

Summary: Investigation of NPS Associate Director

Report Date: December 16, 2014

OIG investigated several confidential complaints against an associate director with the National Park Service (NPS). The complainant alleged that in 2012 the associate director instructed NPS' Washington Contracting Office to award a noncompetitive cooperative agreement to the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites (NCWHS), whose president was a former NPS employee and a friend of the associate director. The complainant also alleged that NCWHS was not uniquely qualified for a noncompetitive agreement because NCWHS did not have the required capability, knowledge, or expertise to complete the agreement's tasks. Finally, the complainant alleged that the associate director and her assistant created a hostile work environment and retaliated against employees in their unit, and that the associate director may have used Government travel for personal benefit.

The cooperative agreement was part of a departmental initiative to increase awareness of women's contributions to American history. The agreement authorized the expenditure of almost \$95,000 in Federal funds for NCWHS to research archives and other repositories for historic information that would benefit historical preservation offices' interpretation and preservation programs, and to develop a workshop to assist with evaluating, nominating, and designating properties as national historic landmarks.

While the associate director denied that her friendship with the NCWHS president influenced her decision to initiate the cooperative agreement, she acknowledged that she did not disclose the relationship to NPS contracting officers (COs) during the agreement's award process. Both the original CO and the current CO said that the associate director should have disclosed this information to help them avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, but the current CO did not feel that the associate director had attempted to steer his decision making or that she had acted inappropriately with regard to the agreement.

We also found no evidence that NCWHS failed to meet the "unique qualifications" standard for cooperative agreements. Our interviews of NPS staff and reviews of the agreement's documentation revealed that NPS considered NCWHS to be the organization best suited for completing the agreement's objectives because of NCWHS' focus on women's history and its past work with NPS on similar projects.

We provided our report on this investigation to the Director of NPS for any action he deemed appropriate. The Director later informed us that the associate director had been counseled on the requirement to disclose information that might create the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Regarding the remaining complaints, we referred the complaint about hostile work environment and retaliation to the Office of Special Counsel. The complaint about travel abuse was referred to NPS, which reviewed it and found no evidence of impropriety.

This is a summary of an investigative report that was issued internally to the U.S. Department of the Interior. This summary was posted to the web on June 1, 2015.

