

GCE-LTER Broadening Participation Implementation plan

The GCE-LTER Broadening Participation Plan lays out broad goals for the project in terms of broadening participation in GCE activities so that they are available to all. This Implementation Plan is a companion document that describes in detail what the project has already done, what specific actions we plan for the next 6 years (on a rolling basis), and what we hope to accomplish over the longer term for those who face barriers to participation in our research program. It also takes stock of our efforts to be thoughtful in our interactions with the local community and to respect the historical ties and knowledge that Native Americans, the Gullah-Geechee community, and others have regarding our study site. We assess progress annually, and we welcome your input.

Barriers to participation in GCE research include lack of previous research experience, lack of familiarity with GCE and the University of Georgia Marine Institute (UGAMI), concern over field and travel expenses, harassment and discrimination, sexual misconduct, and lack of dependent care support. Some individuals may also face barriers associated with poor English skills, lack of trust, or disabilities that limit access. Below we list what we have done to date to address these barriers, along with both our short-term goals and long-term aims.

What we have done (some of these actions are ongoing):

We established a standing committee (currently the “Broadening Participation Committee”), which meets at least annually to assess the GCE Broadening Participation Plan, Broadening Participation Implementation Plan, code of conduct and field safety plan, and to identify new potential actions.

We wrote a GCE diversity plan (2012, revised in 2024) and a companion implementation plan (2022). Based on new guidance from NSF on April 18, 2025 (<https://www.nsf.gov/updates-on-priorities>), the GCE diversity plan and implementation plan both sunset in 2025 with the end of the GCE-IV award. During the GCE-V award, the Broadening Participation Plan and Broadening Participation Implementation Plan (this document) will guide our efforts to broaden participation in our program.

We conducted a demographic survey of past and active GCE personnel (2020), and will repeat this survey during the GCE-V funding cycle.

To minimize and correct negative interactions within the group, we adopted a GCE code of conduct (2021-present), which prohibits harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct, and provides mechanisms for reporting violations. We provide this information to everyone who works in the GCE program, and to the Schoolyard participants (2023-present). This document is reviewed annually.

We wrote a GCE field safety plan (2022-present), which provides guidance on general field safety and on minimizing risk of harassment from co-workers or the public. This information is provided to all who work in the program. This document is reviewed annually.

To broaden participation in our intern program, we added a question about overcoming obstacles to the application (2021-present) so that it wouldn't just emphasize experience, but also motivation. We rephrased this question in 2023 so that applicants didn't feel pressured to over share. We also invite applicants to provide information on disabilities so that we can facilitate reasonable accommodations.

We continue to expand promotion of the summer intern program by seeking to advertise as widely as possible, including through Savannah State University and programs at the University of Georgia and the University of Houston. We hosted a visit by the Savannah State University REU program to UGAMI (2021) and hosted a visit by the Ecological Society of America SEEDS program to UGAMI in April 2024.

To improve the experience of interns and graduate students, and allay potential concerns about participating in our program, we added (2021-present) an annual pre-summer orientation for interns and incoming graduate students to help address questions about what to expect at the field site. We routinely put recordings of this orientation session on the GCE web site for reference by anyone unable to attend the meeting live (2024-present).

To improve our relations with local residents, we include residents of the Hogg Hummock Community in our summer seminar series and provide opportunities for GCE participants to engage in community-based agricultural programs. We also work with relevant Native American tribes to help design and vet local archaeological research. We emphasize respect and consideration for the Hogg Hummock community in our summer orientation.

To improve researcher safety, we make field vests available through the GCE technicians' office to help identify researchers working in the field (2022-present).

To reduce financial barriers to participation, we routinely cover travel expenses for interns to the field site (2022-present).

We started a GCE twitter account as one way to improve communication within the group (as well as outside) and celebrate our achievements (2023-present). This account was migrated to Bluesky in 2024.

To improve the experience of interns and graduate students, we emphasize the importance of mentoring to intern sponsors and graduate advisers, and provide them with mentoring resources. We provide clear expectations to mentors, including providing necessary field gear and completing mentor-mentee contracts (2024-present).

We provide a welcome packet of sunscreen and bug spray and electrolytes to summer students (2024-present).

Action items for 2025

We will run our first Faculty Fellows Program, which seeks to broaden participation in GCE science at the faculty level.

Possible actions in the next six years during the GCE-V funding cycle

We will distribute results of the LTER network climate survey overall, and the GCE-specific results. Once we have results, we will discuss whether and how to follow up on this survey within GCE.

We will repeat the GCE demographic survey that was last done in 2020.

Explore a summer visit by the Savannah State REU program to UGAMI.

Promote the 2025 intern program more broadly.

Make essential field gear available to reduce out of pocket expenses for undergraduate and graduate students (boots, field shirt and pants, sunscreen, bug spray).

Ask UGAMI to better label the trailers, or make a map that shows which trailer is which.

Add mentor training to each annual meeting.

Make polo shirts with the GCE logo available to help identify researchers working in the field. These will be an alternative to the field vests, depending on the situation.

Establish an on-island buddy system for scientists while they are in residence at UGAMI.

Work with GCE researchers and the Schoolyard program to expand the “meet the scientist” video series on the GCE education web page.

Provide recorded talks on cultural competency in research from Geechee contacts.

Work to improve group cohesion through social events, training events, and other community building events, both in the summer at UGAMI and at other GCE events.

Provide more career training for interns and graduate students and technicians.

Develop regular avenues for graduate student interactions to improve inclusion.

Make it clear that we can provide remote research opportunities for those who face barriers to field work.

Partner with UGAMI and other Island entities (e.g. SINERR, NGOs) to sponsor an open house for Hogg Hummock (and perhaps McIntosh County) residents.

Continue to partner with members of the local Gullah/Geechee community to conduct research on traditional ecological knowledge.

Long-term aims

Partner with the local community organizations.

Webinars for GCE membership (maybe we can get or promote the CERF webinars).

Provide access to culturally-aware mentoring and DEI training for interns, graduate students, and schoolyard teachers.

Identify mechanisms to provide childcare for researchers while at Sapelo Island.

Documenting progress

The GCE Broadening Participation Committee will continue to oversee and promote Broadening Participation actions, including regularly reviewing the Broadening Participation Plan and implementation plan.

We will include a Broadening Participation working group in or around every GCE annual meeting to assess annual progress and set priorities for the coming year.

During the fourth or fifth year of each grant cycle, we will identify actions needing funding in the next grant cycle.

We will conduct a demographic survey of GCE participants in every grant cycle to document progress and inform grant proposals (we conducted a baseline survey in 2020).

Updated 10/8/2025