

GAO

Fact Sheet for the Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Science, Research and  
Technology, Committee on Science,  
Space, and Technology, House of  
Representatives

June 1987

# FEDERAL WORKFORCE

## Recruitment and Retention of Senior Executives at the National Science Foundation



133125

039082



---

General Government Division

B-226950

June 4, 1987

The Honorable Doug Walgren  
Chairman, Subcommittee on  
Science, Research and Technology  
Committee on Science, Space,  
and Technology  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This fact sheet responds to the April 15, 1987, request by your office for information on employee recruitment and retention at the National Science Foundation (NSF). Specifically, we were asked to provide information on any difficulties being experienced in recruiting and retaining career personnel in the Senior Executive Service (SES) at NSF. We were also asked to obtain information on salaries paid to individuals working at NSF under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) program.<sup>1</sup>

We interviewed NSF officials to obtain the information requested on recruitment, retention, and salaries of SES members and salaries of IPA participants. We obtained governmentwide data on retention of SES career employees from officials at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We reviewed NSF's response to the request from the Executive Office of the President for information on recruiting and retention problems. Also, we reviewed the regulations in the Federal Personnel Manual relating to the IPA program. We did not verify any of the information we obtained from NSF or OPM. Our work was done during April 1987.

---

<sup>1</sup>Title IV of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970 provides for the temporary assignment (for periods generally of up to 2 years) of personnel between federal agencies and certain nonfederal organizations for work of mutual concern and benefit. .

RECRUITMENT

NSF officials told us they were experiencing recruiting problems at the SES level, but evidence of such problems was limited to anecdotal information. The agency does not maintain statistical data on availability of candidates who declined offers or chose not to apply.

In January 1986, NSF responded to a request from the Executive Office of the President to provide information on any recruiting and retention problems it was experiencing with scientists and engineers. NSF reported that the caliber of its scientific and engineering recruits remained high, but that it was becoming harder to recruit these people. It said top quality candidates were reluctant to leave their research for federal administrative positions, and federal pay lagged salaries in the academic community. NSF also said it had increased its use of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act, which enabled it to attract individuals whose salary levels could not be met under the constraints of the government pay cap.

RETENTION

On April 15, 1987, NSF had 114 authorized SES positions. One hundred and four of these positions were filled and included 96 SES employees (89 career and 7 limited term) and 8 IPA participants. Table 1 provides information on attrition of NSF's career SES members from fiscal year 1985 through April 15, 1987. Of all career SES separations during this period, 57 percent were retirements; 29 percent were resignations, and 14 percent were separated in a reduction-in-force.

Table 1: Career SES Separations

	Fiscal year <u>1985</u>	Fiscal year <u>1986</u>	Fiscal year <u>1987<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Total</u>
Separations:				
Retirements	4	6	2	12
Resignations	1	4	1	6
Reduction-in-force	-	2	1	3
Attrition rate	5.4%	13%	4.4%	

<sup>a</sup>Through April 15, 1987. If the level of separations continue at the same rate as the first 6.5 months, the attrition rate for the entire fiscal year 1987 will be 8.1 percent.

By way of comparison, the attrition rate for career SES employees governmentwide was approximately 9 percent in fiscal year 1985 and 11 percent in fiscal year 1986.

#### IPA PROGRAM COSTS

According to Chapter 334 of the Federal Personnel Manual, IPA assignments can be made for up to 2 years, and may be intermittent, part-time, or full-time. In addition, the federal agency may agree to pay all, some, or none of the salary, supplemental pay, fringe benefits, travel, and relocation costs associated with an assignment. Cost-sharing arrangements are negotiated by the participating organizations.

On February 24, 1987, 53 IPA participants were employed at NSF, about 4 percent of NSF's total workforce. NSF officials told us that IPA employees are paid directly by the institutions from which they came and that NSF reimburses the institutions for the amounts negotiated in the form of grant awards. We previously provided salary data on the 53 IPA participants to your office.

Table 2 provides comparative salary information on all SES members and IPA participants occupying SES positions at NSF during fiscal year 1985 through April 15, 1987. It shows that salaries for IPA participants are generally higher and that the gap has widened over the past 2 years.

B-226950

Table 2: SES and IPA Salaries

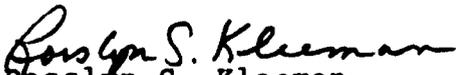
	<u>SES salary range</u>	<u>SES average salary</u>	<u>IPA salary range</u>	<u>IPA average salary</u>
Fiscal year 1985	\$61,296- 72,300	\$68,491	\$64,534- 72,545	\$68,539
Fiscal year 1986	\$61,296- 72,300	\$68,686	\$64,058- 98,700	\$79,284
Fiscal year 1987	\$64,700- 77,500	\$73,616	\$67,262- 100,267	\$85,243

Note: Salaries for IPA participants are the amounts reimbursed by NSF. In some cases the employing institution paid additional salary amounts to the participants.

In addition to their salaries, five of the eight IPA participants serving in SES positions as of April 15, 1987, received reimbursement from NSF for consulting work that was foregone when they accepted the positions with NSF. These reimbursements ranged from \$6,410 to \$20,000 for the period of their assignment.

As arranged with your office, we will send copies of this fact sheet to the Director, NSF, and to others who have expressed an interest in this subject. If you have any questions, please contact me on (202) 275-6204.

Sincerely yours,

  
Roslyn S. Kleeman  
Senior Associate Director

(966296)

---

Requests for copies of GAO reports should be sent to:

U.S. General Accounting Office  
Post Office Box 6015  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877

Telephone 202-275-6241

The first five copies of each report are free. Additional copies are \$2.00 each.

There is a 25% discount on orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address.

Orders must be prepaid by cash or by check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents.