

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

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URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color -- USGS PSW Pod Deliverable April 26, 2021

This is what was found by USGS PSW Pod at U.S. Geological Survey on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

Pods may have members from a range of career stages and involvement in the development and execution of research projects, and pod members may have different experiences or different perspectives when responding to these questions. Consider this in the summary document and focus on capturing responses that are representative of the range in your pod.

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

USGS is a large organization with a long history of previous interactions with communities of color. The federal government of the United States of which USGS is a part, has a checkered history of relationships with communities of color, from the westward expansion of the United States, to Manifest Destiny, to the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. As we learned about in Session 3, John Wesley Powell, an early director of the USGS also “furthered anthropologic research invested in the racial inferiority of Native Americans and was motivated by military imperialism”. We have done a lot to perpetuate inequality in this country and have an extra burden to undo that legacy.

The federal government is bound by several Executive Orders, EO 12898, issued by President Clinton that directs federal agencies to: 1) identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law; 2) develop a strategy for implementing environmental justice; and 3) promote nondiscrimination in federal programs that affect human health and the environment, as well as provide minority and low-income communities access to public information and public participation. Recently, President Biden issued EO – 14008 calling on the federal government to “deliver environmental justice in communities all across America.” We have a legal obligation to address environmental justice issues and to not negatively impact communities of color. Members of our URGE Pod have been involved in several projects that have involved interactions with communities of color.

- ☒ USGS has many partnerships with tribal nations, examples from the New York Water Science Center include:
 - ☐ Working with the Haudenosaunee tribe to research the Tully Mud boils near Onondaga Lake
 - ☐ Working with the Shinnecock Nation on Long Island to address water quality concerns
- ☒ Urban Waters Federal Partnership- opening up recreational and open space
 - ☐ Bronx and Harlem River – USGS
- ☒ USGS Hazards has been doing work in equity in the hazards designations they are doing



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- Flood Forecasting in urban areas
- ∠ Water Mission Area IIDD – working on web analytics of USGS tools and relating this to potential user demographics (broad demographics – county level)
- ∠ USGS Technical training in Support of Native American Relations (TESNAR) makes funds available to support USGS employees to design and conduct technical training for staff of tribal governments or organizations. The purpose of the program is to strengthen the technical capacity of tribes for managing tribal natural resources and build on networks between the USGS and tribal governments.
- ∠ Minority participation in Earth Sciences (MPES) Program - This program was established in in the 1970s in response to the civil rights movement and was one of the more successful programs at USGS. It was defunded years ago and is no longer active.
- **What worked well in these interactions?**
 - ∠ There are several tribal partnership coordinators in USGS that facilitate relationships with the tribes. Monique Fordham - USGS Tribal Partnership Coordinator
 - ∠ USGS as a federally funded agency has the potential to be a more long-term relationship builder
- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
 - ∠ Work tends to be project oriented with funding concerns, which leads to a get in and get out approach, which is bad for relationship building.
 - ∠ There are not a lot of opportunities for employees to make connections to tribes or communities in areas where we work. It's not necessarily that these types of relationships are discouraged, but they are not prioritized, this could be fine to avoid overwhelming communities with individual requests from researchers and collaborators, but if communication from communities or tribes doesn't make it down to the people doing the work on the ground, this seems like an issue.
 - ∠ Expand training for tribal engagements
- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
 - ∠ Include acknowledgements in forthcoming publications and presentations.
 - ∠ Increase communication of research results to the public through open source publications, social media, and translations into multiple languages.
- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**



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- ∠ 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
- ∠ Guidance is needed on how to make respectful land acknowledgements while not inadvertently making a federal statement endorsing sovereignty in contested land or acknowledging and working with tribes that aren't legally federally recognized.