Union of Concerned Scientists

ONE-YEAR UPDATE

UCS'S RACIAL EQUITY JOURNEY

Building the Road as We Travel

How the Union of Concerned Scientists is working to center justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) in our science-based advocacy, impact, and workplaces

HIGHLIGHTS

The Union of Concerned Scientists 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. In 2020, we redoubled our racial equity efforts to become a more diverse, inclusive, and anti-racist organization.

This document describes the past year of efforts by staff and board members—early steps—in our ongoing journey of organizational transformation. Here we share some background, early lessons, and steps we have taken to date. As we continue this work, we encourage our partners and supporters to provide us with candid feedback that can help us continuously learn and improve.

We realize that becoming an inclusive and anti-racist organization is a journey. A decade ago, UCS started adjusting our recruitment and outreach practices in order to diversify our staff and our science-based advocacy. Over time we realized a more systematic approach was needed. Our decentralized efforts had not addressed aspects of UCS's structure and practices that reinforced inequities for BIPOC staff (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color), so we began work to develop a more coordinated organizational framework.

The 2020 murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd (and many other Black people before that) prompted a long-overdue racial reckoning in the United States and put racial justice into sharp focus for our organization. Former staff members wrote two public letters describing harms they and other BIPOC staff, especially Black colleagues, experienced at UCS. These events highlighted structural gaps and barriers in our organization, and we resolved to do better.

As a result, in 2020, we pledged to become a more inclusive and anti-racist organization, and to invest the necessary time and resources this commitment requires. We began to understand that becoming an anti-racist organization will require not only uprooting persistent bias and barriers in our personal assumptions, interpersonal behaviors, workplace structures, and the fields and systems in which we work, but also actively promoting affirmative actions in these areas. Below are some of our early lessons and steps we have taken as we continue to refine and deepen our work.

Early Lessons

1. While UCS is seen as a supportive workplace for some, it has not been for everyone—and differences are particularly apparent along racial lines. Through a persistent call to action from staff, UCS's White leadership confronted the fact that it had repeatedly missed vital perspectives and had not acted on feedback in a timely or consistent way. Openly acknowledging and understanding differences in experience, and redressing missteps has been a necessary early step in creating greater fairness and inclusion for all staff.

2. Successful organizational growth requires better infrastructural support and commitment from leadership. As UCS grew rapidly in staff, membership, and budget, we did not upgrade our internal structures adequately. Specifically, program growth was not met by parallel growth in human resource capacity and we did not adequately prioritize JEDI support throughout the organization.

> ***Science and policymaking that put diverse perspectives at the center lead to better solutions and more innovation.***

3. Strengthening organizational equity and inclusion is a multifaceted effort that requires a durable organization-wide commitment of time and resources over multiple years. While it is tempting to reach for quick fixes, our BIPOC staff affinity group recognized that a deeper investment would be necessary, and pointed to immediate and longer-term recommendations. Over the last year, we have started adjusting how we work with one another, our leadership and organizational support structures, and our systems and norms.

4. Trust and morale are strengthened through effective communication and intentional action on decisions we prioritize. We have a way to go in strengthening deep, authentic connections and trust across organizational hierarchies, between veteran and newer staff, and across departments, programs, and functions. Remote working has further exacerbated silos and isolation. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, there's an urgent need to re-establish our work culture in a way that creates opportunities for staff at all levels to be in dialogue, and that fosters trust with each other and with leadership.

An Organization in Motion

Our staff, leadership, and board have been working hard to infuse JEDI principles and actions throughout UCS. This includes bringing a more intentional and integrated anti-racist perspective to our science-based advocacy, including the research and analysis we generate, the campaigns we support, and the policy solutions we seek. Importantly, our commitment includes adjustments to internal practices and cultural norms that undergird our work in the world. Specific actions we have taken since June 2020 include:

INTEGRATING JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION INTO OUR EXTERNAL WORK

This includes our scientific research and analysis, our campaigns, and how we engage with partners and supporters. Science and policymaking that put diverse perspectives at the center lead to better solutions and more innovation. We are more effective science-based policy advocates when we reach and mobilize wider audiences.

- Our staff and board are learning how to **better incorporate racial equity into our technical analysis**—for example, panel discussions with community partners on ways to strengthen collaboration in our analyses.
- We are **designing our policy positions to promote more equitable outcomes for underrepresented and overburdened communities**—from deepening our understanding of the issues that frontline communities face, to engaging more external experts as advisors and collaborators in UCS research, to enhancing our capabilities in incorporating equity concerns into our research and technical analysis (for example, by engaging with supporters to help include environmental justice in key climate legislation).
- We are working to **elevate the voices and perspectives of our partners in conversations with policymakers and funders**—for example, raising the importance of funding frontline groups and movements to foundation funders, lending UCS staff and resources to the Building Equity and Alignment for Environmental Justice initiative, and connecting congressional offices with grassroots organizations when environmental justice legislation is being developed.
- We updated our organizational policy on **compensating community partners** for their time and expertise.

INCREASING BIPOC REPRESENTATION AND VOICE ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

- We have been **actively recruiting leaders of color** who carry the authority to make the required changes, including our new president and chief

people officer, who each bring deep leadership and management experience, seasoned change-management expertise, and a proven commitment to JEDI principles.

- We are developing plans for **increasing the diversity of our board of directors** as well as our National Advisory Board, including more intentional efforts to develop and nurture relationships with mid-career scientists from a broader range of disciplines and backgrounds.
- We are making **explicit efforts to emphasize racial equity in our recruiting efforts**, by appointing more diverse hiring committees, adopting equitable hiring best practices, and proactively discussing our racial equity journey with potential recruits.
- We are promoting **ongoing dialogue between leadership and representatives of our BIPOC affinity group** about specific organizational changes that will advance inclusion and equity. We are hiring more diverse program leadership. And we are creating and funding a JEDI office with experienced staff to work across the organization, helping to strengthen equity and inclusion in our workplaces and in our strategies.

WORKING TOWARD AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE THAT IS MORE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE

- An important aspect of our new strategic goals will be to **redefine an overarching unified vision for the organization** and help our teams translate this vision into their work.
- We have **invested in building and expanding staff and management competency** in engaging in anti-racism conversations and managing for equity and inclusion.
- Every program and department is engaged in **activities and discussion about how to improve equity and inclusion in our teams**.
- **White ally discussion groups** are helping White-identifying staff understand how racism shows up in daily decisions and actions, and how to better support anti-racism efforts.
- Our **board's active participation in a facilitated series of dialogues on racism, racial equity, and workplace equity** is strengthening their awareness of how racism and White supremacy have shown up in science, and is informing their ongoing dialogue on how science and JEDI can and should be integrated.

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INVESTING IN AND STRENGTHENING THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS THIS WORK

- We have drafted a **comprehensive racial equity plan** for UCS that will be a living document, to be continually improved with staff and board input, including input from our BIPOC colleagues on priorities.
- We are **launching a JEDI office** in the fall of 2021 that will be staffed to provide much-needed capacity for coordinating and supporting our efforts.
- We have begun making **improvements in our HR and talent management processes**, including **an ombuds program** (which provides colleagues with more support in navigating challenging workplace interactions) and **improvements to hiring and onboarding processes**, such as g greater efforts to identify candidates from more diverse backgrounds, explicit discussions with candidates and new hires about our racial equity commitments, and a more intentional, structured approach to orientations. **Our chief people officer** will further improve how we support our staff and hold ourselves accountable for progress toward JEDI goals in our HR practices. This includes fair and equitable talent management practices with a priority focus on compensation, staff engagement, learning, and leadership development.
- We established a **JEDI Advisory Committee to the Board**, including both board and staff members, to oversee UCS's JEDI progress.

> ***Any genuine effort at organizational transformation will encounter challenges, but we are optimistic about what we have to gain.***

The Road Ahead

UCS has set many things in motion in the past year, but this journey is far from complete. By sharing our experiences transparently in this moment, we hope to learn together with other organizations that are navigating their own journeys to racial equity, and we will provide updates on both our progress and our challenges.

As we move forward, we will continue to learn—including from our mistakes. As a science-based organization, we are committed to building on what works, and fixing what we must improve. Any genuine effort at organizational transformation will encounter challenges, but we are optimistic about what we have to gain.

We are committed to sustaining our efforts over the long term. We head into the next year with more knowledge and momentum behind our racial equity efforts, as well as the infusion of new energy and perspectives from our incoming president and chief people officer. Building this road as we travel is daunting but exciting, and essential to the success of our organization. Our future work will expand our ideas of how science can be used to improve public policy and achieve more equitable outcomes. The future demands that UCS commit to this work for the long haul—and we will do so, learning and improving as we build and travel down the road to racial equity.

We encourage you to offer your feedback and perspective on how we are doing by reaching out to your contacts at UCS or by emailing JEDI@ucsusa.org.

Union of Concerned Scientists

www.ucsusa.org/about/building-racial-equity

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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