

**2024 Public Description of Work for
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in
Higher Education**

Virginia Tech

**Developing alternative resolution structure for harassment
cases and improving leadership response to conflict**

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

1. Response - implementing restorative or alternative resolutions
2. Remediation – efforts to remediate harm
3. Prevention – leadership education and skill development

Description of Work:

There are two projects that will comprise this work. The first project focuses on alternative resolution. Through the work of the 2019 End Sexual Violence Taskforce a need for an alternative resolution process for sexual harassment and sexual misconduct cases was identified. Focus groups, climate surveys, student advisory councils, and other assessment tools have identified a desire for an alternative to the formal complaint and hearing process. Our demographic data on who is reporting through formal mechanisms vs. data on individuals using confidential and informal systems suggest diverse populations who are more at risk of sexual harassment and violence do not use formal systems at the same rate they are utilizing confidential resources for support. The purpose of the first project is to identify a structure to be able to provide alternative resolution for sexual harassment and misconduct cases. Work that has been done thus far is identifying the need for alternative resolution resources during our 2019 taskforce and developing draft procedures as one of the work products of the sexual violence culture and climate working group. Future work includes researching other models to see where these services reside within colleges and universities; proposing a future model organization and staffing structure; finalizing procedures and revising policies to allow for alternative resolutions for these cases; and requesting funding or reallocating funding to implement the model on Virginia Tech's campus. NASEM resources will be extremely helpful identifying promising practices at other NASEM action collaborative member institutions.

The purpose of the second project is to equip academic, administrative, and student leaders with the tools for responding to conflict with strength, clarity, and compassion as opposed to reacting with fear, avoidance, or aggression. The project aims to positively impact the overall culture and climate of the university by empowering individuals and teams to engage in direct, inclusive, and equitable interactions on potentially difficult and divisive topics. The leaders will not be the individuals who are facilitating alternative resolution for sexual misconduct and harassment cases. Two cohorts have

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completed the hands-on Foundations of Restorative Justice training. The first cohort completed its Foundations training in June of 2023. Following the completion of the Foundations trainings, the cohort members participated in three advanced workshops on applications of restorative principles to variety of real-world situations. Members of the first cohort also facilitated or co-facilitated multiple community circles dealing with:

- Employee equity in the university libraries;
- The shameful legacy and the continuous impact of the Sterilization Act;
- Economic equity on campus and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Cohort members utilized restorative principles and practices in facilitating at least three faculty retreats. The second cohort has completed their Foundations training on June 13th, 2024. The members of the second cohort will also participate in three advanced workshops and are expected to facilitate at least one community peace circle. Additionally, members of the first cohort will serve as mentors and informal advisors to the members of the second cohort.

The work remaining includes training additional university leaders in restorative practices, with special emphasis on academic leaders, undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. Also, the intention is to integrate restorative practices in all key facets of university's operations including student conduct, academic integrity, and Title IX proceedings, departmental meetings, community forums, and interactions among residents in university's Living Learning Communities, residence halls, fraternities, and sororities. Finally, the intention is to utilize restorative practices and principles to engage in dialogue on important issues facing the university such as: student protests, freedom of speech and expression, academic freedom, and DEIAB concerns. We hope NASEM resources will help us to identify methods to assess the impact of the program on campus culture.

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