

Scientists seeking NSF funding will soon be required to submit data management plans

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During the May 5th meeting of the National Science Board, National Science Foundation (NSF) officials announced a change in the implementation of the existing policy on sharing research data. In particular, on or around October, 2010, NSF is planning to require that all proposals include a data management plan in the form of a two-page supplementary document. The research community will be informed of the specifics of the anticipated changes and the agency's expectations for the data management plans.

The changes are designed to address trends and needs in the modern era of data-driven science.

"Science is becoming data-intensive and collaborative," noted Ed Seidel, acting assistant director for NSF's Mathematical and Physical Sciences directorate. "Researchers from numerous disciplines need to work together to attack complex problems; openly sharing data will pave the way for researchers to communicate and collaborate more effectively."

"This is the first step in what will be a more comprehensive approach to data policy," added Cora Marrett, NSF acting deputy director. "It will address the need for data from publicly-funded research to be made public."

Seidel acknowledged that each discipline has its own culture about data-sharing, and said that NSF wants to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to the issue. But for all disciplines, the data management plans will be

subject to peer review, and the new approach will allow flexibility at the directorate and division levels to tailor implementation as appropriate.

This is a change in the implementation of NSF's long-standing policy that requires grantees to share their data within a reasonable length of time, so long as the cost is modest.

"The change reflects a move to the Digital Age, where scientific breakthroughs will be powered by advanced computing techniques that help researchers explore and mine datasets," said Jeannette Wing, assistant director for NSF's Computer & Information Science & Engineering directorate. "Digital data are both the products of research and the foundation for new scientific insights and discoveries that drive innovation."

NSF has a variety of initiatives focused on advancing the vision of data-intensive science. The issue is central to NSF's Sustainable Digital Data Preservation and Access Network Partners (DataNet) program in the Office of Cyberinfrastructure.

"Twenty-first century scientific inquiry will depend in large part on data exploration," said José Muñoz, acting director of the Office of Cyberinfrastructure. "It is imperative that data be made not only as widely available as possible but also accessible to the broad scientific communities."

Seidel noted that requiring the data management plans was consistent with NSF's mission and with the growing interest from U.S. policymakers in making sure that any data obtained with federal funds be accessible to the general public. Along with other federal agencies, NSF is subject to the Open Government Directive, an effort of the Obama administration to make government more transparent and more participatory.

Provided by National Science Foundation

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