

Just Transitions Chapter Draft

1/13/2025

Opening context – Aleksandra Cirovic

Please arrange these as you must. I arranged them as I see fit, but please let me know if you want a change.

Lengthy Introduction:

The Vermont Climate Council recognized early on the importance of enhancing equity within its operations and in the execution of Vermont's Climate Action Plan (CAP). Achieving a just transition necessitates transformative change, as the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) highlights. This goal involves engaging Vermonters in finding solutions and ensuring that these solutions are fair and equitable for all residents. To weave equity into its efforts, the Council adopted a three-pronged approach: holding space, organizational analysis, and public engagement.

The Council made a conscious decision to prioritize equity by starting each meeting with a presentation or discussion related to the topic. This method replaced isolated training sessions with ongoing opportunities to learn from experts and engage in meaningful discussions about practical equity. This consistent emphasis aims to influence the Council's work as Vermont progresses with the implementation of the CAP.

The Council also recognized significant organizational challenges arising from its rapid establishment and the formation of five subcommittees tasked with developing the CAP. This swift process resulted in flaws in the systems meant to support the CAP's objectives and created power dynamics that marginalized key groups. At present, the Council does not fully represent the diversity of Vermont, especially among BIPOC communities, low-income and rural residents, and economic sectors most impacted by climate change, such as the building trades. While the subcommittees were intended to be more inclusive and representative, their role is limited to providing advice, with decision-making authority resting with the Council. Acknowledging these gaps, the Council is looking into strategies to enhance diversity and representation, including working with the legislature to revise appointments and reassessing the State's per diem policy.

Furthermore, public engagement was crucial in shaping the CAP, although it faced challenges due to the tight deadlines set by the GWSA. The Council recognizes that genuine engagement should not stop at the planning stage but must persist throughout the implementation of the CAP. Continuous conversations with Vermonters are vital to ensure their perspectives are integrated into both the process and the results of climate initiatives. Looking forward, the Council is dedicated to building stronger relationships with Vermonters, collaboratively developing solutions, and consistently enhancing its approach to incorporate equity at every level of its work. By tackling systemic issues, emphasizing ongoing education, and bolstering engagement, the Council strives to facilitate a fair and equitable transition for everyone.

Summarized Introduction (I feel as if this might be better, as it is more broadened to our current situation. I rephrased what was in the initial CAPs intro, so progress has been made since then.):

The Vermont Climate Council has made it a priority to incorporate equity into Vermont's Climate Action Plan (CAP) to facilitate a fair transition under the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA). This initiative employs a three-part strategy: creating space for equity-centered discussions in every meeting, tackling structural challenges by enhancing the representation of BIPOC, low-income, rural communities, and affected economic sectors, and promoting widespread public engagement. Although the swift establishment of the Council and its subcommittees resulted in some underrepresentation and power imbalances, efforts are underway to diversify membership and improve inclusivity. Acknowledging that engagement needs to be continuous, the Council is dedicated to collaborating with Vermonters and ensuring that equity is woven into climate action at every level.

How do we define a Just Transition?

A "Just Transition" refers to the shift from a carbon-heavy economy to a low-carbon, sustainable one, while ensuring that vulnerable communities, particularly minorities and frontline populations, receive support throughout this transformation. This approach emphasizes fairness and equity by addressing the unequal effects of climate change on marginalized groups. It highlights the importance of inclusive decision-making, enabling these communities to play an active role in shaping the policies that impact their lives. By focusing on equity, a Just Transition seeks to guarantee that everyone has the necessary resources and opportunities to succeed in the new green economy.

Equality VS Equity

Equality and equity are terms that are often confused, but they have important differences that are crucial to grasp. Equality means providing everyone with the same resources and opportunities, regardless of their circumstances or needs. While it promotes uniformity, it does not account for the unique challenges some individuals or groups may face in achieving the same outcomes. On the other hand, equity takes into account the varying circumstances, needs, and challenges faced by individuals and groups. It goes beyond treating everyone the same, advocating instead for the fair allocation of resources, opportunities, and support tailored to help each person or group. By addressing systemic barriers and inequalities, equity aims to create a level playing field where everyone has the tools and opportunities needed to achieve shared goals.

Which approach is more effective? The JTSC highlights the significance of focusing on equity rather than equality. Equity understands the unique backgrounds and challenges that people face, ensuring that everyone receives the specific support they need to meet shared objectives. By

adopting an equity-focused approach, we pave the way for a more inclusive and fair journey toward our collective goals.

Who are Vermont's Frontline and Impacted Communities?

Many residents of Vermont are significantly impacted by the growing threats of climate change. These effects are particularly severe for certain groups, referred to as Frontline and Impacted Communities. These communities are especially susceptible to climate risks, including extreme weather events like heatwaves, flooding, droughts, and storms, as well as long-term dangers such as rising sea levels, wildfires, and the decline of ecosystems and biodiversity. They also face additional challenges like disruptions in agriculture, water shortages, health risks, economic instability, and social unrest. Furthermore, Frontline and Impacted Communities often endure higher levels of oppression, greater exposure to pollution, and the risk of job losses as the economy shifts in response to climate change. With limited resources, political influence, and safety nets, these communities are often less prepared to deal with or recover from the impacts of climate change. Acknowledging these vulnerabilities, JTSC's guiding principles emphasize the importance of including Frontline and Impacted Communities in the creation of climate action strategies, ensuring their perspectives are integral to the decision-making process and that resources are distributed to meet their specific needs and challenges. The list below highlights particular communities in Vermont that are most at risk.

Specific Frontline and Impacted Communities (Please arrange + add as you must)

- Rural Communities
- At risk of displacement
- Youth
- Senior Citizens
- Non-native English speakers
- Women
- Homeless
- Low-income
- LGBTQIAP+ Individuals
- Recent Graduates of the Foster Care System
- People of Color; Black/African-American, Brown, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous communities and Native nations
- Outdoor workers taking place in climate-vulnerable labor

- Incarcerated Populations
- Renters/subsiding housing tenant
- Chronically Ill/Hospitalized
- Single Parent Households
- People with Disabilities
- Small Business Owners
- Immigrants
- The Unemployed and Underemployed

Youth as an Impacted Community (This is a section I created after discussing it with my fellow youth reps. I am unsure of where to place this, but I feel strongly about highlighting youth in the CAP. Please contact me if you have any questions!)

Young people are a crucial yet often neglected segment of underrepresented groups, facing distinct challenges that can impede their ability to fully engage with and influence the world around them. Limited access to opportunities, systemic barriers to education, insufficient resources, and social stigmas frequently leave many youth feeling powerless and lacking confidence in their capacity to effect meaningful change. Despite these hurdles, young people possess tremendous potential as the next generation that will bear the long-term consequences of today's actions and decisions. Involving them in climate discussions is not just important; it is essential. By including youth in the Just Transition process and the development of the Climate Action Plan (CAP), we foster greater equity while empowering them to actively shape their future.

Incorporating young voices in climate action ensures their opinions are acknowledged, their viewpoints are respected, and their innovative ideas are woven into solutions for the climate crisis. Youth offer fresh, forward-thinking strategies to tackle environmental challenges, making sure that climate actions are both sustainable and inclusive. Additionally, engaging young people provides valuable leadership opportunities, helping them build confidence, skills, and knowledge to drive lasting change within their communities. This involvement enhances their role in creating a more just, resilient, and equitable future, where climate actions are effective in the short term and contribute to long-term sustainability and fairness. By investing in youth and empowering them to take the lead, we ensure that the climate transition is inclusive, representative, and just—an investment in a more equitable and prosperous world for future generations.

1. Where we were – Claire McIlvennie / Sophi Veltrop

Just Transitions Subcommittee's work during the initial 2021 Climate Action Plan focused on developing the [Guiding Principles for a Just Transition](#) and accompanying assessment tool. The Subcommittee simultaneously worked on engaging the public in the planning process. Contractual

capacity for public engagement was available through Climate Access and Rise. Engagement occurred in the summer and fall of 2021, resulting in a [final report](#) in October 2021.

2. Reflect on 2021 CAP process – Carey Hengstenberg

The timeline of the development of the 2021 CAP did not allow for enough time to meaningfully include equity considerations because there were limitation to resources for outreach activities and to develop relationships with community members. It is important to understand how recommendations in the climate action plan will affect various populations including low-income, BIPOC and front-line and impacted communities. The Vermont Legislature passed the Global Warnings Solutions Act on September 22, 2020. The new law required the formation of the council and subcommittees with a Draft Climate Action Plan due by December 2021. The first meeting of the Climate Council was in December 2020, the Just Transitions Subcommittee began meeting soon after in 2021. The subcommittee drafted the Guiding Principles which were adopted by the Climate Council in August 2021. There were only four months to include the guiding principles in the recommendations presented in the plan. That was not enough time to use the principles proactively to develop and prioritize recommendations.

There was limited public engagement with the first Climate Action Plan because of the quick timeline. The Climate Action Office was required to move quickly to secure a contract to conduct outreach, which did not allow time for deliberation and input from the Just Transitions Subcommittee. The subcommittee reflected on the process used in 2021 and came up with the following lessons learned for the future:

- Information collected through public engagement efforts, meetings and public comments need to be reviewed and discussed by subcommittees and the climate council before decisions are made.
- More public engagement is needed. For the 2025 Plan, there is a new public engagement team was contracted to complete in-depth outreach over the course of 1-2 years in preparation for the plan. This outreach focused on meeting community members where they are out instead of asking them to come to meetings at locations and times that may not be convenient.
- Many of the recommendations in the original CAP were broad, and it was determined that many equity considerations may be more impactful if they are included during the implementation of a recommendation. There are opportunities to include equity and application of the Guiding Principles after the plan was adopted.
- Subcommittee members were unclear on how and when to apply the guiding principles. For the 2025 plan development, the Just Transitions subcommittee created a new visual checklist that was provided to subcommittees. It shows them specifically what outreach and equity considerations they should include, and the time in the process that they should complete these activities.
- The Just Transitions Subcommittee needs to coordinate with the Climate Action Office outreach team regularly. Since the adoption of the 2021 Plan, the Climate Action Office has hired an Outreach Coordinator who fills this role.

3. Where we are now & what happened differently this time – Sophi Veltrop

Changes were made to better incorporate public input and the principles of a just transition into the 2025 Climate Action Plan. The goal was to better align timing and communication throughout the planning process.

1. Public engagement occurred before and throughout the planning process at key junctures. Public input was better communicated through **quarterly reports** and other means. The types of engagement activities that occurred were vastly broadened to lift up the voices of frontline and impacted communities. These improvements were possible because of a new staff position in the Agency of Natural Resources' Climate Action Office and added capacity via the Consensus Building Institute; these did not exist during the first Climate Action Plan process. *See the Public Engagement chapter (page #s) for full details on engagement activities.*
2. Four Just Transitions Subcommittee members volunteered as liaisons to the other subcommittees. The liaisons attended those subcommittees' meetings to help them to apply the Guiding Principles of a Just Transition *throughout* the drafting process, rather than at the end.
3. Just Transitions Subcommittee heard feedback from subcommittees that the Guiding Principles of a Just Transition could be difficult to navigate and unwieldy to apply to the planning process efficiently. In response, Just Transitions Subcommittee created a [simplified visual](#) that explained which key questions to ask at each step of the planning process. It also showed when and how public input should be considered.

- **How have other subcommittees utilized the community engagement reports?**

4. Challenges/stumbling blocks (work still needed to improve during implementation of this CAP and for the next CAP update) – Callie Fishburn

Progress has been made in incorporating equity and the Guiding Principles of a Just Transition into the CAP, but work is needed to improve the implementation of this CAP and future CAPs. The Just Transitions Subcommittee (JTSC) faced several challenges during the update of this CAP which should be acknowledged and addressed in future CAP updates.

Challenges

- There was not adequate time for JTSC members to introduce the Guiding Principles and other tools to the drafting subcommittees and help them become fully comfortable with the materials.
- The JTSC were recruiting and orienting new members at the same time as the drafting subcommittees were working on revisions. More time is needed for new JTSC members to

become oriented to the CAP update process and their role in it, and for the JTSC to build meaningful relationships with the other subcommittees.

- The time commitment for JTSC liaisons to the other subcommittees was high. The liaisons had several meetings to attend in addition to monthly JTSC meetings, and some of the liaisons did not have the capacity to engage as much as other liaisons.
- Many of the recommendations in the CAP are very big and broad – they could be implemented either equitably or inequitably, depending on decisions made by the people implementing the plan. This can make conversations about incorporating equity into the CAP complicated and confusing.
- The general time commitment for subcommittee members is high, and the current compensation system (per diem) doesn't adequately reflect that. The low per diem may also preclude people from marginalized and frontline communities from participating as subcommittee members.

Recommendations

- Recruitment of new subcommittee members should happen earlier in the CAP update process.
- The Guiding Principles and related tools should be presented to the drafting subcommittees at the beginning of the CAP update process with support from liaisons throughout the entire process.
- The per diem amount for subcommittee members should be increased.
- Clearly define the role of JTSC liaisons and provide upfront estimates of the time commitment.
- Conversations about equity can still happen at the Climate Action Plan level and be incorporated into the plan, but the JTSC should also focus on providing recommendations on how to center equity in the *implementation* of the Plan.