

Step Out of the Silo: Science through a Community and Social Justice Lens

Prepared from the work of Sam Grant, Co-Founder of AfroEco

Homework Questions

- Why am I working outside my “own” communities?
- What community am I entering (and who has defined this as a community)?
- Why am I entering this specific community?
- How am I entering it (am I parachuting in, have I been invited (and by whom))?
- What is my “research intent” (serving my own interest as researcher, working in partnership with community on a mutual interest, serving the community as they seek to address their own questions)?
- What research (and how) been carried out in this community already?
- What has the community told me about how to carry out an effective and useful research project **with them?**
- **How am I preparing myself to work in solidarity with the community as it works for self-determination?**

Practice Questions

- What do you know, coming in, about prior experiences this community has had with scientists and partnerships?
- What comes up for you initially, as you consider doing science with a social justice lens AND a community-led process?
- If community-led, how is community defined and who has defined it? How is the community directly involved, rather than through representatives?
- There are a myriad of social justice issues in communities, how do you imagine you will define the social justice framework (single issue, multi-issue, intersectional)?
- How do you operationalize a research methodology that is truly done with the community (how do you close the technical gaps)?
- How do you facilitate the partnership so that you mutually build consciousness, capacity and power for social change?
- What are the patterns of marginalization, oppression and privilege operating in and on the community that negatively impact the prospects and process for mutual power building?
- How do we organize in a way that is by/with community rather than allow the polarity of on/for/over to run through our partnership?

Sam Grant, founder of Afro Eco, has been a regenerative organizer and action researcher since 1983 - always working with communities to define, implement and realize their own social change endeavors. Based on communities defining needs he: a) worked with gang-affiliated youth to create a social enterprise educating the community about the perspectives of so called "at-risk" youth; b) led a community campaign to launch the nation's first environmental business incubator in an inner city community after the community won a fight against environmental racism; c) following a listening project on a secondary commercial corridor, he developed and led a community development credit union for 7 years; d) he worked with peer organizers to create the Organizing Apprenticeship Project to increase the number and capacity of organizers, particularly from communities of color, in Minnesota; e) he worked with peers to launch AfroEco after recognizing the increasing severity of the food, land and water crises globally and their particularly pernicious effects on the African Diaspora.

Sam is organizing director for Afro Eco, a professor at Metropolitan State University, and leader of a regional coalition working to end the racial employment gap in the region. He is working with students and communities to design and implement a replicable model for local living economies in both rural and urban marginalized communities in the U.S. and Africa.