URGE Session 4 Deliverable: Working with Communities of Color

This is what was found by the Cornell Earth & Atmospheric Sciences (EAS) URGE pod at Cornell University on 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:
- *E.g. How many research projects were undertaken in countries or regions with communities of color, how many of those included meaningful interactions with those communities of color? Briefly describe one or more example projects to provide context for the following questions.*

Most members of our pod are modelers and/or bench scientists, so our field interactions have been somewhat limited and may not be representative of our institution/department as a whole. Pod members shared experiences working with communities of color during field work in Latin America. Research was focused on hazards (seismology/volcanology). Other members of our department were surveyed to provide a broader perspective of our department's interactions with communities of color.

EAS also has a long history of working in South America with the Andes Project, a 25-year long interdisciplinary research collaboration examining tectonic and surficial processes in Chile and Argentina. South American researchers involved in the Andes Project can be considered to be part of a privileged economic class compared to local communities. This brings up tangential socio economic concerns that are important to consider in our audit, i.e., is it appropriate to include interactions or collaborations with majority non-white research communities in our audit? We have decided to leave the Andes Project out of this deliverable.

What worked well in these interactions?
- *E.g. Using local names for landmarks or features, adhering to restrictions and customs such as not scheduling outreach meetings/events during hunting season*

Although pod members' experience working in communities of color is limited, we found that integrating local communities into the project goals and outcomes worked well and helped to keep them invested in the results. Taking a personal approach by knocking on front doors and having conversations with locals to explain the motivation and methods for the work also seemed to work well. Incorporating local knowledge into field work plans was the key to

obtaining boat access and safe transport to field sites. Always ask permission to work on site before beginning work.

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

- *E.g., We did not include priorities of local communities of color when developing our proposal, and to address this in the future we will include community member(s) in the early stages of proposal planning and writing as collaborators*

Pod members noted some disconnect was apparent between the priorities of visiting researchers and the local communities--e.g., it is difficult to tell communities of color to dedicate more resources to volcano monitoring when people in the community are living in poverty or dealing with other existential threats.

Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?
- *E.g., Work with and compensate community members to translate research results and outreach materials into local language, include acknowledgements in forthcoming publications and presentations*

Groups researching hazards (climate change impacts, weather, volcanoes, earthquakes) in specific regions could gear publications and outreach efforts to focus specifically on how their work impacts local communities. An example was given in our pod meeting: one group working on modeling regional aspects of climate change/drought that included local co-authors and highlighted the impacts and vulnerabilities in local communities in published manuscript.
One pod member mentioned the importance of language, an important yet hidden barrier that naturally excludes communities from access to latest scientific research and advancements. Translating research papers or related materials into the language of the host country would greatly help improve collaboration with local communities. Although Cornell does have translation resources available on campus (the student-run "Translator-Interpreter" program being one example), there are none that we are currently aware of dedicated to research findings whether in the form of theses, conference or journal papers, presentations, etc. Although the urge pod as a whole has limited experience in field-based research, reducing the language barrier and making our research more accessible to various communities of color is a practice we can advocate for in the department. Installing a research based translation resource for EAS could include initiatives such as developing a partnership with the language department (Languages@Cornell) and the Cornell University Library, which holds an extensive catalogue to journals, scientific assessments, patents and technical reports and does provide some resources for translation services on its site (found here).

Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?
- *E.g., Additional support/funding for early planning process of projects to include forming productive and mutually beneficial connections with communities, establish a point of contact for interfacing with communities so as not to overwhelm with individual requests from researchers and collaborators*

Cornell's statement on international collaborations and ethics can be found here.

We did not find any direct policies or guidelines for working with communities of color from NSF or other national funding agencies.

Some general practices that we thought of:

- Build long term, mutually beneficial relationships by working in the same place a lot.
- Work towards systemic change in academic system that rewards or incentivizes building ethical relationships with communities of color
- Include local researchers in research project from the beginning, including as co-Is on funding requests
- Be culturally sensitive to local practices and customs

Many department members are not working on projects that naturally lend themselves to working with/within communities of color. In this case, researchers could broaden participation through engagement in science outreach events specifically targeting communities of color in the Ithaca area. This led to discussion detailing the desired outcomes of this pod; one of which is to centrally organize and promote department-wide K-12 outreach activities. We are compiling a list of past outreach activities that have been arranged by EAS for this purpose.