

USGS STEP UP! EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES: A BYSTANDER INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR THE PLANETARY SCIENCE COMMUNITY. K. A. Bennett¹, P. Garcia¹, and L. Kestay¹,
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Introduction: In recent years there has been a new cultural awareness of the varied forms of harassment that are prevalent across society. Within planetary science (and adjacent fields such as astronomy or geoscience) there have been multiple high-profile harassment and sexual assault scandals that have come to light [e.g., 1-4]. In addition to these severe cases of harassment, there has been a greater understanding of how low-level harassment can permeate the workplace and cause great harm to community members. These issues have a disproportionately negative impact on people who have minority identities and can lead to toxic work environments [4]. This greater awareness of these issues is an essential prerequisite to taking action to address them. Here we report on one way to encourage such action, the USGS Step UP! Employee Empowerment Strategies (SEES) bystander intervention training. SEES presents training materials designed to reduce harassment and promote positive workplace culture in a professional science environment.

Bystander Intervention: Bystander intervention is an evidence-based framework intended to reduce the burden on targets of harassment by shifting the responsibility of responding to harassment from the target to the community. The key is to have the community recognize that harassment negatively affects everyone, extending well beyond the target of harassment, into the community, and ultimately harms science itself.

Several workplace health and safety organizations, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the National Institutes of Health, have determined that one of the most successful ways to reduce harassment is a system of antiharassment programs broadly described as “bystander intervention” [e.g., 5-9]. The USGS has included the SEES training as part of their annual anti-harassment training requirements.

The University of Arizona developed a bystander intervention program for sports teams [9]. With their support, and with the support of NASA funding, this program was modified to be applicable to scientific teams and workplaces.

The primary goals and outcomes of USGS SEES are to 1) raise awareness of barriers to intervening in a situation, 2) increase attendees’ motivation and desire to help, 3) supply participants with tools and strategies to help them respond to various levels of harassment, and 4) build up the skills and confidence of attendees in

using intervention techniques, all while 5) ensuring the safety and well-being of the participants.

The program begins by introducing the concept of a brave space, where participants are encouraged to feel comfortable enough to share experiences and discussions with the group, with the facilitator setting an example by sharing something about themselves. Topics including prosocial behavior, microaggressions, and the bystander effect are introduced. Throughout the program, videos are used to show examples of harassment or instances of (non)intervention. These videos are used to promote discussion of issues, and to illuminate how and why we decide to act in a situation. Class participants take an anonymous survey so they can see how their colleagues have been affected by harassment. This is particularly effective when a participant believes that harassment does not occur in the workplace. Participants are introduced to the Step UP! training, which consists of 1) Notice the event, 2) Interpret it as a problem, 3) Assume personal responsibility, 4) Know how to help, and 5) Implement the help (Step UP!). Attendees are encouraged to actively participate, contribute to the discussion, and share their own experiences.

Since 2020, this training has been adapted to be given virtually. This includes changing the examples so that they are relevant to current situations and varying the engagement strategies to be applicable in a virtual environment. Moving forward, we anticipate both virtual and in person options for this training.

Service for the Planetary Science Community: Workshop facilitators at the USGS are currently funded by NASA and can provide this training to departments, conferences, or mission teams at no cost. To schedule a training or to inquire about becoming a training facilitator, email Kristen Bennett at kbennett@usgs.gov.

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