

## **VI-EPSCoR Response to TIG's External Evaluation Report for Year 3 of the R2R project**

- 1. R2R should continue to 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. Continuing into Year 3, the most critical of the issues identified by faculty is a policy for return of F&A to the project.**

*We couldn't agree more. Fortunately, UVI has hired a new VP of Research and Graduate Studies, Rick Nader, who has prepared a new IDC redistribution policy proposal for the UVI leadership's consideration. With input from VI-EPSCoR PI and CoPIs, as well as from other researchers, and administrators, this proposal has nearly universal buy-in from the research community and several members of the Cabinet. We are cautiously optimistic that this policy will be approved and submitted to the UVI Board of Trustees for sign-off in the Fall Semester 2023.*

- 2. R2R should advocate for the accounting office to be fully staffed. This is a prominent concern amongst R2R staff. There are currently only two grant accountants (previously there were four), even though there are many more grants. Similarly, the purchasing office is unable to process work if a key staff member is out of the office. Work essentially halts and departments have to wait for that person to return and catch up. The offices of accounting and purchasing are both very important to the administrative side of R2R and management should do all they can to advocate for those offices to be fully staffed/higher functioning.**

*Again, no disagreement from VI-EPSCoR. The proposed IDC redistribution policy proposal mentioned above sets aside funding to support key research administration infrastructure such as UVI's Office of Sponsored Programs and our Accounting Department. VP Nader (mentioned above) and PI Waddell have submitted the first of several planned proposals to NSF's GRANTED program to address these chronic "pinch points" in the flow of research grant administration's operations.*

- 3. The Informal Learning team should continue to try to engage all research areas and provide resources to assist researchers with outreach. This was noted again this year in the faculty survey responses. For example, in the strategic plan, an "outreach menu" is listed as being started in Year 1, but it is still not completed. This may assist research areas that need more direction/ideas.**

*As the restrictions and constraints associated with the pandemic have waned, the Informal Learning (IL) team has already begun to engage additional R2R researchers beyond the “popular and appealing” research areas such as mangrove restoration (Wilson Grimes’ team) and sea turtle tagging and tracking (Jobsis’ Team). Nonetheless, the fact that the menu has not been completed and shared with the R2R researchers is unacceptable and will be set up and shared with the R2R research teams by September 2023.*

**4. R2R faculty and leadership should provide more resources and mentorship to graduate students around their career goals and how to attain their desired goals.**

*Our VI-EPSCoR Communications Director, Elisa Bryan hosted two workshops on Adobe Illustrator. In response to requests from research leads and MMES students, she presented an Introduction to Adobe Illustrator workshop to help facilitate student’s visual and technical science communication skills. 12 individuals participated in the 1.5 hr workshops. Based on feedback, future workshops are being planned.*

*Furthermore, our informal hour-long conversations program titled “Coffee with Postdocs” has invited scientists from Academia, NGO’s and government agencies to speak about their professional careers, choices, opportunities, and challenges from their early careers to the present with our postdocs has been successful. This program will be expanded to include our graduate students. We will also work with our current MMES research and teaching faculty to expand their support and time to address these interests of our grad students.*

*Upcoming in July 2023, R2R research leads Wilson Grimes and Brandt will be hosting a writing workshop for grad students and new faculty- another opportunity for professional development.*

**5. Emphasis should be placed on recruiting and retaining diverse faculty.**

*Agreed. We are pleased to have recruited Guilherme Corte (Latinx) this past year into our Biology Department and he has had a successful spring semester with both undergrad and graduate students. He brings his expertise in coastal ecology and biodiversity to the MMES program and PI Waddell, with a USGS award, has secured summer salary and funding for a graduate student for Dr. Corte beginning in the Fall of 2023. Nonetheless, the goal of recruiting and retaining faculty of color remains a challenge, given our modest salaries, high cost of living, and shortage of affordable housing, not to mention competition from larger and more accessible institutions for employment and professional development.*

*We are tracking several of our native Virgin Islander MMES graduates who are in various stages of completing their PhDs and will be vigorously recruiting them back to UVI as they complete their degrees. We are also looking at programs like that at the University of Puerto Rico, where*

*local students are offered support for their PhD studies in exchange for a commitment to return “home” for at least 3 years as faculty, as part of an effort to bolster more diversity and retention here at UVI.*

- 6. Given the emergence of two new NSF EPSCoR programs (E-CORE and E-RISE) and the termination of the RII Track-1 program after the 2023 competition, the team is urged to revisit the sustainability goals of the project with an eye. towards how to best leverage current assets and position for future opportunities, without changing project scope.**

*Obviously, we here in VI-EPSCoR are still processing the news regarding the end of Track 1 opportunities for the Virgin Islands and UVI. However, we believe we can transition effectively with many of our current researchers and a few new ones with the new E-CORE and E-RISE opportunities. We are fortunate in the fact that our next S&T plan for the Territory is in development, so we are actively adapting it to align well with the E-CORE goals and objectives that were described in the RFP. The upcoming webinars with NSF EPSCoR are expected to advance our understanding of the new RFPs and allow us to start planning for our proposal submission in the fall of 2024.*

*To date, our current researchers have been quite successful in securing research funding from NSF, NOAA, NASA, USDA and USGS. We plan to leverage those funds as best we can with the planned E-CORE/E-RISE proposal submissions. In short, we plan to “play to our strengths” with many of our current team and grow our research foci with new hires and collaborators from other EPSCoR jurisdictions.*

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