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GAO Study May Trigger Creation of New Federal Anti-Harassment Policies

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Within in the next several weeks, the National Science Foundation will publish a notice in the *Federal Register* explaining a new sexual harassment policy under development that NSF Director France Córdoba told *RRC* is “designed to help eliminate such transgressions from science and engineering.”

According to the outlines of the policy released on Feb. 8, NSF will mandate that grantee institutions report actions taken against investigators and grant personnel related to harassment, among other requirements (see story, p. 1).

No other federal agency has such a policy, but many may be obligated to take similar steps in the wake of NSF’s actions. However, the Government Accountability Office (GAO)—with the help of Congress—might ultimately be a stronger driver of what institutions are required to do in the future.

That’s because the House Science, Space and Technology Committee has asked GAO to investigate just how the six largest agency funders of research handle harassment allegations and findings. NSF and NIH are among the agencies to be studied. Committee chair Lamar Smith, R-Texas, and co-chair Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Texas, sent their request to GAO on Jan. 18, calling it a “continuation of the committee’s investigation opened in October into allegations of sexual harassment within the scientific community.”

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