



Resistance in Restriction:

Practitioner Approaches to Preserving Campus Sexual Violence Prevention + Response Services in a Threatening Political Climate

April 28, 2025

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Executive Summary

In response to recent laws and policies impacting funding and structural support for campus sexual violence prevention and response services across the US, [HF+C](#), a joint project of [Chrysalis Network](#) and [Seven & Nine Consulting](#), hosted a two-part discussion series on February 19 and March 19, 2025. The goal of the series was to identify 1) Current barriers to preventing and addressing sexual violence within higher education institutions, and 2) Strategies to move through and around existing and anticipated challenges.

Two hundred and eighty-four professionals from around the US registered for the meetings and submitted information via Google forms, and a total of 140 professionals participated live across the two 75-minute sessions. Participants included campus and community advocates, preventionists, Title IX, student conduct, counselors, medical professionals, administrators, and legal and law enforcement officers.

Upon registration, participants shared notable barriers to their work, resulting in the following themes: Recent Executive Orders and the 2025 [Dear Colleague Letter](#) regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), Title IX compliance confusion, funding uncertainty/inadequacy, engaging students in training, and managing burnout and feelings of institutional betrayal.

During Part One of the series, participants were asked to brainstorm the impact of the aforementioned barriers on their day-to-day work, as well as note current and anticipated changes in how they do their work. The challenges participants identified were then used for Part Two, informing the goals toward which participants were asked to develop action steps. The identified goals were:

- Adapting **language** and messaging to navigate political and institutional restrictions
- Continuing **response** efforts despite funding cuts and structural changes
- Empowering **students** and harnessing the power of grassroots organizing
- Maintaining **prevention** programming within new compliance requirements and institutional structures
- Prioritizing **mental health** and avoiding burnout for practitioners

Action strategies noted by participants emphasized **flexibility, collaboration, and mental health support** for both students and practitioners. Examples include: building strong student leadership, engaging in transparent communication, adapting to shifting requirements, fostering a supportive work environment, utilizing stories and data, and engaging with external partnerships. Implementing these action steps can contribute to more resilient systems that not only respond to immediate challenges but also set a foundation for sustained, meaningful change in the face of adversity, ultimately preserving campus sexual violence prevention and response services.



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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the sexual violence prevention and response practitioners around the US who bravely shared their fears and challenges and generously offered their ideas and strategies to move forward during these hostile times. We honor the people you are and the relentless work you are doing even despite difficulties, to ensure that survivors get the services they deserve and that perpetrators are held to account.



Introduction

Escalating in January 2025, HF+C has witnessed significant confusion, fear, frustration, and a chilling effect among sexual violence prevention and response practitioners related to advancing their work. The cause of the disruption stems from new regulatory requirements, budget restrictions, oppression of human rights, and inconsistent direction from the federal government about how to best move important work forward. From the dismantling of the Department of Education¹ to prohibition of undefined “illegal DEI” programs², funding freezes³ and Title IX shifts,⁴ practitioners have been facing constant external challenges. The National Women’s Law Center recently specifically outlined ways in which the Trump administration is jeopardizing sexual violence prevention and response efforts.⁵ For additional examples (though not an exhaustive list) of laws, guidance, and removal of funding impacting campus and community practitioners, please see Appendix A.

HF+C Co-Founders, Juliette Grimmatt and Amy Circosta, had a strong desire to take action in a way that would support colleagues in continuing to advance prevention and response efforts. Although the landscape is shifting daily, creating community and offering opportunities for collaboration are accessible steps toward actionable progress. HF+C wanted to add to that an opportunity to ideate on barriers and strategies at the granular level: **What is impacting practitioners’ day-to-day operations and what can be done to work through or around those challenges?**

Publicized through relevant listservs⁶, the Chrysalis Network’s [Puzzles](#) conference participants, and via the collaborators’ LinkedIn accounts, HF+C invited practitioners (advocates, counselors, preventionists, Title IX officers, law enforcement officers, medical providers, etc.) to come together over two sessions, one month apart, to generate ideas. Publicity materials informed potential registrants that their contributions would be kept confidential, explicitly stating: *“Information will be presented in the aggregate, taking care to remove personal- and agency/institution-identifying information.”* Additionally, registrants were notified that if they

¹ [Executive Order 14242](#) (March 20, 2025)

² [Executive Order 14151](#) (February 20, 2025)

³ [Rape Crisis Centers See Funding Delays Amid Trump Administration Spending Upheaval](#), National Public Radio Online (February 7, 2025)

⁴ [The Trump Administration’s Title IX Decision Endangers Women, Girls, and Survivors](#), EdTrust Press Release (February 3, 2025)

⁵ [Abuse of Power: How the Trump Administration Is Undermining Survivors of Sexual Violence](#), National Women’s Law Center Blog Post (April 16, 2025)

⁶ HF+C recruited participants via the following national listservs: [SAPC](#): Sexual Assault Program Coordinators; [CAPPA](#): Campus Advocacy + Prevention Professionals Association; [WRAC-L](#): Women’s Resource and Action Centers List; and [MASOC Campus PSB Professionals](#): Massachusetts-based professional association for clinicians and other professionals working to prevent sexual violence through early intervention, treatment, and resources for young people engaged in problematic sexual behaviors (PSBs).



were unable to participate in the live session but wanted to contribute to the report, they could anonymously complete the data collection worksheet via a Google form. The first session of the series was held on February 19, 2025 and focused on identifying barriers. In total, 236 practitioners registered for the session and provided data on barriers, and approximately 100 practitioners participated live in Part One of the series, submitting their notes from small group discussions and individually via a Google form. Using the data collected in Part One, HF+C framed topics for action planning for Part Two which was held on March 19, 2025. In Part Two, 264 practitioners registered for the session and provided data on strategies, and approximately 40 practitioners participated in the live meeting.

This report describes themes and insights derived from the data and ideas offered by participants. Data summarization was conducted by HF+C with the support of ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025).



Part One: Barriers Faced by Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Practitioners in Higher Education

As reported by participants in Part One of the two-part series, this section outlines the key barriers faced by practitioners working in sexual violence prevention and response within higher education. The responses reflect the stressors that these professionals encounter in their day-to-day work, as well as the changes and challenges that are expected to arise due to state and federal policy shifts, financial constraints, and institutional reorganization.

1. Impact of Stressors on Day-to-Day Work

Participants highlighted several stressors that have deeply impacted their work in sexual violence prevention and advocacy. These challenges contribute to burnout and uncertainty, leaving practitioners feeling overwhelmed and unsupported.

Key Themes:

- **Burnout and Emotional Toll:** The rollback of protections, attacks on marginalized communities, and shifting policies have contributed to significant emotional fatigue. Many professionals are survivors themselves or have identities under direct attack, making the work even more exhausting.
- **Fear and Job Security Concerns:** Anxiety about job stability is widespread, particularly as some institutions eliminate DEI offices and restructure advocacy roles. There is a palpable fear of being reported or investigated for addressing certain topics.
- **Increased Censorship and Self-Censorship:** Prevention educators are increasingly hesitant to address topics such as gender, masculinity, LGBTQIA+ issues, and systemic oppression, due to fear of repercussions and shifting political climates. Some institutions have removed DEI-related language to comply with changing regulations.
- **Lack of Clear Guidance:** Frequent regulatory changes have left professionals unsure about how to proceed with programming and student support. This uncertainty is compounded by a lack of direction from leadership.
- **Threats to Student Safety and Access to Resources:** Increased reports of students being doxxed or subjected to ICE involvement have heightened concerns, particularly for marginalized groups such as immigrant, LGBTQIA+, and disabled students. Advocacy programs face potential funding cuts, further limiting available support.



- **Increased Workload Without Support:** With DEI offices closing or restructuring, prevention and advocacy teams are expected to absorb additional responsibilities without receiving extra resources or support. This has left many staff feeling overwhelmed and unclear about expectations.
- **Physical and Mental Health Impacts:** The emotional strain of existing stressors has led to heightened anxiety, difficulty focusing, and a sense of isolation. This constant state of emergency has also reduced the capacity for long-term planning and meaningful engagement in advocacy work.

2. Anticipated Changes in Work

Participants foresee significant shifts in how their work will be conducted, driven by institutional and policy changes. These shifts present new challenges to maintaining a meaningful and supportive environment for sexual violence prevention and response efforts.

Key Themes:

- **Censorship and Language Restrictions:** Many participants are being asked to modify or eliminate terms such as "DEI," "privilege," "gender," and "transition" from training materials, websites, and social media. Some are expected to use "codewords" to continue their work without drawing scrutiny.
- **Structural and Institutional Changes:** Offices and programs are being renamed, restructured, or eliminated with little transparency or staff input. DEI offices and identity-based centers are particularly vulnerable, leaving staff uncertain about how to continue outreach and support.
- **Legal and Compliance Uncertainty:** Many professionals are waiting for guidance from senior leadership and legal counsel on how to proceed with their work, especially with regards to Title IX and Clery compliance. Others face the challenge of submitting program descriptions for legal review as the regulatory landscape shifts.
- **Funding Cuts and Job Security Concerns:** Some participants have seen grant funding frozen or eliminated, impacting both staffing and programming. Others fear further budget cuts as institutions seek to balance their finances in light of policy changes.
- **Increased Workload and Role Shifts:** As offices are cut or restructured, remaining employees are being asked to take on additional responsibilities without a clear increase in resources or support. This adds pressure and uncertainty to their day-to-day tasks, and presents concerns around being able to continue providing



exceptional advocacy services to survivors.

- **Fear, Uncertainty, and Self-Policing:** Many participants expressed concern about retaliation for discussing certain issues, leading some to feel the need to "stay under the radar" to protect themselves and their work.
- **Impact on Training and Outreach:** Some institutions are shifting their focus from systemic oppression to broader concepts such as "respect," which has made it difficult for practitioners to continue to address key issues like bystander intervention and sexual violence prevention.

3. Strategies for Ensuring Continuity

Despite the many challenges and uncertainties, participants are employing a range of strategies to ensure the continuity of their work and to continue advocating for marginalized communities.

Key Themes:

- **Maintaining Business as Usual (Where Possible):** Many practitioners are continuing with their work and maintaining existing policies, programming, and student support services as long as they are able, while staying vigilant for any changes that may require adaptation.
- **Adapting Language and Messaging:** In response to increasing restrictions, some are modifying materials and training content to comply with new guidelines, using alternative terminology to navigate potential scrutiny.
- **Prioritizing Mental Health and Self-Care:** Participants emphasized the importance of setting boundaries, engaging in self-care, and fostering community care as essential strategies for sustaining their work amidst emotional exhaustion.
- **Strengthening Partnerships and Collaboration:** Institutions are increasing efforts to build stronger relationships with off-campus partners, student groups, and community organizations to continue supporting vulnerable populations.
- **Strategizing for Funding and Policy Changes:** Efforts to secure funding through new grants, diversify funding sources, and integrate protections into institutional frameworks are central to ensuring program continuation, despite external pressures.



- **Leveraging Institutional Values:** Some participants are using institutional commitments to community care and student retention to justify and sustain their work, framing advocacy efforts in alignment with broader university priorities.
- **Monitoring Legal and Policy Changes:** Staying up to date on state and federal regulations is a key priority for many, who are consulting with legal counsel and attending expert-led meetings and workshops on relevant topics to ensure they are prepared for any changes.
- **Ensuring Discreet Access to Resources:** Some institutions have found creative ways to keep identity-based resources accessible, such as using alternative channels or ensuring resources remain available even after official websites have been taken down.

In summary, the barriers faced by practitioners of sexual violence prevention and response in higher education are pervasive and complex, involving both emotional and institutional challenges. Professionals in this area are navigating a shifting landscape of political pressure, policy changes, and financial constraints, all while trying to maintain their commitment to advocacy and student support. However, the strategies employed by practitioners—including adapting to new language restrictions, strengthening collaborations, and advocating for funding—demonstrate resilience and determination in the face of adversity.

As the environment continues to evolve, practitioners will need continued support and solidarity to ensure that their critical work is not only sustained but strengthened.



Part Two: Strategies for Sexual Violence Prevention and Response in Higher Education

Using the barriers participants identified in Part One (above) as the bases for discussion, this section outlines the strategies identified by practitioners during Part Two of the series. These strategies focus on adapting to political and institutional restrictions, overcoming funding cuts and structural changes, empowering students, maintaining prevention programming, and supporting the mental health of practitioners. The responses highlight resilience and creative problem-solving in the face of significant challenges.

Goal 1: Adapt Language and Messaging to Navigate Political and Institutional Restrictions

Practitioners are adapting their language and messaging to ensure continued advocacy and support for survivors despite increasing political and institutional pressures. These approaches aim to align with shifting priorities while preserving the core values of sexual violence prevention.

Practitioner-Offered Strategies:

- **Reframing Language to Align with Institutional Priorities**
 - Emphasize student safety, wellness, retention, and belonging rather than focusing on social justice or DEI-specific framing.
 - Use values-based language like "human dignity" or "community care" to align with institutional missions.
 - Integrate faith-based values where appropriate to gain broader institutional support.
- **Strategic Terminology Shifts**
 - Replace contested terms (e.g., "gender-based violence" with "power-based violence") to avoid triggering scrutiny.
 - Substitute "marginalized identities" with "lived experiences."
 - Rename programs (e.g., "Lavender Graduation" becomes "Senior Celebrations") to maintain inclusivity without drawing attention.
 - Use widely accepted policy terms, such as "student success" instead of "equity."
- **Institutional and Structural Adjustments**
 - Relocate advocacy and prevention offices under less politically scrutinized departments (e.g., student affairs, wellness, compliance).
 - Rename DEI-related offices (e.g., "Civil Rights Compliance") to reduce vulnerability to targeting.
 - Align with institutional legal counsel to ensure legal protection for programs.



- **Leveraging Partnerships and External Support**
 - Collaborate with faculty, student organizations, and off-campus nonprofits not subject to the same restrictions.
 - Encourage faculty to integrate discussions into coursework where there may be more institutional protection.
 - Promote external advocacy events to ensure continued dialogue on sensitive topics.
- **Quietly Maintaining Core Work While Reducing Visibility**
 - Continue existing programs until explicitly told otherwise, avoiding preemptive compliance.
 - Use office spaces to signal support discreetly and provide confidentiality messaging to students.
- **Strategic Communication and Messaging Tools**
 - Develop an institutional glossary to provide alternative language for sensitive terms.
 - Create communication templates to ensure alignment with new messaging restrictions.
 - Train staff to adapt messaging in real-time and update outreach materials to reflect necessary changes.
- **Long-Term Resilience and Documentation**
 - Document successful cases of navigating language restrictions to share best practices.
 - Establish internal networks for sharing strategies and circulating language guides to maintain advocacy while adhering to institutional restrictions.

Goal 2: Continue Response Efforts Despite Funding Cuts and Structural Changes

Practitioners have implemented strategies to sustain sexual violence prevention and response efforts despite financial constraints and institutional restructuring.

Practitioner-Offered Strategies:

- **Strategic Planning & Structural Adaptation**
 - Continuously update strategic plans to maintain organizational vision and structure.
 - Designate more campus staff as confidential resources, allowing survivor support with minimal cost.
 - Reframe services under different departmental titles to maintain visibility and relevance.



- **Funding Diversification & Advocacy**
 - Engage with institutional philanthropy, alumni, and advancement offices to secure alternative funding sources (e.g., grants, endowments).
 - Train staff to advocate internally for sustained funding despite budget constraints.
 - Present data to demonstrate the impact of sexual violence prevention efforts and justify continued funding.
- **Collaboration & External Partnerships**
 - Strengthen relationships with local nonprofits and state and national organizations to fill gaps in service provision.
 - Establish formal partnerships with off-campus shelters, legal aid services, coalitions, and community groups.
 - Create coordinated community response teams to clarify roles and prevent burnout.
- **Technology & Communication Strategies**
 - Utilize encrypted platforms (e.g., Signal) for confidential communication among key stakeholders.
 - Leverage virtual platforms to provide support services, share resources, and offer online education.
- **Workforce & Capacity Building**
 - Cross-train staff from various departments to provide basic survivor support and referrals.
 - Use peer-support models to sustain services without over-reliance on professional staff.
- **Institutional & Community Engagement**
 - Frame survivor support as integral to campus safety and well-being to maintain institutional buy-in.
 - Encourage volunteerism, financial support, and advocacy from individuals and nonprofits.



Goal 3: Empower Students and Harness the Power of Grassroots Organizing

Empowering students through leadership training, mentorship, and advocacy is a key strategy to sustain efforts and ensure long-term resilience.

Practitioner-Offered Strategies:

- **Supporting Student Leadership & Organizing**
 - Train students in advocacy, policy navigation, and community organizing.
 - Facilitate leadership pipelines to transition engaged students into formal roles.
 - Establish student advisory boards to provide input on prevention policies and initiatives.
- **Strengthening Student-Led Initiatives**
 - Provide funding and logistical support for student-led campaigns and events.
 - Encourage peer-to-peer education programs on consent, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention.
- **Building Networks & Coalitions**
 - Foster collaboration among student organizations (e.g., LGBTQIA+, mental health, cultural groups) to broaden impact.
 - Engage campus media to amplify student-driven messaging.
- **Providing Spaces for Dialogue & Support**
 - Create confidential spaces for students to share experiences and strategize action (e.g., restorative justice circles, survivor workshops).
 - Organize “spotlight sessions” to highlight different communities and their intersections with sexual violence.
- **Utilizing Alternative Communication & Advocacy Methods**
 - Encourage students to use free speech spaces and mobile apps to advocate for change.
 - Provide students with research and storytelling tools to strengthen their advocacy efforts.
- **Prioritizing Sustainability & Well-Being**
 - Encourage self-care and set boundaries to prevent burnout among student leaders.
 - Encourage strategic action that minimizes exhaustion (i.e., “harnessing the wind” as a metaphor).



Goal 4: Maintain Prevention Programming Within New Compliance Requirements and Institutional Structures

Adapting prevention programming to meet new compliance requirements while ensuring continued support for survivors is essential.

Practitioner-Offered Strategies:

- **Adapting Programming to New Compliance Structures**
 - Review new policies to assess the impact on prevention programs and adapt where necessary.
 - Align programs with compliance requirements while preserving core content.
- **Leveraging Partnerships & Institutional Relationships**
 - Engage external victim services agencies to provide on-campus support.
 - Collaborate with state coalitions to use approved content that has undergone legal review.
- **Centering Student-Led and Social Norming Approaches**
 - Leverage social influence about prosocial behaviors students are engaging in to promote prevention, and to ensure programming remains relevant and adaptable to changing environments.
- **Using Creative Delivery Methods**
 - Explore nontraditional partnerships (e.g., concerts, radio stations) to extend outreach and engage a wider audience.
- **Strategic Planning & Long-Term Sustainability**
 - Create clear action plans and programming calendars to ensure continuity of prevention efforts.

Goal 5: Prioritize Mental Health and Avoid Burnout for Practitioners

Maintaining the well-being of practitioners is critical for sustaining their work in sexual violence prevention and response.

Practitioner-Offered Strategies:

- **Support Systems & Community Building**
 - Create peer-support networks and wellness check-ins to reduce isolation.
 - Foster a sense of community through team-building activities and casual spaces for connection.
- **Boundaries & Self-Care Practices**
 - Normalize self-care practices by encouraging regular breaks and promoting mental health activities.



- **Wellness Initiatives & Institutional Support**
 - Advocate for flexible work arrangements, professional development, and wellness stipends for IPV practitioners.
- **Training & Professional Development**
 - Provide training on burnout prevention, resilience-building, and secondary trauma to support practitioners.
- **Advocacy & Long-Term Strategies**
 - Advocate for sustainable staffing models and focus on long-term goals to maintain motivation.
- **Flexible Approaches & Realistic Expectations**
 - Implement trauma-informed supervision and create safe spaces for practitioners to debrief and process their work.

Overall, the strategies outlined above emphasize the importance of flexibility, collaboration, and mental health support for practitioners, while also empowering students and harnessing the power of grassroots organizing. By adapting language, maintaining mental health, and working collaboratively both within institutions and with external organizations, practitioners can continue to support survivors and create safer campus environments despite increasing challenges. The resilience and creativity shown by these practitioners will be crucial in sustaining efforts to combat sexual violence and support survivors on campuses in the long term.



Key Insights

When evaluating the participant data from Part One and Part Two together, several key patterns and insights emerge that highlight how practitioners are navigating the current challenges in sexual violence prevention and response within higher education. Below are some overarching insights:

1. Resilience in the Face of Adversity

Across both the barriers and strategies sections, there is a clear theme of resilience. Practitioners are facing intense emotional tolls, uncertainty, limited resources and institutional changes, yet they remain deeply committed to their work. They have developed a variety of creative strategies to ensure that their efforts continue despite adversity. This resilience is often fueled by a strong sense of duty to support vulnerable students and marginalized communities, even when institutional backing is and/or feels diminished.

2. Adaptation and Flexibility as Core Strategies

The need to adapt to shifting political, institutional, and funding climates is a constant theme. Whether it's adapting language to comply with new policies, reframing services under different department titles, or embracing new partnerships, flexibility is a cornerstone of ongoing success. The ability to pivot quickly, change approaches, and find alternative methods is crucial for ensuring that sexual violence prevention efforts remain viable, even when traditional structures and funding are reduced or altered.

3. Empowerment of Students as a Primary Driver of Change

Data emphasized the importance of empowering students to lead efforts in sexual violence prevention. From leadership training to student-led initiatives and grassroots organizing, students are positioned as not only the beneficiaries of prevention programs but also as active participants in the creation of change.

Empowering students shifts the burden from staff and allows for more sustainable, peer-driven prevention work. Additionally, student leadership is a powerful tool for navigating politically sensitive environments, as students may have more freedom to express and advocate for the work without facing institutional pushback.



4. Mental Health and Self-Care as Non-Negotiable

Mental health and burnout prevention are consistently recognized as essential for practitioners. The emotional toll of the work, combined with increased pressure due to institutional changes and political climates, has made self-care an explicit strategic necessity. To maintain quality and sustainability of work, practitioners identify the importance of prioritizing wellness, setting boundaries, and engaging in community-building efforts to manage the impact of stress.

5. Strategic Use of External Partnerships and Resources

Practitioners are increasingly turning to external organizations—such as local nonprofits, community organizations, and off-campus advocacy groups—as key partners in continuing their work. Building strong, mutually beneficial external partnerships helps fill gaps in services that arise due to institutional restructuring or funding limitations. These external collaborators provide vital resources, support, and a level of protection and support that is especially valuable in politically sensitive environments.

6. Compliance and Advocacy Need to Coexist

There is a constant balancing act between adhering to compliance requirements and staying true to the advocacy mission of sexual violence prevention. Practitioners are adjusting language, rebranding programs, and developing creative solutions to ensure they remain within the boundaries of institutional policies and political climates, while still pushing for meaningful change.

Maintaining this balance requires strategic thinking and legal acumen. Professionals need to work collaboratively with legal counsel and institutional leadership to navigate regulatory constraints while ensuring that their programs are still effective in supporting survivors and addressing the root causes of sexual violence.

7. Institutional Uncertainty and Fragmentation

A recurring theme is institutional uncertainty, particularly regarding how sexual violence prevention and response work fits into broader institutional priorities. Some institutions are actively supporting these efforts, while others have deprioritized or dismantled related programs. This inconsistency often leads to fragmentation, with professionals feeling disconnected from the broader institutional mission or facing challenges in maintaining visibility and influence. As a result, it is critical for practitioners to both build internal alliances and frame their work in ways that align with other institutional priorities, such as student



success, wellness, and retention. This adaptation ensures continued buy-in, even in the absence of strong leadership support.

8. The Need for Long-Term Planning

While short-term resilience in navigating immediate political and institutional shifts is crucial, there is also a strong emphasis on long-term sustainability of prevention programs. Practitioners are preparing for future challenges by diversifying funding sources, building leadership pipelines, and developing strategic plans that will allow their work to endure as a priority, regardless of changing circumstances and uncertain times.

9. Focus on Data and Impact

Collecting and sharing data is a powerful tool for advocacy. Practitioners are increasingly using data to justify continued funding and demonstrate the effectiveness of their efforts, even during a time of limited funding and/or institutional restructuring. This data-driven approach not only strengthens their case for resource allocation but also provides concrete evidence of the positive impact of prevention programs on campus communities.

Additional Considerations

A few insights stood out as potentially noteworthy across data provided by practitioners in Part One versus Part Two. The following subject areas raise interest for further exploration:

1. The Gap Between Institutional Messaging and Reality

In Part One, some participants reported that their institutions are deprioritizing sexual violence prevention, folding offices into compliance-based units, or eliminating staff roles altogether. However, in Part Two, a common strategy was to **align work with institutional values** such as student wellness, safety, and belonging. This suggests that while institutions are shifting away from explicit DEI and prevention work, they still publicly uphold related values that practitioners can leverage. This is an interesting example of using institutional rhetoric strategically rather than resisting it outright.

For Further Discussion:

- Institutions are reducing direct support for sexual violence prevention, yet still claim to prioritize student safety and wellness. This raises the question: Are institutions truly committed to these values, or are they using them as surface-level talking points?



- How effective is this strategy of aligning prevention work with institutional priorities? Does it truly sustain programming, or does it dilute the work to the point that it loses its impact?

2. The “Quiet Resistance” Approach vs. Fear of Retaliation

In Part One, many practitioners described a fear of being targeted or reported for their work, leading to self-censorship. However, in Part Two, one of the strategies was **“avoid preemptive compliance”**—essentially, continuing work as usual until explicitly told otherwise. Instead of outright defiance or complete compliance, many practitioners are operating in a “gray area”—adjusting their work in subtle ways but still continuing core efforts.

For Further Discussion:

- Some practitioners mentioned the need to step back and self-censor, while others are pushing forward quietly, maintaining programming until they are forced to change. Are these two separate groups of practitioners, or is the same group of professionals employing both strategies depending on their institutional context and level of perceived risk? Is this a strategic approach to risk management, or a reactive response to unclear or unaligned institutional leadership directives (or both)?

3. The Emphasis on Student Leadership Amid Increasing Restrictions

In Part One, there was a clear sense that prevention and response professionals are being **removed from decision-making spaces** or are seeing their authority diminished. In Part Two, however, one of the strongest strategies for continuity was to **empower students as organizers and advocates**. Institutions, particularly public colleges and universities, are often less willing (or able) to curtail student-led advocacy, providing an opening to continue efforts even as institutional offices face limitations.

For Further Discussion:

- Does student advocacy offer a genuine workaround, or is it just a partial strategy that could be targeted?
- What is the role of grassroots movements in higher education?

4. The Reliance on External Partnerships in a Time of Institutional Retrenchment

In Part One, participants expressed concern that institutions were moving away from supporting DEI-related efforts, yet in Part Two, external partnerships (e.g., with nonprofits, legal aid organizations, and survivor advocacy groups) emerged as a leading solution.



For Further Discussion:

- Are practitioners using these external collaborations in an “under-the-radar” way, or are institutions still supporting them?
- What is the risk to the community, if any, of outsourcing prevention and survivor support work to external agencies?

5. The Disconnect Between Increased Workload and Mental Health Strategies

In Part One, participants spoke about how increasing workloads, layoffs, and institutional cutbacks were leaving them burned out and exhausted. In Part Two, prioritizing mental health and self-care emerged as a key survival strategy. The fact that mental health strategies were emphasized in Part Two suggests that **practitioners are recognizing burnout as a structural issue, not just a personal one.**

For Future Discussion:

- If workloads are increasing dramatically, how feasible is it for practitioners to actually implement self-care and boundary-setting strategies?
- Are these strategies being meaningfully supported by institutions, or are they left to individuals to manage on their own?
- Are these strategies actionable or just aspirational goals?

Summary of Takeaways

- Institutions are shifting away from explicit DEI and prevention work, but practitioners are finding ways to operate within institutional rhetoric to sustain efforts.
- There is a tension between fear of retaliation and quiet resistance—practitioners are both self-censoring and pushing forward, depending on context.
- Student leadership remains a stronghold for advocacy, potentially because institutions are less likely to censor student-led efforts.
- External partnerships may be the future of sexual violence prevention, as institutions quietly push these efforts outside their own walls while avoiding direct political risk.
- Mental health strategies are being named as essential, but increasing workloads may make them difficult to implement in practice.



Conclusion

Sexual violence prevention and response professionals in higher education are facing an environment marked by significant challenges and also remarkable resilience. Through strategic adaptation, student empowerment, external collaboration, and a focus on mental health and long-term sustainability, practitioners are finding ways to continue vital work. Identifying actionable strategies to navigate these complexities not only ensures the continuity of efforts but also sets a foundation for long-term, meaningful change in the work to preserve campus sexual violence prevention and response services.

About HF+C

HF+C operates with the goal of creating environments where sexual harassment will not be tolerated. Through a collaborative process with our clients, HF+C redefines expectations around how to effectively respond to and prevent the pervasive problem of sexual harassment.

HF+C's focus is on the future, helping our clients most effectively respond to and prevent sexual harassment from this point forward. Our work is evidence- and trauma-informed, and is designed to comply with relevant laws and policies. HF+C primarily serves clients by conducting holistic external reviews, both division- and institution-wide. In addition, HF+C offers guidance and support on: Campus incident response strategy, Communication/media assessments; Culture audit (focus groups, individual interviews, surveys); Leadership development (support leaders in navigating the integration of compliance and advocacy); Policy reviews; Review/condense documents and educational materials for relevance and clarity; and Specific program audits. For more information, please visit our [website](#).

Who We Are

HF+C is a joint project of Chrysalis Network and Seven & Nine Consulting. Having worked together for nearly 20 years, Co-Founders Amy Circosta and Juliette Grimmatt bring synergistic expertise in the field of preventing and responding to sexual violence, assessing Title IX compliance, and implementing trauma-informed and effective programs. They provide objective feedback on current efforts and offer insight and a fresh perspective on strategies for continued improvement toward a safer community.



Amy Circosta, JD

Amy (she/her) brings decades of experience in higher education administration and consulting, blending her expertise in law and psychology to drive meaningful change. From spearheading award-winning initiatives to resolving nuanced conflicts and avoiding costly litigation, Amy's leadership ensures institutions not only meet compliance requirements but supports a culture in which faculty, staff, and students can thrive. Amy evaluates relevant internal structures, drafts policies, offers training on compliance and culture-related strategies, and has extensive experience in preventing and addressing sexual violence on campuses. Amy's passion lies in the customization and implementation of systems designed to achieve identified goals. Prior to founding Seven & Nine, Amy served within higher education institutions in roles including: Interim Vice Provost for Institutional Equity & Diversity, Associate Vice Provost for Equal Opportunity, Title IX Coordinator, ADA Coordinator, and University Ombuds.

Juliette Grimmatt, MPH

Juliette (she/her) has over 25 years of professional experience creating and implementing interactive gender-based violence prevention and response programs that call people to action. As Founder of Chrysalis Network, she most enjoys creating and facilitating engaging and customized workshops for businesses, schools, and colleges and universities. Juliette has a long history of helping campuses assess their sexual assault prevention and response programs to be both effective and trauma-informed. She also hosts the international annual conference, *Solving the Campus Sexual Assault & Dating Violence Puzzle*. Additionally, Juliette serves as the Sexual Assault Victim Policy Strategist for the NC DOJ. She is also a survivor of campus sexual assault a fierce advocate for survivors, holding offenders accountable, and dismantling all forms of oppression. She holds a Master of Public Health degree from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Our Combined Philosophy

Our organizations believe strongly in the value and necessity of equity, diversity, and inclusion in advancing desired progress and innovation. Achieving a thriving, equitable, safe, educational and professional community requires openness to continued learning and broadening one's perspectives. To that end, we respect the knowledge and perspective of each client and participant, and work to create an environment for information-gathering and learning that honors each individual's experience.

We value the equal rights of all people as intrinsic to ending sexual, domestic, and dating violence including stalking. We are committed to building a strong professional network, creating space for personal and professional growth, and helping you and your community reach full capacity to successfully respond to and prevent sexual, domestic, and dating violence.



Appendix A

Actions implemented by the Trump administration have impacted sexual violence prevention and response services. *Just Security* has a [litigation tracker](#) to keep up with on-going challenges to Trump Administrative Actions.

Below is a list of laws, policies, and federal guidance that were enacted or issued between January and April 2025. This non-exhaustive list provides context for what sexual violence prevention and response practitioners are currently facing in their work, both directly and indirectly, causing barriers and challenges in their efforts:

1. [Executive Order 14168](#) declaring there are **only two sexes**: male and female (January 20, 2025);
2. [Executive Order 14159](#) on executing **immigration laws** (January 20, 2025);
3. [Executive Order 14187](#) prohibiting gender-affirming care for kids and teens (January 28, 2025);
4. [Executive Order 14201](#) to **ban transgender athletes** from participating in girls and women's sports (February 5, 2025);
5. The [removal](#) of information about upcoming **grant opportunities** on the Department of Justice's (DOJ's) Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) website (February 6, 2025);
6. [Executive Order 14172](#) renaming the **Gulf of Mexico**, to the Gulf of America (February 9, 2025);
7. The 2025 [Dear Colleague Letter](#) regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (**DEI**) (February 14, 2025), to which [injunctions have been issued](#) as of April 24, 2025
8. [Executive Order 14151](#) targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives resulting in the Office of Management and Budget flagging more than two dozen DOJ programs for compliance review that distribute over half a billion dollars to **combat sexual violence** (February 20, 2025);
9. Trump administration directives to [freeze funding](#), including to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) **Rape Prevention and Education Program** (February 2025);
10. [Administrative crackdown](#) to **revoke student activist Visa's** and in most cases, with no reason provided (on-going since February 2025);
11. Federal funding cuts of health research studies focused on women's health, including a recent cut to a [landmark study](#) on **women's health** that began in 1990 (ongoing since February 2025);
12. [Executive Order 14224](#) designating **English as the official language** of the United States (March 1, 2025);
13. [Executive Order 14242](#) to close the **Department of Education** (March 20, 2025);
14. The [lack of clarity](#) and [concerns](#) around **Title IX regulations** and [which](#) to implement;



15. [Health and Human Services gutting](#) of sexual violence prevention staff at the CDC, disrupting **funding** pipelines to rape crisis centers and causing organizations to shift services away from supporting survivors (April 1, 2025)⁷;
16. President Trumps April 2025 **Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month proclamation** falsely claimed that "*the leading causes of sexual violence over the last 4 years has been the invasion of illegal aliens at our southern border*", in otherwords that undocumented immigrants are driving sexual violence (April 1, 2025);
17. Trump administration [reverses](#) abrupt terminations of **foreign students' US visa** registrations (April 25, 2025)
18. The Trump administration [denying federal funds to sanctuary cities](#) threatening rape crisis programs in communities that work to **protect immigrants**⁸ (threats and court cases ongoing since April 2025);

In addition to laws, policies, and guidance, in providing context for pratitioner frustration and confusion, it is notable that several [members of Trump's cabinet](#) have been **accused of sexual misconduct**, including Trump himself who was recently found liable by a New York City jury for sexual abuse and defamation and eventually ordered to pay the woman, E. Jean Carroll, \$83 million in damages.

⁷ [Abuse of Power: How the Trump Administration Is Undermining Survivors of Sexual Violence](#), National Women's Law Center Blog Post (April 16, 2025)

⁸ [Trump Crackdown on Sanctuary Cities Harms Other Public Safety Impacts, Critics Say](#), The Washington Post (March 12, 2025)

