

Year 2 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Argonne National Laboratory

The Use of Action Research in the Wake of Violence and Civil Unrest

Relevant Rubric Area(s): Other methods for monitoring climate on an ongoing basis, Identifying and reinforcing community values, other efforts to address or prevent sexual harassment

Description of Work:

As a scientific enterprise, our work is grounded in the social sciences. Through an overarching process of action research, Argonne works to create a safe, equitable, welcoming and inclusive environment. This approach involves four stages – assessments, interventions, results, and continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is achieved through the use of focus groups,¹ creating a feedback loop to continually address contemporary issues.

Through focus groups, Argonne continually adjusts its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategic plan to serve its community. Laboratory Director Paul Kearns holds bi-weekly listening sessions known as “Conversations with Kearns” to hear from employees and make any necessary adjustments to management practices. Prior to 2020, these conversations were conducted face to face. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, these conversations have been even more vital; the Laboratory Director continues to hold regular, biweekly listening sessions, which now happen via teleconference. Throughout the Laboratory, nine DEI councils – composed of employees who volunteer to participate – provide additional feedback and support. In May of 2020, after the civil unrest sparked by the killing of George Floyd, and in April of 2021, following the rise of anti-Asian violence, Argonne held additional focus groups. The Laboratory Director, along with other senior leaders, sponsored these multiple focus groups to collect feedback from employees and develop an appropriate response.

Focus Groups Following the Murder of George Floyd

In May 2020, Minneapolis, Minnesota police officers killed George Floyd, an unarmed African American man. This event sparked civil unrest around the world and caused a great deal of concern and anxiety among Argonne employees. In response, the Laboratory Director and other senior leaders sponsored 26 focus groups to develop an appropriate response. The results of the focus groups revealed a need to address key areas as shown below:

- Strengthen and support our DEI Councils and Employee Resource Groups.

¹ The focus groups conformed with social science research practices including (1) had a targeted topic of inquiry, (2) focused on a set of specific questions posed to the group

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- Develop a set of core leadership competencies that support our core values.
- Design and implement a leadership development program focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Clearly define what Argonne means by diversity, equity and inclusion and the vision for creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment.
- Perform a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Assessment to ensure our processes and procedures are fair and equitable.
- Hold all employees accountable for behavior associated with our core values.
- Ensure all professional development programs have established criteria for selection that are clear, fair and equitable.

Focus Groups Following Anti-Asian Violence

In spring 2021, an uptick in anti-Asian violence occurred across the country. This included the Chicago area, home to our Laboratory, where on March 21, a 60-year-old Chinese American man was attacked while jogging in Naperville, Illinois. In response to the stress and concern experienced by Argonne employees, the Laboratory Director and other senior leaders sponsored four focus groups to develop an appropriate response. The results of the focus groups revealed a need to address key areas as shown below:

- Communicate the progress on DEI Actions widely through a newsletter.
- Provide enhanced mentoring support through a Lab-wide mentoring program.
- Create support for newcomers to Argonne, including English as a second language support.
- Increase cultural awareness and empathy through cross-cultural dialog and learning.
- Enable individuals to speak up by promoting psychological safety at the Laboratory.

Outcomes and Accountability

Argonne's overall DEI strategic plan, developed by Argonne's Leadership Institute in close consult with Paul Kearns and other senior leaders, incorporated the results of the goals identified through these assessments. The results were broadly shared with all Argonne employees. The Leadership Institute partners with the Laboratory's Project Management Office to develop a detailed project plan and work schedule each year for execution of the plan. The plan is reviewed by the Laboratory's DEI Executive Council and approved by the Lab Director. Line management across the Laboratory has primary responsibility for execution and implementation of specific actions under the plan. Many of our near-term actions rest with the Leadership Institute or Human Resources Services, as they focus on review, improvement and creation of policies and

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programs; these policies and programs are then executed and/or implemented through line management. The Laboratory's leadership team has joint accountability for successful execution of the entire plan, as well as responsibility for execution within their organizational line. Parties responsible for plan deliverables meet weekly to assess progress against goals. Once a month, a meeting is held with Laboratory executives to identify areas of support, assess progress and provide guidance.

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