

SEAS Islands Alliance URGE Pod

Deliverable: Policies for Working with Communities of Color

The SEAS Islands Alliance mission is to forge pathways for island communities in the geosciences, with a specific focus on oceanography and the marine sciences where islanders are underrepresented. This means that the entire mission of our program is grounded in working with Communities of Color. Below we use the prompts to address specific discussion points provided by the URGE curriculum and also detail additional philosophies and mechanisms for our work in this arena.

- *Have you actively sought out local collaborators/liaisons/guides? Why or why not? Were they included in the early development and/or proposal of the research or the project itself, or added at a later stage?*

Our Alliance is organized around three Island Hub Teams (US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam) as well as a Research Team, a team who coordinates the Bridge Program, and the coordinating Backbone Organization. Each of the island hubs has representation from islanders who were involved in the proposal, including as co-PIs. We also continue to seek more local collaborators and partners from each island community to help grow and sustain our program. In addition, the Research Team has local community liaisons who provide feedback on survey instruments, carry out interviews, and other community engagement activities.

- *Actively sought to include local students in your research? Why or why not?*

Because our Alliance is focused on local student engagement, this is a given of our project.

- *Sought to build trust and form long-term connections and collaborations with local institutions if your project is multi-year / ongoing? Why or why not? Were previous negative interactions, whether from inside or outside of your organization, addressed in the plans for building these connections and trust?*

The partnerships that are part of the SEAS Islands Alliance include a range of time frames in terms of connections. Some of these have a long history – a decade or more – while others are those initiated only recently. We know through experience that these depend on trust and relationship building and commitments to work together over the long term. For the Puerto Rico Hub, that is led both by a local institution (Universidad Ana G Méndez) and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and Maryland Sea Grant, there has been a strong history of acknowledging and talking about the legacy of colonialism in Puerto Rico and the importance of avoiding extractive “parachute” efforts to come in to Puerto Rico, take, and leave. We also strive to have representation in our leadership, with Puerto Ricans taking roles on the steering committee and in primary liaisons with local community groups. In the USVI, we have purposefully tried to engage partners across our interventions as a way to build trust that investments of time and opportunities, pay off over the long-term. We also conduct periodic, post-program check-ins to see how we can improve

programming and their partner experience, so we can continuously improve relationships over time. Regular communication with partners and seeking joint funding opportunities that strengthen and build these partnerships, have also been part of cultivating important partnerships over time. Local partners are integral to our programming and create content and are guest speakers in our Youth Ocean Explorers Program and mentor our undergraduate and graduate students. Workforce Fellows are matched with local partners as well.

- *Shared data and findings with the local/regional community in a way that is more accessible? (i.e., translating into different languages). Why or why not?*

We are including translators in our All Alliance meetings and have been experimenting with using synchronous translation in Google Meet for Puerto Rico Hub interactions. This has been something we grapple with in the Puerto Rico Hub. For many of our students, opportunities to advance their careers will take place in the United States in programs where English skills are expected. In this sense, the Puerto Rican mentors have wanted our program to provide opportunities for students to use and practice their English in a research setting. However, this brings up questions about how and why English is the first language of science. **Action items from this include:** **1.** *Looking for ways to introduce the colonial history of geoscience into our curriculum in a way that also illuminates the legacy of language, e.g. drawing on the resources of the GEO Context project.* **2.** *We are in the process of collecting data from our Spanish-speaking families for the first time, through both listening sessions that are underway and through a survey that will launch in Spanish later this week. We have not yet considered how to share the results back with families.* **3.** *Consider how to share Summit feedback survey results with family members, in ways that are easy to digest and in both English and Spanish.*

- *Educated yourself and your group/team about local politics, culture, customs, and knowledge, including the history of colonialism / settler colonialism in the region? Why or why not?*
 - *Was sufficient time allocated to the process of working within the community's governance, customs, and priorities?*
 - *Is respecting culture and customs included as part of your code of conduct? This will be addressed in Session 6 as well.*

Within our individual hubs, this work is a continuous thread of growth and development for our programs as we navigate providing culturally competent curricula and address the ways that local culture abuts the geoscience culture. The colonial history of Guam, USVI, and Puerto Rico is something held in common for all SEAS participants and is one of the motivating factors that brought us together. The work we are doing now is in sharing those cultural and historical frameworks across the islands, and the ways that geoscience and geopolitical contexts are connected in island communities (e.g. natural marine resources and coastal hazards like hurricanes). We are also working to embed traditional and local knowledge in our curriculum and to insure that indigenous knowledge holders are introduced on equal footing with mainstream scientists.

Because so many of the hubs are led and populated by local SEAS Islands Alliance members, the co-production model is embedded in our governance structure. We encourage sharing of cultural customs through stories and food traditions are always a celebrated way to make connections. The SEAS Islands Alliance has led listening sessions with community partners to insure that local voices, interests, and

needs are incorporated into the work that we do, and as the management structure evolves, these community members are taking greater roles as advisors and/or hub members.

- *Acknowledged local communities / Indigenous tribes in your research results?*

As an Alliance, we have not formally published anything yet, but are working on a publication agreement and expect to bring this up as a discussion point on if/how/when to include these acknowledgements.

We do not currently include land acknowledgments in any of our Alliance programs. There may be an opportunity in future in-person meetings, in particular, to add land acknowledgements and additional learning activities that focus on local ecological knowledge and local ways of knowing related to oceans, coasts, and marine life.

As a result of the URGE discussion, at least one group member reached out to her institution about whether a formal land acknowledgement exists for her University and if so, what the process was for creating it. The Provost's response was this is something the administration is working on but does not yet currently have. The University of Maryland has a land acknowledgement statement that has been approved by Piscataway elders, and this can be used for any events at UMCES (<https://diversity.umd.edu/resources/land-acknowledgment/>)

- *Included local communities in your broader impacts in a meaningful way that builds on the community's identified needs and concerns?*

o Did these efforts leverage community members, and was that work compensated appropriately?

The workforce fellow program that we run financially supports SEAS Islands Alliance members to work with community partners on projects that address community needs. This program relies on the concept of reciprocity. The fellows do important work with the community partners and the fellows advance through the SEAS Islands Alliance pathway in a way that encourages impact on the workforce - a stated goal of the Alliance. For example, in the USVI, both current Workforce Fellow positions were created in response to stated needs from partners - one as the Coral Disease Response Coordinator for the territory and the other working to build science outreach and community engagement through a split position between VI EPSCoR and the Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service. In Puerto Rico, the undergraduate program also connects with local organizations' needs, carrying out a monitoring program in a bioluminescent lagoon that is under conservation and a valuable ecotourism resource.