

Vermont Voices on Climate

Vermont Climate Action Office

July 1 to September 30, 2024

Report Overview

This is a summary of public outreach activities conducted by the Vermont Climate Action Office with support from the Consensus Building Institute during July, August, and September 2024. Outreach focused on reaching the full range of geographical areas across Vermont, emphasizing events that would attract frontline community members. Previous reports this year are available here: [April-June 2024](#), [January-March 2024](#). Climate Action Office's [August](#) & [September](#) email updates shared additional information about climate action across the State with subscribers.

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

Our goal is to speak with and listen to as many Vermonters as possible, especially frontline and impacted communities.

Outreach focused on:

1. **Attending events** and meeting Vermonters who aren't typically part of climate policy discussions. We attended 9 events all around Vermont (*see list to the right*).
2. **Meeting Community-Based Organizations**, including Community Action Agency staff working directly with low-income clients.

Events Tabled and Attended

- Northeast Kingdom Human Services' Wellness Day (Barton)
- VT Council on Rural Development's Community Visit (Johnson)
- Lake Memphremagog Festival (Newport)
- The RAMBLE at Old North End (Burlington)
- ACORN'S Farmacy Distribution Day (Middlebury)
- Abenaki Land Link Harvest Festival (South Burlington)
- Vermont State Fair (Rutland)
- First African Landing Day (Burlington)
- All Brains Belong Community Health Education Fair (Montpelier)



What Vermonters are saying

A sample of views expressed at events across Vermont

On disasters and resilience

Resilience means supporting elderly in their buildings during times of extreme hot or cold temperatures.

Redirect our funding to implement locally based, community-led solutions.

Please keep in mind people with disabilities when planning resilience strategies

Our family of four have lived in Plainfield 17 years & lost our home to July floods. I urge state government to create concise, centralized response to disaster. We have to navigate the bureaucracy while mourning.

I am really concerned about how small businesses, and small farms, will be able to withstand the impacts of climate change.

We need to think about how climate change is connected to other issues, such housing, food insecurity, and health and wellness, and how the impact may be different for different people

The kids in my classroom get scared as soon as it starts to rain hard & the wind begins to blow. Honestly, I get scared myself. There's definitely trauma.

I worry about the impact of climate change on our food systems; how are we prepared to deal with cascading impacts and reliance on food markets outside of New England?

Perspectives from the Abenaki Land Link Harvest Festival

Regrow and support healthier riparian buffers [vegetated areas alongside streams and rivers]

Restore wetlands. We need them!

The Emerald Ash Borer is destroying ash trees, which the Abenaki use to make black ash baskets. Black ash grows in riparian areas, and acts as a stabilizer, buffering the impacts of floods. The loss of local black ash trees has impacted this deep and rich Abenaki tradition of black ash basket making, and is impacting the ecosystem's ability to be in balance. We must see each living thing as a part of a much greater whole... Invasive species are threatening our cultural history, and the resilience of our landscape.

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

A sample of views expressed at events across Vermont...cont.

On current state programs

I qualified for a free heat pump through BROCC. It's been great. What would be awesome is if there were follow-up, someone to check in on how it's going and answer questions.

Why do all the incentives and benefits come with complicated and long forms and bureaucratic process and barriers? They are burdensome to people who have disabilities, limited education, and no time to go through the whole process.

I had a good experience with an Efficiency Vermont audit. Had them insulate & seal the attic and a gap in my sunroom, then had other contractors do other things based on the info learned from the audit, such as installing a heat pump.



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

Low-Income Vermonters and the Proposed Clean Heat Standard

A conversation with community action agency staff across Vermont

Front-line staff from Vermont's five community action agencies requested a meeting about the Clean Heat Standard currently being studied by the Public Utilities Commission, to understand the initiative better and provide input from their clients' perspectives. The Climate Action Office convened the virtual session with the PUC in late September.

Major themes and takeaways

- Low-income weatherization incentives must take into account that clients do not have up-front cash to spend. For example, when Community Action Agencies install a fan that would cost someone \$10-15 over the course of the year, that is a big deal. They may be debt-averse or have low credit. Incentives applied through taxes do not apply, as clients do not pay enough taxes to get the benefit.
- A senior citizen on a fixed income and tight budget receives fuel assistance. He is doing the right things already: he weatherized his home through NETO and has a heat pump. If he were to only use the heat pump, he's concerned it will cost more than running the furnace because he would no longer get fuel assistance [because of switching to electricity]. He would *like* to run only his heat pump, but it would be too expensive. He understands and agrees with the goals of switching to clean energy, but the impact of doing so would “burn my wallet”.
- Concern about competition with new entities providing weatherization services. Workforce availability is already a serious issue—how would this impact the existing challenge of finding contractors? Would other entities prioritize all the ‘easy to complete’ projects and leave Community Action Agencies with the most difficult projects, which would spread their resources even thinner?
- “As a middle-class Vermonter, single parent of two kids, \$1.70 increase in my fuel would not leave me with any money to fuel switch or weatherize. Middle class is not considered in the Clean Heat Standard.”

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

Low-Income Vermonters and the Proposed Clean Heat Standard

A conversation with community action agency staff across Vermont

Major themes and takeaways (*Continued...*)

- Where the funding comes from matters a lot. Federal funds only cover the lowest income tier. State funding is crucial to meeting weatherization needs for mid-low-income tier, and for pre-weatherization activities such as home repair, vermiculite, and knob-and-tube removal. Current temporary funding will be expiring soon. Sustainable funding source is needed to continue these activities.
- Everything you say the Clean Heat Standard wants to do, Community Action Agencies are doing a great job at already; we need more money to do more of it.
- With all the data and targets out there, don't forget it's **people** we're trying to serve. When processes become too restrictive or administratively burdensome, they no longer benefit the very people they're trying to help.
- We cannot talk about energy transition without also talking about housing issues. Staff spoke about aging homeowners in Rutland County and the Northeast Kingdom having trouble keeping up with the costs of homeownership. Staff also noted that the lowest income Vermonters are often renters. Clean Heat Standard doesn't address the [split incentive problem](#), making it difficult for clean heat measures to reach renters.
- Mobile home owners (30% of people served by Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity) have barriers to clean heat measures. Most are on 100 amp services, which would need to be upgraded to 200 amp for a heat pump. Because of the water system design in a mobile home, a ductless heat pump or mini-split wouldn't work; only ducted heat pumps work otherwise water pipes will freeze.

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

Wellness Day at Crystal Lake State Park

Orleans County, Saturday July 13, 2024

It was a gorgeous, hot Saturday with a slight breeze coming off the lake. This event fell on the one-year anniversary weekend of the devastating floods experienced by thousands of Vermonters the year prior. Vermont towns had yet again experienced a flood the day before. This became a solemn and heavy topic during this otherwise uplifting family event.

Many people talked about their own experiences during last year's flooding as well what they felt and experienced the previous night, as the rains continued to pound. The storms have left a permanent scar not only on the landscape, transforming some towns and neighborhoods, but also, for some, creating a palpable sense of fear and dread.

- A woman from Richford spoke about the inequities for people with disabilities. She said nature trails should be handicap accessible.
- A farmer from Newport, urged Vermont to spend more money on youth-focused programs and outdoor activities, to support mental health and build community resilience.
- A woman from Orleans is still working at 67. She is grateful to Efficiency Vermont for putting in a better furnace in her home, but it really needs to be better insulated and all of the paperwork scares her.
- Quite a few people spoke about the changing climate, having to deal with flooding and being scared of what's next...storms being more severe and preparing for the worst.
- A middle school teacher spoke about her students who had dealt with last year's flooding; being afraid every time there was a report of a thunderstorm. "I've definitely seen a lot more climate catastrophe-related trauma and fear."
- Another person showed gratitude that the Climate Action Office is "out here talking with us," but said the government is slow to respond and shouldn't require citizens to document damages while dealing with life altering events.

Kashka Orlow

Upcoming Outreach Activities

The outreach plan for the final three months of 2024 include three lines of activities.

- **Meeting Vermonters where they are:** Speak with Vermonters at a handful of late fall events, including Missisquoi Festival in Swanton and the Intervale Fair Share Distribution Day.
- **Small-group conversations:**
 - Hold at least six Input Sessions on key topics under discussion by the Vermont Climate Council's subcommittees, as they prepare their recommendations for an updated Climate Action Plan.
 - Hold a half-day event in October: Climate Conversations with Linguistically Diverse Community Leaders
- **Working with Community Based Organizations:** Continue to coordinate with community action agencies to hold discussions of mutual interest.



Vermont Voices on Climate: Past Reports

- [April, May, June 2024](#)
- [January, February, March 2024](#)
- [July, August, September 2023](#)
- [October, November, December 2023](#)