

Saying good-bye and giving thanks: A letter from our outgoing Executive Director ^[1]

Submitted by [Giovanna Guerrero-Medina](#) ^[2] on 14 October 2024 - 11:28am



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The CienciaPR team at a retreat in Finca Tabonuco, Adjuntas (Crédito: José Madera)

Dear Ciencia Puerto Rico family,

I am writing to you with a heart full of pride and at peace despite many emotions. As I announced in an interview [3] a few weeks ago, I decided to retire as CienciaPR's Executive Director after 12 years at the helm of the organization. I made this decision more than a year ago, thinking about both my evolution as a professional and the needs of the organization to continue growing. Together with several colleagues, we managed to plan an organized and responsible transition. **Today, we finally announce with great excitement the appointment of our dear Dr. Gretchen Díaz Muñoz—an impactful and visionary leader—as the new Executive Director of CienciaPR. ?**

Leading CienciaPR for more than a decade has been the greatest joy and privilege of my life and the most important professional training opportunity of my career. During my tenure as director, we grew CienciaPR from an initiative made up entirely of volunteers to a full-fledged nonprofit organization. Today CienciaPR has local and federal tax exemptions, an exceptional team of ~18 people, and a budget of over \$1M, including funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, the Simons Foundation, the Rita Allen Foundation, the Assur Foundation, the Fundación Banco Popular, the Ángel Ramos Foundation, and many more.

Beyond these operational achievements, **my greatest satisfaction has been the positive impact we have had on the lives of students, educators, and scientists in training in Puerto Rico.**

- More than 600 girls have gone through Semillas de Triunfo [4]. These girls today flourish in schools and universities in Puerto Rico and the United States. Hundreds of women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) mentor and inspire these girls, and under Gretchen's leadership, they have helped us create the largest digital collection of Latinas in STEM [5] and even a Borinqueñas in STEM Exhibit, visited by >20K people at C3Tec.
- The Científicos al Servicio [6] talks, which have been viewed by almost 100K people and which have issued >50,000 certificates of occupational exploration hours to public school students. Some of these talks were televised by WIPR during the first years of the pandemic to support education during the public health emergency.
- Our ability to put the commitment and knowledge of our scientific community to work for Puerto Rico, especially during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic [7]. We managed to increase the number of PCR diagnostic tests in Puerto Rico and the quality of the data; we fiscalized the government [8] to make sure it would respond proactively; we collaborated with the media; and we organized public service campaigns and held discussions with journalists, community and religious leaders, and mayors, among others.
- We started collaborations with several underserved communities, focusing on solidarity and on making science culturally relevant, accessible, and applicable to their lives through Aquí

Nos Cuidamos ^[9] and CienciaCoLab ^[10].

- Over the years, we have trained hundreds of young scientists through projects such as the Yale Ciencia Academy ^[11]. Today, many of them are scientific leaders in Puerto Rico and abroad who envision a better future through science and who have the initiative, creativity and drive to promote change.

My intention when I took on the role of executive director was always to finish my term once the organization had greater sustainability, financial stability, established achievements, and a healthy work team. I understand that I have achieved this goal, and I leave satisfied and proud of what we have accomplished. **I am super excited about what lies ahead for the organization and our #CienciaBoricua under Greetchen's leadership.** She is a visionary, creative and compassionate leader with excellent instincts and an amazing drive to do better. She understands the importance of our mission to democratize science and she lives and defends this mission every day. I am committed to helping her continue to take CienciaPR to new horizons, from my spheres of influence and my new role as Senior Advisor to the organization.

Thank You

In closing, I would like to **thank the CienciaPR team**—Mónica, Greetchen, Ben, Liz, Elvin, Xavier, Nathalie, Ariadna, Alondra C., Alondra G., Andrea, Angélica, Ramdwin, Dayanna, Viviana, Patricia, Dareliz. I also thank past members of the team—Daniel, Wilson, Marcos, Yara, Sam, Paola, Reyna, Francis, Edmy, Larisa, Jabes, Kimberly, and numerous interns from Mentes Puertorriqueñas en Acción ^[12]—for all their work, dedication, camaraderie, creativity, and passion. It was thanks to you that I truly understood all that can be achieved when talent, commitment, and collaboration come together.

I would especially like to thank **Daniel and Mónica**, who welcomed me to the volunteer team in 2007 and with whom I shared so many ideas, emotions, celebrations, and dreams before we even met in person that, when the moment finally came, it was like saying hello to two old friends. Thank you for all the life lessons.

I am also grateful to **our Board members**, who supported and encouraged us at key moments, as we launched a new strategic plan in 2017 in the midst of the hurricane aftermath and during COVID when we sought to organize our community to address the needs of Puerto Rico. Thank you Daniel, Baby, Ramón, Ana Helvia, Josefina, Frances, Jo, Ron, and Manu!

The work of Ciencia Puerto Rico would not be possible without an incredible **network of foundations, companies, donors, and organizations** that understand our mission and support it through sponsorships, funds, or collaborations. They are too many to list, but I would like to personally thank two organizations that believed in us and ensured our success in our beginnings. The Banco Popular Foundation ^[13] supported our first project, evaluating how the book Ciencia

Boricua could be integrated into the classroom and the value of a science education contextualized to our culture and identity. I will always be grateful to its Executive Director Beatriz Polhamus and her team for trusting us and making us part of the Community of Collaboration and Social Innovation from which we have learned so much. The Puerto Rico Science, Technology and Innovation Trust ^[14] has also been a key organization. Thanks to its support, we were able to develop our website, a portal that helps us visibilize the CienciaPR community (>17,000 people), that facilitates connection and collaboration, and that is the richest content database on science and Puerto Rico. The Trust is the most important science initiative in the country and I am proud of CienciaPR's work defending its independence and future. Thank you to CEO Lucy Crespo and before her to Iván Ríos Mena for their leadership.

I would also like to thank **all the scientists who over the years have offered their example, advice, connections, and collaboration**. You have quietly been my inspiration. This group includes all my students from the Yale Ciencia Academy. The future of #CienciaBoricua is in good hands. I would also like to specifically thank Emma Fernandez-Repollet, Jorge Colon, Lilliam Casillas, Ingrid Montes, Ada Monzón, Patti Ordoñez, Mariluz Franco, Kenira Thompson, Nayda Santiago, Isar Godreau, Juan S. Ramírez, Natasha De Leon, Ubaldo Cordoba, Yajaira Sierra, Pablo Llerandi, Maritza Morales, Jose García Arrarás, Carmen Maldonado, Uriyoán Colón, Leo Cabassa, Idhaliz Flores, Jose Lasalde, Peter Castro, Elizabeth Padilla, Melitza Crespo, Vanessa González, Arnaldo Díaz, Barbara Segarra, José Cordero, José Rodríguez, Luis Alexis Rodríguez, Marcos Ramos, Kevin Alicea, Fabiola Cruz, Bianca Valdés, Luz Cumba, and many more—too many to name. THANK YOU!

I dedicate my final thanks **to the CienciaPR community**, for whom we do so much and who give so much back in return. CienciaPR is for and by you. Thank you for always being there! Thank you for understanding the value of a visible, vocal, and involved #CienciaBoricua! Thank you for being my community!

A year ago, when I envisioned this moment, I thought it was going to be difficult and sad. On the contrary, I am calm, proud, and excited. I make this transition with love, ambition, and respect: for the organization, for the populations we serve, and for the CienciaPR family and team.

Tags:

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