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

This is what **Earth URGE** at the **University of Michigan** found on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

The level of interactions with local communities and communities of color in field work varies widely within our department and within projects. To get a better sense of the full range of interactions, we surveyed the department with a Google Form, and the responses were used to answer the questions in this deliverable.

Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:

- Active Research & interactions
 - Over half of our survey respondents said that they interacted with researchers local to the study area or communities of color as a structured part of their research. This is likely an overestimate of the portion of the researchers in our department who engage with such communities as there is likely a bias in survey respondents towards those who are interested in these kinds of collaborations.
 - Projects were described that occur abroad in multiple continents (South America, Africa, India) and that occur more locally in the midwest and elsewhere in the US.
- Notable outreach programs:
 - Earth Camp engages communities that are local to UMich in Earth science research through offering hands-on, outdoor exposure to Earth & Environmental Science to high school students. Students participate in three different programs over the course of three summers.
<https://lsa.umich.edu/earth/community-engagement/earth-camp.html>
 - Coastal Ocean Environment Summer School in Ghana (COESSING):
<https://coessing.org/>: “The Coastal Ocean Environment Summer School in Ghana is an international collaboration aimed at building capacity in oceanographic and environmental sciences in Ghana.” Summer schools have occurred every year from 2015-2020.
 - SEARCH <https://www.searcharcticsscience.org/> and PolarTREC
- Land Acknowledgements: Some members of the department community have land acknowledgements in their email signatures and on their syllabi. A land acknowledgement statement is currently being reviewed for the department website and expected to be posted in the next couple of months.



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What worked well in these interactions?

- Maintaining regular communication (one person said they use informal online English classes as a way to stay in touch)
- Established relationships with good communication
- Respecting and valuing the knowledge and opinions of locals, e.g. when/where to visit, and when/how long to chat with locals
- Learning the local language
- Socializing
- Being up front with what is needed and how their contributions will be recognized (one example is printing out and bringing a contract document for locals who will be providing ongoing field support for a fee)
- Learn about the colonial history, scientific history, culture beforehand
- For projects involving youth in local communities of color, engaging with their families/caregivers is vital
- Involving communities of color/international collaborators early in the planning stage; don't ask them to be a author last minute in a way that tokenizes their participation

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

- Formal one-off presentations with a tone of 'knowing more' and 'needing to teach the locals' are not helpful
- Need support in how to have meaningful interactions and impact in places that are still segregated or inequitable, for example
- How to share data with local collaborators who have no email or smartphone
- How to adequately compensate key local collaborators (e.g. meteorological station managers).
- One consideration is that acknowledging local collaborators in a paper might not a valuable compensation for local informants who do not participate in the academic prestige economy
- How to engage local collaborators more holistically (i.e. in the science, not just fieldwork & logistics) when they don't have an active research program of their own

Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?

- While improving the outcomes of short-term ongoing projects is difficult, many of the interactions and collaborations highlighted in our survey are long-term, and could likely stand to benefit from the improvements and resources described below (in the last question).



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- Adding a land acknowledgement is a relatively simple change researchers can apply to ongoing research projects and publications in review/prep. In addition to the forthcoming statement on the department webpage, we can provide guidance and examples for departmental members to reference, emphasizing the importance of reflecting through the process of writing the land acknowledgment.
 - Examples for our university:
 - From the start of the President's Council on Carbon Neutrality: "The University of Michigan is located on the territory of the Anishinaabe people. In 1817, the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Bodéwadmi Nations made the largest single land transfer to the University of Michigan, ceded through the Treaty of Fort Meigs, so that their children could be educated. We recognize the history of displacement of Native communities that facilitated the founding of the University of Michigan. We acknowledge the sovereignty of tribal lands, and we reaffirm contemporary and ancestral Anishinaabek ties to this land as well as the profound contributions of Native Americans to this institution."
 - E.g. "I respectfully acknowledge that the University of Michigan and surrounding communities occupy territory traditionally stewarded by the Meškwaiki·aša·hina (Fox), Peoria, Anishinabewaki, and Bodéwadmiakiwen (Potawatomi) peoples. I also acknowledge that lands from the Ojibwe (Chippewa), Odawa (Ottawa), and Bodéwadmiakiwen (Potawatomi) ceded in 1817 through the Treaty of Fort Meigs allowed for the creation of the University of Michigan. [Whose land are you on?](#)" Link: [Native-Land.ca](#)
 - We recognize the need for a land acknowledgment for our field camp in Wyoming (Camp Davis). There is a plan to have it included on the website.

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

- Bring PIs together who regularly/semi-regularly collaborate with local communities (both nationally and internationally) and discuss the different ways they engage the communities (e.g., coauthorships? honorariums?)
- Add trainings to first-year grad seminars or Research Ethics class (undergrads, grad students & postdocs)- and/or write broader impacts in class



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- Create a “Best Practices for Inclusive Fieldwork and Engaging with Local Communities” using URGE readings, local expertise & experience, crowd-sourcing, and our own workshopping. Potential topics that we would like to address include:
 - When and how to pay workers appropriately, including payment amounts that are locally appropriate
 - Writing/articulating successful strategies that are already in place
 - Defining authorship: when to include colleagues
 - Outlining the levels and communities that are possible to engage with: research peers, governmental agencies, workers who are helping
 - Understanding history and broader context of the place where you are working (colonial history and legacy of science)
 - How to build in time to engage in local outreach and community efforts in your field work; if we are there for multiple weeks, you need off-days or can easily add a few extra days that are pre-planned for community outreach
 - Make an engagement plan that stands up to the level of detail as a safety plan or field plans that we often have in place, trying to anticipate interactions/dynamics among the research team and local community and accounting the cultural differences
- Invite social scientists and historians (many are at UM, e.g., [Kyle Whyte](#)) to give us lectures (Smith lecture?) and perspectives on this engagement
- We need to make our own community more inclusive towards Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities too
 - Can invite local collaborators to give talks (highlight their knowledge!)
 - Post our best practices guide on website
 - Attend conferences like SACNAS & NABG, and advertise that we’re there
 - Make slide with land acknowledgement that faculty & grad students can add to their slides at conferences