Working with Communities of Color

This is what was found by PacIOOS in the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology (SOEST) at the University of Hawai‘i 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:**
  
  - Multiple projects have been undertaken in SOEST and PacIOOS with local communities. One good example of a SOEST project is the Heʻeia fishpond research project, in which the research interests aligned with the community’s visions and goals for the historied fishpond where the Native Hawaiian aquaculture techniques are still practiced in cultivating fish. Through engagement with residents, students, and volunteers, the project successfully brought improvement to the ecosystem and water quality in the fishpond and also provided unique cultural learning opportunities for the local community.
  
  - PacIOOS reaches out to communities and local landowners when determining locations for new equipment.
  
  - PacIOOS engages with local partners and stakeholders to identify observing needs.
  
  - One example that shows room for improvement is the recent denial of land access to work on the MAPCO2 buoy in American Samoa.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**
  
  - Be sensitive to local cultures: such as bringing food during the visit; learning local language; following local customs and protocols.
  
  - Develop and maintain the long-term partnerships with the local community through hiring local staff, expanding outreach, repeat visits, and establish and keep up with the point of contact.
  
  - Be proactive to ask their needs and do our best to help with those needs.

- **Lessons learned from PacIOOS and other projects of which we are aware that did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
  
  - Ask for permission before including local partners as co-authors in publications.
  
  - Continue the relationship after the project completion.
  
  - Avoid extractive relationships and keep the relationship reciprocal.
  
  - Ask upfront what the local community is interested in.
  
  - Be aware we may experience the consequence of other people’s misconduct in the interaction with the local community.
  
  - Investigate other researcher groups’ interactions with local communities and avoid repeating the same mistakes.
Create open communications with the local community and learn what has hurt them.
Expand the outreach circle in the community.

- Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?
  - Be brave to face our past experiences, continue practicing self-reflection, and keep building relationships with the communities.
  - Adapt our communication methods to the local community, such as learning the local language, using their social media platform – Facebook, WhatsApp.
  - Continually broaden the circle of the local community we engage with and stay connected with them.
  - Hiring more people from the local community.
  - Continue to help build capacity in the community.

- Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?
  - Guidelines such as the “Kūlana Noi‘i (Research Standards)” help build and sustain long-term relationships between researchers and local communities.
  - Develop ethics and protocols such as the code of research ethics sample for PacIOOS to guide the collaboration practice with local communities.
  - Workshops and training are needed to improve the researchers’ collaboration capability with local communities.
  - Develop relationships with communities to learn about needs and develop research directions and project goals with them.
  - Create open and transparent communications within PacIOOS and across the SOEST to learn from each other’s mistakes and failures.