

# **CienciaPR partners with Puerto Rico Vector Control Unit to empower schools and communities through science education** <sup>[1]</sup>

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Ciencia Puerto Rico <sup>[3]</sup> (CienciaPR) and the Puerto Rico Vector Control Unit <sup>[4]</sup> (PRVCU) teamed-up to train scientists and teachers in the design of project-based learning (PBL) lessons. The collaboration is part of the second year of Ciencia al Servicio de Puerto Rico <sup>[5]</sup> (Science in Service of Puerto Rico), CienciaPR's flagship education project. Ciencia al Servicio brings

together teachers and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) professionals to co-create lessons that empower students to use scientific inquiry, design and discovery to solve locally relevant problems.

Twenty-six educators from more than 20 schools in the southern region of Puerto Rico and 16 STEM professionals—five from PRVCU—participated of the workshop. The training was held from June 10th to June 12th at Ponce Health Sciences University and Ponce Center for the Development of Research in Science and Technology.

Participants co-created hands-on lessons about controlling the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito— which transmits dengue, chikungunya and Zika—and renewable and alternative energy. They also learned about PBL, and strategies to make science relevant to the culture and context of Puerto Rico, and to communicate science more effectively. The PBL lessons co-created during the workshop will be implemented by teachers during the 2019-2020 academic year. CienciaPR estimates that during this second year of the project, Ciencia al Servicio will impact over 1,000 students from 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Puerto Rico.

PBL is a learning strategy implemented by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico and is mandatory in all public schools of the Island. It consists of students developing projects that aim to integrate scientific thinking skills in the subjects they are studying in school.

As part of the implementation of science lessons, each participating school will receive a visit from a STEM professional, who will give a talk and serve as role models students can emulate. At the same time, STEM professionals will get the opportunity to enhance their career development by practicing science communication skills and engaging with local communities. Professionals from PRVCU will provide educational resources and offer talks about the biology *Aedes aegypti* mosquito and strategies to eliminate the insect from their homes, schools and surrounding communities.

"This collaboration with CienciaPR will help us train teachers and integrate education strategies in schools and communities, promoting the development of research and alternatives for mosquito control," stated Dr. Natasha De León, Supervisor of the Educational Program of the PRVCU.

On the other hand, Dr. Marianyoly Ortiz, associate director of PRVCU, commented: "We can not let our guard down with vectors and the diseases they transmit. This collaborative effort strengthens the various initiatives we carry out to educate all populations, especially young people, on the importance of vector control and how to incorporate the best prevention practices in their daily lives."

"For the second year in a row, Ciencia al Servicio is empowering teachers, students, scientists and their communities," said Dr. Greetchen Díaz-Muñoz, Director of Science Education Program and Community Partnerships for CienciaPR. "By bringing them together in a journey of common learning, Ciencia al Servicio will promote critical thinking and the design of solutions for some of Puerto Rico's priorities, like the control of mosquito vectors," she concluded.

**Tags:**

- [Ciencia al Servicio](#) [6]
- [science in service of puerto rico](#) [7]

- [Unidad de Control de Vectores](#) <sup>[8]</sup>
- [vector control unit](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

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