

**U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Oversight
Subcommittee on Research and Technology**

HEARING CHARTER

Is NSF Properly Managing its Rotating Staff?

Thursday, June 25, 2015
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Purpose

The Oversight and Research & Technology Subcommittees will hold a joint hearing titled *Is NSF Properly Managing its Rotating Staff?* on Thursday, June 25, 2015, in Room 2318 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing will examine the National Science Foundation's (NSF) use of "rotators" or external researchers and educators from across the United States in addition to the NSF's permanent scientific staff. Nearly 1/3 of all NSF program officers are rotators, who are involved in making funding decisions. Most of these rotators come to NSF under the authority of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) assignments. The NSF relies on IPAs to carry out the agency's mission, while administering little oversight and training for IPAs in management positions.

Witnesses

- **The Honorable Allison Lerner**, Inspector General, National Science Foundation
- **Dr. Richard Buckius**, Chief Operating Officer, National Science Foundation

Background

The National Science Foundation (NSF) uses the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) to staff top scientists, engineers, and educators from universities and industry on a temporary basis in an attempt to maintain an enhanced scientific workforce. The NSF also employs Visiting Scientists, Engineers, and Educators (VSEE's), which together with the IPAs form the NSF "rotator" program.¹ The "rotator" program brings expertise, fresh perspective, and diverse skillsets to the NSF.

NSF IPAs remain employees of their home institutions and their salaries are matched by the NSF throughout the tenure as an IPA (less than four years).² The IPAs' salaries are funded

¹ National Science Foundation, Inspector General, *Audit of NSF's Workforce Management: Rotating Director Model* (Mar. 30, 2010), Available at: http://www.nsf.gov/oig/_pdf/10_2_009.pdf.

² National Science Foundation, Inspector General, *Audit of Cost Associated with NSF's Use of Intergovernmental Personnel Act Assignees* (Mar. 20, 2013), Available at: http://www.nsf.gov/oig/_pdf/IPA-13-2-008.pdf.

through NSF Program Funds in the form of NSF grants to the individual IPA's home institution. In addition to salaries, the NSF pays for additional costs associated with IPAs including: lost IPA consulting fees, temporary living expenses, individual research and development travel, and fringe benefits.³ As of August 2012, the NSF employed 184 IPAs or 12% of the total NSF workforce, which is disproportionately higher than other comparable agencies.⁴

According to a 2013 Inspector General report, IPAs cost the NSF on average \$36,448 more per IPA than the average permanent federal employee.⁵ IPA-related costs totaled more than \$6.7 million in 2013.⁶ Furthermore, a 2010 IG report found that IPAs in management level positions at the NSF lacked the institutional knowledge regarding federal employment protocols, training, and expectations.

New Inspector General Report

The NSF IG completed a report on June 19, 2015, outlining a specific circumstance where clear conflicts of interest existed at NSF between an IPA and recipients of NSF grants the IPA oversaw.⁷ The NSF IG made several recommendations including the suspension of the three grants awarded in light of clear conflicts of interests. The NSF IG is prepared to discuss the findings of the report in addition to recommendations to prevent similar situations from being repeated in the future.

³ Mar. 30, 2013 report

⁴ Mar. 30, 2013 report

⁵ Mar. 30, 2013 report

⁶ Mar. 30, 2013 report

⁷ National Science Foundation, Inspector General, *Opportunities to Strengthen Controls over Rotator Conflicts of Interest* (May. 19, 2015), Available at: http://www.nsf.gov/oig/_pdf/Controls%20over%20Rotator%20COI.pdf.