



Recommendations for AOOS on Diversity and Inclusion



Submitted to the AOOS Board by the AOOS Diversity & Inclusion Working Group

April 2021

Background

The AOOS Diversity & Inclusion working group was initiated by the AOOS staff and endorsed by the AOOS Board in September 2020. Three meetings were held between November 2020 and January 2021. The recommendations in this document are the result of working group discussions and will be presented to the AOOS Board in May 2021.

Working group mission

The mission of the working group was to analyze AOOS' policies and procedures to make sure AOOS is inclusive of the diverse communities in our state in both the ways we engage and how we allocate resources.

Working group objectives

The working group was tasked with:

- 1) Reviewing AOOS policies and procedures including: AOOS Board structure and membership; AOOS engagement policies and procedures; AOOS standard operating procedures and Memorandum of Agreement (MOA); other AOOS activities as appropriate
- 2) Developing recommendations for ensuring inclusivity and diversity, especially with Indigenous communities in Alaska
- 3) Reporting back to AOOS board

Working group membership

AOOS Board: Mike Miller (AOOS tribal seat), Lynn Palensky, Katrina Hoffman, Katie Howard, Ginny Eckert

Non-board members: Kaare Erickson (UIC), Wáahlaal Gíidaak Blake (First Alaskans)

AOOS staff: Darcy Dugan, Molly McCammon, Sheyna Wisdom

Cover Photo: Community sampling training for ocean acidification on Kodiak Island. KANA image.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Expand board representation

Currently the AOOS board has one seat representing an Alaska Native entity, the Indigenous Peoples Council on Marine Mammals (IPCoMM). The working group recommends expanding Alaska Native Organization (ANO) representation to four seats, each representing a coastal eco-region (Beaufort/Chukchi Sea, Bering Sea, Western Gulf of Alaska, Eastern Gulf of Alaska).

Working group discussion:

- The working group strongly believes that the number of Alaska Native organizations needs to increase, given the inherent challenges in being a single representative on a large board.
- Choosing entities to fill the seats is complicated and will require thought from AOOS. The working group was hesitant to offer names of potential Native entities and urged AOOS to initiate more conversations and do some research.
- Since it's hard for one organization to represent Native interests broadly, the idea of rotating through different regions every 2-3 years was discussed. However, this approach poses challenges since it takes time to learn an organization and there are only two AOOS board meetings each year.
- Keep the seats open to all Alaska Native Organizations that are involved in activities relevant to the AOOS mission. This would include Tribes, co-management groups, profit and non-profit regional corporations, village corporations and boroughs that are predominantly Alaska Native run (e.g., North Slope Borough).
- Word the invitation to potential board members carefully. Reciprocity is important and AOOS should be ready to state what we can offer back to the Tribe or Native organization.
- Instead of stating the criteria we are looking for in a member, explain what other board members represent and have the entity choose someone for themselves.

Recommendation #2: Amend AOOS Governance docs

The working group recommends the following changes in AOOS governance documents to make AOOS' commitment to diversity and inclusion more explicit.

- I. AOOS Memorandum of Agreement
 - a. On page 2 under Objectives, second bullet, add wording to read "Coordinate State, Federal, Alaska Native, local and private interests at a regional level to meet the priority needs of user groups in the Alaska region;"
 - b. On page 2 under Objectives, second bullet, add wording to read "Enhance the usefulness of ocean observations for a wider variety of users, including users with different internet bandwidth capabilities;"

- II. AOOS Standard Operating Procedures
 - a. On page 2 Section II G, add wording to read "The Board will normally meet in Anchorage, Alaska, but may choose to meet in other communities in Alaska or by teleconference or other virtual formats in order to broaden participation."
 - b. On page 2 Section II G, add bullet addressing the ability to compensate Board members for their time and knowledge sharing as appropriate, also to broaden participation.
 - c. On page 5 section VII, first bullet, add wording to read "Communication pathways and forums of partner organizations and programs using the most relevant channels of communication;"
 - d. On page 5 section VII, review wording in first sentence to incorporate 2-way engagement

- III. AOOS 5-year Strategic Direction
 - Page 1, "AOOS does:", add bullet "Support monitoring and operational and applied research to meet the needs of stakeholders".

Recommendation #3: Expand engagement with Alaska indigenous communities

The working group provided both general and specific suggestions to help AOOS increase engagement with new groups and improve the quality of the engagement.

Suggestions for entities for AOOS to engage

- Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC)
- Alaska Beluga Whale Committee
- Bering Sea Elders Group
- Ice Seal Committee
- Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope
- Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)
- Sea Coast Trust
- Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat
- Eskimo Walrus Commission
- Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission

General suggestions for engagement

- Outreach and engagement should be approached with a content-specific lens. Broad-based outreach is less useful; focus instead on what's most important for a specific region and interact with the stakeholders to which the information is immediately relevant.
- AOOS needs to think more clearly about why we observe or participate in meetings. Do we want to make products more available? Are we looking for input? Are we there simply to foster relationships?
- Be aware of transactional relationships vs. actual relationships. Don't always show up with an agenda. Show up ready to observe, participate, and get to know people.
- Avoid identifying needs and then doing nothing about them.
- AOOS has many data products that people don't know about or are not accessible in the formats they need them. The data portal is rich but hard to navigate. There is a lot of potential but there needs to be more focus on talking to potential users and meeting user needs.

Suggested approaches for village outreach when you can't be in person:

- 1) **Social media.** This is used by everyone from elders to kids. Facebook is more popular than Instagram and Twitter.
- 2) **Radio.** Some people have no other connection than AM radio while they're in camp. Connect with stations such as KNOM, KOTZ, KDLG, etc. This is a good place for conversations with researchers, or sharing information through free announcements.
- 3) **Local newspapers.** Papers such as the Nome Nugget, Tundra Drums, and Cordova Times reach broad readership in rural Alaska.

Recommendation #4: Support workforce development by working with existing internship programs

AOOS should look for opportunities to work with existing internship programs to include Alaska Native young people in marine science and data management. First Alaskans, Native Corporations, Sea Coast Trust, University of Alaska, and NOAA IOOS all host internship programs.

Recommendation #5: Suggestions for Land Acknowledgement

AOOS staff asked the working group about suggestions or best practices for land acknowledgements.

Suggestions for land acknowledgements:

- Learn about the history of the area where the meeting is located
- Talk about the care that was given to the lands and waters
- Consider inviting someone from the region to share remarks about the land and history at the opening of the meeting
- Seek staff training for land acknowledgements