MENTOR-CONNECT TUTORIAL

PREPARING THE ANNUAL REPORT FOR YOUR NSF ATE PROJECT

This tutorial will guide you through an important process – submitting your annual report. This is an important (and required) responsibility when you receive a National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education grant.

This material is based on a presentation given at the NSF ATE PI Conference in October 2019.

As part of the project team's annual report to the NSF, an evaluator's report should be attached. The evaluator gives this report to the PI, who is expected to include it in the annual report. This presentation focuses on the annual report written by the project team. The PI and AOR (Authorized Organizational Representative) are jointly responsible for ensuring the annual report is submitted in a timely manner.
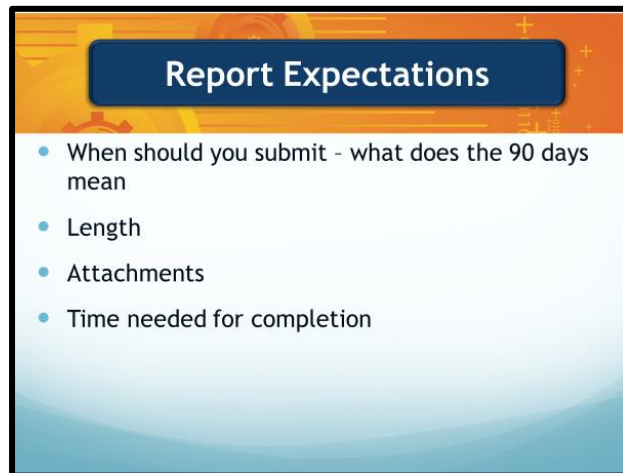
You will receive an e-mail that your report is due 90 days before the end of your project year. For example, if your funding started on July 1, you will get an e-mail around April 1 telling you your report is due. DON'T PANIC. Based on this scenario (July 1 start date), the ideal time to submit your report would be in late May or early June. Your Program Officer must have time to read and approve your report (or return for additional information) BEFORE July 1.

Attachments: You must attach a copy of your external evaluator's report to your report. Other attachments might include detailed information on survey results, samples of surveys, or copies of presentations. When you add attachments, consider if they will help your Program Officer understand what you are doing. Make sure any attachments do not include student names, unless it is a citation of a conference presentation or publication.

It is easy to be intimidated by the annual report. The first time, it may take a while but it will get easier. If you get familiar with the NSF report template at the beginning of your project and write it in small chunks over the entire year, it will be much easier.

You do not have to do this by yourself. HELP is available. If you go to research.gov and click on the *Help* link you will find specific assistance on preparing your annual report.

Your login for research.gov is the same as your login for Fastlane.gov.

When you access Research.gov you will notice they have a report template and sample reports available. You are strongly encouraged to make use of these resources.
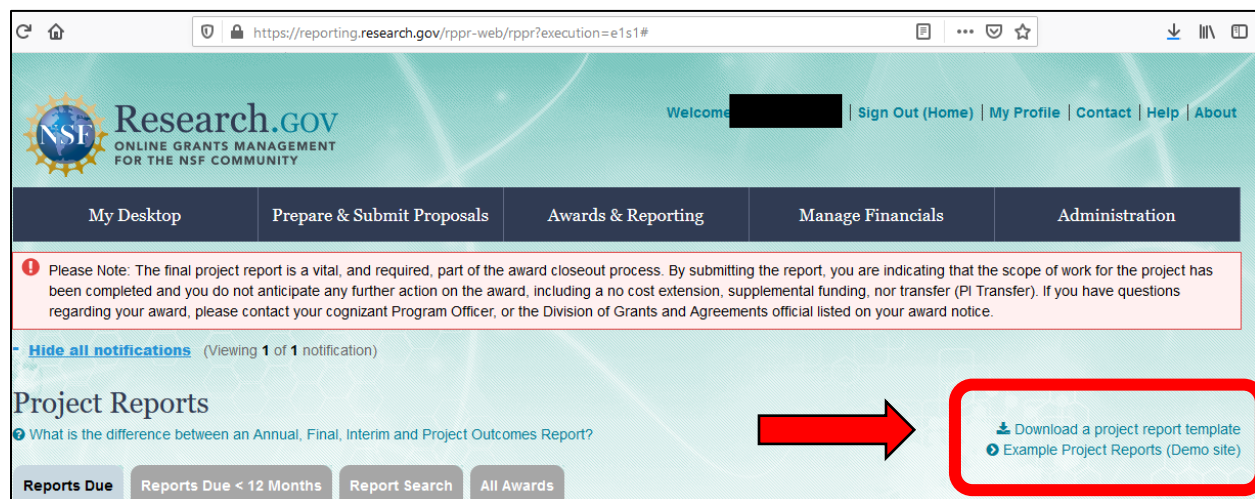
The report consists of seven sections: (1) Cover; (2) Accomplishments; (3) Products; (4) Participants/Organizations; (5) Impacts; (6) Changes/Problems; and (7) Special Requirements. For a new project, most of your time and effort will be spent on the *Accomplishments* section.

Cover

The *Cover* will be completed automatically.

Accomplishments

Information Needed

- What are the major goals of the project?
- What was accomplished under these goals (you must provide information for at least one of the 4 categories)?
  - Major activities
  - Specific objectives
  - Significant results
  - Key outcomes or other achievements

Information Needed

- What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?
- How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?
- What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?
- Last Item: ATTACH EXTERNAL EVALUATOR REPORT

When writing your report for the first time you will be asked to list the major goals of your project. These should match your proposal (copied from your proposal) along with any change in scope you might have submitted.

If you have previously submitted an approved Annual Report for the award through Research.gov, the major goals will be pre-populated with information from that Annual Report. Please review this information. You would only edit if you have changes that you have previously discussed with your Program Officer, you find mistakes that need correction, or you find more succinct ways to communicate information.

The place where you will spend the most time is sharing information about what you have accomplished during the year. These are listed as Major Activities, Specific Objectives, Significant Results and Key Outcomes. You are sharing information with your Program Officer – this is your opportunity to share what you have done during the year.

Useful tips: The annual report is NOT the time to propose new goals or significant changes. These should be discussed with your Program Officer first, as any change in a project's scope requires NSF pre-approval.

Engaging Key Partners - Internal

- Administration – Communicate with Deans and Upper Management how the institution can meet the needs of the industry and how your project fits.
- Faculty – Meet and advise them of the projects purpose and goals even if they are not part of the grant.
- Grant Coordinators – Explain to the Grants department what your goals are pertaining to the project so they can effectively assist with the requirements of HR, Purchasing & Accounts, and NSF.

When creating your annual report, the accomplishments should be specific. You (as the PI) should NOT be working in a silo. It is a team effort.

From the beginning of your project you should make sure your administration, faculty, grant coordinators and industry partners are on board. As you begin writing your report, check in with others and see what they would consider "key" accomplishments.

Engaging Key Partners - External

- Industry Partners – Survey the needs of your industry and obtain in writing if possible. (Advisory Committee Meetings)
- External Evaluator – Update and communicate with your evaluator regularly

You should be communicating with your external evaluator regularly. Your report and the report provided by the evaluator should match. For example, you should not list that you hosted 20 events with 500 attendees while your evaluator states they are concerned because no events had been offered during the year.

Remember:
- COMMUNICATE with your external evaluator.
- COMMUNICATE with your partners.
- COMMUNICATE with your Program Officer.

Products

Frequently new projects will not have anything to include in *Products*. The categories are:

- Licenses
- Other Conference Presentations / Papers
- Other Products
- Other Publications
- Patents
- Technologies or Techniques
- Thesis/Dissertations
- Websites

If you do have one of these items, make sure you include a description and attach a copy of the artifact. The most likely items you will have are conference presentations (copy of Power Point or other presentation can be attached) AND a website.

Participants/Organizations

This section is easy to overlook. But it is critical to complete this section accurately. This is where you include time spent on the project by the PI and Co-PI to the nearest month. Also provide an overview of what each person's role has been. In your grant proposal you listed the initial roles for each PI and Co-PI, so your proposal can be a good starting point for their "Contribution to the Project."

You should also include any partners in your grant and what their role is. Some examples of this would be K-12 school systems or other colleges.

Never report the names of students in your report or in any attachments.

Impacts

You are asked to discuss the impact your project has made on seven areas. In the context of your project, for some of the questions asked it may be appropriate to click the "Nothing to report" box. This is especially true for infrastructure and human resources in many cases. The seven impact areas are:

1. What is the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?
2. What is the impact on other disciplines?
3. What is the impact on the development of human resources?
4. What is the impact on physical resources that form infrastructure?
5. What is the impact on institutional resources that form infrastructure?
6. What is the impact on information resources that form infrastructure?
7. What is the impact on technology transfer?
8. What is the impact on society beyond science and technology?

Changes/Problems

If you have encountered any changes, which could include a change in PI or Co-PI, or a change in a goal – you should have contacted your program officer and submitted the change BEFORE doing your annual report.
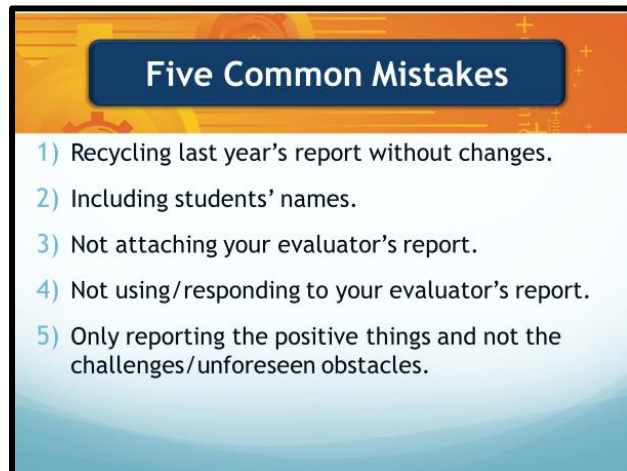
Special Requirements

There are no special reporting requirements for an NSF ATE grant, so you should click the Nothing to Report box for this section.

Changes/Problems: Changes need to be identified and approved as they happen. In the Changes/Problems section you might include something such as: *In Fall semester Co-PI Smith left the college. The PI identified Jones as a potential Co-PI. Paperwork and notification were provided in October and the new Co-PI was approved.*

Five Common Mistakes

1) Recycling last year's report without changes.
2) Including students' names.
3) Not attaching your evaluator's report.
4) Not using/responding to your evaluator's report.
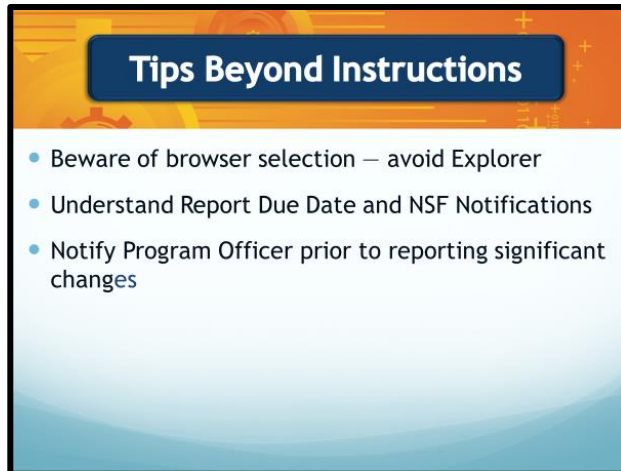5) Only reporting the positive things and not the challenges/unforeseen obstacles.

Reports can be returned for revision by your Program Officer if the report is not complete. This does happen.

Five common mistakes reports contain are:

1. Using the prior year's report with no changes. Yes, your goals should be the same, but your accomplishments should be totally different. In talking to experienced PIs, one PI (whose report has never been sent back for revision) said they write their accomplishments WITHOUT looking at the prior report. Then, before submitting, they will look at the prior report to see if they missed anything, or to match style.
2. Remember, reports are read by others. Make sure you redact ALL student names, except when they are part of a citation from a professional conference or publication. This also includes participant names. Share your accomplishments, but not the names.
3. You must attach your evaluator's report to your annual report. This means you need to make sure you are communicating and planning so you receive the evaluator's report in a timely manner.
4. As mentioned previously, your external evaluator's report and your report should match. This does NOT mean you can copy and paste from the external evaluator's report – DON'T DO THIS. You are sharing your experiences; they are sharing their external view. The viewpoint is different, but the event was the same.
5. It would be nice if everything always went as planned. But it doesn't! Share concerns; problems; and, if you have them, solutions.

Tips Beyond Instructions

- Beware of browser selection — avoid Explorer
- Understand Report Due Date and NSF Notifications
- Notify Program Officer prior to reporting significant changes

When experienced PIs were asked what they wish they had been told, there are three items that were repeatedly stated:

1. If research.gov or fastlane.gov isn't working in the Browser you are using, try a different browser as your first troubleshooting step.
2. For your first report the due date can feel intimidating. If you aren't sure what to do, ask someone with NSF ATE experience.
3. The Program Officer wants you to succeed – contact them prior to reporting significant changes.
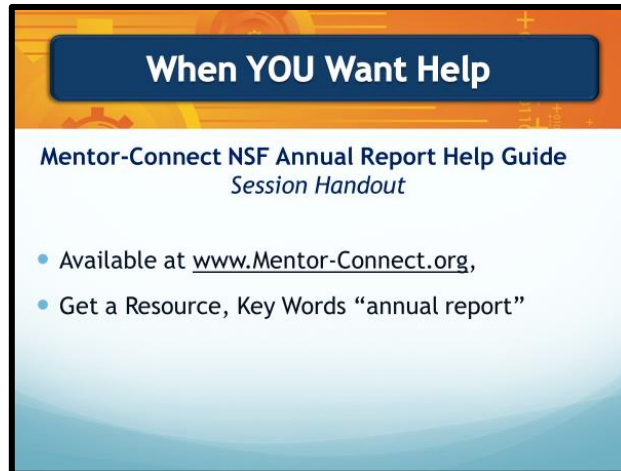
Mentor-Connect has created many resources for NSF ATE grant recipients. Go to www.Mentor-Connect.org and select *Get a Resource* to get assistance on creating your annual reports and many other topics.

This resource was adapted from information presented at the NSF ATE PI conference held in October 2019. The personnel listed on the left were co-presenters at the conference.

Tom Higgins will be leaving NSF in August 2020.