Observations from our Department Survey

1. In a survey of our department, we found a wide variety of levels of engagement with communities of color. Some PIs had worked on five or more projects with communities of color, some had worked on none.
2. All respondents wrote that logistical support and hiring local students or community members was key to the success of their project. However, only 50% reported engaging with researchers from local communities and including them in the research process. In addition, only 15% (one respondent) reported compensating local participants (non-university affiliated local stakeholders) for the time they took to attend forums on research.
3. Barriers to engagement included a lack of respect for local customs amongst some team PIs, and one scientist noted that power dynamics were inherently present in relationships because of the legacies of colonialism and exploitation between the two countries involved.
4. 66% of respondents were not aware that data collected on indigenous lands are owned by indigenous peoples.
5. 100% of respondents were willing to change their practices to better work with communities of color, but we should note that this URGE survey had the least buy in from the department - past surveys involved 100% or nearly 100% responses from the department, in this case only a third of faculty responded.

Reflections from members of the pod:
“We’ve always included local communities in the research and outreach activities. Never underestimate the local communities’ knowledge. In many/most cases they know more about earth and environmental science (e.g., tsunami warnings, impact of global warming) than researchers do! They contribute to project success.”

“Researchers should realize that if local communities have not granted permission to conduct the proposed research, then the project cannot proceed. It is most problematic when you are the lead PI and some members of your team are not sensitive to local communities and their customs.”

“We regularly include funding to show true collaboration for broader impact activities. We also discuss what types of outputs would be helpful to these communities. Do they want us to come talk to them about our results? Do they want raw data? Do they want images or photos? A short presentation?”

Ideas for Improved Policy
1. Include money to pay local community members for their time and expertise
2. Involve community members at an early stage of project design, including months to a year prior to submitting a proposal
3. Present and share digestible information with local communities, either in Syracuse or at field sites
4. Make sure any information shared acknowledges mutual expertise, in publications, presentations, and any information sharing with local communities
5. Request funds for outreach activities dedicated to educating/disseminating results to communities of color (or any communities relevant)
6. Always providing public access to generated data (instead of solely peer-reviewed articles behind a paywall)
7. Recruit students from the communities where we are working and who we are working with