Strategic Goal 3 (G3): Excel as a Federal Science Agency

Strategic Objective 2 (G3/O2): Use effective methods and innovative solutions to achieve excellence in accomplishing the agency's mission.

NSF can accomplish our mission only when our operational and administrative enterprise functions work seamlessly with the front-line organizations they support. A wide range of services--including human resources; performance management; information technology (IT); financial, procurement, and administrative support--provide the wherewithal for the agency's program staff and leadership to make critical investments in science, research, engineering, and education.

The agency uses three key strategies to achieve organizational excellence: openness, inclusion, and effectiveness. Openness and inclusion are achieved when we conduct business in a transparent, collaborative, and participatory manner with all stakeholders. Continuous, clear communication with all parties is a hallmark of openness and inclusion. An organization is effective when all business processes work to optimize administrative efficiencies, provide business intelligence for data-driven decision making, and enable organizational agility.

An essential mechanism that NSF uses to accomplish our mission is the competitive merit review of research proposals. We have developed a strong business and operations model that is emulated around the world. This model uses frontline U.S. researchers who have the best sense of where opportunities for major advances lie to evaluate proposals for original research. NSF accepts proposals in a manner that represents an open portal for new ideas in all fields, including interdisciplinary proposals. Whether they are submitted in response to open funding opportunities or for formal targeted solicitations, the proposals undergo merit review, with the subject matter experts (peers) assessing the intellectual merits and broader impacts of the proposed research. This merit review may take many forms, but all are designed to provide NSF program officers with the information they need to make award recommendations from among the (usually) large number of high-quality possibilities. The agency's IT systems are critical to the process, facilitating the flow of proposals through the merit review, award, and oversight processes. External members of the research community periodically assess the quality of the merit review process as a means of accountability for NSF management and staff. Construction and operation of large scientific instruments and infrastructure efforts present added challenges. NSF requires extensive project execution plans, including detailed work scope, milestone schedules, and risk management; progress is monitored continually by NSF staff using extensive Earned Value Management (EVM) data, supplemented by in-depth external reviews conducted at least once a year.

Programs in support
Agency Operations and Award Management (AOAM)

FY 2016-FY 2017 Agency Priority Goals in support
None

FY 2016-FY 2017 Performance Goals in support
Use Evidence to Guide Management Decisions
Make Timely Award Decisions
Foster a Culture of Inclusion
Evaluate NSF Investments
Increase the Percentage of Panelists Participating in Merit Review Virtually