URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for The University of Virginia Department of Environmental Sciences

This is what was found by the UVA-Environmental Sciences Pod at the University of Virginia on 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:
Successful aspects of these interactions:
- Pod members had success with projects that had huge involvement with the community, with community members participating in data collection and publishing papers. Specific projects had data collection where local knowledge was necessary, so community involvement was essential.
- An example of a successful project was spearheaded by Indigenous leaders, as opposed to US professors. This allowed the students to view the science and ecology from the lens of people who have a close relationship with the land.
- A program that became well integrated with local populations was a good example of science working with the community and mutual benefits.

Areas of improvement or challenges in past interactions:
- Tension arose towards scientists who come in seasonally and leave.
- Most found it challenging to form lasting connections and find ways to positively contribute to local communities without additional support or large networks.
- Only a small proportion of NSF grants go to Indigedious researchers and communities, making it a challenge to fully compensate their work. Scientists must determine if they are contributing to communities or taking advantage of them.
- It's hard to build trust from afar. Several projects had communities that were nervous about US scientists coming in with their own equipment.
- Some pod members experienced research where local communities provided access and service to the scientific project, but were not included in the scientific process, or given recognition. Problems emerged in the project over extractive data collection, and it appears that the findings were not meaningfully shared with the host community in a way that benefited the local community.

Goals to improve projects in the future:

Goal 1 : Build trust, dialogue, and collaboration with local communities.
We aim to learn about trusted messengers and how to connect with them as a way to build rapport with a community. Physical presence in a community is the most effective way to build trust and identify community leaders and/or find a liaison within the community. Putting in this time prior to the execution of research, or even proposal development, allows strong collaborations to develop and creates opportunities for community members to ask questions and help guide research in the earliest phases.

Goal 2: Prioritize research questions and goals based on needs of local communities.
We aim to consider and prioritize research that is important to the local community. Early stakeholder engagement will help prioritize goals and needs of the local community. If this is not done, other aspects of the project (building trust, sharing data) may not be as meaningful. Research questions should include a way to translate time and measurement periods of research to scales that match lived experiences.

Goal 3: Share data and findings with the local communities in an accessible way.
One way to make data more accessible is in the format it's presented in. Formats such as maps may be more meaningful to communities than typical scientific figures. Presenting data and findings at local community meetings or community colleges can help communicate major findings to community members. Additionally, providing funding for people to attend these opportunities can help bring that information to them. Requesting money in grants for long term relationships and communication with communities can provide the infrastructure and support needed to make data and findings accessible by the community. The Equity Center at UVA is a fantastic resource that can help researchers make data more accessible, identify community needs, and design products that are specific to the community's needs, rather than creating a product we hope is useful.

Pod guidelines to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color:
1. **Preparation before project:** Take time in the early stages of project development/proposal planning to consider the impact of geo-science research and roots in colonialism, and how this impacts your research questions, motivations and methods. Before entering or approaching a community, it is essential to understand Indigenous perspectives and colonization lingering impacts.
2. **Involve local communities in the early development**: Ask communities what their needs and goals are before planning a project. Include community members in the grant and proposal writing process, and make sure they help to align place-based relationships and project funding. Written permission must be obtained from the partners before

beginning the research projects. Transparency is a major goal, have the project's intentions be clear. Consider: Who is your work centering and empowering? Who benefits from this research?

3. **Ensure equitable compensation:** Write financial support for local groups into grant proposals, especially when working in closer association with local communities that are often impoverished. This will lead to appropriate compensation for all parties involved.

4. **Include early career scientists and students:** Have advisors advocate for their students to reach out to communities, and make students aware of community collaborative opportunities.

5. **Respect local communities' knowledge**: Do not try to reinvent the wheel and rediscover what's already known.

6. **Plan for transparent and inclusive data:** Research done in communities should be available to members of the community. To avoid 'hit and run' science, don't leave before setting up a data product or structure in place for the community. The community must agree to any release of information. Data collected in a community belongs to and must be returned to that community.

7. **The community must be involved as full partners in all aspects of research**: Partnership should be based on continuous collaboration. The culture of the community should be respected throughout the project. All research results and findings should be reviewed by that community. Publications should be edited and approved by local communities. These guidelines adapted from the ANSC Code of Research Ethics.

Pod's suggestions for department:

1. **Diversity course syllabi:** We encourage our department to incorporate course material that reframes how foundational knowledge arose. For example, a geoscience course may read work detailing the full picture of John Wesley Powell's work from Session 3. Courses should also incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

2. **Developing concrete code of conduct for the department.** With collaboration from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee, we seek to develop a code of conduct for working with communities of color for all researchers in the department. This code of conduct will be widely shared and the guidelines developed in this deliverable will shape our final code of conduct.

3. **Invite Equity Center to present seminar:** We plan to invite the Equity Center to present a seminar on how to thoughtfully conduct research with communities of color. We hope this will help develop and shape our goals and our departmental code of conduct.

Resources to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color:

- [UVA Equity Center's Support of Community Engaged Scholarship](#)
- [ANSC: Ethics and Protocols](#)
- [Collection of resources about colonialism in the geology](#)
- [Understanding Our Environment Requires an Indigenous Worldview](#)

Pod Members' Signatures

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