



URGE Management Plan for USGS, Woods Hole Pod

The USGS Woods Hole Pod gratefully acknowledges the tremendous value added by the URGE coordinator's insightful selections of papers, interviews, inclusivity tips, discussion prompts and deliverable structures. In addition to building awareness, the URGE format catalyzed pod discussions that generated actionable recommendations we can now present to USGS leadership at both the center (local) and bureau (institutional) levels.

The tentative plan is to collect and summarize recommendations from all USGS pods in a USGS "Open File Report." These reports are reviewed (internally), citable, publicly available, and can be formatted to facilitate their use as leadership-level tools for improving on existing systems and policies. A [recent example](#) provides guidance to the bureau on improving the promotion review process for USGS research scientists. Additionally, a pair of summer meetings are being scheduled for the five USGS URGE pods to present preliminary URGE findings to [WE3](#) (mid July) and subsequently to the USGS Executive Leadership Team. USGS leadership has repeatedly expressed support for URGE and interest in engaging with URGE recommendations. This Session 8 Management Plan deliverable represents an initial effort to consolidate the key recommendations around the various deliverable topics from URGE. Table 1 and the subsequent deliverable summaries capture high-level suggestions for local and broader institutional change. Detailed information on each of the suggestions can be found in the individual deliverables, available on the [USGS Woods Hole URGE pod website](#).

Fundamentally, our pod recommendations are meant to advance the [2010 USGS commitment](#) regarding "seeking out and retaining a highly skilled and diverse workforce to ensure we accomplish our mission in the most effective, efficient, and robust way possible." Our recommendations can be broadly split into two approaches: 1) "seeking out" and hiring a workforce that demographically represents the Nation's populace; 2) retaining that workforce by fostering the psychologically safe workplace environment [called for by USGS leadership](#) in which "all employees have an opportunity to contribute their greatest talents in support of our important mission."



Table1. Summary of status and primary recommendation for each actionable deliverable.

Deliverable	Existing Policy or Resource?	Where It Is or Will Be Posted	Priority Recommendation
Complaints and Reporting Policy	Yes, but not centered on the reporting individual	Publicly available web site	Center the Anti-Harassment Program on the reporting individual to ensure the individual knows they will be protected from additional unwanted behavior.
Demographic Data	Yes	Publicly available web site	Collect demographic data on applicants to investigate how the hiring process itself might create barriers to diversifying the workforce.
Policies for Working with Communities of Color	Partial	Publicly available web site	Extend existing tribal liaison concept to other BIPOC communities.
Hiring Policies	Yes, but not optimized for increasing diversity	Publicly available web site, but limited guidance on navigating the process	View hiring as one element in a fully-supported, long-term commitment to network with, hire, and retain employees who reflect the Nation's demographic diversity. Because employee retention requires employees to devote time and resources to creating and maintaining an inclusive workplace environment, we recommend specifically adding support activities (e.g., mentoring, diversity, equity and inclusion work) to the list of career advancement activities in the review of all employees.
Safety Plan	Partial	Publicly available web sites	Expand "safety" to include physical and psychological safety in the office, laboratory and field workplace environments.
Resource Map	No	Post internally	Utilize the Resource Map as a center-level tool for rapidly connecting new hires with members of their group, center, cohort and community.



Summary of key observations and recommendations for deliverables noted in Table 1.

- **Complaints and Reporting Policy (Session 2) –**

- Though there are many conflict resolution resources within the USGS and Dept. of the Interior, they are not necessarily centered on the reporting individual. [The Anti-Harassment Program](#) is a stark example in that their policy specifically denies the reporting individual access to any information about how their complaint was resolved.
- A key recommendation for individuals experiencing unwelcome behavior is to seek guidance and support for resolution options at the Center level. Peer Support Workers are one such center-level, confidential source of information on potential solution pathways. The Center's Administrative Officer is also a local option for human resource questions.

- **Demographic Data (Session 3) –**

- Demographic data on current USGS employees is publicly available through the [FedScope](#) portal. A limitation is the lack of data on applicants and on retention statistics. These limitations restrict the ability to assess why the USGS is over-represented (relative to the US population) by white males, particularly at the leadership pay grades. It is unclear if the hiring process filters out applicants from diverse backgrounds, and/or if the workplace environment preferentially retains and promotes the white male demographic. Both may be true, but the lack of data makes it more difficult to assess which interventions could have the largest impact in advancing the USGS goals of diversifying the workforce to represent the diversity within the US population.

- **Policies for Working with Communities of Color (Session 4) –**

- Through the Department of the Interior, the USGS has Tribal liaisons and specificity regarding interactions with Tribal Nations. A reaffirmation of the structure and intent of the department and bureau's "trust responsibility" was published in [Secretarial Order 3335](#).
- Similar resources and guidance do not exist for other communities, and the lack of diversity within the USGS workforce further disconnects our workforce from the Nation we serve. This disconnect is detrimental to our science and presents an obstacle to effectively engaging with traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Tribal status as "entities distinct from states and foreign nations" makes them distinct from other communities within the U.S., but structural and process elements within Secretarial Order 3335 could be used to develop guidelines and resources for the USGS to more effectively engage with other communities.



- A key recommendation here is to invest in connecting with BIPOC communities, such as by adding to the limited number of minority-serving institutions (MSI) with whom the USGS has formalized cooperative agreements and programs. Networking, mentoring and internship opportunities may be a way to involve BIPOC communities in research on issues that are important to them. Such activities would also support recommendations for improving networks and hiring from diverse applicant pools (see “Hiring Policies”).

- **Hiring Policies (Session 5) –**

- The [USGS has stated](#) that to “ensure that we carry our mission forward and achieve our potential for transformational earth and biological science, it is critical that we attract, retain, and develop a skilled and high performing workforce, establish and strengthen sustainable relationships with our diverse communities, educational institutions, and professional organizations, and foster an attractive workplace that reflects the best and the brightest of every segment of our society.” Demographic data indicate the USGS approach to hiring has not been effective in reaching our stated diversity goals. Developing recommendations around hiring and retention strategies were among the highest priority elements our pod drew from the URGE project.
- A key recommendation is to approach the hiring process as one element of a long-term, three-stage investment:
 - Stage 1 - Networking and recruiting. Diversifying the USGS workforce is contingent on diversifying the network of people we have contact with. USGS must “expand the funnel” and make deliberate efforts to advertise jobs outside of established networks. In addition, USGS can foster more diverse networking opportunities by (1) building participation in and representation at targeted conferences, such as SACNAS, AISES and NABG, (2) supporting and expanding internship opportunities (such as the [Partnership Education Program](#)), and (3) investing in MSI cooperative programs. Lastly, because these efforts require time and dedication from existing employees, it is critical that these efforts be explicitly listed as career advancement activities (see *Stage 3 - Retention*).
 - Stage 2 – Hiring. The [USAJobs](#) website is our official hiring portal for applications. Currently, demographic data on applicants is not available, but we have identified several aspects of the hiring process that are likely contributing to a less diverse applicant pool. First, applicants must provide a self assessment, which is used by human resources to cull applicants. A problem with the self assessments is that, even with equivalent skill levels, [women](#) and BIPOC applicants are more likely to rate themselves lower than white men. Thus, qualified candidates will be removed from the hiring process before supervisors can even view their applications. Second, all members of hiring panels should receive unconscious bias training. Another key recommendation is to utilize alternative hiring pathways in which the hiring group can exercise more control over the applicant pool and the vetting process (e.g., Mendenhall program, NAGT, NSF-GRIP



and others). Finally, to mirror an effective approach being used at academic institutions, supervisors should consider hiring at lower, more accessible pay grades to reach more diverse candidate pools, and then support and promote those employees to higher pay grades as their careers develop (e.g. through [Pathways](#) or expanded versions of the program that can be applied to non-student employees).

- Stage 3 – Retention. Demographic data show diversity diminishes with increasing pay grades, indicating barriers to retaining and promoting diverse employee pools into leadership roles. To address these barriers, we are calling for a renovation of the workplace culture to address the issue of retention. Until we can honestly advertise the USGS as a welcoming, inclusive workplace environment, characterized as promoting psychological safety and employee growth, we will struggle to retain talented employees from diverse backgrounds. There are a number of recommendations for workplace culture renovation, but at the core of all recommendations is the need for accountability. Accountability is [defined by OPM](#) as addressing negative behavior as well as promoting desired behavior. Given that networking, mentoring, peer support, diversity, equity, inclusion and justice work are all conspicuously absent from the [OPM guidelines for RGE promotion](#) used by the USGS, the Survey has a demonstrated lack of accountability with regard to promoting employees engaged in efforts to foster a psychologically safe, inclusive workplace. Meaningfully rewarding these efforts will enable them to spread widely and create the inclusive culture envisioned by OPM and called for at the USGS Director level.
- **Safety Plan (Session 6) –**
 - Our pod defined “safety” to include both physical and psychological safety. We felt it was important to develop safe behaviors and safe spaces across three workplace environments: office, laboratory and field. The USGS has a number of mandatory training programs available, primarily directed at physical safety, and primarily presented as “one and done” experiences during an employee’s already potentially overwhelming onboarding experience. Given the Survey’s stated goals regarding [workplace culture transformation](#), “to create a workplace that is civil, professional, rewarding, engaging, respectful, and inclusive; and one where all employees have an opportunity to contribute their greatest talents in support of our important mission,” the following priority recommendations were seen as ways to set expectations and maintain accountability for physical and psychological safety. To increase engagement with these recommendations, one option is to present these resources as opportunities to answer “Yes” to the question “do I feel I can step in if there’s a threat to my colleague?”:



- Field and laboratory safety
 - Existing USGS field safety guidelines should be updated to specifically provide space in the planning process for BIPOC or other protected classes to speak up about threats they may anticipate in the specific study environment involved.
 - Bystander Intervention (field-version) should be at least an annual training resource to build the intervention reflexes needed for employees to protect coworkers.
 - Self defense is not currently an option for field safety training, and USGS personnel are forbidden from using pepper spray (or its equivalent). Protection from personal threats should be a priority safety training element.
- Office Safety
 - Psychological safety, the sense of being able to challenge ideas within the group without fear of reprisal is the operationalized form of the USGS [Guiding Principles](#) and [vision](#) of giving employees “an opportunity to contribute their greatest talents in support of our important mission.” Training for psychological safety (which includes bystander intervention training) is a priority that will also support *Hiring Policies (Retention)* and *Resource Map (Mentoring)* recommendations.
- **Resource Map (Session 7) –**
 - A critical barrier to employee creativity, productivity, growth and retention is the sense of isolation. The Resource Map, when coupled with active human engagement with a new hire, combats isolation by rapidly connecting new hires with members of their group, center, cohort and community. Our Resource Map recommendations center on direct connections between employees (e.g., mentoring and cohort networks). These connections are critical for fostering an inclusive, productive workplace, but to get the majority of employees to engage will require establishing these activities as career advancement opportunities (see *Hiring Policies (Retention)*).
 - Onboarding – administrative, supervisory and project personnel are all engaged with onboarding, but gaps can still occur (not receiving center-wide emails/notifications is a commonly reported lapse for new hires, and this isolation-increasing lapse can take a long time to come to light and get addressed). A recommendation is to link new hires to a new-hire peer group and to a Barton Buddy, an existing employee willing to actively engage with the new hire about available resources at work and in the local community.



- Mentoring and establishing peer cohort groups (such as early-career scientist, or technician or core-activity employee) with mentors can combat isolation by engaging employees with people and perspectives from outside their group. These cohort-style opportunities to learn what's available and what's possible in the USGS can foster collaboration and employee growth so they can "have an opportunity to contribute their greatest talents in support of our important mission" ([USGS Office of the Director vision](#)).