NSF Policies on Transparency

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Basic Framework

• Proposals are private documents.
• NSF gives grants, not contracts.
• NSF’s research misconduct role doesn’t cover transparency issues.

BUT

• Merit review is a community driven process.
Example: NSF Data Policy

• Longstanding.
• Posted on nsf.gov as “Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures”.
• Data sharing expected
  – “at no more than incremental cost and within reasonable time.”
  – Program Director authority for adjustments.
• Enforced through the usual process (annual reports, future grants).
Newish: Data Management Plans

- Now a required part of proposals
- 2 pages and can cover
  - Types of data
  - Standards for data and metadata
  - Policies PIs will implement for access and sharing, use and reuse (including privacy protections).
  - Plans for archiving.
- Basic goal: get this all part of merit review.
- FAQ answers most questions.
How does this apply to Social Sciences?

• Official: SBE Guidance document.
• Implementation: up to each community through merit review.
• PIs can request funds for archiving and dissemination.
  – But no additional program $ for this.
• No additional staff to enforce data sharing.
Experience To Date

• Quality of DMPs varies.
• Reviewers want to see more than “AEA standards” (eg, what if you never publish?)
• Bully pulpit and funding carrots have effects.
• Open question: will NSF enforcement be effective/efficient?
Tentative Conclusions and Questions

• NSF role is real, but not all-powerful.
• Research community leadership and consensus is key.
• What can NSF do here?
• What are the opportunity costs?