

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

The details below were derived by USGS SPCMSC and WARC staff as recommendations to improve Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

- **Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:**
  - Within the USGS there are many project staff that interact with communities of color; however, given the national and international scale and breadth of interdisciplinary science applicable to the USGS, conducting an audit for our organization is somewhat difficult. The list below highlights specific projects our pod members are directly involved with and provides direct or solicited knowledge of project experiences.
  - The Coastal Change Hazards (CCH) program (working across three USGS Coastal and Marine Science Centers) have participated in and funded projects in regions where communities of color exist and are directly impacted by large wave events (either actual or predicted) that could cause or have resulted in coastal erosion and flood damage.
    - Alaska
      - Scientists engage in meetings with local government officials and elders, conduct outreach at elementary schools, hire locals, and even engage in extra-curricular activities such as basketball games with local high schoolers in order to develop a rapport and good standing.
    - Hawaii, Puerto Rico, St. Croix, Guam, Saipan, American Samoa, and Marshall Islands:
      - Researchers interact and work alongside minority communities in these small island territories at university and agency (federal, state, territorial, local) levels on project planning, operation, and data dissemination.
  - The Wetland and Aquatic Research Center (WARC) interacts with both international and local communities of color on projects.
    - Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand
      - The NexView project develops models designed to be used by decision and policy makers in the Lower Mekong River Basin, with the ultimate goal of improving local livelihoods.
    - Indigenous communities in Florida
      - Scientists consider the indigenous communities impacted by Everglades restoration (Seminole and Miccosukee) as stakeholders and partners in Everglades related science.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**
  - The CCH projects cited above have successfully engaged local scientists, hired local field personnel when applicable, and included community leaders in their project development and application. Prolonged engagement over many years for these long-term projects in remote areas demonstrates that meaningful relationships have been established.
  - Researchers have started to include native lands on maps of study areas in presentations and publications to acknowledge the indigenous communities that exist(ed) in these landscapes.
  - For the NexView project, it has been beneficial to organize workshop/multi-day meetings where all collaborators fly into one location and can get to know each other and build rapport, while making progress on project development.
    - These types of interactions are likely impacted by COVID restrictions and may show how the pandemic could indirectly and disproportionately affect communities of color by reducing the ability to engage directly with these communities.
  
- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
  - In Alaska, USGS researchers and collaborators initiated citizen science and school programs, but simply found that USGS employees do not have the bandwidth to continue with those efforts in the detail that they require.
  - There are local, on-the-ground programs and people, that are critical to making these interactions successful. Projects should engage with these organizations and knowledge-holders so that best practices for engagement with communities of color can be employed (rather than “invented” on-the-fly). This does not and should not negate the need for USGS outreach and coordination expertise, which ideally would exist outside of individual projects and have dedicated, sustained resources (e.g., perhaps at the Mission Area level). This kind of in-house, USGS expertise could be leveraged by projects across a Mission Area to achieve engagement objectives.
  - In many cases, even though local communities of color are included at project meetings, their concerns may be left to the end of the agenda.
  - When questions from the community are raised, there are times where an answer isn’t readily available and they are told an answer will come later. It is not readily apparent if there is timely follow-up in these situations. Suggestions to resolve this issue are under the final bullet topic.
  
- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
  - Project team members, at all levels (PIs to support personnel), should engage with the communities where research is being conducted to broaden the depth of relationships. This could help to sustain these working relationships as projects evolve or personnel change. Furthermore, by having all levels of project personnel involved, generational gaps in awareness that may exist between those in leadership roles and support positions may be overcome.

- Train/Employ (part-time) people in local communities who reside in long-term research project-areas to use and maintain monitoring instrumentation and to troubleshoot problems. This would allow for direct involvement in and ownership of the production of data.
  - Include existing liaisons at the programmatic, bureau, and department level to help establish and build relationships with remote, minority, or sovereign communities beyond specific project level personnel
    - E.g. Regional Tribal Resilience Liaisons (<https://www.bia.gov/bia/ots/tribal-resilience-program/liaisons>)
    - USGS Office of Tribal Relations (<https://www.usgs.gov/about/organization/science-support/office-tribal-relations/about/tribal-consultation>)
  - Engage with NGOs or scientific entities already working in local, minority communities to help build relationships before/during project planning, implementation, outcomes
    - Level of engagement to be commensurate with project prominence? PI, center, bureau, departmental
  - Build on the points above to have more resources allocated to initiate more citizen science in these remote regions and provide acknowledgment of that help.
  - Show that tribal community input is taken seriously by moving their opportunity for feedback earlier in meeting agendas. Additionally, meeting organizers can ask for questions from these communities ahead of time so that answers are available at the meeting instead of as a follow-up.
  - If follow-up on a tribal concern is needed, reach out to these communities to make sure they received the follow-up answer and if not, ask the person responsible to prioritize getting an answer to them.
  - Engage with communities in the project development phase rather than waiting until the sharing results phase, asking for their feedback, comments, or buy-in after funds have been spent and primary decisions have been made.
- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
    - Create a “code of conduct” with all researchers and stakeholders (to include communities of color) at the outset of a collaborative effort to reach consensus on 1) the objectives of the work, 2) how decisions will be made and data will be shared, 3) how best to share information amongst ALL collaborators, 4) how to resolve disputes, and 5) establishing timelines for responding to stakeholders and collaborators. Such actions would (hopefully) lay the foundation for meaningful engagement with local communities of color and would serve as a means of accountability for USGS and other project partners.
    - Relationship-building support (time and funding), opportunities to connect with communities of color outside of or prior to specific project requests.

- Include Center-wide or USGS-wide training that informs scientists of the existence of community liaisons (governmental, non-profit, NGOs) that can help with establishing a project and partnership with a community.
- Guidelines on data sovereignty within the federal government, with specific regards to data collected on sovereign lands by USGS scientist that would need to be published via a data release.
- Develop a survey that asks stakeholders and collaborators to evaluate the effectiveness the project at its various stages (planning, implementation, outcomes), the benefits interactions with each other, and/or value of the established relationships.
  - A third-party could be contracted to conduct these surveys in order to ensure anonymity or protect the sources in other forms.
- Educate scientists to be more aware of how interactions are going with stakeholders and collaborators beyond what is reported (noticing of social cues).

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