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RE: Response for Comment Request: NSF PAPPG (NSF 26-1)

To Whom It May Concern,

We write to offer comments in response to “U.S. National Science Foundation Proposal/Award Information—NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide” (PAPPG) NSF [\(26-1\)](#); OMB Approval Number: 3145-0058. *Should any further revisions be considered to the PAPPG, we strongly urge NSF to provide the research community with an opportunity to review and comment, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995.*

COGR is the national authority on federal policies and regulations affecting U.S. research institutions. We provide a unified voice for over 220 research universities and affiliated academic medical centers and research institutes. Our work strengthens the research partnership between the federal government and research institutions and furthers the frontiers of science, technology, and knowledge. We advocate for effective and efficient research policies and regulations that maximize and safeguard research investments and minimize administrative and cost burdens.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on the PAPPG (26-1) before its finalization. NSF has a long history of engaging with the research community to help promulgate sound policy. In previous PAPPG updates, NSF demonstrated a commitment to addressing public input in a thoughtful, responsive, and transparent manner. This is particularly important now in light of recent Executive Orders affecting NSF-funded research and the uncertainty and confusion that their implementation has engendered. COGR and its members value the opportunity to work with NSF to advance effective research policies.

We offer the comments below on the proposed PAPPG (26-1) revisions for your consideration. Should you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact me or Krystal Toups, COGR’s Director of Contracts and Grants Administration at ktoups@cogr.edu.

Sincerely,



Matt Owens
President

cc: Dr. Rebecca Keiser, NSF Office of the Chief of Research Security, Strategy, and Policy
Dr. Quadira Dantro, Division Director, Office of Budget, Finance and Award Management

COGR Responses to NSF's Proposed Revisions PAPPG 26-1

Chapter I: G.3, NSF ID (page I-11)

To enhance system security and reduce online exploits and scams, users must provide at least two verification factors (multi-factor authentication (MFA)) when logging in to NSF systems. If a user's account at the organization or at NSF is compromised, the NSF IT Service Desk must be contacted immediately. Additionally, organizations must annually review and recertify that all user accounts associated with the organization are still active and roles are still valid in NSF systems.

The updated guidance states that organizations must notify the NSF IT Service Desk "immediately" if a user's account at the organization is compromised. However, the language does not explicitly limit this requirement to NSF accounts, which could lead to confusion about whether institutions are expected to report compromises unrelated to NSF systems. Furthermore, the expectation of immediate notification does not account for institutional protocols for investigating and containing security incidents before external reporting, which may be necessary to ensure accurate and meaningful communication with NSF.

COGR's Recommendations: To provide clarity, we recommend revising the language as follows:

"If a user's NSF account, either at the organization or at NSF, is compromised, the NSF IT Service Desk must be contacted as soon as possible."

This revision ensures that the requirement is specific to NSF accounts and acknowledges that immediate notification may not always be operationally feasible, particularly in complex security incidents where institutions must first assess and contain the breach before reporting. Additionally, we recommend that NSF reevaluate the roles subject to multi-factor authentication (MFA). While we fully support the goal of enhancing system security, the current MFA requirements place a significant burden on institutions, particularly in managing access across various roles. Given that the primary concern appears to be fraudulent financial transactions, NSF should consider limiting the MFA requirement to financial roles rather than

broadly applying it to all users, including those submitting proposals, prior approval requests, and reports. Targeted MFA implementation would better align security measures with identified risks while reducing unnecessary administrative burden.

Chapter II: B.1, Preadward Disclosures (page II-2)

(Additionally referenced in Chapter II.D.2.a. [Cover Sheet and Proposal Certifications] (page II-8), Chapter II.D.2.h.(i) [Biographical Sketch(es)] (page II-24), and Chapter II.D.2.h.(ii) [Current and Pending (other) Support](page II-28))

...completed the requisite research security training that meets the requirements specified in PAPPG Chapter IX.C. within one year of proposal submission...

PAPPG 26-1 introduces new language to implement 42 U.S.C. § 19234, but the text, as written, is ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations. NSF officials have presented two conflicting interpretations in public settings: one suggesting that training must be completed within the year preceding proposal submission and another indicating that training must be completed no later than one year after submission. This ambiguity has led to significant confusion within the research community. However, NSF has recently clarified that covered individuals must complete training within one year from the time of proposal submission.

COGR's Recommendations: To eliminate uncertainty, we recommend that NSF revise the language to explicitly state the requirement. We suggest the following revision:

...completed the requisite research security training that meets the requirements specified in PAPPG Chapter IX.C. within one year of proposal submission. This means that covered individuals will have completed the training no later than one year after the proposal submission.

Additionally, 42 U.S.C. § 19234 does not prescribe a specific renewal frequency for research security training, and PAPPG 26-1 is also silent on this point. NSF has historically deferred to institutions to determine the frequency of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training ([FAQ #4](#), August 16, 2010), and many institutions have adopted a four-year cycle, consistent with other research training requirements, such as conflict of interest training (42 CFR Part 50 [§ 50.604 \(b\)](#)). To promote consistency and facilitate institutional implementation, we recommend that agencies align research security training requirements with this existing four-year standard. This alignment would provide clarity for researchers and institutions while ensuring compliance is both manageable and effective.

Chapter II: D.2.f.i.b Administrative and Clerical Salaries & Wages Policy (page II-13)

In accordance with 2 CFR § 200.413, the salaries of administrative and clerical staff should normally be treated as indirect costs (F&A). Direct charging of these costs may be appropriate only if all the conditions identified below are met:

- (i) Administrative or clerical services are integral to a project or activity.*
- (ii) Individuals involved can be specifically identified with the project or activity.*

- (iii) *Such costs are explicitly included in the approved budget or have the prior written approval of the cognizant NSF Grants and Agreements Officer; and*
- (iv) *The costs are not also recovered as indirect costs.*

PAPPG 26-1 continues to include a condition in this section that is not required by the cited Uniform Guidance section ([2 CFR § 200.413](#)). Specifically, item (iii) above adds the requirement for these costs to be included in the budget or receive prior written approval, creating administrative burden for a higher level of support than Federal regulations require.

COGR's Recommendations: NSF should consider the increased administrative costs for both the grantee community and the agency that are caused by continuing to include this condition. NSF should revise the language to remove item (iii) and align its policy in this area with the standard Uniform Guidance.

Chapter II: D.2.f.iii Equipment (page II-14)

(Additionally referenced in Chapter II: D.2.f.(vi)(a) Materials and Supplies (page II-16))

Equipment is defined as tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost which equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the proposer for financial statement purposes, or \$5,000.

NSF has continued adopting the definition for Equipment in PAPPG 26-1 as it is included in the Definitions section of the Uniform Guidance ([2 CFR § 200.1](#)), except that the default capitalization threshold in PAPPG 26-1 does not reflect the October 2024 revision to the increased threshold value of \$10,000.

COGR's Recommendations: NSF should align its definition of Equipment in PAPPG 26-1 to reflect the current Uniform Guidance capitalization threshold of \$10,000.

Chapter II: D.2.i.(ii) Data Management and Sharing Plan (DMSP) of the Products of Research (page II-31)

The newly introduced Data Management and Sharing (DMS) requirements represent an important step in advancing open science; however, it also presents challenges for institutions and researchers. These requirements were not part of the community input through NSF's Public Access Plan review, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on their implementation.

NSF's use of a webform in Research.gov requires certain [fields](#) for Data Management and Sharping Plans (DMSPs). While it allows an opportunity for NSF to leverage reporting on static form fields, it limits flexibility and may increase burden for researchers. Many researchers and institutions have established structured templates for DMSPs, and the Research.gov webform omits an option to upload files (ex. PDF).

Additionally, section III. Data Standards and Metadata section requires researchers to specify granular data standards at the proposal stage, which is often hard for researchers to identify at the beginning of projects. The expectation that researchers predict exceptions at the

proposal stage, with program officer approval for modifications, creates unnecessary administrative hurdles.

COGR's Recommendations: We recommend that NSF engage the research community before implementing required DMSP fields, reduce overly prescriptive documentation requirements at the proposal stage, and allow an option to attach files to the webform. These adjustments will reduce administrative burden, provide needed clarity, and ensure a practical approach to research data management and sharing.

Chapter VII: D.3.b Reporting Period and Record Retention Requirements (page VII-12)

The report must be submitted by September 30th of each calendar year. The report will cover the reporting period from July 1st, 2024, through August 31st, 2025, to provide the institution with a 30-day period for finalization and submission of the requisite information. Subsequent years' reporting periods will run from September 1st of the previous year to August 31st of the reporting year.

We appreciate the NSF Office of the Chief of Research Security, Strategy, and Policy for engaging the community in discussions on the proposed Foreign Financial Disclosure (FFDR) requirements and for providing clarifications that align with the FAQs and webinars held by the office. We fully support the September 30 reporting deadline, as it allows institutions additional time for review and submission. We also support the ability to opt out of certain data fields, which provides institutions with greater flexibility while ensuring compliance. However, we have concerns regarding the proposed change in the reporting period.

COGR's Recommendations: We recommend maintaining the current July 1 – June 30 reporting period, which aligns with the Department of Education's Section 117 reporting cycle, rather than adopting a new September 1 – August 31 timeframe. While the reporting requirements for the two regulations differ, many institutions rely on similar data sources for both submissions. Aligning the reporting periods would help reduce administrative burden by eliminating the need to generate reports on different timelines and enable institutions to leverage existing data processes for greater consistency across reporting obligations.

Chapter X: D.1.b.(iii) Special Limitation concerning Colleges and Universities (page X-5)

Special Limitation concerning Colleges and Universities education. For these entities, the negotiated rate at the time the award is made shall be used throughout the life of the award. The applicable text from 2 CFR § 200 Appendix III, paragraph C.7 is repeated below:

NSF states that the negotiated indirect cost rate (singular) at the time of the award shall be used throughout the life of the award. While this section has not been revised, we note the language uses "rate," whereas Chapter X: D.1.d (page X-6) and 2 CFR § 200 Appendix III, paragraph C.7 refer to "rates" in the plural.

COGR's Recommendations: NSF should revise "rate" to "rates" to ensure alignment with federal regulations and variability in institutions' negotiated rate agreements.

Chapter X: D.1.d Indirect Costs, NSF Policy (page X-6)

NSF will generally fund continuing grant increments and supplemental support using the negotiated indirect cost rate(s) approved at the time of the initial award. (See PAPPG Chapter VI.E.)

NSF states that it will generally fund continuing grant increments and supplemental support using the negotiated indirect cost rate(s) approved at the time of the initial award. While this is consistent with past practice, institutions are now facing updated thresholds for equipment and subawards, which will likely be reflected in their new indirect cost rates. Further, the January 15, 2025 COFFA [MEMORANDUM FOR THE FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE COMMUNITY](#) grants two OMB class exceptions “applicable to awards applying the prior version of the Uniform Grants Guidance.” One exception allows, with written agency notice or approval, “recipients of both active and expired Federal awards, and subrecipients of both active and expired subawards, which applied the prior version of the Uniform Grants Guidance,” to “instead use the revised equipment thresholds of \$10,000 provided in the 2024 Revisions.”

COGR’s Recommendations: NSF should reconsider this policy and allow for the application of updated indirect cost rates to continuing increments and supplements and to allow higher equipment thresholds under active and expired awards and subawards subject to the prior version of the Uniform Grants Guidance, ensuring that institutions are able to compliantly implement new MTDC equipment and subaward thresholds.

Chapter XI: B.2 Research Involving Recombinant or Synthetic Nucleic Acid Molecules (page XI-7)

This section applies to all research, for which NSF award funds are used, that falls within the scope of the Guidelines for Research Involving Recombinant DNA or Synthetic Nucleic Acid Molecules (NIH Guidelines), as amended in April 2024, hereafter referred to as the “Guidelines”.

NSF’s proposed language applies to all research funded by NSF that falls within the scope of the Guidelines for Research Involving Recombinant DNA or Synthetic Nucleic Acid Molecules (NIH Guidelines), as amended in April 2024. However, it is unclear whether NSF intends to rely entirely on NIH for oversight and compliance, including responsibilities such as RAC reviews and reporting of accidents or violations of the NIH Guidelines to OBA.

COGR’s Recommendations: We request clarification on the extent of NSF’s reliance on NIH processes and whether additional NSF-specific review or compliance mechanisms will be required. Clear guidance on oversight responsibilities is essential to ensure institutions can effectively comply with these requirements.

Chapter XI: D.4.b. Dissemination and Sharing of Research Results (page XI-21)

PIs and co-PIs are expected to publicly share, at no more than incremental cost and within a reasonable time, the

primary data, samples, physical collections, software, curriculum material, and other supporting materials created or gathered in the course of work under NSF awards...

NSF's proposed language appears to significantly broaden the scope beyond the existing NSF Public Access Plan¹, expanding public sharing expectations to include physical collections (specimens) and software code. This modification creates new obligations for researchers, raising concerns about feasibility, compliance burdens, and potential conflicts with intellectual property rights or proprietary considerations.

COGR's Recommendation: COGR recommends that NSF clarify expectations. Specifically, we propose removing the term "publicly" to clarify expectations and ensure manageable and effective compliance. Given the complexity of sharing software and physical specimens, NSF should provide additional guidance on appropriate mechanisms and exceptions.

Chapter XI: E.4.a.(ii) Recipient Obligations (page XI-22)

Instrumentation/equipment must be marked with the NSF logo by the recipient if the purchase price is \$150,000 or above, in accordance with the guidance specified in the NSF Brand Standards Manual.

NSF requires recipients to mark instrumentation or equipment with the NSF logo if the purchase price is \$150,000 or more, in accordance with the NSF Brand Standards Manual. While acknowledging NSF's interest in visibility, applying logos to certain types of instrumentation may present significant logistical challenges.

COGR's Recommendations: NSF should consider the practical burdens associated with this requirement and provide flexibility. NSF should revise the language to change "must" to "should," allowing for greater flexibility in cases where marking equipment is impractical or may interfere with functionality.

¹ COGR joined a joint association response for NSF Public Access 2.0, <https://www.cogr.edu/cogr-submits-joint-association-response-nsf-public-access-20>, January 19, 2024