Our past experience

At the Ecosystems Center, our experience working with and within communities of color has mostly occurred in other countries (Brazil, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda). In these cases, we had local contacts but not necessarily with local Indigenous communities. In those cases, prior contact and planning largely followed rules for international research, already in place from the host country, and following guidelines from NSF, Nagoya, etc. Although we worked with local guides and support staff, only in the case of Trinidad and Tobago were local scientists included as PIs. In this case they were also coauthors on publications. One big obstacle to working with international scientists on an NSF grant is that salaries cannot be paid from the grants. Support has to be provided indirectly through supplies and other expenses.

Some of us do work on the North Slope of Alaska at the Arctic LTER. However, the site is very remote and there are no local villages in the area. Attempts to involve Indigenous students in an LTER Schoolyard program met stumbling blocks; the families were reluctant to have the students in the research camp, or to interact too much with the researchers. Although the “long-term” aspect is built into LTERs, the ability to cultivate and maintain long-term relationships with local communities is mixed. We suspect this inability to build trust over time was responsible for the limited success of the ARC Schoolyard program. A challenge will be to figure out how to build in long-term continuity between research and/or education projects and the community.

Past experience/lessons learned from other Woods Hole institutions

The following recommendations were shared by Ben Gutierrez (USGS) who is among Woods Hole Scientists that have worked with the local Mashpee Wampanoag in the Native Youth in Science: Preserving our Homelands (POH) program:

- Take the time to cultivate relationships; spend a lot of time talking to people and exploring what synergies there might be with the local community. The best protocol is to talk first with heads of Wampanoag Dept. of Natural Resources and Dept of Education, and Dept of Historical Preservation.
- Meet in person and be flexible with time. Don’t expect a strict schedule; be open to conversation and ideas/synergies that arise.
Be conscious and respectful of Wampanoag culture and listen. Follow the lead of tribal elders. Western and Wampanoag culture have different concepts of different topics. Some Wampanoag people know Woods Hole very well others may not. Their main interest for the POH program has been in Mashpee, on a very deep level. The connection to the land is incredibly important.

Listen rather than talk. Creation and origin stories are opportunities to listen and learn; they might differ from Western or other interpretations. Understand that ‘western style’ knowing/understanding is not the only ‘truth’.

Discussions about tribal culture and foodways may be very valuable. All the science USGS tried to do with Wampanoags came back to native food. Consider it a cultural practice to be aware of herring runs and shellfish, both are very important for them. Consequently, the science around water quality, links among sewage systems, nitrification in estuaries, and land development affecting the food system are of central interest to them. Also relevant are all the cranberry bog restorations happening recently; have to worry about waterways going through pristine forests and golf courses alike. Having someone who can speak to that would be good for students.

Many people from the tribe work really closely in the WH community, and their coworkers are unaware they are Wampanoag. In contrast, many Wampanoag people know a lot about Woods Hole. Do the research to learn about Wampanoag history and culture, including interactions/conflicts with colonists, in the more recent past with European immigrants, as with respect to current tensions.

For our pod, this Deliverable will have two parts: self-education, and proposals for future approaches/guidelines.

Self-Education
We realized we need first to educate ourselves about the Indigenous and other communities of color local to our institution, and to where we have long-term, ongoing research. Who are they? Where were their lands historically and where are they now? Are there existing science (research and/or education) programs/initiatives within the communities and/or in connection to local science institutions or management agencies? What ecological concerns/interests do they have, and are there synergies? What can we offer and what can we learn?

Specifically, the two locations we will focus on are Cape Cod, MA, where our institution is located, and the Great Marsh and its watersheds in northeastern MA, the research domain of the Plum Island Ecosystems LTER. For example, until recently we were unaware that sweetgrass is an important ceremonial and traditional crop in the region, and there is some concern about its availability given habitat changes. Common interests, however, relate to issues of water quality and their impact on fish and shellfish.
Cape Cod is the ancestral home of the Wampanoag; the Mashpee Wampanoag have tribal lands in Mashpee and Taunton, MA, and the Aquinnah Wampanoag have lands on Martha’s Vineyard. We are aware of existing research and education programs in the Woods Hole community with both tribes, and will be investigating ways to connect and contribute.

The Great Marsh and its watersheds were inhabited by Abenaki peoples, including the Pennacook of central New Hampshire, since the retreat of the last ice age. At the time of contact with European colonists, the area was home to Pawtucket, a branch of the Pennacook. There are no longer people who call themselves Pawtucket, and there are no designated tribal lands within the Great Marsh; a rich history describes the diaspora and loss of this identity. However, descendants do exist among the Pennacook, and in other communities in MA, NH, VT, ME, and beyond. We are educating ourselves about this history. For example, A local historian, Mary Ellen Lapionka, has written extensively about the Pawtucket; UNH is conducting a seminar series “Honoring the Mother of All People; Contemporary Indigenous Leadership in Revitalizing Environmental and Cultural Sustainability”. After doing this work, we plan to connect with educators/scientists/elders of Pennacook and other related local communities to begin a relationship.

Proposal for Action/Guidelines

1. Create a Land Acknowledgement for the MBL campus, for PIE-LTER, and for any where we work and post them on websites
2. In collaboration with other WH institutions and consultation with Wampanoag, erect signage for Waterfront Park in Woods Hole with the land Acknowledgement
3. Include a Land Acknowledgment in publication Acknowledgements
4. Define resources and mechanisms that can build and maintain relationships long-term, e.g. a DEI officer.
5. Provide training for staff working with Indigenous people
6. Archive our new knowledge in one space (DEI committee, LTER webpage) to work from
7. Seek out local Indigenous collaborators (scientists, students, community members), where appropriate (due to field site (e.g. Waquoit Bay) or topic). Consider (environmental) research questions with local needs and interests in mind. Incorporate traditional knowledge, where possible.
8. Provide a platform for regional Indigenous scientists and their research and perspective, e.g. invited seminars at MBL, summer courses, guest lectures at SES. For example, a great speaker would be Elizabeth James-Perry a marine researcher from Aquinnah (MV), who does work that is of interest to many scientists in the Woods Hole community.
9. Create a Protocol/Guidelines for all to consider/follow when proposing new research (on the Cape and at PIE?). Should include the guidelines outlined by Patricia Cochran, for example, but should also be specific to the people/place where the research will take place, and become a normal feature of proposal planning, building in time to:
a. Educate oneself about local history and communities at existing or proposed field sites (for Cape Cod and PIE, there will be info at MBL, see above)
b. Follow recommendations (e.g. http://www.nativescience.org/communities/code.htm)
c. Acknowledge who owns/contributes to data and who contributed resources
d. Locally: Start with talking to heads of Wampanoag Dept. of Natural Resources, Dept. of Education, and Dept. of Historical Preservation
e. Understand that ‘western style’ knowing/understanding is not the only ‘truth’
f. Build capacity and acquire funding at the community level
g. Understand that participatory research involves community-initiated research, community-based research and community-led research
h. Share the role of PI, accept community direction and priorities;
i. Acknowledge that Indigenous people have a right to NOT participate

10. When planning to work on tribal lands, create a protocol for data handling (best practice rules) together with Indigenous collaborators, that includes procedures for asking permission, explanation and data availability/ownership

11. Incorporate our own (new) knowledge on local Indigenous communities in our lectures and education programs and explore collaborations with other education programs that have active programs with the Wampanoag. For example, undergraduates in SES expressed interest in Wampanoag culture regularly. We envision some information to be included in the summer courses. We also envision to invite seminar speakers (e.g. based on suggestions from UNH seminar series) and invite local representatives of Indigenous communities to activities like open houses.

12. Synthesize knowledge and ideas from all Woods Hole URGE pods