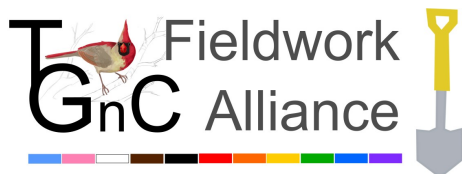


# Field Safety!

an e-zine by & for trans & queer  
scientists



Trans & Gender Non-conforming  
Fieldwork Alliance



Summer 2023



# Hey!

Doing field research can be an amazing experience. Many of us first got into science because we love exploring nature (and getting paid to do it)! But it also takes preparation to make sure we're safe in the field. There are safety guides out there for how to deal with bad weather, snake bites, ticks, etc. But none *yet* that discuss the social-safety issues trans & queer scientists face when we go into the field.

This zine was created by members of the Trans & Gender Non-conforming Field Alliance as a resource for other queer scientists to help set up work at a new field site and protect our safety and wellbeing! Happy reading, and check out our website if you want to learn more!



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# Part I: before heading to the field

If your research is taking you to a new field site, you can start preparing a few weeks before you go! Here are some things you may want to research about the field location you'll be traveling to, questions you can reflect on to decide what'll be the most comfortable for you, and material resources you can prep ahead of time to make your trip more safe and easeful.

"We only use campgrounds with single stalls that have proper doors, and we do our research on the bathroom situation well in advance by visiting the sites every year. Everyone gets the same health, safety, hygiene, information about 1 month in advance of the trip." ~ K

## Research!

### CHECK YOUR RIGHTS

Read about local anti-trans and anti-lgbtq laws. Look at travel alerts for the countries or regions where you're planning to work. Here are some resources:

[equaldex.com](https://www.equaldex.com)

Explore the progress of LGBTQ+ rights around the world.

[lgbtmap.org/equality-maps](https://lgbtmap.org/equality-maps)

[freedomforallamericans.org/states](https://freedomforallamericans.org/states)

Search for US States lacking full protections for LGBTQ+ folks.

[travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/lgbt-travel](https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/lgbt-travel)

[travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories](https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories)

Resources from the Canadian government.

[travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-with-special-considerations/lgbtqi.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-with-special-considerations/lgbtqi.html)

International travel advisories from the U.S. government.

### CONSIDER HOUSING & BATHROOM ACCESS

Learn about the specifics of housing arrangements and bathroom facilities. If you can, try to speak with LGBTQ+ people who have worked there before and ask about their experience. Some questions to consider:

How is rooming/housing organized? By gender? Is single housing or a separate room an option?

Are there bathroom/shower room facilities? Or is the field the bathroom?



# COMMUNICATION & REPORTING

What forms of communication are available at the research location?

Will you have cellular service and a way to plug in and charge your phone?

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Will you have internet service? How reliable is it?

Consider taking a mobile hotspot or satellite phone to maintain a connection.

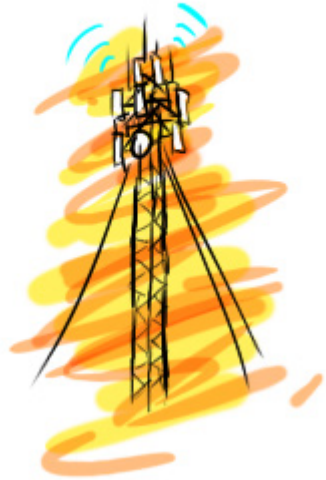
Who are the proper people/channels to report to if you or someone else experiences discrimination?

These can include university/field station affiliated channels and, when applicable, local laws.

Be familiar with the official code of conduct for the organization you're working with AND supervisor/lab-specific code of conducts for your individual group.

Are TGnC protections codified in these documents?

If you feel comfortable doing so, consider asking supervisors to explicitly state TGnC protections in their lab code of conduct if they're not included in the institution-wide rules.



Choose a confidante you will check-in with regularly who is based outside of the field scenario. Let them know you may be lacking queer support systems in the field and arrange regular check-ins using your preferred/most accessible method.

Checking in with queer friends at home can help with any feelings of pressure to suppress your queerness or if you're feeling isolated.

"For me, I prep by having at least one person I can confide in. If I'm not the one hiring staff, I put effort into making sure we have regular telephone and/or internet so that I can contact my support system as needed." ~ Starfleet



# Reflect!

Now that you've done the research, it's time to do some emotional prep.

Here's how some TGFA members have handled it:

Who do I want to be "out" to in this field setting?

Think about the people you'll be interacting with  
— supervisors, coworkers, land managers, the public, etc. — and make decisions around how you feel most comfortable interacting with different folks.

This might mean deciding to wear a pronoun button or badge if you feel comfortable.

"I initially decided to come out at my field station to avoid dysphoria I experienced being seen as a woman. I had to do a lot of "gender-101" educating & self-advocacy! I am out as trans to my supervisor & colleagues. With land managers & the public, I don't draw attention to my transness, but I have "they/them" in my email signature, so I'm not hiding it, lol." -Eli

"I tell coworkers that know to not mention it unless I bring it up first"  
~Rebecca

If you are out to people at work but not in the field, your colleagues may need to be reminded beforehand that being out is context-dependent, and they should adhere to your preference for whether or to what extent you are out while in the field.

"Don't feel that you need to come out if you don't feel safe doing so, especially if fieldwork is remote. If you are not out, it can be emotionally & psychologically hard. Be kind to yourself and seek a support group when you return or before you head out to the field." ~C

"I am basically honest if anyone asks, but I don't bring it up myself in an effort to just normalize that my existence should not be questioned." ~Starfleet

"I do wish I had thought more about how my being trans was going to impact how others saw me and how I would respond to that beforehand. I think if I were able to have more conversations with people like my supervisors and therapist and even friends I may have felt more supported and had more strategies for dealing with getting misgendered."  
~Alex

"I have only come out to fellow lab mates that I have done fieldwork with when I know that they are a safe person to come out to. I pay attention to how they react to different pronoun usage and LGBTQ+ issues in general, before talking to them about myself. I also go through this process with colleagues. I also pay attention to whether there are signs for safe spaces etc. in people's offices before coming out as part of how I vet out different folks." -CJ

### How do I want to present in terms of gender expression and queer signifiers?

"When starting work in new field sites, I may choose to alter my expression to be less visibly queer (i.e. removing nail polish, dying hair to "natural" colors, wearing less dudey clothes). I wish I didn't feel the need to do this, but for now it's a safety measure I take until I have a better sense of how queer friendly an area is."  
-Eli

Masking your queerness is sometimes safer but can also be draining and frustrating! You get to decide how you feel most comfortable presenting, and it can be fluid depending on the context.

### Does it feel safe to do fieldwork in this area?

There are many safety concerns to take into account when doing field work alone, including the potential danger as a queer person. If for any reason it does not feel safe to work alone at a site, tell your supervisor and get the help you need!



"When I was doing fieldwork in Wyoming, I was relieved that after asking about it, my employer always paired me with another colleague I trusted when out in the field." ~ Ephraim

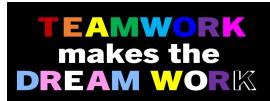
### Options for when solo fieldwork isn't safe:

Get help from your supervisor

Hire an undergraduate assistant or technician

Coordinate with another student for reciprocal field support

Solicit volunteers (friends or community members)



### When is unsafe TOO unsafe?

Early during planning for a field research project, if you're picking up on major red flags in the laws or culture, you should be able to discuss alternate locations. This option is not always possible for students, technicians or postdocs, but a form of self-advocacy we think should be more normalized as we promote awareness of queer and trans field issues.

"REMEMBER: Your health, safety, and well-being are more important than any research project. It is 100% okay to say no, I am not able to work at this location."  
~ Rocky

### Options for when a site isn't safe:

move field work

work with open-access data (e.g. NEON, LTER data)

do a data modeling or simulation-based study

leverage museum or herbaria datasets

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## Example script for contacting advisor about safety concerns

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Dear [Advisor],

I am writing to express concern about potential threats to my safety while conducting field work in an environment that is hostile to queer people. I do not feel comfortable participating in field work in this location and feel it necessary for my well-being to request accommodations. I am hoping that we can work together to find an alternative solution. Thank you for prioritizing my safety.

Best,  
[Student]



## RESOURCES

### Supplies to bring with you!

Privacy protective cover on your phone  
(so nobody can see what's on the screen unless they're holding it)

1-3 month supply of HRT and other  
meds (easier to get from your usual  
pharmacist than find at field location)

Guide to bathroom use and  
menstruation in the field

[https://www.antarcticglaciers.org/  
2022/09/menstruation-in-the-field/](https://www.antarcticglaciers.org/2022/09/menstruation-in-the-field/)

Clothes that accommodate physical  
requirements of field work & minimize  
dysphoria

"I FIND THAT 'MEN'S' CLOTHES FROM  
SIERRA.COM ARE ONE OF THE MORE  
AFFORDABLE OPTIONS FOR FIELD CLOTHES.  
ARE RELATIVELY GENDER NEUTRAL,  
AND HAVE BIGGER POCKETS!" ~ Eli

"Although I bind regularly, I can't always  
in the field since the binder becomes  
uncomfortable/unsafe when hiking to field  
sites. I typically just wear baggier  
clothes and layers to work around chest  
dysphoria in these situations." - C

## Part 2: while in the field

When you get to your field site,  
find the essentials.

Locate bathrooms/showers — gender-neutral facilities can be found in surprising places. Figure out what's going to be safest and most comfortable for what you'll need to do.

If you're in a more isolated location, look for spots with cellular connection or find out if you have wifi access.

While you're doing field work..

Stay situationally aware (but try not to increase your anxiety unnecessarily)— this is so much easier when there's another queer person with you. Or, if there's not, try to check in with someone to validate/moderate your concern.

“I found gender-neutral facilities in Utah! And there are always outhouses that are gender-neutral”  
~ Roberta

Considerations for single-day vs. multi-overnight trips

Bathrooms and other facilities can be tricky, sometimes you have to be creative/flexible.

Sometimes it's safer to follow norms like face-shaving in men's room and applying makeup in women's room.

“When I first started a field work job out of college, I went right to my employer and told them I was queer, and asked if I should be concerned for my safety. I don't think this employer had handled many questions like that as of 2006 -- and it really should have been on their radar. In the end, I ended up in a situation where I was always out in the field with a colleague I worked with a lot and with whom I felt safe -- I think this was probably somewhat deliberate on my employer's part. It worked out and I had a successful field season. If I had the hindsight, and were operating decades later, I probably could have been much more specific about my safety needs and intersecting access needs -- I would have expected my employer to provide them”

~ Ephraim



# Mental Health & Self-care

- Maintaining connections and check-ins/debriefs with queer colleagues or friends
- Getting enough sleep and eating enough, having good snacks
- Bring some trans or gender-affirming media - books, playlists, podcasts (e.g. Gender Reveal)



- Debriefs with queer colleagues
- Appreciating the natural environment, doing photography or other non-work-related tasks
- Writing letters, journaling
- Having down-time to check-in with yourself



Take stock of your mental well-being on a regular basis to check for changes in your comfort and sense of safety. If your plan for self-care isn't working, you change tactics. Your well-being is important!



**The End!**

**Stay tuned for more TGFA Zines!**

**Next zine: Finding safe(r) fieldwork opportunities**

**TGFA Website: <https://ezrakottler.wixsite.com/field>**

**Twitter: [@TGFieldAlliance](https://twitter.com/TGFieldAlliance)**

