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In This Month's E-News: May 2019

By Theresa Defino

◆ **After querying NIH and the Department of Defense, Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, chair of the Finance Committee, has now moved on to the National Science Foundation (NSF) with his "integrity" investigation** into possible foreign influences in U.S.-funded research. In an April 15 letter to NSF Director France Córdova that is nearly identical to those sent to the other agencies, Grassley asked for a description of the "background check process NSF and recipients of NSF funds use to vet grant recipients; current rules and procedures that are in place to prevent potential theft of research data and findings" and the "amount of staff and taxpayer dollars used to identify and investigate potential violations." Further, he asked Córdova to list "all entities currently under investigation for employing individuals that failed to disclose contributions from foreign governments." Grassley gave her until April 29 to submit responses. Grassley first asked NIH about this issue last year, and recently received information that the HHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) is investigating a dozen principal investigators ("OIG Outlines Multiple Probes Into NIH, PIs Who May Have Failed to Disclose All Support," *RRC* 16, no. 3). (*4/14/19*)

◆ **Auditors from the NSF OIG are recommending that Arizona State University repay nearly $900,000 in subawards it made to two investigators after they left ASU,** arguing that NSF did not formally approve them, according to an April 15 report. ASU opposes the request, stating a program officer was aware of the subawards. The audit reviewed $4.9 million of the approximately $159 million of costs ASU claimed to NSF from Jan. 1, 2014, to Dec. 31, 2016. During this period, ASU "awarded $915,540, or approximately 39% of the award's approved budget of $2,324,821, to two organizations to allow senior personnel identified in the original grant budget to continue performing grant-related research after leaving ASU," authors said, concluding that $890,982 was unapproved because ASU did not obtain grant amendments authorizing the subawards. In response, ASU said it was "unequivocally acting with the understanding that we had the full support and approval of NSF for the issuance of these two subawards," noting that there were "no changes in the proposed scope of work nor in the key personnel conducting the work." Auditors did not agree with ASU's suggestion that the subawards be deemed a "compliance finding with no questioned costs." (*4/14/19*)