

Guidelines for Safe and Equitable Fieldwork

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Why is this guide important?

We want to ensure the safety of all individuals involved in fieldwork or field trips through the School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences (SAFS). We have compiled and linked to Environmental Health and Safety ([EH&S](#)) requirements below regarding specific policies and practices that must be followed when conducting work in the field. This is to ensure safe practices and to be in compliance with University of Washington policies. However, in addition to these EH&S resources and requirements, we present a list of equity considerations to guide researchers in their field practices to better serve and ensure the safety of individuals with marginalized and underserved identities that may experience [heightened risk](#) in field situations. Inconsistencies or vague field safety policies have a negative impact on all participants, but a disproportionately negative impact on these individuals.

This guide is a tool both for people planning/leading fieldwork projects and for participants. It is critical for field leader(s) and crew to have a shared understanding of expectations.

This guide is a living document and will be updated as needed. Suggestions are welcome, and you can email the chairs of the Equity and Inclusion Committee at safsincl@uw.edu to provide feedback or request a time to discuss the content in this guide.

Rationale

- This guide does not replace any of the required documentation required by EH&S and/or SAFS but instead aims to extend fieldwork preparation by focusing on specific equity and inclusion considerations.
- Thoughtful instruction, guidance, and training for team members, volunteers, or students benefits everyone and ensures the safety and intentional inclusion of individuals with identities most at risk of harassment, discrimination, or barriers to participation.

- Many of the suggestions in this guide rely on preparation, thought, and discussion prior to the start of fieldwork. We recommend anyone with even the potential to conduct or participate in fieldwork give themselves ample time to read this guide and other resources.
- In fieldwork, stressful situations and tight timelines can lead to a mentality of “the work must always be done, even at the expense of the well-being of the crew”. **This is not safe, equitable, or true.** If you have concerns regarding the fieldwork you are being asked to do, you can submit a report to the [SAFS Anonymous Feedback and Reporting Tool](#) or reach out to [EHS](#) with a specific concern or anonymous report.
- Fieldwork can provide an amazing opportunity for a person to learn, grow, and deepen their scientific knowledge. Because safety concerns can serve as barriers to a person’s participation in fieldwork, following safe practices can lead to more equitable access to these learning opportunities. It is our entire community’s responsibility to ensure safe and equitable practices are followed.

Roles and Responsibilities by Position

The role of each person in maintaining field safety will vary depending on their position within the university. The table below briefly lays out the responsibilities of different persons in mutually creating and implementing equitable field practices.

Role	Responsibility
Administration	Share and ensure implementation of EHS policies , review Field Safety Plans if concerns arise, communicate concerns to the College, address parties responsible for persistent field safety violations in a timely manner
Principal Investigator	Share and implement EHS policies , create and/or evaluate Field Safety Plans , communicate regularly with Field Leader (if different than self) and team, ensure recommended items are provided, address reported issues and anonymous feedback in a timely manner
Field Leader	Ensure team has access to and has discussed recommended items , communicate safety issues to Principal Investigator (if different than self), ensure field safety practices are followed, report unsafe practices or incidents anonymously or officially
Field Crew	Reads and discusses recommended items ; takes trainings and pays attention to field safety practices; contributes to the safety, well-being, and comfort of all members of the Field Crew; reports unsafe practices or incidents anonymously or officially

Required and Recommended Preparation

The University of Washington and SAFS require that trip organizers complete and have the following documents on file:

- [Risk Assessment](#)
- [SAFS Field Health and Safety Plan](#) - to be reviewed and approved by the SAFS Director and Assistant Director of Facilities
- Other documentation as required (e.g., medical release forms, liability waivers, etc.)

In addition, we recommend that the organizer for a project or field trip should provide the following information to all participants before departure. Share these documents and expectations with participants as early as possible to allow them time to review, ask questions, and prepare.

- “What to expect” document overview, including:
 - General accessibility
 - Physical activity
 - Weather/environment
 - Water/meals/snacks/food allergy considerations
 - Bathrooms/showers/sleeping arrangements
 - Contact with individuals outside of the team
 - Wildlife interactions
- Safety manual
- Reporting structures list
- Training checklists
- Training manuals (may be provided on site)
- Equipment checklists
- Emergency procedures list (may be provided on site)
- Team member and support contact information
- First aid, wilderness first aid, and CPR training (as needed)
- Pre-trip meeting to go over expectations, set community norms, and answer questions
- This guide!

Faculty/PIs/site supervisors are knowledgeable about their specific field sites and are expected to write the above documents following [general](#) and [detailed](#) EH&S guidance, existing samples, and best practices. All of the above should be reviewed and revised annually by the research team to ensure safe practices.

Equity Considerations Checklist

The following are specific considerations for creating equitable field safety practices and safe and inclusive field spaces. Before going into the field, all team members should communicate about important safety information and equipment; set expectations that are reasonable, safe,

and accomplish the stated goals of the fieldwork; and plan to respond to unexpected circumstances in safe and effective ways. Here are some specific tips and guidance.

Preparing the Team

- ☐ Read through the [SAFS Code of Conduct](#)
- ☐ Arrange pre-trip [discussion](#) (or training, preferably) on communication and conflict resolution for team participants including the Field Leader and Principal Investigator (if different people)
 - ☐ Develop community values, norms, and expectations with input from the whole team
- ☐ Read through [safety considerations](#) for people of color, [queer and trans folks](#), women, people with different religious practices
 - ☐ Consider local culture/climate around folks of marginalized identities
 - ☐ Identify local [hate groups](#)
 - ☐ Prepare exit strategies in advance for if a hostile situation cannot be resolved
- ☐ Read through safety considerations for people with differences in [access and ability](#)
 - ☐ Discuss “What to expect” document prior to departure in order to give folks a chance to prepare and speak up if they have any concerns about their ability to engage in certain aspects of fieldwork
 - ☐ Review how to have conversations about accessibility/accommodations (including [how to ask folks what they need](#), [how to respond to a request](#))
 - ☐ Consider transportation options for those without vehicles or with limited mobility
 - ☐ Consider field sites and possible accessibility issues for those with limited mobility (e.g., absence of paved/unpaved paths, boardwalks, stairs, etc.) and investigate alternatives (e.g., [accessible hikes](#))
 - ☐ Consider field trip alternatives (e.g., virtual presentations, museum trips) for courses where field trips are currently required

Planning the Trip

- ☐ Follow best practices for [toilet stops](#) and bathing facilities
 - ☐ Communicate bathroom availability (frequency, facilities, and supplies) in advance to all participants
 - ☐ Arrange for gender neutral bathrooms or communicate alternatives if unavailable
 - ☐ Ensure bathing/showering facilities, if available, are secure and private
 - ☐ Bring extra menstrual hygiene and hand-sanitizing products
- ☐ Follow best practices for housing/sleeping arrangements
 - ☐ Share floor plans/layouts of field housing in advance
 - ☐ Avoid automatically segregating sleeping quarters by gender
 - ☐ Discuss team members’ sleeping preferences individually
 - ☐ Allow people to have private rooms/tents if available or pick their own room/tentmate(s)
 - ☐ Discuss alternatives if private accommodation is needed but not available
 - ☐ Identify private locations for changing clothes, taking care of medical needs, etc.

- ☐ Ensure rooms or [tents](#) can be locked from the inside
- ☐ Consider timing and duration of travel with respect to [caregiver responsibilities](#)
- ☐ Assess that proper gear is available for all participants and provide options for those without gear or the means to purchase it (e.g., [UW Gear Garage](#) rentals, funds to purchase supplies)

Communicating in the Field

- ☐ When working in small communities or remote areas, notify local communities of work and introduce all team members to host community
- ☐ Equip team members to handle power dynamics in the field (between team members or the public)
 - ☐ All team members should complete:
 - ☐ UW-required [sexual harassment and Title IX training](#)
 - ☐ Bystander intervention training (such as [offerings from Right to Be](#))
 - ☐ The Principal Investigator and Field Leader (if different people) should have practices in place to:
 - ☐ Empower folks to identify and respond to an unsafe situation without fear of retaliation
 - ☐ Ensure members are trained prior to tasks
 - ☐ Conduct training in an empowering and safe manner
 - ☐ Check in throughout project to assess everyone's comfort and safety
 - ☐ Provide anonymous dropboxes or emails by which to receive feedback
 - ☐ Identify a third-party individual to act as an intermediary between students/employees and their supervisor in case of conflict
- ☐ Provide information on reporting resources and accountability
 - ☐ Create a plan for documenting incidents immediately after they happen
 - ☐ Provide [reporting resources](#) for official complaints or issues
 - ☐ Create and communicate a plan for following up on concerns
 - ☐ Set and communicate a timeline by which incidents will be responded to
 - ☐ Request feedback (anonymous or public) after the completion of the trip
- ☐ Provide teams with documentation and safety contact information (which can be particularly important for increasing the safety of people of color in the field)
 - ☐ Provide paperwork explaining researchers are official university employees, etc.
 - ☐ Provide branded clothing, stickers, ID tags, bags, car decals (optional)
 - ☐ Give all team members a physical list of local emergency contacts
 - ☐ Identify locations where cellular service may be limited, establish alternative methods of communication, and ensure all participants are familiar with the communication plan

Additional Resources

UW offers a wide variety of existing trainings that cover some of these topics more in-depth. Please visit the following websites for more information:

- [EH&S Trainings](#)
- [SafeCampus](#)
- [Title IX Office](#)
- [Disability Resources for Students](#)
- [The Q Center](#)
- [Child Care at UW](#)

The following organizations offer trainings and other resources that are recommended for people participating in fieldwork. If you know of another organization that offers relevant training, please email safsincl@uw.edu:

- [ADVANCEGeo](#): training about implicit bias, bystander intervention, etc.
- [FieldFutures](#): training about sexual harassment (prevent, intervene, report), resource list
- [The Fieldwork Initiative](#): training (FEIST), reading lists, other resources
- [Right To Be](#): training about bystander awareness, conflict de-escalation, etc.

The following list includes links to articles, papers, and guides relevant to those engaging in fieldwork. Many of these documents were instrumental to the creation of this guide. If you know of other resources that are relevant to fieldwork safety and equity, please email safsincl@uw.edu:

Anadu, Ali, and Jackson (2020): [“Ten Steps to Protect BIPOC Scholars in the Field”](#)
Bazzana, et al (2022): [“Recommendations to the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Toronto, on the Decolonization of Department-Affiliated Field Work”](#)
Chiarella and Vurro (2020): [“Fieldwork and disability: an overview for an inclusive experience”](#)
Chicago Sun Times (2020): [“Calling out racism, Black scientists say they face discrimination while doing fieldwork”](#)
Consortium for Ocean Leadership and California State University Desert Studies (2021): [“Report of the Workshop to Promote Safety in Field Sciences”](#)
Coon and Alexander, et al (2023): [“Best practices for LGBTQ+ inclusion during ecological fieldwork: Considering safety, cis/heteronormativity, and structural barriers”](#)
Demery and Pipkin (2020): [“Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions”](#)
Earth and Space Sciences Handbook: [“Field Trips”](#)
EH&S: [“Boating Safety Manual”](#)
EH&S: [“Diving Safety Manual”](#)
EH&S: [“Field Operations Safety Manual”](#)
EH&S [resources for outdoor heat exposure](#)
EH&S [resources for field operations safety](#)
EH&S [resources for boating safety](#)
EH&S [resources for diving safety](#)

EH&S [training course selection guides](#)

EH&S: ["Working Alone Safely"](#)

Gewin (2015): ["Indecent Advances: Surveys of sexual harassment and assault during field research and on campus reveal a hitherto secret problem"](#)

Greene, et al (2020): ["Toilet stops in the field: An educational primer and recommended best practices for field-based teaching"](#)

Lynn, Howells, and Stein (2018): ["Family and the field: Expectations of a field-based research career affect researcher family planning decisions"](#)

McGill, et al (2021): ["You are welcome here: A practical guide to diversity, equity, and inclusion for undergraduates embarking on an ecological research experience"](#)

Ramírez-Castañeda and Westeen, et al (2022): ["A set of principles and practical suggestions for equitable fieldwork in biology"](#)

Respect and Equality in Fieldwork Committee (REIF) UW (2018): ["Preventing Harassment in Fieldwork Situations"](#)

Scheuerell, Applied Ecology Lab Book: ["In the Field"](#)

Tucker and Horton (2018): ["The show must go on! Fieldwork, mental health and wellbeing in Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences"](#)

Whitmeyer and Mogk (2013): ["Safety and Liability Issues Related to Field Trips and Field Courses"](#)

Acknowledgements

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