**Building Equity into the CAP**

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. 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. This was articulated in the approach the Council took to public engagement (discussed in the preceding section) from the onset but was formalized by the Council with the recognition of a three-pronged approach to equity: 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. This commitment was reflective of the Council’s interest in leaning into the conversations around applying equity in policy and decision making in practice. 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 continue as we move into implementation of the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and highlight the need to further consider equity in the specific actions recommended in the 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 standup the Climate Action Plan was no less than the formation of a new bureaucracy to realize the objectives of the GWSA. In standing it up at astonishing speed, the systems needed to support it 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, income, and geographic diversity needed to represent all Vermonters and specifically the most vulnerable. The Council did cast a much broader net when forming the subcommittees through outreach and engagement with Vermonters in the process but in doing so, created the hierarchical imbalance of power. The subcommittees, which are now 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, leaving the power with the privileged. In recognizing and appreciating this issue, the Council seeks to engage with the legislature going forward to consider new appointments to the Council and the increased opportunity to add diversity to the Council. Finally, the Agency of Natural Resources staff who support the work of the Council will continue to support the per diems for non-state employees and explore ways to enhance them to ensure that payment is not a barrier to serving.

The final approach to equity is the co-creation of our engagement in the development of the CAP and ultimately, its implementation. While detailed in the preceding section, the Council acknowledges the challenges of this approach under the timeline. That said, engagement is not any one moment in the development of this CAP and the future iterations of but a commitment by the Council and its staff to work in an ongoing fashion to engage Vermonters in climate action for the betterment of the outcome. 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” concept 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 support the Council and subcommittees to evaluate, adjust and prioritize recommendations outlined in the Vermont Climate Action Plan. By providing a checkpoint to ensure the inclusion of equity, 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 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 incorporation into the final Vermont Climate Action Plan.

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