

Public Engagement

Why engagement matters

The breadth and scale of a climate action plan impact all Vermonters in various ways. It is crucial to ensure that diverse voices, perspectives, and lived experiences are welcomed and valued throughout the process. It is especially important to prioritize the needs and considerations of frontline and impacted communities.

CALL OUT BOX: Frontline and impacted communities include those who:

- Are highly exposed to climate risks, such as health impacts, flooding, and extreme temperatures;
- Experience oppression and racism, are excluded from opportunities, or have less resources to adapt to climate and economic change;
- Bear the brunt of pollution and negative effects from today's fossil fuel and extractive economies; and
- Are more likely to experience a job transition as Vermont addresses climate change.

To reach Vermonters from all walks of life, we need to adopt new and different engagement approaches, recognizing that not everyone has the time, means, or ability to attend a typical government public meeting—yet it is still important to hear from them. These new approaches include:

- **Meeting people where they are:** One approach involves speaking with people in places they already frequent. Meeting people where they are means having conversations that are accessible and transparent, and providing information or resources that are of interest to them.
- **Getting creative with communications and working with community partners:** Another involves collaborating with community partners on engagement and using creative communication methods to spread the message and reach larger audiences.
- **Redesigning traditional public meetings:** Finally, recognizing that public meetings are still important avenues for sharing information, we can modify the design of those events to better welcome all.

Read on to see how these approaches were incorporated in the Climate Action Update process. To succeed at these engagement activities, we must invest the necessary time and energy to build and maintain ongoing relationships, and to ensure engagement is inclusive and accessible. This round of public engagement learned from and improved upon the initial Climate Action Plan engagement in 2021. However, we recognize that there is still much work to be done to amplify the voices of those disproportionately affected by climate change impacts and to expand our reach further to Vermont communities we have not yet engaged with.

Engagement for the 2025 Climate Action Plan Update

One important lesson from the first Climate Action Plan was the need to involve Vermonters continuously and include their input throughout the entire update process. To achieve this in the Climate Action Plan update, engagement started in early 2024 and continued until the Plan was finished. Community input was shared with the Climate Council every three months via the [Vermont Voices on Climate](#) engagement summaries. This engagement also aims to influence ongoing climate-related programs and systems in Vermont beyond the creation of the Climate Action Plan. To support this, the Vermont Voices on Climate summaries are regularly shared with the Inter-Agency Advisory Board to the Climate Action Office, the Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit, and other key partners.

Boots on the ground outreach

Starting in early 2024, the Climate Action Office, with help from Vermont engagement experts at the Consensus Building Institute, attended events across the state to respond to questions, hear concerns, and listen to ideas—all in service of building trust and engaging Vermonters in state climate action. Conversations covered many topics depending on the interests of the community member engaged—a few examples include flood recovery, home heating, health, and public transportation.

Table 1: Events Attended

January 2024	
Community Dinner at Islamic Society of Vermont	Burlington
February 2024	
Northeast Organic Farmers (NOFA) Conference	Burlington
June 2024	
Vermont Afghan Alliance Lunch	Burlington
Capstone Community Action's annual gathering "Community Impact"	Hyde Park
Memory Lane Car Show	Essex Junction
Juneteenth Celebration	Winooski
Juneteenth Celebration	Burlington
3 rd Annual "Summer Jam" free family day	Bennington

Lamoille Pride Event	Morrisville
July 2024	
Wellness Day	Barton
Vermont Council on Rural Development Community Forum	Johnson
Memphremagog Festival	Newport
Old North End Ramble	Burlington
August 2024	
Farmacy Distribution Day with Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN)	Middlebury
Abenaki Land Link Harvest Festival	South Burlington
Vermont State Fair (2 days)	Rutland
First African Landing Day	Burlington
All Brains Belong Community Health Education Fair	Montpelier
October 2024	
Missisquoi Festival	Swanton
Intervale Fair Share Distribution Day	Burlington
November 2024	
Deer Check	West Enosburg
Vermont Maple Conference	Randolph
December 2024	
Youth Climate Leadership Academy	Fairlee
January 2025	
Free Ice Fishing Day	Barnard

Partnering with community-based organizations

Over the past year, the Climate Action Office has worked to build relationships with various community-based organizations and Community Action Agencies (also known as CAP Agencies) around the state. In addition to working with many of them to attend events listed above, partnership has resulted in focus groups, small-group facilitated conversations, and inviting their constituents to climate-related events. Much of this work focuses on engaging frontline and impacted communities. These events often provided compensation and/or food and were held in familiar and accessible locations.

Table 2: Focus Groups hosted for the Climate Action Plan 2025 Update

January - March 2024	
Six introductory focus groups were held with linguistically diverse communities (Arabic speakers, French and Lingala speakers, Spanish speakers, Somali Bantu community, and Nepali Bhutanese community). These laid the foundation for the October 2024 focus group below.	Winooski, Burlington, Montpelier, and virtually
October 2024	
Community leaders within linguistically diverse Vermont communities	Winooski
November 2024	
Capstone Community Action focus group with weatherization clients and other program participants	Barre
January 2025	
Caregiver support group with Sunrise Family Resource Center	Bennington
April 2025	
Elder Caucus with Northeast Kingdom Organizing	Barton
University of Vermont Eco-Reps	Burlington
May 2025	

Youth Input Session in partnership with Vermont Energy Education Program	Virtual
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An additional focus group was planned in collaboration with Bhutanese-Nepali community members, but had to be cancelled due to emergency.

Summaries of these focus groups and others can be found in the [Vermont Voices on Climate](#) engagement summaries.

Climate Action Plan Events

The Vermont Climate Council, Climate Action Office, and Consensus Building Institute hosted events throughout the entire Climate Action Plan process to share information, answer questions, hear new ideas, consider community priorities, and receive feedback on work-to-date. These sessions focused on different themes from the various subcommittees. At key moments, community-based organizations and Regional Planning Commissions supported and collaborated on these events. The timing intentionally lined up with key decision-making and drafting periods of the planning process. Locations were chosen to cover a broad geographic range and reach areas that had not hosted an event during the drafting of the first 2021 Climate Action Plan.

Below are a few methods used to increase the accessibility and inclusivity of these events, recognizing that there is still much to be done.

- Spreading the word to community-based organizations and community partners with whom relationships have been built.
- Availability of language interpretation. This includes automatically including a question in the registration form for participants to indicate whether language access services are needed.
- Only hosting events in physically accessible facilities.
- Offering multiple ways of providing input (physical and virtual meeting options with various activities such as writing, small group conversation, and smartphone polling).
- Offering printed hand-outs of the PowerPoint slides.
- Hanging flyers in known community gathering places such as laundromats, general stores, hardware stores, gas stations, cafes, and town halls.

Table 3: Public meetings hosted for the Climate Action Plan 2025 Update

June 2024	
Kick-Off Public Meeting	Virtual

Kick-Off Public Meeting	Virtual
October 2024	
Buildings and Thermal	Virtual
November 2024	
Municipal Day	Montpelier
Transportation	Virtual
Rural Resilience and Businesses	Virtual
Rural Resilience and Town Support	Virtual
Agriculture	Virtual
Municipal	Virtual
Municipal	Virtual
Natural Lands and Forestry Input Session	Virtual
April 2025	
Public Input Session	Virtual
Public Input Session	Hardwick
Public Input Session	Hinesburg
Public Input Session	St. Albans
Public Input Session	Bennington
Public Input Session	Rockingham
Public Input Session	Barre
Public Input Session	Rutland
May 2025	
Public Input Session	Virtual

Climate Action Plan Update Virtual Event Participants

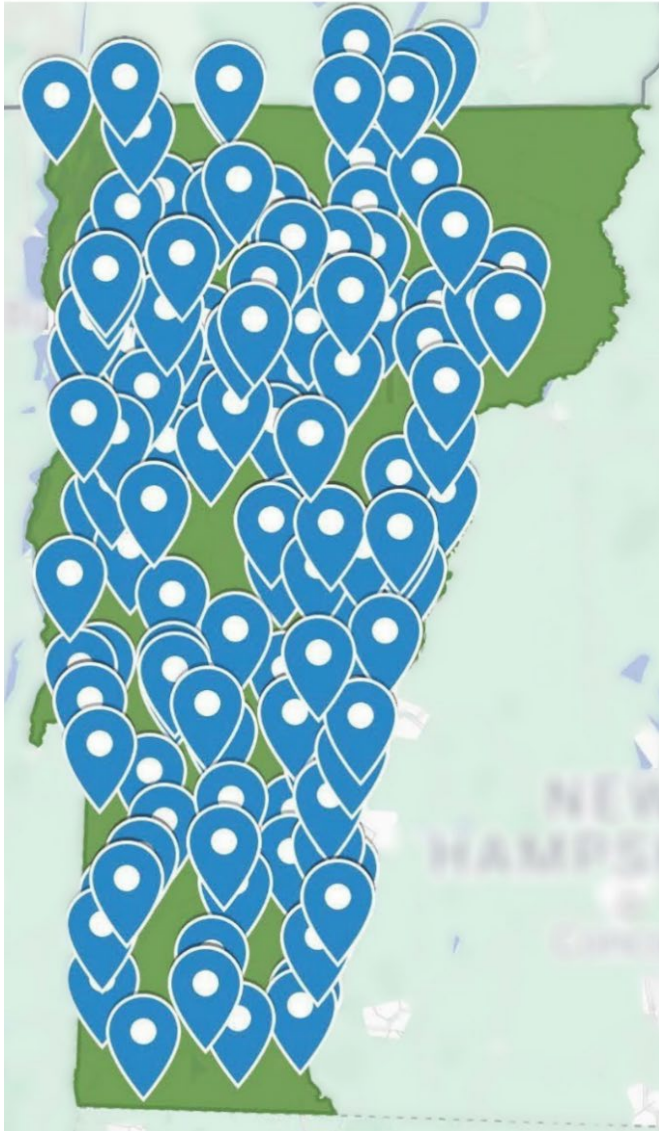


Figure 1

Climate Action Plan Update In Person Events

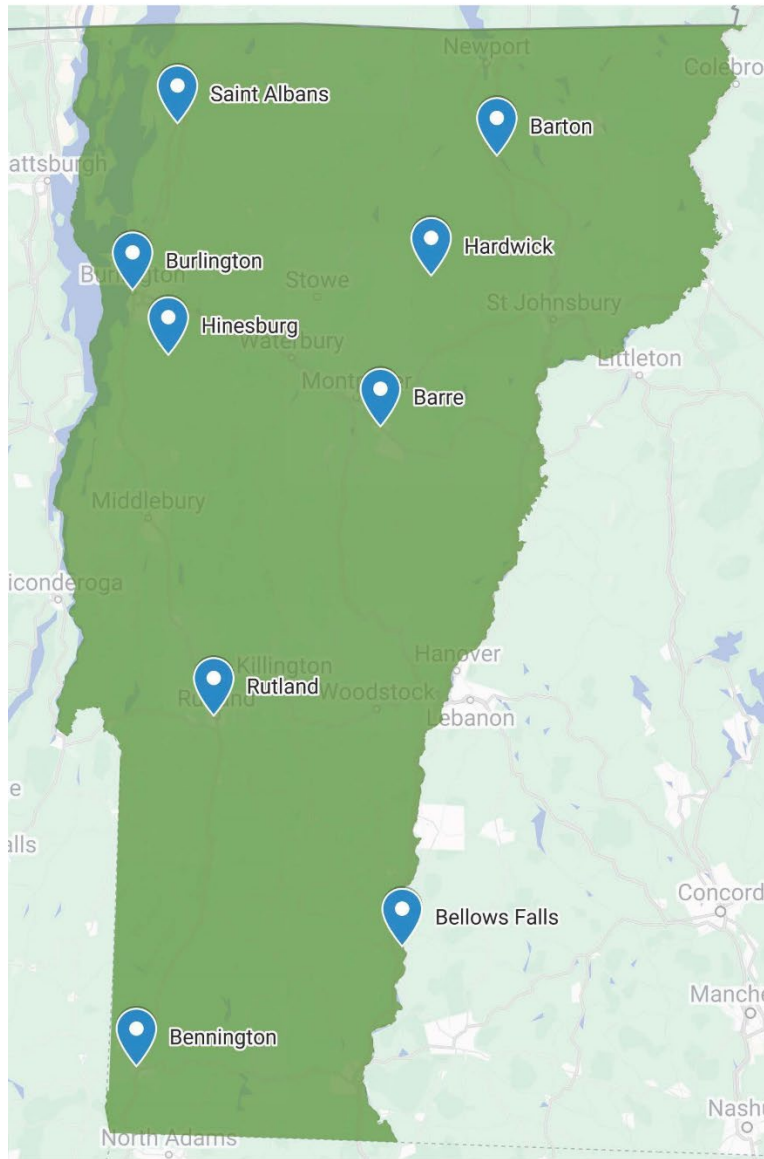


Figure 2

[View summaries of fall and spring input sessions.](#)

TIMELINE

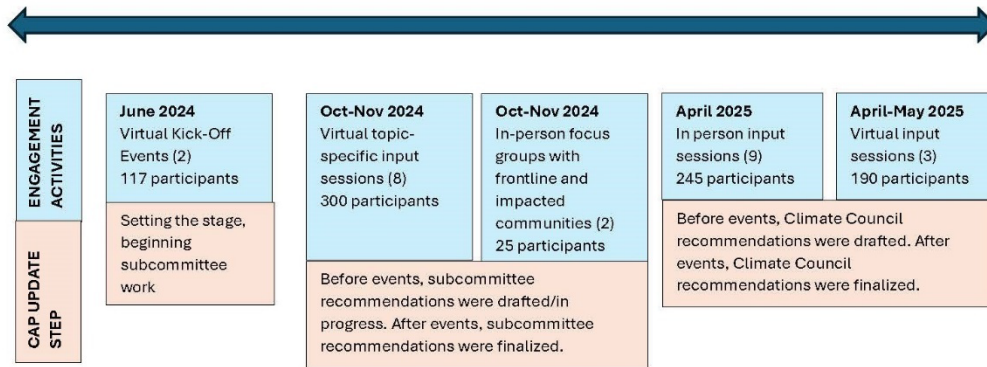


Figure 3

Participation

More than 850 public participants took part in a virtual or in-person input session. This figure may include some double-counting for Vermonters who attended more than one session. Seventeen out of eighteen Councilors attended events, with most attending two events.

In addition to events, approximately 250 Vermonters or Vermont-based organizations submitted written comment by email or through the [Public Comment Portal](#) during the public input process. The Climate Council and subcommittees adopted an improved process for receiving written comments at meetings (see Just Transitions Chapter).

How input was used

In the fall, subcommittees considered public comments while finalizing recommendations and pathways in the plan. Feedback from the events did lead to terminology becoming more well defined, inclusive, and intentional when updating the Climate Action Plan. Portions of subcommittee meetings were spent asking whether perspectives were missing, if programs were accessible, and how research and monitoring of the impact on individuals would occur. Additional, more passive inclusion of engagement considerations occurred as ideas and comments were held in the minds of subcommittee members as they updated recommendations for inclusion in the Plan.

After April's engagement on the draft plan, the Council and Steering Committee met many times in May and June to consider input from public meetings and public comment and revise the Plan. In response to feedback that there were too many priorities and more focus was needed, the Council created a top ten priority actions list out of the broader fifty priority actions. These include actions that public meetings revealed broad support for, including weatherization, Cap-and-Invest, supporting electrification, workforce development, maintaining and expanding the Flood Resilient Communities Fund, investing in municipal infrastructure, and conservation that supports landscape connectivity.

CALLOUT BOX: "Too many goals! Prioritize!"

"Great ideas but too many. Whittle down to the most impactful, most likely to succeed and result in positive benefit and success."

The Council also made a new recommendation for a funding mechanism for these programs.

CALL OUT BOX: "Need to ensure funding for actions" and "So many of the priorities are around increasing funding, but there is not necessarily a noted path forward to that funding. Being more specific and clear and make actual recommendations on funding sources."

In response to feedback that geothermal networks should be part of the priorities, the Council created a new recommendation

CALL OUT BOX: "There is no mention of geothermal networks in this draft. TENS (Thermal Energy Networks) are CO2 free, use the [rights-of-way] of gas and power companies; have the same worker skills and tools and use off-the-shelf parts and technologies...[a] bill passed this year that allows towns, groups, and organizations to form companies to create TENS."

Many participants expressed that the Plan's language was difficult to understand and communications could be improved. The Council added introductory framing language to better communicate the overall plan and its goals. In 2026, a plain language summary of the Plan will be released as well.

CALL OUT BOX: "The language use in these recommendations isn't accessible to many VTers it would be so helpful to put these in plain language."

The preamble also responded to feedback emphasizing the importance of affordability by speaking about the actions with a heavy emphasis on affordability and low- and moderate-income Vermonters seeing benefits from this plan.

CALL OUT BOX: "Please be mindful of the impacts of the proposed actions on low- and moderate-income Vermonters. The cost of living is high in Vermont and adding more financial burden will only make people angry at the government."

Actions for which there was broad support at the meetings remain in the top 50 priorities—these include public transit, education, and the utility-scale biomass study.

In addition, nuanced edits were made to actions about solar siting, climate-ready workforce, business emergency (BEGAP) funding, public health, and education and workforce actions were made in response to feedback.

CALL-OUT BOX: Councilor quotes

“I really appreciated the feedback we got from people in terms of their interests and goals related to different priorities, as well as their interest in ensuring our recommendations thoughtfully balance goals important to them -- including cutting planet warming pollution while also ensuring any solutions recognize and respond to the financial and other challenges Vermont families and communities are already facing today...we adjusted our [Cap and Invest] recommendation to aim to make clear 1) our goal in aiming to mitigate and avoid negative cost impacts to low income Vermonters from any potential program and 2) outlined some key principles ... that any program is designed to not only deliver (real-time) direct financial relief to [low and moderate income] households as well as direct benefits from clean energy programs, while also cutting climate pollution.”

– Johanna Miller, Council member representing a statewide environmental organization

“We heard consistently during public meetings that members of the public would like to see the plan include a greater degree of prioritization among our recommendations, including the development of something like a "Top 10" list of the highest priority actions. As a Council, we followed through on that idea and, in addition to our list of 50-ish priority recommendations, have also worked to lift up a list of 10 top priority recommendations.”

– Jared Duval, Council member representing a Vermont-based organization with expertise in energy and data analysis

Continued Engagement

Recognizing that engagement is a key component of successful climate action, efforts to reach Vermonters in all corners of the state will continue between now and the next Climate Action Plan. In the coming years, community engagement conducted by the Climate Action Office will seek to reach rural communities, geographic areas not yet engaged, and frontline and impacted communities. This work is aligned with and guided by broader state government efforts to improve community engagement—including the [Environmental Justice Law](#) and ensuing

Agency-specific Community Engagement Plans, as well as the new Community Engagement Community of Practice.