

Just Transitions Sub Committee

Response to Feedback on Draft Guiding Principles

August 2021

On June 9th, the Just Transitions Sub Committee [released Draft Guiding Principles for A Just Transition](#) with an accompanying [Equity Scoring Rubric](#). The Sub Committee simultaneously invited Vermont's Climate Council and Sub Committees to begin to use the Draft Guiding Principles and to also feedback on the drafts. On June 17th, the Sub Committee hosted a [workshop](#) for all Sub Committee and Council Members. In this workshop, the Sub Committee described to overarching purpose and goals of a Just Transition and the Guiding Principles, the Sub Committee's process, and an overview of the document which includes:

- Introduction;
- Definitions of Equity and Justice;
- Explanation of Impacted & Frontline Communities;
- Draft Principles;
- Sub Committee Self-Assessment Questions; and
- Scoring Rubric.

The workshop provided some examples of how the principles might be incorporated into Climate Action Plan recommendations, and also an opportunity to try out and discuss the assessment questions and rubric tool.

In June, July and August, the Sub Committee received comments from 3 Council members, and comments from subcommittees, as well as feedback from the workshop and conversations during Just Transitions Sub Committee meetings.

This document provides a summary of feedback and the response from the Sub Committee.

Summary Description of Comment(s) Received

Response

The Sub Committee is grateful for the feedback received. All comments provoked important additional reflection.

Comments & Response

In general, feedback received on the Draft Guiding Principles and Rubric was positive. People felt that it provided a helpful lens to guide thinking at this stage in the Climate Council's work and to think through important details. The principles and tools were helpful in identifying questions that need answers.

When and how should these materials be used? There were a number of questions about how to use the tools. Such as whether the rubric should be used to score and/or rank each proposal or to support individual proposal development. Feedback generally supported use of the tools to inform thinking and identify blind spots.

The Sub Committee has encouraged other Sub Committees to use the draft principles and tools now to shape the recommendations that will be presented to the Climate Council to consider. At the time of drafting, the Climate Council's decision-making criteria and process was not fully developed. Ultimately, the Climate Council will need to determine how it will integrate the Principles, Assessment Questions and/or Rubric into its decision-making process. The Sub Committee encourages using the Rubric as one part of the Climate Council's decision-making process. We acknowledge that the Council will use other decision-making criteria as well.

Can the Just Transitions Sub Committee help support other Sub Committees in using the tools?

Just Transition Sub Committee members are participating in other Sub Committees to support an equity and justice lens. The Sub Committee encourages the Climate Council to hire a consultant to support this work.

Is there information or data to help understanding historical inequities and/or potentially identify impacted communities? Sometimes this data does not seem to be available, and so applying the principles may be more subjective.

There is a lot of data and information available to understand historical inequities and impacted communities. The Sub Committee intends to create a Resource list and will include some relevant data. The Sub Committee also appreciates that there are still gaps in data. We encourage the Science and Data Sub Committee to work to identify and fill information gaps. *Inclusive, Transparent, and Innovative Engagement* is a core principle and hearing from people and communities about their own experiences is a critical way to identify potential impacts. The Assessment Questions and Rubric are meant to ask these important questions, even when we don't have the answers, and can help to illuminate gaps in information.

The Principles do not do enough to emphasize the status quo as currently inequitable and harmful. They should emphasize the need for change in order to reduce burdens on impacted communities. An assessment question should be added or edited to emphasize this.

The Sub Committee wholeheartedly agrees that the status quo is currently inequitable and harmful.

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. (Section III).

The status quo continues to perpetuate ingrained systems of discrimination, inequality, inequity and racism (Section IV, Guiding Principle II).

An assessment question was edited (addition is underlined).

Does this recommendation maintain existing inequities, make them worse or create a future that is more equitable than the unjust status quo?

A criterion was also added to the Rubric:

The proposal outlines how it will create a future that is more equitable than the unjust status quo

How do the principles address global climate justice? Are they meant to/should they? Some comments emphasized a desire to recognize climate justice and climate impacts beyond Vermont. Some public comments noted that Vermonters may be tired of policies that are meant to demonstrate Vermont's leadership or that focusing on promoting justice in Vermont is true leadership. The Cross Sector Mitigation Sub Committee suggested the following:

“Does this recommendation make a meaningful contribution to global climate justice by reducing Vermont's climate change impacts and setting an example for other communities, states, and nations?”

If the intention is to encourage the Climate Council to think about impacts outside of Vermont's borders, the Sub Committee agrees this is important.

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. (Section IV, V, underline added)

The Sub Committee recognizes the interconnectedness of our people, natural environment, and economy with the larger world. The Sub Committee also understands its focus, and the focus of an equity assessment, to be on Vermont.

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 (Section I).

If the intention is to identify how the recommendation helps Vermont to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or climate change impacts (and thereby contributes to global justice), this seems to be achieved in the whole of the Global Warming Solutions Act. It does not seem to need to be called out separately as an assessment question or as part of the work to support a Just Transition.

The Sub Committee agrees that Vermont can be an example for other communities, states, and nations; however, the primary goal of the Climate Action Plan is to recommend good policies for Vermont, not to set an example for the sake of setting an example.

The Sub Committee did not add the question as proposed, but instead has added the following to the first guiding principle, Inclusive, Transparent & Innovative Engagement (added text underlined):

- Potential impacts, benefits, and burdens of recommended climate actions are identified and shared publicly. This includes considering and naming known potential impacts, benefits and burdens outside of Vermont's borders.

How is individual action accounted for in the Principles? For Vermont to reach its Green House Gas (GHG) emission goals, individuals, and communities (in addition to government and business) will also need to act.

Individuals take action within the context of business and government policies. Government and business actions impact the resources, choices and consequences to individuals and communities. The Global Warming Solutions Act requires government to take responsibility and have accountability. Vermont's Climate Action Plan will focus on what policies and resources government and businesses must put in place to encourage or discourage individual or community action. In some cases, policies may be punitive or restrict certain actions. In other cases, they may incentivize or promote new actions. The Guiding Principles are meant to steer government and business action to provide the policies, resources and tools for impacted and frontline communities and individuals to be able to fully participate and benefit from Vermont's climate transition.

The Guiding Principles specifically speak to the ability of organizations, communities and households to take action by calling out capacity needs:

Communities, local and regional governments, organizations, and families require the capacity to implement recommendations both in the short and long-term. Recommendations ~~w~~consider current capacity and how to build needed capacity. (Section IV, Guiding Principle VI)

Can the assessment questions better address concerns about town and community capacity?

We agree that this is an important addition. An assessment question was edited (addition is underlined).

What capacity is needed for communities, local/regional governments, organizations and families to implement the recommendation? How will the recommendation build and/or strengthen capacity, community trust, cooperation, and respect?

The corresponding metric in the Rubric was also updated.

The principles emphasize both impacted communities and workers/labor; however, these ideas aren't well integrated in the document. It was recommended that Sections V and VI in the Guiding Principles be merged.

We appreciate and acknowledge the roots of the Just Transitions movement is in addressing the impact of industry transition on workers and looking towards the jobs of the future. The Just Transitions Sub Committee is further called upon to support the Climate Council with an understanding of a Just Transition that includes even broader considerations of equity and justice. On further review of the Guiding Principles, we find that both are incorporated into each Section.

For example, *Section III, Vermont's Impacted & Frontline Communities* identifies the following key criteria:

- *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*

An additional statement was added to this section to further call out the importance of identifying impacts on workers (current and future). The Introduction was re-ordered to better call out the charge of this Just Transitions Sub Committee as including and broader than job transition.

On review, the goals of V. *The Most Impact First*, and VI. *Supports Workers, Families and Communities* are complimentary but distinct. These principles were left unchanged.

Range of comments related to the full cycle of the Climate Action Plan. Such as: implementation will need to also integrate Just Transition Principles; the initial plan may not achieve all Just Transition goals; public engagement efforts should include the Principles; and achieving Just Transition goals will take time and ongoing work.

The Sub Committee agrees that the work to achieve a Just Transition will not be completed with a Climate Action Plan, but also in doing the plan, adapting plans, and so on. The Sub Committee would like to hear feedback from Vermonters and impacted communities about the Guiding Principles and opportunities for improvement.

The Rubric seems to be overly quantitative and loses the nuance of more qualitative assessment in the scoring process.

The Guiding Principles tools include both Assessment Questions and a Rubric. These tools honor different ways of knowing by providing different approaches to understanding and integrating the Guiding Principles into Sub Committee work (Section IV, Guiding Principle III).

A section for comments was added into the Rubric to call out the importance of narrative more clearly.

Perhaps less important than the overall score, is the opportunity to evaluate how well (1, 2, 3) a proposal addresses an area of the Guiding Principles.

The Sub Committee agrees that quantitative tools alone are imperfect. To the extent that other numbers-based tools or scores are used to help make recommendations or decisions, Sub Committee and Council members are encouraged to also use the Equity Score in addition to the assessment questions.

Should the Rubric include negative values? Or weigh principles differently?

The Sub Committee understands a “negative value” to mean that it creates a negative impact (vs. neutral or positive). In many cases, the Rubric is asking how well the proposal addresses a particular issue, and a “negative value” may not make sense. The Sub Committee does not believe that any proposals with negative impacts should not be considered by the Climate Council.

Weighting of criteria seems to suggest that there is an ability to perfect the Rubric as a scoring tools by identifying which assessment questions are most important for a Just Transition. The Rubric is not meant to provide a score which can be compared to other scores out of context to determine which recommendation is the “best” from an equity perspective.

The Rubric should not be used to rank recommendations, and/or the rubric will only be one way that recommendations will need to be evaluated. Other ways include cost effectiveness, GHG benefit, etc. It may be challenging to find a way to apply all of these criteria at the same time.

The Sub Committee agrees that the Rubric “score” alone is insufficient to rank recommendations or identify the “best” recommendation from an equity or justice lens. Instead, the Rubric highlights weaknesses or strengths of a proposal. Scores will range from low to high, and this general comparison

may prove useful. As well, proposals or recommendations on their own may not “score high” but may be an important part of a set of recommendations. The Sub Committee appreciates and respects that all proposals will need to be evaluated on a range of criteria.

The Sub Committee did make some changes to the Rubric based on feedback received to help support people in using the Rubric:

- Adding a section for comments and additional narrative in the Rubric itself;
- Incorporating the Rubric into the Guiding Principles document to more clearly show how the Principles, Assessment Questions and Rubric are intended to work together;
- Providing a description of the 1, 2, 3 ranking; and
- Adjusting “Recommend: Y/N” to “Recommend: Yes, Yes with Changes, No”.

The list of Impacted and Frontline Communities needs to be clarified, it should not be seen as exhaustive.

The Sub Committee agrees and has reorganized Section III, Vermont’s Impacted & Frontline Communities to better convey the intent of the word cloud.

The assessment questions about supporting the natural environment and promoting fairness to all living things are better as “yes/no” questions to promote a clear and accountable response.

The Sub Committee amended the question.

The Just Transitions Sub Committee additionally reflected on the initial draft and made the following adjustment based on Sub Committee member suggestions:

- *Section III, Vermont’s Impacted & Frontline Communities*, added to the introductory paragraph:

Finally, some Vermonters may also be necessarily focused on achieving immediate goals of food, shelter, safety and health, which can impact ability to focus on long-term adaptation to climate and economic changes.