

WE ACT’s Environmental Health and Justice Leadership Training (EHJLT) program:

A tool to help disseminate research to community members who live/work in Northern Manhattan

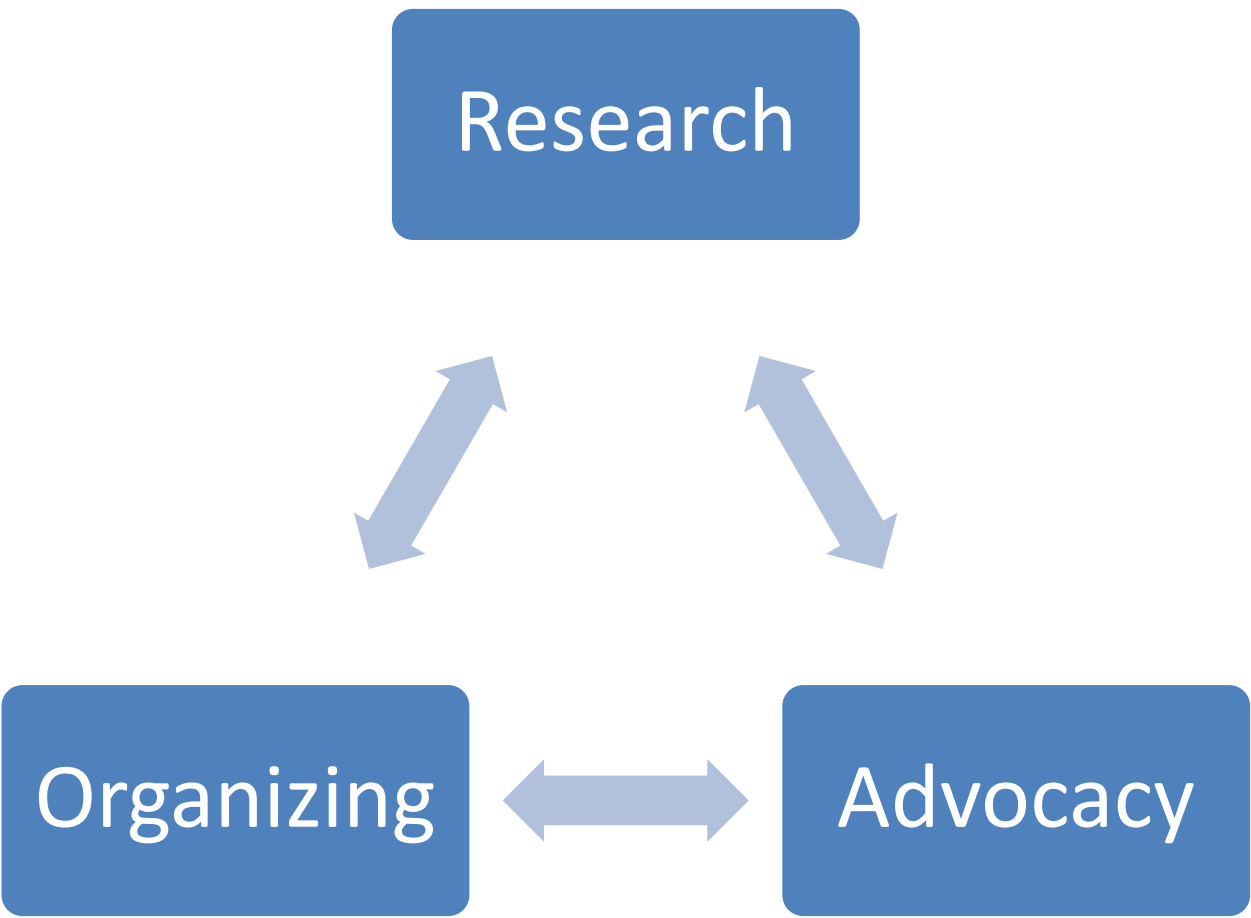
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Introduction

WE ACT for Environmental Justice is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to build healthy communities by assuring that people of color and/or low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies. Located in Northern Manhattan, the organization supports a large population of black and Hispanic residents.

WE ACT’s work centers around three pillars: research, community organizing, and advocacy. Through long standing partnerships with academic institutions such as the Columbia Center for Children’s Environmental Health and the NIEHS Center for Environmental Health in Northern Manhattan, WE ACT has fostered opportunities for the translation of research conducted by both academic institutions and community members living/working in Northern Manhattan. A tool that WE ACT uses to disseminate research is the EHJLT program.



Goals

1. Raise public awareness among community members about environmental risks and health impacts
2. Engage participants to take action by joining member-led working groups, giving testimony at public hearings, and applying to small grants

Methods

1. Provide a 10 week education program structured to offer interactive activities, promote place-based learning, and stimulate discussion around community current events/findings
2. Guest presenters who are lead investigators or have expertise in the field are invited to share their findings and connect with the cohort
3. Develop and pilot new curricula with the help of researchers/educators

EHJLT Weekly Themes/Modules

- Introduction to WE ACT & Environmental Justice
- Community Organizing
- Clean Air Quality & Climate Change
- Toxic Free Products
- Healthy Indoor Environments
- Affordable & Equitable Transit
- Food Justice
- Sustainable & Equitable Land Use
- Advocacy in Action

Highlights

- 40 graduates (25 in spring; 15 in fall)
- 10 graduates have attended lobby days or have given testimony at hearings to pass bills at the city and state level
- 3 elected officials have come out to award graduates with certificates (Council Member Lavine, Council Member Rodriguez, Senator Perkins)
- 83% of participants strongly agreed that their environmental knowledge was increased
- 92% of participants believed guest speakers contributed to the trainings

Guest Speakers have included:

- Diana Hernandez, PhD – Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health
- Dennis Derryck – Professor at the New School & founder of Corbin Hill Food Project
- Ansje Miller – Center for Environmental Health



Findings

Surveys/evaluations collected throughout the program demonstrated:

- Participants gained a thorough understanding of environmental health and justice issues
- Participants enjoyed interactive activities such as poster making and public commenting exercises
- Participants agreed resources provided were useful, albeit there needed to be better integration with presentations
- Throughout the end of the program, participants were requesting activities that would give them more hands on skills to battle injustices within their communities.

Conclusions

- Training programs similar to the EHJLT can be a helpful and replicable model in capacity building
- Translating scientific evidence into policy is necessary for the creation and sustainability of healthy and equitable communities

Next Steps

- Provide in-classroom training to youth cohorts at Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS)
- Incorporate Science Take Out Kits into Healthy Indoor Environments and Toxic Free Products curriculum in partnership with the University of Rochester Medical Center