Code of Conduct

Purpose and Scope

A Code of Conduct is a tool that defines organizational norms for behavior. These documents serve as accountability mechanisms to ensure that individuals, supervisors/managers, partners, and the organization itself are responsible for a values-driven approach to the mission, especially as it relates to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA).

The NOAA Ocean Exploration Code of Conduct serves as a guiding document for interpersonal relationships within and external to the office. NOAA Ocean Exploration team members are expected to foster a safe, supportive, and inclusive work environment. This Code of Conduct includes a non-comprehensive list of behaviors and actions that support a positive, inclusive work environment. This Code of Conduct does **not** provide disciplinary guidelines or consequences for engaging in disrespectful behavior and does not establish a reporting structure. Rather, it seeks to establish a common understanding for all members of NOAA Ocean Exploration and universal expectations for how we interact with one another in order to foster a culture that exemplifies teamwork, embraces innovation, and values equity and inclusion to achieve mission excellence. This document seeks to support existing Department of Commerce and NOAA policies (see Existing Policies and Resources below) and federal, state, and local laws that prohibit any form of illegal harassment of any individual because of race, religion, color, gender, age, national origin, disability, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other protected class. Corrective action, discipline, and responses to behavior that violate this Code of Conduct are beyond the scope of this document.

This is a living document that can adapt to reflect the evolving nature of our office's growth and values. The following are guidelines for use of this Code of Conduct:

- A working group of volunteers from each Division (excluding Leadership Team members) will convene annually to reassess the Code of Conduct and make any relevant amendments to its content. Any member of the office can provide suggestions for amendments to include in future versions of the document.
- The Code of Conduct and any future amendments to it must be reviewed and approved by the Leadership Team.
- Each member of the office (federal and affiliate) will be asked to review the Code of Conduct annually to reaffirm their commitment to upholding outlined expectations. It is

recommended that Leadership organize an annual staff meeting to discuss the Code of Conduct and any relevant updates. New members of the office will review the Code of Conduct as part of their onboarding activities. Supervisors should refer to the Code of Conduct on a continuous basis to ensure all office members (including the Leadership Team) are adhering to it, and actively promoting the positive culture the office is seeking to cultivate.

Collaborations and Partnerships

Internal and external interactions should have the same expectation of respectful treatment. Contractors, grantees, and other external partners working directly alongside NOAA Ocean Exploration will be provided a copy of the Code of Conduct and expect their personnel to comply with the Code of Conduct throughout their working relationship with NOAA Ocean Exploration. Members of NOAA Ocean Exploration may report incidents of disrespectful behavior by outside organizations internally and expect those reports to have meaningful consequences. In circumstances where harassing and bullying behaviors are committed by Ocean Exploration partners, the office will take actions as appropriate and necessary, including but not limited to reporting the conduct of these individuals to their employers for disciplinary action, prohibiting access to NOAA facilities and NOAA sponsored events, and terminating relationships.

Guiding Principles

NOAA Ocean Exploration affirms its commitment to ensure a safe, positive, supportive, and respectful working environment of the highest professional and ethical standards of conduct, which is critical to organizational and individual employee success. NOAA Ocean Exploration believes that such a civil and inclusive community characterized by mutual respect for the contributions of all individuals is essential to our ability to provide excellent service to the ocean community. The NOAA Ocean Exploration Code of Conduct is founded on the following three Guiding Principles, which reflect our personal and organizational values:

Respect for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion

NOAA Ocean Exploration is a highly diverse organization composed of people from differing backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Each person's contribution is valued and their opinion should be heard and treated with dignity, civility, and respect. A broad diversity of backgrounds, experiences, ethnicities, cultures, personalities, and skills creates opportunities for participation and innovation and contributes to a productive, high-achieving workforce. Members of NOAA Ocean Exploration are expected to treat each other with respect at all times, without regard to gender, race, religion, creed, color, citizenship, national origin, age, marital

status, veteran status, family responsibilities and choices, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or disability. We hold diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion as core components of our mission that are woven into the fabric of our goals.

Integrity

All individuals should demonstrate personal and organizational integrity in all matters. NOAA Ocean Exploration members seek to conduct themselves in a manner that is honest, direct, and open to receiving information that will support a more respectful, equitable, and inclusive workplace. Central to the principle of integrity is effective communication, which includes listening, understanding, and creating space for everyone to contribute and be heard. Integrity also demands respect for an individual's ideas, skills, and expertise, as well as equitable distribution of credit across collaborations. Civility and respect for others should be demonstrated through behavior, attitude, and language.

Accountability

Accepting personal responsibility and accountability are the foundation of successful outcomes for individuals, teams, and the organization. In addition to holding ourselves accountable internally, we are accountable for our actions externally when working with NOAA partners. NOAA Ocean Exploration expects to be the model representation of a respectful, inclusive, diverse, and accessible workplace, and seeks to foster the same in our partners, leading by example. Accountability also expects good faith efforts to seek understanding, to apologize after causing harm, to listen to and work towards acceptance of sincere apologies, to commit to understand each other better, and to strive for conflict resolution.

Responsibilities

Individual

Individuals within NOAA Ocean Exploration are responsible for conducting themselves in a professional manner and in accordance with the Guiding Principles. Respectful conduct towards coworkers, internal, and external partners is expected without condition at all times. In addition to avoiding disrespectful behaviors, members of NOAA Ocean Exploration are responsible for seeking to understand why these behaviors are disrespectful and how they can contribute to a positive work environment. Examples of behaviors that contribute to a positive work environment include:

- Practicing active listening
- Remaining respectful during disagreements
- Creating open, respectful and clear communication, with timely responses to colleagues

- Recognizing and providing credit for achievements, accomplishments, and ideas
- Cooperating and collaborating with others, using appropriate points of contact across divisions
- Fostering inclusive meetings that allow for in-person and remote attendance
- Recognizing and respecting personal and cultural differences and choices
- Striving to use **inclusive language**[1]
- Creating a safe space to discuss and work through disagreements/conflict
- Generating universally accessible content
- Respecting scheduled time
- Engaging with others with respectful language
- Fostering good will between colleagues
- Not engaging in the spread of rumors and untruths
- Actively seeking to be involved in the solution
- Respecting the expertise of colleagues and their knowledge of policy in their particular discipline
- Recognizing the importance of every division and colleague, no matter how public-facing their work may or may not be

As a reminder, disrespectful behaviors may be intentionally or unintentionally demonstrated by individuals. However, where an allegation is made, the intention of the alleged perpetrator is considered irrelevant. It is the impact of the behavior upon an individual that is important. The following examples of best practices and things to avoid are provided as a reference, with additional resources linked below.

Best Practice	Avoid
Refer to everyone the way they ask you to (e.g., names, pronouns)	- Misgendering - Not learning the correct pronunciation of someone's name - Unwanted nicknames
Mirror the language people use to describe themselves (e.g., disabled/person with a disability, victim/survivor, gay/queer)	- Assuming everyone wants to be referred to with the same terminology - Using terms interchangeably without understanding their meaning
Acknowledge systemic barriers and prejudice against marginalized identities (both historical and present-day)	Statements that trivialize and/or erase someone's lived experience "I don't see color" "I'm so OCD about this" when you are not diagnosed with the disorder. "I wish I could take time off work every time I was sad!" "You're lucky you're [insert identity]"

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[1] American Psychological Society Inclusive Language Guide

Best Practice	Avoid
Recognize your own biases	Implying you cannot be prejudiced because of your identity or the identity of your friends ● "I'm not a racist. I have several [insert race] friends." ● "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."
Recognize and respect the diversity within a country or community (e.g., there is no singular way to look or sound American)	Questioning or assuming someone's citizenship based on speech or appearance ● "Where are you *really* from" ● "You speak English very well" Exoticizing ● "Can I touch your hair?" or touching hair without permission ● "What are you? You're so interesting looking?"
Focus on individual attributes and accomplishments when praising a person	"Compliment" someone by disparaging other members of their identity group ● "You're one of the good ones" ● "You're a credit to your race" ● "You're so smart for a [insert identity]"
Challenge the assumptions you consciously or unconsciously make about professional competency	Reinforcing stereotypes in the workplace ● Mistaking someone's occupation based on their gender/ race ● "I would have never guessed that you were a scientist" ● Assuming someone has less expertise due to their identity (e.g., disability, age, gender, race) ● Routinely assigning women "office housework" (e.g., note taking, meeting coordination, menial jobs) ● Perceiving a man as a "leader" and a woman as "bossy" for exhibiting the same behavior
Value equitable hiring practices Evaluate the presence of conscious/unconscious bias in a hiring panel's candidate assessments	Statements negating how prejudice and historical/present-day marginalization affect professional opportunities, pay, etc. ● "Everyone can succeed in this society if they just work hard enough" Statements implying that people of color are given extra benefits in the hiring process ● "I believe the most *qualified* person should get the job" ● "He only got the internship because he's [insert identity]"
Keep interpersonal interactions professional and respectful	● Telling women to smile ● Comments focusing on someone's body or physical appearance ● Calling a coworker "sweetheart" or other terms of endearment ● Asking invasive questions about gender identity and sexuality

Best Practice	Avoid
Follow NOAA's Guidance Documents to ensure respectful tribal & Indigenous engagement Respect the diversity of cultures represented by Indigenous Peoples (a best practice for collaborating with one tribe may not be the best practice for another)	Having an extractive relationship ● Sharing indigenous culture without permission or collaboration (e.g., photographs, stories, ideas, knowledge) Using generic terms like Native Americans, Native people, or Indigenous people if your story references specific tribes and their citizens.
Listen to understand when someone is sharing their experience Be knowledgeable about resources for reporting harassment and receiving support	Statements that invalidate a person's experience with harassment and/or discrimination ● "Are you sure that really happened?" ● "I just can't believe [insert person] would do that - I've only had great experiences with them" Not informing people you supervise that you are a mandated SASH reporter

Some examples in this table were adapted from UCSC's tool "Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send."

Manager/Supervisor

Managers and supervisors hold professional power in the workplace and have a responsibility to be aware of how those power dynamics can shape the work environment. In addition to the Individual Responsibilities listed above, supervisors must:

● Maintain their knowledge of and ability to communicate resources for reporting and receiving support, including but not limited to:
  ○ Existing Policies and Resources
  ○ Employee Resource Groups
  ○ Work Life Programs
  ○ Mental Health
● Serve as stewards of a positive work environment by being the example of appropriate behavior
● Create, maintain, and support positive and respectful relationships with their direct reports
● Model engagement with respectful workplace training and development; encourage and provide time for supervisees to engage with opportunities such as sensitivity training,

DEIA working groups, resource groups, and protected opportunities to provide and receive feedback
- Receive and take action on reports of harassment or disrespectful behavior, including avoiding minimizing victim treatment, believing victims, listening to reports effectively without prejudice, and supporting direct reports that interact with higher levels of authority
- Ensure their subordinates are aware of supervisors' status as mandatory reporters and the boundaries of confidentiality for mandatory reporters

Organizational

The organization supports the individual and supervisor responsibilities by sharing information, policies, and resources for NOAA Ocean Exploration members and by:

- Publishing and promoting this Code of Conduct
- Developing and sourcing training opportunities for all staff members (federal and affiliate)
- Critically evaluating workplace culture with outside consultation
- Providing guidance to supervisors for fostering a respectful workplace
- Preventing retaliation for reporting Code of Conduct violations
- Taking appropriate administrative action in corroborated cases of disrespectful conduct
- Treating corroborated cases of dishonest allegations as disrespectful conduct
- Sharing the NOAA Ocean Exploration Code of Conduct with external partners and communicating the expectation that partners will share similar values and adhere to our Code of Conduct while engaged in business with NOAA Ocean Exploration
- Modifying, diminishing, or ending partnerships with organizations that regularly violate this Code of Conduct, or fail to take action against individuals they are responsible for that violate the Code of Conduct

NOAA Ocean Exploration expects all employees and affiliates to not only strive to uphold the ideals outlined in this document, but to also maintain a growth oriented mindset as we all look to contribute to an inclusive, safe, and respectful workplace. As culture changes and evolves, our collective understanding and acceptance of what is acceptable does as well. With this in mind, we expect all employees and affiliates will hold themselves to high standards laid out in this document, but also continue to seek ways to improve our positive work environment as well as acknowledge and course correct when infractions occur.

Existing Policies and Resources

The NOAA Ocean Exploration Code of Conduct is not comprehensive. Existing guidance, regulations, and policy overlap with many of the topics present in this document. Where authority exists in Department of Commerce, NOAA, or other higher organizational levels, those policies will supersede this Code of Conduct. Due to the intersectional nature of many forms of conduct, several relevant policies are listed below. Affiliates may have their own formal policies governing formal and informal reporting, and are responsible for knowing those policies.

Policies

Policies below may involve **Restricted reports**, which do not trigger an investigation, and **Unrestricted reports**, which trigger an investigation. **Mandatory Reporters** (supervisors, managers, and others) who receive formal reports must always identify themselves as mandatory reporters and classify these reports as Unrestricted and initiate investigations within the policies below. Please familiarize yourself with these policies and reporting mechanisms as they apply to your position.

- DOC Ethics Law and Programs Office (ELPO)
- NOAA Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (SASH)
- NOAA Office of Inclusion and Civil Rights (OICR)
- NOAA Workplace Violence Prevention Response (WVPR)
- NOAA Corps (directive)

Additional Resources

The following Resources include NOAA, DOC, and external resources that help support the work environment we are all trying to cultivate. Please take some time to explore them and share your experiences with others.

- NOAA Employee Resource Groups and Affinity Groups
- NOAA OICR EEO and DEIA Events calendar
- Psychological Safety at NOS presentation
- Psychological Safety Toolkit at NMFS
- Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send
- Employee Resource Groups
- Work Life Programs
- Mental Health
- Fieldwork Initiative to Stop Sexualized Trauma (FIST) Bystander Intervention Training

Training Opportunities

Additional resources may be needed for non-Federal employees to access suggested and/or recommended training. Speak with your supervisor if you are interested in any that are not available to you directly.

Commerce Learning Center Curriculum

Use the search function in CLC to find these curricula, which may include several courses on the listed topic

- DECIDE: The Neuroscience of Breaking Bias
- DOC LGBTQ+ Ally Toolkit
- Management Skills for New NOAA Supervisors (MSNS) Companion Courses
- NOAA Pride
- NWS DEIA Training: Leading a Diverse Team Track
- NWS DEIA Training: Managing Diversity Track
- NWS DEIA Training: Self Awareness Track
- Veterans and Disability Hiring Training

Required CLC Training

Log in to CLC to use links or search for course playlists by name.

- Required Training for all Employees
- Required Training for Supervisors
- Required Training for Special Functions

Management Concepts Curricula[2]

- Supervisor's Workshop - 4723
- Professional Government Supervisor Program - 4710
- HR Essentials for Government Supervisors - 4708
- Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act Training - 1046

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[2] Management Concepts training