URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color

This is what was found by the Earth, Environment, and Planetary Science department at Rice University on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources. While the policies are primarily intended to put an end to and repair the harmful legacy of western colonialism in the geosciences, many are rooted in the spirit of being a respectful guest, and should be applied when working with any community of people.

● **Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:**
  The scope of field work appears limited in the department, aside from one researcher who has extensive experience working in China and Russia.

● **What worked well in these interactions?**
  Bringing gifts, collaborating with local scientists and knowledgeable community members (with financial compensation), holding workshops for local students, and hiring cultural liaisons were all effective in building relationships with the local community. It is also important to be humble and listen more at the beginning, rather than immediately trying to educate people about their environment, which they know extremely well through their lived experience.

  Possible plans which may work well in the future could include: asking about the scientific needs of a community and using our networks to connect them with the right people; inviting local students to Rice for a fully-funded exchange program (especially for longer projects); using our scientific knowledge and networks to advocate for and amplify the voice of local environmental activists (water protectors, etc).

● **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
  Local communities were not included as collaborators early in the proposal planning; their priorities need to be factored in much earlier, in the beginning stages. One way to address this is to submit a pre-proposal for a travel stipend to visit the
communities and ask for their permission and discuss the project before submitting the proposal.

Additionally, the complete absence of a policy for working with communities of color is, in itself, a problem, which we hope to resolve by drafting this deliverable.

● Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken/new projects that have not yet begun?

Proposals for field trips and research projects should require a plan to actively engage with local indigenous communities before being approved.

Ongoing projects may be improved by continuous efforts toward better communication and understanding of the collaborating communities and their needs, and by including collaborators as coauthors on the publication.

Even projects that do not involve fieldwork can still require considerations. For example, in research that uses precompiled data from other studies, the locations of the samples should be scrutinized, and we should request permission to use the data on a new project if it originated on sovereign tribal land. For projects such as hazard modeling, the models should be made available, in an accessible format, to the local communities that are impacted by the hazards.

Publications should include a land acknowledgement for Houston (stolen lands of the Atakapa and Karankawa people) and for any other locations where data originated, and an acknowledgement of indebtedness to the people enslaved by William Marsh Rice, whose exploited labor made research at the institution possible.

Finally, names of places and landmarks should be decolonized by using traditional names in publications and in our conversations.

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

Communication guidelines to help people understand the nuances of communicating with other cultures in general, and communities of color who are adversely impacted by Western colonialism. Compile a list of translation agencies for different languages as the need arises.