NSF ANNUAL AND PROJECT OUTCOMES REPORTS: DEMYSTIFYING PREPARATIONS

NSF Annual & Project Outcomes Reports: Demystifying Preparations

Live Webinar
Wednesday, April 17, 2024 — 2:00 pm

This reference guide will explain the reporting requirements for NSF-funded projects and help you prepare the reports that are due annually and at the end of your project. The information is based on a Mentor-Connect webinar, conducted in April 2024 and available as a recording in the resource library at Mentor-Connect.org.

Webinar presenters included Elaine Craft, Emery DeWitt and Pamela Silvers, PI and Co-PIs of Mentor-Connect, and NSF Program Officer Dr. Kalyn Owens.

All NSF-funded projects must submit two kinds of reports:

- **Annual Project Reports**: Submitted to your Program Officer every year of an award to describe project activities during that reporting period. They have the same reporting requirements each year, but you will see that the final report has a different due date than the others.
- **Project Outcomes Report**: Submitted at the end of the project to describe its accomplishments to a broad audience.

Only PIs and co-PIs may create, edit, and submit the reports, and it is the PI's responsibility to make certain that this is done in a timely manner. Your institution's AOR (Authorized Organizational Representative) will have access to the submitted reports in a user-only view. (As a reminder, AOR and SRO, Sponsored Research Office, are two terms used to refer to the same person/office.)

The information that you provide in your reports is important. NSF draws on it to support project and program improvements as well as evaluation and monitoring efforts across the agency. (The annual reports are not shared outside NSF.)

Submit your reports on time! Overdue reports will result in complications with and beyond your current project. Until your reports have been submitted and approved by your Program Officer, NSF will not process other funding requests from your institution or for projects led by anyone listed on your project as senior personnel, even if they are employed by a different institution. Also, any administrative actions that you have requested from NSF, such as approval of a no-cost extension or additional supplementary funding for this or any other project on which the PI or a Co-PI serves as Senior Personnel, will be delayed until all reports for project personnel have been submitted and approved and there are no outstanding reports.

All Annual Project Reports, except the final one, are due within the *90 days prior* to the end of the relevant budget period, as shown in the timeline below.
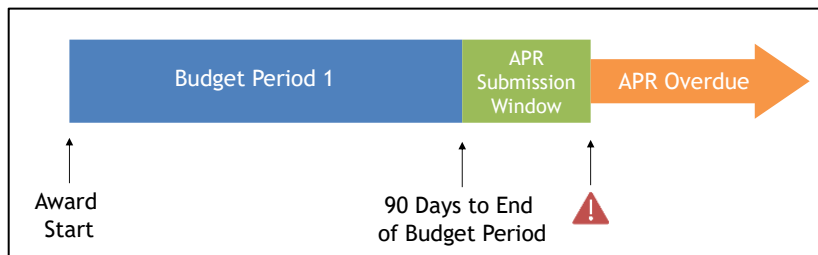

The Final Annual Project Report is due within 120 *days after* the end of the last budget period.
The Project Outcomes Report is also due within *120 days after* the end of the last budget period.

NSF will send reminders every 30 days during these submission windows to the PI and the AOR and any other administrator who has signed up for notifications. Even so, remember that the responsibility for submission rests with the PI.

Creating Your Reports

Begin the process by signing in on Research.gov in the upper right-hand corner of the main page.
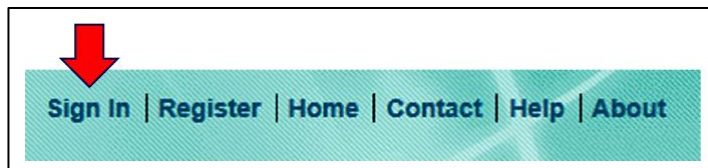
This will bring up a screen on which you will enter your email address or your NSF ID and the password that you used when you submitted your proposal.

After signing in you will see the Awards and Reporting options on the screen. Click on Project Reports.

Click on Demo Site if you need more help filling out the forms. It offers a downloadable template, which serves as a guide. You cannot complete and submit the template, however. You must copy and paste the information into the boxes in the project report form.

When you click on Project Reports, you will see your project on the Reports Dashboard. If you have multiple projects, make sure you select the correct one! The tabs indicate which report is due and when it is due. Clicking on the last item (Create/Edit) allows you to create the report. You may return to the report and edit it as many times as necessary prior to proposal submission.

Beginning 90 days before the deadline for submitting an Annual Report and 120 days before the deadline for submitting the Project Outcomes Report, the status indicator tab will show that these two reports are due. It is helpful to remember that the report will not be overdue until the end of that period.

After you submit a report to NSF, you will receive an email acknowledging that it has been received. At that time the status indicator tab will say "under review" and when it has been approved by your Program Officer it will say "approved."

Annual Project Reports

Each Annual Project Report provides your Program Officer with an overview of what was accomplished during the project year. It should reflect well on your team, your college, and the work that ATE funding is making possible, but it should also discuss significant problems you may have encountered during the reporting year and any resulting adjustments.

It is NOT acceptable to submit the prior year's report again! Grant activities may repeat in some ways year after year, but there will always be changes. Each report should reflect the current reporting period's experiences, outcomes, and lessons learned.

Cut and paste information into the reporting sections. You will see that each text box has character limits. If your response is too long, be sure to edit it before pasting it in. Note that you will also need to adhere to the indicated file size limitations if you upload supplementary documents.

Print and review each completed Annual Project Report before submitting it. Make sure that it is well developed and free of careless errors. If you have difficulty submitting information, switch browsers and try again. Google Chrome usually works when other browsers do not.

Goals: The first section of each Annual Report is about project goals. Unless your Program Officer has approved a change, the goals you list here must be the same as those in your proposal.

Accomplishments: This is your opportunity to share what you have done in the reporting period. Accomplishments are broken down into four different categories:
- major activities
- specific objectives
- significant results
- key outcomes or other achievements

You must provide information in at least one of the four categories. However, use as many categories as appropriate to fully report what you have accomplished. The number of reporting categories that you address may vary by reporting year. In your first year, for example, you may have started several activities, but you may not yet have outcomes to report.

When reporting on project activities, be specific and provide metrics whenever possible. Sample questions you may want to answer include: How many participated in the activities? Were they students or prospective students, parents, high school teachers, two-year college faculty, or industry partners? What were the demographics of the participants, e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity?

Other Information: The reports will also include your responses to the following questions:
- 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 project goals?

You may upload up to four PDF files to support reporting for this section. The file content can be text, images, tables, charts, or other graphics, as long as each file size does not exceed five MB. These files might include:
- training and professional development event agendas
- evaluation surveys
- recruitment fliers

NSF is interested in the extent to which you have disseminated information about your project. Describe any relevant publications and your involvement in local, regional, state-wide, or national events where you have shared information about your work. Dissemination could include speaking to a faculty group or Board of Trustees at your institution, conducting a workshop for high school teachers, speaking or exhibiting at a national conference, or being interviewed for a local news article. The more your project advances, the more you will have to share with others. As a result, this part of your Annual Report will become more robust over the life of the project.

When describing what you will do next to accomplish your goals, remember that next steps should always be informed by the work you have already accomplished and by what you have learned about what works and what doesn't. Describe any adjustments you will make and, where possible, tie these decisions to your evaluation data and the evaluator's report.

What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals? ℹ ☐ Nothing to report

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Supporting Files

You may upload pdf files with images, tables, charts, or other graphics in support of this section. You may upload up to 4 pdf files with a maximum file size of 5 MB each.

[Browse for PDF] **Please select a file.**

Description (required if uploading a file). Please provide a description of the content contained in the attached file.

Evaluator's Report: Your evaluator must provide a separate Evaluation Report each year for you to submit with your Annual Report. Do not incorporate the Evaluator's Report into your own report! Upload it in the Supporting Files box, circled above, which follows the section where you explain what you will do in the next reporting period.
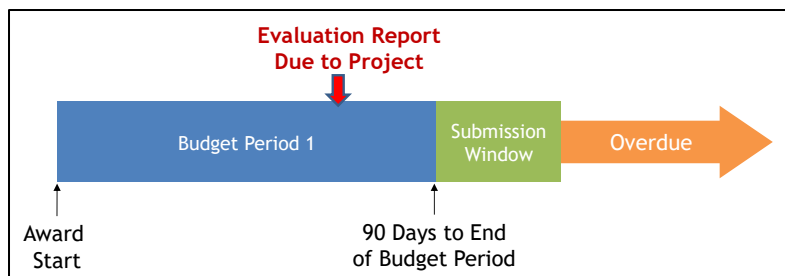
> *Important Tip: You MUST review your Evaluator's Report and respond to the information contained in it. Make sure your timeline allows for this!*

Even though the reporting system does not have a separately labeled place to upload your Evaluator's Report, this is where your Program Officer will expect to see it. Type the name of the document (such as 2024 External Evaluation Report) in the Description box, then select the file from your computer and upload it as a PDF. Failure to upload it will likely result in your report being returned to you without being approved!

Your own report should address the information provided in the Evaluation Report. The purpose of evaluation is to help improve projects, and NSF expects you to use the information collected and analyzed by your evaluator to make program improvements and achieve better outcomes.

Communicate with your evaluator, with sufficient advance notice, to determine when they will provide the Evaluation Report, so that it is ready to for you to review when you need it.

The red arrow added to this reporting timeline indicates approximately when to request your year one Evaluation Report. Other annual Evaluation Reports should follow the same schedule, except for the last one, which is due with the Final Annual Report within 120 days after the end of the project.

Evaluation Report Due to Project

Budget Period 1 | Submission Window | Overdue

Award Start

90 Days to End of Budget Period

Your evaluator depends on the project for certain information, so make sure that you are doing your part to support on-time completion of the Evaluation Reports. Be diligent about securing and sharing any information that your evaluator requests.

Remember that your Annual Reports and the Evaluation Reports must be different documents. Don't copy the Evaluation Reports and submit them as your own reports! Your Program Officer will be looking for different insights on how your project is progressing - one internal and one external. Your Annual Reports and the Evaluation Reports must be unique, but they should align. You and your evaluator should avoid reporting conflicting information or data for your project.

Products: Products are typically stand-alone items that can be accessed and/or used by others. They can include a wide range of items such as a website, webinars, conference papers, curriculum, or journal articles. You will identify relevant products from a list shown on the screen. Items that are not shown can be reported under the "Other" category. Note that each item is reported separately. If you have numerous items, it will take some time to complete this portion of the report.

Participants: In this section, you will report the time worked by the project PI and Co-PI(s), their contributions to the project, and the contributions of partnering organizations. For the PI and Co-PI(s), you will provide the nearest person months worked, which may require rounding to provide a single digit response. You will also describe the work that each person did for the project, the source of their funding (typically NSF ATE), and any changes in their support from other funding sources (which may trigger the need to update that person's Current and Pending Support form). Other questions in this section ask whether participants were involved in international collaboration or have participated in international travel.

For each partnering organization that you list, provide its name, type of organization, location, and its contribution to the project. An extra text box is available for more details about partners and their contributions. For example, an organization may support the project in specific ways while an individual in that organization may provide additional contributions that you can describe in the second text box.

Impacts: This is another area where you may not have anything to report in your first year, but reporting may become more substantial over time. Don't be concerned if you indicate "nothing to report" in several of the categories in this section:

- The development of the principal discipline(s) of the project
- The development of 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
- Percent of the award's budget spent in a foreign country

You are not required to provide responses in these categories, but you should consider impacts that your project could possibly have in any of the areas. (Remember that the report may not include the names of any students impacted by the project.) You might find that this section helps you reflect more broadly on what you are doing and on how the project may have impacts beyond the people and organizations directly served by your project.

Changes/Problems: This section is for reporting major changes or significant problems during the reporting period. Note that some of the categories shown on the screen are not likely to be relevant for ATE grants. It is OK to indicate that a category is are applicable or that you have nothing to report.

NOTE: If a change or problem is significant enough to be reported here, you should communicate via email or discuss it by phone with your Program Officer before submitting your report.

No project will unfold exactly as planned, and NSF does not expect you to report every challenge you have encountered or every adjustment that has been made during the reporting period. Report big issues like a change in grant personnel, particularly a PI or Co-PI, changes in the commitments of a partner with a significant role in the project, or how a problem is preventing you from implementing the project as planned. For example, when COVID hit, many programs had to quickly switch from in-person to virtual activities; others had to re-think all on-site outreach activities involving high schools.

NSF Program Officer Kalyn Owens emphasized during the webinar that many projects encounter problems that require project adjustments. Very often, what project personnel learn through mistakes and from things that didn't work will improve their approaches and lead them to positive solutions and outcomes. Program Officers want to know about the good things that have happened with your project, but they also want to know what you tried that didn't go as planned. What is important is what you learned and what changes you will make going forward to achieve your goals.

NSF awards are grants rather than contracts. Therefore, you are not restricted from making changes to your activities or from moving things around in most budget categories as you make needed changes. Aspects of projects that most often require adjustments in planned activities and budgets include:

- Faculty training/travel needs
- Business office issues (like delays that affect your timeline)
- Unexpected financial costs (like certification exams)

- Equipment (like vendor timeline issues, costs that exceed original estimates)
- Evaluator's site visits
- PI or Co-PI leaving the institution (requiring replacement training, salary adjustments)

Timing of Reports: It may be confusing to receive a message 90 days before the conclusion of the first year of grant work saying that your Annual Report is now due. Program Officers manage a large number of projects with similar timelines, so they will be reading many reports during the 90-day period when your report is due. Submit it in a timely manner! If you delay until the 11th hour, you may find that your Program Officer cannot approve it by the deadline – which means that NSF will classify your report as PAST DUE.

Allow enough time to develop a solid report! Each report consists of multiple sections, and you may need information requiring research or data provided by others. Reports do not have to be completed at one time, so plan to write portions of your report as you gather the relevant information.

Common Mistakes: Learn from others – below are some common mistakes made in the Annual Reports that have been identified by Program Officers and Mentor-Connect personnel:
- Recycling last year's report without changes
- Including student names
- Not attaching your evaluator's report
- Not addressing relevant information in the evaluator's report
- Only reporting the positive things and not the challenges/unforeseen obstacles

Project Outcomes Report

Your Audience: This report provides information about your completed project and is intended for general audiences. When you submit your Project Outcomes Report, it becomes a public document on the NSF website. Make it as readable and as polished as possible. You will find valuable guidelines in NSF's Guide for Preparing the Project Outcomes Report, available in Research.gov. Prepare your Project Outcomes Report to be distributed as a public relations piece for your college that demonstrates the impact of your ATE grant on both internal (students, faculty, and the college) and external (industry and economic development) entities in your region.

A Project Outcomes Report may be up to 800 words, but it does not need to be that long. What you say is more important than how much you say. Focus on exactly what the title says - outcomes. Specifically discuss the issues and problem(s) your project addressed and what resulted from your efforts in terms of the Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts. It is not necessary to explain how you accomplished the project outcomes. Discuss only the results. Focus on features and impacts that best demonstrate why this project was a good use of public funds.

Submission: You will find the commands for report submission - *Save*, *Save and Submit*, and *Cancel* - at the bottom of the control screen.

You are not required to include images with your Project Outcomes Report, but you may upload as many as six. The displayed images will be small, so close-up action photos of no more than two students (with

permission!) and simple graphics work best. Keep in mind that the images should reflect the participants served or the outcomes achieved.

Images must be less than 8 Mb and should be in landscape format. Acceptable file types include JPG, JPEG, GIF, BMP, PNG, and TIFF. Note that you must provide a copyright release for all uploaded images.

> *Tip: If your project has a logo, include it here.*

When you submit the Project Outcomes Report, you are signaling that this is the end of your project. Upon submission, NSF will close your grant. So, before you submit the report, make certain that you resolve any questions related to the project and request that your business office complete any outstanding payments. Confirm that your business office has paid all project bills and is not expecting any more funds from NSF prior to submitting the Project Outcomes Report.

If you have funds remaining in your budget, consider requesting a no cost extension instead of closing the project. NSF wants you to maximize project impacts by using all awarded funds that have been allocated to the project.
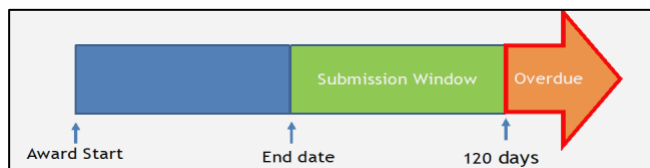
You have 120 days after the end of your award period before the Project Outcomes Report becomes overdue. But remember to submit it early so that your Program Officer has time to approve it before the deadline.

Project Outcome Reports are not reviewed or approved by NSF, so they are accepted and posted on the website immediately and as submitted, with a disclaimer that NSF has not approved or endorsed the content since it has not been seen or reviewed by any NSF staff. Shortly after submission you should receive notification that your report was submitted successfully. With that your project will officially end!

Sample Project Outcomes Report: See below for an example of a Project Outcomes Report that was written by the PI and reviewed by the Co-PIs, the college Grants Professional, the External 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-B 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-B 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-B 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.

Using Your Reports

Communicating with Stakeholders: A synopsis of the content in your Annual Project Reports can be used as an executive summary for your Grants Professional, an internal advisory group, administrators, or other groups internal to the organization who need to be kept informed. Full reports may be printed from Research.gov, but the formatting does not make them very attractive. Also, these reports may be too long to serve your dissemination purposes. Using the content to create a short, concise executive summary is better for sharing information about the project.

Marketing: Your Project Outcomes Report can be a valuable source of information about your project as you connect with local industries and organizations. Your Public Relations and Marketing Department can help disseminate the report for local marketing purposes as well as use it for a press release about the completion of the project. (Since it will serve as a public reflection of your institution as well as your project, you may want to consider consulting this department for suggestions about how best to portray the college in the report.)

Reporting Results of Prior Support for Your Next NSF Proposal: Draw on your Project Outcomes Report when you write your next NSF proposal! A synthesis of outcomes with metrics written in terms of Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts is exactly what you will need as you report Results of Prior Support when seeking another grant.