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An NSF rotator's perspective: view from inside the hamster wheel

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Duncan McBride served as my unofficial mentor during my time at NSF as a “rotator” (or, in NSF-speak, an IPA, short for an Intergovernmental Personnel Act assignee), from fall 2012 through summer of 2013. A rotator’s main job is to help keep the wheels of the grant submission process turning, shepherding individual proposal jackets through the submission cycle. While most proposals are eventually “Declined” it is the few that are funded that evoke the most vivid memories of my time there. I hope to relay a little bit about what that was like on a daily basis, to give one hamster’s take on the machinations of the NSF machine, and testify to Duncan McBride’s critical role in establishing physics as the leader in disciplinary based educational research (DBER). It was a heady experience in many ways, despite the sheer girth of proposal jackets to be processed and the uncertain footing upon which federal employees tread these days.