

APPENDIX D: Sexual Harassment Taskforce Process Summary

The UMass Lowell Sexual Harassment Taskforce is charged with providing recommendations to the Executive Cabinet that are designed to ensure that our policies and processes, communication efforts, education and training, and climate and culture related to sexual harassment are aligned with national best practices and all state and federal laws. Joanne Yestramski, Keith Mitchell and James Kohl were appointed as co-chairs and charged with the responsibility of designing and facilitating an efficient, effective and inclusive taskforce process that results in a report of recommendations for submission to the Executive Cabinet in December 2019. Five subject matter experts, Meg Bond, Lauren Turner, Michelle Haynes-Baratz, Clara Reynolds and Annie Ciaraldi were appointed as advisors to the co-chairs. The co-chairs and their advisors comprise the Taskforce Steering Committee.

Four subcommittees were created to deeply study each of the areas of focus and have worked diligently to assemble a set of recommendations that each subcommittee member can support. It is essential that there is broad agreement among the Taskforce membership on the recommendations that will be included in the final report. The following consensus process is being proposed for the review, modification, and acceptance or rejection of subcommittee recommendations.

Sexual Harassment Taskforce Process for Determining Final Recommendations

Based on the determination of the Sexual Harassment Taskforce membership, decisions concerning what recommendations will be included in the final Sexual Harassment Taskforce Report will be made using a hybrid consensus and voting process. As described below, the Sexual Harassment Taskforce will discuss each proposed recommendation, in good faith, in the effort to reach a decision through consensus. If, upon the determination of the facilitators, consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be called, and a supermajority of 75% of the present (in person or via teleconference) individuals must vote Yes for the proposal to be included in the final report.

Definitions:

Consensus: Consensus is a decision-making process which strives for resolution of conflicts and the cooperative development of decisions that everyone can support. In order for consensus process to work, five essential elements must be in place:

1. A willingness to share power
2. Informed commitment to the consensus process
3. A common purpose
4. Strong agendas
5. Effective facilitation

Core Belief of Consensus: each person has an important piece of the truth.

Values of Consensus: respect, trust, cooperation, non-violence, goodwill, truthfulness, diversity, inclusivity, shared responsibility for the group's action.

Skills Necessary for Consensus Process: patience, disciplined speaking and listening, active participation, creativity, willingness to experiment, problem solving

Three Stages of the Decision Making Process:

Proposal:

- The proposal process begins by the Sponsor (Subcommittee) requesting time on the agenda and submitting a formal recommendation proposal using the proposal format (Appendix A).
- Proposed recommendations should be bulleted and consist of
 - An overarching higher-level theme
 - Followed by sub-bullets of specific recommendations that fall within the theme
- The full text of the proposal will be shared with the entire Taskforce prior to the meeting in which it will be introduced and discussed.
- At the allotted time on the agenda, a representative from the sponsoring subcommittee selected by the subcommittee will introduce their proposed recommendation.

Discussion:

- After a proposal is introduced in a meeting, one of the individuals serving in the role of facilitator will facilitate a group discussion designed for all Taskforce members to share their thoughts, ask questions, and offer modifications to the proposed recommendation.
- The Facilitator will work to ensure that all voices are heard and valued equally. These efforts as necessary will go beyond just providing the opportunity for Taskforce members to speak, but will also include efforts to invite those into the conversation who may be silent, recognize and implement strategies to reduce and eliminate stress, keep the process on track (with assistance from the Time Keeper), and work to create a positive dynamic. The Facilitator's role is to facilitate the process and remain neutral.
- The Facilitator may take an anonymous straw poll during the discussion to understand the current status of the Taskforce membership's position on the proposed recommendation being discussed. The Membership will be asked to share if they would: block, stand aside or give consent.
- In order to maximize participation, individuals will be allowed to participate via teleconference. In addition, those not able to be present or participate via teleconference will be allowed to submit their feedback to the facilitators who will in turn share that feedback with the taskforce.

Decision:

In the consensus process, no votes are taken. Proposals are introduced, discussed and eventually arrive at the point of decision. If it seems that the point of decision has been reached, the Facilitator will ask the Taskforce members to indicate their decision by choosing one of the following three options. Decisions to determine if a proposal is included or not included in the final report will not be anonymous. All members of the Sexual Harassment Taskforce will indicate their decision with the exception of the facilitators, who by virtue of their role and need to remain neutral, will not indicate a decision.

- **To Block:** This step prevents the decision from going forward, at least for the time being. Blocking is a serious matter, to be done only when one truly believes that the pending proposal, if adopted, would violate the morals, ethics or safety of the whole. This right should be exercised with great care.

- **Recusal:** If an individual believes that they have a conflict of interest concerning the proposal currently being discussed, they may recuse themselves from the decision making process concerning that proposal.
- **To Stand Aside:** An individual stands aside when they cannot personally support a proposal, but feels it would be all right for the rest of the group to adopt it. Standing aside is a stance of principled non-participation, which absolves the individual from any responsibility for implementing the decision in question. Stand asides are recorded in the minutes of the meeting. If there are more than a few stand asides on an issue, consensus has not yet been reached.
- **To Give Consent:** When everyone in the group (except those standing aside), say “yes” to a proposal, consensus is achieved. To give one’s consent does not necessarily mean that one loves every aspect of the proposal, but it does mean that one is willing to support the decision and stand in solidarity with the group, despite one’s disagreements. Consensus decisions can only be changed by reaching another consensus.

If the Taskforce is not able to reach consensus after thorough discussion and good faith effort among the participants to reach consensus, the facilitators may call for a vote.

- **Voting options:**
 - Yes: the proposed recommendation should be included in the final report
 - No: the proposed recommendation should not be included in the final report
 - Abstain: support or oppose the recommendation
- In order for a proposed recommendation to be approved for inclusion in the final report by a supermajority of 75% of the participants present or on the teleconference voting Yes.
- Facilitators, who by virtue of their role and need to remain neutral, will not cast a vote.
- Like the decisions in the consensus process, final votes will not be anonymous.

The final agreed upon forms of the proposals and decisions will be recorded in the minutes by the Minute Taker, as well as the process by which they were approved (consensus or vote). When the proposed recommendation is approved by vote, the distribution of Yes, No and Abstention votes will also be included in the minutes. The distribution of votes and context including the opinions/alternatives and pros/cons discussed by the Taskforce will be included in the final report.

Recommendations that achieve consensus or passed by a supermajority will be included in the final report exactly as they are recorded in the minutes, as will the distribution of Yes, No and Abstention votes if the proposed recommendation was approved by vote.

Essential Roles:

Facilitator/Agenda Planner: (Joanne Yestramski, Keith Mitchell and James Kohl)

- Thinks about the needs of the group as a whole
- Participates in pre-meeting information gathering and agenda planning
- Prepares the meeting location; brings necessary equipment
- Solicits volunteers to fill other roles in the process
- Creates an atmosphere of trust and safety
- Equalizes participation

- Ensures that the agenda is honored
- Keeps the energy of the group focused on the task
- Exposes conflict and suggests processes for resolving it
- Collects agreements; tests for consensus
- Orchestrates appropriate follow-up activities
- Keeps track of items to be discussed at future meetings, as well as, conditional or time-limited decisions
- Participates in planning the next meeting's agenda, checking with members beforehand to see if they have items to propose

Minute Taker: (TBD by the Taskforce)

- Maintains the minutes
- Notes the name of those present at the meeting
- Writes down the decisions, worded as agreed to, noting stand asides, plus the intent behind the decision (3 sentences or less), and a summary of the discussion (key points only, no names) and the names of those who commit to follow up activities

Timekeeper: (TBD by the Taskforce)

- Keeps track of time limits set by the group
- Uses a watch or timer
- Gives a warning before time is up, then announces when time limit is reached

Sponsors of agenda items: Subcommittee proposing recommendations

- Take responsibility for presenting agenda items to the group
- Get information, prepare reports, charts etc. before the meeting

Content adapted from:

Briggs, B. (2013). *Introduction to Consensus*. Jiutepec, Morelos, Mexico: International Institute for Facilitation and Change.

And modified through:

Discussions and suggested modifications by the membership of the UMass Lowell Sexual Harassment Taskforce

Appendix A: Proposal Format

Sexual Harassment Taskforce Recommendation Proposal

Date Proposed: _____

Proposal Sponsored By: (sponsoring subcommittee and list membership)

Recommended Action (Exact wording of the proposed recommendation): _____

Summary of Principle Ideas and any Background that might help the Taskforce to better understand the Proposal: _____

Justification/Goals (What the proposal is trying to accomplish): _____

Pros and Cons (Three possible benefits of the proposal and 3 possible drawbacks): _____

Alternatives to proposal:

*Please attach any additional materials to this proposal if the space provided is not sufficient.