A Full-CERCLE Approach: Community-Engaged Research Collaborative for Learning and Excellence

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Essential workers, Staten Island, NYC, 2020.
 (photo: Sol Aramundi)

Presentation Game Plan

- Why am I here?

- Why should you care?

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Just briefly…

- Senior Scientist for Community Participatory Research

- Team lead for Community-Engaged Research Collaborative for Learning and Excellence (CERCLE)

- Collaboration between ORD and Region 2

- Background in Medical Anthropology and Epidemiology (research), ethical and equitable research collaboration (program development)
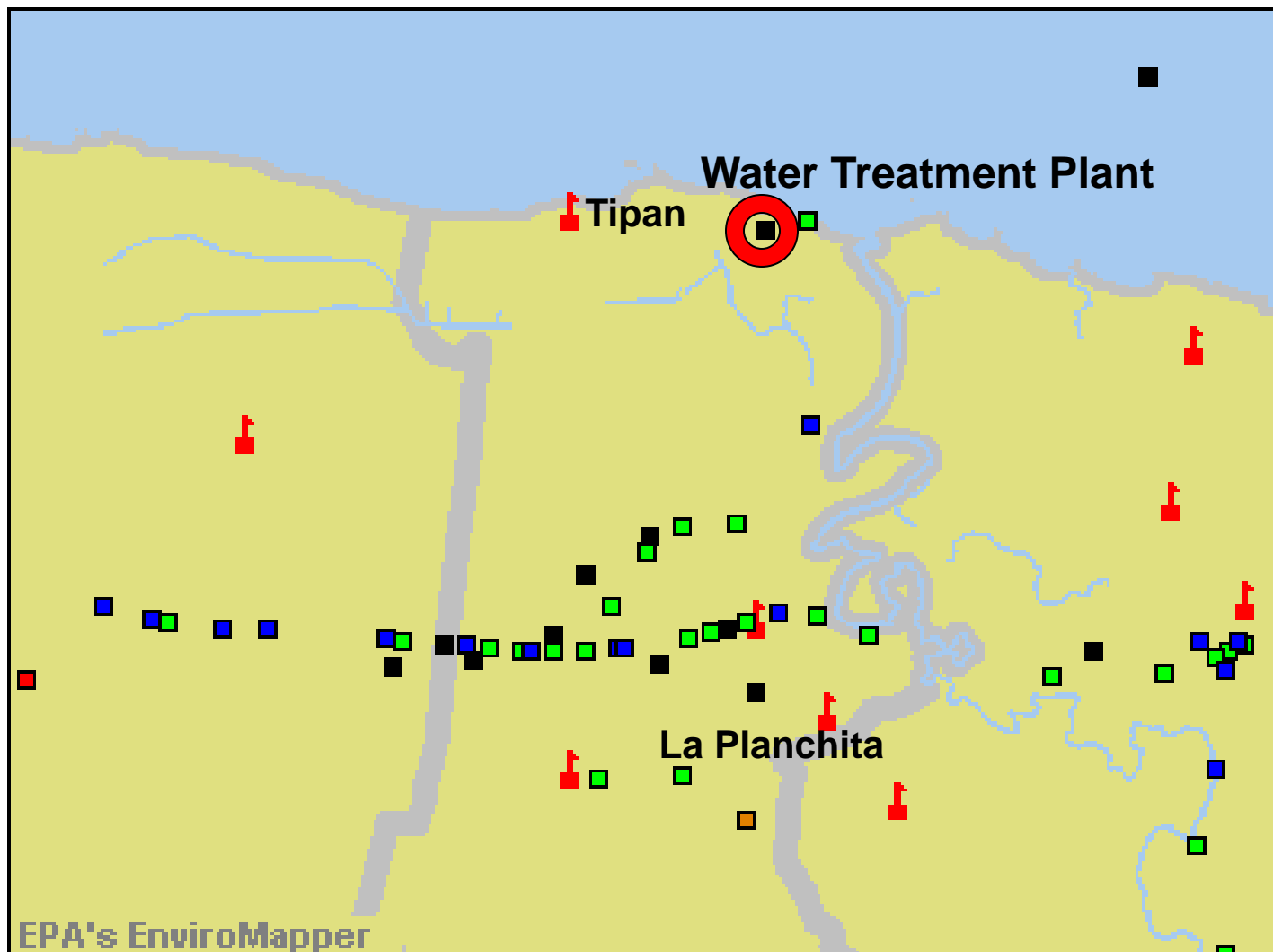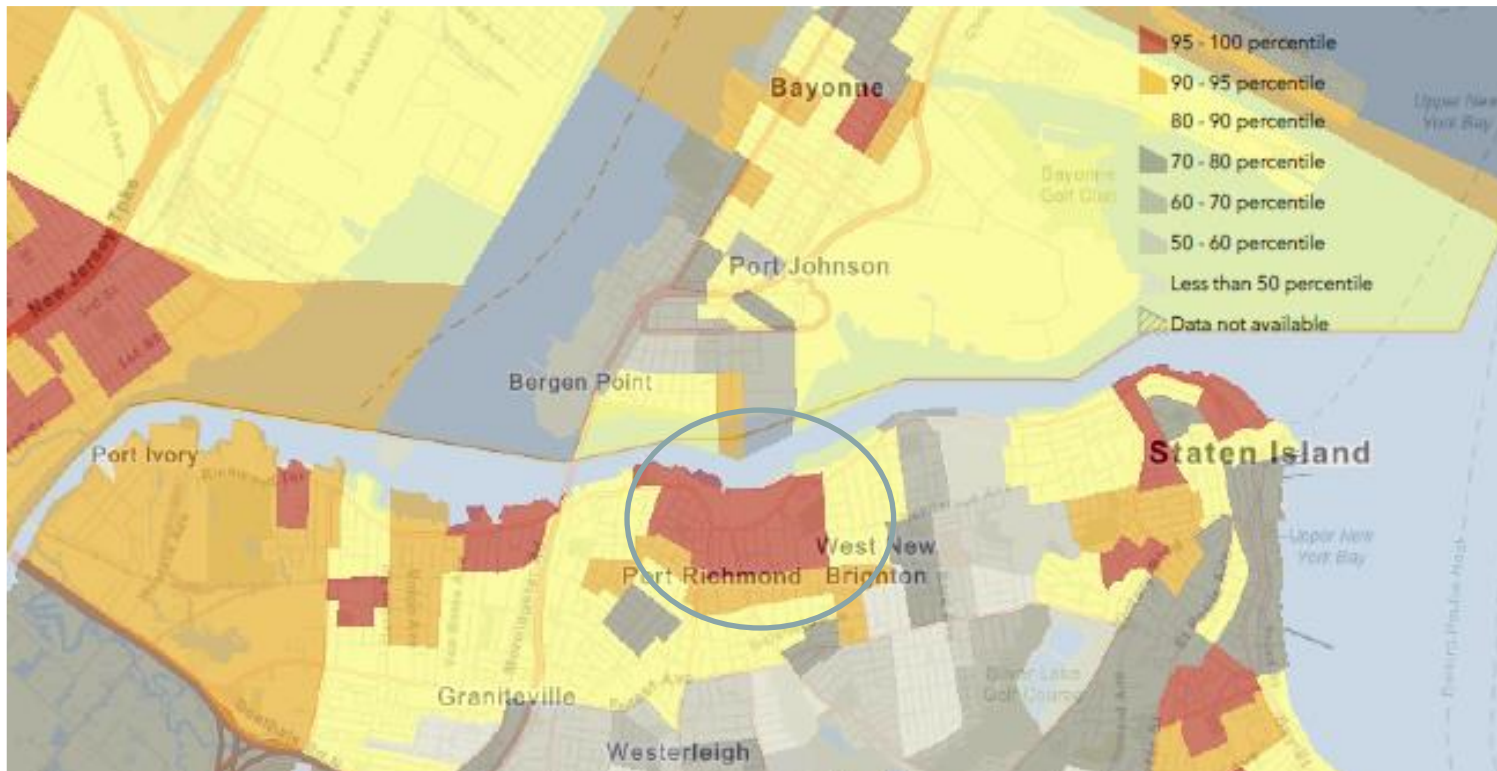
Puerto Rico's North Coast, 2003

Lessons Learned

- Get a diverse picture of "community" and "leadership"

- Engage communities in effort from the start

- Recognize when formal science approaches can help, and when they need bridging support / translation

- Support exchange of different types of knowledge

- Listen and build trust – not automatic

Port Richmond, Staten Island

- **Hazardous Waste proximity (National percentiles, via EJScreen, v. 2.01)**

Community Partnership *Pitfalls*

1) No engagement with priorities of the organization (as representatives of the community)

- ❑ Assumed they would have environmental concerns AND these would automatically be priorities

2) No co-planning activities/consideration of specific tasks

- ❑ Assumed demands of the project would not create a burden for community members or staff

3) No consultation about the budget

- ❑ Assumed staff of CBO would be happy to help as volunteers/with minimal financial support

Youth leaders take part in a protest on Staten Island
(photo: Marquis Pickering/_PicksPics

Community Questions and Priorities

❑ What are we expected to do?

❑ What deliverables will we be obligated to produce?

❑ What resources are we expected to offer?

  ❑ Do they need space?

  ❑ Staff time?

❑ Most importantly - What is in this project for us?

Yes, we care about the water quality, **BUT**…

The Incentive Structure supports the *Pitfalls*

Time demands

Institutional pressures

Resource scarcity (real or constructed)

Challenge in problem-based research — **Not framed to consider communities beyond most visible problems**

Moving principles into process and practice
- **Understanding community priorities**
- **Implementing models and processes of equitable engagement**
- **Improving science and outcomes**

EPA-sourced community engagement resources

- Goals for CERCLE: Moving from guidance to program integration (*proactive*)

- Working to ensure that these approaches come in **at the inception** of research (co-creation)

- Nurturing the science (and art) of building relationships

- Meet communities where they are (version 2.0)

Superfund Community Involvement Handbook

Shifting incentives –
thinking collaboration *before* a project

1) What principles of ethical collaboration will guide the research, and how they are already reflected in the proposal?

2) Budget guidelines that address the true costs to community partners

3) The researcher's own positionality, examples community-engaged collaborations / community relevant outputs

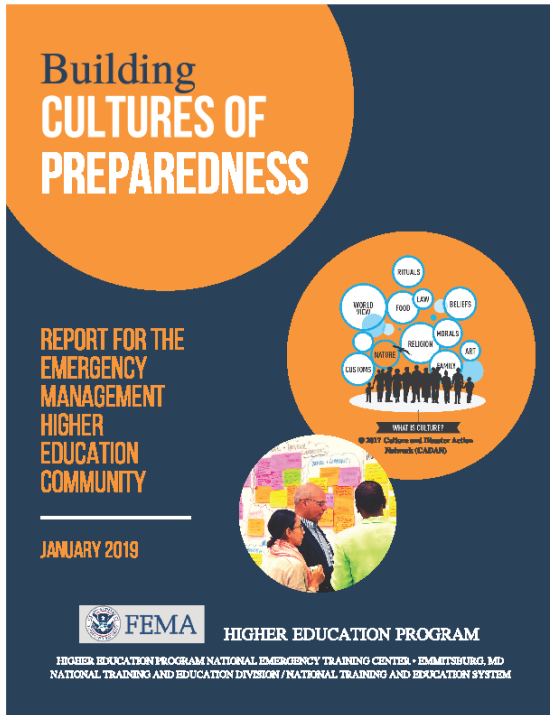   1) "How do you show up?"
   2) "How will the community benefit?"

Stepping back for a second

- Where do we start?

- Typically, ORD research has been driven by EPA questions and concerns

- "Science-driven"

- EPA takes issues to communities
  - Sometimes there's a match on questions
  - Sometimes there is community engagement/consultation
  - Sometimes there is engagement with Regions

Flip the Script

- Begin in the community (in collaboration with the Region)

- Figure out what we mean by "the community" in a given location of interest

- Identify concerns and priorities *they* have

- Work together to decide what research questions can be asked and answered

- Work together to figure out if/how community members might be involved

What we mean by "the community"

Approach of Culture and Disaster Action Network (CADAN): *Who Lives Here?*

- What brings a particular group together at this time in this place?

- What is their shared history?

- What are their concerns, skills, challenges?

- How can we build a collaborative working relationship with a significant number?

Federal Emergency Management Agency. 2019. Building Cultures of Preparedness: A Report for the Emergency Management Higher Education Community. Washington, DC: FEMA.

Dietrich, Alexa S. 2020. "On Seeing and Listening: How to Better Support Affected Communities before the Disaster Starts." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters.* Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 13-42.

Collaborative Working Agreements: A Living Document

1) What are the agreed-upon/co-created research questions?

2) What methods will the researchers be using?

3) What will be needed from the organization?

4) What types of outputs will be produced?

5) What are the agreed-upon obligations of the researchers and organization *to one another*?

6) What are the steps that would be taken in the event of any conflict?

Notes on Your Collaborative Working Agreement

Overview

- The purpose of the working agreement is to create a set of understandings to guide your work with your SSRC Research Fellow
- This is a collaborative, living document. The fellow holds the main responsibility for drafting the working agreement.
- Deadline for first draft is October 1, 2022 (for organizations beginning their ethnographies in 2022, or within the first month of the fellowship for those beginning in 2023)
- For those who will have fellows in the second cohort, please review these materials as well, so you have a sense of what to expect when your fellow begins in summer 2023

From SSRC program guidelines, 2021

EPA — United States Environmental Protection Agency

Stormwater Infrastructure Resilience and Justice (SIRJ) Lab (photo: Marccus Hendricks)

Collaborative Network: initial approach

- Collaborate with EPA-based researchers working on/developing community-based projects

- Cooperatively build out *community-driven* projects

- Build bridges between EPA researchers' priorities and those of communities of focus

- Work collaboratively to help structure projects that would address multiple overlapping priorities

Multiple, overlapping priorities

- Centering the community's priorities

- Finding the shared focus that meets multiple areas of concern and potential impact

  - Example: youth engagement and science education

- Modeling process that enacts core values

- Addressing both project design (co-creation) and research process from inception to outputs

- Use initial projects to build out the network and bring in other collaborating organizations

Background: Community demonstration for fallen construction workers, NYC. (photo: Sol Aramundi)

EPA
Researchers/
Programs/
Resources

Other Federal
Agency Program
collaborators
(e.g. NSF, NOAA,
CitizenScience.gov)

College and
University
Research and
Training
Partners

Community
Justice Partners

Activists, Organizations,
Community Scientists,
Critics, and more

Other
potential
collaborators
??

K-12
Community +
Science
Initiatives

State, Local,
Native Nations'
governance

Strengthening local research capacity *and* community relationships

- Emphasize crucial role of local researchers, "researchers in place"

  1) May be harmed by the disaster itself

  2) May be from less prestigious institutions, or themselves be from marginalized communities, but

  3) Are more likely to have existing ties to or relationships with impacted communities

- Target opportunities for local colleges and universities that teach and train future scientists from those same communities
- Also bolster resiliency within the broader researching and learning communities

The Process is the Product

- What makes a project a CERCLE project?
  - A "Full-CERCLE" process
  - Begins in the community, and ends where the community wants it to end
  - Has foresight built into a transparent decision-making guide
  - Centers transparency and equity (including open access to data and budget considerations)
  - Connects the community with (other) resources to support their concerns
  - Concludes in mutually-agreed manner

Hard Truths and Take-homes:
The potential of *CERCLE*

Community garden at the corner of Broadway and Hickory Street in Buffalo, New York (photo by A. Carrotflower)

- "Meet communities where they are" (version 2.0)

- Listening and hard truths

- Showing up: networks of **commitment** as well as **collaboration**

- Co-creation of knowledge and shared ownership of outcomes

Questions??

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency