



## Sustainability

[Home](#)

› [Blog](#)

› Just Transitions and the foundational place of racial equity and social justice for sustainability

# Just Transitions and the foundational place of racial equity and social justice for sustainability

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2023

*by Tom Kelly, chief sustainability officer, UNH and founding executive director, Sustainability Institute*

In this month that is dedicated to Black History as well as global social just day, it's appropriate to reflect on the foundational place of racial equity and social justice for sustainability generally and in our own work at UNH.

**Because we have grounded our work in the principles and commitments articulated by the international scientific and policy community as well as civil society movements, justice in its many forms has been a [core principle of our work](#), and conception of our sustainable learning community, since its very beginnings.**

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And as we look ahead, we are developing a UNH 2030 Sustainability Vision and Strategic Roadmap that incorporates the framework of just transitions as a central principle. [Just Transitions](#)' values and commitments are reflected in public international law through its inclusion in things like the Paris Climate Agreement and outputs from the two most recent COPs of the Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is also a framework that has been adopted and expanded by ["frontline and fenceline"](#) communities organizing for [climate justice](#) in the US and internationally. [Scholars](#) tracking the evolution of the just transitions framework have pointed to its approach encompassing *distributional justice, procedural justice, and restorative justice*.

In building the sustainable learning community, we began by reformulating the question "what is sustainability" to "what sustains us?" This reformulation neutralizes, at least temporarily, the problem of sustainability as a term of jargon that often elicits a narrowly focused response about the environment or an inert, memorized phrase or fragment approximating the triad of economy, ecology, and equity ...

When asked what sustains human communities, responses encompass everything from the basic necessities of air, water, food, and shelter to beauty and love as well as livelihoods, education, religion, and healthcare. The question elicits a genuine sense of the breadth and inclusiveness of sustainability without reference to any particular report or international agreement. This intuitive or common-sense grasp of sustainability is fundamental to building a common purpose because common sense reflects common values that provide a foundation for dialogue, critical reflection, and collaboration. It also aligns with the idea of "quality of life" as a rich, complex tapestry that shapes "what people are able to do and to be," a profound concept that goes far beyond a country's gross national product or measurements of individual economic utility.

This broader, integrative reframing is very well-suited to the principles and commitments of sustainability and the work of continuously enlarging the impact of our sustainable learning community.

This month is also the time when we get the word out about the 9th annual [21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](#). The Challenge is part of the work of the Sustainability Institute's Food Solutions New England, a six state, multi-racial network supporting the democratic transformation of our regional food system rooted in a [commitment to racial equity](#). Our UNH community can engage further on campus with a [suite of events and activities](#) planned in collaboration with faculty, staff and students from across campus.

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### Further resources and readings

UNH prides itself on providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for students, staff, faculty, and administrators of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. We're all learning, and teaching one another. Here are a few resources and readings to help deepen your understanding of racial equity, justice and wellbeing as a diverse community and how it fits into sustainability.

- [2022 21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge Prompts & Resources](#)
- [UNH 21-Day Challenge events and activities](#)
- [UNH Resources, Offices & Centers](#)
  - [Beauregard Center](#)
  - [Civil Rights & Equity Office](#)
  - [Office of Community, Equity & Diversity](#)
  - [Student Accessibility Services](#)
  - [UNH Safe Zones](#)
  - [Sexual Misconduct \(Title IX\)](#)
- [Black Resistance: A Journey to Equality](#) - National Museum of African American History & Culture
- [No Sustainability Without Justice, 2022 Anthology on Racial Equity and Social Justice](#) - AASHE
- [The global climate crisis is a racial justice crisis: UN expert](#) - United Nations Press Release
- [Why Is Climate Change a Racial Justice Issue?](#) - Global Citizen

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[Creating Impact while Nurturing Leaders](#)   
SATURDAY,  
JUNE 10, 2023

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[New England High School Students Innovate to Solve Sustainability Problems](#)   
THURSDAY,  
MAY 25, 2023

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[Bee Campus UNH](#)   
MONDAY,  
MAY 08, 2023

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## CONTACT US

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### Sustainability Institute

107 Nesmith Hall  
131 Main St.  
Durham, NH 03824

(603) 862-8564  
[sustainability@unh.edu](mailto:sustainability@unh.edu)

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