

Year 1 Public Description of Work for
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association

Workplace Violence Prevention and Response

Victim Advocate Liaison Program

This Action Applies to Rubric Item: #22, Other efforts to remediate the harm of sexual harassment and/or support those that experience sexual harassment

Description of Work:

NOAA Victim Advocacy Program

Although a medium sized agency, the NOAA workforce spans over 600 locations including all U.S. states and territories, and is routinely deployed in state, Federal, and international waters. Often this means employees in the field or satellite offices with limited employees and resources. When faced with harassment and assault there are sparse response options. As a result victim services within the agency requires a diverse and grassroots approach within these dispersed geographic locations are isolated workplaces.

In 2016, in response to incidents of sexual assault and harassment the Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention at NOAA was passed. This law explicitly called for the administration to stand up a victim advocacy program to respond to the unique challenges of the workforce. This law also called for victim services to be provided for all employees, contractors and affiliates. In 2018, NOAA slowly rolled out its victim advocacy program.

The initial program only had a staff of one who carried out the duties of victim advocacy on behalf of the agency. However, since April 2020 a coordinator for victim services has been brought onboard to stand up an expanded advocacy program from NOAA. This program will provide a structured, confidential, client-centered resources for victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault and also provide a support system while navigating through the reporting, investigating, and healing process. While the administration is moving toward hiring full-time Victim advocates across its regions, NOAA has decided to engage the NOAA workforce as volunteers and provide a scaled down version of these services. These positions are named victim advocate liaisons (VAL)s

The VALs are select volunteers from the NOAA employee pool. They will be provided the training to ensure they are able to direct clients to resources, advocate on their behalf, effectively follow up on clients' statuses, assist with creating client safety plans, provide information on victims' rights, and accompany the clients to NOAA-based and/or local

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resources. Successful advocates require traits such as empathy, **ability to maintain confidentiality**, patience, active listening skills, and ability to provide judgment free emotional support. NOAA's volunteers will need to show they are capable of using and/or possessing these traits. The vetting for victim advocates at NOAA is rigorous including an integrity interview, a security background check and a 1-year commitment to the VAL program.

Once certified and trained, VALs will be responsible for locating, collaborating, and maintaining a connection to local resources that would be beneficial in supporting their clients though their trauma, confusion, and addressing other needs they may have. This includes resources for mental health, physical safety, and any others which may be invaluable to the clients' healing and reporting.

VALs respond to all workplace reports requesting support including those by contractors and affiliates within their workplace region or local area. This ensures that they are able to effectively refer the clients to appropriate local resources within their area to support their clients' needs. They will report the status of clients to the Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Coordinator (WVPRC) and consistently keep her abreast of the clients' needs, referrals, and mental/physical health.

Full-time NOAA staff manages the day-to-day operations of the VAL program which includes providing and tracking the training of VALs, tracking and maintaining client referrals, and tracking the status of clients. This ensures that the clients are receiving the care needed for healing and that their reporting /investigation process is directed to the right program/office. Staff also assist with unusual or severe cases which require expanded expertise in navigating and obtaining NOAA support and intervention.

The WVPRC coordinates and maintains the training for VALs through NOVA. NOAA's first VAL class will be held on September 14-24, 2020 in a virtual setting for a cohort of about 22 students. To date 90 members of the workforce applied to be VALs. This will establish the program and its mission to provide top-notch service to our clients and volunteers. The ultimate goal of the advocacy program within the next year, will be to have 9 fulltime Advocate/Coordinators covering the 9 NOAA regions. These fulltime advocates/coordinators will have a group of approximately 10-15 VALs under them.

Website for further information (if applicable): <https://www.noaa.gov/workplace-violence-prevention-response-program>

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