

# State of Vermont CLIMATE ACTION PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Developed by Climate Access and Rise Consulting  
for the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources  
July 2021





# Section One: Introduction

## **PURPOSE**

Climate Access and Rise Consulting are working with the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Climate Council and Just Transitions Sub-Committee to develop a public participation plan that provides a wide range of opportunities to engage diverse Vermonters in co-creating and implementing the Vermont Climate Action Plan. The purpose of the public engagement plan is to provide guidance on how to frame climate issues with key audiences and involve community members in the planning process and implementation of climate goals. It is important to note that research and engagement were completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required outreach to occur entirely online for this first phase of the project.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the first phase of the project, the consulting team conducted stakeholder research and outreach to inform the development of the engagement plan. This included a review of public opinion polling, an analysis of media coverage on climate change in Vermont, and a scan of the Climate Council webpages and related materials, roundtable discussions and in-depth interviews with target stakeholders. Insights from this process informed the public engagement plan, which was presented by Climate Access and Rise Consulting to the Climate Council Steering Committee and Just Transitions subcommittee in July 2021.

## **CONTENTS**

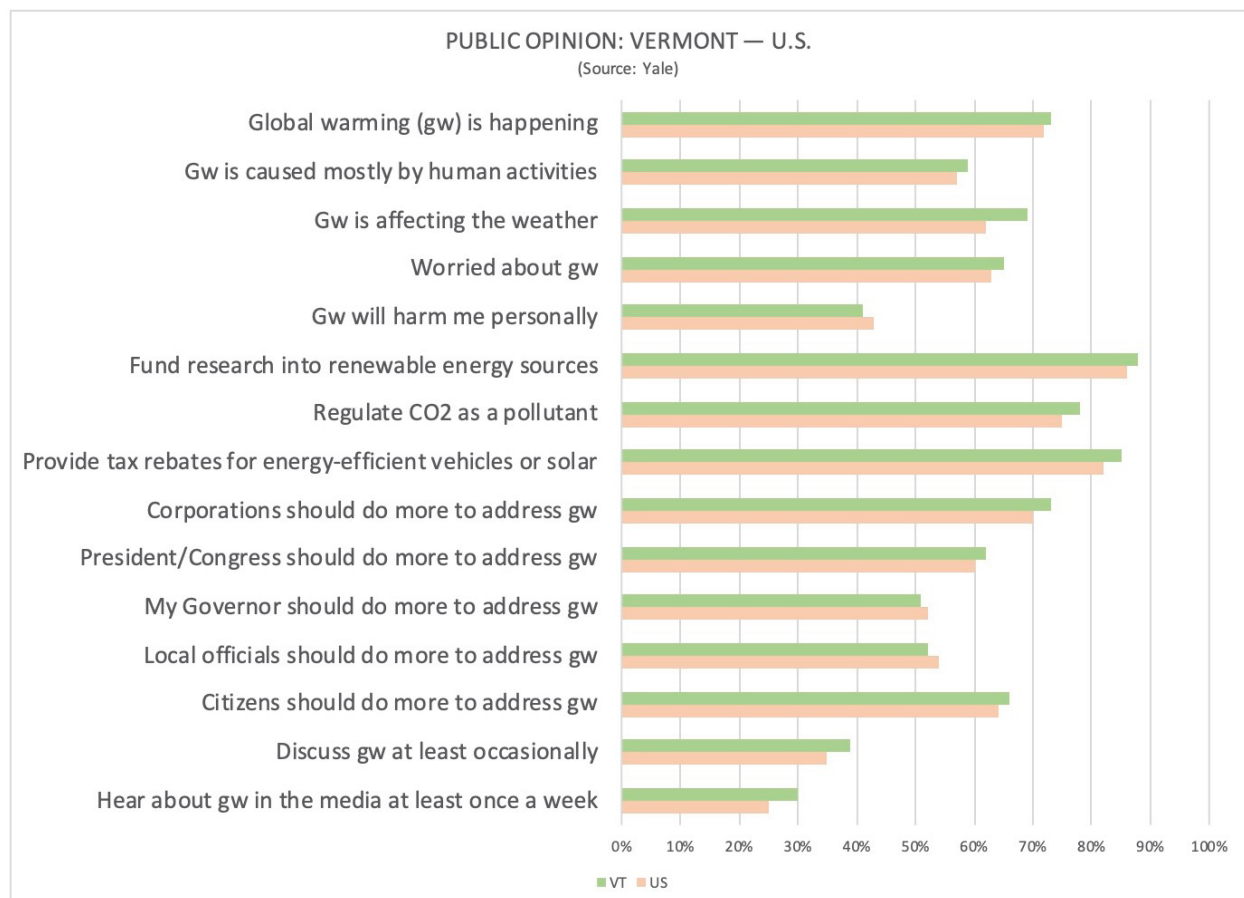
The following public engagement plan includes a review of public opinion and the media conversation, audience analysis and participant report, framing approach and engagement strategy. A social media strategy and web content plan will be developed based on these findings and proposed communication and outreach approaches.



## Section Two: Public Opinion and Media Conversation Review

### *Vermonters Accept and are Concerned about Climate Change Yet Barriers Remain*

A majority of Vermonters understand that climate change is happening and caused mostly by human activity. Most people in the state say it's affecting the weather and are concerned about impacts, but are less concerned that it will impact them personally. There is strong support for climate solutions, from renewable energy to regulating CO2 as a pollutant. Vermonters want corporations and decision makers at all levels of government to do more to address the issue. Engaging in climate change, however, is not the norm with only a third of Vermonters saying they discuss climate change at least occasionally and fewer hear about the issue regularly in the media.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [Yale](#), 2020

The team conducted a media scan of climate change coverage across the top three Vermont publications by circulation: Burlington Free Press, Seven Days and The Rutland Herald.<sup>2</sup> The analysis used the search term “climate change” to review media coverage from the past year (June 2020 - June 2021). The resulting dataset consisted of 71 articles from the three publications.

Across the three media outlets, climate change was presented neutrally as a scientific fact, and featured voices of both proponents and opponents of climate action. Articles primarily focused on decision-makers and governmental responses to climate change, as well as energy sector and infrastructure news stories. The top themes that emerged from the analysis of climate-related coverage were policy and the Global Warming Solutions Act in particular, energy transition, seasonal shifts in the weather impacting agriculture and local ecology.

The Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) was a frequent focus of the climate change media coverage, which closely followed the legislative process, especially the Gubernatorial veto of the bill and veto override. Rep. Brian Smith (R- Derby) was quoted as saying “I voted no because I will have no part of cheating my Northeast Kingdom constituents out of their hard-earned paychecks” whereas Majority Leader Jill Krowinski (D-Burlington) asserted that “(The bill) creates a strong and effective path to cut pollution and will increase climate resilience for all of our communities”.<sup>3</sup> Media attention on the work of the Vermont Climate Council has been less frequent following the passage of the GWSA.

Local, state and federal elections were regular features with coverage of nominee positions related to climate change.<sup>4</sup> For example, a profile of Burlington Mayoral Progressive nominee Max Tracy featured a quote expressing that rooting out systemic racism and addressing climate change “in a much more rapid and furious way” will be hallmarks of his campaign.<sup>5</sup> Following the election, there was attention on the climate protest at the State of the State address. Protesters interrupted Gov. Phil Scott's address with chants of “Climate collapse means starvation in Vermont!” and “I’m afraid I’m going to die!”<sup>6</sup>

Issues surrounding an energy transition for Vermont revolved around the transformation of the state’s energy sector, grid limitations, energy storage devices, and the potential for a clean energy future. In response to a waste-to-energy plant, coverage described the reluctance of renewable energy advocates to add new sources when “Vermont's ambitious climate goals require a sweeping transformation of the state's energy sector. They say the persistent grid limitations underscore just how far the Green Mountain State remains from embracing a clean energy future.”<sup>7</sup> There was also a question around economic savings and backup power during extreme weather events,

<sup>2</sup> [Top 10 Vermont Daily Newspapers by Circulation](#) Agility PR Solutions

<sup>3</sup> [Vermont House Approves a Key Climate Bill](#) Seven Days

<sup>4</sup> [Major party candidates for Vermont governor: Who they are and where they stand](#) Burlington Free Press

<sup>5</sup> [Pine, Tracy to Seek Progressive Nomination for Burlington Mayor](#) Seven Days

<sup>6</sup> [Climate Activists Disrupt Scott's State of the State Address](#) Seven Days

<sup>7</sup> [Grid Block: Vermont's Aging Transmission Network Can't Keep Pace With Green Power Projects](#) Seven Days



“The state's largest utility says it saved its customers about \$3 million this year by using a network of energy storage devices, including Tesla batteries in homes and solar sites, to cut demand during energy peaks, especially during the hot, dry summer.”<sup>8</sup>

Seasonal shifts as they related to agriculture and ecology in the state was another key focus, with stories on the need for crops that are drought resilient and tolerant of heavy precipitation to withstand extreme weather and therefore useful for both climate change adaptation and mitigation.<sup>9</sup> Changes in weather trends were noted in the media as hotter than normal temperatures were experienced across Vermont and there was less surface ice on Lake Champlain due to the mild winter. Coverage of these changes included a call from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation asking residents to engage in citizen science and report when the state's lakes and ponds lose their ice cover, thus tracking the effects of climate change in Vermont.<sup>10</sup>



## Section Three: Audience Analysis

### IDENTIFYING ENGAGEMENT GOALS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The team met with each of the Climate Council subcommittees (Agriculture and Ecosystems, Cross-Sector Mitigation, Just Transitions, Rural Resilience and Adaptation, and Science and Data) to facilitate conversations about the public engagement process' goals and target stakeholder sectors, groups, and individuals. Those meetings generated the following list of 33 sectors and 325 individual stakeholder contacts. The [stakeholders list](#) was further refined in collaboration with the Just Transitions Subcommittee to identify roundtable and interview invitations. The stakeholders list will continue to be a useful tool for connecting with groups throughout the public engagement process.

<sup>8</sup> [Green Mountain Power says Tesla batteries and more saved customers \\$3 million in 2020](#) Burlington Free Press

<sup>9</sup> [Vermont Farmer-Researchers Explore the Potential of Perennial Vegetables](#) Seven Days

<sup>10</sup> [Ice is melting in Vermont and scientists want to know about it. Here's how to report](#) Burlington Free Press

Abenaki Communities	Education	LGBTQIA+ community
Agriculture (non-dairy)	Energy	Migrant farmworkers
Artists	Environmental Communication	Mobile home communities
BIPOC Communities	Environmental Justice	Motorized recreation
BIPOC farm and land	Environmental Law	Outdoor workers
Business	Farmer Association	Public health
Community Development	Forestry	Racial Justice
Conservation/Environment	Fuel Dealers	Rural Outreach
Construction	Housing Advocacy	Ski Industry
Dairy	Hunters/Anglers	Small Business
Disability Rights	Indigenous community	Youth
Ecology	Industrial Operations	
Ecology	Landowners	

The team engaged 37 individuals during Phase One, including conducting a roundtable discussion with 11 BIPOC leaders, and a roundtable discussion with 10 sector leaders, as well as 16 interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders. Thus far, 15 individuals have requested to receive \$100 stipends to honor their time. The Phase One stakeholder participant list is below, organized by sector:

SECTOR	NAME	AFFILIATION	OUTREACH METHOD
Abenaki Community	Fred Wiseman	Wobanakik Heritage Center	Interview
Agriculture	Grace Oedel	NOFA VT	Interview
Art	Rachel Wilson	Building Fearless Futures	BIPOC roundtable
Asian Community	Boebin Park	Asian Pacific American Law Student Association- Vermont Law School	BIPOC roundtable
BIPOC farm and land	Ana Mejia	ReLeaf Collective	BIPOC roundtable
Business	Jenna Evans	Ben & Jerry's	Interview
Business leader	Policy Manager	VT Businesses for Social Responsibility	Interview
Community Development	Paul Costello	VT Council on Rural Development	Interview
Community Organizing	Shaina Kasper	Community Action Works	Interview
Construction	Matt Musgrave	Association of General Contractors	Sector roundtable
Dairy	Mary Ellen Franklin	Vermont Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program	Interview
Disability Rights	Deborah Lisi-Baker	Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights	Interview

Ecology	Sung-Hee Chung	Forestill Foundation, Inc.	BIPOC roundtable
Educator/Youth	Mariah Keagy	Vermont Energy Education Program	Sector roundtable
Energy	Lisa Cline	Renewable Energy VT	Sector roundtable
Environment	Vanessa Rule	350 VT	Sector roundtable
Environmental Communication	Nina Ridhibhinyo	ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain	Sector roundtable
Environmental Justice	Bindu Pannikar	University of Vermont	BIPOC roundtable
Environmental Law	Jameson Davis	VT Renew BIPOC Advisory Council	BIPOC roundtable
Forestry	Colleen Goodridge	Goodridge Lumber	Sector roundtable
Housing Advocacy	Sandrine Kibuey	Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity and VNAAC	BIPOC roundtable
Hunters/Anglers	Matt Breton	Vermont Fish and Wildlife Conservation Group	Interview
Abenaki Community	Rich Holschuch	Atowi Project	BIPOC roundtable
Abenaki Community	Chief Don Stevens	Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe	BIPOC roundtable
Land Conservation	Jessica LaPorte	Every Town	Interview
Landowners	Lisa Sausville	Vermont Coverts	Sector roundtable
LGBTQIA+ community	Taylor Small	Pride Center of VT	Sector roundtable
Local Government	Elaine Wang	Town of Barre	BIPOC roundtable
Migrant Farm workers	Marita Canedo	Migrant Justice	Interview
Mobile Home Communities	Kay Curtis	Tri-Park Board	Interview
Outdoor Workers	Sam Perron	North Woods Center	Sector roundtable
Public Health	Steve Maier	Vermont's Free & Referral Clinics	Interview
Public health	Dr. Beth Sigmund	Vermont Climate and Health Alliance	Sector roundtable
Racial Justice	Mia Shultz	NAACP of Rutland	BIPOC roundtable
Racial Justice	Xusana Davis	State of Vermont	Interview
Rural Outreach	Carey Crozier	NEK Collaborative	Interview
Small Business	Morgan Nichols	Main Street Alliance	Interview



## AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

The project team asked roundtable participants and interviewees what concerned them most about climate change and the type of solutions they would like to see incorporated into the Climate Action Plan. The best ways to communicate with and engage different stakeholders in the planning process was also discussed in depth. This information helped shape the framing and engagement recommendations outlined in this plan.

### *Climate Concerns Identified by Phase One Stakeholders*

1. **Equity: the uneven burden of climate impacts and lack of access to solutions for Vermonters with less financial resources.** Many participants expressed deep concern about how climate change is disproportionately affecting people with less financial resources. Here are some of the equity concerns that were expressed:

#### **Access to basic needs.**

- ▶ Those with lower incomes and farmworks often have housing that is not weatherized or resilient to extreme weather. Lower income Vermonters already struggle with energy bills and are not in a position to heat or cool more in response to extreme weather events.
- ▶ There is a lot of housing insecurity with low-income people being displaced. Rents are increasing and many jobs don't pay a living wage that allows access to good housing. Houselessness and unstable housing for the LGBTQIA+ community is another concern that will be exacerbated by climate change.
- ▶ Migration into the state by predominantly wealthy white people is pushing up land costs making it challenging for many Vermonters to buy land and have access to housing. It is also threatening agriculture with land facing development pressures as it becomes more expensive to farm. This can result in food deserts in rural areas, loss of food self-sufficiency, and food insecurity.
- ▶ Power loss due to extreme weather can affect food security for people who keep extensive food stores in chest freezers.
- ▶ The remoteness of the state means there is a reliance on car transport for access to basic needs and employment.

*"The wealth divide permeates so many issues- what are the main concerns of someone who needs to go to a cooling space vs. someone who is leading a medium or large-scale business."*

#### **Structural racism can compound the effects of climate change on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Vermont.**

- ▶ Concerns were expressed regarding the ways in which Indigenous sovereignty might be affected by climate change.
- ▶ Given the disparities that already exist, there are questions regarding how to

- ensure that BIPOC people have access to land, clean air, and clean water.
- ▶ BIPOC people in Vermont are disproportionately renters (vs. homeowners) so all housing-related climate impacts can impact them more intensely.
- ▶ Many BIPOC communities have clear ideas for solutions but don't have the power to allocate the resources to make it happen and are not listened to by the State government. BIPOC people experience racism when trying to participate in public processes and decision-making. *"You have to have a backbone of steel to show up at town meetings etc. because the gatekeepers are almost always white, and uphold white supremacy culture and process."*
- ▶ Farmworkers are already experiencing the stress of toxic exposure (pesticides and agrochemicals), poor living conditions, high dust levels in barns, lack of PPE, social isolation, and immigration enforcement. All of these challenges could worsen with climate change.
- ▶ Lack of language access to information and solutions is a major barrier.

*"Often when there is a crisis, it's the people who are marginalized and not truly understood to be a part of the community, that are most likely to be vulnerable to not having a sense of being equally cared for or equally protected when we are in the middle of a shared crisis- and climate change represents a shared crisis"*

#### **Many Vermonters feel climate solutions are inaccessible and/or will harm some stakeholders.**

- ▶ People are worried that climate change will cost people money they don't have to respond to impacts. Similarly, access to climate solutions such as electric vehicles and solar power is something that is wanted yet feels out of reach for those struggling to get by and working-class people. Those who rent have limited decision-making and resources to participate.
- ▶ Solutions tend to be scaled for larger businesses, institutions, or wealthier Vermonters- such as solar and EV incentives and other climate protective technologies. Small businesses can not generate demand for climate protective measures. Renters have limited decision-making and often resources to dedicate to solutions.
- ▶ Issues were raised regarding the ways in which an energy transition would impact those in the energy sector and large energy users such as agriculture.
- ▶ There is a hesitancy among some lower-income homeowners to have a contractor come in their house due to concerns about unexpected fees, other problems being revealed including the need to condemn a home.

#### **People with existing health conditions and disabilities are more at risk from climate change.**

- ▶ Vermonters with disabilities should not just be seen as an important group to plan to support but instead also need to be part of actively defining and deciding on climate solutions. For people with certain disabilities or medical conditions, loss of power to a respirator or refrigeration and a lack

of air conditioning can be life-threatening. Emergency centers are often not accessible to this community.

- ▶ Older Vermonters who can't afford AC are more vulnerable during a heat event.
- ▶ People with health concerns who are uninsured are also more at risk as well as low-income Vermonters who face challenges accessing and affording medication.
- ▶ Those living in more densely populated parts of the state will be more impacted by air pollution and urban heat than rural communities.
- ▶ The impact of fossil fuel pollution was also raised as a concern and the disproportionate impacts it delivers to those with health issues, low-income, and BIPOC Vermonters.
- ▶ Climate change induces anxiety and youth, in particular, are experiencing fear and lack of trust, apathy, and anger.

## **2. The Impact of Climate Change on the Environment, Farms, Forests and Outdoor Recreation.** There is widespread concern regarding the ways in which extreme weather and other climate change impacts will affect Vermont's landscapes and natural systems.

### **Agriculture is already experiencing the impacts of climate change.**

- ▶ Uneven distribution of climate impacts around the state, changes in agricultural hardiness zones, and threats to soil health as well as a decline in pollinators are some of the major issues.
- ▶ Cost of new equipment and approaches to respond to climate impacts such as the need to purchase watering equipment.
- ▶ The challenge of addressing both flooding and drought.
- ▶ Climate change is already adversely affecting the maple sugar industry.

### **Vermont's forests and ecosystems and industries that rely on them are at risk.**

- ▶ There are multiple stresses on forests that impact the forest products supply chain. Invasive species and pests in forests are also on the rise.
- ▶ Recreation and tourism are being impacted i.e the ski industry by extreme weather, warmer temperatures and less snow.
- ▶ Pockets of plants that were important historically to Abenaki may be threatened by climate change.
- ▶ Animals are moving out of their usual habitats which is a sign that something is wrong.
- ▶ Water pollution is already an issue and linked to undrinkable water, algae blooms and fish die-offs.
- ▶ Ticks, invasive species, and pollen levels are all on the rise. Ticks impact moose populations and moose hunting.
- ▶ Natural springs are not accessible to the community.



**3. Lack of trust in state government or resistance to new regulations is an issue with some Vermonters.** Some worry the Climate Action Plan won't go far enough while others worry it will go too far.

- ▶ Some communities don't want more regulations.
- ▶ State government tends to favor incremental change, which is comfortable from a policy and economic perspective yet not commensurate with the scale of the challenge or in keeping with the level of ambition outlined in the Global Warming Solutions Act. There is also concern that the government will embrace false solutions.
- ▶ Concern regarding the state adopting unrealistic strategies where technologies are not yet available or reliable and not considering the economic impact on different Vermonters or limitations it would place on different practices such as forestry, farming, hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation and practices.
- ▶ People in positions of power are secure in their access to land. If they need to rebuild or move they can, which can result in less motivation to take drastic action.
- ▶ Public meetings in State policy are not very accessible, friendly, or structured in a way that sustains engagement from those who are not paid advocates.

**4. Concerns regarding the impacts of and preparation for climate migration.** There is concern that Vermont is not prepared to handle migration to the state which people anticipate will only intensify with climate change.

- ▶ Land costs are increasing as more people move to the state, making it more difficult to access land and maintain local food systems.
- ▶ Many roundtable participants and interviewees expressed the need to become accepting, welcoming, and accommodating of newcomers who are pushed here because of the climate crisis.
- ▶ Climate change is one of the major reasons that migrant farmworkers are already coming to Vermont to work.
- ▶ There is a worry that there is already a lack of infrastructure to support existing as well as increased population influx from climate migration and people feel now is the time to start planning and building for it now. As climate change worsens, people are concerned there will be fighting over resources.

*"No one is separate, the experience of climate change in VT in part comes from refugees who had to leave their home due to climate change. The way we live our life here affects the climates and quality of life of people in different parts of the country, Vermont and the world. The world is very small in terms of how we affect each other."*

**5. The way in which the problem of climate change is defined affects how we will try to solve the problem.**

- ▶ Dominant societal values are framed in terms of success, wealth, and individualism which are at odds with what needs to be prioritized to address climate change.
- ▶ The way the climate change agenda is set up does not reflect Indigenous perspectives or knowledge.
- ▶ Climate change is a spiritual problem. Our souls and spirits are being impacted. The land affects us and we affect the land and white supremacy separates people from that relationship.
- ▶ The politicization of climate change could cause people to reject the solutions proposed in the Climate Action Plan.
- ▶ Over-emphasizing individual lifestyle choices places too much of the burden there when corporations are disproportionately responsible for environmental impacts and systemic solutions are needed.
- ▶ The enormity of the problem and scale and pace of the change needed is difficult to process and comfort with incremental change is a barrier.
- ▶ Not everyone understands the issue, its relevance to their lives, impacts of their actions, and how they can engage in solutions.

*“Vermont can make a difference. We’re a small state where we can make things happen that can be scaled up as an example for other states.”*

## **Climate Solutions Identified by Phase One Stakeholders**

**1. Equitable approach to planning.** Vermonters want their diverse experiences and points of view represented in a plan that offers accessible solutions and protection from uneven impacts.

- ▶ Planning needs to include a diversity of stakeholders and perspectives. People want to engage in a conversation with those responsible for creating the plan and see their views and ideas expressed in it.
- ▶ The plan must consider the impact of the solutions proposed on low-income Vermonters and address their needs.
- ▶ The diversity of disability experience is important to incorporate. Infrastructure projects should anticipate diverse needs and offer disability-related support and accommodations.
- ▶ Community members need investment and agency. There should be room to influence the solutions to prioritize and how resources are being allocated. the money is spent and what solutions to advance.
- ▶ The process should include buses to the events, continued voting by mail options to ensure those who face transportation or internet access limitations can participate.

**2. Vermonters want a just energy transition.** Ensuring access to solutions was raised as a critical issue for consideration.

- ▶ Relying less on imported energy was mentioned as a solution to advance as well as moving away from fossil fuels.
- ▶ Investments need to be made in employee development and job training in clean energy and low-carbon sectors.
- ▶ Considering the impacts of solutions on BIPOC communities is an important priority
- ▶ Energy options that reduce utility bills and /or providing rebates for low-income Vermonters should be a focus
- ▶ The grid infrastructure needs to be fixed and expanded.

**3. Food security and sustainable consumption.** Climate-friendly agriculture, improved food access, and strong local food systems that feed all Vermonters are a priority as well as promoting more sustainable consumption of goods and services.

- ▶ Incentivize climate-friendly food systems and agricultural practices including move away from fossil fuel use.
- ▶ Building local food security and home gardens and traditional foodways.
- ▶ Reduce waste, reduce energy and resource use with an emphasis on high consumers.
- ▶ Make it easier for Vermonters to identify climate and environmentally friendly consumer goods and services including reuse, repair, and sharing. Incentivize doing the right thing or make it economically viable and worth the time to do it.

**4. Land management and carbon sequestration.** Forestry, conservation, and land management solutions.

- ▶ Promote land management and ecosystem solutions that are climate protective. Strategies for compensating farmers for climate-friendly practices are a much-needed element of advancing action in this area.
- ▶ Farming, building, plant medicine, hunting, fishing, conservation, and other skills need to increase.
- ▶ Practices that connect with the land to our souls and spirits.
- ▶ Solutions that allow for a range of land practices and use.



## ***Climate Framing and Messaging Insights from Phase One Stakeholders***

- ▶ Emphasize people who are most impacted due to economic status or social identities. Demonstrate the immediate benefits of climate action to their lives.
- ▶ Sector-differentiated framing is key.
- ▶ Be clear about benefits and costs at the household or small business level and pathways for accessing proposed solutions.
- ▶ Avoid polarization. Don't make the plan sound like a liberal agenda. Concern over extreme weather is something many share as well as interest in access to solutions. Ensure low-income Vermonters are not harmed by and ideally will benefit from the Climate Action Plan.
- ▶ Talk about it in a way that connects to people's concerns and address how changes being proposed will not be barriers for those trying to survive.
- ▶ There needs to be more education regarding the intersections of environmental justice. Not just how climate change and economics are connected but also around the ways in which climate migration and gentrification affect low-income and BIPOC folks versus affluent and white people.
- ▶ Communications must be in plain English and easy to read, engaging for a diversity of reading skills and ways of learning and translated into all dominant languages in the state.
- ▶ Focus on what our shared experience will be and make it as human as possible. Be empowering and emphasize changes that improve quality of life.
- ▶ Start conversations with something Vermonters share and value. For example, working lands are a basis of what Vermonters value yet be sensitive to the fact not all Vermonters value or want the same things.
- ▶ Avoid being prescriptive or coming across as elitist. Begin with personal experiences and respect lived experience. Be mindful of telling people what they should care about and acknowledge their values.
- ▶ Don't get too technical. Instead, present people with clear options and focus on the core elements.
- ▶ Amplify solutions that are exciting to people such as complete streets, or access energy security particularly during extreme weather events. Emphasize opportunities with carbon storage and sequestration, carbon markets.
- ▶ Make it personal such as communicating the health impacts.
- ▶ People want to know the risks they should be planning for, the tools and resources they should be aware of, how to get involved with the planning process, and how input will be used.
- ▶ Weatherization information is needed for renters.

## ***Climate Engagement Recommendations from Phase One Stakeholders***

### **GENERAL GUIDANCE**

#### **Use Trusted Channels and Existing Networks**

- ▶ Meet people where they are. Don't make folks come to you but go where people are already gathering and plug into existing networks, farmers markets, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) meeting halls, faith group gatherings, school events. Work with trusted people who are already organizing with different communities.
- ▶ The best channels are the ones that people already use. Local newspapers are important for some, hearing from their Chief will be important for others, Facebook or TikTok might be best for another group
- ▶ Set up daisy chain consultations, where a few from each group help find and help consult the next group. Compensate people for their time.

#### **Be Willing to Listen**

- ▶ There should be some dialogue in the meeting.
- ▶ Be prepared to have a difficult conversation about the cost of solutions and how it will impact low-income Vermonters.
- ▶ Go softly and ask people what they need. Don't go at them from a place of authority – don't talk at them, listen.

#### **Highlight how Climate Change Affects People in Their Daily Lives**

- ▶ Break it down. How is heat or drought affecting people?
- ▶ Talk about potential solutions to housing insecurity, food insecurity, the rising cost of childcare, affordable healthcare, job creation with livable wages, etc. rather than leading with climate change.
- ▶ Work with people who disagree, but can connect about a shared situation like something that threatens the health of your community.

#### **Talk to Those Most Impacted and Create Inclusive Respectful Spaces**

- ▶ Be careful not to set up a conversation that may not be a safe space for BIPOC individuals.
- ▶ Don't be over technical. Be regionally specific, recognize local expertise, culturally competent messages that acknowledge community concerns, and provide language interpretation.
- ▶ Be aware of rural internet issues.
- ▶ Create open, public events with a diversity of participants so no one group is felt left out or put on the spot.
- ▶ Engage with frontline environmental stewards and underrepresented groups.

## **Make Engagement and Information Accessible**

- ▶ Ensure adequate and timely translation of materials and work with trusted people who are already organizing with different stakeholders to share information..
- ▶ Find convenient times for in-person meetings and offer written and online options.
- ▶ Identify and overcome barriers to engagement including for low income Vermonters.
- ▶ Sustained engagement should support the lives of those who are showing up, if not with money then at least with childcare and food.

## **Offer a Real Sense of Agency**

- ▶ Be able to demonstrate that community voices aren't just going into a void where nothing happens with them. Communities need to see that the policymakers are accountable to community voices
- ▶ Take community expertise seriously and express that by being transparent about how input will be used and shared.
- ▶ Go beyond local concerns and solutions. Illustrate how climate change is impacting other parts of the US and the world and solutions being adopted.
- ▶ Increasing education to the public about how to participate in and influence local, and state policy on these issues is an important part of the process.
- ▶ Focus on solutions and link to programs that help people.

## **Suggested Communication Channels**

- Local papers, VT Digger and radio are key for reaching everyone.
- Front Porch Forum.
- Direct mail and flyers for distribution at libraries and community hubs.
- Social media.
- Connect with businesses and big employers like UVM and the sugaring and ski industries.
- Celebrity outreach.
- On-line teach-ins and forums.

## **Others to Invite to Partner on Outreach**

- 4H, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts
- Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions
- Cooperative Jackson
- County and State Fairs
- Engineers Construction
- Food Not Bombs & People's Kitchen
- Organize a session with AALLV, Migrant Justice, etc.
- Public schools



- REJOICE and some of the project partners
- Releaf's membership
- Rotary Clubs
- Shift Meals
- SUSU commUNITY Farm
- The Vermont New Americans Advisory Council and CVOEO
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants - Vermont
- Vermont Association of Snow Travellers
- Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
- Vermont Center for Independent Living
- Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights
- Vermont Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
- Vermont Forest Industry Network
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Vermont Natural Resources Council
- Vermont Public Interest Research Group
- Vermont Professionals of Color Network
- Vermont Sugar Makers Association
- VNRC and the Climate Coalition
- Women's Justice and Freedom Initiative

## **GUIDANCE FOR TAILORING OUTREACH FOR DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS**

### **Vermonters with Disabilities**

- ▶ Work with trusted networks such as Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights through emails, social media, alert systems, networked communication channels, and network events. People with disabilities should be part of creating solutions, not just getting support.
- ▶ Offer a combination of public and dedicated affinity spaces for people to share their input in a safe space.
- ▶ Be aware of the Statewide independent living council's work on the emergency preparedness toolkit.
- ▶ Recognize that for many people climate change is in relation to the climate crisis in terms of how it affects everyday life, safety, wellbeing, and access to essential services.
- ▶ Emergency preparedness is a big concern

### **Vermonters with Low-Income**

- ▶ Offer food, childcare, and stipends at meetings
- ▶ Be clear about how this is relevant to people's everyday life
- ▶ Work with trusted networks and messengers

## **Abenaki and Indigenous Vermonters**

- ▶ Work with established trusted partners.
- ▶ Emphasize indigenous climate resiliency.
- ▶ Abenaki communities often feel dismissed or left behind in these kinds of processes
- ▶ People need to be hired to do the jobs asked of them. So simply stated, Abenaki need full-time employment to represent their interests properly.
- ▶ Be clear about what is in it for Abenaki communities.
- ▶ Recognize a lot of Indigenous folks have bigger issues to contend with in their day-to-day lives.
- ▶ Understand the history of Indigenous people being used as tools to promote a Euro Settler agenda.
- ▶ Present the issue non politically as Abenaki communities are very politically diverse.
- ▶ Connecting with both leaders of these communities and members of the communities who may not yet be engaged. Partner with Echo Center that has deep trust and respect with Abenaki communities.
- ▶ In-person listening session meeting with food, stipends, and a sense of community, preferably on a weekend. Offer support to elders. Understand geographic difficulty and plan far in advance.
- ▶ Keep in mind the most important people who hold the most traditional ecological knowledge might be wary, busy, distracted, and politically conservative.

## **BIPOC Vermonters**

- ▶ Emphasize agency to make change.
- ▶ Use trusted channels.
- ▶ Create affinity spaces that are culturally sustaining.
- ▶ Offer stipends for participation.

## **Migrant Farmworkers**

- ▶ Offer information in Spanish that is accessible and use social media.
- ▶ Use groups and assemblies that work directly with farmworkers to disseminate information including migrant justice, migrant clinics, and ally organizations.
- ▶ Invite workers to spaces to talk about the issues and be clear about the structure of their engagement.
- ▶ Offer stipends or gathering opportunities that include activities that people will enjoy.
- ▶ Link migration to the climate crisis.
- ▶ WhatsApp and Facebook are good places to disseminate information through trusted organizers.
- ▶ Farmworkers have very intense and demanding schedules.

## **Those who speak languages other than English as their primary language**

- ▶ Using translators and translated materials in outreach efforts.

- ▶ Attending meetings with cultural/language groups where information is presented in the dominant language of the group.
- ▶ Do specific outreach to communities with trusted partners.

### **People who have limited access to the internet/computers**

- ▶ Offer in-person meetings and paper surveys.
- ▶ Make sure that marketing of events and engagement opportunities happens through the mail, print media, and other accessible channels.

### **Youth**

- ▶ Use social media channels that are used and frequented by youth (i.e. TikTok).
- ▶ Use positive framing that emphasizes their agency in making a difference on this issue.

### **Agriculture**

- ▶ The timing for engagement is tough. Place an emphasis on joining on-farm events or conferences being planned by agricultural organizations and networks.
- ▶ Tailor engagement for conventional dairy farmers such as a sector-specific event. Focus on listening to their concerns with an emphasis on economic impacts and benefits. Find the leaders within the Dairy community that people respect and ask if they can get them to talk to neighbors and fellow dairy farmers.

### **Business Community**

- ▶ Recognize that many businesses are continuing to suffer because of COVID-19 and are often understaffed and facing workforce challenges.
- ▶ Provide information on what's available to business owners, such as tax credits, rebates and incentives. Small (and particularly micro-businesses of fewer than 5 employees), want to be as "green" as possible, but are concerned about what solutions will mean for their bottom line.

### **Environmental Sector**

- ▶ Work with environmental and climate networks and organizations to engage their stakeholders in the climate action planning process and spread the word about the process to others.

### **Outdoor Recreation**

- ▶ Work with coalitions and associations of hunting, fishing, motorized vehicle groups to spread the word about the planning process and invite their members to participate. Provide an information package and notice of events as early as possible recognizing the fall is a key outdoor time.
- ▶ Engage the ski industry in the planning process.

## Section Four: Framing

When developing the framing approach, Climate Access and Rise Consulting identified five framing principles for Vermont's Climate Action Plan communication and outreach process.

1. **Be inclusive by meeting people where they are at.** Start from a place of listening and connect with people's existing concerns and interests.
2. **Convey issue relevance, not technical details.** Most people don't need or want all of the in-depth information. Translate complex concepts into accessible language and format.
3. **Position the need for action in the near term and future.** Describe how short-term and long-term strategies will reduce climate threats and improve quality of life.
4. **Bridge from impacts to solutions.** Balance the scale of the threat that climate change poses with the advantages that solutions can bring.
5. **Illustrate the benefits of bold action.** Emphasize that now is the time to address this urgent challenge and move forward with ambitious solutions.

Using this approach and analyzing the findings from the Phase One stakeholder outreach activities, the team identified the key **challenges, choices and opportunities** faced by Vermonters at this critical juncture. This top-level framing will be used to shape the collateral for the public engagement campaign and will be tailored for different segments of the to help connect around different interests and needs.



## CHALLENGE:

**Climate Change is affecting all Vermonters and the impacts are uneven**

*Hotter temperatures, flooding and storms are harming people, communities, and the environment. Some face more risks than others based on income, health, age, race, language, and occupation.*

## CHOICE:

**We can come together to create a bold and equitable climate action plan**

*The State of Vermont is creating a plan to cut climate pollution and prepare for the impacts of a changing climate. Every Vermonter has a role to play by weighing in on the plan and taking action in their lives and communities.*

## OPPORTUNITY:

**A resilient, thriving, and just future for Vermont**

*Vermonters want to take action to prepare for flooding and extreme weather, access to clean energy and low carbon jobs, and to play a leadership role in tackling the climate emergency. Vermont's Climate Action Plan is the vehicle to get us there.*

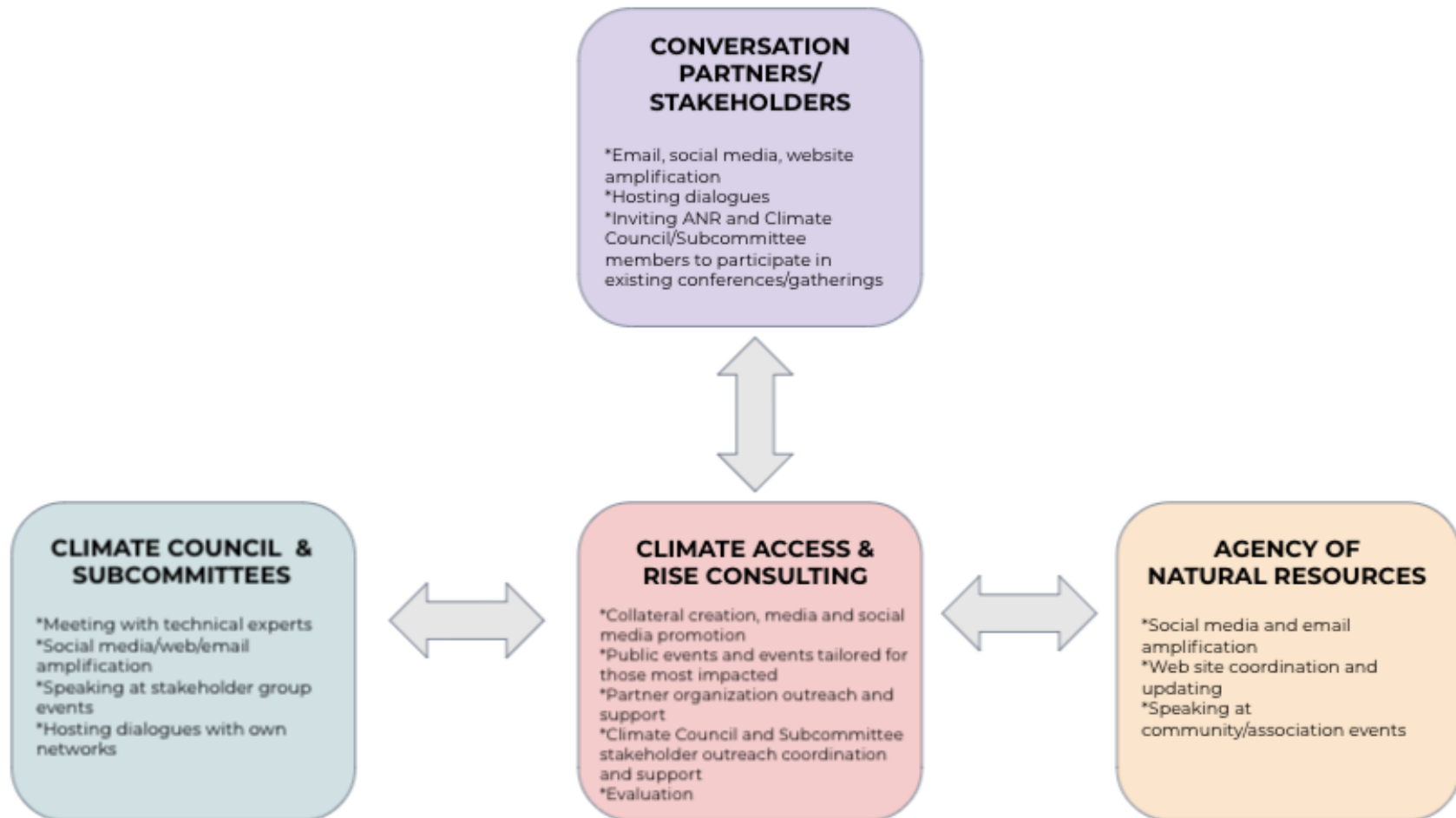


## Section Five: Engagement Strategies

Climate Access and Rise Consulting identified five key components of the public engagement approach:

1. **Co-explore risks and responses versus prescribing.** Engage in dialogue around what climate change means for individuals to capture concerns and information on the risks that communities are facing.
2. **Public Input on Solutions.** Respect and incorporate local concerns, knowledge, and innovation. While solutions need to be based on the best available science, public input helps prioritize and reveal local strategies.
3. **Partner with diverse communities and resource existing community leadership.** Work with trusted organizations and individuals identified during Phase One of the public engagement process to expand outreach to wider networks.
4. **Eliminate barriers to participation.** Provide tools, materials, and stipends to facilitate involvement and honor people's time.
5. **Focus on equitable solutions.** Address community needs of those most impacted & deliver tangible benefits.

Climate Access and Rise Consulting will work closely with the Agency of Natural Resources on the development and distribution of materials, web and social media content and will partner with the Climate Council and subcommittees and partner organizations to engage a diverse range of stakeholders across the state in the planning process.



## Section Six: Public Engagement Timeline

The public engagement plan consists of four stages that will be completed from August 2021 to March 2022: public engagement preparation, public engagement in the development of the Climate Action Plan, public comment promotion for the initial Climate Action Plan, and final plan release. At the end of the process, there will be an evaluation of the public engagement process.

### **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PREPARATION AND TARGETED STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH** **August-September 2021**

#### **Social media campaign (Aug-Sept)**

- ▶ Develop messages for key stakeholders, set a content calendar, and create copy for posts and stories.
- ▶ Produce promotion strategy to target and connect with target audiences including paid social media. Determine whether to use a portion of the paid social media budget for advertising in local papers and/or radio.

#### **Website strategy (Aug-Sept)**

- ▶ Create a content strategy with information architecture recommendations and produce copy based on the “challenge, choice, opportunity” frame.
- ▶ Outline the stages where content will be added and the web functionality expanded.

#### **Outreach materials (Aug-Sept)**

- ▶ Develop a summary of climate impacts and how it affects Vermont, an overview of the planning process and how to get involved and distillation of the pathways for each sub-committee as well as action guide outlining steps Vermonters can take to cut climate pollution and prepare for impacts.
- ▶ Produce infographics for the above materials, website and social media, and web banners to promote events, the survey, and the online education and engagement platform.
- ▶ Create a presentation deck and guide for facilitating public dialogues that will be used by Climate Access and Rise in the public events described below as well as by ANR and Climate Council and sub-committees members in additive outreach.
- ▶ Press release announcing the launch of the public engagement and public event dates and media backgrounder on the planning process and ways to get involved.
- ▶ Toolkits to support community events
  - ▷ Paper Surveys
  - ▷ Posters

- ▷ Event planning / dialogue guides
- ▷ Promotional materials
- ▶ ANR will work with state agencies with translation services to translate materials into the following languages Nepali, Arabic, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Kirundi, Burmese, Maay Maay, and Tiếng Việt.

#### **Targeted Stakeholder Outreach (Aug-Sept)**

- ▶ ANR and CBI will work with sub-committees to organize dialogues with stakeholders who sub-committees identify as being important to engage directly in their work due to specific technical or sector knowledge.
- ▶ Climate Access and Rise Consulting will reach out to organizations on the stakeholder list to identify upcoming events ANR, the Climate Council and sub-committee members can attend to talk about and get input on the Climate Action Plan. An [event calendar](#) will be created and the team will work with ANR and CBI to identify representatives from the planning process to attend and will help ANR, Climate Council and sub-committee members prepare as needed (i.e. tailoring presentation decks, creating materials and talking points).

### **INITIAL CLIMATE ACTION PLAN: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

**September – October 2021**

#### **Social Media Campaign (Sept-Oct)**

- ▶ Implement social media strategy in partnership with ANR and amplify with partner organizations.

#### **Online Survey (Sept-Oct)**

- ▶ Create and field an online survey to gauge climate concerns, gain input on the strategies to prioritize and identify missing alternatives.
- ▶ Work with ANR to host the survey on the VT climate change website and publicize.
- ▶ Promote via social media and partners.
- ▶ Summarize findings

#### **Stakeholder Events (Sept-Oct)**

- ▶ Climate Access and Rise Consulting will design and facilitate three online public focus groups, one of which will be an Affinity Space for BIPOC Vermonters. The team will work with ANR to publicize events on the website, social media, email and via other state agencies and will send out invitations via partner groups. These will be dialogue events where participants are broken into small groups to discuss concerns regarding climate impacts and weigh in on potential strategies to include in the plan. Climate Access and Rise will draw from the Vermont Climate Assessment and the pathways being developed by the sub-committees to shape the content for the discussions. Feedback will be gathered during the small group discussions and an online survey used at the end to gain additional insights.
- ▶ Climate Access and Rise will design and facilitate four in-person geographically dispersed peer-to-peer dialogue events to discuss climate risks of most concern and



strategies to prioritize. The team will work with ANR to identify the best locations to hold the events and organizations in the regions that can help host and publicize events. Participants will have an opportunity to explore and share concerns about climate impacts and weigh in on strategic pathways for the Climate Action Plan. Feedback from small group discussions will be gathered and participants given an opportunity to fill out an online or paper survey at the end.

- ▶ Dialogue findings will be summarized in report backs to sub-committees.
- ▶ Identify speaking opportunities for ANR, Climate Council and subcommittee members at association, organization and community events. Create an event calendar and work with ANR and CBI to coordinate and support involvement in community events.
- ▶ ANR and CBI will continue to work with sub-committees on outreach to targeted stakeholders with key insights for sub-committee work. Feedback from these meetings will be summarized by CBI and shared with sub-committees within a few days of the events.

#### **Partner Support (Sept-Oct)**

- ▶ Reach out to the stakeholders who were interviewed and participated in the roundtables as well as to the list of 325 stakeholders co-created by Climate Access, Rise Consulting, ANR, the Climate Council and subcommittees to ask if they can play a role in sharing information about the Climate Action Plan process and the various ways to get involved, if there are upcoming events that we can send a representative from ANR, the Climate Council or subcommittees to engage around the Climate Action Plan or if they would like to host their own event with support from the consulting team and ANR.
- ▶ Provide support to partner organizations hosting dialogue events for their networks, including tailored toolkit materials, event promotion materials and forms for gathering feedback.
- ▶ Offer stipends to partner organizations that would otherwise not be able to participate in sharing information regarding the Climate Action Plan and public engagement opportunities via email, social media, websites and events.

#### **Summary of Findings (Sept-Oct)**

- ▶ Summary of public engagement data from the survey, stakeholder events, and social media performance to outline key concerns and priorities. Share and discuss the implications of the findings for the Climate Action Plan priorities with sub-committees.

### **INITIAL CLIMATE ACTION PLAN: PLAN AND PUBLIC COMMENT PROMOTION** **December 2021-Jan 2022**

#### **Initial Plan Launch (Dec)**

- ▶ Produce a public-facing summary of the plan, draft a press release, media backgrounder, and talking points.
- ▶ Produce promotional materials for email and social media.

### **Social Media Campaign (Dec-Jan)**

- ▶ Implement social media strategy, including partner amplification.

### **Website Promotion (Dec-Jan)**

- ▶ Update the website to align with Climate Action Plan strategies and promote the online education and engagement platform.

### **Online Education and Engagement Platform (Dec-Jan)**

- ▶ Develop and release an online education and engagement platform for community members to better understand what is in the Climate Action Plan, weigh in on strategies to prioritize and add additional ideas for consideration in updates to the plan.
- ▶ Generate a simple online survey to run in parallel for folks who may not feel comfortable with the education and engagement platform.
- ▶ Summarize response data.

### **Stakeholder Events (Dec-Jan)**

- ▶ Host 3 peer-to-peer online dialogue events to gather feedback on the initial plan. Climate Access and Rise Consulting will design and facilitate the sessions and work with ANR and partner organizations to publicize.

### **Partner Support (Dec-Jan)**

- ▶ Provide support to partner organizations hosting dialogue events for their networks, including tailored toolkit materials, event promotion materials, and forms for gathering feedback. Include guidance on steps community members can take to help implement the plan.

### **Summary of Findings (Feb)**

- ▶ Distill public input on the initial Climate Action Plan and meet with sub-committees to share findings and discuss implications for the final plan.

## **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN: FINAL PLAN RELEASE & EVALUATION**

**February - March 2022**

### **Final Plan Launch (Feb)**

- ▶ Host an online press conference.
- ▶ Support subcommittee members and partners with distribution.
- ▶ Update web content and final social media promotion.

### **Evaluation Report (Mar)**

- ▶ Produce a summary of data from the education and engagement platform, survey, public and stakeholder events, and social media post-performance to outline key concerns and priorities.
- ▶ Produce a project assessment report with reflections on the process and recommendations for next steps.

