



# JuST 4: Using Science for Social Transformation

## Tree Talk: Youth Leading Environmental Justice in Rochester

University of Rochester's  
Institute for Human Health and  
the Environment

### What is Tree Talk?



Tree Talk was a 2024 project supported by the Institute for Human Health

and the Environment (IHHE). It engaged students in grades 5-8 from an urban Rochester school's garden club **to investigate inequitable access to trees** – a public health and environmental equity issue.

**Students collaborated** with community experts – from school groundskeepers to neighbors and environmental educators – and ultimately organized the planting of **over 40 trees across the city**. The project culminated in a student-led community celebration, bringing together diverse stakeholders who had never met before.



### Why does it matter?

#### Expanding Who Counts as “Expert”

Identifying community expertise can reveal connections to other types of expertise and create a larger network of possibilities.



#### Community Issues are Meaningful Issues

Community experts wanted to participate because it was a meaningful issue to themselves and to their community's youth. As youth experienced the enthusiasm that their community experts contributed to



the project, they became more engaged and driven to continue to grow the project's momentum.



### How is it JuST?



Grounded in the Justice-centered ambitious Science Teaching (JuST) Framework, this work centers students as transformative intellectuals, positioning them to learn science and use that science for social transformation, in this case bringing 40 trees to areas who need them..

