The USGS Woods Hole Pod identified the following materials and resources regarding policies for promoting safety in the office, the laboratory and in the field. The information below is publicly available from the links provided. Recommendations for improving USGS effectiveness and efficiency through the promotion of safe, supportive spaces across the spectrum of USGS working environments will be presented to USGS leadership for consideration.

Our Pod defined “safety” to include both physical and psychological safety. We discussed ways of fostering safe behaviors and developing safe spaces in three workplace environments: the office, laboratory and field. The motivations for creating safe workspaces extend beyond preventing overt consequences such as incidents of harassment or physical harm. Research shows that people feeling threatened (physically or psychologically) operate with reduced cognitive capacity because they are focusing on the perceived threats or uncertainty rather than on the primary task at hand. Over time, a sustained sense of threat or uncertainty leads to disengagement (see also the discussion on “Retention” at the USGS in the Session 5 deliverable). Improving our culture of safety thus drives productivity and innovation at the USGS by supporting effective cognitive effort and overall employee retention. The grand challenge to attaining a comprehensive sense of safety throughout the USGS is in transforming “safety” from being a mandatory list of activities added onto one’s existing obligations (extrinsic motivation), into a culture of expected behaviors within our daily routines (intrinsic motivation). Ideally, this cultural behavior would extend beyond the workplace environment, supporting our colleagues outside the typical bounds of work locations and work hours.

This Session 6 deliverable is organized into three sections focusing first on a discussion of the safety threats (Challenges), a summary of existing tools for addressing a range of threats (Safety Plan), and concludes with a series of suggestions for effectively implementing safety tools and protocols on two fronts: Setting Expectations and Maintaining Accountability (Recommendations).

**CHALLENGES**

Table 1 contains a summary of questions one can ask to assess the extent to which people
feel safe, certain and supported. It is vital to recognize that the risk profile of a situation depends heavily on the specific person assessing the situation. Group leaders or project planners cannot assume their perspective of risk covers all of the details of importance for each group member or project participant. For example, a person who swims regularly may overlook the threat felt by a non-swimmer in a field project occurring in or near water.

**Table 1.** Prompts for starting a series of inclusive discussions regarding how to most effectively organize a work experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Safety</th>
<th>Psychological Safety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... understand what the physical dangers and limitations will be in a particular workplace environment?</td>
<td>... feel comfortable being themselves in their workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... understand what will be required of them while in a particular workplace environment?</td>
<td>... understand the expectations and the requirements for growth/career development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... agree their personal requirements for feeling safe and supported in a particular work environment have been voiced and satisfactorily addressed?</td>
<td>... feel they have the agency and support to carry out the expectations and requirements for growth/career development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>... feel encouraged to speak up, even when voicing ideas that are novel or that challenge existing ideas? (Challenger Safety)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effectively communicating information (safety-related or otherwise) between project leads and members, or supervisors and supervisees requires clear expectations, codes of conduct and trust in how everyone involved are held accountable for supporting the project and people involved. How we can create an environment more conducive to productively engaging in the types of interactions listed in Table 1 is discussed in the remainder of this deliverable.

**SAFETY PLAN**

The Session 6 deliverable example provided by URGE included a list of recommended elements to be included in the Safety Plan. These elements, along with their current state of accessibility within the USGS, are given here. In the final section (Recommendations), we address actions for improving the efficacy of Safety Planning at the USGS.

**Code of conduct**

The USGS has a [code of conduct](https://www.usgs.gov) available online. The code stipulates both a list of “Expected Behavior/Conduct” and “Unacceptable Behavior/Conduct” items. The code contains elements that address issues of physical safety (e.g., “Be mindful of their surroundings and of their fellow colleagues, alerting a manager/supervisor or other appropriate office/official if they notice a dangerous/unsafe situation or someone in
distress”) as well as psychological safety (e.g., treating “others with courtesy, dignity, respect and consideration... critiquing ideas rather than individuals,” and providing “a safe and rewarding work environment that nurtures, challenges, and encourages all employees”). The code can be printed out as a poster as well, and the poster contains links directly to a series of resources for reporting unacceptable behavior.

As noted in our discussion, the “code of conduct” need not be limited to the bureau-wide version. Additions can be made at the project level as appropriate. For example, a suggested URGE reading for this session contained a concise list of suggestions for creating an anti-racist laboratory.

Members of field teams who are not USGS employees or contractors but who are closely affiliated with those who are, and who perform regular, essential functions of the field program (such as ship or rig crews), should also be informed of and required to adhere to the USGS code of conduct.

Process for reporting violations

As noted in the Session 2 deliverable, the USGS has a robust system for reporting various forms of unacceptable behavior. These options are summarized here along with their associated links:

1. Overview: Anti-Harassment Program Homepage:

2. Resources available for those considering reporting or reaching out for support as a result of experiencing unacceptable behavior include confidential guidance (NOT A REPORT), which can be obtained through:
   2. [USGS Collaborative Action & Dispute Resolution (CADR)](https://www.usgs.gov/about/organization/science-support/human-capital/anti-harassment-program) » Cheryl Caldwell ccaldwell@usgs.gov
   3. [DOI Employee Assistance Program](https://www.usgs.gov/about/organization/science-support/human-capital/anti-harassment-program) (EAP)
   4. [Union Representative](https://www.usgs.gov/about/organization/science-support/human-capital/anti-harassment-program) » Employees represented by a union may contact their Union Representative, e.g. [https://www.afge.org/about-us/agencies/department-of-the-interior-doi/](https://www.afge.org/about-us/agencies/department-of-the-interior-doi/)

3. Reporting:
   1. Reports can be made to any supervisor or management official (including your own)
   2. Employee Relations Specialists are available for making reports:
   3. Reports can also be made directly to the DOI Office of the Inspector General (OIG): Toll Free: 800-424-5081 or 202-208-5745 [https://www.doioig.gov/](https://www.doioig.gov/)
   4. Anonymous online reports at DOI level: [https://www.doioig.gov/oig-hotline-forms](https://www.doioig.gov/oig-hotline-forms)
Training resources (General and physical safety)

General and physical safety courses are available online at the USGS, some through the bureau, some through the Department of the Interior. An overview of these training opportunities indicates separate training regimens for executive leadership, supervisors, collateral duty safety coordinators, and new employees. These training opportunities are provided for new employees, representing a “one-and-done” approach to establishing a culture of safety. The new hire list of training titles is illustrative:

General (all new employees)
- DOI safety and occupational health overview
- Authorities, roles and responsibilities
- USGS safety and occupational health program overview

Administrative personnel
- USGS safety program requirements – Admin

Non-administrative personnel
- USGS safety program requirements
- USGS industrial hygiene program requirements

The only recurring physical safety training listed for USGS employees is for defensive driving (3-year interval).

USGS offers a DOI Learn Online Training course: “Personal Safety through Awareness” (course 1291) and an Informational Sheet “Personal Safety in Field Environments” (Jan 2018), though these resources are not required and not widely advertised. The Informational sheet lists “Federal Protective Service Training: Personal Safety Awareness” as available upon request. Significantly, the information sheet also specifies that with regard to self-defense, the use of “pepper spray or any other self-defense equipment while performing government work is strictly prohibited per 18 U.S.C. Section 930(d).” Note this is an employee rule only - in the state of Massachusetts, the use of pepper/chemical defense spray is legal for people over the age of 18.

Training resources (Psychological safety)

The USGS has previously dedicated itself to “Workplace Culture Transformation,” and the Department of the Interior is working to set up a “Diversity Change Agent” program to “develop a critical mass of stakeholders to embrace and enact [the department’s] Inclusive Workplace Strategy.” In practical terms, elements of antidiscrimination, bystander intervention, and de-escalation training are available. Recurring, mandatory training sessions are listed under the EEO section of the USGS list of mandatory training, and include:
- Discrimination and Whistleblowing in the Workplace (No FEAR Act) (2-year interval)
- Prohibited Personnel Practices and Whistleblower (PPP) Training (3-year cycle)
- Anti-Harassment/EEO/Diversity
All Supervisors are required to complete a minimum of 8 hours of EEO-related training including diversity and anti-harassment on an annual basis.

All Employees are required to complete a minimum of 4 hours of EEO-related training including diversity and anti-harassment on an annual basis.

Training that specifically targets bystander intervention is available online as part of a broader Dept. of the Interior course called the "Intergenerational Sensitivity and Bystander Intervention Training Program." A facilitator led, bystander intervention workshop from the USGS SEES (StepUp! Employment Empowerment Strategies) is also available. Other specialized training, such as for addressing microaggressions, are available internally at DOI Talent, the Dept. of Interior platform for handling most online training.

The Dept. of the Interior’s Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution (CADR) offers a range of training opportunities centered around communication. There are sessions on communicating in meetings/collaborations/public venues, communicating to work through conflict or other emotionally-charged topics and negotiations, and there is a separate training for boosting the emotional intelligence required to become a more effective communicator.

Site assessments of risk (including risks due to an employee’s race, religion or any other protected class) - what to look for, what precautions to take, etc. An important aspect of the Survey’s overall safety profile must include employee safety in the field. The USGS Safety and Health for Field Operations Handbook deals with fieldwork safety. Though comprehensive regarding physical safety across a number of field environments, this document does not address psychological safety or risks associated with an employees protected class(es).

Something lab groups and field teams can do now is to develop a Safety Plan specific to the area and situation that group will be working in. An effective starting point for developing a project-specific set of safety guidelines was presented in a Session 6 suggested reading from URGE published in Nature. The publication included extensive table of "Strategies for researchers, supervisors and institutions to minimize risk." Highlights include:

- Checklist of discussions within field team
  - What topics should be included?
    - Risks and preparations to minimize risk. This can include a statement that certain demographics may be at higher risk, and that the supervisor is available to discuss with any researcher about concerns and proactive measures. Educational resources should be made available to all researchers, who can then self-select to engage in a conversation about safety issues surrounding their specific identity(ies).
  - Procedure for documenting field incidents
    - Two different branches- one for incidents within field group, one for other encounters

RECOMMENDATIONS
“We must never become too busy sawing to take time to sharpen the saw” (Stephen Covey, Habit 7 from *The 7 habits of highly effective people*). A challenge for implementing even the most well-researched Safety Plan is that employee efforts on Safety Plan activities are not equivalent to efforts on the USGS Mission-advancing for which employees are rewarded and promoted. Successful implementation of the Safety Plan requires fundamentally shifting our perception of the Plan from being a list of mandated activities that take time away from an employee’s “real work” to seeing the Plan as a list of strategies for optimizing each employee’s “rewardable output.” This perception shift will require an identity shift. Regardless of their role in the USGS, people will need to replace their “expert” identity with a “learner” identity: we’re never perfect experts, but we can always improve.

Regarding the Safety Plan, the learner’s mindset can be implemented as an active awareness of, and communication with, people outside our own groups. When successful techniques are found, those ideas must be communicated and spread. For a learner’s mindset to become part of the USGS culture regarding the Safety Plan, however, people will need to see bottom-line evidence that Safety Plan efforts are improving their rewardable outputs as judged by the USGS promotion and reward structure. As was highlighted in the Session 5 deliverable, the USGS must be willing to modify their reward structure, particularly for staff who are graded under the RGE (currently based on guidelines from the Office of Personnel Management) to reflect behaviors the USGS truly wishes to foster in its workplace environment.

Presented below are recommendations for implementing and expanding on tools presented in the Safety Plan above. These recommendations can be broadly grouped into two arenas: Setting Expectations (does everyone know what they need to in order to move forward productively?) and Maintaining Accountability (does everyone trust that constructive behavior is rewarded, and unsafe behavior is not allowed to continue?).

**Setting Expectations**

- **Raising Awareness:**

  As noted above in the Safety Plan, the USGS has a number of existing training opportunities for setting expectations across a number of different aspects of an employee’s work experience. While training is a necessary element in the culture change required to fully operationalize a comprehensive Safety Plan, training is not sufficient. Unless an employee easily recognizes how a particular training opportunity improves their life (in general, or specifically with regard to rewardable output), the training has no value beyond providing legal cover for the USGS should the employee overstep a trained boundary.

  A challenge to communicating the relevance of a particular training is the “Mastery Illusion” in which a person is likely to hold an expert mindset, a perspective of “I already know how to be safe in that situation, and it’s a demeaning waste of time to be told I have to take the training anyway.” Because safety issues tend to appear rapidly and demand essentially instinctual reactions, a strong parallel can be drawn with sports. As described by Jim Afremow, “Some people just practice a skill until they’re able to get it right; others practice until they’re nearly unable to get it wrong.” True safety requires being unable to get the response wrong. How then, does one motivate employees to pursue mastery?

  One way to promote the “learner identity” for safety training of any kind is to try making it clear that a particular training is intended so you (the employee) will have
the skills to assist a colleague/project member in a moment of crisis. It’s much easier to recognize potential gaps in your understanding when you’re forced to ask “do I actually know how to step in if there’s a threat to my colleague in that situation?” In the context of a center-wide “Safety Day” dedicated to various physical and psychological training experiences, establishing the idea that you’re learning how to protect your colleague could be more motivating than thinking you’re just being told how you should run your own office/lab/field project. Crafting the training experiences to be as hands-on or otherwise as active as possible will also boost engagement (e.g., a video showing how a fire extinguisher is used is less engaging and memorable than actually trying one out for real), or perhaps “a workshop led by a diversity leader where groups role-play how to respond to real-world situations”.

A significant limitation here is that not all centers have dedicated safety officers. The role is primarily structured as a collateral duty, so the logistical effort to set up extensive hands-on training sessions may not be manageable for all centers given the part-time status of safety in the local safety officer’s position description (e.g., fire extinguisher training requires coordinating with the local fire department). With these caveats about working to boost employee engagement in training, a list of suggested training opportunities is given here. Though there is some overlap in the training titles, the content will differ across the different workspaces:

- **Field-based**
  - General Field Safety - USGS currently working on a module for this, but a recommendation would be to incorporate elements specific to the safety concerns of BIPOC and other protected classes. A first-person account of what can happen when managers do not recognize safety concerns that impact BIPOC workers (or any worker who identifies differently than their managers) was posted in 2020 and linked to by the URGE organizers.
  - Hands on-training - fire extinguishers, floatation gear, swimming, others as required for specific job duties.
  - Bystander intervention - a field-specific version for this is being developed and tested by USGS SEES, and context for this type of training could be shared via any of a number of publicly-available videos about the impact of microaggressions.
  - Field personnel who are not USGS employees or contractors but who are working closely with USGS personnel should also be informed of the expected standard of conduct.
  - Self defense training is not currently available as a bureau-wide resource, but the possibility of adding self defense to the existing list of training guidance should be considered.

- **Lab-based**
  - In the Woods Hole Coastal and Marine Science Center, we can potentially make use of certain safety training opportunities from the neighboring Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) for lab-based safety training (acids/bases or high-pressure gas use, others?). Field-based training through WHOI has been offered in the past, but inquiries will need to be made to see if such programs are still available.
  - Hands on-training - eye-washing stations, emergency showers, etc. In the Woods Hole Center, new hires who will be working in laboratories are given a walkthrough of their lab and the associated safety equipment in
addition to the online training. Refresher training reminders are periodically given to existing employees.

- Office-based
  - Psychological Safety - promoting inclusion, safe-spaces, allyship to foster more engaged communication and improved sense of agency. The USGS Peer Support Worker (PSW) program is currently scheduled to offer facilitator training for psychological safety with the intent of PSWs being able to assist their centers in promoting the psychological safety model in the workplace.
  - Bystander intervention ("see something, say something") definitely has value in discussion-based activities in addition to the physically-based field activities, so this would involve a totally different set of role-play scenarios than would be provided in the field version of this training. As noted in the Safety Plan, USGS has an internal training available for this, as does DOI. The training is not mandatory, however, and from our podlet discussions, there is considerable support for making bystander intervention training a more frequent element in our training regimen.
  - Gender-bias training (like bystander intervention training, the gender-bias training has been developed as a grassroots effort by a USGS Peer Support Worker based on the book *What works for women at work* by Williams and Dempsey)

- Mentoring
  Mentors are a particularly valuable resource for their capacity to set expectations by providing targeted, personalized training to their mentees. Their roles and significance in hiring and retaining employees was discussed in the Session 5 deliverable, and the additional Session 6 reading/interview focus on mentor/mentee relationships motivated extensive podlet discussions around mentorship ideal and opportunities.

  - Mentor training - The motivations and perspectives of the mentor are important factors in determining the overall quality of the mentor/mentee relationship. Even when the mentor is centered on supporting and enabling their mentee’s career, it’s critical for the mentor to recognize how “solutions” from their perspective can be either untenable or irrelevant for the mentee. An example raised in Session 6 is how significant family input can influence a mentee’s choices, so hearing “just tell your family that you’re going to ___” may not be as effective as it would be from a more independent mindset of the mentor. A training program specific to connecting mentor perspectives with those of their BIPOC or other protected class mentees has been an effective means of fostering productive mentor/mentee relationships in the Partnership Education Program in Woods Hole. As with the safety training, it’s important even for mentors to adopt the learner identity so they feel more comfortable asking for feedback about where mentees may be wishing for additional (or different) support.

  - Multiple mentors – because perspectives and lived experiences are so diverse, having a mentor “cohort” could potentially offer a mentee support that is more directly relevant to the mentee. Diversifying and sharing the mentorship load via the cohort approach will also help address the issue of mentor burnout, and raise awareness about the importance of expanding the mentorship pool so we are not continually assigning mentorship duties to a limited pool of employees. A caveat
is that such a mentor cohort would have to be coordinated to prevent the mentee receiving mixed or conflicting messages.

- Field program planning – obtaining and providing background material describing a particular project workspace (field location or vessel) can significantly reduce uncertainty with regard to expectations in the field. Specific ideas recommended during the pod discussions include:
  - Obtain pictures/background information to use for judging safety elements
  - Establish group norms for drawing out ideas about concerns people would like addressed about a particular field experience. The USGS Project Aviation Safety Plan (PASP), for instance, includes space for listing potential challenges. If everyone in the group is encouraged to include all perceived challenges (including challenges certain employees may feel only pertain to them), a more robust, inclusive discussion of the project expectations can be fostered.

Maintaining Accountability

The foundational importance of accountability is recognized by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in their discussion of the benefits of accountability. A key point OPM makes is that “accountability” isn’t just about punishment, it’s also about regarding positive behavior. OPM cites Mark Samuel’s book *The Accountability Revolution*, saying “accountability means people can count on one another to keep performance commitments and communication agreements.” With this definition of accountability in mind, the following are recommendations for establishing the expectations and guidelines for holding each other accountable.

- Executive Leadership Team (ELT) or Workplace Equity, Engagement and Excellence Council (WE3) Level
  - At this level, clear guidelines for expected behaviors throughout the USGS can be effectively articulated and fought for. As a specific example, ELT and WE3 efforts to redefine “promotable activities” would be effective. As noted in the Session 5 deliverable regarding retention, the employee-level activities promoting workplace equity, engagement and excellence, such as mentoring/supervising and working to establish a safe, supportive work environment, are not currently represented in the OPM elements of promotional activities. Until they are, the Survey’s productivity will continue to be hampered by an inequitable apportioning of the activities OPM states are vital to developing employees who are “creative, innovative and committed to their work” workplace, in which USGS “employees have an opportunity to contribute their greatest talents in support of our science mission.”
  - Top-level leadership can work to establish support and affinity groups in which people can connect with others who share similar lived experiences. These connections significantly reduce the sense of isolation or “otherness” that can draw down an employee’s cognitive bandwidth (e.g. *Whistling Vivaldi* and *Burnout*) and productivity. There are several affinity groups, or Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) currently, but as our workforce diversifies, it will be important for WE3 to continue growing these groups (directive 3c in the WE3 charter). Other types of support resources, such as the *Peer Support Worker* program, (PSW) will also be important to support for their capacity to engage both with employees directly, and with center leadership and others regarding initiatives for improving the workplace environment.

- Supervisor and Center Director engagement
Much of the onus for establishing and maintaining accountability will necessarily fall to supervisors and center directors. Survey tools, such as the Federal Employment Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), Workplace Environment Survey or more targeted employee surveys from the PSW programs or others, indicate opportunities for growth in our capacity to hold people accountable for unacceptable behavior, as well as for recognizing and rewarding behavior in support of others (e.g. questions 32-34, 66 and others in FEVS). Responsiveness to the results from various workplace environment surveys is seen as evidence of maintaining accountability.

Establishing and maintaining accountability requires challenging conversations and difficult choices. Promoting affinity or discussion groups among supervisors and among center directors could foster a peer-mentoring environment in which ideas that work can be shared, and novel solutions can be developed. One such center director-level group has been formed under the auspices of the PSW program and could be used as a model for creating other peer-cohorts.

- **Employee Performance Appraisal Plans (EPAPs)**
  - EPAPs, in which an employee’s upcoming year’s worth of activities is codified by the employee’s supervisor with input from the employee, providing a framework for clearly defining critical elements and performance standards for the employee. EPAPs also stand as a framework for justifying awards based on the employee’s performance. These rewards can include acknowledging productive activities that may not yet be included in the official promotion requirements (such as mentoring work, supporting early-career coauthors/interns etc.).

- Leaders of field teams can debrief field activities after the fact, to determine whether the activities met safety and conduct requirements and expectations.