MENTOR-CONNECT TUTORIAL

PREPARING NSF ANNUAL AND PROJECT OUTCOMES REPORTS

This tutorial focuses on reporting requirements for projects funded by the National Science Foundation. It provides guidelines for preparing the reports that you will submit annually and at the end of your project.

The tutorial is based on a Mentor-Connect webinar, conducted in May 2022 in coordination with the South Carolina Advanced Technological Education Center.

A recording of the webinar is available in the resource library at Mentor-Connect.org.

NSF has very specific reporting requirements.

- As an NSF grantee, you will use the Research.gov platform to submit:
  - Annual Reports which explain yearly progress made on your project, how your funds were used, and the activities and outcomes of project evaluations carried out during the year.
  - A Final Outcomes Report, prepared after the project ends, which explains the results of your work to a broader audience.
- Only Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs may create, edit and submit project reports. Your Sponsored Projects Office (SPO) staff or Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) will have read-only access to view project reports, but they may not edit or submit them.
- Your external evaluator will prepare an Evaluation Report that is uploaded as a separate component of each Annual Report. It should provide a summary of the evaluation activities and the observations and recommendations that resulted from them.

Annual and Final Outcomes Reports have different purposes. Annual Reports explain what your project accomplished during each year. They also offer an opportunity to discuss problems that you may have encountered and how they were resolved.

When crafting your annual reports, consider seeking both internal and external support. You may need to include internal information from your:

- Institutional Research Office
- Co-PIs
- Faculty who are engaged with or may benefit from the project
- Internal Advisory Committee, if you have one

It is important to collaborate with your External Evaluator as you prepare your Annual Reports, so that evaluation feedback can be reflected in your report. You may also want to include external input from:
• Industry Partners
• Academic Partners
• An External Advisory Committee (if applicable)

Your Grants Professional may want complete copies of your Annual Reports for the college. It is also useful to develop short, concise executive summaries of each annual report that can be used to inform administrators, industry partners, academic partners, and other interested parties about your project activities.

The Final Outcomes Report is an overview of the accomplishments of your project intended for general distribution rather than to meet specific NSF requirements. It is a good idea to consult with your college Public Relations and Marketing Department as you prepare this report. As a widely distributed document, it will be a public reflection of your project and your institution. Consider sharing it with others external to your organization who have assisted with the project. This can be a good way to bring closure to the project as you thank these organizations or individuals for their support.

Due Dates
Research.gov tells you when the reports are due on a screen titled NSF Project Reporting Reminders. The start date for your grant award is your anniversary date. An Annual Report is due each year and must be submitted within 90 days before the anniversary of your award date. The date posted in the Research.gov dashboard is the one to adhere to.

Note that Annual Reports must be submitted prior to the anniversary date and within 90 days before that date. The date you submit your report should account for the time necessary for your Program Officer to review and approve the report. Program Officer approval must occur before your anniversary date each year to avoid having an overdue report. Plan on submitting your annual report at least 2 weeks before the report is overdue (the anniversary date), preferably sooner, so that there is time to interact with your Program Officer about any questions that may arise. Don’t be alarmed that your Year 1 Annual Report becomes due in less than 9 months from the start date of your project. Program Officers understand that the Year 1 plans are still being implemented at that time.

And don’t be alarmed when the PI, Co-PIs, and the college AOR or SPO begin receiving notifications that the annual report is due. These automatic alerts are sent 90, 60, and 30 days prior to your project anniversary date. Because the message makes it sound as if you are already late, it is important that all who receive it understand your timeline for submitting your annual report.

Note that in the final year of your project, your last Annual Report is just another annual report. The only cumulative findings are those reported separately by the project Evaluator.
A Final Outcomes Report must be submitted within 120 days of the end date of your project. Automatic alerts are sent 90, 60 and 30 days before this deadline. The submission of the Final Outcomes Report formally closes out your grant, so be sure that your college is aware of this before you submit it. Ask your business office if all anticipated grant funds have been received, all financial obligations of the grant have been met, and if the grant is ready to be closed. Note that once NSF closes the project, there is no reprieve. Your award can’t be reactivated for any reason, and your college will no longer have access to any remaining grant funds.

Submit your project reports on time! Many NSF grants are awarded in a way that releases budgeted funds one year at a time, and the next year’s funding increment for a project will not be released unless the current year’s annual report has been submitted and approved. And for any project with an overdue report, NSF cannot approve a no-cost extension or a supplemental funding request.

Also important to note: no new NSF award can be made if a proposed PI or Co-PI is participating in a project that has an overdue report. This extends to grants awarded to another institution and grants awarded by all funding programs at NSF.

Accessing Report Forms
Sign in on the main page of Research.gov. (Note the Help tab on this page and use it if you have any questions about the forms.)

After entering your ID and password, you will see the Awards and Reporting option in the middle of the screen.

Click on Project Reports.
You will see a screen like the one on the following page, with information about the next report that is due. (If you have multiple projects you may see multiple listings. Make sure to pick the correct award number.)
Note the “Status” and “Days Until Due” columns. The report Overdue Date will coincide with the start date of your project. The last tab allows you to begin creating your report. Until you submit it, you can keep coming back to work on it.

Pay attention to the Report Status indicator. Before the 90 day mark it will list the report as “not yet due,” and during the 90-day period, it will list it as “due.” After submission, the indicator will first show that it is “under review” and then “approved” by your Program Officer. (After submitting a report, you will receive an email acknowledging that the report has been received by NSF.)

**Developing the Reports**

On the top right of the Project Reports screen you can download a template for a report that is currently due. Using the template is optional, but you will probably find it helpful in structuring your report since it lists the questions that must be addressed.

Whether you use the template or write the report as a Word document, the information must be copied and pasted into the text boxes on the form that appears when you click on Create/Edit.
Annual Reports
The questions to be addressed in the Annual Reports are shown in the template below.

Accomplishments
What are the project goals?
This is the first item to address in each Annual Report. The information should come directly from your proposal. Note that you may not change your major goals without prior permission from your Program Officer.

What was accomplished?
This is the main part of your annual report. Review your grant proposal, look at the objectives and activities and consider what you accomplished during the year. You must provide specific information for at least one of the four categories:
- Major activities
- Specific objectives
- Significant results
- Key outcomes or other achievements

Don't worry if your information is limited in your first Annual Report. Your Program Officer knows that you can only report on the work accomplished during a part of the first year.

What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?
Describe what was offered, to whom, for how long, and provide data about the events, such as the number and demographics of participants and any survey or evaluation results. Remember to include any professional development for the PI or Co-PIs.

Have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?
Have you provided information about your activities and outcomes to your college administration, industry partners, other collaborators, the local community, other educational institutions? If so, in what form? Remember to include your project exhibit at the annual ATE PI Conference and any other conference activities in which you shared information about your project.

What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?
Describe your plans for the coming year, and include adjustments you will be making, especially in response to project evaluation. (In your last Annual Report, you will indicate in this space that the grant will end as of that year.)
**Evaluator’s Report**

Look in the section that deals with the next reporting period for the place to upload supporting files. This is the place for uploading and thereby including your evaluator’s report. Make sure you give an accurate description in the box provided for that purpose, such as “2022 External Evaluation Report.”

**Products**

On the Products screen, select any products resulting from your project during the reporting period. The most likely selections for ATE projects are conference presentations/papers, websites, curricula/modules, and recorded webinars.
Participants
This is where you will report PI and Co-PI time on the project. Note which other individuals have worked on the project and any industries, organizations, schools or colleges/universities that have been involved as partners.

Impacts
This section asks for the impacts your project has had on:
- The development of the principal discipline(s) of the project
- Other disciplines
- The development of human resources
- Teaching and educational experiences
- Physical resources that form infrastructure
- Institutional resources that form infrastructure
- Information resources that form infrastructure
- Technology transfer
- Society beyond science and technology

Early in the project, you may have nothing to report in the Impacts section. In subsequent years, you may still have little or nothing to report for many of the potential impacts on this list, or for a separate question about the percent of the award's budget that was spent in a foreign country. Reporting template questions apply to all NSF grant recipients, and some sections are more relevant to projects that focus on basic scientific research, rather than ATE-funded projects. You are only expected to report on what is relevant to your project.

Changes or Problems
This is the place to describe things that did not go according to your plans and to explain any necessary adjustments:
- Actual or anticipated problems or delays, and actions or plans to resolve them
- Changes that had a significant impact on expenditures, and the necessary adjustments
- A change in your primary performance site location (Provide the location of your current site and explain the reason for the change.)

This section also asks for information that is less relevant for ATE Grants, to which “not applicable” will likely be an appropriate response:
- Significant changes in use or care of human subjects
- Significant changes in use or care of vertebrate subjects
- Significant changes in use or care of biohazards

Five Common Mistakes
NSF Program Officers have shared the following common mistakes that they see in Annual Reports:
- Recycling last year’s report without changes. While some basic information about the project will not change from year to year, your annual report should focus on what occurred in the current grant year. Include any new data you have collected and your most recent activities, outcomes, and lessons learned.
- Including individual student names. No individual identifiers should be included in the report.
- Not uploading your evaluator’s report.
- Not responding to the evaluator’s report. The goal of evaluation is to improve your project, and NSF expects you to apply what you learn from the project evaluation. For example, if in Year 1 the evaluator identified positive outcomes from one activity and disappointing results from another, your Annual Report should indicate the changes you plan to make in the coming year in order to address these findings. Will you do more of what was working well? Replace the unsuccessful strategy with a new one?
- Only reporting positive data and what is going well. NSF considers all ATE projects to be research, and the expectation is that some things you try will work better than others. What is important is learning what works and adjusting your project plan over time to maximize positive outcomes.
Challenges/Unforeseen Changes
COVID was a huge disruption that forced numerous unforeseen changes. Faculty were often unable to attend professional development workshops or conferences, and many planned events for participants were cancelled. For some projects it took far longer than expected to get evaluator contracts in place. Problems related to COVID have diminished, but your project may need to deal with unexpected illness or personnel changes. What if you lose a PI or Co-PI? Or if supply chain issues delay the delivery of equipment that is critical to your project? Perhaps costs that you estimated are proving unrealistic as travel costs soar, or you underestimated the time it will take to complete some aspects of the project. All this and more can happen when implementing a project.

Communicate with your Program Officer in a timely manner when you have problems or delays, and be honest in your Annual Reports. Do not wait to explain such issues in the Annual Reports! Above all else, ATE Program Officers want the projects they support to be successful. Your Program Officer will work with you as you adapt to barriers and disruptions that you encounter.

Additional Tips
- **Beware of browser issues.** As you work on your Annual Report, you may run into technical difficulties. If so, try changing the browser you use to access Research.gov. That often solves the problem.
- **Print and review BEFORE submitting.** Sometimes you can see something on a print copy that you missed when looking at the same text on the screen.
- **Understand report due dates and NSF notifications.** Watch your dashboard in Research.gov and pay attention to the due date alerts. When you get your first alert, set an internal deadline for report completion and stick to it. Make sure your evaluator knows your timeline so that your annual evaluation report can be provided to you at the right time. If you are a Co-PI, Grants Professional, or AOR, touch base with the PI to make sure that the report will be submitted on time. Only the PI and Co-PIs can edit and submit the Annual Reports, but other personnel can and should contribute information.
- **Coordinate with your business office before submitting the final annual report for your project.** This report signals NSF to close the grant award. Once this is done, the college will no longer have access to remaining grant funds.

Final Outcomes Report
Remember to:
- Be absolutely sure that the project is over before submitting the Final Outcomes report and that your business office is ready to close out the project.
- Submit the report NO LATER THAN 120 Days following the project end date.
- Look for the reminder e-mails that are sent to the PI, Co-PIs and AOR, beginning 30 days after the end date of the grant.

For the Final Outcomes Report, you must enter your content in a text box, as you did for the Annual Reports. Prepare this document in Word, Google docs, or some other system first, then cut and paste the final version into the text box.

Your report must be between 200 and 800 words long, no shorter and no longer. Do not feel obligated to use the entire 800-word allotment – more is not better! Large research-based NSF projects need longer Final Outcomes Reports, but the ATE projects usually submit shorter reports.

The content should focus on your outcomes and findings, as they relate to Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts (though there is no need to use this terminology in the report). Emphasize the purpose of your project and the results of your work. What impact has it had? Craft the Final Outcomes Report as if it were a public relations
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release for your college. Focus on outcomes and results as they relate to the challenge your project addressed. It is not necessary to explain how you did it. Emphasize information that demonstrates why funding your project was a good use of public funds. Keep in mind that you are writing for a general public audience. (Final Outcomes Reports are not reviewed or approved by NSF.)

You will see a place to upload attachments to the Final Outcomes Report. Images are not required, but if they help to illustrate your project, you may upload as many as 6. They will appear small, so action photos of 1 or 2 students and simple graphics work best. Keep in mind that the images should reflect the participants served or outcomes achieved. You may also want to include a project logo, if you have one. Note that you must provide a copyright release for all uploaded images. Images must be smaller than 8Mb and in landscape format, where the width exceeds the height. Acceptable file types include: JPG, JPEG, GIF, BMP, PNG, and TIFF.

Note the SAVE, SAVE & SUBMIT, and CANCEL commands at the bottom of the screen. Before you hit SUBMIT, review the guidance about final outcomes reporting that is provided in Research.gov to make certain that you have not missed anything. Then be sure to review your completed report. When you do submit your report, you will receive a message confirming that it has been received by NSF.

See below for an example of a Final Outcomes Report that was written by a PI and reviewed by Co-PIs, a Grants Professional, an Evaluator and a PI from an ATE Center before submission.

This project focused on (1) improving the awareness and perception of technology and engineering careers and educational opportunities, and (2) increasing the number and diversity of technicians available for employment in the workforce. Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-Tech) partnered with the 14 high schools in its service area (Buncombe County, Asheville City and Madison County) to offer outreach to personnel, students, and parents.

The project’s three-pronged approach resulted in outreach to over 3,500 people during the project. There is a saying that you “can’t do what you don’t know about.” The project was successful in letting targeted groups know about the technology programs and the paths students can follow at A-Tech. Below is an overview of some of the events held for targeted groups:

1. High School Personnel - The project team hosted meetings for high school personnel including teachers, counselors, and support staff. Pre-covid, these events included Lunch and Learn sessions and two-day on-campus workshops. During covid, virtual events were held utilizing Zoom and YouTube.
2. Students - Meetings were held with high school students via classroom presentations, student club meetings, career days and leadership academies.
3. Parents - Events which focused on parent engagement were hosted. The most popular and well-attended sessions were scheduled as part of local high school sporting events. The lesson learned about engaging parents is the importance of hosting activities during events they would already be attending.

At the conclusion of the project, enrollment of high school students in the targeted programs had doubled. Enrollment was defined as students starting A-Tech within one year of high school graduation. The targeted programs were Computer Engineering Technology, Electronics Engineering Technology, Mechanical Engineering Technology, Geomatics Technology, Environmental Engineering Technology, IT: Information Systems, IT: Systems Security, and IT: Network Management.

Both the in person and virtual events created critical relationships between community college faculty and high school personnel. One teacher who attended a workshop stated: “It is crucial that we connect students who have an interest . . . to their passion and with all that is possible for their lives.”

Due to covid restrictions, many of the planned activities were migrated to a YouTube channel and virtual meetings. Long term these resources will continue to be available, and usage will continue after the conclusion of the project.
NSF automatically adds this disclaimer to all Final Outcomes Reports: “This Project Outcomes Report for the General Public is displayed verbatim as submitted by the Principal Investigator (PI) for this award. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this Report are those of the PI and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. NSF has not approved or endorsed its content.” (This means that you do not need to include any disclaimers of your own, like the one below for this tutorial.)

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