Deliverable 4 - Policies for Working with Communities of Color
Bushkill Bunch Pod
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Purposes: (1) To reflect and summarize past experiences of pod members working with communities of color and (2) to propose plans/procedures for improving relationships with communities of color in the future

Pod Members’ Reflections on Past Experiences and Plans for Improving Relationships with Communities of Color

When working with communities of color, we will…

1. Actively seek out local collaborators

Experience: During late 2019 and in early 2020 I worked to plan a trip for students over their summer break. The goal of the trip was to build community among the group of students through a team oriented service project, so I sought out Habitat for Humanity to partner with. We registered to work with a branch of Habitat in Taos, New Mexico. I had never been to Taos and had no personal connection to that area or community, nor had my students. The trip ended up being cancelled before I got too far into the planning process due to the onset of the pandemic (Molly).

Analysis/how to improve: In the early idea development stage of this process, I was not very intentional or creative in how to best plan a trip for my students. By partnering with Habitat for Humanity, so many of the logistical details would be taken care of and make my job easier. If I could go back in time, I would have done much more extensive research and information gathering on Habitat’s policies and procedures for engaging with their local communities, many of them low-income, communities of color. I realize now I also should have spent more time reflecting on the goals of the experience for the students and looked for some other opportunity that maybe did not involve such a short term project in a rural community we would be tourists in. I did not seek out local collaborators and just relied on the branch of Habitat that we registered with. It would have been a more enriching and meaningful experience to actively seek out local members of the Taos community in planning this trip (Molly).

2. Include local collaborators in the development of new research projects

Experience: In 2018, I was privileged to begin a research project with a few mentors and coworkers during an internship in Colorado, through the National Park Service and Americorps. The project was based on a collection of fossils previously collected from within the park. While I don't know the specifics of the relationship between that park and any indigenous community members and/or tribal governments, I also did not actively try to determine the nature of that
relationship, if one existed; in fact I don’t think I considered this beyond questioning it once or twice while beginning this project. I definitely never pursued it as a potential avenue.

**Analysis/how to improve:**
I knew next to nothing about indigenous history and the history of that area and land before the establishment of the national park; I had made the conscious choice to learn about the history of the park’s establishment and the geologic history, but I should have made much more of an effort to dive into the history of the land somewhere between those two timescales. I aim to do so in the future for both this project (currently editing manuscript, and aim to at least add a land acknowledgment in the manuscript acknowledgements, as well as personally dive deeper into the indigenous history in the area so as to see what else could be included). This will involve (initially, at least) reaching out to my coworkers there and asking what they know of that relationship. In the future, I aim to avoid this by reaching out to communities at the beginning of research projects, digging into places’ histories to be more aware and more actively work with local collaborators. This analysis of how to improve here also crosses into multiple other points in this deliverable, such as including local collaborators as authors, and creating and fostering mutually beneficial relationships. Excited to keep all of these points in mind as I move forward in my career with both this project and as I form & contribute to other future research projects.

(Anna)

3. **Include local collaborators as authors in publications**

**Experience:** Working in Democratic Republic of the Congo, my team includes the chief scientist of the Goma Volcano Observatory as an author on every publication we submit. Scientists from the GVO are partners in fieldwork, and are involved in identifying research needs in future projects (Lissie)

**Analysis/how to improve:** While Goma scientists are included as authors, they are often not involved in the proposal process, and we do a poor job communicating our results and their significance. In the future, I will ensure that the line of communication is clear, and send regular updates on our project, and facilitate conversations between US scientists and DRC scientists (Lissie)

4. **Include local students in research projects, and include students as authors**

**Experience:** I’ve had experience doing outreach programs and having conversations with various groups at Virginia Tech aimed at underrepresented students (Black College Institute Summer Camp, Nano Summer Camp, HBCU Day).

**Analysis/how to improve:** I was not the organizer of any of these, I just helped facilitate programs. These programs all take different approaches to potentially integrating the students into the VT community. Some of them have half a day presenting about college majors while others just hand the students brochures at the end of the camp about one program. If I had more leadership responsibility in a program like this, this is what I would change:
A. Ask students from various groups on Tech to help out (i.e. the Black Students in STEM group)
B. When student volunteers are introducing themselves have them add in anything that may allow the students to relate better to them (i.e. say if they are a first generation college student)
C. Send a pre camp survey to both students and their parents asking what they would like to learn about in addition to the science: college application process? Financial aid? Other things? Don’t assume what the group needs, but ask instead.
D. Do a more thoughtful job with presenting about potential college majors (especially geology!), talk about why the major is cool, and then also highlight alumni in different careers.
E. Include a session about the college life aspect of college. Clubs! Friends!

5. **Forge long-term, mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with communities of color while acknowledging and learning from past negative experiences**

**Experience:** My previous experience working with indigenous communities (particularly in mineral exploration projects) has been primarily transactional. In exchange for access to their land local people have been provided seasonal work (usually in junior or unskilled labour positions). As projects become more advanced employment opportunities increase (in number and duration), however these roles have been primarily labour and not management. In the event of a mine being developed non-indigenous companies form partnerships with local communities in order to obtain access to opportunities. While regulations have changed in the past few decades there is a long history of mine closures leaving a legacy of pollution for the local community to deal with (Sean).

**Analysis/how to improve:** While there is a financial benefit to indigenous communities with this model there is a clear power imbalance. It is assumed that the local communities will be grateful for whatever jobs/income they are given. A truly mutually beneficial model must go beyond financial investment. It is important to ask what the community wants instead of just giving them what you think they want. And companies need to be ready to accept that some communities might just want to be left alone (Sean).

6. **Share findings with local communities in an accessible manner.**

**Experience:** As part of my work with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), I organized a volunteer event to help Polson, a larger city within tribal lands, map their stormwater system. The system is pretty old, and updates that were made since its installation were not well documented, so there was no up-to-date record on the existing infrastructure. With the help of many volunteers in the community, we documented locations of catch basins, stormwater manholes, and outfalls and were able to piece together urban sub-basins in the city. I then digitized the data using ArcGIS tools and shared a final version of the map with the City of
Polson. Because the CSKT employees do not have access to ArcGIS tools, I had to share the map in the form of a PDF (Emilie).

**Analysis/how to improve:** Although I shared the data in the only way that I was able to at the time, I feel as though increasing the CSKT’s capacity for mapping and managing their stormwater infrastructure will be imperative moving forward. The data is accessible but not extremely usable at the moment given the technological limitations, so I plan to work with the CSKT to obtain ArcGIS licensing for their government officials and conduct trainings as needed on how to use these tools. The data becomes meaningless if they are unable to use it effectively for asset management, so I believe that helping the tribal government to build capacity is an essential piece of the communication strategy. Other strategies for improving data accessibility would be to ensure that (1) the data/findings are presented in the native language of the community, (2) conclusions are communicated in a way that non-scientific audiences would understand (which is just a good practice for data communication in general), and (3) those with limited access to computers or other technology are still able to access the data if it is something the entire community would benefit from knowing, which would likely involve printing findings in local papers or talking about it on local radio stations (Emilie).

7. **Educate ourselves on local politics, culture, customs, and knowledge, including the history of colonialism in the region**

**Experience:** While reading about the geologic history of my field area in Democratic Republic of the Congo, I make sure to also read about the politics, culture, and customs of the region. This is partially to achieve a holistic understanding of the region, and partially to understand social dynamics in future expeditions. In this reading, I have come to understand how past geologic expeditions to the region have been exploitative (Lissie)

**Analysis/how to improve:** One of my struggles is finding accurate, accessible information about the region that isn’t sourced from western studies. I will continue digging to find information about the area from local experts (Lissie)

8. **Allocate time to the process of working within the community’s governance, customs, and priorities**

**Experience:** When I first began working with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of northwestern Montana, I was unaware of tribal governance practices and the CSKT’s priorities. I would send an email to a CSKT representative and expect to receive a response the same day, and when it didn’t come, I assumed that my request was unimportant to them. It wasn’t until I learned about the other projects the CSKT was working on that I began to understand their priorities as a government entity and their tendency to take a bit longer to respond to communications as a result (Emilie).

**Analysis/how to improve:** Before engaging in work with an indigenous community, we should research tribal government policies thoroughly and educate ourselves on the other projects and responsibilities that they have to their constituents. Understanding these things prior to initiating
any kind of communication will prevent any feelings of resentment that may arise from miscommunications and a perceived lack of engagement or interest (Emilie).

9. **Respect the culture and customs of the community**
   
   **Experience:**
   
   **Analysis/how to improve:**

10. **Acknowledge local communities/Indigenous tribes in our research results**
    
    **Experience:** Although not related to research, and instead related to geoscience education, during the summer of 2020 I was meant to spend 4-6 weeks teaching an intro level geology class at a disadvantaged high-school in the south-east of the USA. The class was canceled due to the pandemic, but during course design I had planned to (1) incorporate discussions of various contributions to geology by minoritized people and to (2) discuss the ongoing oppression of various groups. (Jack)
    
    **Analysis/how to improve:** The discussions I had planned did not incorporate local considerations. I was tackling discrimination at a broad and global level, but it would’ve been better to deeply research the history of the area and to incorporate local communities/Indigenous tribes into the course. (Jack)

11. **Build research projects on community identified needs/concerns**
    
    **Experience:** I am currently working on a watershed-wide stormwater remediation and water quality improvement campaign in northwestern Montana, where the southern half of the watershed is land that belongs to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). Noticing the diminished water quality in Flathead Lake, the tribal government suggested an evaluation of stormwater runoff and an approach that involves addressing nonpoint source pollution. They reached out to the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC), the group that I work for, who then organized this project and hired me for the job. The entire basis of the project came directly as a request from the tribal government (Emilie).
    
    **Analysis/how to improve:** I feel that in using its plentiful resources to address this issue, FBC is doing a good job of building research projects based on the needs of the CSKT. However, the avenue through which the CSKT had to get in touch with FBC regarding this issue was rather convoluted and not straightforward. The channels of communication between FBC and the CSKT should be improved, and there should be more regular engagement between the entities, not exclusively communicating when there is an issue that needs to be addressed. I am now working to improve those channels of communication by engaging with three CSKT representatives on a bi-weekly basis to provide project updates and receive feedback (Emilie).

12. **Fairly compensate community members for their work on projects**
    
    **Experience:**
    
    **Analysis/how to improve:**
URGE’s Questions to Guide Individual Reflection

1. Did you actively seek out local collaborators/liaisons/guides? Why or why not?
2. Were they included in the early development and/or proposal of the research or project itself, or added at a later stage?
3. Were any of the local collaborators included as authors?
4. Did you actively seek to include local students in your research? Why or why not?
5. Did you seek to build trust and form long-term connections and collaborations with local institutions if your project is multi-year/ongoing? Why or why not?
6. Were previous negative interactions, whether from inside or outside of your organization, addressed in the plans for building these connections and trust?
7. Did you share data and findings with the local/regional community in a way that is more accessible? (i.e., translating into different languages)? Why or why not?
8. Did you educate yourself and your group/team about local politics, culture, customs, and knowledge, including the history of colonialism/settler colonialism in the region? Why or why not?
9. Was sufficient time allocated to the process of working within the community’s governance, customs, and priorities?
10. Is respecting culture and customs included as part of your code of conduct? This will be addressed in Session 6 as well.
11. Did you acknowledge local communities/Indigenous tribes in your research results?
12. Did you include local communities in your broader impacts in a meaningful way that builds on the community’s identified needs and concerns?
13. Did these efforts leverage community members, and was that work compensated appropriately?
14. Did you consider and prioritize research questions and research locations based on needs of local communities, in addition to how impactful they are seen within academia?