

# Focus Groups: Overview

**Overview.** The focus groups will be facilitated first by Alteristic and then by VRLC, with a notetaker for both sections.

**Purpose.** The purpose of conducting focus groups is to ascertain an understanding of organizational and community culture on the ice, perceptions of the issues of sexual assault and harassment, perceptions of leadership support, unique needs, and the formal and informal interactions between USAP participants on the ice.

**Length.** Up to two hours, based on recruitment limitations. Time shared equally between Alteristic and VRLC.

## Key Topics and Goals for Focus Groups:

- *Relationships.* Better understanding of daily routines and interactions between individuals enroute to and while on-ice (i.e., between coworkers, activities engaged in for relaxation, social activities and norms, dating, parties, etc.)
- *Organizational and community culture.* General culture en-route, to and on-ice.
- *USAP participants' experiences and perceptions.* Capture diverse experience across genders, sexual orientation, race, professional status/hierarchy and exposure to being on-ice (season, station, field work, contractor/grantee/military positions.) Solicit participants' ideas and recommendations to improve training and response to sexual harassment and sexual violence.

## Focus Groups to be interviewed: (6-10 participants in each group)

- South Pole Station (Open – mix of participants)
- Palmer (Open – mix of participants)
- Research Vessel team members (Open – mix of participants)
- JTF-SA/Support Force Antarctica (SFA), Air National Guard, AF, other military personnel (Open – mix of DoD participants)
- Leidos/Sub-contractors (Seasonal/Direct Labor Open – mix of participants)
- Leidos/Sub-contractors (Seasonal/Direct Labor Women only)
- Leidos/Sub-contractors (Seasonal/Full time employees deployed)
- Grantees/Research Team--McMurdo (Open – mix of participants)
- Grantees/Research Team--McMurdo (Women only)
- Grantees/Research Team--Near Field (Open – mix of participants)
- Grantees--Deep Field (Open – mix of participants)

**Confidentiality.** Focus group participants will be told at the beginning of each group to use only non-identifying information either about colleagues or themselves when discussing incidents of sexual harassment, sexual violence or interactions with contractors, grantees, military, NSF or

other groups regarding a complaint or investigation. The interviewers intend to remind them of this periodically during the interviews. The focus group facilitators will also ask participants at the beginning to share whether they are mandated to report any disclosures should they occur (to further underscore the importance of not revealing personally identifying information)

## Focus Group: Protocol and Questions

### Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. Let's do brief introductions.

[Brief introductions: Facilitator and notetaker (Alteristic), facilitator and notetaker (VRLC), key stakeholder(s)]

As you may know, we are a part of a team conducting a Needs Assessment for the National Science Foundation (NSF), Office of Polar Programs (OPP) and for the United States Antarctic Program (USAP) Sexual Assault Harassment Prevention Training and Response (SAHPR) program. The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to learn more about current conditions relating to sexual assault and harassment on the ice and across OPP and partner organizations, and identify feasible recommendations that will support OPP in developing a successful, comprehensive approach to address and prevent sexual assault and harassment.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us and discuss your experience. We are holding several key stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and administering surveys as a part of this Needs Assessment with many USAP participants. We are going to record our conversation today and [INSERT NAMES OF NOTETAKERS] will be taking notes. We will capture the actual words that are said, to ensure the Needs Assessment accurately reflects participants' experiences and perceptions. After we complete the data collection process, we will analyze the information and identify themes to inform the Needs Assessment Report. **Please note, we will not link your name to your words.** Recordings and transcripts will be available *only* to the Needs Assessment Team. When we are done with the data collection process we will preserve them to the end of the project and delete them. They will not be made available to members of OPP or Partner Organizations. Themes and data will be summarized in group form for the Needs Assessment Report and responses will be reported as a group and not attributed to a single individual. I do ask that you keep what is spoken here confidential. I will let you know before I start recording.

You can skip any questions you don't want to answer, and you may take a break or quit at any time. If there is something you would like to share with one of us privately, we will provide our contact information in the chat box, and you can feel free to contact us directly.

We have XX minutes to talk. We may or may not use the full time.

### Definitions:

Before we start, I want to share some definitions so that we have a shared understanding of what we're talking about.

*[Share on PowerPoint slide.]*

**USAP participants** and community members are defined as all persons working or visiting at a USAP or an NSF managed station, field camp, other facility, ship, or aircraft. This includes, but is not limited to, researchers, students, contractors, federal civilian and military personnel. We may refer to USAP participants as community members on the ice, during this focus group.

**Sexual assault** is defined as intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, threats, intimidation, abuse of authority, or when the victim does not or cannot consent.

**Harassment** is defined as behaviors that demonstrate hostility related to race, gender, age, ability, sexuality, belief system, age, or other identity. Such behaviors may include offensive jokes, slurs, name calling, physical assaults or threats, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, and/or interference with work performance.

Are there any questions before we get started?

Will you please verbally agree that you consent to participate in this virtual focus group?

*[Get verbal indication that each participant consents to participate. If anyone would like to leave at this point, that is fine. Thank them for their time.]*

I'd like to start by doing a round robin in which each of you share your first name and your job/position. We'll do this before I start the recorder.

I'm going to start recording now.

*[Note: You may not have time to get to all of the questions. Concentrate on the main questions, the prompts are optional.]*

### **Questions:**

Let's start by talking about the culture on the ice and your work environments.

1. Tell me a little bit about the culture of your typical work settings.
  - How do people communicate with each other formally?
    - *[Prompt]* For example, regular meetings, email chains, apps such as Slack, text messages, informal conversations, etc.
  - What about informally?
    - For example, social media, text messages, informal conversations, going for a walk or to get coffee, etc.
  - *[Prompt]* Do people tend to get to know each other while they're at work? Do they socialize or keep it professional?
  - *[Prompt]* How do people express themselves or endorse issues they care about (e.g., social media, t-shirts or other swag, etc.)?

- *[Prompt]* Do people tend to eat lunch/take breaks together or spend time together outside of work socially?
2. Tell me a little bit about the culture on the ice, in general.
    - *[Prompt]* Who interacts with whom?
    - *[Prompt]* How do people socialize?
    - *[Prompt]* What do people do for fun, outside of work?
    - *[Prompt]* What does dating or hooking up look like on the ice?
  3. We know that people often behave in certain ways based on the people around them. Who is most influential in setting informal norms of day-to-day interactions?
    - *[Prompt]* For example, are supervisors, those who have been around longest, specific personality types, people with certain jobs, etc.?
    - *[Prompt]* How do you know what is acceptable and not acceptable behavior at work or in the community on the ice?

For this next question, we want you to think about the issues of sexual assault and harassment.

4. What kinds of behaviors relating to sexual assault or harassment have you witnessed, heard about, or worry about happening either at work or in the USAP community on the ice?

Now, let's talk about bystander intervention.

5. When you think about intervening as a bystander, why kinds of things might get in your way or stop you from intervening?
  - *[Prompt]* For example, maybe you're shy or don't like confrontation, or you don't want to interrupt the work, or face backlash for saying something.
  - *[Prompt]* What barriers to bystander intervention might be unique to USAP participants? Or to your organization?
6. What are ways you have intervened or seen others intervene?
  - *[Prompt]* What was effective or ineffective about the intervention?
  - *[Prompt]* What do you think could work better?

In our prevention programs, we use the 3 Ds to provide realistic options for people to intervene, even when they have some of the barriers you've mentioned. The three Ds are Direct, Delegate, and Distract.

7. What are ways that you might intervene directly? For example, call someone out, check in with a friend, or tell someone to stop.
8. If you didn't feel comfortable intervening yourself, who could you delegate to that might have more authority or confidence in intervening? For example, a supervisor, manager, co-worker, friend, or group of friends.

9. Finally, what are ways you might distract or de-escalate a situation as a bystander? For example, you could distract yourself by changing the subject, asking for help on a task, or by pulling someone away from a situation to grab coffee.

Now what I want to do is show you typical scenarios used in bystander intervention-focused prevention training and get your response.

10. Are these examples relevant?

*[Insert slide with examples here.]*

Finally, I have some questions about the issues of sexual assault and harassment, in general.

11. Do you think that sexual assault and/or harassment are problems for USAP participants? Why or why not?
12. What kind of information or training do you get about the issues of sexual assault or harassment as a USAP participant?
13. How seriously do you believe the leadership at your organization or institution takes the issues of sexual assault and harassment?
  - *[Prompt]* How do you know?
  - *[Prompt]* What do you see them doing?

Thank you so much for your time today. As a reminder, your names will not be used in any report. Your answers will be compiled with many others and themes from these conversations will be used to inform the Needs Assessment. Please feel free to contact us if you think of anything else you would like to add.

*[Provide contact information in chat.]*

#### Response Focus Group Questions

Depending on the nature of the responses to the earlier questions by Alteristic, some questions may be removed if answers are likely to be redundant.

1. Can you help describe the professional atmosphere on-ice in the Summer months?
2. Can you help describe the professional atmosphere on-ice in the Winter months?
3. Can you describe what your workday looks like? Indoors? Outdoors? Field research? Lab work?
4. Can you describe the sleeping accommodations? Is there ever a time (meaning at Peak season) to be completely alone or is it likely someone is always around?
5. Could you give us a feeling for how folks relax in off-hours on-ice?

[Will use some transition language here to let them know we're moving into set of questions that are more specific to Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment.]

6. Are there instances where you feel circumstances create an atmosphere where sexual harassment does or is likely to happen? Will refresh on definitions provided earlier as reference.
7. Have co-workers or acquaintances told you about sexual or sexually charged comments or other sexual harassment type behavior that was inappropriate or made them uncomfortable?
8. Have you seen, experienced or been told about what you consider to be inappropriate sexual behavior or assault?
9. Regarding the questions above, who engaged in this behavior (NOT name, but rather title/role. E.g., A researcher, a pilot, etc.)
10. Have you ever reported a sexual assault or sexual harassment that someone disclosed to you or that you experienced?
11. Are you aware of any victims who have reported sexual harassment or sexual assault? If so, to whom?
  - a. Are you aware of whether any actions were taken in response to the report?
  - b. If yes, what were those actions?
  - c. What did you think [feel] about the response (or lack thereof)?
  - d. What do you think could/should have happened in response?
  - e. If it was not reported, do you have thoughts on why not?
    - i. What do you think would make it easier to report?
    - ii. Do you think there should be an option for a victim of sexual harassment or assault to report anonymously and ask that no action be taken?
12. To what extent do you think alcohol has played a role in the sexual harassment (including sexual assault) that occurs on the ice?
13. Do you think alcohol use should be monitored or regulated more than it currently is, for sexual assault/sexual harassment-related reasons?
  - a. If yes, what do you think that could look like? E.g., How can it be successful considering adults, alcohol is legal, etc.?
14. Do you feel there are any challenges or barriers you have seen, heard of, or would expect/ are concerned might occur when someone alleges sexual harassment on-ice?
  - a. Is there anything you can suggest that would address these challenges or barriers?
15. Are you aware of any resources available on-ice for victims of sexual assault? What about en-route to the ice?
16. If two people needed to be separated, is that possible or realistic at a station during the summer?
  - a. More possible at one location than at others?
  - b. Is moving to another station feasible? [See other follow-up questions re: who would be moved, how that would be determined, whether the victim has the option to decide whether they or the alleged offender is moved, etc.]

17. Are there measures you think could be taken to try and prevent certain individuals from returning to the ice due to their behavior (or coming in the first place)? If so, what would those measures be?
18. Are there steps you feel could be taken by NSF, your employer or your institution to better prevent sexual harassment / sexual assault behaviors to begin with?
19. (For grantees) Have you been trained by your institution on their Conduct policy regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence?