



USCJ

Seek meaning
together

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN 2024



Proud member of the



**Jewish Climate
Leadership Coalition**
POWERED BY ADAMAH



CALL TO ACTION

The global climate crisis is an historic inflection point for our planet, our communities, and our people.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN body that assesses the science of climate change, estimates that we have fewer than five years to take urgent and meaningful action to avoid locking in the most catastrophic effects of climate change.

Jewish tradition compels us to respond.

JEWISH CLIMATE LEADERSHIP COALITION

In 2022, USCJ signed on as a founding partner to the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition, along with twenty other national and international umbrella organizations of Jewish life.

Powered by Adamah, the Coalition is a network of Jewish community organizations who recognize the existential threat and moral urgency of climate change and commit to taking action.

Coalition members develop **Climate Action Plans** that outline our strategic priorities of our climate work. Our Climate Action Plan details action taken to date and sets goals for both reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and mobilizing our networks around climate action in the year ahead.

Inspired by Jewish values, we are working to do the Jewish community's part to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and build a livable future together.

We invite Jewish community organizations everywhere to join us.

For more information about the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition, watch the [Coalition launch video](#) or visit Adamah's [website](#).



UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

2024 CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

With around 550 synagogues in North America and a presence in Israel, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) is the largest network of Conservative Jews in the world. We are the network that ensures there are thriving centers of Jewish practice across North America, Israel, and beyond that celebrate both tradition and contemporary life. Together, we demonstrate what an authentic and dynamic Judaism looks like, inspire people to be a part of it, and advance its critical role in the world.

In 2023, USCJ proudly released our first Climate Action Plan, outlining our strategic priorities for both reducing USCJ's organizational greenhouse gas emissions and mobilizing our broader networks to engage in climate action.

This year's Climate Action Plan includes a reporting on our 2023 climate action priorities, both successes and challenges, as well as our goals for expanding our climate action work in the year ahead.

2023 CLIMATE ACTION GOALS AND REPORTING

The following are our 2023 climate action goals and our report on successes and challenges to date:

Top Priorities

Congregational community of practice. As the convener of the Conservative movement, USCJ is uniquely poised to support and encourage member synagogues to take action on this issue. We planned to partner with Adamah to co-facilitate a community of practice through the framework of the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition and we did this. As a part of this work, we sought to recruit 30 Conservative synagogues from around North America to join the Coalition; we were successful in helping recruit 42 synagogues! We aspire to involve over 100 congregations over the course of this shemita cycle.

Elevating the issue. USCJ has had a number of projects that have dealt with issues related to climate and sustainability. We planned to integrate that work to ensure coordination, and compile information about our climate-related efforts onto a public-facing page on our website with the goal of supporting congregations wishing to take initial steps to improve their climate impact. We did this and the landing page can be viewed [here](#).

Internal Carbon Reduction. USCJ planned to engage in our own process to reduce our carbon footprint. Those plans and what was accomplished in 2023 are detailed in the "additional goals" below.

Additional Goals

In addition to the priorities outlined above, USCJ committed to the following climate actions:

Primary energy use. Many USCJ congregations have building footprints. We planned to support and encourage congregations to reduce their primary energy usage and to conduct webinars and provide educational resources to support congregations in doing so. This did not get accomplished but is on the list for the future.

Renewable Energy. We planned to continue to encourage Conservative synagogues to begin the process of powering their buildings through renewable energy. This happened in part through our helping recruit 42 synagogues into the Coalition where renewable energy is a focus. We made available to our network information

about government rebate programs in the US and Canada and planned to share other resources about how congregations have implemented renewable energy improvements across our network. We hope to further this work in 2024 and beyond.

Transportation. Through the coronavirus pandemic, we developed creative ways to meet our mission that involved reduced travel. Heading into the writing of our 2023 Climate Action Plan, we had already limited travel as much as possible and we committed to incorporating that learning and making climate impact a factor in evaluating future travel opportunities. This has become a consistent approach and we tend to limit travel to only necessary trips.

Some work-related travel will remain essential for our mission, including teen trips, for example. For work-related travel that we do engage in, we planned to explore offsetting the climate impact of that travel through purchasing climate offsets. For our conferences, we also planned to explore offering participants the opportunity to offset participant travel emissions through climate offsets. Neither of these happened, but we will maintain these as goals in our 2024 Climate Action Plan.

We planned to encourage congregations in our network to be thoughtful and deliberate about holding virtual meetings when feasible and appropriate but did not advance this work beyond the congregations enrolled in the Coalition. We plan to advance this work in 2024 or 2025.

Food. We planned to use the resource guide by Adamah along with Adamah staff support to mitigate the climate impact of our meals served at events and our conference by choosing lower-impact foods. We planned to explore making an explicit commitment to reducing GHG emissions from the food we serve through participation with the Humane Society's Forward Food program. While we did not specifically use the Forward Food program, we did reduce the meat served at our convention and requested that fish served be sustainability sourced.

Not concretely related to food, but we also reduced waste at the convening by minimizing the use of disposable materials for meals, ensuring that the badges were biodegradable, and all swag was made from sustainable materials and was offered as a choice so attendees could take only what they would use. Attendees were asked to bring their own refillable water bottles; we distributed materials electronically instead of printing paper and donated all leftover supplies and snacks to a local homeless shelter and children's organizations.

We planned to encourage all of our congregations to follow this same approach, especially to reduce food waste by providing Shabbat/event leftovers to those in the community who could use an extra meal and to implement composting where possible. We planned to encourage all of our congregations to reduce the use of disposable dishes and flatware (unless it is compostable), and to minimize single-use plastic for food preservation and protection. Congregations in the Coalition were encouraged to do so, and we are creating resources to share in 2024.

Education & Celebration. There is a direct link between synagogues that have a high level of awareness of the topic of climate change and those that take assertive action. Young people, in particular, are passionate about this topic. We planned to strengthen ties between USY and the Jewish Youth Climate Movement in order to support work at individual synagogues and communities. This happened mainly in the congregations who were part of the Coalition and, thanks to a grant received by the Rabbinical Assembly, will advance considerably in 2024.

We planned to seek to broadly provide support and distribute educational resources for our membership, leveraging the material of the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition. We partnered with Congregation Agudath Israel of West Essex, NJ to host a webinar with Jakir Manela, CEO of Adamah, in April 2023. As partners in the movement sustainability initiative, we expect more movement resources to be disseminated in the coming year.

USCJ planned to explore ideas to celebrate climate action awareness in future years, such as Climate Action Shabbat which could be celebrated in conjunction with Earth Day / parsha Behar and supported by Adamah resources. A project manager is already working on this project, and we look forward to reporting success in our next Climate Action Plan.

Finance. USCJ maintains several funds, including investment of restricted and non-restricted USCJ funds, and participates in a group pension fund for staff who are employed at USCJ institutions. Our Investment Policy

statement, which governs the funds that USCJ manages, states that our investments shall be managed with environmental, social, and governance considerations in mind.

Our Investment Committee has explored the topic of Environmental Social Governance (ESG) investing, which considers various environmental criteria when making investments. The Investment Committee has determined there are no widely-accepted criteria for environmental investing at the current time. The Investment Committee planned to continue to monitor this area, which it did, and to report back to the board as appropriate (which did not happen this year).

We planned to also share our findings on ESG investing with our member congregations, many of whom are also wrestling with this complex topic. This did not happen this year.

Advocacy. USCJ does not currently engage in political advocacy. We planned to explore the possibility of engaging in political advocacy on the topic of climate justice in the future. We started this by having an initial conversation with the Rabbinical Assembly about social justice generally and how to take it on.

We planned to encourage our member congregations to include environmental advocacy in their social justice efforts. While we did not find an opportunity to do so, we will be participating in the movement sustainability initiative in May 2024 which will hopefully have an advocacy component.

Resiliency. We planned to create a disaster preparedness plan for the UCSJ that can be implemented when/if a natural disaster or other crisis disrupts our normal operations. We planned to provide informational resources and support to all of our congregations to develop the same. We have not yet created this resource but still intend to do so.

We have a process to support congregations impacted by disasters and update it regularly, which we plan to continue to do. This includes an existing process to allow for dues variances and reductions for congregations impacted by natural disasters and connecting them to relevant organizations and agencies to aid in disaster recovery.

We planned to continue to update and provide resources on our website and will continue to add resources in the coming year.

Click [here](#) to see USCJ's complete 2023 Climate Action Plan.

2024 CLIMATE ACTION GOALS

Sustainability is a mitzvah derived from God's command to Adam to till and to tend the Earth (Genesis 2:15). One articulation of this is in Kohelet Rabbah 7:13: At the time when God created Adam, God took him around the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him, "See My works! How beautiful and praiseworthy they are. Everything that I have created, I created for you. Take care not to damage and destroy My world, for if you damage it, there is no one to repair it after you." There are many other halakhot and values relevant to taking immediate action with respect to reducing carbon emissions and impact on the environment which also motivate us to take action.

USCJ Expanding Impact

Grow membership and engagement in the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition. We will continue to partner with Adamah to co-facilitate a community of practice for synagogues through the framework of the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition. We will recruit 25 more Conservative synagogues from around North America to join the Coalition (to add to the 42 recruited previously, and continuing to our goal of over 100 congregations over the course of this shemita cycle).

Elevate the issue. USCJ has had a number of projects that have dealt with issues related to climate and sustainability. We integrated that work to ensure coordination, and compiled information about our climate-related efforts onto a public-facing page on our website with the goal of supporting congregations wishing to take initial steps to improve their climate impact. We will update [this website](#) as needed to make it continuously relevant and useful.

Educate and mobilize our network: As the convener of the Conservative movement, USCJ is uniquely poised to support and encourage member synagogues to take action on climate change. In addition to the education and support that Conservative synagogue members of the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition will receive due to their participation in that program, we will take action in the following areas aimed at our entire network (whether in the Coalition or not):

- **Primary energy use.** Many USCJ congregations have building footprints. We will support and encourage congregations to reduce their primary energy usage and to conduct webinars and provide educational resources to support congregations in doing so.
- **Renewable Energy.** We plan to continue to encourage congregations to begin the process of powering their buildings through renewable energy. We will continue to make available to our network information about government rebate programs in the US and Canada and plan to share other resources about how congregations have implemented renewable energy improvements across our network.
- **Travel.** We will encourage congregations in our network to be thoughtful and deliberate about holding virtual meetings when feasible and appropriate.
- **Food.** We will encourage all of our congregations to reduce food waste by providing Shabbat/event leftovers to those in the community who could use an extra meal and to implement composting where possible.
- **Waste reduction.** We will encourage all of our congregations to reduce the use of disposable dishes and flatware (unless it is compostable), and to minimize the use of single-use plastic solely for food preservation and protection.
- **Educational resources.** We will broadly provide support and distribute resources on how to do climate education to our membership, and in particular will leverage the material of the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition. We also plan to explore ideas to celebrate climate action awareness such as Climate Action Shabbat, which will be celebrated across the Conservative Movement in conjunction with Earth Day / parshat Behar.
- **Finance.** We plan to share our findings on ESG investing with our member congregations, many of whom are also wrestling with this complex topic.
- **Advocacy.** We will encourage our member congregations to include environmental advocacy in their social justice efforts.
- **Resiliency.** We have a process to support congregations impacted by disasters, including natural disasters exacerbated by climate change, and will continue to update it regularly. This includes an existing process to allow for dues variances and reductions for congregations impacted by natural disasters.

Education & Celebration. We will strengthen ties between USY and the Jewish Youth Climate Movement in order to support work at individual synagogues and communities. This past year, we had our first ever successful partnership between USY and the Jewish Youth Climate Movement. We hope to find opportunities to continue the partnership in 2024.

Finance. Our Investment Committee has explored the topic of Environmental Social Governance (ESG) investing, which considers various environmental criteria when making investments. The Investment Committee has determined that there are no widely-accepted criteria for environmental investing at the current time. The Investment Committee will continue to monitor this area and to report back to the board as appropriate.

Advocacy. USCJ does not currently engage in political advocacy. We are exploring in general about how social justice and advocacy fit into our work. As we do so, we will hold climate justice top of mind. We will continue our conversation with the Rabbinical Assembly about how we might proceed.

Resiliency. We will create a disaster preparedness plan for UCSJ that can be implemented when/if a natural disaster or other crisis disrupts our normal operations. We plan to provide informational resources and support to all of our congregations to develop the same.

USCJ GHG Emissions Reduction.

USCJ will engage in our own process to reduce our own GHG emissions.

Food. We will use the resource guide by Adamah, along with Adamah staff support, to mitigate the climate impact of meals served at our events and our every-other-year convention by choosing lower-impact foods. After using the guide and consulting with Adamah staff we will develop specific climate actions and goals, and especially for our 2025 conference (for which a bulk of the planning will happen in 2024). We will explore making an explicit commitment to reducing GHG emissions from the food we serve through participation with the Humane Society's Forward Food program.

Transportation. We have already limited staff travel as much as possible. However, this is a behavioral choice, and so it will continue to be reflected in our Climate Action Plans each year to ensure that we continue the practice. Some work-related travel will remain essential for our mission, including teen trips for example. For work-related travel that we do engage in, we plan to explore offsetting the climate impact of that travel through purchasing carbon offsets. For our conferences, we also plan to explore offering participants the opportunity to offset participant travel emissions through climate offsets.

For more information about USCJ and our climate work, visit our [website](#).