

**USGS STEP UP! EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES: A BYSTANDER INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR THE PLANETARY SCIENCE COMMUNITY.** K. A. Bennett<sup>1</sup>, P. Garcia<sup>1</sup>, and L. Keszthelyi<sup>1</sup>,  
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**Introduction:** In recent years there has been greater awareness of the varied forms of harassment that are prevalent across society. Within planetary science (and adjacent fields such as astronomy and 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 is new understanding of how low-level, pervasive harassment can create a hostile or toxic workplace and cause great harm to community members. These issues have a disproportionately negative impact on people who have minority identities [4]. The improved awareness of these issues is an essential prerequisite to taking action to address them.

One way NASA has moved forward in this sphere is by requiring Inclusion Plans to be submitted with several types of larger proposals, including Solar System Exploration Research Virtual Institute (SSERVI) and Payloads and Research Investigations on the Surface of the Moon (PRISM), with the hope that this will lead to more of the planetary science community thinking deeply about inclusive team strategies, reducing harassment, and making the community more welcoming to all people. Here we present one established program for reducing harassment and improving inclusivity that community members can incorporate into future Inclusion Plans. The USGS Step UP! Employee Empowerment Strategies (SEES) bystander intervention training presents materials specifically 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. A key step is to have the community recognize that harassment’s negative effects extend well beyond the target of harassment and ultimately harms science itself. For example, if a target of harassment decides to leave the field rather than continue to endure the harassment, any scientific progress that would have been made by that individual is lost.

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 now includes the SEES training as part of their annual anti-harassment training requirements.

SEES is adapted from a bystander intervention program for sports teams developed by the University of Arizona [10]. With their support, and NASA and USGS 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 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 sensitive experiences and discussions with the group, with the facilitator setting an example by sharing something about themselves. Topics such as prosocial behavior, microaggressions, and the bystander effect are introduced. Throughout the program, videos are used to show examples of harassment or instances of nonintervention. These videos are used to promote discussion of issues and to illuminate how and why we respond depending on the 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.

**Other versions of the training:** A field-version of this workshop was developed in 2019 and is available to the community. Field work is an exciting part of science, but also has the potential for more abundant or severe harassment to occur. There are several reasons for this, including the remote nature of the work which can result in participants being physically isolated in a remote location and being dependent on the harasser for basic necessities such as food, shelter, or transportation. Also, participants can spend long periods of time in a

“third space” away from the office, which may result in unprofessional cultural norms and more chances for conflict. The field-version of the USGS SEES bystander intervention training enables discussion of these issues and how to address them.

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

Finally, several related trainings (i.e., shorter, follow-up refresher courses) are in development and will be available to the community in late 2023 or early 2024.

**Service for the Planetary Science Community:**

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

**Acknowledgments:** We thank NASA and the USGS for funding this work, and Moses Milazzo and Alex Etheridge for developing the original SEES training.

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