URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for University/Organization - Example Deliverable

This is what was found by University of Lynchburg/VMNH 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:
  - In terms of VMNH paleontology, fieldwork leaders have not reached out to communities of color although the digs have taken place on lands once held by Native Americans. A majority of the other research and collections departments have also failed to include communities of color while doing research/collecting in Virginia. One exception is the Archaeology department- a field that has been working on inclusion and cultural relativism since the early twentieth century. I am unsure of the total number of projects that have included meaningful interactions with communities of color, but I can think of at least two projects that were instigated here at the museum that were focused on local sites with strong ties to the African American community. One example:
    The Baldwin Block excavation was a project that combined archaeology, oral history, and documentary research to answer questions about 20th century African-American life in Martinsville, Virginia. Archaeologist Dr. Elizabeth Moore led excavations in 2007 at the site of the Baldwin Business Center in Martinsville, Virginia. Members of the Fayette Area Historical Initiative (FAHI) collaborated on the project, by providing invaluable access to people and local historical resources. The building at the site of the excavations was once at the center of the African-American community in Martinsville. It held St. Mary’s Hospital on the 2nd floor, the Baldwin Pharmacy and doctor’s offices on the first floor, and the Green Dragon club in the basement.

    A dedicated crew of community and student volunteers and student interns used a combination of hand excavation and backhoe trenching to locate and recover deposits associated with the original use of this building. A variety of artifacts
were recovered. Artifacts were processed in the archaeology lab at VMNH; a lab visible to visitors, and everyone who visited the museum could see the artifacts being cleaned and laid out to dry in the lab through the viewing window.

At least two advertised “Community Days” were held on Saturdays which allowed volunteers to take part in the excavations. In addition, oral history interviews were conducted at the site.

From the University of Lynchburg, faculty and students are involved with the Anne Spencer House, a historic site base in Lynchburg. Ms. Spencer was a poet and librarian at an all-black high school in the City.

Faculty have also conducted research abroad in the Americas, including South and Central America. For the South American research in Brazil, research was conducted with locals on the effects of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest on local fauna. For Central America, ongoing research is addressing water quality issues across Costa Rica.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**
  For the Baldwin Block project, collaboration with the Fayette Area Historical Initiative (an African American Museum and Cultural Center) was a major reason that the project was successful. Utilizing a pre-existing community organization helped to incorporate the needs and wants of the African American community into the planning phase and ensured that the project was inclusive and accessible to the public.

  From the University of Lynchburg projects, locals have been heavily involved, and a strong working relationship has been established.

- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
  - I am not sure of the issues and failures of the Baldwin Block project- this was before my time at the museum and I have only heard the positives relayed. However, I will say that in my time here at the museum I am unaware of any continued collaboration with the FAHI museum and staff, so there is a need to strengthen that partnership.

  With the UL work in the Americas, there still seems to be a sense of disconnectedness, as we simply do not deal with their issues as closely as they do.
Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?

○ In terms of current paleontological research at the VMNH, field leaders could reach out to the indigenous communities that are historically tied to the land where digs take place. In addition, recognition of the land’s historical ownership could be addressed in research and while disseminating findings.

○ At the University of Lynchburg, paleontological fieldwork taking place in Wyoming could also work harder to address the Bureau of Land Management property and the history of the Plains indigenous groups who were first on the land. Creating a student project of cultural sustainability that ties into the dig could better enhance understanding of the values and importance of the site to Native peoples, while also helping to bring Native groups into the project and provide a voice going forward.

○ Professors in the earth sciences could also expand upon their lectures in environmental stewardship, the effects of climate change, environmental destruction and pollution by increasing their focus on Indigenous voices, research and the often ignored consequences of environmental degradation in communities of color.

Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?

○ In terms of the VMNH paleontological research, field leaders could reach out to the Pamunkey Indians Tribal government via http://pamunkey.org/ in regards to fieldwork in and around Richmond Virginia. Research and fieldwork in North Carolina could be enhanced by reaching out to Indigenous people who identify with a Saura/Catawba/Lumbee heritage.

○ With the University of Lynchburg, as projects are proposed, this issue needs to be explicitly addresses in the planning and approval process.