

# Vermont Climate Council & Subcommittee Member Onboarding Guide

## What is the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA)?

In 2020, the Vermont Legislature passed the Global Warming Solutions Act ([Act 153 as Enacted](#)), which created legally binding emission reduction targets.

The Act was created in response to concerns around Vermont's changing climate and the magnitude of what must be done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for the impacts of climate change on Vermont's landscape.

The Act requires Vermont to reduce greenhouse gas pollution to 26% below 2005 levels by 2025. Emissions would need to be 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 80% below by 2050.

In addition to the emission reductions required by the statute, the law also directs the Council to consider opportunities for conservation through long-term carbon sequestration and identify actions Vermont communities can take to better prepare for more extreme weather.

## What is the Climate Council?

The Vermont Climate Council was established by the passage of the Global Warming Solutions Act by the Vermont Legislature. It is a 23-member Council made up of legislative appointments and administration officials and is responsible for drafting the Climate Action Plan by December 1, 2021, and revising it every four years thereafter.

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources supports the work of the Climate Council.

[View Council membership here](#)

## What is the job of my subcommittee?

The Vermont Climate Council has five subcommittees that carry out the various aspects of work for which the Council is responsible. Each subcommittee is co-chaired by one member of the administration and one legislative appointee, and includes members of the Council as well as people who do not serve on the Climate Council. You can view the makeup of the five subcommittees [here](#).

- 1) The **Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee** is charged with focusing on the role Vermont's natural and working lands play in carbon sequestration and storage, climate adaptation, and ecosystem and community resilience. This subcommittee seeks to understand current initiatives in the agricultural and forestry sectors and the businesses that depend on them and to develop actions and policies that restore wetlands; increase carbon stored on agricultural and forest land and in forest products; and support healthy agricultural soils and local food systems.
- 2) The **Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee** is charged with focusing on focus on comprehensively "identifying the most scientifically and technologically feasible strategies and programs" to achieve the GHG emissions reduction requirements of the GWSA.
- 3) The **Just Transitions Subcommittee** is charged with developing principles to guide and evaluate the work of the other Sub-committees to ensure that the initiatives, programs and strategies necessary to achieve the State's GHG emission reduction requirements and build resilience and climate adaptation of Vermont communities and natural systems support all residents of the State fairly and equitably.

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- 4) The **Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee** is charged with focus on pressures climate change will place on Vermont's transportation, electricity, housing, emergency services, and communications infrastructure, with particular attention to the challenges faced by rural communities across the state in addressing these pressures. The Sub-committee will also assess how individual and community preparedness impact resilience to climate change.
- 5) The **Science and Data Subcommittee** is responsible for incorporating the most recent and highest quality data and information available about climate change, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience into the Vermont Climate Action Plan.

For a detailed review of subcommittee charges, view the document [here](#).

## What is the Climate Action Plan?

The Vermont Climate Action Plan aims to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, help protect Vermont communities and landscapes from the greatest risks of climate change, and create new clean energy industry and jobs.

More specifically, the Climate Action Plan includes strategies to:

1. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation, building, regulated utility, industrial, commercial, and agricultural sectors;
2. Encourage smart growth and related strategies;
3. Achieve long-term sequestration and storage of carbon and promote best management practices to achieve climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience on natural working lands;
4. Achieve net zero emissions by 2050 across all sectors;
5. Reduce energy burdens for rural and marginalized communities;
6. Limit the use of chemicals, substances, or products that contribute to climate change; and
7. Build and encourage climate adaptation and resilience of Vermont communities and natural systems.

The Climate Action Plan serves as a guide for the Vermont Legislature in setting policy that supports climate change solutions for Vermonters and Vermont's landscape. You can find the Climate Action Plan, adopted by the Climate Council on December 1, 2021, [here](#).

## The Climate Action Plan was passed on December 1, 2021, what is the Climate Council working on now?

With the CAP adopted, activity largely moves back into the Legislature for the 2022 session. The legislature is working to:

- Identify a suite of high-impact policy priorities that will support durable environmental outcomes.
- Fully appropriate ARPA funds for climate action
  - Identify opportunities to utilize one-time monies to augment federal funds to achieve the speed and scale of implementation actions required by the GWSA

The Climate Council is currently working on understand additional analyses and contractor support needed to fully achieve the requirements of the GWSA, including:

- Advancing improvements to the emissions inventory and carbon budget

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- Establishing an approach for data collection and management to track progress
- Creating a municipal climate toolkit, including vulnerability index
- Continuing and expanding public outreach and engagement

The subcommittees have established task groups, often made up of members from multiple subcommittees, to continue the work outlined above. If you are interested in working on one of the task groups, please reach out to your subcommittee co-chairs. The structure of the Council, subcommittees, and task groups can be viewed [here](#).

## Website Orientation

The Agency of Natural Resources manages the website [www.climatechange.vermont.gov](http://www.climatechange.vermont.gov) that is used to warn Council and subcommittee members and serves as the landing page for both the public, Councilors, and subcommittee members for relevant documents.

The two most important pages on the website are:

- 1) [Calendar](#) – This is where all public meetings related to the Council are warned. By clicking on an event, you will find the zoom link for those public meetings, as well as agenda and any other relevant documents for those meetings. Events stay on the calendar even after they are completed, so you can use the calendar to review previous meeting minutes and recordings if needed.
- 2) [Resources](#) – This page is where all relevant documents for the Council are stored. It is a sortable table, so if you are looking for the Guiding Principles for a Just Transition document, for example, you can search for the word “guiding” in the search field, and any documents with that word in the title will appear.

## State Partner Email Account

Once appointed to a subcommittee, you will be set up with a state of Vermont Partner email address. All Council communications will be sent to this email address, so you are encouraged to check it periodically.

To activate your email address please contact the Agency of Digital Services (ADS) Help Desk at 802-498 7873 to setup your passwords. Press 1 when you get through. Once you have your password, you will need to open a browser and go to [portal.office.com](http://portal.office.com) to login to check your email. Your email address will be there [first.last@partner.vermont.gov](mailto:first.last@partner.vermont.gov) (example: [Peter.Bourne@partner.vermont.gov](mailto:Peter.Bourne@partner.vermont.gov)).

## Governmental Ethical Conduct

Please watch the [Vermont Climate Council meeting on November 20, 2020](#) – starting at 1:26:15 to review the [presentation from the Vermont Ethics Commission](#).

Key Takeaways:

- 1) When there is a potential conflict of interest:
  - a. Disclose the potential conflict of interest and disclose yourself from those potentially conflictual discussions. Ensure you are clear that you are recusing yourself due to a conflict of interest.

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- b. If you have a question about a potential conflict of interest, you can contact the [State Ethics Commission](#) for confidential advice.

*Vermont State Ethics Commission*  
*6 Baldwin St.*  
*Montpelier, VT 05633-7950*  
*802-828-7187*  
*Larry Novins, Executive Director*  
<https://ethicscommission.vermont.gov/>  
[Larry.Novins@vermont.gov](mailto:Larry.Novins@vermont.gov)

- 2) Preferential treatment is not permitted.
- 3) Use of government property, resources, or the position for personal gain is not permitted.
- 4) Act 102 is likely to apply to members of the Council and is currently under review by ANR.

## Vermont Public Records Act

Please watch the [Vermont Climate Council meeting \(video #2\) on November 20, 2020](#) – starting at 3:32 to review the presentation from on the [Vermont Public Records Act](#).

### Key Takeaways:

- 1) The Vermont Climate Council and its subcommittees are considered public bodies.
- 2) A public document or public document is defined as “any written or recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which is procured or acquired in the course of public agency business.” 1 V.S.A. § 317(b).
- 3) The Public Records Act applies to public records that are stored in private accounts or on personal devices. When requested, public records must be produced “promptly” upon request. “Prompt” means 3 business days 1 V.S.A § 318(a).
- 4) Documents considered personal, or documents that violate attorney-client privilege are exempt from Vermont’s public record act.
  - a. A communication is protected by attorney-client privilege when there is existence of attorney-client relationship, the communication was made for the purpose of facilitation the rendition of professional legal services, the client sought lawyer’s “skills and training”, or the client reasonable would have expected communications to be confidential.
  - b. A communication is considered a personal document and is therefore exempt from Vermont’s Public Records Act when the privacy of an individual is involved, it reveals intimate details of a person’s life, it might subject an individual to “embarrassment, harassment, disgrace, or loss of employment or friends, or if it contains information that would not normally be shared with strangers.
- 5) **You can use personal or business email addresses for Climate Council communications, but you should understand that doing so opens any other communications in those email accounts to public records requests related to the Climate Council.**
  - a. Auto forwarding of emails to accounts outside Vermont.gov is prohibited as of March 2021.
- 6) Best practice would be to always include your state partner email address on Council communications, even if using your work or personal email.

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## Vermont's Open Meeting Law

Please watch the [Vermont Climate Council meeting \(video #2\) on November 20, 2020](#) – starting at 40:12 to review the presentation from on the [Vermont's Open Meeting Law](#).

Key Takeaways:

- 1) Vermont Open Meeting Law requires all meetings of public bodies be open to the public unless a specific exception applies. In order to make a meeting open, the public body must:
  - a. Provide advance public notice of meetings, including meetings agendas (must be posted 48 hours prior to the meeting).
  - b. Discuss all business and take all actions in open meetings, unless an exception applies.
  - c. Allow members of the public to attend and participate in meetings.
  - d. Take meeting minutes and make them available to the public (must be posted 5 calendars after the meeting).
  - e. Vermont Climate Council and subcommittee meetings are warned and meetings posted at [www.climatechange.vermont.gov](http://www.climatechange.vermont.gov) and on the [Public Meetings Calendar for State Agencies](#).
- 2) A meeting is a gathering of a quorum of the members of a public body for the purpose of discussing the business of the public body or for the purpose of taking action. A quorum is a simple majority of the total members of the body regardless of any vacancies or recusals. In short, you should not reply all to emails sent to the Council or subcommittee, and subcommittee business should not be discussed over email with a quorum of the Council or a subcommittee, as that would constitute a meeting.
- 3) When discussing collaborating on online documents, name a point person who collects and compiles each member's comments for later discussion at a duly-warned meeting.

## Climate Council Per Diem and Expenses

Members of the Vermont Climate Council and its subcommittees are entitled to compensation for their work as a Council and/or subcommittee member.

In accordance with 32 V.S.A. § 1010, Council and subcommittee members are entitled to the per diem amount of \$50 a day for attendance at subcommittee or Council meetings. For any other necessary work performed, the per diem rate will be prorated for the actual time spent on the work based on an 8-hour day and must be approved by the board chair to receive reimbursement. That equates to \$6.25/hour for work outside of official Council or subcommittee meetings. The maximum compensation for all work is \$50 per day.

To set up and submit for per diem payment, follow the steps in the attached document titled: Climate Council Per Diem and Expense Guide, and submit the attached excel form. If you have questions or need assistance in completing the form, please contact Marian Wolz ([marian.wolz@vermont.gov](mailto:marian.wolz@vermont.gov)).