

# CienciaPR celebrates its first Noche de Ciencia Boricua <sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[2]</sup>



The attendees learned about the organization's future projects.

Alongside friends, colleagues, and sponsors, CienciaPR celebrated its first Noche de Ciencia Boricua on October 24. The event highlighted the most notable achievements of the organization since its foundation as a

community in 2006. The activity also served to officially welcome the new executive director of the organization, Dr. Greetchen Díaz Muñoz, who took office in September 2024 [3].

In the gathering, people were informed about new projects for the end of the year, including the launch of the first digital catalog of educational resources for educators, students, and the general public and a fundraising campaign in November.

In 2025, Díaz Muñoz said CienciaPR will announce a new board of directors, a new organizational strategic plan, as well as a new website. The Seeds of Success program, which promotes science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and leadership experiences among 7th-9th grade girls, will celebrate its 10th anniversary next year and will seek to celebrate it in a big way, Díaz Muñoz said.

## Celebrating achieved goals

One of the main purposes of Noche de Ciencia Boricua was to review the trajectory and impact of CienciaPR in Puerto Rican society.

Among the milestones highlighted was the collaboration of almost two decades with the newspaper El Nuevo Día, through which members of the CienciaPR network have published over 400 science articles and opinion columns. Also, the publication of the book *¡Ciencia Boricua!* in 2011, the first anthology of essays by Puerto Rican scientists.

About the collaboration with El Nuevo Día, the researcher, cell and molecular biology professor Dr. Kevin Alicea Torres commented that he learned about the organization while he was an undergraduate student and “thanks to CienciaPR, I was able to write my first opinion column in El Nuevo Día”.

In 2015, CienciaPR created Seeds of Success, the first and only program for middle school girl STEM ambassadors in the archipelago, which has impacted more than 600 young women and 90,000 people through the girls' outreach projects. Next year, the program will start its first edition in New Haven, Connecticut. Díaz Muñoz noted Seeds of Success inspired the creation of For Girls In Science (FGIS), for girls in grades 9-11. FGIS is a collaboration with L'Oreal Caribe, making Puerto Rico the only other place in the world where it exists outside of France, where the global company's headquarters are located.

For her part, Seeds of Success' first cohort participant and Vieques student Yihana Meléndez said, “At the time, Seeds of Success was the first science program I joined.”

Meléndez who is a resident of Vieques stated: “The fact that Seeds of Success was, not only in San Juan, but that year at the University of Puerto Rico in Humacao was what allowed me to go to a place closer to where I live. It was the program that opened the doors for me to become a leader and also to teach at the school in Vieques about science and what it meant for women to be part of the sciences.”

Díaz Muñoz highlighted the different ways in which CienciaPR has responded to the emergencies that Puerto Rico has faced in the past decade. For example, motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic, they launched the Científicos al Servicio initiative through which they visit schools as well as conduct online talks, which have been watched by more than 100,000 people and some televised by WIPR. As part of its response to the public health crisis, CienciaPR also devised Aquí Nos Cuidamos, a multimedia project that promotes wellness and prevention in Puerto Rican communities that has reached more than 300,000 people in Puerto Rico and won awards in Germany and Spain.

## The power of a community

CienciaPR began with three premises that CienciaPR's co-founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Dr. Daniel Colón Ramos, came up with when he was a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University. In California, Colón Ramos felt united to his scientific community, but not to his Puerto Rican community. After reading news stories about the difficulties that affected Puerto Rico the most, he generated his first hypothesis.

"The first was that the big problems that Puerto Rico faces, that faced then and that faces today, needed scientific voices," he said during Noche de Ciencia Boricua. "If you don't have that scientific voice present, you're not going to solve the problem."

He added: "The energy problem is fundamentally a science problem. The education problem is a problem that would benefit from scientific concepts that improve education in Puerto Rico." The same would apply to the challenges of climate change and crime on the island.

After conversations with colleagues in Singapore about the power of formulating a vision in community to address national problems, the second belief arose. This was that "Puerto Ricans had the capacity to solve these problems, we had to unite our minds to solve them because they are not problems that are going to be solved by one person alone, but we had the capacity to solve them."

Finally, he understood that "the capacity we have here (to solve the country's problems) had to be developed in community, it had to be developed on a platform such as CienciaPR." At that time, the easiest way to create that community was through a virtual network.

Colón Ramos had the goal of getting 20 to 40 people to sign up, which would be twice as many Puerto Rican scientists as he knew at the time. In the first week of launching CienciaPR, over 100 people registered. Today the global community exceeds 17,000 people. Some of the first people to join CienciaPR were the new executive director Díaz Muñoz, the Public Engagement with Science director, Dr. Mónica Feliú Mójer, and the senior advisor and former executive director, Dr. Giovanna Guerrero Medina.

Relating it to the brain and neurons, which he studies as a professor at Yale University, Colón Ramos expressed that "a separate neuron cannot accomplish much, it is the connection between neurons that matters in the brain." Therefore, he described that "that interaction you have with other human beings is as essential for the development of the brain as all the other biological processes that happen independently." This is the reason why great ideas emerge in community and collaboration, he commented. For this reason, the executive director of the Puerto Rico Science, Technology, and Research Trust, Lucy Crespo, said she is "excited to continue collaborating with CienciaPR" because between organizations "we always saw a relationship and our strategic objectives are very aligned" which are research, innovation, and development.

Crespo said that CienciaPR "is one of the organizations that, above all, we love because whenever we support them they have an impact that makes a difference". He favored: "When we support Ciencia Puerto Rico we are supporting the socioeconomic development and wellbeing of Puerto Ricans".

**Tags:** • [Ciencia Boricua](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

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