Field Research and Travel Safety Manual:
Inclusivity Considerations for Underserved, Marginalized and Overburdened Identities

Introduction:

The National Marine Mammal Foundation (NMMF) Field Research Safety and Travel Manual is designed to provide guidance on promoting safety and inclusivity in field research activities, recognizing the importance of addressing risks specifically associated with underserved identities, including women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, among others, who play vital roles in our organization.

This manual goes beyond general field safety guidelines to explicitly address the unique challenges faced by underrepresented individuals during fieldwork. It is essential that all team members feel safe, respected, and supported while conducting research or traveling in both domestic and international settings. By acknowledging and understanding intersectionality - the interconnected nature of an individual's social and cultural identities - we can better recognize and mitigate the risks faced by underrepresented individuals in the field. This manual serves as a crucial resource and guide in creating an environment that is sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of our team members. It encompasses the principles of inclusivity, cultural competency, and respect for all individuals, while emphasizing the importance of risk assessment, mitigation, and emergency preparedness.

As an organization, we are committed to ongoing learning and improvement. We encourage all team members to actively contribute to the enhancement of protocols and ensure that our practices align with current best practices. By implementing the guidelines outlined in this manual, we aim to foster a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all individuals involved in any off-site engagement, including but not limited to work travel, outreach, and/or field research endeavors.

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General Considerations:

a. Basic Field Safety Practices:

- Personnel involved in field work may undergo comprehensive safety training before participating in any research activities. This includes training on general safety protocols, emergency procedures, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), if applicable. Part of the safety training/briefing should include considerations for historically or systemically underserved groups, or for people with disabilities.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to all team members, ensuring it fits properly and accommodates different body types, sizes, and other needs. Consideration should be given to the specific needs of individuals, such as providing PPE options that allow for religious or cultural practices while maintaining safety standards.

b. Awareness of Intersectionality:

- Foster an understanding of intersectionality among all personnel. Recognize that individuals' social and cultural identities can intersect and influence their experiences in the field.
- Encourage team members to reflect on their own identities and biases, as well as the privileges they may possess. Promote empathy, understanding, and allyship among colleagues.

c. Sensitivity Training and Cultural Competency:

- Provide sensitivity training to all team members, ensuring they understand the importance of respecting diverse identities and experiences.
- Offer cultural competency training that addresses the specific cultural, religious, and social nuances of the communities and regions where fieldwork is conducted.

d. Creating an Inclusive Environment:

- Establish clear expectations and guidelines for inclusive behavior that emphasizes respect, empathy, and equal treatment for all team members.
- Encourage open and inclusive communication among team members, creating space

for dialogue, feedback, and support.
- Foster an environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their concerns or reporting incidents of discrimination, bias, or harassment.

Pre-Fieldwork and Travel Preparation

a. Cultural and Contextual Research:

- Conduct thorough research on the cultural, social, and political contexts of the fieldwork locations. This includes understanding local customs, norms, and potential risks that may disproportionately affect historically underserved individuals.
- Engage with local communities, organizations and stakeholders to foster relationships, gain cultural insights, and establish mutual understanding and respect.

b. Identification of Potential Risks:

- Recognize the unique risks and challenges faced by underserved identities in the specific fieldwork locations. This includes understanding potential discrimination, bias, or harassment that may arise from cultural, social, or political factors.
- Conduct a comprehensive risk assessment that explicitly addresses these specific risks, taking into account the experiences and concerns of underserved individuals.

c. Health and Medical Considerations:

- Provide access and information to mental health and medical resources.
- Consider the specific health needs and concerns of underserved individuals, such as access to culturally sensitive healthcare providers and considerations for individuals with chronic illnesses or disabilities. Additional consideration may be given to bathroom needs for various individuals.
- Develop protocols and contingency plans for medical emergencies, ensuring that underserved individuals have equal access to prompt and appropriate medical care.

d. Accommodations for Disabilities and Special Needs:

- Identify and address any potential barriers that may impede the participation of individuals with disabilities in fieldwork activities. This includes providing reasonable accommodations, such as accessible transportation, accommodations, and assistive devices.
- Consult with individuals with disabilities to ensure that their specific needs and requirements are considered during pre-fieldwork planning and preparation.
- Specific accommodations should be given to pregnant and lactating women allowing for appropriate lactation spaces and bathrooms.

Travel Safety:

a. Safe Travel Practices for Domestic and International Destinations:

- Provide comprehensive travel safety guidelines that encompass both domestic and international travel. This includes recommendations for transportation modes, routes, and safe travel times.
- Encourage team members to conduct thorough research on travel advisories, local laws, and customs of the destination to ensure respectful and informed travel behavior with regard to local policies and procedures.
- Promote the use of safe and reputable transportation services and accommodations, prioritizing establishments that have demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity and safety.

b. Addressing Discrimination and Bias During Transportation:

- Educate team members on recognizing and addressing instances of discrimination and bias during travel. Encourage individuals to be proactive allies, intervening when witnessing discriminatory behavior.
- Establish reporting mechanisms for incidents of discrimination or bias during travel, ensuring that underserved individuals feel supported and empowered to report such incidents.

c. Planning for Safe and Inclusive Accommodations:

- Prioritize the selection of accommodations that demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, safety, and respect for all individuals.
- Consider the specific needs of underserved individuals when arranging accommodations, such as ensuring access to gender-neutral or single-gender options based on preferences and cultural considerations.
- Advocate for accommodations that are accessible and inclusive, addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Fieldwork Safety:

a. Risk Assessment and Management Specific to Fieldwork Activities:

- Conduct comprehensive risk assessments that explicitly address the unique risks faced by underserved identities during fieldwork. Identify potential hazards related to the environment, local communities, and socio-cultural factors.
- Develop mitigation strategies that address these risks, including specific measures to minimize incidents of discrimination, bias, or harassment in the field.
- Provide guidance on responding to incidents of discrimination, bias, or harassment in the field. Encourage reporting of such incidents and ensure that appropriate action is taken to address and prevent future occurrences.

b. Strategies for Maintaining Personal and Mental Well-being:

- Promote self-care and mental well-being among all field personnel, recognizing the potential stress and emotional toll that fieldwork may have.
- Provide resources and support for individuals to seek assistance and counseling, addressing the specific needs of underserved identities.
- Encourage team members to engage in open communication, support one another, and establish a sense of community and solidarity in the field.

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Emergency Procedures, Reporting, and Support:

a. Protocols for Emergency Situations:

- Establish clear protocols and guidelines for responding to medical emergencies, natural disasters, or other crisis situations that may arise during fieldwork.
- Ensure that all team members, regardless of their identity, have equal access to emergency services, including medical assistance and evacuation procedures.
- Establish communication channels to relay emergency information and instructions promptly.

b. Reporting Mechanisms:

- Implement clear and accessible reporting mechanisms for incidents of discrimination, bias, or harassment. Ensure confidentiality and non-retaliation for individuals reporting such incidents.
- Train field supervisors and team leaders to respond appropriately and sensitively to reported incidents, offering support and guidance.

c. Support Resources:

- Offer comprehensive support resources and networks for underserved individuals, connecting them with counseling services, advocacy organizations, and legal support, if needed.
- Maintain a confidential and supportive environment for individuals to seek assistance and discuss concerns related to discrimination, bias, or harassment.
- Regularly review and update support resources to ensure their effectiveness and relevance.

References

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