**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, Accessibility, and Justice in the US Ocean Studies Community**

The U.S. ocean studies community – including academia, government, industry, conservation, and philanthropic organizations – has struggled for decades to increase diversity among those who study and ultimately pursue professional positions in the field. Increasing diversity in ocean studies faces several structural challenges not faced by other STEM fields, for example the relative scarcity of undergraduate marine science programs and lack of cultural diversity in the locale of many marine stations. Inclusion of individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives is essential to achieve equity and to facilitate community engagement and coproduction of knowledge, identified as fundamental practices for developing the science to address sustainable development for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

This study will provide a coordinated strategy to address Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, Accessibility, and Justice (DEIBAJ) within the U.S. ocean enterprise of research, education, policy, conservation, resource management, and private industry. Past efforts, while numerous, lacked an overarching framework or strategy for lasting and substantial change. The study will provide an authoritative analysis to guide the ocean studies community in achieving DEIBAJ and help develop a culture of commitment to this end among the many institutions seeking to diversify their workforce.

In October 2020 and May 2021, the Ocean Studies Board held scoping sessions with experts in diversity and members of historically excluded racial and ethnic groups in the ocean enterprise to explore the issues and frame a study related to increasing DEIBAJ in the U.S. ocean studies community. Based on the outcomes of these in-depth, preparatory discussions, we propose to engage a wide range of experts in DEIBAJ and members of historically-excluded groups to identify the elements of effective programs and develop an action-oriented strategy. The goal is to accelerate a strategic, coordinated plan to address DEIBAJ within ocean studies to achieve an ocean enterprise that is representative of U.S. population racial and ethnic diversity, is equitable and just, fosters a sense of belonging, and includes the talent, expertise, and perspectives necessary to address future ocean challenges.

We seek a broad-based funding structure to underpin this effort, such that the diversity of study supporters reflects the goals and audience of the effort.

**Statement of Task:**

An ad hoc committee will undertake a study to ascertain the impediments, including past social policies leading to marginalization, and identify evidence-based approaches for increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the ocean studies workforce. The committee’s report will identify specific strategies to guide future activities to advance the adoption of evidence-based practices and policies for increasing DEIBAJ in the ocean studies community. The study will include the following:

* Collection of existing narratives from ocean enterprise professionals representing historically excluded, or marginalized, racial and ethnic groups to help clarify the variety of barriers that exist and the losses caused by these barriers not only to ocean studies but also to the individuals themselves. This will include consideration of intersectionality for other identifiers such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, native country, religion, and others. The committee will have the option to collect additional narratives, if they determine that this would be of substantial benefit for the community and their report.
* Analysis of policies, strategies, and practices of current and previously funded ocean studies programs that have sought to build more diverse, equitable, and inclusive working environments. This analysis will include identification of what has been successful and the metrics used to define success across a broad array of ocean studies institutions and potential examples from other STEM fields.
* Development of explicit goals in a coordinated strategy across ocean studies that relates to each element of DEIBAJ.
* Identification of metrics to evaluate progress in the implementation of recommended strategies such as by educational institutions, government agencies, and other organizations (e.g. conservation groups, ocean industries) that employ experts in ocean studies.

**Work Plan:**

The committee will convene a number of meetings (combination of virtual and in-person) to: 1) Define the nature and scope of the issues, develop a plan for gathering and analyzing information from existing DEI activities and incorporating experiences from students and professionals in ocean studies; 2) Meet with STEM DEI experts from outside of ocean studies to identify effective practices and metrics; 3) Meet with ocean studies DEI experts to address issues specific to ocean science disciplines; explore how structural and organizational aspects of ocean studies affect perceptions of professional opportunities and careers; and 4) Meet with students, faculty, administrators, and workforce managers in public and private sectors to understand the spectrum of experiences of historically-excluded groups.

Upon release of the report, we plan to initiate an Action Collaborative (See example for preventing sexual harassment: <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/action-collaborative-on-preventing-sexual-harassment-in-higher-education>), or comparable activity, to promote implementation of the study’s recommendations and initiate sharing of experience and results among institutions in the ocean enterprise community. The collaborative will build accountability and buy-in for implementing recommendations on DEIBAJ policies and effective programs. The goal is to create an active space where academic, research, non-profit, industry and other organizations pledge to move beyond pro forma policies to evidence-based practice.