

**Vermont Measuring and Assessing Progress of Vermont's Climate Action
Virtual Focus Group with Community Based Organizations (CBOs)
December 17, 2024 at 3 PM**

Eastern Research Group Presentation on Project and Priorities

ERG provided a PowerPoint presentation on the background and purpose of the project, the project's steps and what has been completed to date, the tool's expected users, and how the tool is expected to be used. Following the presentation, attendees were put into breakout rooms for discussion, and notes from these discussions are captured below.

Breakout Group Discussion

Breakout Group 1

Organizations represented: Peer Plus, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, Mosaic Vermont

Question 1: Which issues are the focus of your organization's work? How does climate change factor into your work?

- Housing issues are most important group. For example, there are not enough 3-bedroom units. Heating and electric are also major issues, and going to an electric car is out of the question for many, so fuel is also an issue.
- So, residents may simply not have the resources to do what they'd like to do or should do.
- Homeless community often feels overlooked and underfunded. Three constituents died this year related to housing insecurity.
- Mosaic Vermont. Sexual violence is the focus of this group. Climate change most impacts women and children. For example, flooding events led to an uptick in violence against women and children. (ER and shelter data.) So, climate and violence are interrelated to our constituents. Lack of resources, homelessness, and effects of environmental change increases the struggles. Work has expanded to focus on queer community in Vermont, as they've seen a lack of resources and an uptick in violence, as well.
- Already vulnerable people are more likely to be targets of violence. After the second round of flooding, they spoke with ER doctors to help screen patients and present resources they may not have thought about after a disaster. The group always works with other agencies and organizations, but these groups have all seen an uptick.

- CVOEO. Starting off EPA project with weatherization as a major focus, and it's clear that climate change disproportionately affects the New American/BIPOC community. Kicked off program in October after a large grant from EPA to run a "healthy homes/weatherization" project. Focus will be on New American communities. Community Ambassadors represent and work within each of these communities. They will lead work on the EPA project. Right now, they are providing training to Ambassadors to work with each community (first year). Includes home assessments (second year). Listening sessions for 23 communities with their ambassadors. They will have "house parties" for each group at a participant's house to provide education, information, and discussion. Third year will have a selection of homes that need remediation, and that work will be completed. It also includes the "why" the home is unhealthy. It goes beyond just showing the problems but educating on the cause. It will then work to remediate everything possible. Remediation will bring in existing weatherization programs and specialists, in other words, working outside of the organization.

Question 2: Do you currently track information and/or progress on climate (including resilience and adaptation) and/or climate equity/justice in your work?

- Currently tracking need for housing and upticks in violence. Applied for a grant to assist in gathering data on impact of violence related to environment and housing. Transitional housing for those fleeing challenging situations is no longer available. So, we are focused on tracking access.
- There is data collection related to the weatherization project, but since it was just funded, data collection is not yet underway. There is a set goal with each of these projects. By next year, there should be traceable data on progress. There is a research/data component to the set scope of the project. Vermont Department of Health owns the project but partnered with us to run the project within the communities we serve. UVM is assisting with data/research component.

Question 3: What type of information would be most helpful for your organization to have about climate, resilience, and climate equity/climate justice issues?

- Knowing weather patterns and how to properly prepare or adapt (e.g. using propane properly) would be most useful. Information that helps organization reach out to those most vulnerable. Just keeping people safe is the key for group.
- Having data that shows disproportionate burden on vulnerable communities and how to access resources.
- You don't know what you don't know. So, specific way of sharing is first key—so it's accessible. Multiple languages important.

- Widespread sharing important. Accessible by as many people as possible. Important for others around these groups also be educated.
- Model for being funded for grants typically requires focus groups, presentations, and messaging. Problem is that organizations may not have people trained in doing this kind of work. So one bit of useful information would be whether there is funding for professionals to facilitate these requirements.
- Saturation of messaging and access to information are as important as what is being shared. Data about *effectiveness* of marketing/education is also important so resources go where they are needed most.

Question 4: Do you think your organization would use such a tool?

- Relevant data points would be the key. Information about funding opportunities (or data they will request) would also be important.
- Agreement with above

Breakout Group 2

Organizations represented: Somali-Bantu community, Community Resilience Organizations, Northeast Kingdom Organizing, NETO

Question 1: Which issues are the focus of your organization's work? How does climate change factor into your work?

- NETO's focus is weatherization to lower the cost of heating and cooling by improving home efficiency, which benefits the climate and environment. Something we've noticed – we get a lot of calls when it gets cold; these days we're getting an increasing number of calls when it is too hot.
- Northeast Kingdom Organizing (NEKO) focuses on a just transition for the Northeast Kingdom; our campaigns include housing, social connection, food systems. NEKO wasn't made to do flood recovery but in 2023 staff member Meghan Wayland stepped up to the challenge when flood recovery efforts were largely focused on Montpelier area and Barton (rural, low income, marginalized identities) was being overlooked and left behind. When the Northeast Kingdom was hit again by floods in 2024, our recovery response was quicker. We want to teach others, share what we've learned, strengthen other people and orgs to do this work so it is not just us – it's relevant to what we do but we have other components of our jobs too.
- Community Resilience Organizations (CROs) plays a technical support role and service provider for resilience organizations; the organization is over a decade old and started

doing this work after Tropical Storm Irene. We focus on housing and land access, food sovereignty, especially in the context of Vermont as a state not welcoming those with marginalized identities. We support organizations to build resilience through grassroots and community-led efforts. Communities in Vermont are very unique from one another.

- Education is a barrier for people in my community accessing information about climate change and understanding the issues and what resources are available. Online resources are inaccessible for non-English speakers. People would like to know where to go for help and resources, and who to contact for information.

Question 2: Do you currently track information and/or progress on climate (including resilience and adaptation) and/or climate equity/justice in your work?

- We do some modeling of money saved and emissions reductions. What we're missing is – did it actually work? What's having an impact? Where are we seeing the emissions reductions? Which is better, electricity or propane?
- NEKO's understanding is more of a sociological & economic understanding of people. We've used Crisis Clean Up – a disaster management tool that, through a hotline, creates a map with needs that organizers can respond to. We log our canvassing (door-to-door) results in an app. We use 211 data as well, though that's not as comprehensive as our canvassing. If you can show where at-risk land is on a map, often at-risk people are there (e.g. mobile home communities in floodplains). We also tracked and learned other sources of help people need after a disaster (e.g. paying phone bills or electric bills). People on the ground usually know and can articulate what they need.
- CROs developed a community resilience assessment, it was used this summer at a community forum in Johnson – brings out peoples understandings of vulnerability and strength. There's lots the State does to help people but its so inaccessible, information is located many different places, some things have to be mediated through town officials.
- An example is that the town clerk must sign a form before the State can come pick up flood trash, which is a great free service, but access to it comes down to education, time, energy. NEKO would help towns understand what they needed to do to access free state clean-up services. An info sheet or checklist on what to do following a disaster for town officials in these small, limited-resource towns would be helpful.
- Some of the state resources are not printer-friendly; we spent time copying information into google docs in order to print it! A lot of community resilience organizations worked hard to consolidate State resources and disaster recovery information following the 2023 floods, which helped response to be quicker in 2024 – put that good work to use for others. Information flows along existing channels, especially when disaster strikes.

- We don't track these things because we don't have the basics. Interpreted information isn't helpful if people can't get to it. In my community, WhatsApp is understood and widely used, can that be a source of information? Can there be a spoken rather than written version?

Questions 3 and 4: What type of information would be most helpful for your organization to have about climate, resilience, and climate equity/climate justice issues? Do you think your organization would use such a tool?

- The work we do keeps people employed. Are weatherization improvements happening mainly in high-income homes? What percent of improvements are for low-income homes? Who is getting access to electric vehicles? Would love to specifically see how weatherization is contributing to emissions reductions in Vermont; this can help us make our case to both politicians and homeowners.
- It would be cool to have an interactive map on flooding disasters that shows who was affected, where the buyouts are vs. are not happening? If a community received money to raise homes, how was that money used? How many second homes or Airbnb are in a community? (This is related to displacement after flooding: people who have access to them have another place to go, while the number of second homes and short-term rentals affects availability of housing stock for locals.) Who is able to replace furnaces and other damaged appliances after a flood?
- We would want to understand how the money going into resilience work translates into actual outcomes for people on the ground. Are the inputs resulting in conditions improving? Not sure how you'd measure it, but it would also be helpful to understand how the wealth gap is growing and the long term economic impact of these climate disasters. It is important to keep front of mind that making the success happen is more important than documenting it. It could help communities ask for specific relief and make their case, or draw attention to disparity.

Breakout Group 3

Organizations represented: Capstone Community Action, Intervale Center, Shelburne Farms, VT Garden Network, Vital Communities

Question 1: Which issues are the focus of your organization's work?

- Fighting poverty in all its aspects; helping people lift themselves up from poverty. Capstone provides home weatherization services and helps landlords weatherize their apartments. Has been working with FEMA to help victims of 2023 and

2024 flooding. VT food systems being impacted by climate change (for example, they didn't receive any potatoes this year due to weather impact). Serve 50 to 100 every day. 1,300 families signed up for the food pantry last year. Goes through 20,000 lbs of food per month

- Intervale runs free food distribution that provides gleaned, donated, or locally produced produce. Climate impacts the ability to run programs (flooding in particular). Access to the regular streams they source food from is disrupted by climate change. People coming to food distribution program cannot rely on having similar products each week or a similar amount of food. Intervale Center has lots of programs focused on strengthening community food systems (including like selling trees for riparian buffers, farm business teams that help new farmers)
- Shelburne Farms works with public education systems to help schools provide locally sourced food to their students and to put farm to school in crux of school nutrition programs. Partners with VT Food Bank. Since their land is above flood level, they sometimes help provide food to the food bank. Shelburne Farms has a goal of being net zero by 2028 (challenging as a working dairy farm). Partnering with UVM on innovative ways to mitigate dairy farming impacts. Yasamin's role is to make sure the org's programs have positive impacts on marginalized communities

Question 2: How does climate change impact your work? How does climate change factor into your work?

- VT Garden Network focused on food access through education; organization does a lot of garden education, teaching people how to grow their own food. Have paused programs midway through season due to flooding. There is interest from gardeners to know how to adapt to climate change at the small scale, community garden level. Changing weather and climate directly impacts food supply
- Vital Communities works on housing, transportation, food system, energy, and climate. Climate intersects everything they work on. Mostly works with food systems and climate and energy (works with local climate action plans) and a bit with housing. Impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt by the farming community. This is also increasing the stressors on farmers' mental health. Energy burden is not felt equally across society. For example, heat waves do not impact everyone the same
- Shelburne Farms has seasonal workers for approximately 6 months (over 200 people). Finding affordable housing is very difficult. Housing is not brought into the climate action world enough and is not as prominent as it should be. Without housing, people have no access to healthy food, running clean water, etc. Also, transportation up to Chittenden County is limited. They are constantly thinking about how to allocate

resources to provide housing. Can we partner with other orgs to help us with housing? Affordable housing should be foundational to this work.

Question 3: Do you currently track information and/or progress on climate (including resilience and adaptation) and/or climate equity/justice in your work? If so, what information do you use to do so? Any specific datasets? Are there datasets or information that you wish you had? What would you track if you could?

- Capstone starting to collect data on number of people impacted by floods. Will ask everyone who comes through the food pantry: have you been impacted by X flood, and if so, what do you need today? Will also ask if they have experienced any natural (or non-natural) disaster (like a fire). Hoping to start this collection in Jan/Feb.

Question 4: What type of information would be most helpful for your organization to have about climate, resilience, and climate equity/climate justice issues?

- VT Community Garden Network interested in gardeners' understanding of climate change. Would like to know whether people understand climate change/mitigation/adaptation as it relates to growing. People are curious to learn more about climate, but we need to scale it down to the garden level. Language and technology currently is focused on commercial scale growing. Should track things at a small, individual scale, such as frost dates, current pests (new pests that have migrated north), how many people producing food using no till techniques, what are perennial gardens looking like
- Intervale manages a large area of land in a floodplain and farm businesses lease land from the Intervale. No formal way to track changes in climate because there are so many people using the land. Would like to have a more formal way to share experiences and information about impacts of climate change that farmers experience. This is happening informally, but they don't have any formal data, just experiential knowledge
- Shelburne Farms is working with a research group that is tracking migration patterns of bobolink (wetland shore bird) that are nesting on their land. Studying changing migration patterns of the birds and measuring how ag practices are impacting their population. Having to hay at different times of the year has been impacting their habitat (they nest in tall grass)
- Interested in the idea of citizen science – what can we all be documenting or collecting to help track climate change?
- Would like some way to track food deserts. We track the pounds of food they glean and send off, but we don't track how many people we are impacting and which food deserts they are supporting

- Food pantry tracks food that comes in by pound for grant purposes. This data is not disseminated anywhere. Not much food is wasted
- CHIP Map is a GIS map that shows food deserts
- <https://trorc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=1695bc2da8424810bc6adab4695f37ac>
- Local climate action groups have been very mitigation focused, but they are seeing more resilience efforts coming in. Would be interested to see how and where resilience efforts are coming up in town plans. Are there community based efforts trying to advance community resilience? Town of Hartford VT was first town that went through TNC community resilience process

Question 5: Do you envision your organization using the tool? Do you think any of the frontline community members that you work with or serve might use the tool?

- Maybe -- depends on what ends up in the tool and how easy it is to navigate. Frontline community members would also maybe use the tool (depends on accessibility of tool and relevance of content)
- Yes – weatherization programs would also use the tool, their housing department would use the tool. They need a resource with data, even if it's just broad data. It would be great to have a map of food deserts, and a map of places you can find fresh local food
- as someone interfacing with community members, she sees a need for resources instead of data. If someone says they are experiencing a climate change related disaster, it would be great if there was a hub to figure out the resources for them would be most helpful. This hub should include not just government resources (often people are not interested in gov. resources – think it will take too long and will be too much work).
- a localized hub of resources would be helpful (not useful to share resources in Burlington for someone in Rutland with no car)