

xykademiqz

## Funding Acknowledgements

Here's a pretty common scenario in regards to coauthorship on papers from my group. Student A works on a certain project for which I have funding from a federal agency, grant GR1. I, Prof X, also draw some salary support from that grant, so you can say that I am funded for my work on said project by that salary on GR1. But, in addition to Student A and myself, there's also Student B who does something else and is funded by grant GR2, but has given some code to Student A and has spent a fair bit of time training and troubleshooting with Student A by virtue of having related expertise and broad interests. Also, we have Postdoc, who again has his own projects, but has on many occasions shot breeze with Student A and has contributed some key insights, again because they have related expertise. Postdoc is funded by GR3.

In my opinion, there is no doubt that everyone here should be a coauthor, and usually the author list will be: Student A, Postdoc, Student B, and Prof. X (or Postdoc and Student B change places, depending on who was actually more instrumental in the paper coming together).

Now comes the tricky part. How do you acknowledge the funding?

The reason I am asking is that there seems to be quite a tightening in the federal oversight to ensure there is no duplication of work, and several program managers have communicated that people have recently gotten into legal trouble for seemingly (or actually) getting money for the same work twice. As a result, program managers are being very specific in terms of how the acknowledgements on grants are supposed to be written in order to avoid ambiguity.

In the case of the paper above, this is what I would write. "This work was primarily supported by Agency 1, grant GR1 (Student A and Prof. X). Partial support was provided by Agency 2, grant GR2 (Postdoc) and Agency 3, grant GR3 (Student B)." Apparently, this way of acknowledging funding is borderline OK, so I hear, so I am legally likely fine, but instead of separating by who is funded by what, they would much prefer it if we delineated by the work done under each funding string.

This is what really bothers me in regards to the type of the work I do. Maybe it's not quite so dire in lab work, or I could be imagining, but in experimental work people can actually perform parts of complicated experiments for one another, so you could say "transmission-electron microscopy was funded by grant 11, crystal growth was funded by grant 22," because the student who's an expert in crystal growth of that particular compound grows materials for everyone and is funded by 22, while the transmission-electron

microscopy whiz is funded by grant 11. But when you do theory and computation, all the actual work is done by you. It's not like anyone will sit down and write a thousand lines of code just for you. They may give you chunks of their code if appropriate, but how do you acknowledge that? Maybe I should write "the work on adaptive meshing for Complicated Partial Differential Equation was funded by grant 33," when all that means is that Student B gave his routine to Student A and spent some time discussing how it would be implemented for Student A's project. Also, we talk and draw on the board and look at figures a lot. When you do theory and especially computation, literally nothing can happen unless you really, really know what you are doing — there is no simulation unless you actually write the code; there is no physical system to probe, you first have to (reliably!) create it on a computer, only then can you play with it — so it is absolutely critical to read and talk and scrutinize and brainstorm and test and test and test... And finally build some intuition. If talking to someone has helped you dramatically to build your intuition, and they have contributed key insights into your project, how do you acknowledge that? "Coming up with the explanation following Figs. 2-4 was funded in part by grant GR2?" "The work that led to us all finally understanding why that curve had a crossover was funded by 44?"

(And don't even get me started on having short papers and having to devote a whole paragraph to elaborate acknowledgements.)

Now, you could ask — why aren't your postdoc and Student B actually compensated for their time spent on this project from the grant that funds it, GR1?

Because I have better things to do than track every second of every group member's mental activity. Also, it's completely insane and at odds with how science is done. My group members each have their own projects to which they devote most of their time, and those projects have funds associated with them, which are acknowledged as primary support on papers where the appropriate group member is first author. But they should be able to talk to whomever they like, and they should definitely be able to talk as much as they want about work with their fellow group members. That's what team science is all about — we are smarter and more productive when we work together.

I don't know, maybe there are people who double- or triple-dip. I certainly don't and I think most people don't. I really don't see how I would even get funded for work with too much overlap anyway, there are multiple points during peer review to make sure that doesn't happen; we certainly scrutinize overlap during NSF panels. It really irks me that now I have to think about creative ways to convince some new layers of federal bureaucracy that we are not abusing their funds, lest we get into legal trouble.

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## 6 comments

### 1. **sciencedino** says:

July 7, 2014 at 8:19 pm

I run into this as a drosophila experimentalist too. I am on my own postdoctoral fellowship A. My advisor is paid by her private grant B and a large R01, C. A tech does a prep portion on one technique, and she's paid by grants B and C. I get flies from another postdoc's protocol to use for electrophysiology. That

postdoc is paid by grant D. I receive a great deal of helpful discussion and support from the postdoc on grant D and another postdoc on grant E.

Obviously, I cite grant A. Do I cite B, C or both? Technically, my major project falls under grant B, so my advisor's time is on B, I guess. But the tech is paid equally by B and C, so do I cite C? The work paid for by grant D is concluded before I get the flies from the other postdoc. But it did pay for the postdoc's time setting up/running the protocol, for the fly stocks, etc. Do I cite grant D? Do I have to cite grants D and E because I spent time discussing it with postdocs paid by D and E? It gets crazy.

I would cite A, B, and maybe D. But not C or E. I think...

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2. **DM** says:

July 7, 2014 at 11:29 pm

I think you are over worried and your statement of who/what for each grant should be more than sufficient.

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3. **xykademiqz** says:

July 8, 2014 at 7:24 am

DM, I am not sure if it's the same in the NIH world, but several agencies I deal with have started to be very nitpicky about wording. For instance, it used to be enough to say "This work was funded by NSF (grant No), DOE (grant No), and ONR (grant No)." Not any more, apparently this gets you in trouble. You need to explicitly delineate according to type of work done or at the minimum according to who funded which person; if the latter, one person cannot claim more than one source of funding. We got memos with this information, so it's not just me being neurotic (this time :-)).

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4. **M** says:

July 8, 2014 at 7:52 am

I think I'm going to claim ignorance until I get busted. We run a large group and, while I wouldn't say we "double dip," there is definitely overlap, both in funding sources and experimental work. Students have primary projects, but also contribute to secondary projects. They just can't have it all: interdisciplinary and collaborative science, but also perfect budgets and attribution of every man-hour of work, WITHOUT the overhead required to fund the administrative support required to track these details. The academic setting is just not conducive to that type of system.

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5. **pyrope** says:

July 8, 2014 at 10:21 am

Your solution seems like a nice, clean way to deal with this. If lead and senior authors are supported by the same grant then it's clear who is the primary funding agency. I haven't run into this yet...will be a nice problem to have one day

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6. **engprof** says:

July 14, 2014 at 1:28 pm

My DOE program officer has recently given out several warnings to PIs for not being explicit enough in their acknowledgements. The specific issue was what parts of the experiments, models, and analysis were DOE-funded versus NSF- or DARPA-funded. We actually spent a decent chunk of time at a recent PI workshop being "taught" the "proper" way to do this with actual "right" and "wrong" examples. Ahhh,

gotta love the bean-counting, but I guess that's what happens when budgets get tight. We were told the most important thing is to not submit a similar research "highlight" (those 1-slide ppt overviews of a research accomplishment) to more than one agency. That is a definite no-no and can get your grant pulled.

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