

FAQs regarding National Science Foundation – Safe and Harassment-Free Fieldwork Plan (SAHF Plan)

A. General

1. What is the NSF – SAHF plan?

Effective January 30, 2023, the NSF - SAHF plan (Safe and Harassment-Free Fieldwork plan) is a project specific, two-page supplementary document required for proposals involving off-campus or off-site research and must describe how any form of harassment will be addressed. It is NSF policy to foster safe and harassment-free environments wherever science is conducted. NSF's policy recognizes that a community effort is essential to eliminate sexual and other forms of harassment in science and to build a safe scientific climate where people can learn, grow and thrive.

2. Are SAHF plans required to be uploaded with the proposal submission to the NSF?

A SAHF plan is only required to be uploaded with the proposal submission for certain NSF BIO and GEO solicitations. Accordingly, for each proposal that proposes to conduct research off-campus or off site, the PI must complete a certification that they have a plan in place for that proposal and will disseminate that plan prior to the off-site or off-campus research. The AOR must then certify at the time of proposal submission that the organization has a plan in place that describes how the following types of behavior will be addressed:

1. Abuse of any person, including, but not limited to, harassment, stalking, bullying, or hazing of any kind, whether the behavior is carried out verbally, physically, electronically or in written form; or conduct that is unwelcome, offensive, indecent, obscene or disorderly.
2. If the funding agency does not require a SAHF Plan, TTU PIs will be able to submit their proposal without a SAHF Plan. However, PIs are strongly encouraged to develop SAHF Plans. Other funding agencies have indicated a commitment and future requirements underway. To help researchers, TTU is asking PIs to develop SAHF Plans proactively and is providing support to create them.

3. What does off-campus or off-site research mean?

NSF defines off-campus or off-site research as “data/information/samples being collected off-campus or off-site, such as fieldwork and research activities on vessels and aircraft.”

4. How does TTU define fieldwork?

For the purpose of this NSF requirement, fieldwork refers to any situation where TTU researchers will be collecting data, information or samples off-campus or off-site. This includes work performed in traditional outdoor field settings both near (e.g., Non-campus fieldwork in West Texas or Eastern New Mexico) and far (e.g., Antarctica), as well as K-12 schools, clinics, archives, vessels and aircraft – any place where research teams will be away from the immediate network of campus resources available to support safety or respond quickly to emergencies.

Field work does not include:

- i. Travel for conferences, seminars, meetings or visits to other institutions.
- ii. Supervised study or work placements at the campus, buildings, TTU property not connected directly to the main campus (e.g., New Deal Farm, TTU Center at Junction, TTU School of Veterinary Medicine, Mariposa Station, etc.) or leased offices of other institutions, companies, or organizations.
- iii. Research consisting exclusively of electronic surveys or use of online platforms such as Teams.
- iv. Research performed in a “work-from-home” setting by an individual.

5. What is the intent of this requirement?

The intent of this requirement is to provide guidance and protection for individuals participating in research for when they do not have ready access to the on-campus, in-person resources that they normally do. If individuals continue to have such access, then no plan is needed. If the individuals are sufficiently distant from campus that access to these resources is more limited than they would be if they were on campus, then a plan is likely needed. Each PI of an NSF proposal is responsible for determining whether any off-campus or off-site research is involved in the proposal. When in doubt, create a plan.

6. If field work is done off campus but does not require any overnight stays, will a plan be required?

Yes. The NSF does not specify any time requirement. If off-campus research is involved, a plan must be prepared.

7. What about field work where an individual is stationed at another location, such as a national lab or other permanent facility?

If the permanent facility already has policies and procedures for how to handle prohibited behaviors described in the NSF requirement for safe environments for off-campus or off-site research, and individuals supported on our NSF award would clearly be subject to those policies and procedures, then it is not necessary to create a plan. If there is any doubt about whether individuals on our award would be subject to the permanent facility's policies and procedures, creating a plan may be prudent. Even if NSF does not require the creation of a plan, individuals working off-campus or off-site are still subject to TTU policies while on work-related trips.

8. Does the SAHF Plan need to address conference travel?

No. The requirement applies only to research activities. (NSF has separate, related requirements about conference and travel proposals. See NSF PAPPG Chapter 2.F.9 and 2.F.11.)

9. Will TTU supply a template or other resources for PIs needing to create a SAHF plan for Off-Campus Research?

Yes. A template is available at this link. For certain solicitations, the NSF Directorates of Biological Sciences and Geosciences require submission of a plan at the time of proposal. Where required, the solicitations contain instructions for plan preparation.

10. Will ORS approve the plan?

No. The only expectation is that the PI will upload the plan prior to proposal submission. Should a PI need assistance with the creation of a plan, the Office of Workforce Relations may be able to assist. Also see the provided plan template.

B. Subawards or Collaborative Proposals or Multiple Off-Site Locations

1. If Texas Tech University is part of a collaborative proposal, but not the lead institution, do we need to submit a plan?

Per NSF, only the lead institution will check the box on the Cover Page that Off-Campus or Off-Site research is involved. Only the lead institution will be responsible for submitting the safe and aware fieldwork plan for off-campus or off-site research. This is similar to how the NSF handles postdoc mentoring plans or data management plans. The expectation is that the organizations in the collaboration will work together as necessary to prepare a plan. The lead institution will need to incorporate the other collaborative institution's Title IX reporting mechanism within the SAHF Plan.

2. Is the SAHF plan requirement applicable to subawardees?

Yes, this plan applies to all participants engaged in off-campus or off-site research in the project as proposed. Similar to the collaborative proposal, the primary institute will need to create a SAHF Plan that includes links to the other institute's Title IX reporting mechanism.

3. If a proposal has multiple off-site locations, will there need to be a SAHF plan for each?

No. You should only need one SAHF plan for the proposal that might address the multiple off-site locations.

C. During the Award Period of Performance

1. What happens if a need is identified post-award to conduct off-campus or off-site research?

There is no explicit NSF guidance for situations where off-campus or off-site research is added after the award has been made. If the addition of such a component constitutes a change in objective or scope, then prior approval would need to be requested. The PI should speak with their program officer to seek their advice.

2. I forgot to send a plan to one or more individual participating in the research before we left campus. What do I do now?

If the off-campus or off-site research is still taking place, send the plan now to the individual(s). If the off-site research is over, send an email to ORS explaining the circumstances. ORS staff will confer with the PI and other offices on appropriate next steps. (NSF has not identified what corrective actions should be taken, but

most likely it will involve an uninvolved third party checking with the individual to ascertain whether there were any issues that arose while off-campus that made the individual feel unsafe or needed reporting.)

3. What should happen if the person doing the alleged misconduct is the named point of contact?

Is it possible to have a backup point of contact? Yes, in fact, it is advisable to have a primary and secondary point of contact available. Make sure and include the cell phone and email of the alternative contact.

National Science Foundation:

[NSF 23-071, FAQs Regarding Preparation and Submission of Safe and Harassment-Free Fieldwork Plans under the BIO/GEO Pilot](#)

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