
URGE Policies for working with communities of color for Department of Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering

This is what was found by the QueensU Pod at Queen's University on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

The summary of interactions described below are the results of a survey sent out to graduate students, faculty, and researchers in our department. All respondents had the option to remain anonymous.

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

It appears that our department has had very limited interactions with communities of color. It's difficult to know if this is accurate or if we just had a poor response rate in our survey. Most responses mention that local interactions were necessary for land access and because local community members know the terrain and how to best access outcrops or study locations. Some examples of interactions that members of our department include:

- "as terrain guides from local tribal communities, they know the area more than anyone. Because of the primitive nature of the topographic sheets from Survey of India, drafted prior to independence of India, at some remote central areas of the country, specifically around Bandhavgarh, Madhya Pradesh/Chattishgarh provinces. In Rann of Kutch area of the state of Gujarat, India, a salty featureless marsh land, bordering Pakistan, where local communities have better understanding of negotiating treacherous terrain and reaching outcrops based on their historical knowledge. I took their help and support for allowing me to perform field mapping in their areas, on top of permit from Indian Border security force, during my M.Sc. thesis project. Also in the state of Meghalaya(NE India) took support from local tribes to do a research project work."
- "In Argentina, I conducted field work that required permission from local land owners. I do not speak Spanish and I was lucky to have a field assistant who was fluent in Spanish and helped to translate between our

groups. I always felt sad that I couldn't easily communicate with them, share our plans, and learn more about the region from them. Our overall interaction was limited beyond gaining land access"

- Other collaborations occurred because "The nature of the research and the increased awareness of the importance of local knowledge made the decision."

Most researchers involved local communities early in the process. In some cases as co-applicants to proposals, during the writing stage, or as field assistants. One respondent mentioned that in all cases they met with local collaborators to discuss results.

- **The Queen's URGE pod also discussed reasons why some members of our pod have not had significant interactions with communities of colour or other underrepresented or remote communities.**

Many interactions seem to be based on getting access to land and not particularly focused on sharing knowledge. Some pod members expressed that language barriers hindered interactions. Some members noted that their earlier interactions in South America and Alaska should have incorporated more interaction with communities but it was a challenge when being hosted by mining companies. We discussed how increased awareness on this topic and dissemination of information regarding best-practices could help to shift the tendency to interact solely for land access.

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

- Listening, being patient when arranging meetings and choosing times when people are not too busy.
- "The tribal people are welcoming if they find the visitors honour their local practices, culture and food habits. I stayed couple of weeks with them at couple of occasions. The only barrier was language, they hardly interact in common languages."

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

- Sometimes emails were not answered. Researchers commented that they may need to find a better way to communicate. Also, sometimes results were received with little or no comment or reaction, which highlights the need for continued patience.
- Language barriers have been a big challenge when interacting with communities in remote locations. It works well to have local translators. When I worked in Italy we had a local geology student join as a field assistant. They were able to help with navigation and communication and were able to gain field experience by joining us. In the future, I will aim to incorporate more local students in field experiences.

- **Reflections & introspections (from some pod members)**

- Based on the responses regarding projects from our department, at least in how they are described by the respondents, interactions with communities of colour tend to revolve around access to land, which can tend towards being exploitative in nature.
- However, there is almost universal recognition of the importance of sharing results with the community
- There has been, in at least some cases, efforts to involve communities of colour in the planning and proposal stages of projects.
- Reports of seemingly disinterested behaviour from communities of colour, such as not responding to emails, may reflect a need to incorporate other methods of communication, and tailor these to the methods of communication favoured by the community(s). Other reports of seemingly disinterested behaviour, such as disinterest in the results, may indicate that more work should be done in the planning/proposal stages to ensure that project(s) also serve the community(s) of colour.
- I'm hoping that the Pod's initiative to develop resources at the department level will help to encourage and facilitate positive, constructive, collaborative, and non-exploitative relationships with communities of colour.

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

- Our pod discussed developing a set of guidelines and best practices for department members to read and reference if undertaking new research projects. This would also include links to the readings associated with this URGE session and some additional Canadian references.
- It would be beneficial to carry our science outreach endeavours into local schools. One survey respondent mentioned that Canadian funding opportunities for outreach endeavours would help with this.
- Our pod and other members of the department agreed that having pointers and a resource list for self-education would be appreciated.