

Bigelow URGE Pod FINAL Session 6 Deliverable

Field and Laboratory Accessibility/Safety Plans

As part of the objectives of Unlearning Racism in Geoscience (URGE; www.urgeoscience.org), a community-wide journal-reading and policy-design curriculum to help Geoscientists unlearn racism and improve accessibility, justice, equity, and inclusion in our discipline, this deliverable seeks to address how our approaches to field work and our laboratory environments could be made more accessible to all, and to design plan guidelines that managers can use to promote accessibility.

Guided by the [URGE Session 6 readings](#) and [interview](#) and the [URGE Session 6 deliverable guideline](#), we discussed the following questions:

- Are the spaces where our work is done uncomfortable or unsafe for people of color? For people from other countries? For people with disabilities? For people who visibly identify as transgender or queer? For women? For people who identify with certain religions?
- What training does our organization require or offer? How often? Do we find this training effective? What would we introduce to make it more effective?
- How can one manage the potentially conflicting expectations for a safety plan between one's own research group and the host organization, be it a ship, a field lab, a field camp? How do we reconcile these two?

Overview:

We were motivated to complete this deliverable because Bigelow scientists conduct work in a variety of places away from our physical research campus. Our goal is to produce a plan for Bigelow scientists that are leading field teaching or research expeditions that will allow them to critically evaluate the situation into which they are bringing students, staff or colleagues. The field safety plan will help identify potential unsafe or uncomfortable conditions for the members of the research team or class (hereinafter participants). We provide guidance to reduce potentially unsafe/uncomfortable situations through preparation to identify potential issues. Below we describe the action steps and discussion points that field team leaders and field course instructors should perform before going into the field, and/or that supervisors should go through with members of their team participating in remote work.

The DEI Liaison will present these guidelines at an upcoming all-hands meeting of the institution to promote awareness at an institutional level of this topic, and provide these guidelines as a resource to staff. Further, the DEI Liaison will create an example "checklist" for a theoretical field program to use as a guide. The DEI Liaison will also follow up with institutional leadership to discuss how/if to codify these recommendations.

Step #1: What is the scope of work and how will the team conduct the work? What is expected of the participants to complete the project/class goals?

In essence, we are asking field leaders to create “job hazard analyses” for any remote work, to outline the goals and objectives for the field work/course and give all the participants an idea of what they will be doing. Open discussions of the role of each participant helps everyone know their roles and responsibilities.

Step #2: Read and discuss relevant sections of the Bigelow Employee Handbook concerning code of conduct, safety, and reporting, and empower employees with training.

As Bigelow employees, we have agreed to adhere to the Bigelow Code of Conduct in any of the spaces in which we are working. Sometimes during field work or courses, this means where we work is also where we are living. We read the Bigelow Code of Conduct in order to compare it to the policies and procedures in place at the field site/station/ship. Beyond the Code of Conduct, have Bigelow employees been empowered to provide a safe environment for students and colleagues through, for example, unconscious bias training, bystander intervention training, or sexual harassment training? We encourage these trainings at the institution so that Bigelow employees can be a source of safety and knowledge during multi-institution and/or international field work.

Step #3: Familiarize yourself with the locations your work will take you and the cultural history of those places.

For land-based remote work, consider starting with an understanding of the history of the land and how/where the current land owners came to own the land. Who were the indigenous people that lived on the land (one reference: <https://native-land.ca/>)? Have we asked their permission or incorporated their ideas into the project?

For ocean-based remote work, consider the history of the region the work will be conducted in (national or international waters), of the vessel operator, and of the ports/cities that the team will be working in and/or transiting through.

Then, do an assessment of the site where field work/teaching will happen. Are there attitudes, beliefs, safety hazards or risks in the area that might be dangerous towards any participant based on their identities related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation (for instance a site with a history of discrimination against a particular group)? Is the site accessible for everyone involved? Are there cultural traits in the site where the field work/teaching will happen that should be taken into account (e.g. sacred cultural site)? Consider contacting a local institution or other researchers who have done work in the area for this assessment.

Where issues are identified, create a clear plan for how these issues will be minimized, prevented, or removed to ensure that all participants can work safely.

Step #4: Review the field site/station/ship policies and critically evaluate their potential to decrease harm.

Review the policies in place for safety at the field site/station/ship. Is there a plan in place? Does it include information on how to identify and address harassment, bullying, and discrimination? If so, the policy should be capable of answering the questions listed below. It is important to note if the field site/station/ship values training and provides training for the participants so they are familiar with these policies before/upon arrival or if they go further and provide additional resources and training for participants that discuss antidiscrimination, bystander intervention, and de-escalation. Responsible and respectful conduct is expected while working at the field site/station/ship and a reportable incident may be any of the following: physical or verbal abuse or assault, intimidation, coercion, threats, gender, racial, or sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, or any other behaviors that endanger the health and safety of oneself or others. If any of these questions are not answered by the field site/station/ship policies, then the field team leader and participants (or participant with their supervisor, if their supervisor is not part of the remote team) should develop and agree on ways to fill in the gaps of the policy.

1. Is it easy to figure out how to report an incident and to whom the incident should be reported? What is the role of witnesses and to whom do they report?
2. If someone is the target of one of these behaviors, what is the plan for the safe removal from the situation and how can they safely finish their field course/work? How will privacy be maintained?
3. What are the policies for alcohol and drug use while living and working in this space? Do these drug and alcohol policies interfere with safety?
4. Are there clear alternates for reporting if individuals in positions of power are the ones accused of violating policies?

Step #5: Communication with the field site/station/ship.

If the analysis in step #4 reveals that the policies and procedures at the field site/station/ship are not sufficient or lack critical elements to protect participants, then it is important to develop a plan for your group. Share these additional plans with the leadership of the field site/station/ship, so they know what you will do in case of an incident. This also helps the field site/station/ship to develop more robust policies during this review process.

Step #6: Provide resources for where the field site/station/ship policies and plan fall short of protecting participants.

Established field stations or ships might have well thought out policies and plans in place that have been audited and represent a comprehensive plan. In some cases, the field work may be conducted at a remote field site with no infrastructure for safety in place. It is the responsibility of the field team leader to ensure that suitable mechanisms and support are in place. At any point along this spectrum, field team leaders need to work with their colleagues to find the resources to make a complete safety plan that incorporates all of the points listed in Step #4. If supervisors are facing obstacles to adequately address concerns, they should speak with Bigelow's Vice President of Research and Administration to discuss possible solutions.