

# UCS JEDI Report 2023

*An annual update on the Union of Concerned Scientists' work to center justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) in our science-based advocacy, impact, and organizational culture*

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## OVERVIEW

*This document summarizes the past year of efforts by staff and board members to transform the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) into an anti-racist organization, building on the work of prior years and finding ways to go deeper in our commitments. This report reflects on how we use our scientific research to support our partners, specifically those in and/or representing environmental justice communities.*

*UCS's current focus is on racial equity as the dimension of equity that has been in greatest need of attention in our organization; racial inequity affects every other dimension of identity, such as gender, sexual orientation, and disability. An explicit focus on addressing racial inequity will necessarily lead to more just outcomes for everyone.*

At UCS, while we work in accordance with our values for a healthy planet and a safer world, we must address the reality that health and safety are experienced inequitably, particularly across racial identity in our country. We must be driven both by the evidence (Hunt, Prince, and Dixon-Fyle 2018), which shows that organizations that incorporate JEDI principles consistently outperform those that do not, and by the moral imperative of working towards a more just, equitable, and anti-racist world.

When conducting research, we must improve our science-based outcomes by expanding our ways of knowing to include and amplify the invaluable lived experiences and solutions of people in frontline communities—those who bear the brunt of our planet's most pressing issues (such as climate change). Because we are all inextricably connected, these inequities threaten our health, safety, well-being, and even our very existence.

That is why ending inequities must be an integral part of our mission and our work. To that end, the UCS JEDI Office, established in June 2022, has been building a base of foundational anti-racist learning and opportunities for all staff to educate, build trust, and center the dignity and humanity that connects us all. This prepares us to effect change, engage authentically with our external partners, and sharpen our scientific focus—all through a JEDI lens.

So far, UCS staff and board members have been guided by exceptional leaders of color through educational sessions on implicit bias, restorative justice, intersex and LGBTQIA identity, tools for holding each other accountable while centering respect for our colleagues, and the history and fundamentals of the environmental justice movement. We have been working closely with our People and Culture department to build upon equity work it has already successfully undertaken with respect to equitable compensation, and we will continue to modify policies and procedures that support a more equitable work experience for all. In addition, our database team has made important improvements to the way we address our supporters, by making sure our communications are gender-inclusive—eliminating automatically gendered honorifics and salutations in our database of more than 400,000 supporters—and working to ensure we understand *who* we are reaching by updating supporters' demographics.

The JEDI Office welcomed its second staff member in February 2023, and is continuing its work of gathering and assessing critical data from our staff and our programmatic work, laying the foundation for a coordinated and more effective JEDI and anti-racist strategy. This strategy will inform the work choices we make and how we treat our colleagues while we're in the midst of that work. We must

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center our efforts in demonstrating that we value the dignity of each person and respect the work they contribute to UCS.

We recognize that we have fallen short in the past and that not everyone who has worked at UCS has felt welcomed and respected. Our efforts to build trust and skills that will better equip all of us to recognize gaps and own up to our shortcomings will prepare us to engage with frontline communities and support those at UCS who are often marginalized in our society.

### Support, Broaden, and Deepen

As the JEDI Office continues to build upon the foundations we are laying, we are emphasizing three objectives in our externally facing work:

- **Support** existing partnerships and relationships
- **Broaden** our reach to diverse partners with whom we align in values
- **Deepen** existing partnerships, depending on the needs and priorities of the times

This multifaceted approach includes flexibility and emphasizes trust building, co-creation, and elevating our partners' perspectives. Greater coordination of our efforts will allow us to operate more efficiently for greater impact.

### Our Partnerships and Our Collective Impact

Maintaining the integrity and authenticity of UCS partnerships is vital to the organization's ability to be effective in its work.

Whether that work is scientific discovery and dissemination or on-the-ground advocacy, it is imperative that UCS draws on the strengths of our partners—their unique expertise and knowledge—so we are that much more assured of success (see Box 1). We are proud that UCS continued to honor, maintain, and grow our partnerships and external relationships over the last year, which is a testament to the hard work of our staff and partners and their dedication to our values.

### How We're Showing Up: JEDI Highlights from 2023

Incredible work is being done throughout UCS along our JEDI journey. The following are just a few examples with a significant

JEDI focus, conducted in partnership with frontline and environmental justice communities.

### Research and Reporting

UCS maintains a unique role in combining evidence-based environmental advocacy with consistent reporting on the disparate and inequitable effects of climate change and toxic pollution. In the last year, UCS informed the public about the following topics:

- **Invisible Threat, Inequitable Impact: Communities Impacted by Cancer-Causing Ethylene Oxide Pollution** (February 2023). UCS has found that an Environmental Protection Agency rule on facilities that emit ethylene oxide (EtO)—a known carcinogen—is only a piecemeal solution. Only commercial sterilizers are covered by this rule, leaving hundreds of facilities nationwide free to continue emitting EtO. For decades, Black and Brown communities and communities with low incomes and limited English proficiency have advocated for restrictions in their neighborhoods, and UCS's research corroborates these communities' concerns.

BOX 1.

## Partnerships Spotlight

Staff from both UCS and the Greenlining Institute (which convenes the Just Future Summit where more than 1,000 attendees discuss and advance racial justice each year) met with Sacramento decisionmakers in July 2023 to discuss the air pollution caused by older vehicles. We shared our scientific work that shows Latino and Black Californians and low-income households have an increased exposure to that kind of pollution, and together with Greenlining, we urged that any efforts by the California Air Resources Board to reduce air pollution focus on these communities.

UCS has also embarked on a partnership with the NAACP, building on our shared values and combining efforts to work on areas of mutual overlap, including calling on the Biden administration to take bold climate action.

In mapping the emissions and enforcement data for 104 facilities, the data show that several may be in violation of the Clean Air Act. The case studies and mapping done here can be used as evidence by other communities trying to hold polluters responsible.

- ***Investing in Farmworker Health: How Research Can Help Protect the People Who Produce Our Food*** (May 2023). In UCS’s advocacy work on the next food and farm bill, we are working with frontline food justice advocates seeking more protections for this country’s millions of food workers and farmworkers. UCS joined with the Environmental Working Group, Natural Resources Defense Council, the United Food and Commercial Workers, and others for a press event in August at which we recommended specific protections to Congress. Farmworkers, 78 percent of whom identify as members of a Latino/Hispanic group, face some of the deadliest occupational hazards in the country: extreme heat, exposure to pesticides, dangerous equipment, air pollution, sexual harassment, assault, and gender-based violence. In 2021, 20 out of every 100,000 farmworkers died. This report highlights the fact that current research lacks a nuanced, sociological understanding of what creates these high-risk environments and calls on the federal government to invest more in this research so that more effective interventions can be implemented.
- ***Lost Inheritance: Black Farmers Face an Uncertain Future without Heirs’ Property Reforms*** (June 2023). Written in partnership with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, this report explains that Black farmers lost 90 percent of their land—with a value of \$326 billion—during the 20th century because it was inherited without a legal title. The report concludes that the federal government must take responsibility for reforming programs within the US Department of Agriculture and the Farm Service Agency to rectify this ongoing injustice. This includes providing direct funding to Black farmers, reorganizing programs to account for historic prejudice (particularly against heirs’ property landowners when administering the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conversation Stewardship Program), and codifying reforms into the next food and farm bill.
- ***Building Community Resilience: Lessons from Frontline Leaders*** (June 2023). UCS staff, in collaboration with Taller Salud of Puerto Rico and the New Alpha Community Development Corporation of South Carolina, identified four obstacles that hinder communities’ resilience to climate change: displacement, government negligence, lack of access to funding, and the need for community-driven solutions. The report’s conclusions included strong recommendations for

policy-makers and adaptation practitioners; central among them was the reminder that communities are already creating solutions, and federal and state governments must catch up to them by investing resources and implementing the proposed solutions. For example, traditional funding processes like grantmaking are not only extremely competitive, but also often fail to include essential expenses like rent or electricity—expenses that literally “keep the lights on” for under-resourced frontline organizations.

The work of UCS and our partners unveils common themes that show up when we advocate through an equity lens: that low-income neighborhoods and communities of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people are the most at risk; that the resources available do not consistently flow to the communities and stakeholders most in need; and that the government must play both a restorative role in providing restitution for the damage that’s already been done and a more effective enforcement role in holding polluters accountable.

***UCS plays a unique role in combining evidence-based environmental advocacy with consistent reporting on the disparate and inequitable effects of climate change and toxic pollution.***

### **Community Building and Engagement**

Over the last year, UCS has worked hard to connect with new and existing partners all over the country. These are just some of the JEDI-centered events in which we engaged with partners to build and strengthen relationships and exchange ideas and perspectives:

- 9th Annual HBCU Climate Change Conference 2023 (New Orleans, LA)
- 2022 AISES (American Indian Science and Engineering Society) National Conference (Palm Springs, CA)
- 2022 oSTEM (Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Conference (Boston, MA)
- 2022 SACNAS (Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science) National Diversity in STEM Conference (San Juan, Puerto Rico)

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- 2023 lobbying fly-in to support the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (Washington, DC)
- Just Future Summit 2023—The Greenling Institute (Oakland, CA)
- Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition 2022 Summit (Detroit, MI)
- Renewable Energy Markets 2022 Conference (Minneapolis, MN)

By bringing our scientific evidence directly to the communities in need of it—to support their organizing, lobbying, community-led science, and the issues most important to them—we are living into our values and elevating local priorities.

We have a lot to learn, but we've come a long way. UCS has a unique perspective as a science-based advocacy

organization that has gone through significant and necessary structural changes—changes that have led us to the certainty that without an explicit focus on JEDI and racial justice, we will always fall short of our objectives. Knowing this has caused us to have transparent and challenging conversations internally and externally. We will continue to learn in order to build a structure that serves the organization and our mission as well as the values of our partners.

#### Reference

Vivian Hunt, Sara Prince, and Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle. 2018. *Delivering through Diversity*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>

#### HEADQUARTERS

Two Brattle Square  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
617-547-5552

#### WASHINGTON, DC

1825 K St. NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20006  
202-223-6133

#### WEST COAST

500 12th St., Suite 340  
Oakland, CA 94607  
510-843-1872

#### MIDWEST

200 E. Randolph St., Suite 5151  
Chicago, IL 60601  
312-578-1750

#### ONLINE

