

Vermont Climate Council: Guidance for Subcommittees for the Update of Vermont's Climate Action Plan 2025

Overview

This document provides guidance to the Vermont Climate Council subcommittees as they start the process of helping to update the state's Climate Action Plan. The document includes guidance on:

- **Expected level of effort and outputs** from the subcommittees
- **Major milestones** in the update process over the next 16 months, and
- **Substantive areas of focus** that are a priority for the Council

Subcommittees will have at their disposal an up-to-date **Progress Report** (excel sheet) on the Initial Climate Action Plan actions, to help orient conversation and provide baseline information. In addition, a stakeholder and community outreach process will help to bring diverse viewpoints into the subcommittee work.

Expected level of effort and outputs

The subcommittees are the primary vehicle for developing recommended updates to Vermont's Initial Climate Action Plan. Three subcommittees – Cross-Sector Mitigation, Agriculture & Ecosystems, Rural Resilience – will take the lead in generating substantive recommendations. Just Transition and Science and Data will support this work. Cross-cutting issues such as workforce, education and outreach will require the Climate Action Office to convene joint meetings of subcommittees.

After developing the Initial Climate Action Plan, many subcommittee and Council members said the process was too time-intensive, and encouraged the state to set clearer expectations when it came time to update the plan. This document attempts to do that.

Expected process steps for subcommittees: The three subcommittees working on substantive recommendations are expected to:

- Review in detail the Progress Report on the Initial Climate Action Plan, which is the foundation for the update.
- Review key scientific and other inputs, such as relevant updates from the recent National Climate Assessment and anticipated scientific products being supported by Climate Action Office
- Determine where additional action is needed based on preliminary priorities from Council and understanding of what is covered in first Plan
- Invest time in prioritizing strategies/actions, with the goal of 1) keeping all relevant strategies/actions 2) signaling a handful of highest priority strategies/actions that require immediate attention by lawmakers and/or state

government and 3) suggesting one or two strategies that could be included in a “Top-10” list of strategies in the updated Climate Action Plan.

Expected deliverables from subcommittees: The three subcommittees working on substantive recommendations are expected to produce:

- (July-August) At least one update to the Council about the subcommittee’s progress in developing these prioritized strategies/actions.
- (November-December) A prioritized list of strategies and actions. The Climate Action Office will provide a template that minimizes the amount of writing required.

The Just Transition Subcommittee will provide support to the process by:

- Having liaisons participate actively in subcommittee meetings as members
- Assisting subcommittees in using the Just Transitions Principles and Scoring Rubric in the prioritization process
- Bringing in stories and learning from the public engagement work, and encouraging community members/leaders to share their lived experience in relevant Council and subcommittee meetings

The Science and Data Subcommittee will provide support by:

- Reviewing and guiding technical studies, including the Business-As-Usual analysis
- Synthesizing relevant technical and scientific information that will support the Council’s work and are developed in collaboration with the other Subcommittees

Expected level of effort by subcommittees: The work of subcommittees will restart in April 2024 and be most active in the fall of 2024. The estimated time commitment is roughly:

- 4-6 hours of work per month for the first few months, with monthly meetings.
- Starting in September 2024, more frequent meetings will be needed to finalize the recommended strategies and actions, likely becoming weekly or bi-weekly meetings in October and November, meaning up to 4 hours per week at the height of the work.
- Once recommendations are presented to the Council in late 2024, the rhythm of work will slow significantly, with just a handful of meetings prior to the Council finalizing the revised Climate Action Plan in June 2025.

Support from staff and consultants: The Climate Action Office will have a staff member assigned to support meeting logistics, create Zoom links, and provide general coordination of the process. In addition, the Climate Action Office has staff members participating in each subcommittee, further assisting coordination across groups. The Climate Action Office has consultant support for public engagement activities (see additional details below) and technical analysis (listed below). Subcommittee co-chairs

and members will need to take the lead in drafting the subcommittee's recommendations, with support from state agency staff. Subcommittees will need to adopt a system for notetaking at meetings. Facilitation support is available for key conversations, though not for every meeting (subcommittees can ask the Steering Committee to allocate facilitation hours.)

Key Milestones in the process

- ⇒ April 2024 (or late March 2024): Subcommittees convene with their updated membership, sketch out a workplan for the next 8 months, do a detailed review of the Progress Report.
- ⇒ May – August 2024: Subcommittees determine where additional strategies/actions are needed to address key gaps (or lack of progress) and begin to draft revised strategies / actions. Subcommittees present an update to the Council.
- ⇒ September – December 2024: Subcommittees prioritize strategies / actions and present a final recommended list to the Council.
- ⇒ January – March 2025: Council consolidates subcommittee inputs into a single document, approves version for public comment. Subcommittees don't have tasks in this period, unless the Council asks for help.
- ⇒ April – June 2025: Subcommittee members can help support the public engagement process around the draft. Council reviews input, finalizes document.

A note on public engagement: Throughout the process, a public engagement team will be using multiple strategies to reach a diverse set of Vermonters and have discussions about climate action generally as well as specific issues being addressed by subcommittees and the Council. The results of this ongoing engagement will be shared with subcommittees and the Council. In addition, Councilors and subcommittee members will have opportunities to attend engagement events. The Just Transition Subcommittee will help to orient the engagement work and assist in transmitting what is being heard.

Additional guidance subcommittees should expect

This document is intended as an initial, short guide for subcommittees to begin their work. In the coming months, subcommittees should expect additional guidance around:

- Support from a new full-time position in the Climate Action Office to develop templates to aid in drafting the CAP update, further guidance documents, and overall support of pulling the Plan together.
- A detailed public engagement plan that will help subcommittees weave public input and diverse viewpoints into their deliberations.
- More detail around the process of prioritization and incorporating equity considerations into that prioritization. In addition, there will be further guidance on the level of detail subcommittees should strive for.

- The Subcommittees will benefit from an updated Pathways Analysis, including a new Business-as-usual emissions analysis and consideration of assumptions built into the model, as well as further technical analyses discussed at the [January 2024 Council meeting](#). The technical analyses proposed in January, including the transportation policy analysis, the carbon budget, net-zero framework analysis, and the agricultural sector greenhouse gas emissions and sequestration study follow-up, will be coordinated with input from Subcommittees to consider timing and need.

Substantive areas of focus that are a priority for the Council

The Council has expressed the following priority areas for subcommittees to focus their efforts. While this is an orientation, it is not intended as an exhaustive list or a limitation if subcommittee identify other areas that merit attention. Additional detail can be found in the meeting [notes](#)¹ from the Council's January 29, 2024 meeting.

In addition to these specific areas of focus, the revision process will include conversations among multiple subcommittees on cross-cutting issues such as workforce, education, and outreach.

Subcommittee members are also encouraged to review a "Do No Harm" framework incorporated into the [Initial Climate Action Plan](#)² (page 21).

Additional detail can be found in the meeting [notes](#)³ from the Council's January 29, 2024 meeting.

Cross-Sector Mitigation

- Must generate a suite of recommendations that allow the state to meet equitably its statutory emissions reductions goals.
- Transportation: Specific focus on additional action in the transportation sector
- Other sectors: Review of implementation of actions across all sectors to consider complementary actions needed to meet climate goals equitably.
- Low-income households: Emphasize implementation and impacts/opportunities for vulnerable communities and low-income Vermonters
- Workforce: Development of strategies and action to support workforce development

Rural Resilience & Adaptation

- Goals: Establish quantitative goals and metrics to track progress
 - Vision: Vision / goals for climate resilience to inform metrics & actions

¹ <https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/climatecouncil/Shared%20Documents/1-29-24%20Minutes%20-%20Vermont%20Climate%20Council.pdf>

² <https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/climatecouncil/Shared%20Documents/Initial%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%20-%20Final%20-%2012-1-21.pdf>

³ <https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/climatecouncil/Shared%20Documents/1-29-24%20Minutes%20-%20Vermont%20Climate%20Council.pdf>

- Timeline: To achieve desired outcomes and goals
- Level: What does success look like for resilience at the landscape vs. community vs. individual level?
- Review Plan specifically to consider if more work is needed to address:
 - Strategies aimed at cascading and compounding impacts
 - Actions that help smaller communities move from planning to implementation, particularly communities with limited resources and no professional staff
 - Explore land use and land use policy with Ag & Eco
 - Strategies to address the mental and physical health impacts of climate change, including health and wellness disparities.
- **Related process:** The Climate Action Office will help the subcommittee work in a complementary way with the simultaneous Resilience Implementation Strategy process.

Agriculture & Ecosystems

- Agree on overarching goals for use to prioritize actions in first Plan
 - Support for farmers and forest landowners to **reduce emissions** associated with farming and forestry equipment and practices
 - Provide guidance on climate-smart agriculture and forestry to increase **carbon sequestration** and storage
 - Create **resilient** and equitable food systems and forestry-product supply chains
- Four buckets of likely climate actions to be further prioritized from first Plan
 - Farm and forest-sector viability (in the face of climate and other impacts)
 - Farm and forestry practices (particularly opportunities for lower net emissions)
 - Supporting natural lands (to support overarching goals)
 - Support food security
- Balancing interests will be crucial (VT's needs around affordable housing and food production, nature & wetlands, managed forests, renewable energy, etc)