

VERMONT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION

February 2022

Beginning in April 2021, Climate Access and Rise Consulting served as contractors for the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, leading a public participation process to engage Vermonters in creating and implementing the Vermont Climate Action Plan. The initial four-phase project scope, set to continue through the end of March 2022 was amended by the Agency of Natural Resources to conclude following the completion of the project's second phase and the release of the initial Climate Action Plan.

Climate Access and Rise Consulting produced the following deliverables and activities:

- Regular coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources and Climate Council subcommittees;
- The creation of the public engagement plan (based on findings review of public opinion polling, an analysis of media coverage on climate change in Vermont, a scan of the Climate Council materials, a series of roundtable discussions and in-depth interviews with target stakeholders);
- The development of outreach materials (overview fact sheet, pathways and strategies summary, overview of what's at stake and what can be done, partner event facilitation guide, event presentation deck, event planning guide and event promotion poster);
- Website and social media strategy and content;
- Online survey development and dissemination;
- Event ad-buys and promotion;
- Planning and facilitation of in-person and online stakeholder engagement events;
- Production of the public engagement findings report; and
- Creation of materials for the release of the initial Climate Action plan on December 1, 2021.

The following evaluation report considered event promotion metrics, media coverage, social media analytics, the feedback of in-person and online event participants and interviews with state staff and Climate Council members conducted in January and February 2022. From these sources, Climate Access heard praise for the outreach materials, the opportunity to connect with other community members through the events and join in discussions around climate concerns and the Climate Action Plan priorities. The ongoing pandemic and short time frame for releasing the plan were noted as significant obstacles for deeper and more equitable public engagement.

Efforts to facilitate a BIPOC engagement event were met with opposition from members of the Vermont public, which ultimately created a barrier that reduced BIPOC participation in the input session. More work, time and resource investment is needed to build trust and authentic relationships with diverse community-based organizations across the state that represent communities most impacted by climate change. Additional efforts should be made to clarify how public input is being considered to influence the Climate Action Plan.

PARTICIPATION

A total of 1,602 Vermonters were engaged in the Climate Action Plan process by Climate Access and Rise Consulting in partnership with the Agency of Natural Resources.

Participation:

- Interviews & Roundtables: 37 participants
- Public Engagement Events: 521 total attendees
 - *In-person events*
 - Sept 21, 2021: Elm ore State Park Pavilion, Elm ore (46 attendees)
 - Sept 22, 2021: Emerald Lake State Park Pavilion, East Dorset (48 attendees)
 - Sept 23, 2021: Lakeside Pavilion, Island Pond (33 attendees)
 - Sept 26, 2021: Airport Park Pavilion, Colchester (48 attendees)
 - *Online events*
 - Sept 30, 2021: Online public meeting (151 attendees)
 - Oct 6, 2021: Online public meeting (152 attendees)
 - Oct 12, 2021: Online meeting for BIPOC communities (10 attendees)
- Public Opinion Survey: 679 responses
- Public Comment Form : 365 comments

PROMOTION METRICS

The public engagement events were promoted via Front Porch Forum and local and statewide digital and print news outlets, including VT Digger, Seven Days, Barton Chronicle, Caledonian-Record, Newport Daily Express, Bennington Banner, Vermont Newsguide, Colchester Sun, St. Albans Messenger and Essex Reporter.

Digital ad results:

- VT Digger: 55,002 impressions, 59 clicks
- Front Porch Forum : 51,181 impressions, 37 clicks
- Seven Days: 25,000 impressions, 20 clicks
- Newport Daily Express: 25,000 impressions, 3 clicks
- Manchester Journal: 6,589 impressions, 12 clicks

MEDIA COVERAGE

Climate Action Plan public engagement was prominently featured in ten media outlets including local and state-wide outlets. Overall, coverage of the events was positive and focused on the concerns, insights, and reactions of event participants. Equity issues were highlighted by the media as well, regarding the importance of equity and inclusion in the Climate Council’s decision-making process, the security concerns around the online BIPOC event and the community engagement challenges inherent in the plan’s accelerated time frame.

MEDIA OUTLET	ARTICLE	QUOTE
Manchester Journal	Vermont Climate Action Plan hearing draws crowd at Emerald Lake	Attendees were broken into groups and asked to consider questions such as ‘What actions are most important to you and why?’ regarding climate change and potential action steps. The smaller groups were asked to share their ideas and priorities.
My Champlain Valley	Formation of Vermont’s Climate Action Plan gets	I and many of the people in the group felt stressed out for our children and for the kinds

	underway	of changes our children may have to deal with..I could see it on everyone’s face. Just this sense of it’s going to be really embarrassing to tell them why we didn’t do something different when we could,’ said Jessica Seddon from Morrisville.”
Seven Days	The Climate Council Doesn’t Want Its Plan to Burden Vermonters. Did it Deliver?	We need relationship building and direct engagement with low-income communities to have a shared understanding of what actual barriers to adoption are, not what we think the barriers to adoption are, Moore said.
Valley News	Public hearings planned for Vermont Climate Council’s proposal	Because of the short time frame provided by the Global Warming Solutions Act, there is a lot going on simultaneously," said Susanne Young, who chairs the Climate Council. The Council is only in the early stages of drafting the plan, although it is already engaging with the public. Vermonters’ opportunity to voice any concerns about the plan will not expire when it is presented to the Legislature on Dec. 1.
Vermont Biz	Vermont Climate Council adopts CAP, administration calls process 'overzealous'	While there is much more work to be done to equitably engage Vermonters in shaping climate action moving forward, applying these principles will ensure those most affected by climate change and an energy transition are being considered,’ said Councilor Sue Minter and Co-Chair of the Just Transitions Subcommittee.
VPT	Vermont just adopted a Climate Action Plan. Here's how it says we should reduce emissions	And there’s going to be a big effort early in 2022, to get more feedback from the public.
VT Digger	Climate council, starting a series of public meetings, fields list of priorities in Elmore Council authorizes state’s 1st Climate Action Plan Will climate resilience earn enough weight in Vermont’s Climate Action Plan?	Handed packets of information about the council’s draft plans and divided into groups, attendees raised myriad questions and issues. How, for example, does Vermont plan to maintain food security? How will the state house people who move from areas affected by wildfire and drought? How will everyone gain equal protection from the impacts of climate change? Council members plan to continue engaging with the public and the bodies responsible for carrying out the plan in the months to come as the plan is updated and revised.

	<p>Climate council has until December to file plan to reduce carbon emissions</p> <p>‘Our future isn’t guaranteed’: Young Vermonters call for more climate action</p>	<p>Young said the just transitions panel, which aims to ensure the climate action plan is equitable for all Vermonters, is close to finalizing a public engagement plan that is “integral for the rest of the council.”</p> <p>Without any input from the most impacted Vermonters, this plan does not, cannot harness the power of this moment of transition to repair harm in the way that we might have been able to,” Hsiang said. While she wants the plan to move forward, she said, the council must engage frontline communities in the next few months.</p>
WAMC	<p>Vermont Climate Council gathers BIPOC input for Climate Action Plan</p> <p>Vermont’s initial Climate Action Plan approved by Climate Council</p>	<p>A virtual session focused on gathering input from BIPOC, or Black, Indigenous and People of Color, was initially postponed due to internet security concerns. The rescheduled meeting echoed some common interests but focused on the plan’s potential impact on underserved communities.</p>
WCAX	<p>Vermonters voice suggestions for Climate Action Plan</p>	<p>There’s so many different ideas out there, and you’re not going to be able to find the best of them if it’s just a couple of people. You got to filter through all of them to find the best ones,’ said Kira Ecay, a student at UVM.</p>
WVNY/WFFF	<p>Formation of Vermont’s Climate Action Plan gets underway</p>	<p>Participants gathered at Elm ore State Park, on Tuesday, separated into groups to discuss their concerns and how they’ve been personally affected by climate change.</p>

SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYTICS

The engagement events were amplified across the stakeholder groups identified by the subcommittees and the partners who participated in the interview and roundtable engagement process.

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

Facebook

- [9.14.21](#): 13 reactions, 1.1k impressions, 6 shares, 0 comments, 32 clicks

- [9.21.21](#): 331 reactions, 11.9k impressions, 34 shares, 152 comments, 310 clicks
- [12.12.21](#): 104 reactions, 29.7k impressions, 16 shares, 174 comments, 1.1k clicks

Instagram

- [9.17.21](#): 122 likes, 1,026 impressions, 1 comment, 6 saves
- [9.21.21](#): 431 likes, 10,556 impressions, 0 comments, 1 share, 10 saves
- [12.12.21](#): 691 impressions, 58 likes, 0 comments, 0 saves

EVENT FEEDBACK (IN-PERSON)

38 in-person event participants completed feedback forms

Participants enjoyed:

- Community building, meeting and having conversations with other concerned and active citizens with the chance to hear others' perspectives and expertise, share concerns, opinions, feelings about climate change, and a diversity of ideas from so many different voices
- Positive energy and enthusiasm of the group and impressive creative input
- The facilitation, handouts, and opportunity to see what actions are being contemplated

What could be improved:

- Needed more promotion and should have happened in the spring to have direct input on the plan
- Not enough time and sound quality impeding conversation due to the need to host the events outside with masks adding to the challenge
- Problems were oversimplified and presentations seemed to be to steer groups toward particular conclusions

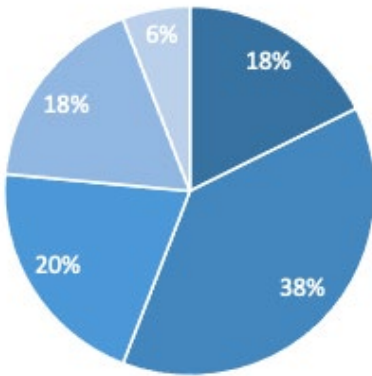
Additional input:

- “I was impressed with how the event was run and left feeling a bit more optimistic! Great job!”
- “For us locals it was an opportunity to meet others we might not have known before.”
- “You all did a great job!”
- “Thanks for the hard work!”
- “Thank you for all you are doing to bring us together to create the future we want and need. Bravo.”
- “We are here because we care!”
- “What happens to these ideas now? We talked about how the government is not responding to these concerns. We meet, we speak, but it's usually ignored. Maybe already ignored?”
- “Facilitation was biased toward favored electricity generation technologies.”
- “I'm afraid the public will not have enough input into CAP. Many forums are ignored”
- “We're anxious to have the political structure (administration) to catch up with our sense of urgency! They're much too tentative”
- “I hope there will be a LARGE push to help folks (like myself) to educate ourselves about what is happening with the GWSA and other state initiatives.”
- “Outreach to rural and lower socio-economic Vermonters will matter SO MUCH to create a culture of engagement.”
- “This meeting will not be of value in the long run. Rule making will lose the public comments.”

Response scale: 1(not useful) to 5 (very useful)

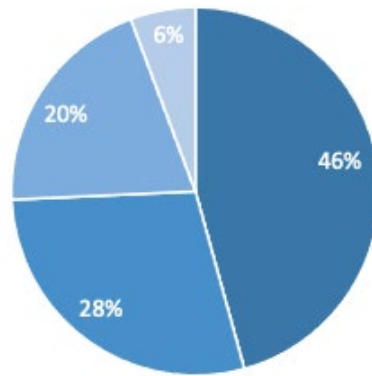
PRESENTATIONS

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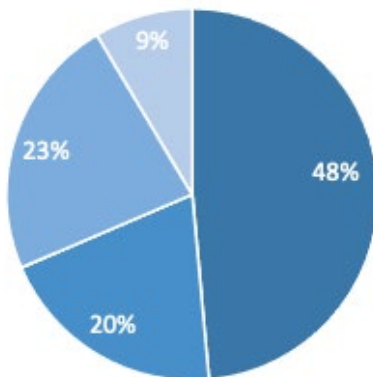
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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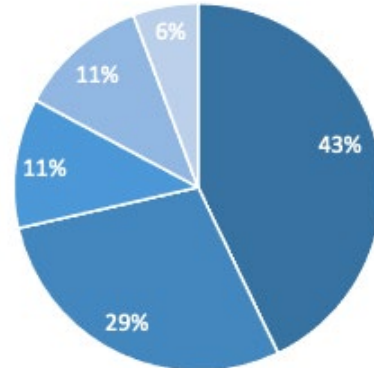
OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE CLIMATE CONCERNS

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OPPORTUNITIES TO WEIGH IN ON CLIMATE ACTIONS

■ 5 ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1



EVENT FEEDBACK (ONLINE)

10 online event participants completed feedback forms

Participants enjoyed:

- Good input during breakout group conversations, more time needed for breakouts
- Participating in a critical planning process
- Opportunities to hear from other BIPOC community members
- Quality of the materials

What could be improved:

- Presentation took too much time
- More structure to small group discussions, more time for discussion, have groups designated by topic to allow participants to choose topics of highest interest
- Clarity around how input is being captured
- Host more online events geared toward younger people
- Need more people of color with disabilities and mobility issues

Additional input:

- “I had prepared a four-minute presentation on my main concern, the lack of any mention of passive solar in the state's previous climate plan, energy plan, or the new climate plan framework. I had been envisioning a session that would be like a town meeting or Selectboard meeting, where citizens could make statements of a few minutes in length. It was apparent at this session that with 100 people in attendance, that would not be possible. When the moderator said that there would be small groups, I hoped that that would provide a forum to offer my comments and suggestions to a representative of the state. After all,

the main objective of these public sessions was stated to be that the Climate Action Council wanted to hear Vermonters' ideas. Our group had four people, none of whom were representing the state. I enjoyed meeting the other three people, but the 90 minute main session and small group provided no opportunity for a citizen to ask questions of the climate council, and inadequate opportunity to provide detailed input to the plan. With that said, I appreciate all of the work that went into preparing and offering this evening's meeting."

- "If you send us to a breakout session, shouldn't someone from the climate council be in the room? There was no reporting out. In terms of informing the climate council, nothing was produced about what three attendees had to offer."
- "Despite Kiah's involvement and tone setting, I do not believe that the event inspired confidence that BIPOC concerns will be addressed as opposed to merely noted. I am a Native American but mainstream looking white guy who for the first time experienced what it is like to be truly marginal. Vermont has a long long way to go. I do appreciate the effort, but please learn from it rather than take a "no matter what we do for THEM, nothing is enough attitude."

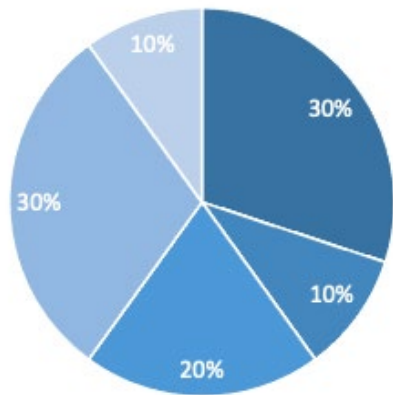
Zoom chat comments:

- "This was a very well-managed Zoom event, Pls share my appreciation with the other facilitators."
- "I think this meeting has been extremely valuable both from the information you provided to the depth of the dialog."
- "Listening to the comments from the participants has been very enlightening. Thanks for planning the meeting with so much time for comments."

Response scale: 1(not useful) to 5 (very useful)

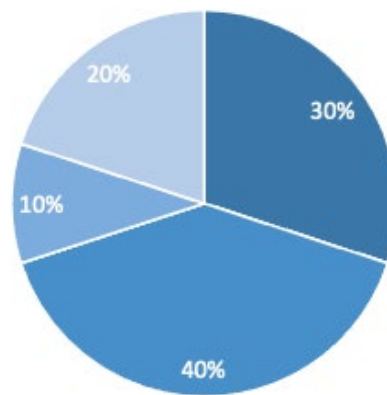
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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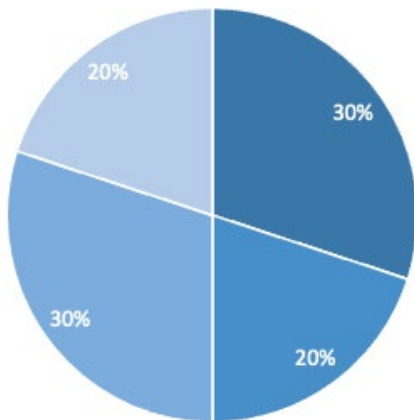
PRESENTATIONS

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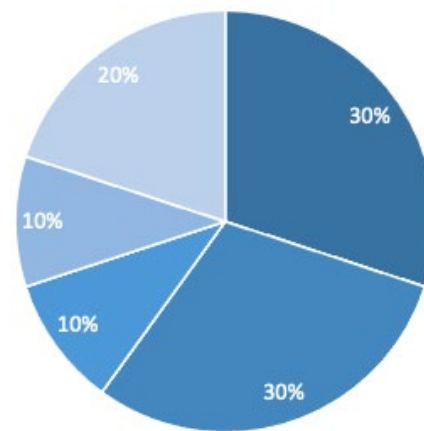
OPPORTUNITIES TO WEIGH IN ON CLIMATE ACTIONS

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OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE CLIMATE CONCERNS

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INTERVIEWS

In February 2022, Climate Access conducted 7 evaluation interviews with the following individuals based on the recommendation of the ANR team :

- Ali Kosiba (ANR Staff)

- Iris Hsiang (Just Transitions Subcommittee, Senate Appointment to Council)
- Johanna Miller (House Appointment to Council)
- June Tierney (Administration Council Appointment)
- Kashka Orlow (Just Transitions Subcommittee)
- Kelly Klein (Senate Appointment to Council)
- Sean Brown (Administration Council Appointment)

Primary strengths of the CAP public engagement process identified by interviewees:

- Well-designed outreach materials that were visually engaging, distilled a large amount of technical information and led with values. The presentation decks were wonderful. The online tools augmented the in-person events well. The outreach materials were useful for facilitating a small online meeting with stakeholders, to draw on that format to support the event and help balance information sharing and listening to people's lived experiences.
- The website was drastically improved and much easier to navigate.
- Regional in-person events were a highlight. They were effective and well-received by participants. It was a good decision to hold the in-person events outdoors given the COVID risk. Appreciated that the events didn't have the level of rigidity or formality that can be off-putting. In-person connections were strong and it was a positive experience gathering as a community to work together.
- Online engagement allowed more people to participate and view materials and meeting recordings at their own pace – all commendable efforts.
- The extra step to summarize public feedback in a report was useful to provide a trusted characterization of the events.
- This was a monumental undertaking in a short amount of time, to engage with communities that aren't typically in the conversation.

- Important to have facilitated the BIPOC affinity space. It was an important component.
- The process to identify stakeholders started a useful foundation of public engagement partners that can be continued to be built on.

Primary barriers of the CAP public engagement process and opportunities for improvement identified by interviewees:

- The pandemic and intensive time pressure were major barriers. The pandemic was stifling in terms of trying to get things done. Door knocking and community tabling are useful ways to connect that weren't an option. This work is hard enough in its own right, then given the accelerated timeframe and pandemic conditions, with those qualifiers in the picture – there's a lot to be proud of. It's important to keep in mind that the goal was to start the work, not to finish everything in a year. It's an imperfect process, but there's a commitment to doing it better.
- Timing was tough and the engagement process wasn't lined up until after work was already underway. More time, money, capacity to connect with community groups and support smaller events and more support on how to center equity in the process. Engagement started too late in the process, without an opportunity to hear directly from the public before pathways were developed.
- The events gathered many of the usual suspects. Would have liked to see more events to allow for more participation. Not enough Councilors showed at events that were held.
- More efforts were needed to connect with partners who had direct contact with frontline communities and for Just Transitions to connect with people from their communities to hear from more diverse voices.
- Accessibility of materials – all materials should be automatically translated from English into additional languages.
- Despite best intentions, it's not possible to hear from everyone. There needs to be proxies for public outreach because perfect outreach isn't possible, but we can improve. How do we expand outreach to bring in people who are disinclined to participate but the policies will materially affect them?
- Need to be aware of the magnitude of what we were asking of people and understand how people want to participate and what they're

looking for. Many people care but don't have time to engage. Not everyone wants to be involved in the policy details, but are concerned and want to know how the outcomes will impact them. Need to speak in a way that connects with what people care about.

- There was a missed opportunity to engage colleges and universities. Students could have helped organize and think about social media process, create memes and videos to share the work.
- More opportunities for material review and feedback would have been appreciated. Need more materials written in plain, accessible language, however, nuance is sometimes lost when boiling down so much complex information.
- There wasn't enough time to set up strategic systems. Each subcommittee could have used an administrative assistant to schedule meetings and take notes, post on social media, debrief each meeting on the website in real-time, organize meeting documents.
- There is room for improvement with the website to provide more context and organize materials. It was challenging for the general public to understand what we were doing in the process outside of a handful of people who have time and interest to come to every meeting.

Engagement strategy recommendations for future public engagement by interviewees:

- Underscore that this is an iterative, ongoing and important process where we're attempting to move past a flawed economic model. Give ourselves some grace, not going to get it right overnight. Center the urgency of climate change while setting realistic expectations. Give ourselves credit for difficult work in a pandemic.
- Need to use a multi-channel approach to get the word out and reach more people. Produce short informational videos spoken in different languages, along with increased social media and print articles.
- Deeper engagement work led by community partners and environmental justice groups. Identify leaders in communities to help open doors to BIPOC, low-income, and rural communities. Reach into new communities through the leadership of community-based organizations. Give people the tools and resources to be partners in the process and lift up these conversations.

- Direct outreach work by trusted messengers with a quality of engagement that's relevant and more likely to gain someone's confidence.
- Get on the agenda for existing community meetings to go where people are already gathering.
- Hold small focus groups to bring people together. Consider how to reach people who aren't online and get their feedback in a constructive way.
- More direct engagement with communities – ask them what they want to see to get buy-in and understand what Vermonters want. Consider how we get people's input without putting an unrealistic set of technical asks on their plate.
- Connect with conservation commissions that are eager to connect and provide tangible ways to engage.
- The legislature is the best option for reaching Vermonters through constituency newsletters, legislative breakfasts, and town meeting days – those are the opportunities that exist to communicate more broadly and have a chance to reach more people. It's about the legislators as trusted members of the community helping people understand it's something they need to be concerned about.
- Provide access to a platform/toolkit of materials that councilors and partners can take into their communities to gather feedback from their existing communities. A centralized place for educational materials that can be accessed and customized with feedback forms.
- Consider a dedicated CAP social media presence.
- More grassroots efforts to turn out attendance, outreach through legislatures to attend public hearings that are attended. Meet people where they are. Community dialogues, not formal events hosted by the state.
- If we're truly working to engage frontline communities it's going to take time to build trust and relationships.
- Need events all around the state that are hosted by a collaboration of partners who can bring together communities at a fun event. People are burned out on Zoom and some people aren't online. Supporting those events in a systematic fashion to build trust and an integrated community.