Deliverable - Policies for Working with Communities of Color

This is what was found by Miami University Pod at Miami University on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources. Our pod is composed of 18 individuals: 10 graduate students, 5 faculty, and 3 undergraduate students.

Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:

Our institution is deeply rooted in colonialism; Miami University itself was established in southwestern Ohio in 1809 and named for the valley that was home to the Miami (Myaamia) Tribe. US armies were sent to the region in 1790, 1791, 1794 to burn villages and destroy crops in an effort to force out the Miami Tribe. In 1795, the first land treaty was made ceding lands to white colonizers. This continued for decades until a final forced removal of the Miami Tribe in the fall of 1846 to a location just east of what is now Kansas City, and then again in 1867, after another treaty ordered their removal to what is now Oklahoma. Meanwhile, Miami University used a racial slur for its mascot name and had no relationship with the Miami Tribe. In 1972, the Miami Tribe Chief Forest Olds visited Miami University in an effort to establish a connection. In 1991, the first known students of the Miami Tribe enrolled at Miami University. In 1996 the tribe sent a resolution to the University requesting it change its mascot, which was approved in 1997. In 2000 the Myaamia Project was created, which later transitioned into the Myaamia Center in existence on campus. Today, an average of only 30 Myaamia students are enrolled at Miami University (which has approximately 19,000 undergraduate and graduate students) each semester. A faculty member in our pod has collaborated with members of the Miami Tribe and Myaamia students for the last 12 years.

Across our department, research areas include Albania, Argentina, Atlantic Coastal Plain, Azores, Bahama Islands, Bolivia, Cascadia, Canada, Canary Islands, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Curacao, Galapagos Islands, Greece, India, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Mediterranean region, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Norway, Ohio and surrounding areas, Oregon Plateau, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Puerto Rico, Rio Grande Rift, Snake River Plain, South Africa, Tibet, Turkey and the Rocky Mountains. Of these, our pod members have mainly conducted research in Puerto Rico, Jordan, Chile, and Indonesia. A brief summary of experiences follow.

Graduate students working in Puerto Rico have experienced Americans approaching research there with the very colonialist expectations that everyone in Puerto Rico will speak fluent English. Faculty leading projects in Jordan have expected their graduate students to take Arabic classes before field research. Collaborations with local residents in Chile have been essential, but language continues to be a barrier to full collaboration. Field research in Indonesia involved official collaboration (and co-authorship) with Indonesian geologists. Local Indonesian residents were essential to the project by digging excavation pits, but were not coauthors or co-PI on the project. The research team worked with local elders to establish a pay rate for their labor that would be fair and beneficial to them, but would also fit within their local economy.

Plans for future improvement:

We are actively discussing ways to improve our relationships with indigenous communities and people of color. We have many beautiful rock, mineral, and fossil displays in our Geology Museum that is prominent within the entryway to our academic building. We are going to investigate where these samples came from, and their relationship to colonial takeover of
indigenous lands and resources.

In our podlet meetings, we discussed consideration of local/indigenous impacts and collaboration in research and grant proposals, similar to the Broader Impacts component of NSF and other proposals. Additionally, we are discussing incorporating language and cultural competency requirements before research projects in new areas, or areas with ongoing projects. Student pod members stressed the importance of collaborating with early-career BIPOC scientists who are native (or otherwise have established relationships) with local communities, rather than rush in independently.