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NSF Brand Standards Case Study

NSF Brand Standards Implementation

When I first started working with the NSF brand, the problem wasn't that NSF didn't have a logo or basic guidance for how to use it. The problem was what happened after those materials left our hands.

NSF funds work globally, and the people communicating that work aren't necessarily communications or brand professionals. They may be researchers, university staff, award recipients, contractors or partners. They also have their own organizations and identities to represent. By the time NSF appeared on a website, research center, event, sign or publication, there are often several competing brands involved and very different interpretations of what it meant to properly acknowledge NSF.

We were seeing the consequences of that inconsistency in real time.

My work over the past several years has focused on closing that gap. What started with strengthening NSF's brand standards grew into a much larger implementation effort: expanding the Brand Standards Manual, building out the Brand Identity Portal, creating resources for the people actually using the brand, and helping implement a review and support structure to strengthen application. That work also helped support the implementation of NSF's formal Policy on Brand Standards.

What we were trying to solve

The objective sounds simple: make NSF more consistently recognizable.

Actually doing that was not a simple, singular solution. Instead, we needed a multi-faceted approach capable of scaling in multiple application environments.



Most common errors & inconsistencies pre-policy:

- Incorrect NSF logo
- Lack of NSF brand recognition
- Inconsistent NSF attribution
- Awardee identity confusion
- Use of outdated resources

NSF Brand Standards Case Study

My role

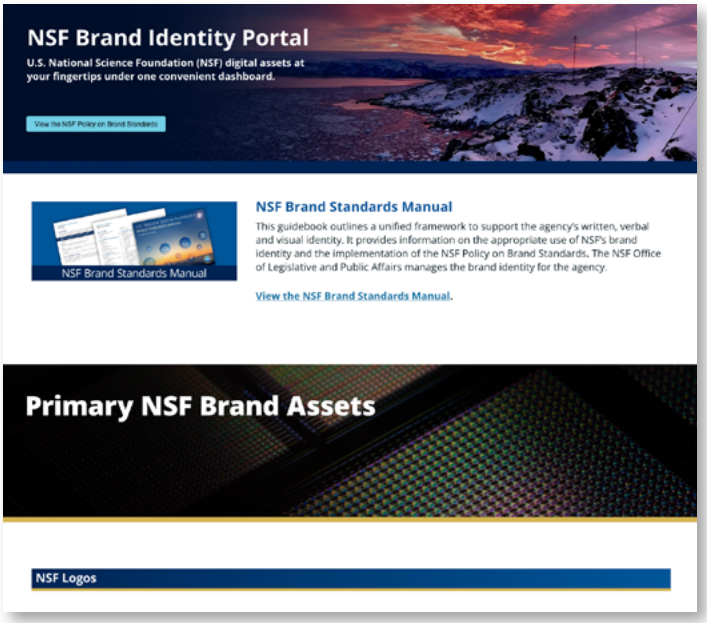
As Senior Brand Strategist, I helped build the system around the standards as much as the standards themselves.

I developed and updated guidance, managed brand reviews, worked directly with NSF staff and award recipients, maintained and expanded the Brand Identity Portal, developed supporting resources and helped teams work through applications that weren't easily answered by a page in a manual.

I also spent a lot of time looking for patterns.

If we answered the same question repeatedly, I didn't want the long-term solution to be answering that question forever. That became an important part of how I approached the project: **the questions coming into Brand Management were data.**

They showed us where implementation was breaking down.



111,141 Total downloads in 2024-2025

345% Increase in downloads

Creating something people would actually use

The NSF Brand Identity Portal became a major part of the solution.

We built it out as a central location for approved logos, templates, standards and other brand resources. I have continued developing the portal as our needs have changed, rather than treating its launch as the end of the project.

In 2024, we added 593 assets to the portal. In 2025, we added another 806. **But the number I care about more is downloads.**

The portal had 22,403 views and 62,124 downloads in 2024. In 2025, it had 16,364 views and 49,017 downloads. **That's 111,141 resource downloads in two years.**

People aren't just landing on the portal. They're taking resources from it and using them. We've seen the same thing with the NSF Brand Standards Manual. **Downloads have increased 345% since implementation began in 2023.**

For a document that exists specifically to help people implement the brand, that increase matters. It tells us that awareness of the standards has grown, but it also tells us people know where to look when they need an answer.

The Policy Changed the Stakes

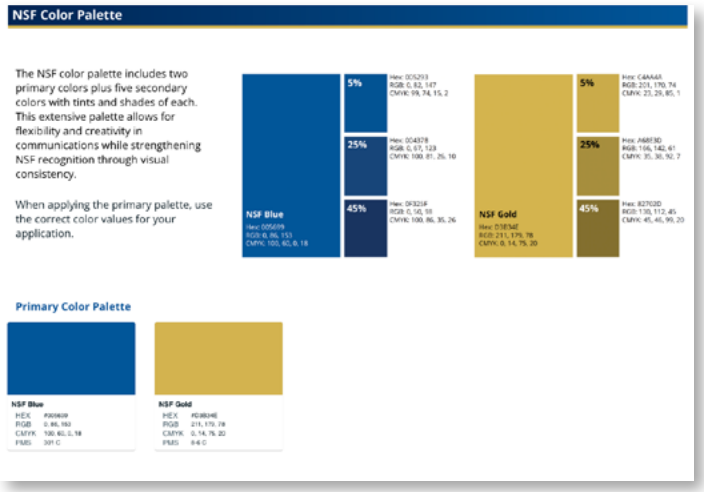
NSF's Policy on Brand Standards moved this work beyond guidance and created a formal framework for how NSF's identity should be represented.

But having a policy and making it workable are two different things.

The portal, manual, templates, FAQs, communications, presentations and direct consultations helped translate those requirements into something staff and award recipients could actually use.

I've worked directly on implementation for projects representing more than $8 million in NSF investment. At that scale, the work can involve multiple institutions, an established project identity, websites, signage, events and other public-facing materials. The question isn't simply Where does the NSF logo go? It's how to make NSF's role unmistakable while respecting the identity of the organization doing the work.

That's where much of my role sits: **taking the standards and figuring out how to make them work in the real world.**



Results

The clearest change has been the movement from having brand standards to having a brand system people actually use.

345% increase in Brand Standards Manual downloads since 2023

111,141 Portal resource downloads in 2024–2025

38,767 Portal views in 2024–2025

$8M+NSF-funded projects supported through direct brand implementation

The numbers only tell part of the story. Brand Management is being brought into conversations earlier, stakeholder questions are helping us improve our resources, and the portal continues to grow rather than becoming a static repository.

What I Learned

Creating standards is the easy part. Implementation is harder.

Organizations have their own brands, projects have unusual circumstances and the technically perfect solution isn't always the practical one. I've learned that good brand management means protecting the integrity of NSF's identity while finding solutions that allow the work to move forward.

I don't consider a standard successful because it exists in a manual. It's successful when someone can find it, understand it and actually use it.

That's what this work has become: a system that makes it easier for people to make NSF visible.