URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for UWisc-GEO^2

This is what was found by Geo^2 at the University of Wisconsin – Madison on experiences with and 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:**
  - Our pod consists of experienced faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. Thus, there an array of experiences at various institutions, which I summarize below.
    - We discussed experiences working with communities of color in locales including Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Chile, China/Mongolia, the Blackfeet Reservation, Yellowstone National Park, Greenland, Jamaica, Mexico, the Seychelles, and Los Angeles.
    - There were varying degrees of interactions with the local communities, in part reflecting the differences in the fields of deep-time geoscience versus physical geography.
    - Some examples:
      - In Alaska, a Keck Geology Consortium group in the summer of 2014 was hosted by the caretakers of the Chugach corporation’s Nuuciq Spirit Camp. Positive experience in the moment, shared meals, shared experiences. There was compensation to the camp for the time we stayed there.
      - Puerto Rico – soil science. The PI has returned to the same places each year, building relationships and bringing in Puerto Rican students to her lab.
      - Hawaii – the PI used a cultural advisor due to National Park Service requirements. The relationship turned out great, but the bureaucratic requirements were a hurdle to bringing that person in.
      - China – areas that were traditionally nomadic people of the steppe but had been colonized by Han Chinese. There was very little opportunity to interact with the indigenous people.
      - Montana – Collaboration with Blackfeet tribe. This stands out as a project we discussed that involved local indigenous people in a meaningful way throughout the conception, execution, and presentation of the work.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**
  - Proud of relationships – the best relationships were built when local communities were included from the beginning of the process.
    - Sharing meals has been incredibly important in our experience.
These interactions went best when there was an acknowledgement that not all research has to be hard science, and researchers can and should look for ways to include indigenous knowledge.

When the fieldwork led to bringing local students to the lab, that was a very successful outcome in the project.

Outcomes were more meaningful and impactful for the local community when the goals of the community and the investigator were aligned.

Cultural advisor as required by the National Park Service:
- Fabulous experience, they helped collected samples respectfully according to cultural norms and practices.

When the researcher is able to make a “reconnaissance trip” before the research trip to collect samples, this helped to establish connections and ensure work could be done respectfully within the cultural landscape.

What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?

Permitting issues
- Can be hard to work with local communities due to an opaque process, especially in international settings where the administration of bureaucracy is hard to navigate.
- Not just international – organizations like the National Park Service can be just as hard to navigate when trying to meet cultural requirements.
- Can be navigated with investment of time, also helps if there’s funding to engage locals to help guide the process.

The work of research is harder when relationships between communities of color and outsiders have been hurt by previous government agency actions (example of how telescopes on sacred mountaintops in Hawaii made it hard to carry out a NSF-funded project)
- Talking to people in the communities to get their perspective can help reveal and soothe the issues for the researcher.

Lack of resources to build relationships – risk of “helicopter science” set up by funding system.
- Funding is often not available for multiple visits to a site after data has been collected. This sets up “helicopter science” where researchers drop in, and then disappear after the data is collected.
- Limits in funding for compensating and reimbursing locals.
- US program officers don’t encourage outreach in international locations, with the exception of student exchange programs.
Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?

- Need for communication after the project is concluded – reach back out to the local community members that had relationships with the work and find ways to make sure the results can be shared (if desired by the community).

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

- Changes to the funding system would be helpful:
  - Resources for multiple trips to a site would help prevent the helicopter science phenomenon and support outreach efforts after the project.
  - NSF support for international outreach beyond student exchange programs, on par with their support for US-based outreach.
  - Resources and mechanisms for compensating locals for time and knowledge, especially when working in places with less formal government bureaucracies or where receipts aren’t commonplace.