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URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for University/Organization – Kentucky Earth and Environmental Sciences Deliverable

This is what was found by Kentucky Earth and Environmental Science at the University of Kentucky on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

*NOTE: Our pod has members from a range of career stages and involvement in the development and execution of research projects, and pod members had many different experiences or different perspectives when working with communities with local identities. In particular, in Kentucky, local research often focuses on Appalachia. These Appalachian communities have historically been treated in marginalized ways and we reflect on interactions with them as well as other communities of colors in the US and abroad.*

- **Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:**
  - Some pod members work at the Kentucky Geological Survey (KGS) who's mandate is officially to work on Kentucky related research, however many researchers have also worked internationally before taking positions at KGS.
  - Approximately 1/3 of pod members have undertaken research projects in regions with communities of color.
  - Most interactions were positive and working with local members of the community was a huge asset to the research projects.

Examples of research projects include:

**Nepal:** Student in a village reached out to a researcher to undertake project. Project worked with other people from the village. The project was largely driven by local student.



## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

**Indian Himalaya:** Some projects involved working with Indian colleagues, however, some did not.

**Bolivia:** Research working with students from local institutions.

**Guatemala:** Cave research involved local community of indigenous Mayan people. Researchers had successfully worked there exploring various cave regions for 10 years. Researchers were finally given permission to explore a never before explored cave for first time. When they returned the following year, the indigenous group said their cave exploration has led to the local water supply drying up and they were not allowed to return to explore the caves.

**Argentina:** Research involving one of 2 possible geomorphologists at an institution there. Both were approached to join project, one agreed and got part of the funding but did not contribute/work with the other researchers. Not a great interaction.

**Appalachia, US:** Generally research was not working directly with communities in this area. It helped to explain the work to any members of community who observed researchers in the field. Pod members felt that goal was to trying to avoid angering local members of the communities.

**Appalachia, US:** Research focusing on scientific communication has been working directly with communities in the region. The project involves going to the area, spending time with people and asking them what they want to know, what they wish they knew? Basically having the community direct the research.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**

In general, things that worked well in these interactions:

- Projects led by researchers in the community that included some from the pod seemed to work best.
- Involving students and researchers from local institutes worked well
- Involving local communities in research lends itself to certain projects more easily than others.
- Letting the community guide the research questions had very positive results (again depends on the project)
- Oral histories can help us view land in different way



## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

- Oral histories for recurrent events like floods and earthquakes were particularly useful and complimented research being done in the area
  - Including land acknowledgement when working in areas like Grand Canyon
  - Going to area with humility and open mind
  - Respect and follow the local cultures even if you don't agree with it (assuming no danger to anyone). Some examples include: dress modestly, separate sleeping arrangements for men and women
  - Try to avoid being disrespectful. This helped build trust and good working relationship with local communities.
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- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
    - Try to avoid creating conflicts between scientific findings and cultural beliefs.
    - Avoid going into an area, extracting resources and research and leaving without any benefit to the local community
    - Avoid putting stress on people in the community
    - Avoid inviting people to be on a paper or panel just to check a box
    - Involve communities from the beginning of project
    - Make sure local communities have an active role
    - Be explicit in project details, what samples will be collected, etc. Don't deviate from original plan without more discussion with local communities. (i.e. Can't collect more samples if wasn't part of plan. Can't use samples for other work without prior approval).
  
  - Did not include local communities when developing research. Exploring their area without their involvement seems to lead to (expected) hostility. However, it was noted that once local communities heard about the project they were welcoming.  
To address this problem in the future some ideas include:
    - Include local members of the community in the proposal planning
    - Inform local members of the community if you are coming to survey or collect samples and explain why. Possibly hold town hall to explain purpose of research if it doesn't include members of community
  
  - Included local researcher in project but ended up being more tokenism than real collaboration.  
To address this problem of tokenism in the future some ideas include:
    - Include local members of community in planning stages of research
    - Provide clear goals/deadlines for work to be completed
    - Provide clear division of work ahead of starting research project



## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

- Oral histories of a major geological event did not correspond to data and specifically timings of events. (Specific example included landslide that occurred 8000 years ago but was discussed in stories as something much more recent in history).

To address this problem in the future some ideas include:

- Do your work in a way that doesn't negate the oral history.
- The local indigenous community was consulted in the research project exploring caves in Guatemala. However, the indigenous group revoked the researchers permission to enter caves following a year where they claimed local water supplies changed. A friend outside of this village but from the same indigenous group explained that this was likely just a handy excuse to sever ties with the researchers since their culture is very conflict adverse.

To address this problem in the future some ideas include:

- Work to understand the cultural context behind some of the beliefs
- Be clear upfront about the work being done to make sure approval to work in the area is understood.
- Follow up with local community about results
- Include local members of the community in the research directly, not just asking permission
- Respect and plan for reality that groups can change their mind about granting access to areas, especially those with important cultural context
- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
- Where researchers results were at odds with oral history in the area, the researchers have since returned to the area many times. Many locals have accepted the result of dating the landslide and have found it interesting and helpful. Others have found it at odds with their history and ignored the result. In writing up research paper, reviewers asked PIs to address their results in the context of the oral history.
  - The researchers could have done a better job of address the oral history of the locals.
  - Future work could include more discussion of how this story had a lot of scientific truth in it (knowing it was an enormous landslide is not obvious and given age was not in recent history but yet it was clearly something known and passed along).



## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

- Try to avoid creating conflicts between scientific findings and cultural beliefs. Do your work in a way that doesn't negate the oral history.
- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
  - Discuss with local indigenous groups in Kentucky about a land acknowledgement statement (specifically Shawnee group) to see if they agree with statement before including it on website.
  - Have researchers demonstrate that they have looked into details about cultural practices and social norms for the area they will be working in ahead of doing with other communities. It was agreed that researchers often which they had increased awareness of the culture.
  - Here is a (non-exhaustive) list of things to consider before working with other communities
    1. Talk to students from the area before travelling
    2. Learn about the culture and social norms
    3. Try to learn the language
    4. Always bring gifts
    5. Respect other cultures (even if at odds with your beliefs) in order to help show respect when working in someone else's home
    6. Do your work in a way that doesn't negate their oral history and cultural beliefs
    7. Try to understand the cultural context of the area
    8. Go with humility and open mind and come back and tell us what you learned
  - Researchers should provide a one-page summary report on the areas they have worked in previously which would be largely beneficial for anyone else travelling to work in the same area.
  - Researchers could provide a sort of de-briefing report to the department when they return from working with communities of color. This presentation/report could include any preparation or pre-conceived notions before travel as well as a summary of what it was actually like working with other communities. Researchers could detail examples of unexpected situations and how they were handled. This would help individual researchers avoid having to educate individually each new person travelling to the same area.