Working with Communities of Color

1. **What are all the local communities of color that SEA works with? (AUDIT OF KNOWN INFO)**

SEA has 50 years of history interacting with local communities of color, primarily on islands. The organization does not have an easily accessible database that locates or describes all of these interactions. In order to provide specificity, the members of the SEA URGE pod compiled the following list from programming over the last 4 years.

From the Woods Hole, MA campus, our academic programming has included brief, paid sessions with Wampanoag educators. Also, in cooperation with other scientific organizations in Woods Hole and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, SEA houses and offers programming and mentoring for 15 participants in the Woods Hole Partnership Education Program (PEP) every summer.¹

From our ships in the Pacific and Atlantic, our academic programming includes interactions with local communities of color in: French Polynesia, Hawaii, Phoenix Islands, Tonga, Samoa, New Zealand, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Bahamas, Cayman Islands, USVI, St. Martin, Sint Maarten, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, St. Martin, Antigua and Barbuda.

**How does SEA work and interact with these BIPOC communities?**

The SEA URGE pod identified the following types of interactions:

**Scientific research interactions:**

- Short-term research efforts involve collection of oceanographic data for student projects during their SEA Semester experience. Samples and data are most often collected offshore within a nation’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and accessed using our own sailing research vessels. Less frequently, we collect samples and data in coastal habitats, either accessed from our ship or from shore with help of island communities (e.g. dive/tour operators). Only 4-5 days are spent in a given nation’s waters before sailing to our next destination.

- SEA program staff submit research clearance requests via the U.S. State Department months in advance of a voyage. These clearances include reserving space on our ships for government-appointed local community scientific observers, and the submission of cruise reports to the national governments.

¹ PEP is a 10-week program designed primarily for college juniors and seniors from underrepresented groups in marine and ocean sciences.
Long-term research efforts include the study of ocean plastic debris and *Sargassum*. Some of these samples and data have been collected in the waters of foreign nations, collected under appropriate research clearances.

- These data have been shared through publications and conference attendance (international and regional). Some of these publications included authors from foreign nations.

In collaborative research programs, such as in the Phoenix Island Protected Area (PIPA) program in the island nation of Kiribati, research objectives and sampling involve representatives (in addition to scientific observers) from the home country and a number of other research/academic institutions. In this example, access to data and samples was coordinated ahead of time.

**Academic interactions:**

- Time spent in Woods Hole and time spent during foreign visits lead to many types of interactions: Guest speakers (paid), Interviews (unpaid), Field Trips with a guide (paid), Educational exchange - Ship tour/Classroom visit (unpaid), Service Learning experiences (unpaid), Museum staff/Park Rangers (paid).

- Institution/Organization collaborations lead to many types of interactions: School/classroom visits for cultural and scientific learning exchanges, guest lectures by SEA faculty (and students and staff/crew), recruitment events, ship tours, guest student scholarships, and internships.

2. **What worked well about SEA’s interactions with BIPOC and Island communities?**

The SEA URGE pod identified the following as examples of positive, short-term interactions:

- SEA requests permission to conduct oceanographic research in their regions (via research clearances) and share data with local communities afterwards, identifying local experts for programs.

- In-person interactions are listening and learning sessions that focus on local priorities in the fields we work in.

- Observers (and, more generally, guests on board): most successful interactions occurred when we incorporated observers into the ship’s routine and community from the beginning of their voyage. They became part of the community, which led to more sharing and exchange of knowledge.

The SEA URGE pod identified the following as examples of positive, long-term research interactions:
• *Sargassum* research has included authors from island nations.

• SEA’s Phoenix Islands Protected Area program is highly collaborative, where research is designed with heavy involvement through island community participation and by additional research partners. Over several years, data collected have been utilized to assess and further develop the Kirabati policies on marine resource uses.

3. What did not work well?

- The focus of research efforts originates within our organization (faculty and students); only a few SEA Semester programs have established collaborative research with island communities.

- Relationships with collaborators in local communities of color are not always developed beyond superficial interactions.

- By only adhering to official research clearance requirements, SEA is not able to determine which communities and collaborators gain access to cruise reports and research findings.

- In programs where planning time or contact time is limited, collaborators and contacts in local communities of color were asked to speak for their entire community.

- Shipboard observers are not always given appropriate time or tools help them become part of the learning community at sea.

4. How can SEA improve the way we interact with BIPOC communities for active projects and programs that are already underway? *(We cannot change the outcomes of past work)*

Members of the SEA URGE pod agree that even in areas where we see positive interactions, there is plenty of room for improvement. Much of that improvement and the actions noted below can be made with more and better planning in advance and better sharing of the outcomes of interactions with local communities of color across the organization. This will assure the maintenance and expansion of existing collaborations and reveal areas where more work needs to be done to ensure that local communities of color are benefiting from the research done by SEA.

The SEA URGE pod discussed the following actions for improvement:

- Expand our conceptions of what research we can and should do by working more collaboratively with local communities.

- Determine ways to more effectively distribute our research findings through conversations with local communities of color.
• Communicate with each community we visit to adopt the most effective measures for sharing data/findings with them.
• Build stronger and longer-term relationships with foreign contacts.
• Establish a standard operating procedure to be applied to every program regarding effective communication with SEA collaborators in local communities of color to encourage more mutual knowledge building.
• Increase program faculty attendance and presentation of research findings at regional and national/international conferences.
• During programs, faculty can expand the scope of interactions* with local communities by arranging:
  o pre-arrival and post-departure electronic communication between community representatives and program participants,
  o pre-arrival video conferencing for guest lectures and conversations,
  o extended time in the locations visited during a program.
  *All of these interactions must provide mutual benefit and/or compensation to local community members.
• Facilitate the paid participation of members of local communities of color in our programs as educators of our student participants and as peer researchers.
• Coordinate with science and humanities diversity education efforts across the country.
• Identify and utilize BIPOC vendors in our procurement efforts, regionally, nationally and overseas.
• Build these efforts by identifying immediate positive changes, share these immediate actions with our community, and generate momentum and confidence that, yes, we can do this. Be intentional about creating early success stories.
• Develop organizational guidelines for interacting with BIPOC communities in Woods Hole and during program port stops with procedures to review, assess, and improve those guidelines.