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National Science Foundation Wins AGA's 2020 Innovation Challenge

(Alexandria, Va.) AGA is pleased to announce that the National Science Foundation (NSF) is the 2020 Innovation Challenge winner with its statistical predictive model.

"We are humbled and excited that the AGA audience voted our improper payments predictive model as their favorite innovation. We are hopeful that this will be a valuable experiment in crowdsourcing development across government to tackle shared problems," said Jesse Simons, Chief of the new Payments and Analytics Branch at the National Science Foundation. "We have been approaching data science in an exploratory and experimental way, and hope that other organizations can use our code as a foundation to explore their own use cases and innovations. We are already seeing downloads of our open-source code and it is thrilling to watch this unfold so soon after the event." NSF recently created the Payments and Analytics Branch to lead comprehensive post-award grant and commercial financial management services, including payment operations, financial analytics and monitoring, and outreach.

NSF developed a statistical predictive model and web scraper using data from the Federal Audit Clearinghouse, agency systems, and open-source development platforms to help forecast which NSF awardees may present a relatively higher risk of improper payments. This minimizes manual burden through automation and provides a more quantitative view of risk, allowing NSF to better allocate its resources in risk assessment and grant monitoring activities. Using open-source code and free technologies, the bulk of this model is transferable to other agencies. It can be customized to accommodate specific program risk factors and help address Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 compliance requirements.

"As UVA's Dean Bourne stated in the Summit's Keynote address, 'Data Science is a Team Sport'," said Mike Wetklow, Deputy CFO, National Science Foundation. "With the AGA that means Federal, State, local governments and industry are all on the same team and data science provides new tools to bring value to the American Taxpayer."

Sixteen organizations representing state, local and the federal government and industry submitted entries, and it was narrowed down to three finalists:
- Bureau of the Fiscal Service
- Robotic Process Automation Division within the GSA Office of the Chief Financial Officer

- National Science Foundation

The Innovation Challenge is for organizations to share their technical solutions to nagging problems or challenges that governments face. Submissions promoted accountability, transparency, and innovation in the public sector. The Innovation Challenge took place virtually on Nov. 18, at the final session of AGA's Technology & Transformation Summit. The 1,500+ attendees voted on the winner.

About AGA

AGA is the member organization for financial professionals in government. We lead and encourage change that benefits our field and all citizens. Our networking events, professional certification, publications, and ongoing education help members build their skills and advance their careers. For more information visit www.agacgfm.org