

Vermont Voices on Climate

Vermont Climate Action Office

October 1 - December 31, 2023

Report Overview

This document is a summary of the public outreach activities conducted by the Consensus Building Institute on behalf of Vermont's Climate Action Office during the months of October, November, and December 2023.

The Objectives of This Climate Action Outreach Are:

- **Provide information and knowledge** that helps people prepare for climate impacts, take action, and access programs that can benefit them.
- **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



Activities

Three types of activities occurred during the period.

- **Meeting Vermonters where they are.** The outreach team spoke with Vermonters at 7 events and set up an information table at 4 of those events. The team continued to select 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. Events included Indigenous Peoples' Day Rocks, the Hispanic & Latino Heritage Celebration and King Street Laundry's free laundry event for unhoused Vermonters.
- **Convening Community-Based Organizations.** The team convened an initial gathering of 11 community-based organizations working with diverse populations from across the state for a conversation on climate action.
- **Public input sessions.** The team facilitated two public input sessions, plus a briefing for the Vermont Climate Council, for targeted feedback about Vermont's emerging priorities for federal climate funding.

What We Are Hearing from Vermonters

The three types of activities provided different types of input.

Meeting Vermonters where they are

When attending other organizations' events, the team continued to speak broadly with Vermonters about how they view issues related to the state's changing climate and policies related to these changes. Some themes included:

- **Concerns about EVs**, including how the state is selecting charging sites, questions about EV range and winter driving, and concerns about waste from battery disposal.
- **Worries about flooding**, including funding for home remediation and/or buy-outs, the need to rethink basements and rebuilding, concerns about water quality after a flooding event, and wanting better early warning systems to get out of harm's way
- **A new idea to mitigate flooding** – host a state Culvert Day to get everyone helping to clean out culverts.
- **Frustration about development** that doesn't appear to respect nature and existing residents

"Respect is key. If we don't respect one another, and we don't respect the Earth, then we're done. We've got nothing left."

Participant at King Street Laundry free laundry event

What We've Heard (Continued...)

Convening Community-Based Organizations

The virtual gathering of community-based organizations was designed to start a conversation about climate action with organizations who work directly with diverse and marginalized populations. Participants enthusiastically spoke about what they are seeing and doing on climate-related issues. Key points included:

- **Climate Change is Here:** We can see climate change happening in Vermont: warming weather, flooding, air quality, poor (and dangerous) water quality, etc. Most Vermonters are witnessing the impacts, meaning there's some level of awareness among community members.
- **The System/Bureaucracy is Too Complex:** The system is incredibly complex to navigate, and there's a need to simplify it so it works for everyone. Programs and resources exist, but they are incredibly difficult to navigate. The system is traditional and ableist. Bureaucracy is such a maddeningly limiting factor for everyone (FEMA example). Bureaucracy encourages mediocrity and undermines hope around what can be done.
 - Programs have strict qualifications that leave many people behind.
- **Communicate Simply, Clearly & Accessibly:** We need to communicate in a clear and accessible manner, and in simple terms. We need to provide more support to communities in navigating these programs and resources.
- **Ensure Adequate Representation:** Compensate people for their time. Ensure broad representation, not cherry-picked representation.
- **Meet People's Basic Needs:** "Less and less it is about saving the climate, and more and more about saving the people. Until they can be housed, and fed, and cared for (basic needs are met), we cannot talk about light bulbs and decreasing emissions."
- **Provide Affordable & Resilient Housing:** Vulnerable affordable housing near waterways: how do we build resilient and affordable housing? How do we make already existing housing more resilient?
- **Act on Policy, Not Symptoms:** Focus on policy instead of treating symptoms: How are our policies allowing vulnerable communities to be taken advantage of (i.e. land use and property rights that allow displacement, mistreatment, etc.)?
 - Act 250 as a barrier to building necessary housing.
 - Expand the Workforce: There is a dire need for an expanding workforce: we need something like 5,000 brand new workers in these fields for the coming years in order to meet the State's goals.

Public Input Sessions (Federal Climate Pollution Reduction Grant)

The public input sessions on Vermont's priorities for federal funding also provided specific feedback.

Approximately 60 people participated in the interactive public meetings and another 25 attended the Council briefing, which was also open to the public. At these sessions, the Climate Action Office gave an overview of the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) and outlined the specific climate actions that the office proposes to include for funding. While the comments did not lead to any significant pivots in what the proposed measures are, they will help inform how these funds are used. [A full summary of public input may be found here.](#) Key points of [feedback](#) included:

- **Desire for these funds to support Vermonters who need it the most**
 - Tax rebates don't benefit low & moderate income people
 - Make it easy to understand; make processes to access funds/benefits simple and accessible
 - Combine with other funding and technical assistance to maximize benefits to Vermonters
- **Prioritize climate actions that have other benefits for Vermonters**
 - Examples: job training/workforce development (Vermont Works for Women's 'Serve, Learn, Earn' program), land conservation/restoration and improved agricultural/forestry/land management
- **More capacity needed at the town and community level**
 - Trust the people, organizations, and community groups already doing work in this space
- **Build on successes that are in high demand but need more funds**
 - Examples: Municipal Technical Assistance Program, Municipal Energy Resilience Program, home weatherization and energy coaches, electric vehicle incentives suite

Additional Related Outreach

During these same months, the Vermont Department of Public Service released the [Draft Summary](#) of its engagement and technical process to review Vermont's renewable and clean electricity policies and programs. Also, the Office of the State Treasurer held stakeholder meetings on climate infrastructure financing. [A report sharing the results of the Treasurer's sessions is available here.](#)

Upcoming Outreach Activities

The outreach plan for the first three months of 2024 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.
- **Gathering of Community Based Organizations:** Re-convening the group of community organizations to start a regular set of check-ins and consultations of topics being addressed by the Vermont Climate Council and the Climate Action Office.
- **Targeted Consultation on Funding Priorities:** As a follow-up action from the public meetings around federal funding priorities, have targeted conversations with stakeholder groups, such as farmers and energy coaches, about the proposed federal funding priorities.

Events Attended

10/1/2023*	Vermont State House Lawn	2nd Annual Community Health Education Fair, All Brains Belong (TABLED)
10/10/2023	Stowe Town Hall	Indigenous Peoples' Day Rocks Event (TABLED)
10/16/2023	Berlin	Hispanic & Latino Heritage Celebration (TABLED)
10/27/2023	CCRPC, Winooski	Equity Advisory Committee (EAC) & Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
10/27/2023	Essex Junction	State wide Volleyball Jamboree
11/9/2023	Ludlow	Climate Resilience & Water Quality Public Forum
11/14/23	St. Michael's College, Colchester	Building Relationships for Climate Justice
12/6/2023	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.

*Was also included in the previous report