

Workplace Climate Assessment Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

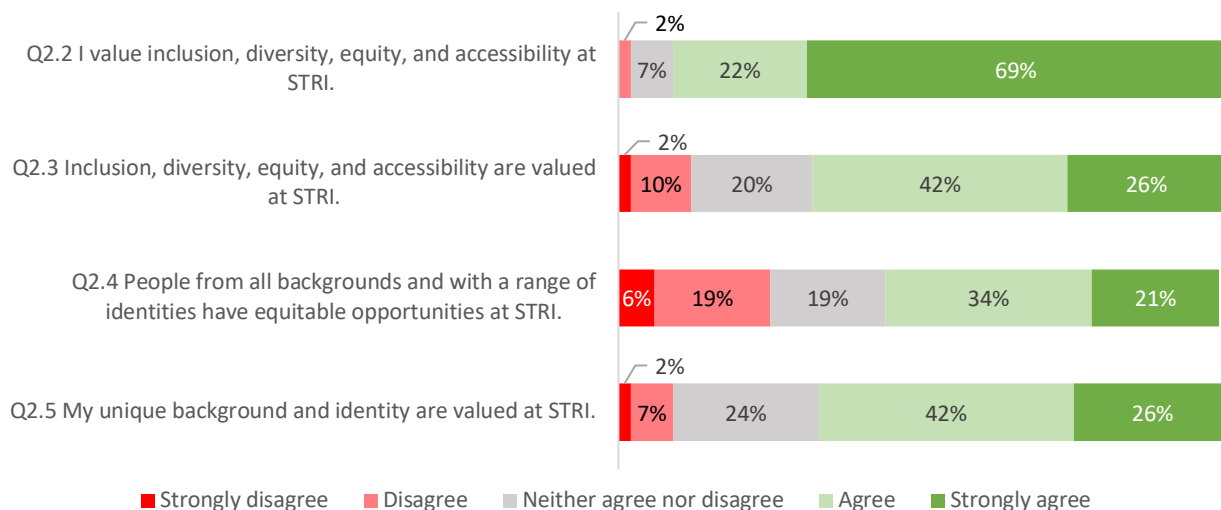
2022

In fall 2021, Smithsonian Organization and Audience Research (SOAR) distributed a survey to a contact list of 368 employees and contractors stationed in all Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) facilities, as well as approximately 2,800 current and former STRI scientific visitors, including research associates, interns, fellows, field course participants, and volunteers. A total of 880 people opened the survey, and 787 completed some or all of it.

All-Respondent Findings

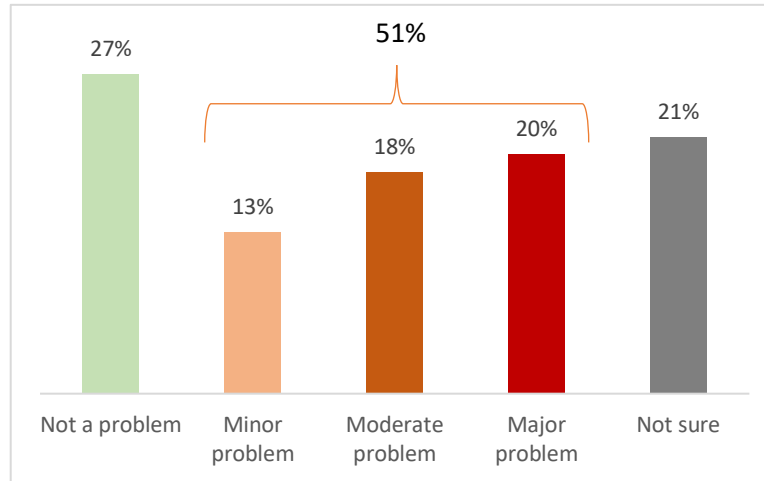
Responses to questions about inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) at STRI were generally positive. However, **Q2.4** (“People of all backgrounds and with a range of identities have equitable opportunities at STRI”) stood out as the area of relative weakness. (See **Figure E.1**.)

Figure E.1: Respondents Tended to Answer IDEA Questions Favorably (n=762-782)



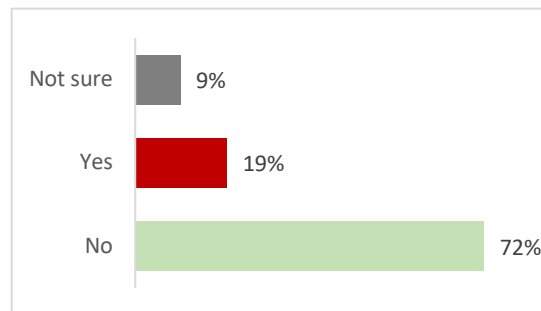
Over half of respondents (51%) believed that unfair treatment, harassment, or other unacceptable behaviors have been a *Minor, Moderate, or Major Problem* at STRI. (See **Figure E.2.**)

Figure E.2: Q3.3 (Within the last five years, do you believe unfair treatment, harassment, and/or other unacceptable behaviors have been a problem at STRI?) (n=720)



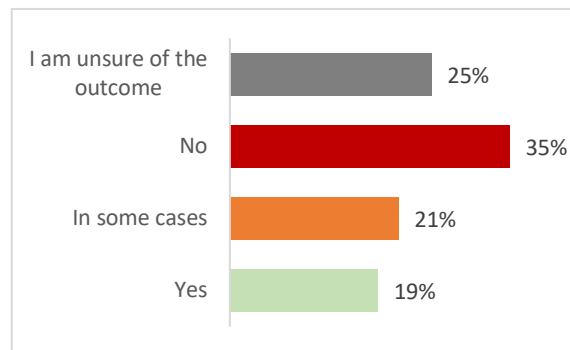
About one in five (19%) respondents indicated that they had personally experienced unacceptable behaviors. (See **Figure E.3.**)

Figure E.3: Q3.4 (Within the last five years, have you experienced unfair treatment, harassment, or other unacceptable behaviors at STRI?) (n=732)



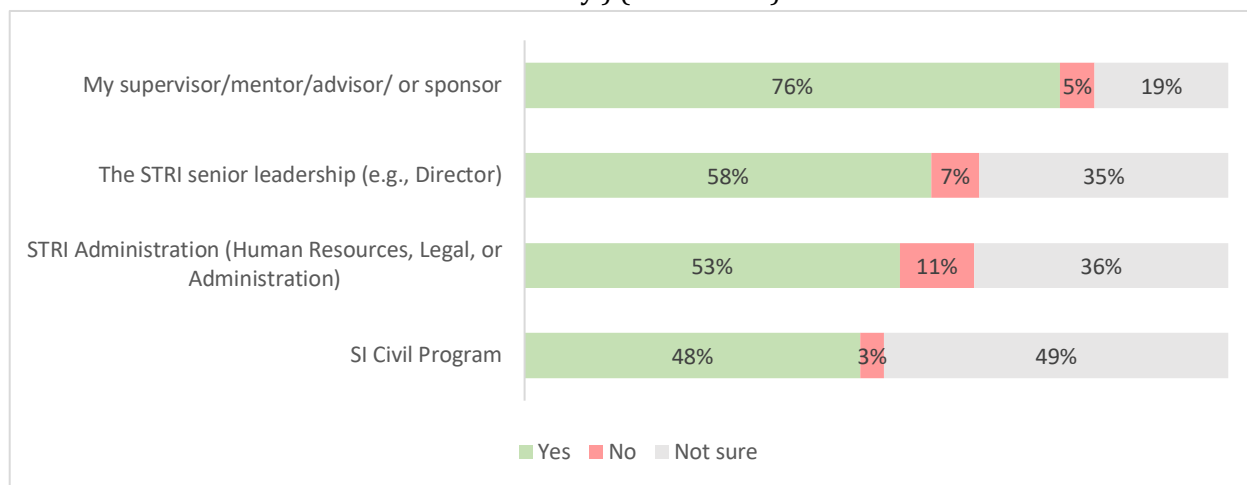
Those who witnessed or experienced inappropriate behavior and took action in response were asked if they were satisfied with the outcome. A quarter of these respondents (25%) indicated they were unsure what the outcome was; and more answered “No” (35%) than “Yes” (19%).¹ (See **Figure E.4.**)

Figure E.4: Q3.13 (After taking action, were you generally satisfied with the outcome?) (n=194)



There appeared to be much uncertainty about whether STRI and SI authorities would take reports of harassment or other inappropriate behavior seriously. When asked whether various reporting resources would do so, “Not sure” responses ranged from 19% (for supervisors and supervisor-like figures) to 49% (for the new SI Civil program). (See **Figure E.5.**)

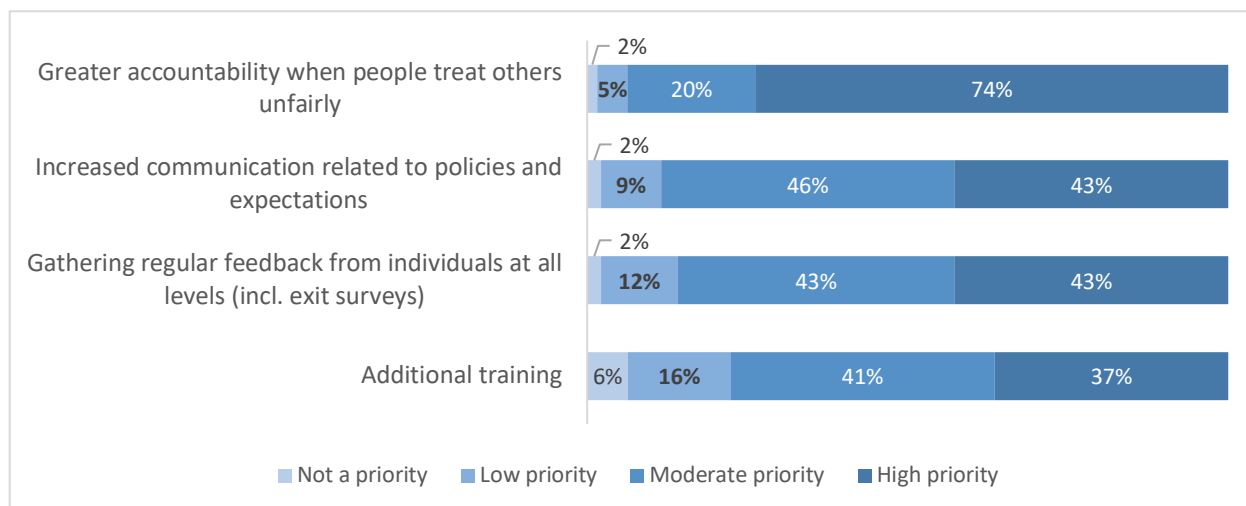
Figure E.5: Q3.16 (If I report an issue like harassment to the following people, it will be taken seriously.) (n=642-652)



Respondents were asked to assess the priority of four measures to promote improvement in the culture. The top priority was “Greater accountability when people treat others unfairly,” which was selected as a *High Priority* by about three quarters of respondents (74%). However, all suggested measures were chosen as at least a *Moderate Priority* by large majorities. (See **Figure E.6.**)

¹ The rest selected “In some cases,” an answer choice for those who witnessed or experienced multiple cases.

Figure E.6: Q7.2 (Please rate the importance of the following measures to ensure people at STRI are treated fairly) (n=639-646)



Respondents were invited to provide write-in responses to the following question: “What can STRI do to prevent harassing conduct and/or provide a more supportive, inclusive, and safe work environment?” Recommendations included the following:

1. **Acknowledge Past Harms.** Some respondents felt that “*STRI needs to break the silence about sexual misconduct and acknowledge what has happened over many years.*” Even if STRI is now taking action to right past wrongs, leadership needs to acknowledge the harm done in the past, in some cases by individuals who remain part of the community or the leadership team.
2. **Set Clear Expectations and Standards.** Some respondents wrote that STRI’s expectations and standards of conduct must be clear to everyone, regardless of position type or length of stay. Some called for a document detailing STRI’s research ethics and code of conduct, with clear definitions of unacceptable behaviors and descriptions of consequences for those who violate them. They noted that onboarding and orientation of new hires are opportunities to clearly communicate STRI’s expectations, standards, and anti-harassment policies, and that scientific visitors would also benefit from well-crafted messaging about STRI’s anti-harassment policies prior to visiting and during onboarding.
3. **Dismantle Unhealthy Power Structures.** Some respondents encouraged STRI to examine its power dynamics, especially between scientific staff and visitors. “*I have seen and experienced: working 80+ hours a week without pay, being put in dangerous situations, [threats] to be replaced, holding recommendation letters over heads, and pressuring people to work when they are sick or injured.*” This includes a review of research approval processes, and of how recommendations are given. Such a review may result in new practices that mitigate the likelihood of unhealthy relationships.
4. **Improve HR and Legal.** Some respondents were critical of staff in the HR and legal departments and recommended an overhaul. They suggested these departments often seem more concerned with preserving appearances than with finding the underlying cause of complaints: “*Stop HR/Legal requesting [us] not to talk about the matter to anyone, and [then] not*

doing anything about it.” At minimum, they insisted that staff in these roles must act more respectfully toward those who file complaints.

5. **Improve Reporting and Accountability.** While some respondents said that STRI has taken steps to improve its reporting process, others wanted STRI to do more to ensure that people are willing and able to report inappropriate behavior regardless of location, situation, or language. Reporting tools must be bilingual and readily available, and reporting processes clear, especially for visitors. Respondents shared examples of reports being made, but nothing changing. Commentors stressed that complaints must be taken seriously, and that anyone, regardless of position or seniority, who is found to have violated STRI’s expectations, standards, or anti-harassment policies must be held accountable.
6. **Support Those Who Speak Out.** To combat distrust and fear about reporting, commentors suggested that reporting had to be encouraged and destigmatized, and any negative repercussions for those who come forward must be eliminated. Commentors wanted those who report to be supported and protected throughout the process and provided with some degree of input into the reporting outcome. For example, a person who reports should be given a copy of their recorded complaint.
7. **Continue to Listen and Engage.** Respondents want STRI to continue to discuss the issues, provide opportunities for people to participate in the process, and provide input through surveys like this one and other feedback mechanisms.

Group Comparisons

Response patterns for many job and identity characteristics were analyzed. The clearest influences on response patterns appeared to be the following three factors: **Tenure**, **Vulnerability**, and **Culture/Nationality**. Aside from the first, these factors are not identical with job/demographic variables drawn from the survey; rather, they are associated with multiple variables, either individually or in combination.

Tenure

“Tenure” refers to the variable *Time at STRI*. The general pattern was as follows:

Longer *Time at STRI* was associated with **less favorable** responses on key questions.

This makes sense intuitively. Respondents with longer Tenure simply have more time and opportunity to witness and experience harassment at STRI, and to become aware of problems with its organizational culture.

The effect of Tenure on response patterns may help explain the finding that higher professional status—as indicated by *Supervisor* status, *Advisor* status, or higher *Salary*—was generally associated with less favorable responses. The influence of *Time at STRI*, which was closely associated with the *Supervisor*, *Advisor*, and *Salary* variables, is probably at work here.

Vulnerability

“Vulnerability” is shorthand for identification with certain demographic groups that historically have been more affected by workplace harassment and insensitivity: women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and those with a disability or chronic illness. The general pattern was as follows:

Female *Gender/Sex*, identification as *LGBTQIA+*, and having a *Disability or Chronic Illness* were all associated with **less favorable** responses on key questions.

Again, this aligns with common sense. Respondents in such groups are presumably more likely to be harassed or treated insensitively, and therefore more alert to the threat of such behaviors and more aware of problems with organizational culture that lead to them.

Survey questions about the reasons for and types of inappropriate behavior experienced suggest that women and LGBTQIA+ respondents were disproportionately subject to bad treatment *based on* their gender/sex and sexual orientation, respectively. Both groups also appeared more likely than men and non-LGBTQIA+ respondents, respectively, to encounter harassment during field work.

Culture/Nationality

“Culture/Nationality” refers to a combination of three variables closely associated with each other: *Country of Origin*, *Language* (Spanish, English, or bilingual), and *Race/Ethnicity* (Hispanic vs. White). For the two largest Culture/Nationality groups at STRI, the general pattern was as follows:

Panamanian, Spanish-speaking, Hispanic survey takers responded **more favorably** than *U.S., English-speaking, White* respondents on key questions.

It should come as no surprise that respondents from different societies may have different definitions of harassment and levels of tolerance for problems with organizational culture. However, SOAR lacks the expertise or data to offer suggestions for *why* Panamanians were generally more upbeat about diversity, inclusion, and harassment issues than U.S. respondents.

Among survey respondents, the *Education* variable was closely associated with Culture/Nationality, specifically in the sense that Panamanians were less likely to hold a doctorate than U.S. respondents—or indeed, non-Panamanian respondents more generally. This follows from the demographic structure of STRI personnel, in which Panamanians are disproportionately support staff and non-Panamanians are disproportionately visiting or resident research scientists.²

Some other findings of possible interest related to Culture/Nationality are the following:

U.S., English-speaking, White respondents were more skeptical that authorities such as STRI administrators or leaders would take a report of harassment seriously; nonetheless, they were more likely to take action if they witnessed or experienced harassment.

Hispanic respondents were more likely to say they were unfairly treated *because* of their race/ethnicity than *White* respondents, although the absolute figure was still low (7% vs. 1%).

17% of *Spanish-speakers* felt unfairly treated because of their lack of English proficiency.

11% of *English-speakers* felt unfairly treated because of their lack of Spanish proficiency.

² The association between doctoral-level education and Culture/Nationality probably lies behind some findings that otherwise may be hard to explain; for example, *U.S., English-speaking, White* respondents were more likely to cite field work as the location of harassment that they witnessed or experienced.