

# **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST TRANSITION**

**Vermont Climate Council, Just Transitions Subcommittee**

May 2021 Draft

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# 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.

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 for a Just Transition is therefore meant to frame the work of the Council and subcommittees around an equity lens.

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 historical marginalization, 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. 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.

In conducting its work, the Subcommittee was inspired by the perspectives and knowledge of Indigenous peoples, who encouraged the group to think beyond the communities involved in a Just Transition and include all living creatures as well as the earth itself.

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*"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

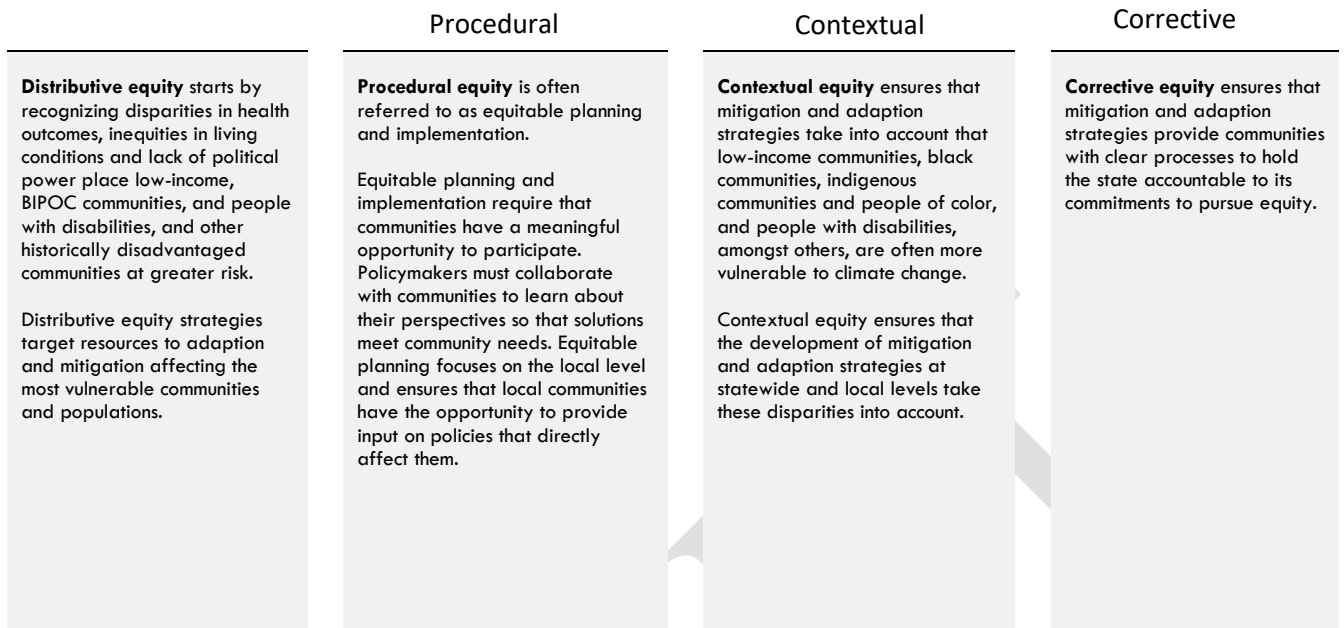
In this section, the Just Transitions Subcommittee offers definitions for "equity" and "justice" – both vital components of a Just Transition and the implementation of the Guiding Principles. These words are defined differently across disciplines, but the meanings presented here served as the foundation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

## Equity

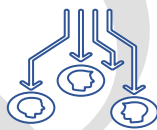


Distributive





## 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.



Climate/Energy

**Climate and energy 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.

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.

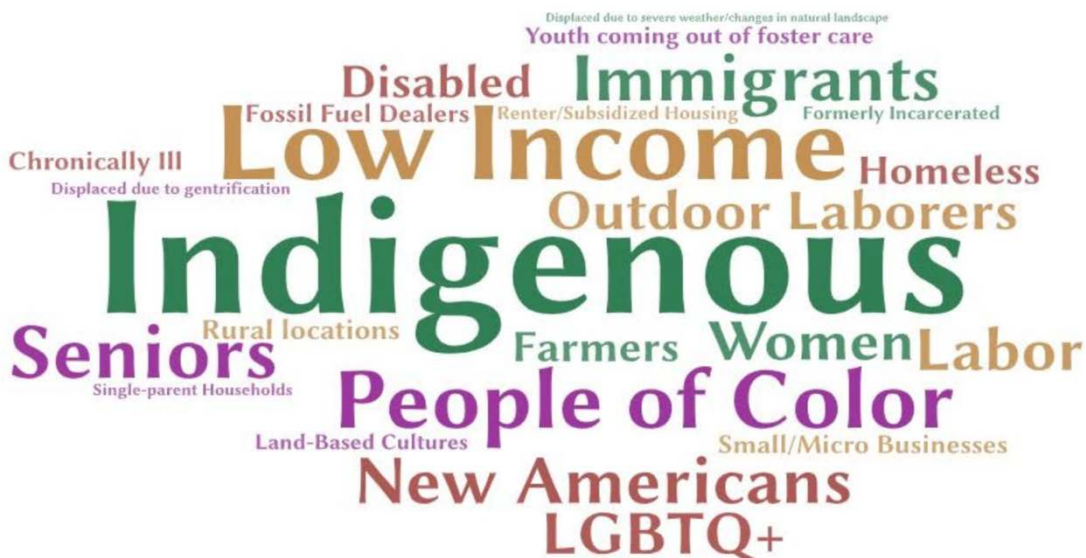
Energy justice aims to make energy accessible, affordable, clean, and democratically managed for all communities.<sup>1</sup>

### 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. 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 Vermont's 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



<sup>1</sup> National Resources Defense Council. (July 2019). Definitions of Equity, Inclusion, Equality & Related Terms. [https://www.broward.org/climate/documents/equityhandout\\_082019.pdf](https://www.broward.org/climate/documents/equityhandout_082019.pdf) and The Initiative for Energy Justice <https://iejusa.org>.

## IV. DRAFT | Vermont Climate Council's Guiding Principles for a Just Transition

These principles set expectations regarding:

- How Vermont's Climate Council, including Sub Committees, will conduct their work,
- What recommendations<sup>2</sup> are made by the Council, and
- How investments, implementation and oversight of climate action plans occur.

### I. INCLUSIVE, TRANSPARENT & INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT

- Decision-making, drafting, administration and oversight allow for all Vermonters to participate.
- The Council's process and public engagement recognizes that people are experts of their own climate and energy experience.
- Impacted communities are recognized as a prioritized voice in conversations surrounding equity, climate change, and the effects of specific proposed strategies.
- Transition planning includes innovative, wide community engagement that includes many different stakeholders and groups. These active participants will define the opportunities at local, state and/or regional levels.
- Plans and policies must be clear and understandable to all Vermonters.
- Potential impacts, benefits, and burdens of recommended climate actions are identified and shared with the public.

### II. ACCOUNTABLE & RESTORATIVE

- Recommendations must provide an opportunity to disrupt and reform unequal power dynamics that reinforce social, economic and political disparities.
- Ongoing assessment tools will 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.

### III. MOVING AT THE SPEED OF TRUST

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

- Candor and honesty are essential for public trust and to prepare business, industry, labor, communities and families for transition to a sustainable climate future.
- Our 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**

- Policies 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**

- All recommendations directly identify and support relevant impacted and frontline communities.
- Investments, policies, administration, and oversight tackle the needs of impacted people first, providing the greatest benefits of transitions to these communities.
- Future climate goals must be broad 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 plans and policies create burdens, these burdens are shifted away from impacted communities.

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

- Policies and strategies 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 include transition plans to respond comprehensively to protect impacted workers, including those that are seasonal, clerical and part-time.
- Transition plans are based on the needs and aspirations of workers, unions and disproportionately impacted communities.
- Plans will support diverse, economic regeneration and spur creation of well-paying jobs with benefits.
- Recommendations will promote strong, equitable labor standards, support access to unionization, and improve access to public services, particularly for groups most disproportionately impacted.
- Job training programs for impacted and new workers must lead to meaningful, life-sustaining, valued work

## V. Subcommittee Self-Assessment & Policy Design Questions

The following questions were developed by the Just Transitions Subcommittee to help each Subcommittee put the Just Transitions 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 are the frontline and/or impacted communities that might be most impacted by this recommendation?
- How do these communities experience inequity today around this issue?
- Can Vermonters hear their voices in the plan? Is the language easily understandable for all?

### **ANALYZING BURDENS & BENEFITS**

- Might this recommendation maintain or exacerbate existing inequities? Which communities bear disproportionate burdens?
- In what ways does this recommendation ensure that its associated benefits are distributed and accessible to various frontline and/or impacted communities? Please name each community and how.
- Consider the long term: Will this strategy affect financially vulnerable, socially/demographically vulnerable, and geographically vulnerable populations in 10 years, 20 years, and 50 years?

### **ENSURING EQUITABLE & JUST ENGAGEMENT**

- How have you, and how will you, engage frontline and impacted communities around the development and implementation of this recommendation?
- In what ways does this policy recommendation recognize different types of knowledge in its design and proposed implementation?

### **FUNDING & DATA**

- How will this recommendation be funded and what percent of this funding will be allocated specifically to support continued frontline and low-income transition success?
- What data /metrics will be required to actively monitor the impact of this recommendation on identified communities? How will that data be collected and presented?

### **IMPLEMENTATION & OUTCOMES**

- Will this recommendation bring fair, high-paying jobs with good benefits to Vermont? How will traditionally underserved Vermonters and unions be prioritized in filling these jobs?
- How does the recommendation strengthen community trust, cooperation, respect, mutual support, and/or other specific social capital?

## **VI. Resources**

[Pending Final Guiding Principles]

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