URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for Texas A&M University

This is what was found by the Shamberger Lab at Texas A&M University on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

Pods may have members from a range of career stages and involvement in the development and execution of research projects, and pod members may have different experiences or different perspectives when responding to these questions. Consider this in the summary document and focus on capturing responses that are representative of the range in your pod.

- **Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:**
  - Shamberger Lab Projects
    - Palau Tropical Coral Reefs
      - Shamberger began working on this project as a postdoc in Anne Cohen’s lab at WHOI. This project was in close collaboration with Palauan researchers, locals, and government officials from the beginning. Palauan government officials enlisted The Nature Conservancy to assist in evaluating and updating Palau’s Marine Protected Areas and TNC invited Cohen to perform research towards this goal. Local researchers participated in site selection, sampling strategies, and interpretation of data; were included as co-authors on presentations and publications; and generously provided work space. We spent time training local community college students, Cohen was interviewed by local newspapers and TV, and Cohen and local researchers worked together to communicate results to the local community. Shamberger learned from this project that working with local communities produces higher quality research and dramatically improves the impact of research results on communities.
    
    - Gulf Coast Stewards of Tomorrow: Working Towards a Sustainable Future Through At-Sea Learning for South Texas Middle and High School Students
      - Educational project funded by the Environmental Protection Agency in collaboration with The Texas Floating Classroom (TFC) to enhance ocean stewardship in Texas coastal communities through hands on activities on short research cruises with TFC. Teacher trainings are also held annually and lesson plans have been developed to maximize the benefit of the field trips.
Aimed at underserved and underrepresented communities on the TX coast, where school districts do not have funding to support field trips.

Collaboration with local teachers has been critical in developing and improving the project to best serve their classes and students. For example, teachers requested funding for substitute teachers during field trips, which we were able to provide by adjusting the grant budget. Teachers have also requested more lesson plans, which we are developing.

- Hawaii Deep Sea Coral Reefs
  - Funding for outreach is included to broadcast live educational components of cruise data and events to local schools in Hawaii (in addition to local programs in Texas/Florida).
  - Aimed to increase awareness and engagement in local HI communities about active research efforts in the area.

- Kahekili, Maui, Hawaii, Tropical Coral Reef
  - This project is led by Andrea Kealoha, who completed her PhD in the Shamberger lab and is now faculty at the University of Hawaii Maui College.
  - Kealoha is Native Hawaiian, grew up in Maui, and is intimately connected with the community on Maui. This project began because of conversations Kealoha had with locals who observed visual changes in water quality when there were no tourists due to covid restrictions. Kealoha then connected with Shamberger to collaborate on investigating these observations.
  - This project is in collaboration with a local citizen science group that performs field work with Kealoha’s lab. In addition, Kealoha has gained unprecedented information and access to sites in Maui because of her personal connects.
  - We participated in the annual “Ridge to Reef” outreach event and gave a virtual presentation on the project.

- What worked well in these interactions?
  - Palau
    - Using local knowledge to effectively select and access sites, working with local researchers and government officials to communicate results to the public and inform local marine management.

- Gulf Coast Stewards
Collaborating with an organization (Texas Floating Classroom) that is established in the region and has worked closely with local teachers and school districts.

Following up with teachers participating in the project to assess their needs 1-2x per year.

- Hawaii Deep Sea Coral Reefs
  - Working with marine managers at NOAA and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument to ensure research results inform policy.

- Kahekili, Maui, Hawaii, Tropical Coral Reef
  - Collaborating with a local researcher and including a local citizen science group has allowed access to sampling areas and invaluable connections for communicating research results.

What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?

- Palau:
  - Shamberger benefited from Cohen’s previous experience and understanding that working with local communities from the beginning of projects makes everything from logistics for fieldwork (obtaining permits, boat access, etc) to communicating results more effective. By the time Shamberger joined Cohen’s group, Cohen was routinely working directly with local communities, including in Palau, in developing projects.

- Gulf Coast Stewards
  - While we worked closely with TFC and reached out to prospective participants in the proposal writing stage, we did not discuss the budget with the teachers we planned to work with. This resulted in our not realizing they would need funding for substitute teachers to cover their other classes during field trips. In the future, we will discuss budget needs with local participants during the proposal writing process.
  - Information is communicated directly to students and we are perhaps missing an opportunity to communicate to the broader community through student contacts. We could develop materials for students to bring home and to school.
  - Information is provided primarily in English, which may limit engagement of some students and their contacts since Spanish is a primary language for many in this area. We could develop materials in Spanish.

- Hawaii Deep Sea Coral Project:
This project has yet to include specific engagement in the local community.

We could improve our efforts with the local education center, Mokupāpapa Discovery Center for Hawai‘i’s Remote Coral Reefs, to provide more information on the project within the local community.

**Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
- Making more conscious/intentional decisions to actively include and seek out indigenous communities/people of color in our research.
- Maintaining outreach in underrepresented communities.
- Learning how to include indigenous communities in acknowledgements and incorporating it into our materials.
- Gulf Coast Stewards Project Specifically:
  - Developing a “take-home” material for the students to share translated into multiple languages relevant to the community to broaden impact.

**Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
- Support/funding for early planning process of projects to include forming productive and mutually beneficial connections with communities.
- Seed funding to collect preliminary data specifically in collaboration with local communities of color to get projects off the ground.
- Funding for publications written with co-authors from local communities of color. Ideally, funding would be available to support engagement with communities of color from project development, data collection, and publication, to truly establish meaningful collaborations.