



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) and CUNY Establish NYC Climate Justice Hub Through \$4 Million Waverley Street Foundation Grant

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New York, New York (April 20, 2023) | The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) and The City University of New York (CUNY) have formalized a partnership to establish the NYC Climate Justice Hub to advance and accelerate climate solutions led by communities of color on the front lines of climate breakdown. The partnership is supported by a two-year grant totaling \$4 million from the Waverley Street Foundation.

The **NYC Climate Justice Hub** will aid NYC-EJA, its members, and campaigns in their efforts to support low-income and frontline communities of color disproportionately burdened by environmental and climate hazards and risks as they fight for policies and projects that secure clean air, water, and energy, and access to healthy food and green space. Over the next two years, faculty, students, and scholars from the CUNY Graduate Center and campuses throughout the CUNY system will collaborate on the ground and in the field with NYC-EJA and six of its community-based organizational members through classes based on local climate issues and campaigns, a summer climate leadership academy, annual fellowships, public programming activities, and interdisciplinary research teams to serve frontline communities and solutions and prepare students for professions in the climate sector and advance equitable climate solutions.

NYC-EJA and six of its community-based organizational members – the Brooklyn Movement Center (Bedford-Stuyvesant), El Puente (Williamsburg and Bushwick), UPROSE (Sunset Park) in Brooklyn, GOLES (Lower East Side) in Manhattan, The Point Community Development Corporation (Hunts Point), and Nos Quedamos (South Bronx) in the Bronx – will work with CUNY to assess local climate adaptation, resiliency, and mitigation needs and priorities, including physical infrastructure and local projects. With

support from CUNY, NYC-EJA member groups will develop and implement strategies to reduce community climate vulnerabilities and environmental burdens.

In addition to collaborating on local community projects, CUNY will also partner with NYC-EJA to support some of their priority climate policy campaigns. Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a non-profit, 501(c)3 citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. For over 30 years, NYC-EJA has been at the forefront of New York City and State campaigns to advance environmental and climate justice. Their recent campaign accomplishments have redefined environmental and climate justice advocacy in New York. Their leadership has included co-founding and working with the game-changing NY Renews state coalition that championed New York's landmark climate law (Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act); working with the Climate Works for All coalition on implementing the most ambitious energy efficiency municipal law in the nation; and co-launching the PEAK and Last Mile coalitions (targeting the retirement of New York's polluting peaker power plants and fighting to reform the clustering of last mile delivery facilities respectively), among other advocacy campaigns. Whether it's the disproportionate threat that extreme heat poses to New Yorkers of color or the need to ensure New York's energy transition is a just one, NYC-EJA and CUNY will collaborate to advance these issues and solutions via deep research, analysis, education, and policy advocacy.

The \$4 million grant is part of a nationwide initiative by the Waverley Street Foundation to redistribute decision-making power in the climate sector by funding partnerships that leverage key university resources – including scale, scope, and research expertise – to build capacity for organizations led by communities on the front lines of climate breakdown. The foundation is seeding several climate hubs in different jurisdictions that bring together minority-serving higher educational institutions (MSIs), including historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges, and CUNY, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop climate justice solutions grounded in lived experience. These cross-sectoral partnerships build on the needs and expertise of local knowledge holders to advance climate strategy that seeds greater equity, justice, and well-being.

“As the primary doctoral-granting institution of the largest urban public university in the nation, the CUNY Graduate Center has a long and impressive history of promoting social and environmental justice,” said President Robin L. Garrell. “We are grateful to the Waverley Street Foundation for this generous grant, which will enable faculty and students throughout CUNY to engage in research, teaching, and advocacy to support the vital work of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance and to end climate injustice in New York.”

“NYC-EJA is thrilled at partnering with CUNY to launch the NYC Climate Justice Hub,” said NYC-EJA Executive Director Eddie Bautista. “CUNY’s 25 campuses, over 240,000 students, and world-class faculty represent a deep reservoir of resources that will take NYC-EJA, our members, and campaigns to the next level of climate advocacy – and not a moment too soon, as everyone sees the escalating threats of climate change mount.”

The hub will prepare CUNY’s diverse students to be leaders in the environmental justice movement and support community leaders and groups in addressing their climate-related risks and needs. The initiatives include:

Summer Climate Academy and Fellowship Program: 25 undergraduate and master’s students and five doctoral students from throughout CUNY each year will receive \$10,000 fellowships to participate in an experiential learning and professional development program designed to refine their environmental justice leadership skills and support the mission of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance.

Participatory Research: The NYC Climate Justice Hub will support research teams comprised of CUNY faculty, students, and community partners to develop research projects that address critical needs and issues identified by New York City Environmental Justice Alliance member organizations.

Public Programs: The NYC Climate Justice Hub will offer diverse public programs to broaden community awareness of and involvement in climate justice issues and initiatives.

“By working together with NYC-EJA to strengthen the connection between CUNY faculty, students, and grassroots environmental justice movements, we’re helping to build critical mass around NYC-EJA’s transformative climate justice agenda,” said Kendra Sullivan, director of the Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center and a co-principal investigator of the grant. “The Waverley Street Foundation has shown tremendous wisdom in honoring the priorities and expertise of local actors and tremendous foresight in funding partnerships between community-based organizations and minority-serving institutions. I’m confident the projects we dream up together will prepare rising generations of NYC leaders to work collaboratively across sectors to navigate climate challenges as they arise with a justice-forward framework.”

“This is a defining moment for the climate movement, higher education, and our city and state,” said Michael Menser, associate professor of Philosophy at Brooklyn College and Earth and Environmental Sciences at the Graduate Center, associate director of the Science and Resilience Institute at Jamaica Bay, and a co-principal investigator of the grant. “Transformative legislation has been passed and more funding is coming, but, for

the implementation to be just, frontline communities need to be at the center and universities need to innovate and step up. This is exactly the kind of work that public universities like CUNY should be doing. Kudos to the Waverley Street Foundation for dedicating resources where so many others have not.”

The Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center will be CUNY’s administrative home for the grant, and a team of scholars from several CUNY campuses will lead and coordinate grant activities.

About the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

Founded in 1991, the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) is a non-profit, 501(c)3 citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. NYC-EJA empowers its member organizations to advocate for improved environmental conditions and against inequitable environmental burdens by the coordination of campaigns designed to inform City and State policies. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability for low-income communities of color to thrive. NYC-EJA is led by the community-based organizations that it serves, with its board elected by its member groups, who set policy and guide program development.

About the Graduate Center of The City University of New York

The CUNY Graduate Center is a leader in public graduate education devoted to enhancing the public good through pioneering research, serious learning, and reasoned debate. The Graduate Center offers ambitious students nearly 50 doctoral and master’s programs of the highest caliber, taught by top faculty from throughout CUNY – the nation’s largest urban public university. Through its nearly 40 centers, institutes, initiatives, and the Advanced Science Research Center, the Graduate Center influences public policy and discourse and shapes innovation. The Graduate Center’s extensive public programs make it a home for culture and conversation.

About the Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center

The Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center encourages collaborative, creative, and engaged work in the humanities and social sciences at CUNY and across New York City through innovative programming, digital and print publications, and project-based public scholarship. For more information visit centerforthehumanities.org.