

Vassar College Guidance
NSF Safe and Inclusive Work Environment
Plan for Off-Campus or Off-Site Research

Vassar’s [Policy Against Discrimination and Harassment](#) describes its commitment to prohibiting discrimination or harassment in the administration of College programs and activities, including educational policies, admissions policies, scholarships and loan programs, and athletics programs.

This *NSF Safe and Inclusive Work Environment Plan for Off-Campus or Off-Site Research* document establishes that the policy against discrimination and harassment – as well as all related policies listed below – apply to all staff, faculty, students, senior personnel and visitors/collaborators who are conducting sponsored research or engaging in scholarly activities at Vassar whether they are on campus *or* at any off-site location.

It is National Science Foundation (NSF) policy to “foster safe and harassment-free environments whenever science is conducted.” Grantee institutions are required, for proposals submitted on or after January 30, 2023, to certify that they have a plan in place that addresses: (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; and (2) Conduct that is unwelcome, offensive, indecent, obscene, or disorderly.¹

Vassar meets NSF requirements and adheres to its own expectations through the policies linked below, and this document provides additional information about how principal investigators (PIs) should address special circumstances, as dictated by their project-specific activities, in their unique *Safe and Inclusive Work Environment Plans for Off-Campus or Off-Site Research*.

PIs should review and follow these steps below.

1) Written plans are required for NSF-funded awards containing research that is conducted off-site or off-campus, so PIs must determine whether research being conducted on their NSF-funded award meets the funding agency’s definition.² When making this determination, keep in mind that the intent of NSF’s requirement is to provide guidance and protection for participants when they will not have ready access to on-campus, in-person resources. If participants are sufficiently distant from campus such that access to these resources is more limited than if they were on campus, a plan is needed. “Day trips” or excursions to public places where participants are returning without an overnight stay may not require a plan,

¹ Vassar is required to notify NSF of: Any finding/determination regarding the PI or any co-PI that demonstrates a violation of awardee policies or codes of conduct, statutes, regulations, or executive orders relating to sexual harassment, other forms of harassment, or sexual assault; and/or if the PI or any co-PI is placed on administrative leave or if any administrative action has been imposed on the PI or any co-PI by the awardee relating to any finding/determination or an investigation of an alleged violation. Such notification will be submitted by Vassar’s Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) to NSF’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion within ten business days from the date of the finding/determination, or the date of the placement of a PI or co-PI by the awardee on administrative leave or imposition of an administrative action, whichever is sooner.

² NSF defines “off-campus or off-site research” as “data/information/samples being collected off-campus or off-site, such as fieldwork on research vessels and aircraft.”

unless the nature of the off-campus research activity is likely to create a larger-than-normal opportunity for harassment to occur.³ When in doubt, consult with the Grants Office.

- 2) If a plan is required, review the relevant linked policies below.
- 3) Complete the project-specific information on the template provided below.
- 4) Attach the completed project-specific plan to this document.
- 5) Distribute a copy to each participant in the off-campus or off-site research *prior* to those individuals leaving campus to participate in those activities.
- 6) Electronic communication is best for this distribution, not only because of the relevant hyperlinks, but also since PIs must retain documentation of who received the plan. Signup sheets that include a statement that plans were distributed might also be sufficient, and the plan itself, along with that documentation, should be retained in PIs' grant files.
- 7) PIs can send their plans and documentation to the Grants Office as well; the plan may not need to be submitted to NSF unless requested.
- 8) Vassar's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EEOA) can provide training for you and your researchers. They can tailor interactive workshops and seminars to your project-specific needs, providing participants with opportunities to engage in discussion and activities that challenge existing perspectives while understanding those that differ. For further information or to schedule a training session, please contact the [EEOA Office](#).

There are some [excellent on-line resources](#) for helping PIs facilitate, ensure and document various mechanisms that ensure safe and inclusive environments for all researchers on their respective projects, and the Grants Office team is always available to assist. Other considerations related to the NSF policy and Safe and Inclusive Work Environment Plan development include:

- The plan should identify steps 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
- Communications within the team and to Vassar should be considered in the plan, minimizing singular points within the communications pathway (e.g., a single person overseeing access to a single satellite phone).
- Any special circumstances such as the involvement of multiple organizations or the presence of third parties in the working environment should be taken into account.
- In the event that the off-site location is outside of the United States, there are additional steps that may need to be taken, including using [Vassar's Travel Registry](#) and completing an associated checklist. The Grants Office can connect you to relevant offices/sites.
- The process for making incident reports as well as how any reports received will be resolved should also be accounted for.
- The plan must be disseminated to individuals participating in the off-campus or off-site research **prior to departure**. Proposers may not need to submit the plan to NSF for review. The Grants Office can advise on individual NSF directorate requirements related to plan submission.

³ Plans can be re-used and re-distributed for multiple off-campus research activities as long as project-specific information/updates are made where needed.

- Individuals who have experienced or suspect misbehavior can contact their supervisor or report to the EOAA Office at Vassar. Individuals can also avail themselves of other reporting channels, as detailed in the Safe and Inclusive Plan and/or the College's [Whistleblower Policy](#).

RELEVANT RESOURCES AND POLICIES

- [Standards in the Conduct of Research](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Support, Advocacy & Violence Prevention](#)
- [Training and Workshops](#)
- [Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office](#)
 - [Non-Discrimination](#)
 - [Affirmative Action](#)
 - [Bias Incident and Bias Crime](#)
 - [Disability Accommodations and Support Services](#)
 - [Sexual Misconduct and Gender-Based Violence](#)
 - [Title IX Policy](#)
- **Discrimination and Harassment**
 - [Information for Complainants](#)
 - [Information for Respondents](#)
 - [Prohibited Forms of Discrimination](#)
- [Policy on Reporting Improper or Unlawful Activities and Prohibition of Retaliation](#)
 - [Confidential Reporting](#)
 - [Formal Reporting](#)
 - [Students' Bill of Rights](#)
 - [Reporting Obligations under Clery](#)
- [Whistleblower Policy](#)
- **Resolution Process**
 - [Investigation](#)
 - [Support Person or Advisor](#)
 - [When the Accused Is a Student](#)
 - [When the Accused Is an Employee](#)
 - [Addressing Behavior of Third Parties](#)
 - [Retaliation](#)
 - [Records & Privacy](#)

**NSF Safe and Inclusive Work Environment
Plan for Off-Campus or Off-Site Research
Project-Specific Information**

PI instructions: *This plan should be no more than two pages when submitted as part of an NSF application. It can then be extended, post-award and as needed, for distribution to participants, along with the above institutional plan, which includes all relevant hyperlinks.*

This plan can also be written in narrative format as long the key four requirements are addressed.

<i>Shaded information to be completed only at time of participant distribution.</i>	
Principal Investigator (PI) Name	
PI Cell/Off-campus contact number	
Alternate contact number (not PI)	<i>Someone other than the PI should be identified</i>
Additional local/off-site contacts	<i>Embassy/consulate if international, for example</i>
NSF Project/Grant Title	
Plan Date	<i>Insert date the plan was distributed</i>
Departure/Return Dates	
1) Brief description of off-campus field setting for research activity	<i>Such as fieldwork, activities on a vessel, overnight research in off-campus location, etc. Note that international travel may require additional steps, including registration in the Vassar Travel Registry.</i>
2) Special circumstances or unique challenges that participants should know about related to the off-campus site	<i>For example, remote locations might necessitate satellite phone; physical barriers in some locations may restrict full participation; variance in cultural norms may necessitate advance training, etc.</i>
2a) Steps to address any unique circumstances or challenges and/or to nurture an inclusive environment	<i>PIs may establish shared roles, responsibilities, review codes of conduct, provide specialized training, schedule regular mentor/mentee check-ins, etc.</i>
2b) If collaborators from other organizations will be involved, list them here and confirm that the PI has consulted with them on all related items.	<i>For example, PI will be working with collaborators from University and federal agency and scheduled virtual meeting in advance to review with full research team all relevant codes of conduct, process for reporting misconduct, etc.</i>

3) What communication tools are in place for participants to report suspected misconduct?	<i>Traditional cell service or internet options, for example, unless limited by remote location.</i>
4) Description of reporting, responding, and resolving harassment issues if they arise. Who can participants contact – besides the PI – about suspected misbehavior?	<i>Multiple contacts are provided in the institutional plan above and can be listed here, and the process for addressing issues immediately and at the off-site location should be considered.</i>