

Staffing Sunset Park, Brooklyn to Advance a Just Transition

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, UPROSE has been working to advance their vision of an intergenerationally-led, deeply engaged, and educated community driving a Just Transition in Sunset Park in Brooklyn toward regenerative economies on the industrial waterfront. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3. You can learn more about their work on their [website](#).

Through their CCHE-funded activities, UPROSE has advanced important policies for climate resilience and health, opened a new culture of collaboration among UPROSE and city agencies, and continued supporting residents of Sunset Park exercise their power to influence decisions that impact their community. By staffing community needs – similar to how elected officials have staffers – UPROSE has seen significant progress toward their longer-term outcomes, as outlined in their 2022 CCHE theory of change [here \(slide 28\)](#) and described in detail below. Key partners in UPROSE’s CCHE-funded work are listed at the end of the document.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Advocated for the City to operationalize the Green Resilient Industrial District (GRID) in Sunset Park. The GRID was the fruit of years of community organizing and planning by the people of Sunset Park. The community asked UPROSE to help develop a plan to articulate its authentic vision for its future. With this mandate, UPROSE worked with a woman-led planning collective, Collective for Community, Culture and the Environment (CCCE), to develop a Just Transition plan that integrated all the community’s prior decades of planning into a unified comprehensive vision. Originally released by UPROSE and CCCE in 2019, the vision provided a sharp clear community alternative to the proposed Industry City (IC) rezoning plan. The IC rezoning plan was a developer-driven plan that undermined the community’s vision of a Just Transition and would have displaced working class residents and small businesses. Through this work and successful community campaign, UPROSE and other community-based and environmental justice groups forced the withdrawal of the IC plan and protected the maritime, industrial, and working class character of Sunset Park, the story of which is now documented in the film, [Emergent City](#). Since that time, the GRID has been a foundational roadmap for UPROSE’s work in Sunset Park by providing a clear guide for operationalizing a Just Transition in Sunset Park. UPROSE unveiled an updated version of the plan, [GRID 2.0: A Just Transition Plan for Sunset Park](#), in August 2023.

The caliber of the research and collaboration behind the document have meant City leaders simply could not ignore it and has led to the GRID becoming a community model and touchstone across City departments. Decision-makers became more educated and aligned with the community’s vision because of the work UPROSE has done to “staff” community concerns and act as a bridge and liaison between community and decision-makers. GRID recommendations were considered by City agencies and UPROSE received requests to present on



Mission:

To build intergenerationally-led, frontline community power to advance climate justice and a Just Transition in Sunset Park Brooklyn through organizing, leadership development, popular education, arts and culture, policy, and participatory research/planning.

Select Resources and Media

- [The Green Resilient Industrial District 2.0](#)
- [Emergent City](#)

the GRID across the City and heard from other organizations in the U.S. that were interested in adapting the GRID model for their own communities. The model UPROSE created with the GRID demonstrated for City officials that community involvement was not an add-on, but rather a core component of any development or community/city planning project. UPROSE staff said, “[...] we have raised the level of the conversation, and exercised our power, and [the City] can’t move forward without incorporating parts of our vision.”

Advanced implementation of the GRID Just Transition strategy in Sunset Park via Regenerative Economies Industrial Ecosystem Development Initiative and Resilience Water Hub Feasibility Study (renamed to Just Transition Waterfront Exchange) with New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) while engaging community residents and community coalition members in GRID planning and implementation. UPROSE partnered with the Pratt Institute Graduate Center for Planning and Environment (GCPE) and NYCEDC, NYC’s quasi-public economic development agency, to advance implementation of specific GRID Just Transition strategies in Sunset Park. The nature and depth of collaboration with EDC transformed over the course of the CCHE initiative as EDC became an increasingly proactive and collaborative partner and independently began to include language related to community prosperity and a just transition in their own projects and programming. More information about these partnerships are detailed in CCHE evaluation and learning memo, [“Reflections on CBO Partnerships with Researchers and Local Government...”](#).

In 2023, UPROSE, NYCEDC and Pratt GCPE completed Phase 1 planning for the Regenerative Economies Industrial Ecosystem Development Initiative with an Ecosystem Assessment, Literature Review, and a Market Opportunity Analysis. The Regenerative Economies project explored strategies to revitalize Sunset Park’s industrial area by leveraging opportunities in NYC’s major building decarbonization policy, the 2019 Climate Mobilization Act/LL97, that mandated emissions reduction and energy efficiency standards for all buildings over 25,000 square feet by 2030. In Phase 2, using supplemental funding from the NYS Department of State Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) program, the project completed climate supply chain financial feasibility studies to confirm the viability of LL97-related manufacturing in Sunset Park. The Just Transition Waterfront Exchange was a longer-term project and underwent site selection with NYCEDC, that built on a 2023 Feasibility Study developed in partnership with Pratt GCPE. In the meantime, UPROSE obtained additional resources to implement the GRID’s key workforce development strategy, the Just Transition Worker Resource Center (Center). This Center will engage Sunset Park’s historically marginalized communities in training and employment opportunities in the emerging clean energy economy such as offshore wind, solar installation/maintenance, building decarbonization, and climate supply chain manufacturing.

Successfully advocated for closing or minimizing peaker power plants through the PEAK campaign. UPROSE supported successful advocacy of the [PEAK Coalition campaign](#), which culminated with a joint study between the New York Power Authority (NYPA) and PEAK. The study showed that each of the NYPA’s gas peaker plants - which operated when utilities faced high demand for short durations - could be retired and replaced with battery storage by 2030. As a result, more than a gigawatt of peaker plants were in the process of transitioning to battery storage installation for clean energy, which will remove a significant source of environmental pollution from Sunset Park and reduce residents’ exposure to air pollution which would impact respiratory and cardiovascular health.

Continued outreach and leadership development for youth via Youth Climate Justice Leadership Academy and engaged residents to improve understanding of current climate, health, and equity issues in the community. Throughout the CCHE initiative, and a global pandemic, UPROSE continued its power building and engagement strategies, including hosting workshops, trainings, Town Halls, candidate forums, and celebrations with community members on a variety of topics: from the GRID to Gender Justice to community visioning for the Brooklyn-Queens express way working with the Department of Transportation to simply gathering together for a Holiday Harvest. They have graduated 135 youth leaders through the Youth Climate Justice Leadership Academy and provided leadership trainings for adult women and elders of the community. UPROSE partnered with the Raising Health Coalition to offer medical trainings for Sunset Park residents, thus increasing resiliency at a hyper local level. As one UPROSE staff said, “People should have all the skills necessary to survive recurrent extreme weather events – knowing CPR could save a life during an extreme heat event if EMS isn’t able to get there.”

Since the lockdown of 2020, UPROSE grew and surpassed its pre-pandemic engagement numbers. The organization developed a renovated and larger space that acted as a community center to host events and accommodate even more people. Despite setbacks and challenges, this growth was evidence of progress towards UPROSE’s long-term outcome that residents be engaged, informed, and exercise self-efficacy in decisions impacting their communities. As one UPROSE staff said, “All of this has moved us toward a mobilized community that can drive its own destiny.”

Continued to work closely with city, state, and national alliances and coalitions to advance common vision on climate justice policy. UPROSE has seen significant climate justice policy gains through key coalitions like the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) as well as the state-level Climate Justice Working Group that advised the Governor on CLCPA implementation. As one example of a major policy win,

UPROSE helped NYRenews launch its Climate, Jobs, and Justice Campaign to advocate for \$15 billion in state-level investments via the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) which required that 35-40% of clean energy investments went to disadvantaged communities. Several components of the Campaign’s package were passed including Build Public Renewables Act, the All-Electric Buildings Act, Climate Change Superfund Act and the launch of New York’s Climate Action Fund. Another example was UPROSE’s work with CJA, Taproot earth, and Rogue Climate to define [Principles for a Just Transition in Offshore Wind Energy](#).

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Beyond funding and technical assistance, philanthropic investment in frontline communities via community-based organizations (CBOs) can have a transformative effect.** In addition to the funding, technical assistance, thought partnership, and trusting relationships with Program Officers, the reputational capital that Kresge provided has been meaningful to UPROSE. “Kresge trusted us, pivoting from big orgs to supporting smaller frontline orgs that didn’t have a history of access to big grants [...] that this work is supported by the Kresge Foundation gives an extra punch to our work.” This investment, along with other factors, allowed UPROSE to change the political landscape, center frontline solutions, and lead to a moment in which UPROSE saw the fruit of their labor – their work on zoning, land use, community planning, and developing alternatives to an extractive economy while integrating public health paying off. “We have power we weren’t able to manifest before.”
- **By staffing community, CBOs can translate community solutions into operational requirements and act as a bridge with bureaucratic processes over the long term.** Additionally, providing operational frameworks to achieve equitable outcomes is hugely important for moving from aspirational to reality. This kind of community staffing, bridging, and technical operationalizing can be slow and often takes years if not decades; thus, investing in organizations with deep roots in community and the ability to sustain the work is critical.
- **The COVID 19 pandemic and post-pandemic labor market disruptions challenged the capacity of both UPROSE and its partners** to make progress on important climate-related community health initiatives. We hope to hope to revisit and update these in the next phase of work.

Looking Ahead

UPROSE will deepen its core community organizing/base-building in Sunset Park, fostering a intergenerationally-led movement for climate justice, and will continue its fundamental coalition-building work to advance climate justice policy at city, state and federal levels. UPROSE will work to operationalize a Just Transition in Sunset Park, through resources generated by these climate justice policies, and by implementing the GRID’s strategies of protecting the maritime-industrial area, decarbonizing the neighborhood, and creating community wealth. To do this UPROSE will strengthen and expand important partnerships with NYCEDC and NYSERDA and secure large-scale investments in GRID strategies. Finally, UPROSE will update the Sunset Park Community Resilience Action Plan, facilitated by UPROSE’s Climate Justice Center, to secure basic availability of food, water, energy, and mental health/well-being for Sunset Park’s frontline communities in the event of climate disaster and system disruption.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
NY Renews	Coalition Partner
Climate Justice Alliance (CJA)	Coalition Partner
Collective for Community Culture and the Environment (CCCE)	Strategic Partner
Grassroots Global Justice	Community Partner
Las Damas	Community Partner
NYC Economic Development Corp. (NYCEDC)	Public Sector Partner
NYC Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA)	Coalition Partner
NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)	Public Sector Partner

Organization	Type
Peak Coalition	Coalition Partner
Pratt Institute Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment (GCPE)	Strategic Partner
Urbane	Strategic Partner
Last Mile Coalition	Coalition Partner
BQE EJ Coalition	Coalition Partner
Sunset Park Family Health Center	Health Partner