URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for University/Organization

This is what was found by the Marine Science Pod at University of Southern Mississippi on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

- Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:
  - The Coastal Ocean Environmental School and hydrography certification program in Ghana offers field and lab training for students interested in hydrographic sciences.
  - Graduate geological field work in Mozambique and Indonesia studying tsunami deposits.
    - Fieldwork took place in Biera, Mozambique – an area that was hit during Cyclone Idai
    - We hired a drone photographer in Biera (black) to take aerial photos of our field site and translate for us with the local community
    - We conducted interviews with locals—incredibly important to understand what happened during the cyclone (how high waters rose, etc) – felt like more meaningful interactions—hear stories of survival during the cyclone and they provided us valuable details such as water height that can help us reconstruct the event
    - No interactions with the local government besides basic research permit—may be plans for future interactions on a local basis
    - From what I heard-Mozambique does not have a marine science or coastal geology department in its Universities—no collaboration on a more local basis than with the South African University
    - Collaborated with Syiah Kuala University and the Aceh Disaster Mitigation Agency in Aceh, Indonesia (Sumatra) to reconstruct the geologic history of tsunamis in that region
    - In my personal thesis I collaborated with an Indonesian professor who was instrumental in organizing the project in Sumatra
  - The gulf coasts states have a community that is closely linked to the land. The communities are generationally linked to the land like many other communities, so most local work done by students is undertaken in communities with an
intimate knowledge of the land even if not always indigenous knowledge. That knowledge isn’t always tapped into.

- Undergraduate research abroad in Belize and working with Mayan communities and local university researchers to design research projects that explored the connection between the land and the near shore environment.

• **What worked well in these interactions?**
  - The instances where our members worked with local scientists or communities worked in easing aspects of the field work. In Ghana for instance, speaking with the leaders of fishing communities is important to ensure that equipment isn’t stolen or vandalized. In Indonesia, local university researchers helped in the planning process of the field work and understanding the cultural norms concerning dress helped. In Gulf Coast field work the communities that consulted local members before conducting field work had more community participation and help.
  - For the Belize research there was a mandatory cultural training required before leaving. The PI/advisor for the group also made a point to include local researchers and get their advice on how they do things and tricks and trade secrets were shared on both sides. It’s important to note that the PI for this research abroad trip has worked with the local community for years and had already cultivated a strong relationship with community leaders and university colleagues. Emphasis was put on exposing undergraduates to local culture especially Mayan traditions and knowledge of the land. Several days were spent learning the land and hiking with the indigenous peoples in the area to learn before starting any field work.

• **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
  - Fishing community leaders in Ghana and Grand Isle examples of needing to talk to local communities in order to collaborate. Field work was conducted on Dauphin Island and Grand Isle (both areas along the Gulf Coast). Dauphin Island had prior communication with communities and leaders and Grand Isle did not. The Grand Isle community distrusted the researchers and their work as they were coming from a different city. But speaking to the community beforehand on Dauphin island helped with that mistrust and cooperation improved.
  - To better address this it is important for our members to not assume they want us to come. Grand Isle had an outsider mindset and weren’t receptive to researchers’ work which is not the goal of scientific research.
  - It is important not to come into a field site with a western mindset and collaborating with specific ways that people have done things in the past.

- Coming in with a western mindset is not the way to enter into this. Indonesian culture dictated certain aspects about field work that are not considered in the west like appropriate dress. There were a few instances
in Belize where students weren’t culturally aware and insinuated the local relaxed nature was laziness and the lead PI could have removed them and made them aware of any insensitivities as the interactions lead to resistance by local researchers every time and hindered field work progress.

- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
  - Making sure to do research on cultural aspects or having a researcher (such as in Belize) who has worked in the communities before be the leader or advise on interactions seemed to make a huge difference on ease of communication and collaboration.
  - Make a point of dividing the post fieldwork research and actively collaborate not only during fieldwork with the researchers whose country you are working in, but also afterwards in the data analysis and interpretation.
  - Publish your work in different languages, especially in the language of the country you are working in.
  - Learn more about what communities want to research and what is important to them.

- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
  - Could include land acknowledgements, but ask communities beforehand and not just assume.
  - Make the social science aspect part of your funding guidelines.
  - Marine Education Center offers a great opportunity to reach out better to communities of color in the area.
  - Reach out to smaller organizations or meetings (not just AGU, GSA etc) and make connections that can lead to collaborations.