Working with Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Communities at UMCES HPL

The Horn Point Laboratory Pod at University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) Horn Point Laboratory (HPL) listened, read, thought about, and discussed experiences and strategies for working with BIPOC communities. A summary of these thoughts and ideas is provided below, with special focus on how we can enhance and improve how we work and support communities of color.

- **Description of previous interactions with BIPOC communities at our organization**

Several researchers in the HPL pod have had the opportunity to work with BIPOC communities. Some of their experiences and what they have learned are summarized here:

- **Working in international waters.** Field research in international waters involves requesting and receiving permits from the country’s government. Although this appropriately informs the government that research is being conducted in their territories, it does not necessarily return the knowledge that was gained from the research back to the country -- especially because the research papers may be behind a paywall and open access fees are expensive for the researcher.

- **Centro TORTUGA (https://www.centrotortuga.org/) & the SEAS Islands Alliance (https://www.seasislandsalliance.org/)**

  These are NSF funded interventions and research programs aimed at broadening participation of Puerto Rico undergraduate, graduate, and K-12 students through research experiences, mentoring, family programming, and coursework. The pilot projects dated to 2012, and have continued and grown over the years, with the current iteration of Centro TORTUGA now a hub of the SEAS Islands Alliance, which also includes intervention programs in the US Virgin Islands and Guam.

- **Conducting research in Australia:** When conducting previous Australian Research Council (ARC) sponsored research in waters of the Great Barrier Reef or Moreton Bay, one first needed to apply for permits from governmental entities that always included approval from Aborignal communities in the region where research was being conducted. In this way the local indigenous populations were given a chance to be aware of proposed research ahead of time and had a chance to decide whether research on their native lands could proceed.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**
  - In addition to approval from local indigenous communities for permits to conduct research, cultural recognition of the Aboriginal traditional land owners as either a land
acknowledgement or – “Welcome to Country” – are conducted in virtually all formal meetings in Australia, as standard practice (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welcome_to_Country).

- Building trust with local people was a slow and deliberate process

- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
  - Open Access journals are expensive so it is difficult to ensure that BIPOC communities have open access to the knowledge generated in their communities/territories
  - Development of programs that were not in collaboration with the diverse communities may not serve the unique needs and priorities of these groups.

- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
  - Spend more time reaching out to BIPOC communities and developing collaborative relationships with them
  - Ask social scientists for advice to help make connections and improve these relationships
  - Actively recruit students of color and build research programs that help them ask and answer questions that are important to them and their communities
  - Fundraise for students so their research results, especially those related to BIPOC communities, can be published as open access
  - Researching and acknowledging the Native American people that once lived on campus and local lands would help improve our appreciation and understanding. Some resources for implementation include the following links:
    - https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement/
    - https://usdac.us/nativeland
    - https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2019/03/are-you-planning-to-do-land.html

- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with BIPOC communities?**
  We are focusing on improving the process for planning ahead and working with BIPOC communities. Our ideas are to:
  - Ask our institution to acknowledge that the land that our lab is on was the territory of the Choptank Tribe
  - Ask our leadership to invite members of the Choptank Tribe to share their music and culture at lab events
  - Hold an environmental justice seminar series and ask researchers and practitioners who work in our region to share their experiences and knowledge
  - Negotiate with leadership to acknowledge the time necessary to develop good relationships, build trust, and use data appropriately and respectfully in the promotion process
  - Develop research programs in partnership with local BIPOC communities supported by long term grants
Create Guidelines for Working with BIPOC Communities. These guidelines will include advice that we received from the URGE speakers, journal articles, and additional resources. Advice we learned from the URGE speakers and readings include:

- Start partnership from the very beginning of a project – work to form partnerships, not to extract knowledge
- Think about who the research will benefit, understand the power dynamics, and work toward building relationships and forming research projects that are mutually beneficial
- Provide adequate introduction to who you are and where you are from
- Follow a code of ethics
- Speak in meaningful language that people understand
- Learn the culture’s language and use the correct terms/words
- Bring and share food
- Share yourself, your music
- Go into a community fully prepared – do not rely on the community to care for you
- Approach BIPOC communities with kindness and respect
- Pay people for their time
- Help support youth