

Ten Paths for Scientist Engagement and Advocacy

As a scientist or expert, there are many paths you can take to influence government policy from the local to the federal level, whether by engaging with the media, the public, or policymakers. Some of the suggestions listed here involve communicating scientific concepts in a relatable way. Others emphasize science advocacy, in support of a cause or proposal.

The Ten Paths

- 1. Partner with community groups to provide scientific support on local issues.**

Example: Through the UCS Groundwater Technical Assistance Project in California, volunteer scientists and experts add a valuable contribution to existing efforts to shape groundwater management policy by responding to communities' technical questions and needs, especially those of marginalized and under-resourced communities.

- 2. Educate legislators on the science behind key local issues through meetings, lobby days, office calls, or policy briefs.**

Example: UCS Science Network members from Nashville flew to Washington, DC, to lobby their senators about the science of clean energy, and the importance of investing in clean energy research and development. A bipartisan bill was later introduced that would do just that.

- 3. Elevate science through the media. This can be done through letters to the editor or op-eds that amplify the impacts of science-based policy or push back against misinformation and attacks on science.**

Example: Scientists' letters to the editor about the importance of the Scientific Integrity Act, which would help protect government research from political interference, contributed to a wave of media attention on the issue.

- 4. Advocate for a stronger role for science in policymaking.**

Example: After UCS activists and Science Network members lobbied hard on behalf of the Scientific Integrity Act, the bill received bipartisan support in the House Science Committee—a sea change in how Congress has viewed the politicization of science.

As a scientist, you can use your expertise to make a difference in your community and shape policy from the local to the federal level.

- 5. Serve as a resource on federal, state, or local advisory boards.**

Example: When the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) claimed it was too difficult to recruit scientific experts who had no financial conflicts of interest, UCS found many qualified, independent experts in our Science Network—to date, we have nominated more than 60 to serve on FDA committees.

- 6. Share scientific knowledge to help inform online public discussions (through guest blogs, social media, or video calls).**

Example: A US District Court judge cited a UCS “Science for Justice” blog post as part of his argument calling for new evidentiary rules to help fight bias in the legal and judiciary systems. The “Science for Justice” blog series amplifies the stories of scientists who are making explicit connections between science and social justice.

- 7. Bring expertise to the table during public comment periods for state and federal rulemaking.**

Example: To help pass the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, more than 450 experts submitted comments and testified at public hearings throughout the country on the benefits of cleaner cars.



Brenda Ekwurzel (second from left), UCS director of climate science and senior climate scientist, participates in a panel discussion about efforts to hold fossil fuel companies accountable for climate change impacts. Clear scientific data is essential in developing solutions for a healthy and sustainable future, and scientists are uniquely positioned to bring this information to policymakers.

Not sure which path to take? Look for action opportunities from UCS or talk to people in your network to decide where to start.

8. Build pressure for action by joining scientific sign-on letters.

Example: While New England and mid-Atlantic states were working to design a regional program that would reduce the climate impact of transportation fuels, 357 scientists signed a letter asking the region's governors to ensure that equity would be built into the program, which had a significant influence on the plan.

9. Help shift the culture in the scientific community to be more accepting of advocacy, by illustrating the impact that science can have in the public sphere (specifically, by presenting posters, hosting sessions, learning new skills at workshops, and actively participating in conversations taking place at conferences and meetings).

Example: UCS staff, our environmental justice partners, and senior-level Science Network members teamed up to discuss the equity and justice implications of energy and transportation issues with early-career scientists, and helped participants build skills they can use to influence policy on these matters.

10. Organize other scientists in your city or on your campus to take action together.

Examples: New Jersey scientists and science advocates joined together to form the UCS New Jersey Local Team, which advocates for science-based policies and practices that address climate change, energy resiliency, environmental justice, and other pressing issues. And at the University

of California–Irvine, students who recognized problems with equity and inclusion in the STEM fields formed the group Reclaiming STEM, which hosts conferences to support marginalized early-career scientists across the country.

Bonus Paths for Early-Career Scientists

11. Identify your mentors. Finding a mentor is especially valuable in the world of science policy and advocacy, where career paths may not be highly visible.

Example: Through the UCS Science Network Mentor Program, we connect early-career scientists with scientists experienced in fighting for equitable, evidence-based policy. With the guidance of his mentor, Filiberto Palacios succeeded in getting his local representative to sign on to proposed climate legislation.

12. Vote, if you can.

Many people have fought hard for the right to vote, and this right is currently under attack across the country. Voting may be just one piece of an individual's civic duty, but it's essential to exercise this right if you are able. Early-career scientists who grew up somewhere other than their university's community may have the opportunity to decide where it is most strategic to vote.

For details on these paths, check out the UCS Scientist Advocacy Toolkit at www.ucsusa.org/resources/scientist-advocacy-toolkit.

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