

Quarterly Public Outreach Summary
Vermont Climate Action
July – September 2023

Overview

This document is the first quarterly summary of the public outreach activities conducted by the Consensus Building Institute on behalf of Vermont’s Climate Action Office during the months of July through September 2023.

Activities

Activities began in August and focused on one aspect of the outreach work: meeting Vermonters where they are. The outreach team attended 8 events and set up an information table at 3 of those events.

The objectives of this climate action outreach are:

- **Enhance awareness** around climate action efforts in the state, with a particular focus on communities experiencing climate impacts and communities particularly impacted by climate policy
- **Lift up the voices and viewpoints of communities** into the implementation of climate-related initiatives and the ongoing work of the Climate Action Office, and other key entities, including the Vermont Climate Council, so that a diverse group of Vermonters can influence this work
- **Build relationships and communication channels** that will help Vermonters work collaboratively on future climate action with the state

The team selected events that would attract Vermonters who aren’t typically involved in climate policy conversations yet feel the impacts of a changing climate and climate policy. The team focused primarily on Burlington and surrounding areas for the first few months to test approaches and methodology, with plans to reach other areas of the state in the coming months.

About three dozen Vermonters provided their contact information and expressed interest in getting involved in the state’s climate action planning.

List of Events Attended

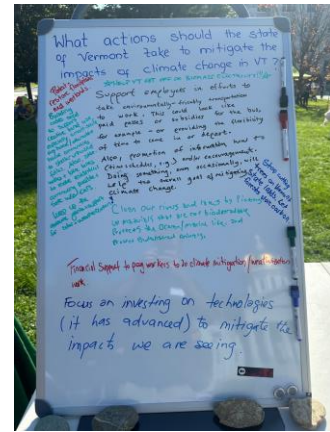
8/6/2023	Quechee, Vermont	Flea Market and Antique Engine show
8/20/2023	Oak Ledge Park Burlington	Building Community Event - Reimagining how different communities interact with nature and public spaces
8/26/2023	Intervale, Burlington	5th Annual Vermont First African Landing Day celebration (TABLED EVENT)
8/22/2023	Battery Park, Burlington	Impromptu Community Building with Music & Food
9/1/2023	South Burlington Public Library	Abolition & Revolution Film Screening + Fundraiser for VT Freedom Fund, South (TABLED EVENT)
9/20/2023	King Street Laundry, Burlington	KSL offers free laundry on Wednesdays from 1-3. People in and out, hanging out while they do their laundry. Accessible to people without phones.
9/23/2023	Common Roots, South Burlington	Abenaki Land Link Festival: A celebration of harvest and indigenous seeds hosted by the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation and Common Roots
10/1/2023*	Vermont State House Lawn	2nd Annual Community Health Education Fair, All Brains Belong (TABLED EVENT)

*Included in this report despite being on Oct. 1

What we heard

These initial events were an opportunity to speak broadly with Vermonters about how they view issues related to the state's changing climate and policies related to these changes. In future months, CBI will focus the conversations on specific topics that will inform the work of the Climate Action Office, the Climate Council, and others.

The annex below offers details of the conversations people had with the CBI team, as well as written input on a white board. The views expressed were as broad as the open-ended questions posed by the CBI team. Some themes emerged, however.



- **Skepticism** about government action around climate change issues and a feeling by some that they have not been taken into consideration
- **Opportunities** for the state to do more – continue grant programs for weatherization, efficiency etc. and consider ways to reduce up-front costs
- **Doubts about EVs** as a transportation solution – urging more action on public and multi-modal transportation as well as habit changes
- **Use native wisdom** to help identify sustainable solutions
- **Get more people involved**, including youth and faith communities
- Avoid solutions that result in **disproportionate costs to low-income Vermonters**.
- Importance of **updating building codes** and **land use regulations** to support changes.

“As a 66-year-old African-American woman, I've observed how the system often overlooks individuals like me. Instead of relying on the government, I've shifted my focus to personal and community-based solutions.”

Additional Related Outreach

During these same months, the Vermont Department of Public Service conducted [significant outreach](#) and engagement around Vermont policies and programs related to renewable electricity. It also released a [public opinion survey](#) about these issues.

Upcoming Outreach Activities

The outreach plan for final three months of 2023 includes four lines of activities.

- Meeting Vermonters where they are: Continuing to attend events. (Ongoing)
- Small-group conversations: Conducting focus group-type conversations with specific populations, starting with communities whose primary language are Somali, French, Nepali, Arabic and Spanish (Nov-Jan).

“You've got to show up, and keep showing up.”

- Public meetings on funding priorities: Creating a space for Vermonters to engage with the Climate Action Office on priority emission-reduction actions for federal funding (Nov-Dec)
- Gathering of Community Based Organizations: Convening a group of community organizations to discuss climate action in the state. (Nov)

Related planned outreach activities by other groups include:

- The Department of Public Service will conduct additional [outreach](#) about renewal energy policies.
- The Office of the State Treasurer will hold [virtual meetings](#) on climate infrastructure financing

Annex 1 – What We Heard – CBI Notes

<p>Flea Market & Antigue Engine Show</p> <p><i>Quechee, Vermont</i></p>	<p>Resiliency comes from the community and your neighbors, not the government. Some areas like Victoria VT didn't even get electricity until 1960's. Government makes things more confusing and frustrating rather than simple, easy, helpful.</p>
<p>Building Community Event</p> <p><i>Oak Ledge Park Burlington</i></p>	<p>"What has actually been implemented from the first CAP?", "too much regulation that actually makes things worse for regular Vermonters and small business owners." "Music and food helps build community."</p>
<p>5th Annual Vermont First African Landing Day celebration</p> <p><i>Intervale, Burlington</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We need the state to focus on creating a multi-modal transportation network and move away from the culture of personal vehicles (and stop pretending like electric vehicles will solve the problem) 2. Make sure there is policy in place to prevent affordable housing and mobile homes from being built on the cheapest land, which tends to be the land most vulnerable to climate disasters (trailer parks built in flood plains) 3. Get the youth involved! They should be at the front of this conversation. Those tabling the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network were eager and excited to be a part of the climate conversation. 4. Get communities of faith involved: Contact Rev. Arnold Thomas with the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Jericho "
<p>Impromptu Community Building with Music & Food</p> <p><i>Battery Park, Burlington</i></p>	<p>"The way to bring community together is through food and music", "You've got to show up, and keep showing up."</p>
<p>King Street Laundry – Free Laundry Event</p> <p><i>Burlington</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building codes make it difficult to put solar on roofs in Burlington - Our flood maps are out of date. They need to be updated (accurately), and if they are out of date, other resiliency tools are likely out of date as well. - The lump sum needed to put solar on your roof is too high. If there were a leasing option, it would be more accessible. - State programs are difficult to learn about and hard to navigate. They need to do a better job of getting the word out about services and providing clear assistance throughout navigating the system. Mail out information to everyone's address? - State should be putting pressure on municipalities, despite strong local rule in VT

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's hard for people to prioritize/think about the climate when basic needs are not being met - "we're living in a wild world!" - Set up systems to reduce waste & promote resource sharing (mutual aid networks). In order to decrease the amount of waste we produce, we need to share more. People throw away goods other people could use. - We need to educate our youth on how to care for the environment- what plants and animals need, how to care for habitats and ecosystems. - Pesticide runoff is a big problem, destroying Lake Champlain. Nitrogen fertilizer is a big problem and is destroying the ocean. We need more agricultural regulation and incentives for sustainable practices. - We need more corporate regulation. Monsanto has done more harm than anyone else, was just recently bought by Bayer. It should be illegal to do what they're doing to the planet. - We need to stop using the excuse of protecting livelihoods as a reason to not make change. Ex: cattle farmers. If the cattle are bad for the climate, we need to stop supporting it and also support those individuals in transitioning careers. - EVs are not the solution- they produce CO2 emissions elsewhere, contribute to waste, and are feeding a global system of slavery (communities from the global south being decimated by mineral mining) - We might have to move communities from small rural towns into larger towns to care for everyone as more disasters come our way. - It's too late... there's nothing the state can do at this point, at least that it's willing to do. At the end of the day, people want to make money and money = more pollution. Unless we change that, nothing will change. - We need to prioritize the protection of natural habitats, especially old trees. - We need to be protecting the monarch butterfly population, and the bees. "
<p>Abenaki Land Link Festival</p> <p><i>Common Roots, South Burlington</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is lots the state could be doing- we should have solar on every roof. It should be mandated for new buildings - [One person] told a story about how in the middle of the summer she was so distraught about all the flooding, focusing on the negative, when she had an ah-ha moment in realizing that corn and indigenous seeds are incredibly resilient. There is a seed of corn that has adapted to the climate disasters and is still flourishing. We need to reframe this conversation and pay attention to the spaces we are witnessing resilience, learn from them, and honor them. Seeds, plants, and humans are resilient. She showed me the most resilient corn and explained that indigenous corn varieties don't deplete the soil like sweet corn does. In fact, these ancient corn varieties actually feed the soil rather than robbing it of nutrients. Many of them grow aerial roots (above the soil) that excrete a mucus that feeds that soil bacteria. The bacteria, in turn, pull nitrogen out of the air to fertilize the growing corn. We need to be paying more attention to indigenous and ancient knowledge that is already, and has been, resilient. If we could

	<p>protect these seeds, and breed them, we could support an agricultural revolution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As more climate disasters hit, they are going to impact our most vulnerable communities the most, including indigenous communities. This past summer, the flooding decimated indigenous fields and yet FEMA recovery funds are not accessible to indigenous communities- they are left to their own devices. This is not okay. - UVM recently started a climate action club and they would be willing and interested in getting involved - There is an event on October 7th to celebrate Indigenous Peoples' day in Stowe, VT. We'd be welcome to attend/table that event.
<p>2nd Annual Community Health Education Fair, All Brains Belong</p> <p><i>Vermont State House Lawn</i></p>	<p>Electric cars primarily cater to the needs of the wealthy. Solutions in our state should be designed to support those with limited financial means.</p> <p>When will the state address public transportation, especially in Vermont's rural areas where the need is pressing?</p> <p>We should explore solutions that are voluntary and don't incur any costs. Making things mandatory often leads to resistance due to human nature.</p> <p>Adopting voluntary solutions will garner support from a wide political spectrum. Even skeptics, particularly those on the right, would be more inclined to join.</p> <p>Solutions should allow for personal engagement and recognize that habit formation takes time. For instance, people choose which side of the road to drive on without being told. Solutions should be culturally ingrained rather than government-mandated.</p> <p>The current system is driven by corporate greed. Solutions that solely benefit corporations won't be effective.</p> <p>Most of the solutions discussed are economy and market-centric. We need to shift the conversation away from corporate interests.</p> <p>Emphasizing adaptation and resilience is crucial. Some changes are inevitable, so fostering discussions around adaptation is essential. As a sailor, witnessing these changes has underscored the importance of adaptability.</p> <p>The state needs to proactively address the shortage of workforce by welcoming more immigrants. Immigrants play a vital role in implementing solutions, from flood cleanup to installing eco-friendly devices.</p>

As a 66-year-old African-American woman, I've observed how the system often overlooks individuals like me. Instead of relying on the government, I've shifted my focus to personal and community-based solutions. By adopting a minimalist lifestyle, I aim to combat overconsumption, a significant contributor to climate issues. Embracing non-western practices and medicines has also been beneficial. We should learn from other nations and communities that have harmoniously coexisted with nature. While national-level discussions can be overwhelming, initiating these conversations at the local level is commendable.

Many proposed solutions come with costs that disproportionately impact low-income individuals. Instead of blaming them for non-compliance, we should understand their perspectives. For instance, providing dumpsters for low-income families would be more supportive than criticizing them for not maintaining cleanliness."

The following responses were transcribed directly from a board where community members were prompted to answer the question, "What actions should the state of Vermont take to mitigate the impacts of climate change in Vermont?" The responses are presented as written, without any edits.

- Protect + restore floodplains and wetlands.
- Building codes need to support creative land use especially small-scale tiny house/alternative house communities to shelter unhoused folks. Also, side-walks +bike lanes to make residential community possible + safe w/o cars.
- Keep up the awesome grants + support for solar + weatherization.
- Help VT get off of biomass electricity.
- Support employees in efforts to take environmentally-friendly transportation to work. This could look like paid passes or subsidies for the bus, for example - or providing the flexibility of time to come in or depart. Also, promotion of information how to (time schedules, e.g.) and/or encouragement. Doing something, even occasionally, will help the overall goal of mitigating climate change.
- Clean our rivers and lakes by picking up materials that are not biodegradable. Protects the ocean/marine life, and protects endangered animals.
- Stop cutting trees on Vermont State lands. Let forests store carbon.
- Financial support to pay workers to do climate mitigation/weatherization work.
- Focus on investing on technologies (it has advanced) to mitigate the impact we are seeing.
- Restore floodplains.
- More student sustainability programs.

