraging New Mechanisms To Reduce Burden

- Evaluating external data sources to enhance pre-population
 - Publications and patent data
 - Participants and other collaborating organizations
 - Including option to import citations in numerous formats
 - Planning for future support of system-to-system submission
-



RPPR Status Update

- GMLOB:
 - Completed a draft RPPR data dictionary based upon the OMB RPPR approved format
 - Completed a draft RPPR XML schema
 - Both documents have been circulated for inter-agency review
 - NSF:
 - Closing out the RPPR requirements phase
 - The RPPR design phase is set to begin later this fall with an anticipated rollout beginning in next summer
-



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

For More Information

Ask Early, Ask Often!

[nsf.gov/staff](https://www.nsf.gov/staff)

[nsf.gov/staff/orglist.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/staff/orglist.jsp)

[nsf.gov/about/career_opps/rotators/index.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/about/career_opps/rotators/index.jsp)
