

# **2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

**The University of New Mexico**

## **Development, Testing, and Launch of the Staff and Faculty Wayfinder Website**

### **Relevant Rubric Area(s):**

1. Trauma-informed Programs and Practices
2. Improved Communication and Increased Transparency
3. Leveraging the strengths of distinct stakeholder groups and creating partnerships between them

### **Description of Work:**

In December of 2022, The University of New Mexico launched the [Staff and Faculty Wayfinder Website](#), a user-centered, private, intersectional, and trauma-informed website for employees at UNM who have experienced or witnessed bullying, harassment, discrimination, violence, or threats to academic freedom. Available for in both browser and mobile versions, the Wayfinder website is an in-house, UNM-specific app co-created by the Division for Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and IT Applications, with input and approval from fourteen campus partners, from campus Ombuds and Advocates to the Office of Compliance, Equity, and Equal Opportunity (CEEEO) and the Committee on Academic Freedom & Tenure (AF&T). From the concept development stage between June and September 2021, consultation with campus partners from January to May 2022, and two phases of usability testing in June and October 2022, the Wayfinder website provided multiple opportunities for stakeholder collaboration and design evaluation. The final and ongoing stage of the project, which focuses on campus outreach and ongoing evaluation of the site, further leverages support for the Wayfinder from campus partners as well as staff and faculty interest groups.

The Wayfinder responds first and foremost to the reality that, at UNM as in many universities, when staff and faculty experience or witness different forms of misconduct, they often don't know where to turn for help, or whether and how to report such incidents. Although all UNM employees complete annual online training on sexual harassment, and new faculty and department chairs receive additional orientation in university policies, many UNM employees have little knowledge about how existing policies and resources might – or might not – benefit them following incidents of bullying, harassment, discrimination, violence, or threats to academic freedom. The challenges university employees face in accessing accurate information -- including guidance on what kinds of misconduct constitute potentially actionable civil rights complaints, and what kinds of support targets can access even if they do not wish to file a complaint – presents an ongoing challenge for the university's attempts to prevent and mitigate the effects of misconduct, including sexual harassment.

The second main source of inspiration for the Wayfinder project was the abundance of relevant research on institutional response to sexual harassment, including research cited in the 2018 National Academies Report. Sparked by a research presentation on trauma-informed

## **2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

websites presented by Katelyn Kennon at the Action Collaborative 2020 Public Summit, the Wayfinder project draws heavily on research and best practices in conflict resolution and User Experience (UX) design, particularly trauma-informed design principles that help users to learn about their options safely and privately. Initial development of the website, its goals, and purpose was shared in a [2021 description of work](#) and in a poster at the 2021 Action Collaborative Public Summit. This work is new for The University of New Mexico (created, implemented, or revised since 04/10/2021), and new or uncommon for higher ed space (created, implemented, or revised since 04/10/19).

### *Research Foundations*

Consistent with the Action Collaborative's emphasis on research-driven interventions, the Wayfinder project is grounded in several key areas of scholarship:

- University websites: As Katelyn Kennon has argued, university websites that simply direct users to policy, contain contradictory information, or are insufficiently trauma-informed may cause further harm to targets of sexual harassment (Kennon, 2020; Eno et al, 2023). The Wayfinder's design was also guided by the principles of Trauma-Informed Design (TID), a community of User Experience (UX) professionals in public health, social work, and related fields that seeks to reduce retraumatizing effects and enhance the usefulness of websites used by vulnerable populations (Dietkus, 2022; Chen et al, 2022; Kelly et al, 2022).
- Social support for targets: The 2018 NASEM Report noted the importance of providing information and support and effective institutional response to sexual harassment (NASEM, 2018; Smith and Freyd, 2014; Cortina and Magley, 2003). While responsiveness to sexual harassment in higher education institutions has increased significantly in recent decades, student and employee access to supportive resources has lagged behind, hindered by broad mandatory reporting policies that discourage disclosure (Holland et al, 2018; Gomez, 2021).
- Harm to communities: Targets of sexual harassment who also identify as BIPOC, persons with disabilities, and sexual- and gender-identity minorities experience higher rates of misconduct and worse mental health outcomes, and may face additional barriers to reporting misconduct and securing support (Brubaker, 2017; Cantalupo, 2019; Gómez, 2021; Clancy et al, 2017; Smidt et al, 2017).
- Conflict resolution: Best practices in ombuds and advocacy services suggest that targets of misconduct benefit from the ability to choose their own pathways, as well as change those pathways, as circumstances and their own well-being might require. Responsive practices include providing multiple access points, confidential resources, and control over pathways for those experiencing workplace conflict can reduce barriers to navigating the system (Rowe & Bendersky, 2002; Wood, Voth Schrag, Hairston & Jones 2019; Ahmed, 2021).

### *Design Goals*

After consulting with experts in communications, organizational sociology, and psychology, project leaders developed the following design goals for the Wayfinder:

## 2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

- User-centered: The website should build user self-efficacy by offering information that enhances users' understanding about available options – for getting support and/or making reports – and the possible outcomes of engaging with different campus offices.
- Private: Prioritize concerns of those targeted by or witnessing misconduct – particularly fears of retaliation – by prominently displaying an “exit quickly” button and removing all tracking of visits on the website *except* the temporary information necessary to navigate the application.
- Intersectional: Signal the importance of addressing all types of harm by making information about all forms of misconduct equally accessible on the site, and by treating all types of response (from ombuds and mental health services to institutional reports) as valid choices.
- Trauma-informed: Employ principles of trauma-informed design to use simple, jargon-free text, reduce text on pages and the number of “clicks” needed to access vital information, and prominently display exit and confidential resource buttons throughout.

### *Development and Testing*

The Wayfinder website was developed over a two-year period, and repeatedly modified in response to design meetings with IT staff, content review with campus partners, and usability testing with staff and faculty.

Proof of concept development: From June 2021 to 2022, DEI worked closely with IT Applications to develop pages and navigational functions suitable for the project's design goals. The resulting design includes four types of webpages – differentiated for staff and faculty pathways – and a content block template for each office appearing in Wayfinder:

- Pages offered:
  - Home page that explains Wayfinder, offers Staff and Faculty pathways, and describes how the site [protects user privacy](#)
  - What Happened? pages showing different types of harm
  - Definition buttons that provide definitions and examples of each type of harm
  - Options for [harm] pages for each type of harm, with available options grouped in columns labeled “I Want Information and Support” and “I Want to Report”
- Each Content Block on the Options page contains:
  - Link to designated office's webpage
  - Icon marking office as confidential or not confidential, linked to [page explaining confidentiality](#)
  - Brief description of the office
  - “What should I expect” button that expands to describe basic procedures and possible outcomes found at this office
- Campus partner consultation: Following the initial design phase in 2021, the project leader consulted repeatedly with fourteen campus offices, seeking input and approval of website content, particularly in relation to their respective offices and functions, including:
  - Division for Equity and Inclusion
  - ADVANCE at UNM
  - Women's Resource Center
  - LGBTQ Resource Center
  - Human Resources

## **2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

- Ombuds Services for Staff
  - Faculty Mediation Services/Ombuds
  - Staff Council
  - United Academics-UNM
  - UNM Police Department
  - Office of Compliance, Ethics, and Equal Opportunity
  - Accessibility Resource Center
  - Counseling, Assistance and Referral Services (CARS)
  - Academic Freedom & Tenure Committee
- Usability studies: Executed by the IT Applications Department, the usability tests conducted with a dozen UNM staff and faculty provided critical information for the site's development. In over a dozen 90-minute recorded interviews, study subjects were asked to identify, after reading eight hypothetical case studies of harm experienced by employees, 1) places at the university or in the community that the target could go for information, support, and/or to report their experience, and 2) university policies or other guidelines that might apply to the situation described. Test results were studied – and changes to Wayfinder incorporated – based on the keywords, search methods, offices and policies located, and user satisfaction of subjects tested at two specific junctures:
    - Current state studies, June 2022: Overcoming their reluctance to rely on UNM or Google searches rather than human informants, subjects consistently arrived first at UNM compliance and policy websites, and rarely at the offices of confidential resources, reporting low satisfaction with their searches. These tests were critical for identifying the kinds of information users wanted to find, such as university personnel knowledgeable about university processes who are also confidential.
    - Wayfinder beta tests, October 2022: Subjects in these tests were generally pleased with the pathways and information provided by the site, offering detailed feedback on its usability and content. For example, as a result of these studies, extra drop-down menus were added to increase navigational pathways, and a link directing students (not served by the site) to confidential resources was added to the home page.

### *Website Launch and Evaluation Plans*

The Staff and Faculty Wayfinder went live in December 2022, and was first highlighted in the UNM Newsroom article, [“New website designed to help UNM staff and faculty get help when they experience harm.”](#) and on the DEI [“About Wayfinder”](#) site. The subsequent “hard launch” of the Wayfinder in January 2023, involved publication of Wayfinder information and links in staff and faculty newsletters; design and distribution of a postcard with QR code via campus offices; mention in [President’s Weekly Perspective](#); and the incorporation of links to Wayfinder on UNM apps pages and campus partner websites. The President also chose to feature the launch of the Wayfinder in her April “State of the University” address, communicating its existence to the university community and university-watchers throughout the state.

From January to May 2023, AVP Hutchison also made live presentations on Wayfinder to the following campus groups:

## **2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

- Faculty Senate
- Taos Administrative Team
- Diversity Council
- Department of History
- Taos Staff council
- Café Q (LGBTQ Resource Center)
- Taos Faculty Council
- Staff Council “Lets Lunch”
- College of Nursing Faculty
- Executive Cabinet
- College of Nursing Staff
- University Libraries
- University College
- UNM Police Department

Live presentations have provided opportunities for real-time feedback on the Wayfinder, and also opened new spaces for discussion about discrimination, harassment, and other harms experienced by staff and faculty.

Plans for continuous evaluation and improvement to the Wayfinder are currently under development by DEI, with support from IT Applications. Changes still pending from the conceptualization and testing phases of the project include adding site translation and page reader functions; building link saving and print to PDF functions on the “Options” pages; adding a page with supportive listening guidelines; and linking university policy sites to definitions of harm. Future evaluation of the website will involve studying the frequency of visitors via the site’s (deidentified) metrics; consulting with campus partners, administrators, and staff and faculty leaders about their referrals to the site; and focus groups with staff and faculty to examine their familiarity and satisfaction with Wayfinder. Regular usability tests conducted semi-annually will also facilitate improvements to the site.

Finally, it is worth noting the ancillary and ongoing effects of the Wayfinder project. Over the last two years of the project’s development, conversations about Wayfinder have brought greater visibility to the challenges faced by staff and faculty in the workplace, as well as the limitations of current university efforts to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other harms. The Wayfinder’s research and trauma-informed focus, as well as the clarity about basic policies and procedures required to build the website, has strengthened collaborative practices among campus partners from a variety of compliance, support, advocacy, and administrative offices.

**Website for further information (if applicable):** <https://wayfinder.unm.edu/>

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