

# Vermont Climate Action Public Engagement Plan – 2023-24

Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute for the Vermont Climate Action Office

April 2023

## Table of Contents

Vermont Climate Action Public Engagement Plan – 2023-24	1
<b>Overview</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Internal Coordination and Planning</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Mechanism for consolidating feedback and engagement results</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Engagement Efforts - Public Meetings</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Engagement Efforts - Partner Engagement and Direct Community Engagement</b>	<b>4-7</b>

## Overview

This plan describes the public, stakeholder and Tribal engagement initiatives proposed under the Consensus Building Institute’s contract with the Vermont Climate Action Office.

The three objectives of this proposed engagement are:

- **Enhance awareness** around climate action efforts in the state, with a particular focus on communities experiencing impacts and other frontline communities
- **Lift up the voices and viewpoints of communities** into the implementation of climate-related initiatives and the ongoing work of the Vermont Climate Council, so that a diverse group of Vermonters can influence these efforts
- **Build relationships and communication channels** that will help Vermonters work collaboratively on future climate action

Figure 1 offers a summary of the efforts:



This engagement plan also includes a mechanism that will serve as a predictable, effective process for receiving priorities for engagement from state government, with input from the Vermont Climate Council, and communicating the engagement results to state government and stakeholders such as the Council.

## Internal Coordination and Planning

This engagement will occur in the context of parallel, related efforts and initiatives across state government, requiring coordination. CBI proposes:

- Weekly or bi-weekly team check-ins with the Climate Action Office
- Regular participation in the Inter-Agency Advisory Board
- Regular discussion with the Vermont Climate Council process through an articulated process decided upon in consult with the Climate Action Office

One purpose of this coordination will be to orient the substantive topics of engagement activities. While some engagement will be focused on building relationships and broad conversations around climate topics, CBI also will be leaning into the substantive areas that will most support implementation of the Initial Climate Action Plan, climate action priorities of state agencies (e.g., the renewable energy work at the Public Service Department) and the work of the Climate Council.

Engagement activities will require inputs from the Climate Action Office, in particular:

- Printed materials: One-pagers, postcards, flyers, posters, a printed table banner, fact sheets, informational materials, etc. CBI is open to helping the Climate Action Office produce these materials. Basic materials will need to be translated into major non-English languages spoken by Vermonters
- Digital tools: A website that supports the type of engagement envisioned in this plan, including channels for making comments. Perhaps a pathway for submit voicemails (or non-written comments) or other types of comments?
- Assistance in promoting events through Front Porch Forums, social media, local papers, radio, TV

## Mechanism for consolidating feedback and engagement results

CBI proposes to write a quarterly report on engagement activities that summaries:

1. The activities conducted during that period
2. The views and key themes that emerged in the different engagements, separated by topic when appropriate. The summary will include comments received via the website and through other channels
3. Planned engagement activities, including any thematic focus of those activities. CBI will include opportunities for state agency staff and stakeholders, such as Climate Councilors, to participate in upcoming events.

The quarterly summary will be short enough to be a reasonable read for a wide audience of state staff, Councilors, and others, while having enough detail to provide meaningful input into state and Council decision-making.

As part of this quarterly summary, the CBI community engagement team will transcribe and document key comments and feedback received from the public and categorize them based on relevant themes. This process will enable the team to analyze the feedback received, identify patterns and trends, and develop appropriate next steps for engagement. By summarizing the categorized comments and

suggestions in the quarterly report, CBI aims to provide insights into the public's views, opinions, and concerns.

## Engagement Efforts - Public Meetings

The state is considering broad-based public meetings this year. The focus of these meetings will be on the substantive areas of ongoing work to inform the implementation of the Initial Climate Action Plan, anticipated legislative priorities, preparing for a revision to the Climate Action Plan, and other topics identified through public and focused partner engagement. The state expects 6-8 public meetings each year, held most likely virtually but could include in-person meetings. Process support for meetings will include:

1. Develop plans for specific public engagement events
2. Designing meetings, together with the Climate Action Office (CAO) Director and the Community Engagement and Communications Coordinator, to promote constructive interaction
3. Reaching out to key participants ahead of time to confirm meeting design and to identify key concerns
4. Assisting the CAO Director identifying materials that should be developed and provided ahead of and during the meetings
5. Facilitating productive conversations at the meetings
6. Developing concise summaries that are shared with all participants.

No public meetings are currently scheduled. CBI will work closely with the Climate Action Office to set priorities for potential meetings later in the year.

## Engagement Efforts - Partner Engagement and Direct Community Engagement

A focus for the state is targeted engagement with frontline and impacted communities, often working with partner organizations to build relationships that will allow more Vermonters to get involved on climate-related issues. The approaches, which will vary depending on the community and potential partner organization, will aim to meet people where they are, improve awareness around relevant climate actions, and identify and understand priority issues for those communities.

The goal is not to immediately “get feedback”, but rather create conversations that can be sustainable over time around climate action issues – how we heat and cool our homes, how we get to work and move around the state, how we use the land around us, how our families prepare for, and react to, threats such as flooding and heat waves.

The targeted engagement will begin with a handful of community organizations as partners, and different approaches to test the effectiveness, and will be directed by the Climate Action Office. This work will build upon work that began in 2022 to develop and sustain partnerships with key organizations.

The plan divides the partner and direct community engagement work into four strategies, which overlap and support each other: 1) Develop and sustain partnerships; 2) Conduct focus groups; 3) Meet frontline communities where they are; and 4) Convene a climate action coalition. Each is described in more detail below.

- 1) **Develop and sustain partnerships with key organizations.** This work began in 2022 through conversations with the CAP agencies, the Health Disparities and Cultural Competence Council (HDCCC), the Council on Rural Development and initial conversations with the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs. In 2023, these conversations should continue, be expanded to other key organizations, and involve specific “asks” and activities. CBI will:
  - a. Reconvene the group of staff working for multiple CAP agencies that offered to continue being a resource and sounding board.
  - b. Maintain contact with HDCCC
  - c. Work with Climate Action Office to develop regular contact with the Council on Rural Development
  - d. Work with Native American communities and leaders to explore potential conversations around climate and climate action.
  - e. Work with community members and organizations in Burlington’s Old North End
  
- 2) **Conduct targeted focus groups** with priority populations, working with cultural brokers. Focus groups are an effective way to gather viewpoints and disseminate information in communities that are often left out of general public conversation due to language and other barriers. CBI recommends starting in 2023 with a round of 3-5 focus groups, initially targeting populations with language barriers. Depending on the results of these initial efforts, CBI could convene additional groups throughout the year. CBI will:
  - a. Start planning to hold the initial focus groups in May, likely with Arabic speakers; Somali speakers; Nepali speakers; and French speakers.
  - b. Key input – simple materials that will be translated.
  
- 3) **Meet front-line communities where they are.** Efforts funded by Capstone in late 2021 and early 2022 showed the value of getting out and interacting with key populations and communities by attending events, meeting people in gathering places, and using creative techniques. This work will happen in earnest in 2023 and will likely overlap with engaging key partners. The goal is to get out frequently, be thoughtful about how to piggy-back on events, and reach key groups and populations. CBI’s Vermont-based public engagement team is well positioned to do this work. CBI will develop an event planning template and calendar of upcoming events, focused on:
  - ❖ Being repetitive and continuous: Showing up multiple times (a minimum of three) at each space per year. Consistency, follow through, reflection and conversation will eventually lead to building trust. The depth of engagement will increase over time.
  - ❖ Starting with Old North End to test the methodology. The community is particularly diverse, and a priority for the Council’s work around biomass issues. Once precedent is established in and around Chittenden county, we will move on to include other regions of Vermont, including: the Northeast Kingdom (NEK), Rutland and Bennington counties, central Vermont, Windsor and Windham counties. The goal is to expand our outreach effort across Vermont.

To build and rebuild trust with frontline communities we will be going directly into those communities and engaging face-to-face with their members, spending the time to listen and discuss community concerns.

We will enlist the help of volunteers from within the communities and leverage already existing networks. Community members who may have been reluctant to participate might do so in the future if they recognize members from their own community. Additionally, we will recruit help from personal networks and leverage organizations that have shown interest in partnering.

CBI will select locations and timing for tabling and events that reflect:

- Where people gather, and specific events that attract the diverse populations we are seeking to engage
- Opportunities to be associated with trusted organizations
- After testing the methodology, geographic diversity around the state

### **Tabling Events and Tabling at Partner Events**

Once we have simple marketing materials in hand from the Climate Action Office, tabling events can take place. While we may sometimes develop our own events, we will emphasize being present at existing events hosted by an established community organization, which can help us reach a wider audience and establish stronger relationships with the community.

The day of the event, we will have set up a table with our banner in the front. An A-frame (or sandwich board) will provide welcoming information as well as additional signage explaining who we are and why we are there. We will have a sign-up sheet, plus we would like to have simple giveaways and promotional materials.

Depending on the location of the event, the table(s) will be staffed by at least one CBI consultant and potentially with volunteers. Depending on the event we will have materials that allow the table to be a vibrant and inviting place for individuals and families to stop and be curious, including useful information sheets, activities for kids, and ways to leave contact information. For instance, we will have:

- Sign-In Table: welcoming attendees and capturing contact information (we ask for permission to include contact info in an email or text distribution list related to climate action)
- Simple information sheets about climate change and climate action (the same as used in the focus groups), in particular with information on programs/incentives
- Invite-a-friend Campaign
- Activities and fun things for families (e.g., bubbles for kids/ plus bubblemaker, sidewalk chalk, face painting, outdoor games, balloons, lawn blankets, music, food, potentially prizes: gift cards with the card holder displaying "Climate change VT website?")
- Ways to provide comments (leave a voice text?)

The goal is relationship building through sharing a fun-filled day. This will allow us to learn how best to proceed in a particular community or area of Vermont. We will be listening for the areas in which people are interested in receiving more information, to inform the next time we show up in that community.

At the end of each event, CBI will write up a short summary of what was heard, key themes, and questions. These summaries will be included as annexes to CBI's quarterly reports on engagement activities.

Multiple touchpoints will be made prior to the next event with community members who have signed the sign-in sheet, volunteers and partner organizations. Reminders to bring-a-friend to the next event.

Each subsequent event in the same location will aim to have deeper conversations about climate-related issues, building off what was previously heard.

- 4) **Convene a climate engagement alliance of frontline organizations.** Vermont has had positive experiences with groups of frontline and marginalized communities to address health issues, including the COVID pandemic. CBI proposes that the Climate Action Office, with CBI's assistance, pull together a similar collection of frontline organizations. The alliance (it could also be called a quarterly forum) would be a space to help organizations insert different issues related to climate action into their work, while also providing a venue for collaboration and coordination.

To achieve this goal, CBI will take the following actions:

1. Meet regularly with representatives (1:1 and/or small group conversations) from organizations working with frontline and marginalized communities (such as Indigenous peoples, Black people, people of color, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, former refugees/immigrants, unhoused individuals, those living on low incomes, and rural Vermonters) to share updates, seek feedback, and strategize outreach efforts. The relationships built through this process will help us understand impacts among various populations in Vermont, send information on upcoming events, request participation from diverse groups of Vermonters, and seek support in reaching out to Vermonters who are generally left out of climate action conversations.
2. Invite representatives to join a collaborative network of organizations that meets on a quarterly basis. Given that the 1:1 outreach and relationship building process takes time, the first meeting will likely be hosted in late summer. The CBI team will work hard to ensure that the organizations in the network represent geographic and racial diversity. The quarterly meeting will focus on providing updates, receiving feedback, sharing resources, and building relationships of trust with participating organizations. The feedback, comments, and concerns shared by the organizations will be documented and shared by CBI in its report.
3. Given the need for affinity spaces, a CBI consultant will meet with BIPOC-led organizations, organizers, and community members from across the state in 1:1 and small group settings. Additionally, they will organize a group meeting on a quarterly basis. The feedback, comments, and concerns shared by participants will be documented and shared by CBI in its report. Depending on the level of interest and engagement among other identity groups (such as LGBTQIA+ communities, individuals living on low incomes, and people with disabilities), the same strategy will likely be adopted.