Community for Advancing Discovery Research in Education

Tips for Preparing NSF Project Reports

Types of Reports and Due Dates

Each awardee is required to submit annual reports, a final report, and a project outcomes report. Interim reports are optional; they are used to inform NSF of significant activities related to the project, such as a noteworthy publication, in between annual reports.

The reports are the avenue through which awardees' work is shared, formally, with program officers. Some of the best annual, final, and interim reports are written in straightforward, easily accessible language. Think of these reports as conversations about your work. Reports include, but are not limited to, information on progress, successes, findings, products, and dissemination efforts. Awardees also report on challenges with their projects and propose plans for addressing them. Annual reports are NOT the time to ask for changes in scope; significant changes to your project's objective(s), methodologies, timeline, project staff, or institute should occur in conversation with your program officer. Making changes to your project's scope of work without NSF program officer approval is problematic.

In addition to annual, final, and interim reports, awardees also prepare a required project outcomes report (POR) upon project completion. This report is developed for a different audience—the general public, including members of Congress and their staffs.

If you have a collaborative project with principal investigators (PIs) from more than one institution (separate award numbers), you must each submit annual, final, and POR reports. Coordination between the reports is essential; report on common elements, as well as your unique areas of work including participants, activities, and findings. Be clear about the role that your particular project plays in contributing to the collaboration and advancing the research.

The information and data in all these reports are valuable for several

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purposes: to help program officers stay up-to-date on your project's progress and identify potential projects for NSF's "Highlights," to assist NSF evaluators in assessing the overall STEM education programs, and to provide a record of NSF's expenditures.

All reports are submitted via Research.gov.

REPORT DEADLINES

Annual Report. The annual report describes the activities of the current project year. The report is due within a 90 day window before the end of the project year. A project year is calculated from your award start date, and a report must be filed for every project year except the last year of the project. NSF will send a notification on the first day a report is due. It is a requirement for every NSF awardee to submit an annual report, and a requirement for every program officer to respond to the report in a reasonable time period. The program officer should approve the report before the overdue date (which is on the one year anniversary). Be sure to submit your report early enough in the 90 day window to give your program officer time to review and approve your report before it becomes overdue.

> NOTE: Please note that because of the funding cycle, your first annual report will include only 9 months of project activity. Your second annual report will cover a full 12 months, including the months that weren't covered in the previous annual report.

Interim Project Report (IPR). This report is not required but is sometimes used to provide an update on the progress of a project. Awardees can submit an interim report at any time, but it is in addition to—not a replacement for—an annual or final report. Program officers sometimes request interim reports when there has been a major change in scope, personnel, or research methodology.

Final Report. At the end of the final year of a project—and within 120 days after the end date—awardees submit a final report instead of an annual report. If an awardee receives any extensions (through supplements or no-cost extensions), NSF requires an annual report for what would have been the final project year, and the final report is submitted at the end of the extension period. The final report is, in effect, a final annual report; in other words, the awardee does not report all previous work but, rather, focuses on the work completed since the last annual report was submitted.

There are 3 NSF report types that will need to be submitted over the course of your project: annual report, final report, and project outcomes report. Some projects may also submit an interim project report.

Project Outcomes Report (POR). The POR is required for all awards that received funding on or after January 4, 2010. Awardees submit a summary written for the general public and develop a convincing case about why the findings of the research are of interest and valuable to the public. These reports are short (800 words max) and may include images. PORs are due within 120 days after the project's end date.

TIMELY SUBMISSION OF REPORTS

Failure to file reports may result in the holding back of project funds, and stops all funding actions for the PI and co-PI(s). A program officer can grant an annual report extension, which can provide additional time for you to prepare a report.

Report Sections

Annual, interim, and final reports all contain the same sections, shown below and in the template found at https://www.research.gov/common/attachment/Desktop/NSFProjectReportTemplate.docx.

- Accomplishments
  - » Major Goals
  - » Accomplishments Under These Goals (includes Major Activities, Specific Objectives, Significant Results, Key Outcomes or Other Achievements)
  - » Opportunities for Training and Professional Development
  - » Dissemination to Communities of Interest
  - » Plans for Next Reporting Period
- Products
- Participants
- Impacts
- Changes/Problems

NOTE: If you are copying/pasting text from a document into Research.gov, formatting may not transfer properly (numbering, bullets, bolding, etc.). Check your work before submitting. Character counts may also differ between your document and Research.gov so you may need to make text adjustments. If you encounter other issues, save your progress and try switching to another browser.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Major Goals. In this section, NSF asks for major goals of the project and a description of what was accomplished under these goals.

NOTE: If you have previously submitted an annual report for the award through Research.gov and it is approved, then the major goals will be pre-populated with information from that previously approved Annual Report. Please review this information and edit the response as necessary.

Accomplishments Under These Goals. Of the four categories listed in the Accomplishments Under These Goals section (Major Activities, Specific Objectives, Significant Results, Key Outcomes or Other Achievements), you need only provide information in one category, but you can use as many of the categories as you choose. For sections you choose not to use, you must select "Nothing to Report."

Suggestions for how to fill out the four categories are below. Keep in mind that there are character limits to each category.

> *NOTE: Experienced PIs suggest keeping a log of project activities, accomplishments, training/professional development, outreach, products, participants, impacts, presentations, and changes/ challenges throughout each year of the project. This can be a running list in a document or a task-tracking project management tool, depending on your own organizational systems. Keeping track of these activities and accomplishments on a regular basis will ensure that you don't forget to report a key accomplishment and will cut down on time spent looking up this information after the fact, making the report writing a faster process.*

Major Activities (8,000 Character Limit). In this section, describe research, development, and education activities conducted throughout the project year. Tie your comments back to the proposal and mention any changes in activities from what was proposed.

Include summary data here (e.g., number of participants, number of sites, number of publications and presentations) but save the data about findings for a subsequent section.

Specific Objectives (8,000 Character Limit). This section is for identifying the objectives of your work over the course of the project year. If you already covered your objectives in Major Activities, you can use this section to go into more detail about the activities related to a central or important objective of your project work.

Significant Results (8,000 Character Limit). In this section, describe major findings and conclusions that resulted from the activities described above. The program officer reads this section to assess the results of your project. If your project uses an external evaluator, you can also attach a PDF of the evaluator's report to this section, but again, this PDF does not replace your narrative. It is here where specific findings from your research and evaluators are important. If possible, try to align the timeline you develop for your evaluation plan with your annual report schedule.

If you have specific questions about what to report or how to report it, contact your program officer for advice.

This section lays the foundation and provides a context for your subsequent description of products that result from the project and contributions to the field.

All program officers recognize that during the first years of a project, there may be few findings to report. If you have specific questions about what to report or how to report it, contact your program officer for advice.

Key Outcomes or Other Achievements (8,000 Character Limit).
If you have used up your allotted character limits in the first three sections, you may choose to use this section for run-over. You may also use this section to describe key outcomes that happen outside of the findings of your research.

Think of these sections as a chronicle of your goals, progress, and achievements. Your program officer needs this information to make sure you are making progress toward the goals identified in your proposal. You should be brief but comprehensive; the program officer should not have to refer back to your original proposal.

Opportunities for Training and Professional Development. This is the section to report on any training and development undertaken as part of your project. Include development activities (e.g., mentoring, conference attendance, workshop participation) of your own staff, including undergraduate students, graduate students, post-docs, and faculty, as well as that provided for youth, teachers, or education leaders. Provide descriptions of any sessions you have conducted and reference agendas, calendars, or syllabi in your text. You must include a summary of mentoring activities if your project team includes postdoctoral researchers. You can also attach these PDF documents to the report.

Dissemination to Communities of Interest. From the start of your award, it is important to think about how your findings and/or products will be disseminated. In this section, describe how you are sharing your project outcomes and experiences. This might include, but is not be limited to, websites, newsletters, peer-reviewed articles, social media, written materials, conference proposals and presentations, engagement at PI meetings, and the role of advisors in "spreading the word." CADRE has developed resources on dissemination available at http://cadrek12.org/dissemination-toolkit.

Plans for Next Reporting Period. Your next reporting period picks up where the current annual report leaves off. You could start this section by referencing the proposal goals. Then consider what the next reporting period might look like in relation to high-level activities, for example, identifying sites, piloting materials, conducting professional development, developing an instrument, analyzing data, or designing outreach and dissemination activities.

> *NOTE: Attachments. If you have agendas, tables, graphs, or diagrams that help present your progress, attach them as PDF files to the bottom of the Accomplishments section. Refer to each of these by title in your narrative. These attachments are intended to be supplements to the narrative provided in the report sections, and do not replace them. Do not depend on the reader having access to internet hyperlinks. You are allowed 4 PDF files in this section with a maximum file size of 5 MB each.*

PRODUCTS

Report tangible products from your project, e.g, published articles, books, online materials, videos, databases, or software products. If you presented a paper at a professional conference, but it was never published, list it in the "Other" tab in the index. NSF is not looking for a long list but is interested in major publications and products that reflect the work of your project. Specifics are required. While it is useful to provide publications as attachments, it is valuable to provide key information in the core of the report about those publications.

> *NOTE: All published journal articles and juried conference papers must be submitted to the NSF Public Access Repository (NSF-PAR) for all projects based on proposals due on or after January 25, 2017. You can find more information on Research.gov. Once they have been submitted, you will be able to select them from a list in the Products section of your report.*

PARTICIPANTS

This section includes basic information about each person from your organization who works on the project, along with the names and roles of partner organizations and other collaborators.

Individuals Working on a Project. Provide all staff names, their roles on the project, the amount of time they allocate to the project (person months), and a brief description of their contribution(s). Descriptions of their work need only be a few sentences.

The information in this field is pre-populated from prior years of the project. Each subsequent project year, it is necessary to add new personnel information and update the roles and activities of continuing staff. If a person is no longer on the project, do not delete their name but change that person's hourly commitment and involvement with the project.

Partner Organizations. List all partner organizations that are involved in the projects. They can provide different contributions, e.g., supply equipment or space, collaborate on research, or assist with dissemination. Include any subawardees on your grant, including evaluators. This list may include academic institutions, nonprofits, commercial firms, or state or local government agencies or schools.

Collaborators. List collaborators, those internal or external to your organization who have not been identified previously. These could include informal collaborations with scientists, engineers, or educators.

> **A**ll published journal articles and juried conference papers must be submitted to the NSF Public Access Repository (NSF-PAR) for all projects based on proposals due on or after January 25, 2017.

IMPACTS

This is where you report on what and how your project has contributed to the field. Your project may not have any impacts in its early stages. You also may not be able to report on impacts in all of the suggested categories. Add information for the impact categories that apply for your project.

CHANGES/PROBLEMS

Should your project experience changes during the year being reported, NSF wants you to describe those changes here. Program officers are interested in the challenges you faced and your plans for addressing them. This not only helps them better understand your project but also provides data for them to identify common concerns across similar types of work.

The following three topics are more likely be the ones you would need to fill in for a DRK-12 project (although you should glance over all topics):

- Changes in approach
- Actual or anticipated problems or delays
- Changes that have significant impact on expenditures

Significant changes described here should have already been discussed with your program officer so that nothing is a surprise. The Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG) gives examples of significant changes to make your program officer aware of.

REVIEW OF ANNUAL REPORT

Your program officer is the person who will read your report most thoroughly. It is possible they will return your report and ask for changes prior to final approval. Staying in communication with the program officer can expedite this process. It is also possible for annual and final reports to be reviewed by the inspector general, who provides independent oversight of NSF's use of funds.

Resources

The advice in this brief is based on a previous CADRE annual report tips document, with revisions resulting from new reporting guidelines, an NSF document on tips and guidelines for NSF's Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, and suggestions from experienced PIs from the DRK-12 program.

In addition to the information in this tip sheet, we recommend reading the following resources:

- NSF website outlining technical requirements
- Guidelines for reporting on conference grants
- A visual guide to submitting reports on Research.gov
- Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG), January 2017
- FAQs on Project Outcomes Reports