

Vermont Voices on Climate

Vermont Climate Action Office

January 1 - March 31, 2024

Report Overview

This is a summary of the public outreach activities conducted by the Consensus Building Institute at the direction of, and in collaboration with, Vermont's Climate Action Office during the months of January, February, and March 2024.

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

The principal activity during these winter months was conducting focus groups with communities that don't typically have access to climate policy discussions because of language barriers.

Working with community leaders, the team convened five focus groups that gathered community members speaking:

- Arabic
- French & Lingala
- Spanish
- Nepali
- Maay Maay



The team also collaborated with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (RPC)'s Equity Advisory Committee on a sixth event that was multilingual.

Participation:

- Five language-specific discussions: 17-19 participants in each group
- Chittenden County RPC Equity Advisory Committee meeting: 35 participants

During this quarter, the team also attended the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) Conference; spoke with Burlington's mayoral candidates Joan Shannon and Emma Mulvaney-Stanak; and spoke with various frontline community members regarding climate change and resilience.



What Vermonters are saying

Focus groups

During focus group conversations, participants shared different perspectives about:

- How they are experiencing climate impacts
- Programs and actions to address climate impacts
- Priority topics of interest, and ways to continue engaging

What Vermonters are saying (*continued...*)

Themes and ideas emerging from the five conversations are pulled together in both a [short visual summary](#) and [comprehensive notes](#); plus, a [summary of the CCRPC Equity Advisory Committee event](#). Highlights include:

- Transportation Improvements: Carpooling; bike/walk paths; more robust public transit; reducing individual car use; focus on public transportation instead of EVs.
- Energy Transition: Shift from gas to electricity; install solar panels on buildings; government support for solar and heat pumps.
- Agriculture and Food Practices: Community gardening; mandating the use of organic materials/regulating chemical fertilizers; make eating locally more accessible.
- Waste Reduction: Better recycling services; free composting services; reduce plastic packaging.
- Reforestation: Plant more trees and protect existing forests.
- Technology and Innovation: Develop machines to remove pollution from the air.
- Community and Government Initiatives: Weatherize homes; incentivize energy efficiency; enhance public transit and infrastructure for walking and biking.
- More flexible funding to support community organizations in meeting people's basic needs.

At the organic farming conference, the team spoke with farmers and farm workers. Views expressed included:

- Several farms are deeply involved in federal and state programs that support climate-friendly practices on their farms. It's time intensive but rewarding.
- Workers and farm-owners alike feel very vulnerable to flooding and related climate impacts.
- There is frustration about the paperwork and bureaucracy of getting certified as organic, which can be a climate solution, along with hurdles in getting technical support.
- One organization, Vital Communities, produced a [Climate Climate Farmer Stories Project](#), which profiles about 25 farmers in words and visual art. These farmers are implementing climate-friendly practices on their farms.

“This was the first summer that I really took home the anxiety about the well-being of the farm with me. It feels so personal even when you don't own the business. There are all kinds of farmer grants, but none of them are for farm laborers.”

“I was so worried...it makes me emotional to think about it.”

Farm workers speaking about the toll of heavy rains and flooding in 2023

Upcoming Outreach Activities

The outreach plan for April, May, and June of 2024 includes four lines of activities.

- **Meeting Vermonters where they are:** Continuing to attend events. (Ongoing)
- **Small-group conversations:** Follow-up session with Vermont communities whose primary languages are Maay Maay, French & Lingala, Nepali, Arabic, and Spanish. In collaboration with Vermont's five Community Action Agencies, lay the groundwork for conversations with Vermonters who live on low incomes.
- **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.
- **Public meetings on specific topics:** Public meetings are scheduled to provide input on, and raise awareness around, the Resilience Implementation Strategy process, as well as the kick-off of Climate Action Plan update.



**Climate change threatens food security.
Some farmers are growing solutions.**



Climate farmers are taking direct action right here in the Upper Valley to draw down carbon, nurture resilient landscapes, and build food security in the face of climate change.

Vermont Voices on Climate: Past Reports

- [July, August, September 2023](#)
- [October, November, December 2023](#)