



## DEVELOPING AN ANTI-RACIST REU PROGRAM

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There are well-documented waves of racial violence in American history that have compounded police violence and seem to have a 20-30 year cycle. The increase in video recording, social sharing, and broadcasting of imagery of police violence in recent years has raised awareness of this racial violence. Police brutality against Black and Brown men and women is leading to calls for active anti-racist action versus passive support of diversity and equity. Bias and inequity are embedded in our history and our laws, and also in STEM and academic activities. In the context of an REU, this includes the selection processes of students, how leaders respond to racist remarks, the isolation of students of color in REU programs, and the low numbers of Black and Brown participants in many programs. This chapter provides insight into these issues and some recommendations of how to intentionally create an anti-racist REU program.

## ➔ Background: Racial Harassment and Discrimination

Racism in the U.S. has a dark past, starting with the colonial genocide of over 100 million Indigenous people and centuries of slavery and related killing. This systemic violence against people of color, such as police brutality, continues unabated today. Discriminatory policies are embedded in our laws and continue to maintain inequities in wealth, education, healthcare, and more.

In response to the State-sanctioned murders and violence against Black and Brown people, scientists in the geoscience community developed "[A Call to Action for an Anti-Racist Science Community from Geoscientists of Color: Listen, Act, Lead.](#)" Below is a quotation from this call.

"The inhumanity of racism in this country has yet again been made unavoidably clear through the racist cruelty of our law enforcement officers, the atrocities of COVID-19 health disparities, and the malfeasance of leadership across all levels, from local officials to the executive branch. For many Black scientists, these experiences form a rite of passage and a common bond. We share these traumas with our Latinx and Indigenous brothers and sisters and have for as long as this country has existed, and before. We cannot watch mutely, nor look away."

In 2020, racism in the U.S. has been brought to the forefront of the public's attention by police brutality against Black people, and the civil rights movement and protest, along with health disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic. The STEM community is recognizing that staying silent about racism in the sciences and in the community would be the same as implied consent. Institutions are taking action, such as dropping GRE requirements for graduate program admissions and establishing diversity, equity and inclusion committees, and action plans. The REU community must take an active stance ensuring its programs are inclusive, equitable, and proactively anti-racist.



*Excerpt from*

[A Call to Action for an Anti-Racist Science Community from Geoscientists of Color: Listen, Act, Lead](#)

“We [...] need to root out the racism in our own institutions. This is particularly necessary within the scientific community, where the impact of racism has limited the representation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people across all sectors of the scientific enterprise.

We recognize that the racism that plagues the criminal justice system and society at large also afflicts the scientific community. Over-policing, stereotyping, inhumane treatment, disregard of humanity, and silencing is epidemic in all scientific fields. Black people struggle to break through the barriers placed in their paths to get to and through college. Black faculty are subject to biased reviews of job applications, grant proposals, and promotion packages, as well as the refusal to mentor them in an appropriate capacity. Black Lives Matter at home, at school, in the community, and at the workplace.

It is not enough for scientists to simply say that we believe in equality, equity, full inclusion, participation, and voices of all people in the scientific community. We must take action in a meaningful way to ensure these goals are met, and demand our collaborators and stakeholders do so as well.”

From: [A Call to Action for an Anti-Racist Science Community from Geoscientists of Color: Listen, Act, Lead](#)



## ➔ Training and Setting Expectations

As program director or manager, it is your responsibility to create a safe, kind, and respectful environment for students, mentors, and staff. As you plan your REU, contact your institution's diversity offices for training and support and put a plan in place that is appropriate for your program.

As REU managers, we can't simply hope for the best and assume that everything will work out. Proactive intervention is the best approach to preventing harassment. PI's must take a leading role in the process.



### Educate Yourself and Your Team

- » Become knowledgeable about federal and state laws regulating racial discrimination.
- » Read and study about the history of racism in this country; see a list of books and resources below.
- » Ensure you and your team have received diversity, equity, and inclusion training, as well as bystander intervention training.

### Language to Use

There is ongoing discussion of what language to use describing students from groups that are typically noted as underrepresented. As one Black colleague said, "We are not a minority because we don't want to be there or because we are not interested. It is an action that has been taken against us systematically and regularly to exclude us from participating."

Other terms being used "include students from groups that have been":

- » Historically underrepresented
- » Racially minoritized
- » Racially marginalized

Terminology is complicated. For example, groups that have been historically excluded through slavery, internment, or more recently, redlining (refusing a loan to someone because they live in an area deemed to be poor and thus, a high financial risk), continue to be excluded due, in part, to systemic biases in selection criteria that in fact reflect an applicant's privilege.

### Have Clear Rules in Place

- » Ensure that you have harassment and discrimination policies for your program clearly spelled out in your code of conduct. Be very clear that racist behavior will not be tolerated.



### Training for Students

- » Prepare training for your students and get support from your institution or facilitators to have open conversations about race and privilege at the beginning of your REU.
- » Make training part of cohort building and welcome it as an opportunity to have meaningful conversations.
- » Focus on bystander intervention approaches that aim to develop participants' skills so they can disrupt inappropriate behavior.
- » Be ready to address national events with your students should they happen. Unfortunately, the nation continues to witness shootings and other violent acts of racism. Students report that having a space to safely talk about these events allows them to feel supported and enables them to be productive in their research. Be aware that this kind of conversation can be triggering and have support available in these instances. It is helpful to be able to offer support services such as counselling with a professional.

### Reporting and Dealing with Complaints

- » Provide students with a route for getting support or filing a complaint in the event of a problem. Establish clear lines of communication for reporting. Appoint an ombudsperson(s) for students to contact if there is a problem. This person must be on-site & available during the entire REU session, including fieldwork. Address common fears that students face concerning reporting, including not being believed, retaliation, or of being sent home.
- » Follow up quickly on any complaint. Consequences for misconduct must be immediate and applied without exception. Practicing such a zero-tolerance policy goes a long way toward building student trust, and encouraging others to report incidents.
- » Recognize that field work puts students at particular risk and establish practices to minimize the dangers. Some challenges posed by field work are discussed in John & Khan 2018. These challenges may not be felt by everyone. For example, some racial and ethnic minorities may feel more unsafe in some rural locations that are overwhelmingly white and may have had a history of racial violence. Knowing the racialized histories of the locations that you will visit during the camp is essential. Discussing these histories openly and honestly (providing inclusive narrative geographies) conveys the type of empathy and cultural literacy that can build trust.

## ➔ Code of Conduct

Ensure that people have received the applicable [code of conduct](#) prior to starting the program.

- » Review the code of conduct during orientation/welcome/opening. Emphasize that people are not here to get a date but to learn, and ensure that people know where they can go to get help.
- » Ensure that staff has basic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training to ensure they can facilitate a welcoming and inclusive summer. Issues that might come up include using non-binary pronouns, harassment reporting procedures, not accidentally saying racially charged things, and being ready to step in if any of the above happens between participants.
- » Get training so that you are better prepared to recognize and intervene in gender and racial dynamics. Ask your institution's Diversity Officer or Title IX Coordinator for support if in any doubt.
- » Provide multiple points of support for participants, so that they always have a place to go with concerns.

## ➔ Bystander Intervention Training

Provide training to staff and students on “how to do your part to protect your neighbors and co-workers when bias and harassment happen in front of you.”

### The 5 Ds

1. Distract - Take an indirect approach to de-escalate the situation.
2. Delegate - Get someone to help.
3. Document - Video record or audio record, if possible.
4. Delay - Check in with the person who was harassed afterwards.
5. Direct - Be direct. First assess your safety. Be firm and clear in speaking up about the harassment.

## ➔ Role Models

The teaching/organizing staff that participants see over the summer should be diverse and culturally literate. If you are recruiting speakers from outside your organization to balance out your staff/facilitators, then you may need to approach White women and people of color early in the process as they are often over-committed. Broaden the diversity of your professional network so that the pool of talent and cultural expertise available to you is enriched. Have a list of women and POC to approach in case your first invitees cannot attend. Try to achieve 50/50 gender balance and at least 30% POC in your staff and speakers.



## ➔ The Importance of People “Who Look Like Me”

Students sometimes comment that they were the only person of color in a group and that this feeling of isolation is oppressive. At times, students will express relief at seeing ‘other people who look like me’ in a program. Having peers who can share the experience of being different within a group can alleviate a great deal of stress for interns. Furthermore, if the student experiences racial slurs, exclusion, or other racist behaviors, they may be able to get support from their peers of color and/or speak up for each other. Having faculty and staff who are diverse and supportive and effective allies can be extremely comforting as well.



## Resources

[A guide to organizing Inclusive Scientific Meeting](https://500womenscientists.org/inclusive-scientific-meetings)

<https://500womenscientists.org/inclusive-scientific-meetings>

[Belonging resources from Mindset Scholars Network](https://mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/learning-mindsets/belonging/#)

<https://mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/learning-mindsets/belonging/#>

Racism in Academia, a collection of Resources

<https://www.ucar.edu/sites/default/files/documents/related-links/2018-05/Racism%20in%20academia%20and%20the%20workplace.pdf>

[Why Color Blindness will Not End Racism](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4LpT9TF_ew). - A video

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4LpT9TF\\_ew](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4LpT9TF_ew)

[How I stopped worrying and learned to love discussing race](http://www.illdoctrine.com/2011/11/my_tedx_talk_how_i_stopped_wor.htm) - TED Talk video and transcript

[http://www.illdoctrine.com/2011/11/my\\_tedx\\_talk\\_how\\_i\\_stopped\\_wor.htm](http://www.illdoctrine.com/2011/11/my_tedx_talk_how_i_stopped_wor.htm)

Elements of Effective Practice National Mentoring Partnership

<https://www.mentoring.org/?s=Elements+of+Effective+Practice+>

## Panel Discussions

White, V. and L.D. White. 2020. "Moving Beyond Good Intentions: Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Community Through Commitment and Action." Panel hosted by the Society of Scholarly Publishing (SSP), Oct. 22nd. [Link to recording](#).

Bailey, K., V. Morris, H. Olivarez, V. Otera, S. Parikh, P. Romero-Lanao, W. Smythe, and K. Thiero. 2020. "A Discussion on Institutional Racism in STEM." Panel by the Colorado Local Science Network. [Link to recording](#).





## Further Reading

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- Inside Higher Ed. 2020. [The Black Experience in Academia](#), A Series.
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- Sue, D. W. 2010. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Wiley.
- Sue, D. W. 2016. *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race*. Wiley.
- Triveti, I. 2020. [Faculty say higher education, research is 'rife' with discrimination](#). *The GW Hatchet*. Aug. 31.
- Warren, C. 2020. [Colleges Must Take a New Approach to Systemic Racism](#). *Inside Higher Ed*. June 9.

