Official Policy on Brand Standards of the U.S. National Science Foundation

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I. Introduction

The NSF Policy on Brand Standards outlines a set of guidelines established to maintain consistency in representation and defines the framework for visual, verbal and written communications to strengthen the agency's identity. Adhering to these standards increases awareness of the impact of NSF's work and the importance of investment and reinforces the agency's integrity, recognition and professionalism as a federal agency.

This policy identifies logo use allowances, requirements and restrictions for NSF internal and external stakeholders. The accompanying NSF Brand Standards Manual provides guidance on how to implement the requirements in this policy and additional details. Specific references to this manual are marked with an asterisk (*) for additional information. The NSF logo may only be used as permitted for purposes described in this policy or with prior written approval of NSF Brand Management (NSFbranding@nsf.gov).

This policy is organized by intended audience, beginning with general information, followed by guidance for agency staff, requirements for recipients and contractors, and finally information for partners and others who may want to use the NSF logo.

Any new requirement outlined in this policy, including clearance requirements, are effective following its implementation (as communicated to NSF staff for agency guidelines and as requirements are implemented into Terms and Conditions for award recipients). The updated guidelines are applicable for new materials and communications, including if/when updated content is published, with the exception of updates to signage posted on physical property such as facilities, centers, buildings, equipment, instrumentation and vehicles, which must be completed as indicated in the NSF Brand Standards Manual.* If clearance procedures and proper marking requirements are not followed, OLPA will require both physical and digital materials to be updated. If updates are not made to comply with this policy and brand standards, then the materials' removal will be requested by the appropriate NSF official.

II. Brand management

The Office of Legislative and Public Affairs (OLPA) manages the U.S. National Science Foundation brand for the agency. Questions regarding appropriate logo use may be submitted to NSFbranding@nsf.gov.

OLPA is responsible for the following:

1. Developing and updating the agency's Policy on Brand Standards and the NSF Brand Standards Manual for internal and external usage in consultation with other agency stakeholders.
2. Establishing and maintaining processes to ensure thorough and timely review and approval for any materials or products requiring brand clearance.
3. Ensuring that NSF's staff, award recipients, contractors and partners understand and align with the agency's official brand standards.[1]
4. Acting as NSF's representative in all brand identity related matters in coordination with external stakeholders including other agencies and Executive Offices.
5. Providing advice and guidance on design solutions for incorporating brand standards and marking.
6. Consulting with the NSF Office of General Counsel, and the Office of the Director and others as appropriate on revisions to the agency's policy directives and required procedures on brand standards and marking.
7. Providing information on NSF's Policy on Brand Standards and the NSF Brand Standards Manual to the NSF staff, NSF recipients, agency senior officials, Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, and other federal departments and agencies as needed.
8. Maintaining a record of NSF logo use and waiver approvals and ensuring that reliance on such waivers does not extend beyond the timeline approved.
9. Coordinating with communication and design professionals at NSF to ensure proper brand application collaboratively.

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1   In effecting compliance of some external entities, OLPA coordinates with cognizant NSF offices as appropriate. For example, the Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support (DACS) is responsible for acquisition policy and other forms that govern the procurement contracting process or otherwise control the relationship between NSF and contractors or prospective contractors.

III. Using government logos

Seals and logos of the federal government are not in the public domain. As such, use of the U.S. National Science Foundation logo may only be used as authorized by the agency. Use of government names, symbols, logos and other identifying marks, including the NSF logo, are expressly prohibited from use to imply endorsement of a commercial product or service. The symbol or logo may not be used by anyone outside of NSF aside from the purposes described in this policy without written NSF approval. These logos and marks are designed to signify official agency products, communications, activities, representatives, facilities and awards. They must never be used by outside parties to misrepresent the purpose, character, statements or policies of the agency.

- The NSF logo **can** be used by NSF staff for brand application on official communications and materials.
- The NSF logo **can** be used by NSF award recipients for the sole purpose of acknowledging that support consistent with the Proposals and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG), Chapter XI E 4 and the NSF Brand Standards Manual.
- The NSF logo **can** be used by institutions of higher education when promoting information related to NSF funding opportunities.
- The NSF logo **can** be used to link to an NSF website or acknowledge NSF assistance or affiliation with NSF approval by submitting a request to NSFbranding@nsf.gov.
- The NSF logo **cannot** be used in a manner that falsely implies employment by or affiliation with NSF.
- The NSF logo **cannot** be used to promote or imply endorsement of a product, service or enterprise.
- Use of the NSF logo on content that could require viewer discretion due to inclusion of language, substances, nudity, sex, violence, political or controversial issues must be reviewed and approved by OLPA by emailing NSFbranding@nsf.gov.

Any entity who meets the stated conditions above for using the NSF logo, must follow the guidance for proper logo application. No other potential uses of the NSF logo are permitted unless prior written consent is obtained from OLPA.*

All use and reproduction of the NSF visual identity must align with the design guidelines in the NSF Brand Standards Manual.

Forging, counterfeiting, distorting, altering or inappropriately using the NSF logo intentionally may be considered a crime. (See e.g., 18 U.S.C. 1017). Instances where this has occurred shall be reported through the NSF Office of Inspector General.

Any use of the NSF logo on any materials, regardless of whether produced by NSF or an outside entity for use in an NSF-associated activity, may be subject to prior review and approval as specified in this policy, the NSF Brand Standards Manual or otherwise requested by OLPA to ensure consistency with the guidelines in the NSF Brand Standards Manual. General communication materials with allowable and/or required use of the NSF logo do not inherently necessitate review unless specified.

IV. The NSF visual identity

The logo of the U.S. National Science Foundation features the NSF acronym on a globe backdropped by a medallion. All logo use must follow specific production requirements and must not introduce individual design preferences. The primary NSF logo is a 4-color logo with shading and dimensionality. It is the core component of NSF's visual identity. Any use of the NSF logo on agency communications must use this primary NSF logo. Additional logo variants are available when required to meet production specifications as outlined in the NSF Brand Standards Manual.

A. Proper usage of the NSF logo

The NSF logo must not be altered or distorted in any way. The logo must never be disassembled and used as separate elements, have typeset alterations, or be re-colored.

The logo must never be combined with another logo or piece of artwork to create a new identity, with exception of logo lockups approved by NSF brand management. Proper logo usage in conjunction with an NSF affiliate or co-sponsor is outlined in the NSF Brand Standards Manual.

Prior versions of the NSF logo and elements of them may be used only in historical context.

Proper use, placement, spacing and reproduction of the NSF logo must comply with guidelines outlined in the NSF Brand Standards Manual at all times.

B. Other visual brand identity elements

The second and equally important part of NSF's identity is the agency name. "U.S. National Science Foundation" must be spelled out and used in tandem with the NSF logo. These two elements should be used together as much as possible by using the standardized designs created by OLPA, which are available in the layout specifications outlined in the NSF Brand Standards Manual.

NSF typography, color palettes and iconography must also be used as additional ways to incorporate the NSF visual brand into both internal and external agency communications. These visual brand elements are outlined in the NSF Brand Standards Manual. NSF fonts must be used whenever possible in agency communications. NSF colors must be the focal palette for both print graphics and digital products, though additional colors may be utilized when necessary.

C. Logo lockups

Logo lockups are files that incorporate the NSF logo with the agency name or other identifier such as directorate, office, division or program name.* Appropriate use of an NSF logo lockup on communications and materials satisfies logo brand application requirements.

V. Agency brand application requirements for NSF staff

The U.S. National Science Foundation logo is the sole visual identifier of NSF and must be present on all internal and external agency communications, materials and property. Other elements of the NSF's visual identity, such as those outlined in section IV.B, must also be implemented into internal and external communications. Communication materials that must be properly marked with the NSF logo and visual brand elements include, but are not limited to:*

1. Printed and electronic documents intended for distribution.
2. Letterheads.
3. Reports.
4. Graphics.
5. Presentations.
6. Videos.
7. Virtual backgrounds.
8. Websites.
9. Social media.
10. Newsletters.
11. Email signatures.
12. Physical property and products.
13. All tradeshow and conference materials produced and/or distributed by NSF, recognition awards and agency-issued promotional items.

In addition to the NSF logo, there may be additional brand application guidance and recommendations based upon Executive Office guidance, to include alerts, memos, orders, etc.*

In written contexts, the agency must be referenced using "U.S. National Science Foundation" in the first reference and in logo lockups, followed by "NSF" on subsequent mentions.

A. Use of partner, recipient and other external logos

Outside organizations' logos must not be placed on agency publications except when communicating about a partnership, co-sponsorship or NSF-invested research and activities. Use of other organizations' logos must not (1) result in endorsement of the organization or products or services of the organization, (2) promote NSF in a misleading manner, (3) be used without authorization from the outside organization, or (4) be inconsistent with the terms of any applicable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

B. Physical marking requirements

All NSF signage, including that of NSF-invested facilities, instruments and equipment; tradeshow and conference materials; and agency-issued promotional items, must adhere to proper logo usage and brand application*.

C. Brand clearance

Approvals must be obtained from OLPA or another NSF brand expert* in coordination with OLPA before the publication of logo lockups or when working directly with external vendors and contractors for the publication, production, and/or procurement of all brand design ideas for webpages; educational materials; physical outreach products; exhibit, conference and event materials; signage and equipment markings; awards and agency-issued promotional items.*

D. Directorate, office and program logos

NSF directorates, offices, divisions and programs, including fellowship and scholarship programs, must present as one voice and one identity of NSF. The NSF logo is the only logo to be used to identify directorates and programs in NSF.

Logo lockups, as described in section IV.C and in the NSF Brand Standards Manual, may be used to identify various NSF programs and entities but must always acknowledge that they are a part of NSF in the text portion of the lockup, including when using acronyms.* Use of logo lockups with the NSF logo satisfies logo use requirements.

There may be instances where separate logos were allowed for certain programs in the past and those logos may be "grandfathered" and provided an exception on a case-by-case basis.*

E. Naming conventions

NSF programs, fellowships, events and initiatives must include "NSF" or "U.S. National Science Foundation" in front of their name when referenced to ensure stakeholders have understanding they are run by NSF.*

F. Special initiative and communication product logos

Thematic design treatments for campaigns and events are encouraged and must always incorporate the NSF brand identity, which includes logo, typography and colors. Creation of a logo from thematic designs or its design elements for ongoing/continuous use is not permitted.*

Some official agency initiatives and communication products may develop an identifiable brand—requests for permission must be submitted before any development has begun and will be approved on a case-by-case basis. Brand development of these products must be coordinated with OLPA, incorporate the NSF visual brand, and be used in combination with the NSF logo.*

A. Award acknowledgment brand application requirements

In compliance with award terms and conditions, award recipients must include the U.S. National Science Foundation full-color logo—with the otherwise required funding acknowledgments—in print and digital products related to NSF-invested research and activities, including property signage and markings such as on facilities/buildings, instrumentation and equipment; websites; educational materials; press materials; exhibit, conference and event materials; and other outreach materials.* Use of logo lockups with the NSF logo satisfies logo use requirements.

The award recipient must acknowledge NSF support in research papers in accordance with the publication guidelines while following NSF brand standards to the extent feasible. The public summary of research papers for public consumption should be written using plain language standards.

The guidelines in this section apply to all award instrument types including contracts, financial assistance (grants and cooperative agreements) and other arrangements/transactions. Besides standard award terms and conditions, NSF may also implement additional brand application requirements on a case-by-case basis using award-specific terms and conditions at its discretion.*

When NSF ceases investment of an activity with no anticipated future awards, the long-term acknowledgment language and logo use must be adjusted appropriately,* and additional guidance may be provided by NSF on a case-by-case basis.

In addition to the NSF logo, the award terms and conditions may be informed by additional brand application requirements and recommendations based upon Executive Office guidance, to include alerts, memos, orders, etc.*

The administration and implementation of this policy will vary among award instruments.*

i. Additional requirements for predominantly NSF-invested activities with an award amount of $1 million or more

a) Logo use and naming conventions

Predominantly (more than 50%) NSF-invested activities with an award amount of $1 million or more must pair their visual identity/logo, if one exists, with the NSF logo in all instances.* Logo lockup files that pair the NSF logo with the entity's logo and name may be created and must be submitted through the branding clearance process.* They must also include "NSF" in front of their name in textual references in logo lockups and elsewhere, including when using acronyms, such as "NSF [facility name]." Any new entities must include "NSF" as part of their official name. In certain instances, this required naming convention may be waived by OLPA in consultation with the program office by submitting a formal request,* or as a condition written into an MOU. When there is a significant change in funding circumstances, such as no longer predominately NSF-invested, including NSF in the name of the entity may not be required and can be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

b) Signage

Research infrastructure, including major facilities and mid-scale RI, predominately funded by NSF must include "U.S. National Science Foundation" in text on signage in addition to the logo.*

c) Websites

Websites of predominantly NSF-invested activities must feature the NSF logo and agency association prominently and adhere to guidelines in the NSF Brand Standards Manual. Website brand application must be submitted through the brand clearance process.*

d) Social media

The NSF brand must be implemented on social media channels and accounts of predominantly NSF-invested activities. Such award recipient names on social media must include "NSF" at the beginning.* If the entity has a logo, they may use it as the main profile image. The NSF logo must not be used as a main profile image since the account is not managed by NSF. However, the NSF logo must be included on the cover/banner images and all graphics. Additionally, acknowledgment of the relationship with NSF and funding must be included in the profile biography text along with the standard disclaimer from the PAPPG (See Chapter XI.E.4, Recipient Obligations).

e) Filming/Photography

Any requests to use predominately NSF-invested activities for commercial photography, documentaries and film production must be submitted to OLPA for review and approval by emailing NSFbranding@nsf.gov.

ii. Brand guidance inclusion in NSF solicitations, agreements and other NSF guidance

Award Terms and Conditions must reference this policy for the logo usage (section VI.A) and messaging requirements (section VI.B).* Additionally, NSF solicitations, the PAPPG, MOUs, contracts and other agency guidance may need to include specific language on brand application requirements.* The language used must be finalized in coordination with OLPA.

iii. Brand clearance

To ensure the logo is implemented correctly and in alignment with NSF brand standards, approvals must be obtained from NSF before the production of physical signage and products such as exhibit, conference and event materials, swag and other outreach products, as well as the publication of webpage and logo lockups that include the NSF logo.*

iv. Waivers

OLPA—in consultation with the communications specialists, program directors or office heads, institution/organization, Office of General Counsel and, when necessary, Office of the Director— may grant an exception to marking requirements and naming conventions,* if marking of specific communication materials or products would:

1. Compromise the intrinsic independence or neutrality of a program or materials where independence or neutrality is an inherent aspect of the program or materials.

2. Incur inordinate costs or be impractical, such as items that are too small or other otherwise unsuited for individual marking.

3. Be perceived as an endorsement.

4. Be inappropriate based on the nature of a partnership.

Waivers should be rare, specific, time-limited and regularly reviewed and never mistaken for blanket approval. Waivers based on historical practices will not be automatically approved.

B. Recipient acknowledgment messaging requirements

i. Acknowledgment language

Per the Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide, the award recipient must acknowledge NSF in any publication (including web pages) or any other material based on or developed under its award. Additionally, NSF support must be orally acknowledged during all media interviews, including popular media such as radio, television magazines, podcasts and online media outlets.*

The award recipient is responsible for assuring that every publication of material (including web pages) based on or developed under an NSF investment – except scientific articles or papers appearing in scientific, technical or professional journals – contains a disclaimer that specifies that the opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSF. This requirement may be waived in instances where the size or type of material produced make this impractical.

On first mention, reference NSF using "U.S. National Science Foundation" followed by "NSF" on subsequent mentions.

ii. News Releases

NSF award recipients must work with their Program Officer (PO) to keep them informed of their project's developments to include issuing news releases and related news materials. Press releases are required to mention NSF support and include the NSF logo.* NSF support must be orally acknowledged during all news media interviews, including popular media such as radio, television and news magazines.*

Award recipients can also request a quote and background information from the cognizant PO at least two weeks in advance. For press releases announcing a new grant, NSF can provide background on the award and the program. For press releases announcing new papers or discoveries, NSF can provide quotes regarding the importance of a finding or breakthrough as appropriate.

iii. Social Media

NSF content on social media should be properly "tagged" with hashtags and NSF social media accounts. Tagging is always preferred, but if it is not possible, NSF funding support must be acknowledged in writing with "U.S. National Science Foundation" spelled out.

Adding the NSF logo to social media profile photos is prohibited unless in context of a social media campaign frame that NSF has distributed. Instead, add the logo to the graphics posted.* Additional logo guidance for predominantly NSF-invested facilities, centers, external programs and fellows can be found in section VI.A.i.

Do not imply through posts or profile information that an account officially represents NSF.

VII. Additional contractor requirements

Contractors with the U.S. National Science Foundation must follow brand application requirements outlined in section VI as appropriate and in accordance with their contract terms and conditions, as well as the following additional requirements:

1. **Use of the NSF brand for direct support of NSF events, websites, publications, and/or social media:** In performance of a contract, the contractor must comply with the NSF Policy on Brand Standards and the NSF Brand Standards Manual, as outlined in the solicitation and executed contract.

2. **Contractor news releases and social media:** NSF contractors must obtain clearance from their Contracting Officer and/or Contracting Officer's Representative prior to issuing news releases, related news materials, social media postings and other releases. Any use of NSF logos must comply with the NSF Policy on Brand Standards and the NSF Brand Standards Manual. News releases and social media posts on behalf of the contractor must not imply an endorsement or that an account or release officially represents NSF.

3. **Coordination with OLPA:** The Program Office must coordinate with OLPA and the Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support to develop appropriate NSF branding language that can be incorporated into funding announcements and any appropriate award-specific terms and conditions.

VIII. Partnerships and others

For logo use not covered as allowable in section III, an outside organization must have a relationship with the U.S. National Science Foundation before the organization can obtain prior written approval to use any NSF logos on non-NSF publications and/or websites.* A relationship, particularly with industry, public sector and international partners, may require branding reference in a new or existing MOU.

A request for use of the NSF logo by other parties must meet the following criteria:

1. Be aligned to the goals of the agency and/or the research it funds.
2. **Not** result in endorsement of the organization or products of the organization.
3. **Not** be misleading or paint the agency in unflattering light.
4. **Not** be used without authorization from OLPA.

IX. Definitions

Brand	Brand refers to a distinct identity created for an entity to shape the perceptions of those who interact with it. It is a strategic and intentional way to differentiate an entity from others.
Brand application	Brand application refers to how an entity's brand is used and implemented across all communications. It is vital to create a unified, cohesive voice and visual consistency when interacting with an audience to establish brand recognition.
Brand clearance	Brand clearance is NSF's review process for long-term, resource intensive products such as webpages, signage and exhibit displays, instrumentation and equipment marking, outreach products, swag and other promotional items to ensure that the NSF brand is applied in accordance with our brand standards and is reproduced by vendors accurately.
Brand elements	An entity's name, logo, tagline, color palette, font, images and other features are referred to as brand elements. They are reflected in every communication put forth by the entity.
Brand identity	A brand's identity consists of elements of visual identity like logo, color palette, typography, voice and tone. Strong band recognition is dependent upon a well-defined brand identity.
Color palette	A designated set of colors to represent the entity across the board to create a brand personality and awareness. A brand's color palette can be inspired by and reflect the mission and values of the entity. All visual assets like print materials, website, internal/external communications should align with the designated color palette.
Logo	A symbolic representation of an entity conveyed via the use of unique typography and/or iconography. Logos are a key component to a brand's visual identity and is inspired by the entity's unique mission statement and values.
Logo lockups	A final form of a logo complete with all the elements such as typography, icons, taglines and other variants. This unique arrangement of elements is full and final and not to be altered in any way. NSF's official logo lockups combine the logo with text of the agency's name or sub-entities such as directorates and offices in a standardized way. Logo lockups can also be used to pair the NSF logo with those of award recipients predominately supported by NSF or with partner logos, when appropriate.
Naming conventions	An agreed upon convention for naming things. This could be any form of arrangement of variables that allows for easy iteration.
NSF-invested	Used synonymously with NSF-supported or NSF-funded, this language focuses on the fact that NSF's role in these projects is an investment, furthering understanding of NSF's commitment to these activities as part of its mission.
Physical marking	A logo used on non-digital, tangible materials, products, and property.
Thematic design treatment	Thematic design treatments are a way to create a cohesive look and feel across communication materials for a particular campaign, announcement, event, etc. These are not intended to be used as a logo or long-term representation of a specific office or program.