

Social Field Safety Plan

When it comes to conducting research or professionally working in the outdoors, having a social safety plan in place is a good measure to take to ensure the well-being of researchers. Safety plans can help minimize risks by identifying safety hazards, establishing standard operating procedures for emergencies and outlining safety measures to take prior to conducting research in the field. **There are many excellent templates that exist for physical field safety hazards; here, we focus on outlining procedures to ensure social field safety measures are in place.**

Assessing risk and developing a risk reduction strategy should include the participation of the field researcher, who may have additional experiential insight based on their identity, and the program leader. This is an iterative process that should be refined based on feedback and reporting.

This document draws heavily on resources provided by [Washington State University](#) and the [University of Minnesota](#).

A note on NSF requirements: Several solicitations from BIO and GEO will soon require the submission of a Safe and Inclusive Work Environments Plan. Accordingly, for each proposal that proposes to conduct research off-campus or off site, the AOR must complete a certification that the organization has a plan in place for that proposal that describes how the following types of behavior will be addressed:

1. Abuse of any person, including, but not limited to, harassment, stalking, bullying, or hazing of any kind, whether the behavior is carried out verbally, physically, electronically, or in written form; or
2. Conduct that is unwelcome, offensive, indecent, obscene, or disorderly.

This plan should also identify steps the proposing organization will take to nurture an inclusive off-campus or off-site working environment, e.g., trainings; processes to establish shared team definitions of roles, responsibilities, and culture, e.g., codes of conduct; and field support, such as mentor/mentee support mechanisms, regular check-ins, and/or developmental events.

This 2-page supplementary document must address the following sections:

1. A brief description of the field setting and unique challenges for the team
2. Steps the proposing organization will take to nurture an inclusive off-campus or off-site working environment, including processes to establish shared team definitions of roles, responsibilities, and culture, e.g., codes of conduct, trainings, mentor/mentee mechanisms and field support that might include regular check-ins, and/or developmental events
3. Communication processes within the off-site team and to the organization(s) that minimize singular points within the communication pathway (e.g., there should not be a single person overseeing access to a single satellite phone); and the organizational mechanisms that will be used for reporting, responding to, and resolving issues of harassment if they arise.

<https://beta.nsf.gov/events/safe-inclusive-working-environments-requirements>

Social Field Safety Plan Template

Safety plan prepared by:

Date prepared:

Safety plan reviewed by:

Date approved:

1. Principal Investigator / Lead Instructor Information:

Name:

Department:

Phone number:

Email address:

2. Research Project Information:

Project Title:

Duration of Research: *List dates*

General description of fieldwork to be conducted:

Location(s) of Research:

Site map: *Include a map of the field research site which includes labeled details such as the camps location, emergency evacuation routes, latrine facilities, location of field operations etc.*

3. Emergency Contacts:

Routine office hours:

After-hours (including weekends):

Life-threatening emergencies:

Mental health services:

Local emergency services:

Fire department:

Ambulance:

4. Communication Plan: *Establish a communication plan for the research team, including regular check-ins and emergency communication. Identify support systems that are in place to support team members, such as check-ins, mentor/mentee programs, etc. Encourage regular conversations with all research team members on risks and preparations to minimize risk. Validate experiences and assist in modifying projects if researchers have complaints/concerns about safety.*

5. Code of Conduct: *List expectations for maintaining a culture of safety and inclusion in the field. Define conduct expectations, roles and responsibilities and consequences of violating the expectations. Emphasize how this extends to off-duty hours as well as off-campus. Link to Code of Conduct document that must be signed prior to embarking on fieldwork.*

6. Required Trainings: *List required social field safety trainings (and links to online resources, if applicable) for PIs/supervisors, staff/field leaders, and students. This can include training supervisors on supporting field staff or students of different identity groups, with different abilities, etc.*

7. Risk Assessment: *For the risk assessment process, **identify all tasks or situations** that will be included in the field research that might pose mental or physical challenges and physical harms to field workers. Document measures to **prevent or mitigate identified risks**. You may want to consider the following:*

- **Acute issues facing marginalized communities**, especially those with visible indicators of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity of expression, religion, sex, immigration status, or national or ethnic origin.
- **Issues that may impact any field researcher**, such as working alone or in remote locations with limited support, being unfamiliar with the area or community, having limited institutional or peer support, working with problematic team members, having insufficient situational awareness.
- **Physical demands**: Consider any physical demands required for this trip and how these could be modified or adapted for those with different levels of physical ability.
- **Mental demands**: List any unique mental demands required for this trip, e.g. long travel days, high stress environments, different cultural norms, etc. Consider developing protocols for disclosing mental health concerns to supervising staff or developing specific mitigation plans.
- **Within-group social concerns**. Do field members feel comfortable with others? Will field members have privacy during the trip? Should biological sex and gender identify differences be considered for necessary accommodations?
- **Security**: Is there a high risk for harassment or violence? Is this greater for individuals from certain backgrounds/communities/identities than others? Review available hate crime information for all field sites using resources such as:
 - <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics>
 - <https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>
 - <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>
- **Cultural differences**: Are culture differences considered such that field members are not being exposed to unacceptable risk?
- **Accommodation and support**: Does accommodation or facilities put certain individuals at risk or pose significant challenges to those with disabilities or special needs? Ensure field site locations/housing are appropriate, safe, and equitable by soliciting regular feedback.

For all identified risks, discuss with field staff prior to embarking on field work and continuously re-evaluating practices to remove barriers to inclusion in safety practices.

8. Reporting Procedures: Ensure that fieldworks and staff are aware that they have the right to report, without fear of reprisal, concerns of discrimination and discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence and make Participants aware of options for reporting and reprisal, including consultations, formal grievance options, and supportive measures or referrals. The following may include information on emergency services, contact information for Lead Title IX Coordinators, local agencies/hotlines, laws/legal measures, etc.

- **Incident and concern reporting procedures**: Describe how team members report any incidents or concerns.
- **Incident and concern resolution procedures**: Description of how these reports would be addressed and resolved.
- **Procedures relating to the abuse of a person**: List specific procedures for incidents like harassment, stalking, bullying or hazing.
- **Procedures related to inappropriate conduct**: List specific procedures for situations with conduct that is offensive, indecent, or unwelcome.
- **Additional support resources available for participants**: List any additional services available such as hotlines, campus resources or counseling services.

9. Emergency Protocols: *Document steps for researchers experiencing harm or harassment in the field. This may include contacting law enforcement or legal services, referrals to care providers, modification of research assignment, altered housing /accommodations, transport out of field area, etc.*

10. Relevant Policies: *List and link to any relevant policies, procedures, or documentation for your university/organization.*

11. Field Research Team: *List the names, contact information, and roles/responsibilities of all team members. Have each team member sign off on the social field safety plan before embarking on field work.*

Resources/Required Reading:

- Blonder, B.W., 2023. Carrying the moral burden of safe fieldwork. *The Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*, 104(1), p.e02031.
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- Davis, K.E., P. Meehan, C. Klehm, S. Kurnick, and C. Cameron. 2021. Recommendations for safety education and training for graduate students directing field projects. *Advances in Archaeological Practice* 9(1):74-80.
- Demery, A. J. C., and M.A. Pipkin. 2021. Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions. *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 5(1): 5-9.
- Ecological Society of America. 2022. Water cooler Chat: Safe and inclusive field research: How can the proposed new NSF supplementary doc help achieve this? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buOboElkpeo>
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- Kelly, A., and K. Yarincik. 2021. Report of the workshop to promote safety in field sciences, March 24-26, 2021. Consortium for Ocean Leadership and California State University Desert Studies. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5604956.
- Langen, T.A., J.L. Beach, J.T. Boulerice, L.W. Halstrom V, A.R. Lamb, A.M. Ross. 2022. How to be a professional ecological field technician or an effective supervisor of them. *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*. 103(3) 1-23, E01985. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bes2.1985>
- McGill, B. M., M. J. Foster, A. N. Pruitt, S. G. Thomas, E. R. Arsenault, J. Hanschu, K. Wahwawsuck, E. Cortez, K. Zarek, T. D. Loecke, and A. J. Burgin. 2021. You are welcome here: A practical guide

to diversity, equity, and inclusion for undergraduates embarking on an ecological research experience. *Ecology and Evolution* 11(8): 3636-3645.

- Morales, N., K. Bisbee O'Connell, S. McNulty, A. Berkowitz, G. Bowser, M. Giamellaro, and M. N. Miriti. 2020. Promoting inclusion in ecological field experiences: Examining and overcoming barriers to a professional rite of passage. *The Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* 101(4): p.e01742.
- Morales, N. and Reano, D., 2023. Critically assessing undergraduate field experiences: understanding conceptualizations and opportunities for building inclusive programs. *Integrative and Comparative Biology*, p.icad008.
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