

Just Transitions Chapter Draft

2/10/2025

Introduction

The Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) requires that Vermont's Climate Action Plan (CAP) incorporate equity into each recommendation. The Just Transitions Subcommittee (JTSC) is responsible for ensuring this is carried through. Our strategy has three parts:

1. Creating space for equity-centered discussions in every meeting,
2. Tackling structural challenges by enhancing the representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), low-income, rural, and other frontline communities, and
3. Promoting widespread public engagement.

Although the swift establishment of the Council and its subcommittees resulted in some underrepresentation and power imbalances, efforts have been 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.

What is a Just Transition?

A "Just Transition" refers to the shift from a carbon-heavy economy to a low-carbon, sustainable one. It means that vulnerable communities, particularly minority 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 often confused, but they have important differences. 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 considers 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.

The [Guiding Principles for a Just Transition](#) (Guiding Principles) highlight the significance of focusing on equity to 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 climate change. These effects are particularly severe for certain groups, referred to as Frontline and Impacted Communities. Due to historic and current systemic oppression and/or barriers, these communities are especially susceptible to climate risks, including heatwaves, flooding, droughts, storms, wildfires, and the decline of ecosystems and biodiversity. They also face climate-related challenges like disruptions in agriculture, health risks, economic instability, and social unrest. Furthermore, Frontline and Impacted Communities often endure greater exposure to pollution, and higher risk of job loss as the economy shifts in response to climate change. With limited resources, political influence, and/or safety nets, these communities are often less prepared to deal with or recover from the impacts of climate change.

The Guiding Principles emphasize the importance of including Frontline and Impacted Communities in decision-making about climate action, and of distributing resources equitably to meet their specific needs and challenges.

Specific Frontline and Impacted Communities

- Rural Communities
- Youth
- Senior Citizens
- Non-native English Speakers
- Women
- Unhoused and Housing-Insecure
- 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
- Incarcerated or Formerly Incarcerated Populations


- Renters and Subsidized Housing Tenants
- Chronically Ill and Hospitalized
- Single Parent Households
- People with Disabilities
- Small Business Owners
- Immigrants, Asylees, and Refugees
- Unemployed and Underemployed



Then and Now




The 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. Contracted organizations supported public engagement during the summer and fall of 2021, resulting in a final report in October 2021. Another consultant, Kiah Morris, met with other Subcommittees and the Council to help them apply the Guiding Principles to evaluate their recommendations for equity considerations. Additionally, liaisons between Just Transitions and other Council Subcommittees were present to uplift equity considerations in real time as those Subcommittees were deliberating suggestions for the CAP.

Then: Initial Climate Action Plan (2021)	Now: Revised Climate Action Plan (2025)
<p>The subcommittee drafted the Guiding Principles, formally adopted by the Climate Council in August 2021. There were only four months to incorporate the Guiding Principles into the plan. That was not enough time to use the principles proactively to develop and prioritize recommendations.</p>	<p>The Just Transitions Subcommittee (JTSC) heard from other subcommittees that using the Guiding Principles while developing recommendations felt daunting. In response, the JTSC created a simplified visual explaining which questions to ask at each step of the planning process. It showed when and how to consider public input.</p>
<p>Members of other subcommittees were unclear on how and when to apply the Guiding Principles. Liaisons from Just Transitions to the other subcommittees were available for support.</p>	<p>In addition to the Guiding Principles simplified visual, five JTSC members volunteered as liaisons to the other subcommittees. The liaisons attended those subcommittees’ meetings to help them to apply the Guiding Principles <i>throughout</i> the drafting process, rather than at the end.</p>
<p>The quick timeline limited public engagement during the first Climate Action</p>	<p>Public engagement occurred before and throughout the planning process at key</p>

<p>Plan. Agency of Natural Resources staff had to move quickly to contract outreach support, which did not allow time for deliberation and input from the Just Transitions Subcommittee.</p> 	<p>junctions. Public input was better communicated to subcommittees and the Council through quarterly reports and other means. Engagement activities were vastly broadened to lift up voices of frontline and impacted communities. These improvements were possible because of a new staff position in the Climate Action Office (CAO) and additional capacity via the Consensus Building Institute (CBI); these did not exist during the first Climate Action Plan process. <i>See Public Engagement chapter (page #s) for full details.</i></p>
<p>There was not a streamlined process in place to ensure that public input was reviewed and discussed by subcommittees and the Council before decisions were made.</p>	<p>In fall 2024, the JTSC created public comment recommendations, detailing how to better receive and incorporate public comment into subcommittees' work. A revised version was then adopted by the Council for their own work in early 2025.</p>
<p>The CAO did not have a designated staff person to support JTSC. A staff member from Public Service Department and another from Department of Environmental Conservation supported JTSC.</p>	<p>In addition to the two support staff, CAO Communications & Community Engagement Coordinator supported JTSC. CBI also provided facilitation support to the Subcommittee for two key meetings.</p>

Challenges/stumbling blocks 2024-25

Challenges

- There was not adequate time for JTSC members to re-introduce the Guiding Principles and other tools to the drafting subcommittees and help them become fully comfortable with the materials. 
- 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 subcommittee members is high, and the current compensation system (per diem) doesn't adequately reflect that. The low per diem may preclude people from marginalized and frontline communities from participating as subcommittee members.
- The time commitment for JTSC liaisons to attend the other subcommittees' meetings was high. Some liaisons **did** not have the capacity to engage as much as other liaisons. 

- Many recommendations in the CAP are broad. Thus, they could be implemented either equitably or inequitably, depending on decisions made by implementors (usually the legislature, executive branch, or a combination of the two). This can make conversations about incorporating equity into the CAP complicated and confusing.
- There has not been enough capacity and time allocated for equity training for Councilors and Subcommittees. Daytime meetings are inaccessible for subcommittee members who work during the day and cannot leave their jobs to attend virtual meetings. This has limited JTSC liaison participation in other subcommittees' meetings.

Recommendations

- Recruit new subcommittee members earlier in the process.
- Present Guiding Principles, and related tools to the drafting subcommittees early, with support from liaisons throughout the entire process.
- Increase per diem amount.
- Better define the role and time commitment of JTSC liaisons.
- JTSC should also play a role in recommending how to center equity in the *implementation* of the Plan (not just the planning itself)
- Offer equity training for all Councilors and Subcommittee members early in the planning process.

Just Transitions CALL OUT BOXES

Youth as an Impacted Community

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.

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