**Islands Alliance: Uniting Island Communities to Solve Coastal Problems and Increase Participation of Underrepresented and Underserved Groups in STEM**

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**Project Rationale**:  Island communities from disparate geographic regions and cultures share a common set of challenges that are distinct from their mainland counterparts. These shared challenges—such as isolation and reduced access to resources and expertise—transcend geopolitical boundaries and regions. In addition, there is considerable disparity in the allocation of our national research investments, further marginalizing these island communities. These island communities are also majority underrepresented minorities (URM) and underserved groups in STEM. But, together, as a unified *Islands Alliance*, these communities can achieve greater collective impact than they can on their own and provide a rare opportunity to understand how to more effectively engage and retain underrepresented and underserved groups in STEM. Therefore, we propose the formation of a new *Islands Alliance* to create a unified voice for island communities to leverage, build, empower, and grow opportunities in STEM and to make long-term investments in finding new solutions to shared coastal issues across island regions.

**Islands Alliance Objective:** To identify and address shared coastal challenges and opportunities unique to island communities and to understand how to more effectively and equitably engage, support, and retain URM individuals in STEM career pathways.

**Project Impacts and Outcomes**:
Island communities are uniquely positioned to form regional, national, and international collaborations surrounding shared experience and knowledge beyond geopolitical boundaries. They are also uniquely positioned to contribute diverse perspectives to the U.S. STEM workforce, which recent estimates show will need to add 1 million more STEM professionals by 2022. The *Islands Alliance* will transform coastal research and engagement of URM in STEM, while supporting the National Science Foundation's 10 Big Ideas, specifically the NSF INCLUDES and Growing Convergence Research areas. To date, no previous large-scale efforts have linked U.S. island communities with the goal of fostering agency to engage, address, and solve collective coastal problems. Additionally, the *Islands Alliance* will grow the national STEM workforce by increasing our understanding of context-specific, culturally-relevant best practices for engaging underrepresented and underserved groups in STEM, thus transforming the face of science into the future.