**Building Equity into the CAP and Ensuring a Just Transition**

The Vermont Climate Council recognized early in the process the further work it needed to do – both internally and externally – to build equity into climate action in Vermont and Vermont’s Climate Action Plan and ensure a just transition. To realize the transformative change that is needed to meet the objectives of the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA), Vermonters must be part of not only the solutions but in determining them, supporting all residents of the State fairly and equitably. Specifically, the Council took a three-pronged approach to incorporating and applying equity principles in policy and decision-making: holding space, organizational analysis, and engagement.

The act of holding space refers to the Council’s commitment to start every Council meeting with a presentation or discussion related to equity. Rather than having one or a few specific trainings in the area, this has provided a continual opportunity to hear from experts in the field, working on the ground in Vermont and/or have facilitated conversations around what the work looks like in practice. This work will need to be continued as the State of Vermont and Vermonters work to implement the Climate Action Plan (CAP).

The Council also recognized that there is further work to do around the organizational structure of the Council. The formation of the Council itself, and the five subcommittees needed to develop the Climate Action Plan, took place at an astonishing speed and are imperfect. The systems needed to support the full work of the Climate Action Plan and represent the diversity in Vermont were developed in real time. As such, the hierarchy of the Council and its subcommittees created a system with imperfect power dynamics and under-represented sectors of Vermont’s population. The Council itself is not representative of the BIPOC, low income and rural communities that are likely to be most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, not is the Council representative of the economic sectors that will be most impacted by this transformation, such as the building trades. The Council cast a broader net when forming the subcommittees in order to bring more voices to the process, . The subcommittees, however, which are more representative, do not determine the final actions in the CAP but rather serve as advisory to the Council. The Council holds the decision-making power. In recognizing and appreciating this issue, the Council seeks to engage with the legislature going forward to consider new appointments to the Council and other tools, such as re-evaluating the State’s per diem policy, to seek and create opportunities to add diversity to the Council.

The final approach to equity is co-creation of and broad-based public engagement in the development of the CAP and ultimately, its implementation. While detailed in the preceding section, the Council engagement efforts were significantly impacted by the aggressive timeline proscribed in the GWSA. That said, engagement cannot be a “point in time” effort in the development of the, but rather must be a commitment by the Council and its staff to work in an ongoing fashion to engage Vermonters in climate action. It is with this commitment, that the Council will continue to strive to do better in providing a platform for Vermonters to see themselves in this process.

**Developing the Guiding Principles**

The GWSA charges the Just Transitions Subcommittee with ensuring that strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to climate change impacts will benefit and support all residents of the State of Vermont fairly and equitably. The term “Just Transitions” encompasses both public policy and business action that address the impacts of the transition away from greenhouse gas emissions for jobs and livelihoods (the transition "out") and the generation of low or zero greenhouse gas emission jobs and livelihoods of a sustainable society (the transition "in").

The Just Transitions Subcommittee intentionally formed as a collaborative and diverse group of Vermonters, representing voices of indigenous, black, people of color, youth, people with low incomes, New Americans, labor unions, rural Vermonters and more. **The Subcommittee promoted proactively centering equity in the work of the Climate Council, rather than reactively measuring it**. To support this goal, the subcommittee created the *Guiding Principles for a Just Transition*. The Guiding Principles provide a framework for the Council and subcommittees to use in evaluating, adjusting and prioritizing recommendations that are outlined in the Vermont Climate Action Plan. By providing a checkpoint to ensure active discussion of equity concerns, the Guiding Principles are especially useful in climate policy areas where equity has not traditionally been considered. It is critical to provide an equity lens to incorporate the perspectives of historically marginalized, disadvantaged and underserved communities that are otherwise overlooked or neglected.

**Defining “equity” is important for this process**. (1) ***Distributive equity*** recognizes disparities in the allocation of resources, health outcomes, the inequities in living conditions and lack of political power place frontline / impacted communities; (2) ***Procedural equity*** includes equitable planning and implementation that requires communities have a meaningful opportunity to participate; (3) ***Contextual equity*** ensures that mitigation and adaption strategies take into account that low-income communities, black communities, indigenous communities and people of color, and people with disabilities, amongst others, are often more vulnerable to climate change; (4) ***Corrective equity*** ensures that mitigation and adaption strategies provide communities with clear processes to hold the state accountable to its commitments to pursue equity.

**Vermont’s Impacted & Frontline Communities**

The Guiding Principles point out the significance in Vermont’s climate work of recognizing Vermont’s Impacted and Frontline Communities, defining these communities as those who:

* Are highly exposed to climate risks, such as health impacts, flooding, and extreme temperatures;
* Experience oppression and racism, are excluded from opportunities, or have less resources to adapt to climate and economic change;
* Bear the brunt of pollution and negative effects from today’s fossil fuel and extractive economies; and
* Are more likely to experience a job transition as Vermont addresses climate change.

Studies show that low-income communities, indigenous peoples, black, and other communities of color are among those who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In addition, as industry and jobs transition away from greenhouse gas emissions and towards “greener” jobs and livelihoods, particular focus must be given to the labor sector. Finally, some Vermonters may also be necessarily focused on achieving immediate goals of food, shelter, safety and health, which can impact ability to focus on long-term adaptation to climate and economic changes. Recognition of the disproportionate impact of climate upon frontline communities is essential to evaluating the impact of the transitions toward a carbon-free economy, and to emphasizing the goals of adaptation and resilience strategies. Consequently, the Guiding Principles encourage consideration of impacted and frontline communities in the development of recommendations and prioritization of resources to address climate change.

**Guiding Principles for a Just Transition**

The Just Transitions Subcommittee designed six key principles to guide the recommendations of the Climate Council in development of the Climate Action Plan. These include:

1. Ensuring *Inclusive, Transparent, and Innovative Engagement* in the development of the plan and associated policies and program.
2. Creating *Accountable and Restorative* recommendations that recognize inequality and seek to resolve them using clearly identified strategies.
3. Moving at *The Speed of Trust* where candor and honesty are recognized as essential for public trust and preparing Vermonters for transition to a sustainable climate future.
4. Incorporating *Solidarity* to create inclusionary spaces for all traditions and cultures, particularly for Indigenous communities, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant Vermont.
5. Prioritizing *The Most Impacted First* through recommendations that addressthe needs of impacted and frontline communities first, providing the greatest benefits of transitions to these communities.
6. Developing *Supports for Workers, Families, and Communities* that consider and plan for potential impacts on workers, families and their communities based on the implementation of Vermont’s Climate Action Plan

**Self-Assessment and Scoring Rubric**

The Guiding Principles also include a process for assessing “equity and justice” which includes an explicit reflection and analysis of:

* Impacted and Frontline Communities;
* Analyzing Burdens and Benefits;
* Ensuring Equitable and Just Engagement;
* Funding and Data;
* Implementation and Outcomes

Moreover, a scoring rubric was developed to accompany a narrative response for each of the Assessment Questions. Each recommendation put forth by a subcommittee is scored on how applicable it is to the criterion of each prompt. The criterion include: *Frontline/Impacted Communities; Analyzing Burdens And Benefits; Ensuring Equitable & Just Engagement; Funding & Data; Implementation & Questions; Which Groups Derive Direct Benefits*. This rubric was designed to be used in the recommendation prioritization process and supported identifying strategies and actions that require additional equity and justice considerations before being advanced to implementation.

The full Guiding Principles document, along with the rubric can be found in (INSERT APPENDIX).