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

This is what was found by Multiple Faculty Institute Pod at Multiple Institutions regarding policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

This is a multi-institution pod, so many of our members have had different experiences based on our different geographic locations. Below, we focus primarily on our experiences working on the North Slope of Alaska, along the southwest border at the University of Texas at El Paso and at Loyola University Chicago.

- Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:
  - Beaufort Lagoon Ecosystems Long Term Ecological Research (BLE LTER) project: The BLE LTER project includes URGE pod members from UTEP, Oregon State University, and UT-Austin. Many of us have collaborated on Arctic research projects in northern Alaska Inupiat communities, most recently as part of the BLE LTER project. Research has not generally included the local communities at the start of the research plan development, and has largely focused on K-12 education and citizen science efforts. More recently, however, we established a Traditional Knowledge (TK) panel consisting of Kaktovik residents. This TK panel was formed so that we could gain perspective from the local community and keep them better informed about our work.
  - Three members of our pod work or study at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), which supports a surrounding community with an 80% Hispanic demographic. As such, much of our training, education and outreach efforts are focused on Hispanic students and their families. Similar to other communities of color, we have learned that retention is equally as important as recruitment, that strong familial ties affect student success, and that close mentoring is key to addressing both the latter.
  - Loyola University Chicago: In 2015 I initiated a partnership with a minority-serving public high school in Chicago, Nicholas Senn High School, whose student population is 44% Hispanic and 28% African American, with 88% of the students being from
low-income families. In collaboration with the Loyola School of Education we have offered summer research internships for students from Senn high school with financial support from Loyola University Chicago. For the last several years we have been able to offer internships for 10 students per summer in labs in the Departments of Biology, Chemistry, and Environmental Sciences. I myself have mentored six of these students, and two of them are included as coauthors on a recent peer-reviewed publication from my lab. We put this program on hold for summer 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID pandemic, but we are planning to start it up again in summer 2022.

- What worked well in these interactions?
  - BLE LTER: The TK panel in Kaktovik has facilitated better communication and trust. Our longer-term K-12 work and involvement of local community members in sampling efforts has also helped to foster trust and understanding of what we are doing. Most recently, virtual outreach to local schools during the COVID19 pandemic has been very successful. We have focused largely on cultivating social interactions and relationships with locals via public presentation, K-12 activities and social activities. Increasingly, we acknowledge that relationships building requires long-term and continuous effort.
  - UTEP: Our work with local Hispanic students has shown that experiential learning and close mentoring are key to improving students’ technical, professional, and soft skills and increasing their likelihood to pursue a STEM career.

- What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?
  - BLE LTER: In our first BLE proposal, we took the approach of asking for letters of support from local collaborators instead of involving them when we developed our proposal. In preparation for the next BLE proposal (a couple of years out), we are making a concerted effort to start conversations early about collaboration and allow for community-driven idea development. We also proposed recruiting local student interns, which has been largely unsuccessful; our recent work with K-12 classrooms aims to generate interest in future intern recruitment. In addition, we anticipate that there will be more interest in these intern opportunities as community-driven research threads are incorporated into our program.
  - UTP:

- Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?
  - BLE LTER: On the north slope communities, we may benefit from more deliberate, yet casual, interaction to identify local interests and research priorities in order to start incorporating those ideas into our next grant submission.

- Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?
BLE LTER: acknowledgement of need by researchers and funding agencies that goes beyond typical fact-based science and into what does the community need and want

Ideas from our overall pods discussion on 3/17/21:

- Planning grants for early career researchers to help them identify projects and develop relationships needed to successful projects in communities of color
- Go beyond the science: hire local people for linking art, video, etc to the project
- Universities could facilitate our ability to work across disciplines; scientists shouldn’t be leading social science studies (not teaching about it?)