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

**HIGHLIGHTS**

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is a science-based advocacy organization whose mission is to use rigorous, independent science to develop equitable solutions to the most challenging problems facing people and the planet.

This document summarizes the past year of efforts by staff and board members to transform 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 UCS’s current focus on racial equity as the dimension of equity that has been in greatest need of attention in our organization, since racial inequity impacts 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.

**Executive Summary**

The Union of Concerned Scientists is on an ongoing journey to becoming a more inclusive and anti-racist organization. To be more effective and make progress on JEDI issues, we are making improvements across three internal and three external dimensions of our organization: 1) infrastructure, 2) culture, 3) teams and leadership, and how we incorporate equity into 4) the science we do, 5) the campaigns we run, and 6) the relationships we build with partners and stakeholders.

Since Summer 2021, our efforts have focused on the areas of highest need and priority, as identified in our Spring 2021 Racial Equity Plan with input from our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) staff. This report describes notable indicators of progress across these areas during the past year, which are described in more detail in the pages that follow. In summary, we:

- **Strengthened critical infrastructure** to better support our people, including a role assessment, compensation study, and corresponding adjustments; the establishment of a remote-first hybrid work policy; a constructive dialogue between UCS management and the UCS United union; and the creation of a JEDI office led by a chief justice and equity officer.

- **Continued efforts to embed inclusive behaviors and racial equity competencies in our organizational culture** through the efforts of our BIPOC and Black Caucus affinity groups, White Ally and Accountability Groups, and ongoing learning among our leadership team.

- **Expanded the diversity of our staff, leadership, board of directors, and National Advisory Board (NAB), and brought deeper racial equity skills into our organization**, most notably in our executive team, which has grown from no BIPOC-identifying individuals in 2019 to a majority as of summer 2022. New executive team members bring deeper experience integrating JEDI issues into their previous work at a range of organizations.

- **Emphasized racial equity as an integral component of our scientific analysis and our campaigns**, with notable examples across each of our issue areas in which we achieved greater impact by intentionally integrating equity considerations.

- **Strengthened connections between funders and frontline organizations to advance equitable fundraising in our sector**, particularly in our work on clean trucks and modernizing the US electricity grid, which is being supported by a grant from the Bezos Earth Fund.
While we see the progress described above as notable, we also recognize that further work is needed. We take three important lessons from the past year. First, we must be prepared to persevere, even when—especially when—progress is not linear, because challenges and setbacks are inherent to this kind of transformation. Second, we must be able to maintain multiple perspectives, even in moments of high emotion and crisis when we might otherwise default to tunnel vision that constrains our ability to empathize and problem-solve, and we are learning how to help each other do this. Third, we must continue to build trust and morale through effective communication, intentional interaction, and the decisions and actions we prioritize. Authentic connections and trust throughout our organization remain vital to the success of our JEDI efforts.

Our experience transparently in hopes of learning together with other organizations that are navigating their own journeys toward racial equity, and encourage you to read on for specifics.

Our Anti-Racism Journey

UCS is on an ongoing anti-racism journey. A decade ago, we began changing recruiting practices to hire more diverse staff and reach a wider set of stakeholders in our science-based advocacy. In 2020, external and internal events made the systemic challenges in our organization even more visible, and we resolved to invest the necessary time and resources to realize a deeper commitment to becoming a more inclusive and anti-racist organization, and produced our first public report on our progress in July 2021.

For UCS to be more effective and make progress on JEDI issues, we must address both internal and external changes. Our Spring 2021 racial equity plan defined a framework for the areas we need to pay attention to in our journey, both internally (within our teams and leadership, our culture, and our infrastructure) and externally (how we incorporate equity into the science we do, the campaigns we run, and the relationships we build with partners and stakeholders).

Since summer 2021, UCS has made some notable progress, but further work is needed, as summarized in this report.

Notable Progress Indicators

In UCS’s first organization-wide racial equity plan (May 2021), we proposed a six-part framework for describing the different areas of work (as shown on p. 3), and prioritized areas for improvement with input from across our organization and especially from our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) staff. In the pages that follow, we summarize notable indicators of progress in the past year across all elements of this framework.

Strengthening Critical Infrastructure to Support Our People

The creation of a Chief People Officer (CPO) role in Spring 2021 has enabled us to identify and begin implementing improvements in the most critical areas of how we support our people and culture. UCS BIPOC staff elevated many of these issues as priority areas for the organization to address. CPO Seto Akinjiola has led improvements including:

- **Expansion of our People and Culture team** to bring much-needed capacity and expertise to the management of our human resources (HR) and to support further improvements
- **Root-cause identification of internal inequities, role assessment, compensation study, and corresponding adjustments** to create greater role and pay equity across UCS programs and departments. The resulting compensation adjustments represent a substantial investment in our people in the form of raises to 76 percent of UCS staff, with average raise amounts of 20 percent.
- **Creation of a remote-first hybrid work policy** that offers employees the flexibility to work from their US-based location of choice, and supports UCS efforts to compete effectively for talent nationwide while also supporting greater equity across our workforce
- **Constructive dialogue between UCS management and the UCS United union** that has allowed us to build deeper mutual understanding of issues, establish more effective processes for dialogue, and contributed to progress in negotiations toward a contract
- **Improvements across a range of HR policies and practices** to ensure greater consistency across our organization, including hiring, onboarding/offboarding, and employee relations

We also created a new JEDI office led by a Chief Justice and Equity Officer (CJEO), fulfilling a long-standing recommendation from UCS BIPOC staff. CJEO Sonja Spears joined UCS in June 2022, bringing critical expertise and experience that will help further our improvement efforts, and we will be expanding the capacity of the JEDI office in coming months.

Investments in new staff and leadership positions have enabled us to begin improving the most critical areas of how we support our people and culture.
Expanding Diversity and Racial Equity Skills in Our Staff and Leadership

- UCS’s executive team has become both increasingly diverse and deeper in racial equity skills. The executive team has grown from no BIPOC-identifying individuals in 2019 to a majority as of summer 2022; 88 percent also identify as female. New executive team members bring to UCS their experience integrating JEDI issues into their previous work at other organizations. Active recruitment is under way for two open executive positions.

- As of June 2022, 40 percent of non-executive staff at UCS identified as BIPOC, compared with 37.8 percent in 2021 and 32.1 percent in 2020.

- In the same 12-month period, our gender ratios have also remained relatively stable at 32:66 (male:female). UCS’s employee data tracking systems were updated in 2021 to

Embedding Inclusive Behaviors and Racial Equity Competencies in Our Organizational Culture

In the past year, our staff-organized BIPOC and Black Caucus affinity groups have further solidified their structures and processes to enhance these safe spaces so our BIPOC- and Black-identifying staff can find community, share resources, and build resilience through peer support, learning, and advocacy.

Staff-led White Ally and Accountability Groups concluded a second round of small group discussions with 100 participants across all programs, departments, offices, and functions to help White-identifying staff learn how racism and White supremacy show up in ourselves, our actions, and those around us, to become better allies to our colleagues of color.

UCS’s leadership team engaged in specific discussions of anti-racist pivots (leadership beliefs and behaviors that can foster a stronger anti-racist culture) and ways of processing conflict through empathy.
allow for more accurate tracking of nonbinary gender for future years.

- An important improvement to our hiring and onboarding processes has been a continued commitment to engaging with candidates in open and transparent dialogue about the transformation that UCS is undergoing and the challenges we are wrestling with as an organization.

- The UCS board of directors and NAB have put in place recruitment and pipeline plans that emphasize diversity along multiple dimensions (racial, lived experience, technical knowledge), which we expect to lead to meaningful results in the next year or two.

Working to Integrate Racial Equity into Our Scientific Analysis and Campaigns

In the past year, racial equity has become more deeply woven into the way UCS does its work, and in the solutions we propose. Below is a selection of notable examples from across our issue areas and campaigns.

Climate Change

The UCS climate team has been focusing on the disastrous impact climate change can have—and in some cases, is already having—on communities of color, which are often said to be “hit first and worst,” and the need to improve our collective resilience.

In August 2021, the UCS report *Too Hot to Work* projected that, without action to reduce global warming emissions, the risk of extreme heat exposure faced by US outdoor workers (including farmworkers and construction crews) will quadruple by 2065, resulting in lost wages and serious illness. We briefed the Biden administration on these findings, and it responded by creating a new workplace extreme heat program in the Department of Labor; Vice President Harris quoted our analysis at the launch event. Meanwhile, in Oregon, UCS and a coalition of labor, environmental justice, and farmworker groups successfully pushed for passage of the nation’s strongest rules requiring employers to protect their workers from the increasingly hazardous conditions of heat and wildfire smoke.

In other analytic work, a journal paper co-authored by UCS scientists found that Latinos living in Colorado’s Front Range—along with children living at or below the federal poverty level, people lacking health insurance, and people with asthma, diabetes, or fair or poor health status—are disproportionately exposed to ground-level ozone pollution attributable to human-caused climate change. Also, a team of researchers including a UCS scientist and a UCS Science Network member published a report for the state of California on climate impacts in the San Joaquin Valley. This agriculturally rich but historically under-resourced region is home to many farming communities that are threatened with worsening air and water quality.

Through a project called CHEETa (Climate and Health Equity Engagement Tactic), UCS has been developing partnerships with environmental and climate justice organizations based in low-income communities of color in Arizona, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, and Texas. The goal is to co-produce policy-oriented materials with these groups, to help build their communities’ resilience to the multiple climate impacts they are facing. And in a similar vein, the UCS climate team is using data to socialize the notion that climate change has turned summer into “Danger Season” for this country’s most vulnerable people, and to call for effective and equitable policy responses.

Clean Energy

In states and communities across the country, UCS is dedicated to ensuring that the urgently needed transition to clean energy is conducted in a way that brings the benefits to all people, regardless of race or income level. Last fall, three years of work in coalition with environmental justice partners culminated with the passage of the Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, which not only promises to make the state’s power sector carbon-free by 2045, but also addresses the needs of underserved communities by funding workforce development, equitable lending, and job training for formerly incarcerated people. A few months later, we also helped Illinois’s Environmental Justice Act pass in the House.

In Michigan, UCS testified that a local utility’s plan to introduce home battery storage would be costly and inequitable, and the state’s public service commission agreed, ordering the utility to address the plan’s shortcomings. In addition, UCS and the energy democracy organization Souladarity conducted an analysis that showed how cities such as Highland Park, Michigan, can meet 100 percent of their electricity needs through clean energy resources owned by local people and businesses. The findings highlight the importance of policies that center traditionally marginalized communities in a way that allows them to pursue energy sovereignty.
Most recently, UCS collaborated with environmental justice partners in Massachusetts, Michigan, and Minnesota to show how entire states can shift to 100 percent renewable electricity by 2035—and doing so equitably will require policies that shut down coal and gas plants, broaden access to clean energy technology, and involve communities in the decisionmaking process.

Clean Transportation

For the communities of color and low-income communities often crisscrossed by major trucking routes, zero-emissions trucks represent one important step toward cleaner air. As 2021 drew to a close, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Washington all adopted California’s Advanced Clean Truck (ACT) rule, which requires increasing sales of zero-emissions trucks. UCS contributed a key 2019 analysis that illustrated the disproportionate share of vehicle pollution these communities are forced to live with, and UCS allies and Science Network members advocated for the rule in each state.

In California, we successfully supported allies’ efforts to make electric vehicle (EV) charging more equitable by increasing the amount of charging-capable parking spaces at multifamily housing developments. UCS also co-facilitated a group working to develop definitions, metrics, and strategies to ensure California’s investments in charging infrastructure directly benefit lower-income communities and communities of color.

In an example of a path not taken, UCS decided in the fall of 2021 to drop its support for the Transportation Climate Initiative that would have created a “cap-and-trade” program for vehicle fuels in the Northeast. This decision came after multiple discussions over the last two years with grassroots partners who had consistently pointed out the inequitable nature of both the policy development process and the policy itself, which places limits on overall global warming emissions while not requiring clear reductions in localized, toxic air pollution.

At the federal level, UCS provided the Department of Transportation with 13 recommendations for its National EV Charging Infrastructure Program, including the need for community consultation and publicly accessible chargers in rural, underserved, and marginalized communities. Twelve of our recommendations are reflected in the department’s new program guidance. And as a member of the Moving Forward Network, UCS collaborated on joint comments to the Environmental Protection Agency calling for heavy-duty truck standards that will reduce nitrogen oxide emissions and accelerate the transition to zero-emissions trucks.

Finally, the UCS transportation team helped incubate and launch the Science and Community Action Network (SciCAN), a resource-sharing platform that helps grassroots and environmental justice groups connect with subject-matter experts and with each other. We collaborated with SciCAN and four of our environmental justice partners to invite scientists to a June workshop on the skills needed to engage equitably with communities on the front lines of climate change, to improve access to technical knowledge, and to develop effective and just solutions.

Democracy and Science

Science and democracy create the conditions that allow each other to flourish; without one you can’t have the other. That’s why the Center for Science and Democracy at UCS is calling for a new scientific framework to analyze the impacts of anti-democratic practices such as gerrymandering and voter suppression on communities of color, which are already overburdened by a history of political and environmental injustice. In the past year, we worked with numerous partners to encourage and train scientists on how to work with and listen to communities so they can best lend their expertise to efforts to advance fair voting policies, and we continued to call for passage of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

We have also been working to strengthen the scientific foundation for equitable government policies by bringing younger and more diverse scientists into the federal workforce. We developed a toolkit to help early-career scientists—including those at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and Tribal colleges—navigate this often byzantine job market, and encouraged UCS Science Network members to nominate themselves to federal advisory boards that play a key role in policymaking. Eleven of the 47 members of the EPA’s Science Advisory Board are now Science Network members, and one-third of the board members identify as people of color.

CSD began a new partnership with CleanAirNow in Kansas City, Kansas, and collaborated on the report Environmental Racism in the Heartland. This report shows that communities of color and low-income communities in Kansas City face a greater risk of exposure to environmental hazards—including cumulative exposures to hazardous pollutants from heavy freight and diesel-powered transportation as well as from industrial
emissions—that are associated with myriad negative health outcomes including cancer, respiratory illness, and shorter life expectancy. The local environmental justice movement has been working to address these inequities by establishing an air monitoring network that provides real-time, local data that people can use to advocate for science-based protections. Our joint report was taken up by city and state government and has supported our partners in more direct engagement with local and state governments.

Food and Agriculture

UCS has called for major investments in federal programs that would not only make US agriculture more resilient to climate change but also address systemic racism within the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Through a combination of analysis and advocacy, many of our recommendations made their way into the Agriculture Resilience Act, the Justice for Black Farmers Act, and Congress’s emerging budget package. UCS also worked with partners and allies to identify candidates for the USDA’s new Equity Commission and its subcommittee on agriculture, and four of the people we championed were appointed.

On the heels of our successful effort with the Food Chain Workers Alliance to bring attention to the plight of meat and poultry workers during the pandemic (which led to some protections in the American Rescue Plan Act, signed into law in March 2021), UCS went after Tyson Foods and its treatment of workers. A joint investigation with The Guardian and a grassroots partner in Arkansas revealed how Tyson’s consolidation of power in the chicken industry has allowed it to exploit its farmers and employees, and to pollute the communities where employees live—many of whom are immigrants and people of color without the political power to fight back. UCS will continue to use Tyson as the worst example of unfair practices in the food industry and to pressure the Biden administration into following through on its stated commitment to increasing competition.

Nuclear Weapons

UCS is working to amplify the voices of the historically underrepresented people who have been harmed by nuclear weapons testing, helping them fight for reparations and more of a say in US weapons policy. We have been meeting biweekly since April 2021 with coalition partners and members of communities affected by weapons testing and production to center and uplift their voices, and to ensure the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) would be extended before its expiration in July. Our working group organized multiple lobbying days so community members could tell their stories directly to members of Congress and their staffs, which contributed to both a 40 percent increase in RECA cosponsors and legislation that will extend the program for two years. We also organized input from community members on a June National Academy of Sciences report that recommends involving affected communities in the planning and implementation of low-dose radiation research.

Finally, as a member of the Organizations in Solidarity initiative launched by the peace and security community in 2020 to support racial justice, UCS is co-organizing an ombuds program that will offer the 200+ partner organizations a confidential and independent avenue for raising concerns. The program will launch as a pilot project with seed funding this year, and we expect our partners to provide sustained funding going forward.

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Strengthening Connections between Funders and Frontline Organizations to Advance Equitable Fundraising

For several years, UCS has played a role in helping advance more equitable fundraising across our sector via our multiyear relationships with organizations such as Building Equity for Alignment for Environmental Justice (BEA), the Equitable and Just National Climate Platform (EJNCP), and the HEAL Food Alliance, to which UCS has provided both financial and capacity support. A recent $15 million, two-year grant from the Bezos Earth Fund, which helps fund our work on clean trucks and modernizing the US electricity grid between late 2020 and early 2023, created an additional opportunity for UCS to strengthen connections between a major funder and frontline organizations.

We accepted this grant with the fund’s understanding that we would redirect 25 percent ($3.75 million) to our environmental justice partners in this work. We have worked with our partners to ensure this pass-through support would not repeat harmful practices that have often accompanied support of grassroots groups. The grant does not limit UCS activities or tactics (or those of our partners), and we ensured maximum flexibility in how the money could be spent while minimizing reporting requirements. We have now distributed nearly 90 percent of the
**Infrastructure:** Having established a JEDI office, we must now devote more resources to it, including the recruitment of an additional senior role and building relationships between the JEDI office and important stakeholders across the organization including our BIPOC and Black Caucus affinity groups, our White Ally and Accountability Groups, and our various staff and board JEDI-related committees. We will need to pay particular attention to how we effectively integrate the JEDI office into organizational processes and programmatic decisionmaking. Additionally, further improvements in how we support our people and culture (from promotions to performance reviews to career path support) are in motion.

**Culture:** While UCS staff have shown remarkable resilience and skill at navigating moments of conflict, we continue to experience instances when we struggle to engage productively across areas of difference. We intend to examine and understand where anti-Black and anti-Indigenous bias exists in our interactions, and to define how we will address it.

**Teams and leadership:** Further work is needed to continue diversifying and deepening racial equity competencies in the middle levels of our organization, particularly around our understanding of environmental justice issues. And we must implement diversification and recruitment plans for the UCS board of directors and NAB as well.

**Science and campaigns:** UCS scientists and analysts have engaged in important learning and reflection on how the perspectives of different communities can better inform their technical work, but building this into a robust organizational capability will require additional skills. For example, deepening our expertise in community engagement and social science, and creating opportunities for dialogue and learning that allow community concerns and perspectives to more deeply inform the solutions we propose.

**Partners and stakeholders:** Though UCS has made notable strides in our relationships with key partners, additional work is needed to align and coordinate our efforts with partners in consistent ways.

### Some Lessons from the Past Year

1. **We must be prepared to persevere, even when—especially when—progress is not linear.** In the past 12 months, UCS has encountered at least two notable moments when the organization seemed to take a step backward in our journey: in Fall 2021 when we announced a change in leadership structure in a way that would have benefited from greater consultation and communication, and Spring 2022, when a Black colleague shared personal experiences that underscored the
Maintaining multiple perspectives is hardest in moments of high emotion and crisis, and we are learning how to help each other see the choices ahead of us not as an “either/or” proposition but as a “both/and” opportunity.

importance of our continued efforts. These moments unleashed strong emotions—anger, frustration, dismay, disappointment—but also served as opportunities to voice valid concerns, to build empathy for others, to appreciate alternate perspectives, to acknowledge the work that remains ahead of us, and to renew our individual and organizational commitments to be better. Challenges and setbacks are inherent to this kind of transformation, and perseverance and resilience are needed to carry it to completion.

2. **Holding a “both/and” view is both necessary and difficult.** We would like everyone at UCS to see the choices ahead of us not as an “either/or” proposition but in a “both/and” opportunity frame: that multiple truths can co-exist simultaneously. One example is in recognizing that robust science, community perspectives, and political opportunities are often in tension, and UCS is at its most effective when we identify opportunities where each of these perspectives can be integrated. Another example is understanding that UCS is making progress on JEDI issues and that we have much more to do. A third is in recognizing the emotional toll of the issues we work on, and celebrating the things that uplift and energize us to continue doing the work. Maintaining multiple perspectives is hardest in moments of high emotion and crisis, and we are learning how to help each other hold these “both/and” viewpoints.

3. **Trust and morale are built through effective communication, intentional interaction, and the decisions and actions we prioritize.** This is a lesson from our Summer 2021 report that bears repeating. Strengthening authentic connections and trust across organizational levels—between veteran and newer staff, and across departments, programs, and functions—remains vital for our JEDI efforts, as does the need to continue creating opportunities for staff at all levels to be in dialogue with each other and with leadership.

UCS shares these experiences transparently in hopes of learning together with other organizations that are navigating their own journeys toward racial equity. We encourage you to offer your own feedback and perspective on what we’ve shared by reaching out to your contacts at UCS or by emailing JEDI@ucsusa.org.

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The Union of Concerned Scientists puts rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet’s most pressing problems. Joining with people across the country, we combine technical analysis and effective advocacy to create innovative, practical solutions for a healthy, safe, and sustainable future.

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