

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST TRANSITION

Vermont Climate Council, Just Transitions Subcommittee

June 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 by 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. While the Legislature has asked us to focus on Vermont, we recognize that the decisions we make in Vermont have repercussions outside of our borders, for which we are also accountable.

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.

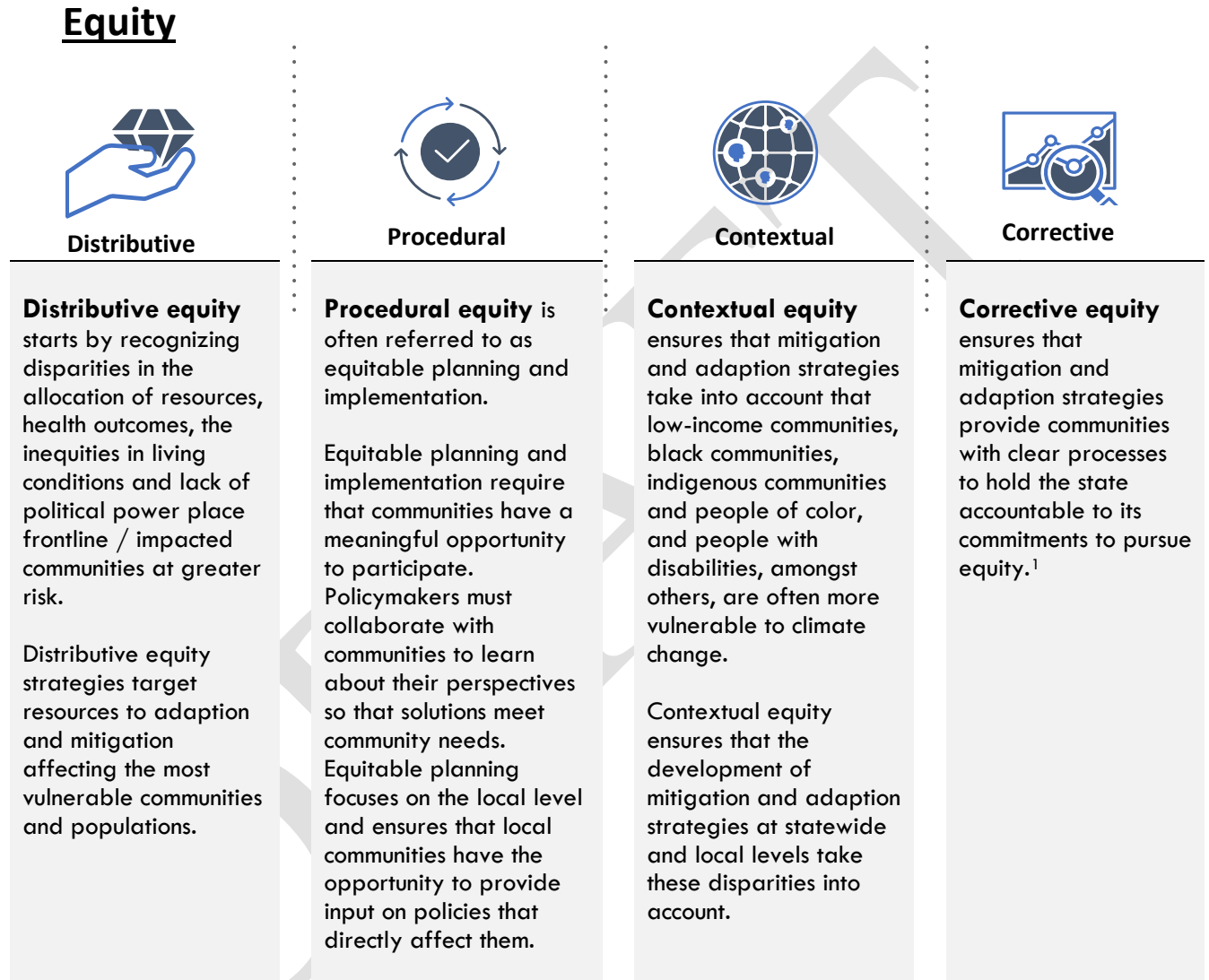
When developing these draft principles and questions, the subcommittee was influenced by the perspectives of Indigenous voices, who urged the group to expand our understanding of frontline communities to include the Earth and all living beings, as our human survival is not possible without taking all life into consideration. Indigenous communities have long held the belief that we, as humans, are here to steward the land that we thrive upon. Many Indigenous people have felt their voices have been unheard and this stewardship ignored. In this context, a Just Transition can help to establish reparations for the Earth’s healing.

“A Just Transition acknowledges the Earth is a living female organism – our Mother. Water is her lifeblood. The Earth and Father Sky, with its air and atmosphere, are the source of life to be protected, not merely a resource to be exploited, degraded, privatized and commodified.”

*Excerpt from The Indigenous Principles of
Just Transitions, Indigenous Environmental Network*

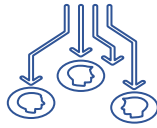
II. Just Transitions Key Terms

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.



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_equality EJ Final Report 111320.pdf](https://port.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3-working-group-reports/GC3_equality_EJ_Final_Report_111320.pdf)

Justice



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 operates at the intersection of racial and social rights, environmental and economic justice. It focuses 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

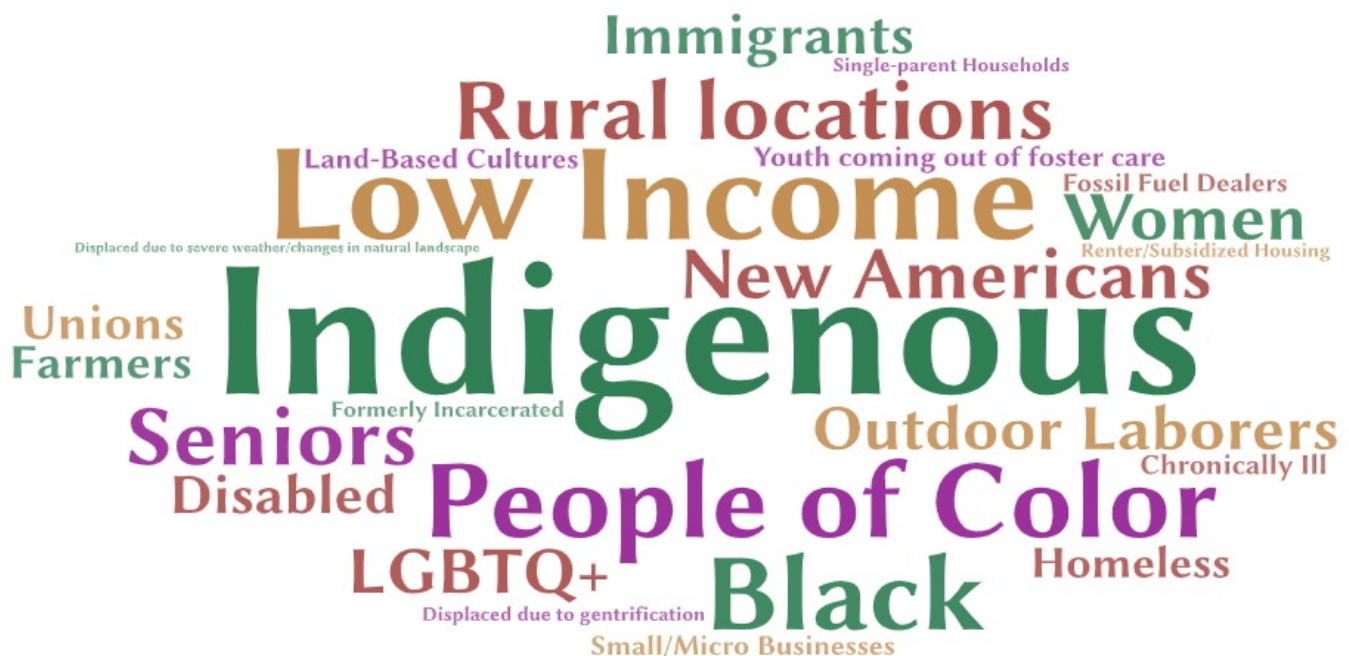
² Slightly Adapted from National Resources Defense Council. (July 2019). Definitions of Equity, Inclusion, Equality & Related Terms. https://www.broward.org/climate/documents/equityhandout_082019.pdf and The Initiative for Energy Justice <https://iejusa.org>.

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



IV. DRAFT | Guiding Principles for a Just Transition

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, with plain language that is easy to understand. 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.

II. **ACCOUNTABLE & RESTORATIVE**

- Recommendations must acknowledge that the status quo continues to perpetuate ingrained systems of discrimination, inequality, inequity 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.
- Recommendations must identify and consider barriers to implementation and include strategies to overcome them.

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.

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.

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. They should also recognize when negative impacts are being shifted onto frontline communities outside of the state.
- Where Recommendations create burdens, they also include ways to shift these burdens away from impacted communities.

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, local and regional governments, 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.

V. Subcommittee Self-Assessment Questions

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 impacted 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

- Which 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?

ENSURING EQUITABLE & JUST ENGAGEMENT

- How have frontline and impacted communities been part of creating and implementing this recommendation? And how will they in the future?
- In what ways does your engagement with frontline/impacted communities recognize different types of knowledge and expertise?
- 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?

FUNDING & DATA

- How will this recommendation be funded? What percent of funding will be specifically to support frontline, low-income and impacted communities? Will there enough funding to make it affordable and accessible for identified communities?
- How will we know about the impacts of this recommendation on identified communities? Which data or indicators will be needed? What process was used to determine the indicators are resonate and relevant to most impacted community needs? How will it be collected and shared?

IMPLEMENTATION & OUTCOMES

- What kind of jobs will be 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 will the recommendation strengthen community trust, cooperation, respect and mutual support?
- How does this recommendation make a specific commitment to a just transition? Is this commitment quantifiable and does it identify who is accountable?
- How well does the recommendation support the natural environment? How well does it promote fairness to all living things?

VI. Resources

[To be included with the Final Guiding Principles]