

SIERRA CLUB EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS

1) What behavior is prohibited by the updated Equal Opportunity Policy (EOP)?

There are four types of behavior prohibited by the EOP.

- **Discrimination.** Discrimination is unfair or unequal treatment of an individual based on any of the [23 protected characteristics](#) listed in the EOP.
- **Harassment.** Harassment is conduct that demeans, offends, humiliates and/or intimidates an individual based on any of the [23 protected characteristics](#) listed in the EOP.
- **Uncivil Behavior.** Uncivil Behavior is rude, discourteous, or disrespectful statements or actions that are **not** based on a protected characteristic. This may include ignoring a person, interrupting a person, trivializing a person's contributions, gossiping about a person, or making fun of a person.
- **Bullying.** Bullying is significantly negative behavior, above and beyond uncivil behavior. This may include humiliating an individual on an ongoing basis; circulating derogatory comments about an individual; or screaming or throwing objects at an individual.

All of these behaviors are toxic for the Sierra Club as an organization.

2) Are these the same behaviors prohibited in the EOP that was issued in 2021?

Yes. The EOP issued in 2021 prohibited "inappropriate, toxic, bullying, and harassing or discriminatory behavior." The updated EOP gives these types of behaviors clearer names and definitions. The policy also creates a response for uncivil behavior that is different from discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

3) Who is covered under the EOP – both in terms of being protected under the policy and having to comply with the policy?

A broad range of individuals are covered under the EOP: **volunteers**, employees (represented and non-represented), board members, applicants for employment,

fellows, interns, donors, vendors/contractors, consultants, and visitors or participants of a Sierra Club hosted event. These individuals are collectively called “Sierra Club stakeholders” in the policy.

4) Are the specific needs of volunteers taken into account under the EOP?

Yes. Volunteers receive the protections of the policy and are expected to conform to the behavioral expectations of the policy.

To take into account the unique needs of volunteers, the policy anticipates the establishment of a group of EOP Volunteer Leaders to help the EOP work well on the ground. At the chapter level, an EOP Volunteer Leader can be a Chapter Chair and up to two volunteers designated by the Chapter Chair. In addition, the policy anticipates a group of at-large EOP Volunteer Leaders that can assist with implementation of the policy.

Moreover, if the People Department conducts an investigation of a complaint brought by a volunteer, the Department will collaborate with a Volunteer Peer Review Group to ensure there is input from volunteers when analyzing the investigation report and deciding on appropriate corrective action. The Volunteer Peer Review Group will consist of one People Department member and volunteers.

For volunteers and participants in Sierra Club outings, the People Department will coordinate with existing structures throughout the process.

5) Will the process for resolving complaints under the updated EOP be different from the process under the EOP issued in?

Yes. A major change in the updated EOP is that the approach for resolving complaints of discrimination, harassment and bullying will be different from the approach for resolving complaints of uncivil behavior.

If an EOP Volunteer Leader or a managerial Chapter staff receives a complaint of, or observes, discrimination, harassment and bullying, they will be required to report that to the People Department. The People Department will undertake an investigation of those complaints and address them.

If an EOP Volunteer Leader or a managerial Chapter staff receives a complaint of, or observes, uncivil behavior, they will not be required to report that behavior to the People Department. The People Department will not investigate complaints

of uncivil behavior. Instead, such behavior must be addressed and resolved at the local level, with advice and guidance from the People Department as necessary. This change will create a more streamlined and timely process and will leverage resources in the best manner possible.

6) What is the Conflict and Dispute Resolution & Management (CDRM) process in the EOP and is it new?

Conflict and Dispute Resolution & Management (CDRM) is designed to address conflict in an organization through means other than a formal investigation and corrective action or through a direct conversation with a person engaging in uncivil behavior in order to stop the behavior.

There are four components to CDRM: conciliation discussions, mediations, restorative justice processes, and community learning. Some are new components for Sierra Club and some are not.

The People Department has used conciliation discussions effectively over many years. These are discussions that take place between parties to a conflict, together with a People Department member and/or a supervisor or volunteer leader who is not part of the conflict. The People Department will continue to use this component as appropriate.

A mediation is a facilitated conversation, run by a trained mediator. Mediations have sometimes been used at Sierra Club. Based on the availability of resources, the People Department may recommend mediations in certain circumstances.

A restorative justice process is designed to repair the relationship between parties and is led by a facilitator certified in restorative justice. The restorative justice process can be used when both parties wish to participate in the process and resources are available.

A community learning process goes beyond individuals involved in a conflict and consists of learning or training for a team, department, or group of Sierra Club Stakeholders. Depending on the circumstances and availability of resources, the People Department may recommend a community learning process.

7) How can I report conduct that I have either experienced or observed and that I believe violates the EOP?

In reporting conduct that may violate the EOP, we encourage you to be aware of the different approaches the People Department will take in responding to incidents of discrimination, harassment and bullying, as compared to incidents of uncivil behavior.

If you have experienced or witnessed discriminatory treatment based on one of the protected characteristics in the EOP, or you have experienced or witnessed harassment on the basis of one of those characteristics, we strongly encourage you to report that conduct to an EOP Volunteer Leader, a managerial Chapter staff member, any member of the People Department, or use the [AllVoices reporting platform](#).

If you experience uncivil behavior – behavior that is simply rude but not based on any particular characteristic – we encourage you to speak to an EOP Volunteer Leader or a managerial Chapter staff member. They will know how to follow the expectations of the policy.

Sometimes it is difficult to know whether behavior is simply rude, and hence is “uncivil behavior” under the EOP, or if it is sufficiently aggressive that it rises to the level of “bullying” under the EOP. You are not expected to know those fine distinctions. You can report the unwelcome conduct to an EOP Volunteer Leader or a managerial Chapter staff member. They will be trained to know the difference, and they will reach out to the People Department for assistance if needed.

For volunteers and participants in Sierra Club outings, the People Department will coordinate with existing structures for reporting complaints.

8) Can I report a complaint in an anonymous fashion?

Yes. The [AllVoices reporting platform](#) has an option for anonymous reporting. However, if the complaint concerns discrimination, harassment or bullying, the People Department will be limited in how much of an investigation it can take in response to an anonymous report. The People Department will maintain records of anonymous complaints, in case there are multiple reports regarding one individual.

If the conduct complained of is uncivil behavior, the People Department will send the complaint down to the appropriate local level, if that location is identified in the complaint. However, any response to such behavior will also be limited because of the anonymous nature of the report.

9) What steps will Sierra Club take when it receives a report of conduct that might violate the EOP?

If the report concerns discrimination, harassment or bullying, the People Department will begin an investigation.

If the report concerns uncivil behavior, the People Department will notify the appropriate person at the local level who is expected to address and stop the behavior.

The People Department will review all reports that it receives. Within 5 days of reviewing the report, the People Department will notify the person who has made the report which approach will be adopted.

For volunteers and participants in Sierra Club outings, the People Department will coordinate with existing structures for responding to reports.

10) What happens during the investigation itself?

The person who is the subject of the report will be told that a report has been filed against them.

The investigator will interview the person who experienced the behavior and has made the report. If a third-party reports discrimination, harassment, or bullying that they have either observed or been told about, the investigator will interview both that person and the person who has reportedly experienced the behavior.

The investigator will interview the subject of the report. During the interview, the investigator will inform the person of the specifics of the complaint. This is a change from the procedures established under the 2021 EOP, when such details were sometimes not provided.

The investigator will determine what witnesses to interview and when to interview them. The investigator will collect evidence and documentation. Finally, the investigator will make credibility assessments based on the interviews.

11) Am I required to participate in an investigation if I am the subject of the report?

Yes. If you do not participate in an investigation, Sierra Club will take appropriate corrective action against you based on the report and on other evidence it collects through the investigation, consistent with the procedures for taking such actions as established in Sierra Club's Standing Rules.

12) Am I required to participate in an investigation if I am a witness to the reported conduct?

Yes. The only way Sierra Club can do a full and fair investigation is if all Sierra Club stakeholders participate in the process.

13) What confidentiality rules apply during an investigation?

Confidentiality is very important during an investigation. Sierra Club will keep the identity of the individual who experienced the conduct, any third-party reporter of the conduct, the subject of the report, and all witnesses confidential to the extent possible consistent with a full and fair investigation.

Only those individuals within Sierra Club who need to receive information in order to assist with the investigation will be informed of the specifics of the report or investigation.

All Individuals involved in the investigation are expected to exercise discretion and their best judgment in talking about the details of the report and the investigation, and are generally discouraged from discussing aspects of the investigation.

All individuals are prohibited from seeking to influence the testimony of other witnesses. They are also prohibited from spreading false information or embarking on a campaign to disparage the reporter, the individual who experienced the conduct (if different than the reporter), the subject of the report, or any witnesses.

14) If an investigator concludes that conduct prohibited by the policy has occurred, what corrective actions will be taken and who will decide on those actions?

At the conclusion of the investigation, the investigator will provide a report to the Volunteer Peer Review Group with the findings from the investigation. If the investigator finds that the subject of the report engaged in conduct that violated the policy, the investigator will recommend *proportionate* corrective actions in the report.

Depending on the outcome of the investigation, proportionate corrective action may include removal from leadership positions, lack of eligibility for future leadership positions (including Board membership), suspension from attendance at or participation in Sierra Club events, and/or removal from club membership.

The Volunteer Peer Review Group will assist the People Department in determining the proportionate corrective action.

Under Sierra Club's [Bylaws and Standing Rules](#), if the People Department proposes termination of membership, a Panel consisting of the Executive Director or designee, the President, and the Chair of the Board Volunteer Leadership and Activism Committee must first review and approve that recommendation. If the People Department proposes a permanent revocation of privileges (such as serving in a leadership position), the volunteer may appeal that decision to the Panel. In all other cases, the People Department will make the final decision regarding the corrective action.

15) How can I be sure that I won't suffer harm if I make a report or participate in an investigation?

Sierra Club's highest priority is to protect those who make a report or participate in an investigation. That is the only way to create trust in our system and to ensure that conduct that violates the policy will not happen or will be promptly stopped if it does happen.

For that reason, Sierra Club will closely monitor whether any form of retaliation occurs against someone who has made a report or participated in an investigation. Anyone who engages in retaliation, regardless of their position or title, will be disciplined, up to and including being removed as a member, consistent with the procedures set forth in the Standing Rules.

Sierra Club will take affirmative steps to determine if retaliation has occurred and will not depend solely on an individual coming forward with a complaint of retaliation.

A belief that the reporting and investigative process at Sierra Club is fair and will not result in retaliation is the foundation for creating a culture of respect, safety and belonging in our organization.