

Summary and Recommendations

This section summarizes the main outcomes from assessment of the progress achieved toward project goals in each of the R2R areas based on findings from the External Evaluation Site Visit Interviews and Focus Groups, ERCORE, Undergraduate Student Survey, Graduate Student Survey, and documents provided by R2R Management.

Overall R2R evaluation questions concentrate on three main themes: 1) project implementation and infrastructure; 2) research activities and outcomes; and 3) R2R impacts.

Project Implementation and Infrastructure

In Year 2, R2R participants have accomplished a great deal as evidenced by research outputs and by reaching most strategic plan goals and milestones this year. The project is well on its way to achieving the overall goals. Based on responses during the external evaluation site visit interviews and focus groups, participants would like to have more mechanisms to see the bigger picture of R2R which would further advance the success of the project. The project infrastructure has continued to develop and would be aided by more support from UVI.

Research Activities and Outcomes

Despite barriers caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and construction delays in re-building the Marine Science building and Environmental Analysis Laboratory, the R2R team has increased research productivity this year. Outputs include publications in high impact-factor journals, increased connections within VI-EPSCoR teams as evidenced by publications and presentations, and strengthening of ties beyond the Territory as the team members increase publications with investigators at other institutions.

R2R Impacts

While it is still too early in the project to form an assessment of the research, institutional, student, or education and workforce impacts, the majority of those areas are progressing well in achieving goals and milestones. This is due to the agility of the team and the management of R2R.

Recommendations from External Evaluators (TIG) and VI-EPSCoR Response *(in italics)*

1. R2R should increase communications within the project so that participants at all levels can understand the value of their own contribution to the larger project goals. Part of this will occur naturally if COVID measures lift but the project should make strong efforts to engage across all levels to build momentum as R2R enters its mid-stage. The goal is for the project to finish strong and not be continuously recovering from COVID (and other) induced slowdowns.

Communications within and across the project components have picked up as COVID restrictions have been relaxed- with several events such as the VI Agricultural Fair in STX this past June that facilitated researchers, our communications team and the Administration team working together on content for public engagement. Other events, such as the preparation of the next newsletter, new MMES student orientation, UVI's Research symposium, and the Youth Ocean Explorers summer program are additional venues where individual participants can share and get recognition for their work/contribution to the R2R project.

2. R2R should position itself to be an agent of change and for building research capacity in the jurisdiction. To do this, the project needs to be a strong advocate for creating a culture of research at UVI – if VI-EPSCoR is unable to make even incremental changes at UVI, it is hard to imagine what will. The most critical of the issues identified by faculty is a policy for return of F&A to the project. This will not necessarily be a comfortable discussion, but it is a crucial conversation needed to attract the next generation of talent to UVI and to retain the current R2R participants.

The PI and VI-EPSCoR Director has been tasked with developing a new University-wide policy for distributing a portion of the F&A/IDCs back to the researchers, their departments, and to the Office of Sponsored Programs to improve research management infrastructure and incentivize researchers. The University Leadership will review this policy proposal in the early Fall of 2022.

3. The Informal Learning team would benefit from mentorship/leadership of more senior personnel that could guide, direct, and encourage staff. Further, a more direct partnership/collaboration with the Education and Workforce Development team would be beneficial.

The VI-EPSCoR management team agrees and has been meeting with the IL team to

discuss their needs, challenges, and opportunities. We are also turning to our outreach experts on our External Advisory Board for additional guidance and mentoring in support of the IL team. We are also reviewing our budgets to see what else we can do fiscally to support IL

4. R2R leadership should consider positioning itself to sunset Emerging Areas projects that are not making adequate progress. If such changes do not change project scope, their resources can be redirected to other R2R areas. These decisions would need to be informed by evaluations, advised by the EAB, and approved by NSF.

That will be discussed with the Co-PIs and then with EAB at our next meeting (July 27th, 2022).