

Building Equity into the Climate Action Plan

Introduction

The [Global Warming Solutions Act](#) (GWSA) requires that Vermont's Climate Action Plan (CAP) incorporate equity into each recommendation. The Just Transitions Subcommittee (JTSC) is responsible for ensuring this is carried out. Our strategy has three parts:

1. Creating space for equity-centered discussions in every meeting,
2. Tackling structural challenges by enhancing the representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), low-income, rural, and other frontline communities, and
3. Promoting widespread public engagement.

Despite the underrepresentation and power imbalance of the council and its subcommittees, efforts are underway to diversify membership. The Climate Council is dedicated to collaborating with everyone living in Vermont to ensure that equity is woven into every step of the climate action plan.

How do we define a Just Transition?

A "Just Transition" refers to the shift from a carbon-heavy economy to a low-carbon, sustainable one, while ensuring that vulnerable communities, particularly minorities and frontline populations, receive support throughout this transformation. This approach emphasizes fairness and equity by addressing the unequal effects of climate change on marginalized groups. It highlights the importance of inclusive decision-making, enabling these communities to play an active role in shaping the policies that impact their lives. By focusing on equity, a Just Transition seeks to guarantee that everyone has the necessary resources and opportunities to succeed in the new green economy.

Equality Vs. Equity

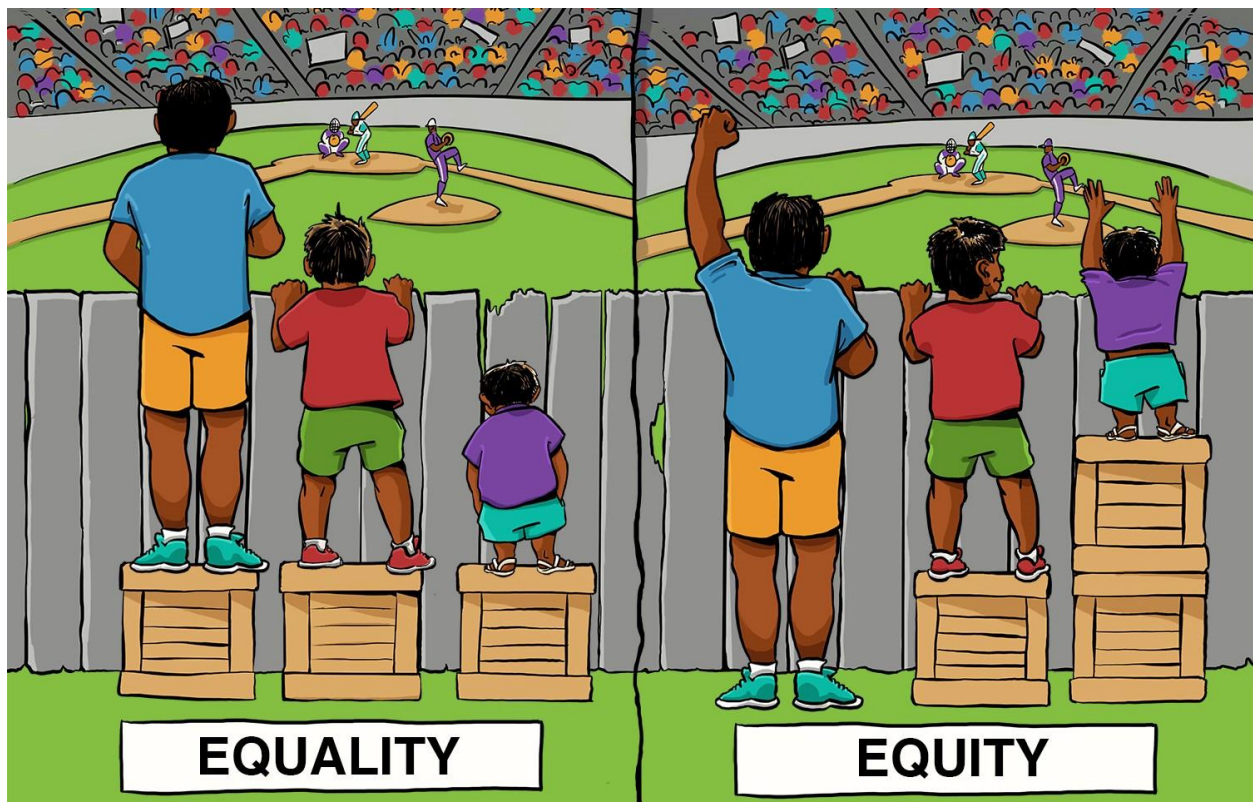


Figure 12

Equality and equity are terms that are often confused, but they have important differences that are crucial to grasp. Equality means providing everyone with the same resources and opportunities, regardless of their circumstances or needs. While it promotes uniformity, it does not account for the unique challenges some individuals or groups may face in achieving the same outcomes. On the other hand, equity takes into account the varying circumstances, needs, and challenges faced by individuals and groups. It goes beyond treating everyone the same, advocating instead for the fair allocation of resources, opportunities, and support tailored to help each person or group. By addressing systemic barriers and inequalities, equity aims to create a level playing field where everyone has the tools and opportunities needed to achieve shared goals.

Which approach is more effective? The JTSC highlights the significance of focusing on equity rather than equality. Equity understands the unique backgrounds and challenges that people face, ensuring that everyone receives the specific support they need to meet shared objectives. By adopting an equity-focused approach, we pave the way for a more inclusive and fair journey toward our collective goals.

Who are Vermont's Frontline and Impacted Communities?

Many residents of Vermont are significantly impacted by the growing threats of climate change. These effects are particularly severe for certain groups, referred to as Frontline and Impacted Communities. These communities are especially susceptible to climate risks, including extreme weather events like heat waves, flooding, droughts, and storms, as well as long-term dangers such as rising sea levels, wildfires, and the decline of ecosystems and biodiversity. They also face additional challenges like disruptions in agriculture, water shortages, health risks, economic instability, and social unrest. Furthermore, Frontline and Impacted Communities often endure higher levels of oppression, greater exposure to pollution, and the risk of job losses as the economy shifts in response to climate change. With limited resources, political influence, and safety nets, these communities are often less prepared to deal with or recover from the impacts of climate change. Acknowledging these vulnerabilities, JTSC's guiding principles emphasize the importance of including Frontline and Impacted Communities in the creation of climate action strategies, ensuring their perspectives are integral to the decision-making process and that resources are distributed to meet their specific needs and challenges. The list below highlights particular communities in Vermont that are most at risk.

Specific Frontline and Impacted Communities

- Rural Communities
- Youth
- Senior Citizens
- Non-native English Speakers

- Women
- Unhoused and Housing-Insecure
- Low-income
- LGBTQIAP+ Individuals
- Recent Graduates of the Foster Care System
- People of Color; Black/African-American, Brown, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous communities and Native nations
- Outdoor Workers
- Incarcerated or Formerly Incarcerated Populations
- Renters and Subsidized Housing Tenants
- Chronically Ill and Hospitalized
- Single Parent Households
- Individuals with Disabilities
- Small Business Owners
- Immigrants, Asylees, and Refugees
- Unemployed and Underemployed
- Those impacted by natural disasters

Then and Now

The Just Transitions Subcommittee’s work during the initial 2021 Climate Action Plan focused on developing the [Guiding Principles](#) for a Just Transition and accompanying assessment tool. The Subcommittee simultaneously worked on engaging the public in the planning process. Contracted organizations supported public engagement during the summer and fall of 2021, resulting in a final report in October 2021. Another consultant, Kiah Morris, met with other Subcommittees and the Council to help them apply the Guiding Principles to evaluate their recommendations for equity considerations. Additionally, liaisons between Just Transitions and other Council Subcommittees were present to uplift equity considerations in real time as those Subcommittees were deliberating suggestions for the CAP.

Table 4

Then: Initial Climate Action Plan (2021)	Now: Revised Climate Action Plan (2025)
The subcommittee drafted the Guiding Principles, formally adopted by the Climate Council in August 2021. There were only four months to incorporate the Guiding Principles into the plan. That was not enough time to use the principles proactively to develop and prioritize recommendations.	The Just Transitions Subcommittee (JTSC) heard from other subcommittees that using the Guiding Principles while developing recommendations felt daunting. In response, the JTSC created a simplified visual explaining which questions to ask at each step of the planning process. It showed when and how to consider public input.
Members of other subcommittees were unclear on how and when to apply the Guiding Principles. Liaisons from Just Transitions to the other subcommittees were available for support.	In addition to the Guiding Principles simplified visual, five JTSC members volunteered as liaisons to the other subcommittees. The liaisons attended those subcommittees' meetings to help them to apply the Guiding Principles <i>throughout</i> the drafting process, rather than at the end.
The quick timeline limited public engagement during the first Climate Action Plan. Agency of Natural Resources staff had to move quickly to contract outreach support, which did not allow time for deliberation and input from the Just Transitions Subcommittee.	Public engagement occurred before and throughout the planning process at key junctures. Public input was better communicated to subcommittees and the Council through quarterly reports and other means. Engagement activities were vastly broadened to lift up voices of frontline and impacted communities. These improvements were possible because of a new staff position in the Climate Action Office (CAO) and additional capacity via the Consensus Building Institute (CBI); these did not exist during the

	first Climate Action Plan process. <i>See Public Engagement chapter (page #s) for full details.</i>
There was not a streamlined process in place to ensure that public input was reviewed and discussed by subcommittees and the Council before decisions were made.	In fall 2024, the JTSC created public comment recommendations , detailing how to better receive and incorporate public comment into subcommittees' work. A revised version was then adopted by the Council for their own work in early 2025.
The CAO did not have a designated staff person to support JTSC, though CBI provided support in most meetings. A staff member from Public Service Department and another from Department of Environmental Conservation supported JTSC.	In addition to the two support staff, CAO Communications & Community Engagement Coordinator supported JTSC. CBI also provided facilitation support to the Subcommittee for two key meetings.

Challenges/stumbling blocks 2024-25

Challenges Faced by Just Transitions Subcommittee

Time:

- There was not adequate time for JTSC members to re-introduce the Guiding Principles and other tools to the drafting subcommittees and help them become fully comfortable with the materials.
- More time is needed for new JTSC members to become oriented to the CAP update process and their role in it, and for the JTSC to build meaningful relationships with the other subcommittees.
- The time commitment for subcommittee members is high, and the current compensation system (per diem) doesn't adequately reflect that. The low per diem may preclude people from marginalized and frontline communities from participating as subcommittee members.

- The time commitment for JTSC liaisons to attend the other subcommittees' meetings was high. Some liaisons did not have the capacity to engage as much as other liaisons.

Capacity:

- There has not been enough capacity and time allocated for equity training for Councilors and Subcommittees. Daytime meetings are inaccessible for subcommittee members who work during the day and cannot leave their jobs to attend virtual meetings. This has limited JTSC liaison participation in other subcommittees' meetings.
- Without adequate compensation in relation to time and energy commitments, who can join these conversations and efforts is severely limited to those who are already able to meet their needs and offer additional time without being paid sufficiently.
- Capacity and ability to engage with those impacted by climate events, especially catastrophic flooding, since the initial plan was adopted.

Broad Scope of Recommendations:

- Many recommendations in the CAP are broad. Thus, they could be implemented either equitably or inequitably, depending on decisions made by implementors (usually the legislature, executive branch, or a combination of the two). This can make conversations about incorporating equity into the CAP complicated and confusing for everyone involved.

Suggested Solutions to Overcome Challenges

- Recruit new subcommittee members earlier in the process.
- Present Guiding Principles, and related tools to the drafting subcommittees early, with support from liaisons throughout the entire process.
- Increase per diem amount.
- Better define the role and time commitment of JTSC liaisons.
- JTSC should play a role in recommending how to center equity in the *implementation* of the Plan (not just the planning itself). The JTSC should also evaluate the equity impacts

of the draft pathways, strategies, and actions and make recommendations to the drafting subcommittees,

- Offer equity training for all Councilors and Subcommittee members early in the planning process.
- Work with Vermont Agency of Human Services and local recovery groups to directly engage with disaster impacted communities about their climate adaptation and resilience priorities.

Youth as an Impacted Community

(This section will be in a call-out box.)

Young people face systemic barriers that limit their ability to make decisions, yet their involvement in climate action is essential for a just and sustainable future. By including youth in the Just Transition process and Climate Action Plan (CAP), we empower them to contribute innovative solutions, build leadership skills, and drive meaningful change. Investing in young voices ensures that climate policies are inclusive, equitable, and representative, creating a resilient future for all.