

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST TRANSITION

Vermont Climate Council, Just Transitions Subcommittee

May 2021 Draft

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DRAFT

I. Introduction

The Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA), also known as Act 153, was passed by the Vermont State Legislature in September of 2020 to require the State to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent of its 1990 levels by 2050. The GWSA also stood up the Vermont Climate Council (Council) and five subcommittees, including the Just Transitions Subcommittee. Through the GWSA, the Just Transitions Subcommittee is charged with ensuring that strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to build resilience to the effects of climate change benefit and support all residents of the State of Vermont fairly and equitably.

The term “Just Transitions” is a way of framing for government and business action on climate change. Its work encompasses both public policies and business action to deal with the impacts of industry transition away from greenhouse gas emissions for jobs and livelihoods (the transition “out”) and aims to generate the low or zero greenhouse gas emission jobs and livelihoods of a sustainable society (the transition “in”).

The Just Transitions Subcommittee believes in proactively centering equity in this work rather than reactively measuring it. These Guiding Principles are therefore meant to frame the work of the Council and subcommittees around an equity lens. In addition and central to our principles, we acknowledge that kinship exists amongst all living things: the earth, water, sky and soil and all its inhabitants {PLACEHOLDER FOR BEVERLY/ARIS DRAFT LANGUAGE}

First, we offer key **definitions** and clarify indicators of “rural, low income, and marginalized communities” as outlined in the GWSA. Next, we lay out draft **guiding principles** for a Just Transition. These are intended for the Council and subcommittees to evaluate as they develop their respective strategies and programming. The Guiding Principles are meant to spark dialogue within Subcommittees and to serve as a grounding checkpoint to ensure the inclusion of equity. They will be especially useful in policy areas that might not traditionally be considered within an equity lens and would otherwise reinforce historically marginalized, disadvantaged and underserved communities.

Finally, we translate the Guiding Principles into more precise **questions** that the Subcommittee should use directly in assessing the “equity & justice” implications of their ideas and strategies. The Guiding Principles and questions also provide a foundation for an equity assessment tool that the Just Transitions Subcommittee plans to build before draft strategies are proposed, which will include more measurable criteria and suggested information sources.

Commented [PS1]: Generally, bigger font and spacing out to make it more readable. Downside is that it’s more pages.

Commented [PS2]: Placeholder language

II. Just Transitions Key Terms

In this section, the Just Transitions Subcommittee offers definitions for “equity” and “justice” – both vital components of a Just Transition and the implementation of the Guiding Principles. These words are defined differently across disciplines, but the meanings presented here served as the foundation for our work.

Equity



Distributive

Distributive equity starts by recognizing disparities in health outcomes, inequities in living conditions and lack of political power place low-income, BIPOC communities, and people with disabilities, and other historically disadvantaged communities at greater risk.

Distributive equity strategies target resources to adaption and mitigation affecting the most vulnerable communities and populations.



Procedural

Procedural equity is often referred to as equitable planning and implementation.

Equitable planning and implementation require that communities have a meaningful opportunity to participate. Policymakers must collaborate with communities to learn about their perspectives so that solutions meet community needs. Equitable planning focuses on the local level and ensures that local communities have the opportunity to provide input on policies that directly affect them.



Contextual

Contextual equity ensures that mitigation and adaption strategies take into account that low-income communities, black communities, indigenous communities and people of color, and people with disabilities, amongst others, are often more vulnerable to climate change.

Contextual equity ensures that the development of mitigation and adaption strategies at statewide and local levels take these disparities into account.

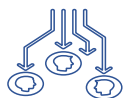


Corrective

Corrective equity ensures that mitigation and adaption strategies provide communities with clear processes to hold the state accountable to its commitments to pursue equity.¹

Justice

¹ Equity & Environmental Justice Working Group, Connecticut. (2020). *Equity & Environmental Justice Working Group Report*. <https://port.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3-working-group-reports/GC3-equity-EJ-Final-Report-111320.pdf>



Environmental

Environmental justice is the equitable access to environmental benefits, proportionate distribution of environmental burdens, fair and equitable treatment and meaningful involvement in decision making, and recognition of the unique needs of people of all racial and ethnic groups, cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and national origins.

It works to redress structural and institutional racism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression and harm done to Black, Indigenous and Communities of Color and other communities and ecosystems that have experienced marginalization and degradation.

Environmental Justice also seeks to address insufficient governmental responses at the local, state and federal level to environmental crises due to the racial/ethnic demographics, national origin, or socioeconomic status of highly-impacted communities.



Climate & Energy

Climate justice operate at the intersection of racial and social rights, environmental and economic justice. They focus on the root causes of climate change, and call for a transformation to a sustainable, community-led economy.

Climate justice begins with recognizing key groups are differently affected by climate change and connects the dots between civil rights and climate change.

Energy justice aims to make energy accessible, affordable, cleaner, and democratically managed for all communities. ²

² Slightly Adapted from National Resources Defense Council. (July 2019). Definitions of Equity, Inclusion, Equality & Related Terms. https://www.broward.org/climate/documents/equityhandout_082019.pdf and The Initiative for Energy Justice <https://iejusa.org>.

III. Vermont's Impacted & Frontline Communities

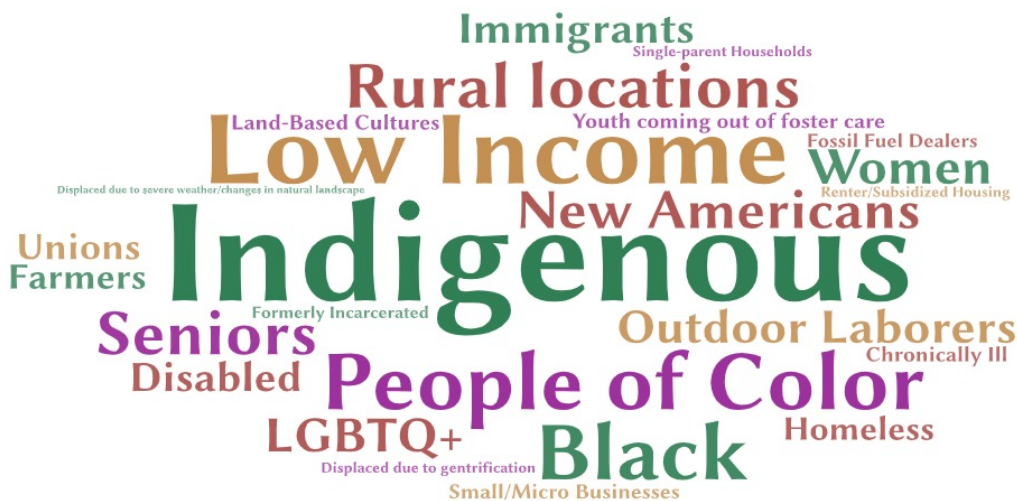
As global warming accelerates, the Council and its Subcommittees must engage with those on the “frontlines” of the climate crisis. Studies continue to show that low-income communities, indigenous peoples, and black and other communities of color are among those who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

This list of frontline and impacted communities is not intended to be exhaustive, nor does it take into consideration the intersectionality of people’s lives and the multiple vulnerabilities that one may experience. It draws from key criteria, identifying those who:

- Are highly exposed to climate risks, such as flooding, extreme temperatures, and health risks;
- 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

Commented [PS3]: Made Rural Communities larger based on comment and added Unions

Reviewed the document and there is one other explicit mention of geography. Rural is implicit/part of other sections (i.e., capacity, lots of mentions of towns, local, community).



IV. DRAFT | Guiding Principles for a Just Transition

Commented [PS4]: General comment – added back in some “musts”

These principles set expectations regarding:

- How Vermont’s Climate Council and its sub committees will conduct their work;
- What Recommendations³ are made by the Council; and
- How investments, implementation and oversight of climate action plans occur.

I. **INCLUSIVE, TRANSPARENT & INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT**

- All Vermonters are informed and able to participate throughout decision-making and drafting of Recommendations, as well as future administration and oversight.
- The Council’s process and public engagement must recognize that people are experts of their own climate and energy experience.
- Impacted communities must be recognized and their voices prioritized in conversations surrounding equity, climate change, and the effects of specific Recommendations.
- Transition planning must involve innovative and wide community engagement that prioritizes various stakeholders and community-based groups to assess Recommendations at local, state and/or regional levels.
- Recommendations must be clear and understandable to all Vermonters. Goals must be clearly identified. To ensure accessibility, the Council must consider the needs of people with limited English, those living with a visual or hearing impairment, and those with limited or no access to technology.
- Potential impacts, benefits, and burdens of recommended climate actions are identified and shared publicly.

Commented [PS5]: Added more explicit mention of accessibility based on last week’s conversation.

II. **ACCOUNTABLE & RESTORATIVE**

- Recommendations must acknowledge that the status quo of climate change continues to perpetuate ingrained systems of discrimination, inequality and racism. Recommendations must examine existing practices and redress historical injustices through concrete actions that will lead to a more equitable future.
- Ongoing assessment tools used by the Council should identify intended and unintended inequities and their root causes.
- Recommendations must recognize inequality and seek to resolve them using clearly identified strategies.
- Recommendations must recognize their potential impacts on the whole natural environment – including air, water, soil and all living things.

Commented [PS6]: Combined Iris’s recommendation with the previous language of the first bullet. Separately they seemed to be speaking in different language to similar ideas.

³ In this document, the word “Recommendations” refers to the strategies, policies, programs or other recommendations that the Vermont Climate Council will make in its Climate Action Plan.

- Recommendations must identify and consider barriers to implementation and include strategies to overcome them.

Commented [PS7]: Added based on meeting - to speak to the need to have feasible or "implementable" recommendations (otherwise what's the point)

III. **MOVING AT THE SPEED OF TRUST**

- Candor and honesty are essential for public trust and to prepare business, industry, labor, communities and families for transition to a sustainable climate future.
- Planning and implementation must balance being time bound and honoring the varied ways of learning, understanding and agreement that exist in different cultures and communities.

IV. **SOLIDARITY**

- Recommendations create inclusionary spaces for all traditions and cultures, particularly for Indigenous communities, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant Vermont.

Commented [PS8]: Could this be moved under "Moving at the speed of trust"? Something for consideration.

V. **THE MOST IMPACTED FIRST**

- Recommendations tackle the needs of impacted and frontline communities first, providing the greatest benefits of transitions to these communities.
- Recommendations must be broad enough for the well-being of all Vermonters and include targeted strategies for different groups that take into account their specific histories, sociocultural and economic realities.
- Where Recommendations create burdens, they also include ways to shift these burdens away from impacted communities.

Commented [PS9]: Removed first bullet as it was redundant with the second.

VI. **SUPPORTS WORKERS, FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES**

- Recommendations are explicit in their identification of potential and likely impacts on workers, families and their communities based on the implementation of Vermont's Climate Action Plan.
- Recommendations should include transition plans to respond comprehensively to protect impacted workers, including those that are seasonal, clerical and part-time.
- Transition plans must prioritize the needs and aspirations of workers, unions and disproportionately impacted communities.
- Recommendations must consider diverse, economic regeneration and spur creation of well-paying jobs with benefits.
- Recommendations must promote strong, equitable labor standards, support access to unionization, and improve access to public services, particularly for groups most disproportionately impacted.
- Recommendations for job training programs for displaced, at-risk and new workers must lead to meaningful, life-sustaining, and valued work. These programs should be designed to be accessible and affordable regardless of income or geography.
- Communities, organizations, and families require the capacity to implement recommendations both in the short and long-term. Recommendations will consider current capacity and how to build needed capacity.

Commented [PS10]: Added to address the need identified last week to be explicit about this

Commented [PS11]: Added to address the need to not assume capacity, etc.

V. Subcommittee Self-Assessment Questions

Commented [PS12]: Generally made some changes towards plain language/readability.

The following questions were developed by the Just Transitions Subcommittee to help each Subcommittee put the Guiding Principles into practice. They aim to better identify, understand, and address the social impacts, types of vulnerable populations, and engagement process of individual policy recommendations. These are not comprehensive, but rather indicative of the analysis required to ensure a Just Transition for Vermont.

IMPACTED & FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES

- What frontline and impacted communities might be most impacted by this recommendation?
- How do these communities experience inequity today around this issue?

ANALYZING BURDENS & BENEFITS

- Does this recommendation maintain existing inequities or make them worse?
- Who will benefit from this recommendation and how does this recommendation help benefits be shared or targeted to help frontline and impacted communities the most? Be specific about the communities and the ways these communities will benefit.
- Which communities will be burdened the most by this recommendation and how can that burden be shifted away from impacted communities?
- What are the long-term and potential intergenerational impacts of this recommendation for identified communities?

Commented [PS13]: Moved under engagement and adjusted the language

Commented [PS14]: Re-ordered and separated some bullets to help it flow better

ENSURING EQUITABLE & JUST ENGAGEMENT

- How have frontline and impacted communities be part of creating and implementing this recommendation? And how will they in the future?
- In what ways was this recommendation shaped by engagement with Vermonters, especially by impacted and frontline communities?
- In what ways does this recommendation recognize different types of knowledge in its design and proposed implementation?
- In what ways can Vermonters hear their voices in the plan?
- Does the recommendation use plain language that is easy for all Vermonters to understand?

Commented [PS15]: Took out the specific years mentioned and added intergenerational language. Took out vulnerable and instead used "identified communities"

Commented [PS16]: Not really sure what this means in terms of concrete design and implementation? Is this otherwise spoken to in the engagement section?

Perhaps leave in and consider editing or discussing as part of future edits.

FUNDING & DATA

- How will this recommendation be funded? What percent of funding will be specifically to support frontline, low-income and impacted communities? Is there enough funding to make it affordable and accessible for people with living with lower incomes or in rural areas?
- How will we know about the impact of this recommendation on identified communities? What data will be needed? How will it be collected and shared?

Commented [PS17]: These two communities called out here based on conversations – could instead say "identified communities"

Commented [PS18]: This is a yes or no question, but perhaps speaks to the conversation last week about being more explicit about access and affordability.

IMPLEMENTATION & OUTCOMES

- What kind of jobs are created by this recommendation? Will those jobs be fair, high-paying jobs with good benefits? How will traditionally underserved Vermonters and unions be prioritized for these jobs?
- How does the recommendation strengthen community trust, cooperation, respect and mutual support?
- How does this recommendation express a commitment to a just transition now and for future generations?
- How well does the recommendation support the natural environment? How well does it promote fairness to all living things?

Commented [PS19]: Added based meeting – “commitment” into the future

Commented [PS20]: From Judy (adapted from yes/no)

VI. Resources

[To be included with the Final Guiding Principles]