

MEMORANDUM

TO: UUSJ Board of Directors (Current and Future)
FROM: Policy & Advocacy Review Committee (PARC)
RE: Recommendations of the Policy & Advocacy Review Committee (PARC) on UUSJ's Policy Priorities and Organization of Policy & Advocacy Work to Assure Maximum Success
DATE: Originally Submitted June 25, 2021
Revised and Submitted to New Board of Directors on September 13, 2021

The following memorandum provides background regarding the establishment of a Policy & Advocacy Review Committee (PARC) and Advocacy Implementation Management Team (AIM) by the UUSJ Board of Directors in 2020, as well as the history of UUSJ's policy priorities and policy action teams. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide additional context to the current Board of Directors to inform their ongoing decision-making process with respect to establishing and finalizing the UUSJ's policy agenda/platform.

Background on the Establishment of the PARC & AIM Team

As a reminder, the Policy & Advocacy Review Committee (PARC) is a relatively new special committee created as an outgrowth of the Special Committee on Advocacy Oversight & Sustainability, which commenced in early 2020. The PARC was established during the [December 2020 board meeting](#)¹, and focused on the following activities since its inception:

- Review the Membership Survey Data regarding UUSJ policy priorities for 2021 and beyond, as well as review the priorities set forth by each of the current four Policy Action Teams.
- Review requests for policy action by UUSJ on areas that fall outside the specific priorities laid out in the 2021-2022 UUSJ policy agenda, and make a recommendation to the board upon how to proceed in responding to each requested action. Specific requests that have been brought to the PARC for input include:
 - Position on use of the filibuster as it related to voting rights legislation in the Senate.
 - Recent weigh-in on Actions of Immediate Witness (AIW) for General Assembly, including:
 - UUA's Action of Immediate Witness regarding voting rights (PARC recommended endorsing).
 - UUJEC's Action of Immediate Witness for GA 2021 (PARC recommended not endorsing at this time).

¹ <https://uusi.net/wp1/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Proposed-Advocacy-Oversight-Motion-December-2020.pdf>

- Additionally, the PARC was asked to provide some recommendations on metrics UUSJ can consider using in the future to measure its effectiveness in the advocacy activities and models it is investing in.

The remainder of this document outlines the PARC's recommendations related to policy priority options, observations related to UUSJ's advocacy activities, and strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of the organization's advocacy program in the future. The PARC will continue as a special committee under the existing governance policies for as long as the new Board of Directors finds it to be of use. The membership is expected to change, as is the case with all Board Committees. But it is anticipated that a PARC will continue to exist, as will the policies approved by this board in 2020 regarding advocacy oversight and implementation, until such time in the future as these policies are amended or replaced by the future Board of Directors.

Policy Priorities

As informed by our membership during the previous membership survey completed in 2016, UUSJ currently has **four (4) priority policy areas**:

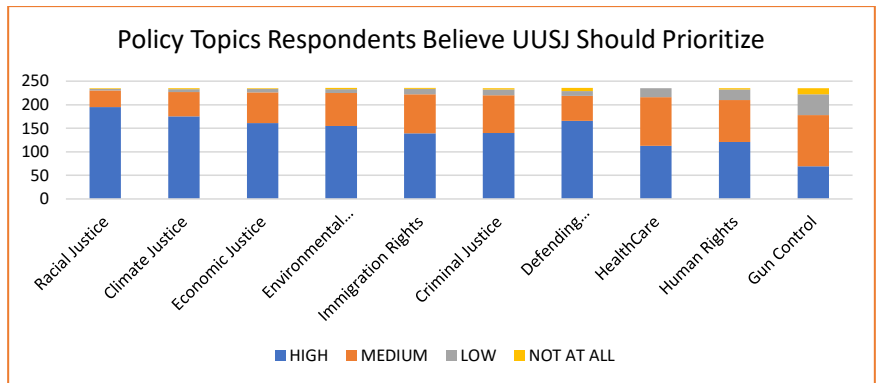
1. Environmental and climate justice,
2. Immigration justice,
3. Economic justice; and
4. Democratic process.

In January 2021, the Policy Action Teams each submitted their short-term and longer-term priorities for the new Biden Administration and 117th Congress. While each policy team had a slightly different way of organizing their priorities, the following document was developed as to a [summary document](#)² of UUSJ's policy priorities to share with the incoming Biden administration officials and the new Congress. During the past six month transition process of the UUSJ's Board of Directors, this summary document has served as our policy platform, guiding our policy and advocacy work in 2021.

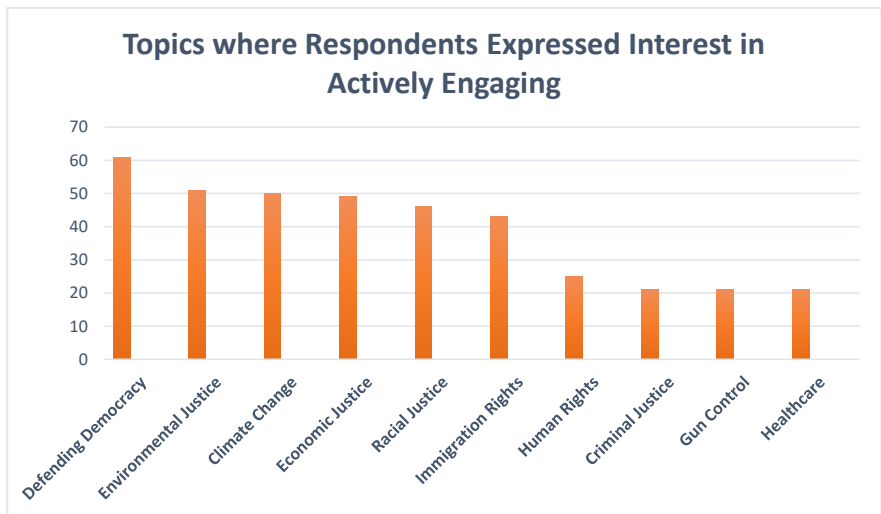
At the same time, the PARC conducted an in-depth analysis of the data collected from the 2021 Membership Survey to inform potential changes to the UUSJ's policy agenda in the future. A [synthesis](#)³ of this analysis was published on June 2nd as part of the UUSJ June 2021 e-newsletter. As it relates to the organization's policy agenda, we learned that a majority of the survey respondents felt that Racial Justice should be a top policy and advocacy priority area for UUSJ, followed by Climate Justice, Economic Justice, Environmental Justice, and Defending our Democracy. Immigration Reform and Criminal Justice followed in terms of interest level, with less interest being expressed for Human Rights, Health Care, and Gun Control.

² <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t7IFM1itVneyNwp5KDSuQnsDEUrhj2tRDozPqjITThk/edit?usp=sharing>

³ <https://uusj.net/wp1/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/UUSJ-Survey-Summary-Results-2020-2021-1.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=d3e700b3-ed01-459a-b186-ba577b1b066e>



Similarly, when people were asked about areas they would like to get engaged in, the rankings of the issue areas were similar in nature:



There were several limitations in the survey questions posed that could have impacted participants responses, including:

- Lack of clear definitions clearly delineating each policy priority area from another. Thus, given the number issues that could be included under “climate justice” (environmental justice, economic justice, racial justice), it was difficult to discern whether individuals who selected climate justice found it to be synonymous or encompassing one or more of the other categories.
- There lacked follow-along questions to better understand what specific policies under each of the categories offered respondents were interested in UUSJ honing in on and prioritizing. Thus, in the case of Racial Justice, while it was the highest among respondents in terms of policy priority

categories, we have no additional information on what was driving this (Black Lives Matter, voting rights, systemic discrimination, cultural addressment around White Supremacy, etc.). For example, since criminal justice came in at seventh in the prioritization exercise, this suggests that there was no correlation in terms of the increased interest in racial justice and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

- There were no questions determining whether the prioritization was from the lens of actual policy reforms, advocacy activities, serving as a witness, or educating the public.

Policy Options

The close numbers of interest across various priority areas, coupled with UUSJ's capacity challenges in maintaining momentum of the four existing priority areas, suggests the need for a more critical conversation over how to strike a balance between addressing the interests/wishes of the membership and maintaining a scope that is manageable given UUSJ's current staff and volunteer resources.

As such, the PARC offers three options for the new Board to consider in terms of updating the UUSJ Policy Agenda:

Option 1: Retain the existing four Policy & Advocacy Teams, and add a fifth one on Racial Justice

The advantage of this option is that it allows UUSJ to continue to prioritize the four policy areas it has in recent years while simultaneously addressing the overwhelming push from members who participated in the survey to prioritize Racial Justice as the top policy priority area for the organization. However, this would require a strong commitment among the volunteer leadership of the existing policy action teams to work to reduce the level of effort required of staff on a monthly basis, and simultaneously build a larger base of advocates ready to serve on the policy teams and help plan the regular advocacy activities for that policy team. Additionally, UUSJ will have to be very intentional in identifying volunteer leaders, partner organizations, and volunteer advocates to build a strong Racial Justice policy action team. Given the difficulty that UUSJ has faced previously in identifying and sustaining an adequate number of volunteer leaders and advocates to support the work of the existing four policy action teams, it seems unrealistic to maintain the four existing teams let alone create a new one. Additionally, the PARC cautions UUSJ from overextending itself and not giving the level of intentionality that taking on a new policy action team on Racial Justice is so deserving. Throwing together a policy action team that lacks strong vision, leadership or volunteer commitment could be perceived as not taking the importance of the work around Racial Justice at a federal level seriously.

Option 2: Remove 1-2 of the existing Policy Action Teams and replace it/them with a new Policy Action Team on Racial Justice.

If this option is pursued, several factors must be considered in terms of what policy action teams to let go of, including the following:

- Decisions regarding adding and removing policy action teams need to also take into account the level of volunteer support we have in managing the work and level of effort required for each policy priority issue area that UUSJ takes on. For example, the Immigration Justice Action Team, which scored among the lowest of the four existing action teams. However, it is currently the most efficient, well-managed policy action team of any of the existing teams, and serves as a strong model for how policy action teams should run for the organization. In contrast, while

Economic Justice ranked third among priorities in the survey, it currently is led by the Executive Director and one Board Member (Serena Lowe), and is based heavily on supporting the work of partners representing impacted communities (Poor People’s Campaign, for example). Thus, the new board will have to factor in not only where the membership wants to head in terms of policy priorities, but where the volunteers doing a large percentage of the work is most committed.

- Second only to Racial Justice, Climate Justice came in second as the most popular priority area that participants wanted UUSJ to focus on. UUSJ could consider collapsing the existing Environment Action Team and Economic Justice Action Teams into one, focusing on the economic and environmental challenges caused by climate change. It is anticipated that there would be push-back from the existing Environmental Action Team, who covers a much larger agenda beyond climate justice issues. There would certainly be implications for both the environmental justice and economic justice priorities if the organization decided to pursue this angle, as cuts to the existing priorities for both of these teams would have to be made to hone in more specifically on environmental and economic consequences created by climate change.
- The Democracy in Action Team evolved after the 2016 elections when it became clear that several constitutional norms that we had all taken for granted were now being put at grave risk. Despite the change in administration, several issues have already arisen around the use of the filibuster. Thus, while this policy area may have been on that was assumed would have less activity post 2020, it remains clear that there continues to be democratic constitutional principals still at risk that would necessitate continued focus in this area. The board of directors could consider, however, whether these issues merit that this topic be one of the UUSJ’s top policy priority areas, or whether it be a topic embedded into all of the policy action teams as appropriate.

Option 3: Maintain the existing four Policy & Advocacy Teams (Economic Justice, Environmental Justice, Immigration Reform and Democracy in Action), but require a racial justice component be embedded into each of the Policy & Advocacy Team’s approach to their work.

Requiring a strong focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and intersectionality in all existing policy action teams is something that many partners would assert should already have been happening, in addition to UUSJ prioritizing the topic in terms of federal policy priority areas in the future. Given the overwhelming support of respondents that prioritized racial justice over all other policy priority areas, there is a concern that if UUSJ does not have a separate policy action team focused solely on racial justice, that it could be criticized for not elevating it in the same way that other policy priority areas traditionally have. However, without really understanding what drove respondents to prioritize Racial Justice in the survey, we have no way of knowing whether embedding Racial Justice as a priority within each of the existing policy action team areas would suffice.

Observations regarding the Structure of UUSJ’s Advocacy Activities

Since the departure of the volunteer Director of Advocacy in October 2020, the policy action team leads have played a stronger role in helping manage core aspects of planning/completing the monthly advocacy activities during the months that their policy issue is the focus of UUSJ’s advocacy efforts.

While the PARC has not been asked to provide recommendations for improving, modifying, or sustaining UUSJ’s existing approach to advocacy planning, the PARC did want to report with enthusiasm several positive elements that have resulted from the introduction of the AIM, including:

- The Policy Action Teams have incrementally improved the breadth and depth of educational and advocacy activities they have undertaken during various advocacy months in 2020-2021.
- UUSJ has experimented with combining several different advocacy models/activities and have collected data to analyze which of these activities is demonstrating greatest impact.
- Due to the virtual nature of existing advocacy activities, advocates from other parts of the country have been able to engage meaningfully in the scheduled virtual meetings with Members of Congress and their staff. Additionally, more seasoned members of the Advocacy Corps have become informal mentors, conveners, and strategists to other advocates who are now able to participate in virtual advocacy activities.
- UUSJ staff are getting more comfortable and improving their ability to streamline various planning/logistics/organizational processes around upcoming advocacy and educational activities.
- While the Advocacy Corps' focus has changed slightly, the participants have engaged in meeting other important volunteer responsibilities for the continued growth of the program (for example, taking on follow-up responsibilities with offices; supporting and mentoring other advocates virtually from across the country; etc.).
- In addition to the advocacy strand of our work, we've also been able to increase our educational activities, working with external strategic partners to co-host informational briefings with national subject matter experts and Congressional champions.

In essence, whilst there were great fears about the future of the organization's advocacy program upon the departure of a full-time seasoned advocacy volunteer leader, the reality is that this massive gap has led to numerous volunteers and leaders stepping up and rising to the occasion in terms of leading various aspects of the organization's advocacy program. And while several lessons have been learned and the organization still has a great deal of work to do to hone its advocacy success, the momentum and dedication of volunteers over the past several months is encouraging.

Once Capitol Hill reopens, UUSJ will have to make some strategic decisions on the following areas:

- Whether or not to continue focusing on one subject per month or allowing different policy action teams to set their own activities up as policy issues arise under their portfolio that are time sensitive.
- Whether or not to revitalize the former Advocacy Corps model (focusing on securing letters from advocates outside of the DMV area and dropping them off to the Hill and securing non-constituent meetings) or maintaining constituent-specific virtual meetings or develop a hybrid model.
- Whether or not to continue to sponsor the *Write Here Write Now* Campaign as a way to maintain strong congregation participation in advocacy efforts, or transition to a more traditional action-alert process, instead focusing on increasing the number of touch-points to the Hill based on individuals.
- Whether or not to raise/devote budgetary resources to support the continuation of existing support staff, or work toward building the resources for a full-time governmental relations staff member (and what qualifications this person would need to justify the investment).

The PARC believes it would be valuable for the new Board of Directors to host a series of focus group and town hall discussions with current/previous participants of the Advocacy Corps, participating congregations in the *Write Here, Write Now* campaign, staff, policy action team chairs, external partners, and members of UUSJ in order to hear first-hand the perspectives of various stakeholders about their experiences and what they think works best in terms of impact and reach.

Looking Ahead: Future Areas of Work for PARC

Another area that the PARC was asked to advise the new Board on was with respect to how the organization should evaluate the effects of various advocacy activities and investments in terms of advancing UUSJ's policy priorities. The central goals of the UUSJ advocacy program are to: amplify the voices of the UU Community in the federal governmental process; and pursue and further the UU 5th Principle (The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large).

In order to measure UUSJ's effectiveness in accomplishing these goals, it is important to create both process-oriented and outcome-oriented measures to evaluate our value added in (a) connecting UUs with key Congressional leaders and opportunities to advocate for key policy actions; and (b) influencing national policies and actions at the federal level. Any measures developed in the future should be aligned with the organization's updated vision and mission and be designed based upon the capabilities and resources of the advocacy program. Any measures must also be easily captured through available data or metrics (in other words, whatever we are trying to measure must be measurable).

As this new chapter of UUSJ's history commences, hard decisions will need to be made as to where to strategically deploy our financial and human resources to effectuate the strongest reach and impact UUSJ can have in advancing its federal policy agenda in solidarity with impacted communities. It is anticipated that in the following months, the PARC would focus on the following priorities:

- (a) monitor the impact of any changes to the Policy Action Teams and priorities for UUSJ;
- (b) continue to make recommendations to the Board when requested on issues that arise related to policy prioritization and strategy that necessitates Board engagement;
- (c) provide additional process for identifying and solidifying both process-oriented and impact/outcome-based measures for evaluating effectiveness of the advocacy program on an annual basis; and
- (d) provide technical assistance and counseling as needed to the Development, Membership, and Strategic Planning Committees as it relates to the

During the August 2021 board meeting, new members were identified for the PARC. Any additional board members interested in serving on the PARC should contact Serena Lowe at EWOLANERES@gmail.com. The PARC will convene for the first time since the new Board was installed in October 2021.

Field Code Changed