

Project #1: Building a Climate Workforce by the Numbers

Project Partners

Vermont Energy Action Network (EAN): Cara Robeck, EAN Deputy Director and Lena Stier, EAN Data Manager and Research Analyst

Resource Partners

EAN's Climate Workforce Coalition

Efficiency Vermont

VT State Office of Economic Opportunity

Capstone Community Action

Advance Vermont

Serve, Earn, and Learn (ReSource, VYCC, VT Works for Women, Audubon VT)

Vermont Gas Systems

Background Context

In response to current and future climate change impacts to Vermont communities and economies, the State of Vermont assembled a Climate Council to draft Vermont's [Climate Action Plan](#). Completed in 2021, the Plan commits Vermont to decarbonizing its economy. One of the five impact areas identified in this plan is: *Cross-Cutting Solutions: investing in communities and workforce development for clean energy jobs*.

[Vermont's Energy Action Network](#) and their extensive [Climate Workforce Coalition](#) is focused on this latter opportunity for Vermont. The Climate Workforce Coalition focuses on scaling up the number of Vermonters being recruited and retained in the energy efficiency and renewable energy sector, as well as foresters, farmers, and those in the public transportation field, to meet Vermont's decarbonization goals of 2030¹. While EAN and their Climate Workforce Coalition is steeped in research and outreach on building Vermont's climate workforce, there is much to be done. Their current research shows 18,900 Vermonters are currently working in what are identified as 'climate workforce jobs', but many more are needed². How will the Coalition meet their vision of building a diverse, well trained, supported, and compensated clean energy workforce by the 2030 deadline? What would it take to install all the green technologies and strategies outlined in the Climate Action plan? How can EAN's strategies support the Climate Action Plan's guiding principles for a [just transition](#)? While EAN is digging into all these hard questions, they do not yet possess the more specific, granular information needed to determine how many Vermonters are needed, where, and doing exactly what, in the clean energy sector to meet all of Vermont's decarbonization goals.

Project Need

This team will build on information in the Vermont Climate Action Plan, EAN's past research regarding climate careers, the Pathways Report developed for the Climate Council, and research in Vermont's annual Clean Energy Industry Reports, to better understand how many more Vermonters are needed, where, and doing what, to meet the demands of this sector. They also want to gain perspectives from those currently in these fields and/or in training to enter this field/s. This project offers opportunities to dive deeply into data analysis, providing essential quantitative information on energy workforce demand by the numbers, building from available research and estimates. The second component, the qualitative piece of the project, will explore the experiences, perspectives, and stories of those already working within these energy jobs and/or those who (or

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<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/House%20Energy%20and%20Technology/Bills/H.703/H.703~Dylan%20Giambattista~Building%20Vermont's%20Climate%20Workforce%20Presentation~3-8-2022.pdf>

² <https://eanvt.org/network-action-teams/climate-workforce/>

would like to) enter training for this workforce. Key questions include:

- What would it take to develop, install, and maintain all of the clean energy technologies and strategies identified in the Climate Action Plan and [Pathways Report](#)?
- How many more workers do we need, where, doing what, and with what credentials?
- What do current participants in these climate workforce jobs and training programs say about what drew them to these jobs, what keeps them there, and what their career path has been and/or is expected to be?

Project Objectives

- Develop an understanding of the climate workforce energy technologies and strategies identified in Vermont's Climate Action Plan
- Develop an understanding of the foundational body of research available through the Vermont Climate Council, EAN's Climate Workforce Coalition, and the State of Vermont
- Improve your understanding of (and correspond with) those in Vermont leading the development of a climate workforce.
- Complete a rigorous quantitative analysis of energy workforce numbers (by business/trade type, job type, position type etc.) to meet the demands of the energy sector outlined in Vermont's Climate Action Plan presented in a formal research report.
- Determine and implement research and outreach method/s to understand the interest and experience of those working/interested in working in the clean energy sector.
- Create a series of public-facing 'stories from the field' from the above outreach efforts. These could be audio, video, and/or visual components that could be used within EAN's communications and/or climate workforce campaign material.

Initial Resources

[Vermont Climate Action Plan](#)

[Vermont Pathways Analysis Report 2.0](#)

[Clean Energy Industry Reports \(halfway down webpage\)](#)

EAN resources

[EAN Annual Progress Report for Vermont on Emissions, Energy, Equity, and the Economy](#)

[Climate Workforce: Community Feedback & Findings](#)

EAN Intern projects

[Workforce Development in Vermont's Thermal Sector](#)

[Exploring the Workforce Implications of Meeting Electric Vehicle Goals in the Vermont CAP](#)

Project #2: Growing Vermont for a Resilient Future

Project Partner

Kevin Chu, Executive Director of the Vermont Futures Project

Potential Resource Partners

[VAPDA](#) (Catherine Dimitruk, Charlie Baker, Dave Snedeker), [VHFA](#) (Seth Leonard, Leslie Black-Plumeau), [ACCD](#) (Alex Farrell, Brett Long, Chris Cochran, Amy Tomasso, Heather Pelham, Sara DeFilippi), [VTPOC](#) (Tino Rutanhira, Weiwei Wang), [Age Strong VT](#) (Angela Smith-Dieng), [VT Arts Council](#) (Susan McClure), [VOBA](#) (Kelly Ault)

Background Context

Vermont is the third oldest and third whitest state in the country. This has major implications for its labor force now and in the coming decades. A declining workforce and tax base will continue to exacerbate existing affordability challenges and socioeconomic inequities³. In response to these projected trends, [Vermont Futures](#), a non-partisan, non-profit organization initiated by the [Vermont Chamber of Commerce](#), is developing a statewide economic action plan that asks the question: *How can we use data to support the evolution of Vermont's economy towards a thriving future full of opportunity for all?* The action plan considers economic, environmental, and equity perspectives to answer this leading question.

Vermont Future's framework is simple: Vermont's future depends on people and places. By *People and Places*, they believe Vermont needs more people, especially younger individuals, families, a more diverse workforce, and more housing to support this growth⁴. Based on data analysis, Vermont Futures have set a goal to grow Vermont's population to 802,000 people and the non-seasonal housing stock to 350,000 units by 2035. Vermont's current population is estimated at approximately 645,000 with non-seasonal housing stock at approximately 273,000 units. The action plan weighs population growth, infrastructure development, and ecosystem services as equal components of a sound economic plan.

While it is easy to find Vermont statistics reflecting the challenges outlined above, the proposal for growth, in a rural identifying state, is a contentious one. Without understanding what this could look like or understanding the benefits to current residents, some are dubious⁵. The success and buy-in of proposed strategies must be backed by qualitative and quantitative research and data, and reflect a deep understanding of Vermont's unique economic, cultural, and environmental values, assets, and present and projected challenges.

Project Need

The Vermont Futures Project is motivated by good questions. The question they would like your team to answer is this: *How can Vermont grow its population and increase housing in an equitable way while contributing to global climate change solutions?* This team will develop a set of tangible recommendations, backed by quantitative and qualitative research and data, to answer this question. Possible topics that intersect with the question are economics, energy, land use planning and design, population health, cultural narratives from different demographics (age, race, gender, class), infrastructure, etc. The team will create public-facing, educational material clearly outlining opportunities, challenges, and recommendations associated with each chosen topic and the above organizing question. VT Futures foresees these technical research bulletins bringing transparency and credibility to their research as well as identifying common assumptions and fears surrounding change. This work will provide talking points with a variety of audiences and stakeholders, including legislators,

³ <https://vtfuturesproject.org/part-2-labor-force-participation/>

⁴ <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/money/2024/01/09/vermont-business-leaders-housing-shortage-development-paid-family-leave-needed-2024/72121285007/>

⁵ <https://vtdigger.org/2023/11/17/john-bossange-futures-project-fails-to-include-true-cost-of-growth-in-communities/>

and local and state decision makers. Ultimately, these state-wide conversations will guide VT Future's Economic Action Plan.

Project Objectives

- Improve your understanding and familiarity of Vermont Futures body of research and data.
- Improve your understanding of the multi-faceted dimensions and state leaders currently at play in Vermont's Climate Economy efforts (economic development, housing, conservation, land use, energy, etc.)
- Identify key stakeholders and audience/s associated with the goals of this project and gain insight into the desires and fears of population and housing growth in Vermont
- Determine and implement an outreach and engagement plan to connect with stakeholders and key audiences
- Synthesize research into a set of informational one-pagers for each topic the team covers (TBD), summarizing key recommendations and associated findings such as: current status, trends, primary barrier/s, suggested intervention, target population, estimated cost/savings, estimated time to implement
- Develop creative educational outreach methods to supplement each one-pager (outlined above). These could take many forms depending on the skills, experiences, and interests of your team. Videos, podcasts, infographics, interactive apps, geospatial maps, webpages, and reports are all fair game.

Catalytic questions your team will consider while answering the primary question of this project:

- Where are we now? What are Vermont's current economic assets and challenges?
- What does it mean to be a Vermonter and what are Vermont values? Who is Vermont for? Who gets to decide?
- How did we get here? What are the key parts of Vermont's history that have created present day conditions? How will these elements help or hinder progress?
- Where do we want to go? What are the hopes, dreams, and ambitions that you have for the future? What about other young people? Does Vermont seem like a viable option for you to pursue those goals? How will we get there?
- Conservation of what and for whom?
- How is sustainability defined and measured? What about resilience? How do we reconcile the tension between the desire for systems change and resilience?
- How can growth of business and industry contribute to distribution of opportunity and climate solutions?
- What are the anticipated future demographics of our state, country, world? How can we proactively create conditions for future generations to thrive in Vermont?
- What are aspirational models or cautionary tales from elsewhere that Vermont can learn from?

Some starting points for research:

- [Joint Fiscal Office – Vermont Population Estimates for 2022](#)
- [Energy Action Network Annual Report](#)
- [US Climate Vulnerability Index](#)
- [Saturday Night Live](#)
- [VT Council on Rural Development report: Imagining Vermont](#)
- [VT Dept. of Labor: Economic Profiles 2023](#)
- [Natural Resources Board Report on Suggested Updates to Act 250](#)
- <https://housingdata.org/>
- <https://thinkvermont.com/sectors/>

Project #3: Realigning Business Toward a Just Transition

Community Partners

Kristin Warner, Public Policy Manager with Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR)

Resource Partners

Roxanne Vought, Executive Director, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR)

Background Context

[Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility \(VBSR\)](#) is a statewide, nonprofit business association with a mission to leverage the power of business for positive social and environmental impact. It's the oldest state-level, socially responsible business association in the nation and home to the highest number of [certified B Corporations](#) per capita⁶, a rigorous business certification, assessing environmental and social impact standards.

VBSR's diverse membership represents all sectors and geographic regions of Vermont - from sole proprietors to the largest employers in the state – and is united by a single vision: *a just, thriving, and transformative economy that works for all people and the planet*. Individually and collectively, [their network of 700 member businesses and organizations](#) advances this vision through shared learning, community building, and collective action.

VBSR works to redirect the power of business to represent socially responsible ideals to legislative bodies, news media, and the public. They also educate their members on how to improve their practices and policies through leading-edge professional development.

VBSR members say they are hungry for new and effective ways for their brand to join the global movement to shift from an extractive to a [regenerative economy](#). In light of this, and in response to B-Corp's recent move to require the development of an explicit advocacy model as part of their certification, VBSR is now in the process of developing a training curriculum that can provide business owners, leaders, and employees with an accessible road map to start (or jumpstart) their businesses' [brand activism](#) toward a [Just Transition](#).

VBSR is aware of the small size of many Vermont businesses⁷, and the vulnerabilities they might face when considering such moves. Adding an additional brand activism layer to the face of a small business can feel risky. What if potential customers don't share the same values? Can you risk losing these customers? What types of sensitivities and intra-organizational dynamics might businesses confront when treading these waters? VBSR wants to create a training module that speaks to the intricacies of these and other questions, structured around understanding the fears, barriers, and attitudes of these business members, and around developing illustrative models showing how businesses have negotiated (and sometimes overcome) these challenges, the key dynamics shaping this process, and strategic pathways for those leaders trying to reorient their businesses toward a Just Transition.

Project Need

This team will work with VBSR on research and content for a future VBSR training curriculum focused on pro-climate, brand activism for Vermont businesses. This will include outreach to VBSR member businesses and others to understand opportunities, barriers, equity, and inclusion challenges as it relates to adopting a regenerative economy business model, consistent with a Just Transition, and developing brand activism. From

⁶ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/vermont-b-corp-collective-has-launched-flip-brown/>

⁷ <https://vermontbiz.com/news/2022/september/02/2022-vermont-small-business-profiles-available>

this research, your team will develop a suite of case studies providing examples of businesses that have successfully navigated challenges and are reaching these goals. These case studies should represent different sectors and sizes of businesses but share the values and vision for a just transition. The case studies will provide encouragement and strategies for businesses looking to do the same. The team will be introduced to VBSR's methodologies of successful campaigning and apply these concepts to training material content.

Project Objectives

- Improve your understanding of the multi-faceted dimensions and leaders currently at play within regenerative economics and brand activism.
- Improve your understanding of [Grassroots vs. Grasstops](#)
- Design and implement an outreach and engagement plan incorporating best practices for social science research, fitting with the goals of your project.
- Develop a series of well researched case studies, the number and format of which to be determined by your team and community partner, which outline and speak to a variety of relevant VBSR curriculum topics, such as:
 - the benefits of brand activism
 - overcoming consumer criticism on taking a public position
 - the universal components of effective activist brands
 - specific strategies and tactics employed by effective activist brands.
 - best practices for educating employees on climate issues and engaging them in action on behalf of the business (including businesses with a small staff or diverse political ideologies within their workforce).
- Provide additional material to VBSR which could be incorporated into future training material, examples of which include:
 - a succinct [theory of change statement](#) for business advocacy and narrative outlining why business can be a force for good written for an audience of socially responsible business owners (both those who consider themselves activist brands and those who do not).
 - Summaries from interviews with employees of politically engaged businesses.
 - Handouts that address questions businesses may have regarding barriers to their participation using the Affirm, Answer and Redirect model of answering Hard Questions.
 - Database of activist brands in Vermont who are working toward a Just Transition.

Project #4: Mutual Aid Economies for a Just Transition

Project Partners

The Vermont Releaf Collective: Samantha Langevin, Network Manager and Jennifer Morton, Resource Manager. [They propose virtual, 30-minute biweekly check-ins throughout the length of the project].

Potential Resource Partners

Offering perspectives on existing pathways to mutual aid: Jess Laporte, [Community Resilience Organizations](#); Raheemah Madany, [Pride Center of Vermont](#); Kenya Lazuli and Shingai Kagunda, [New Suns Community Center](#) (a part of the Every Town Project), Jonah Fertig-Burd, [Maine Inside Out](#), Fran Miller, [Center for Agriculture and Foods Systems](#) (CAFS), Kara Federico and Iva Torres, [The Ops Collective](#) (only available until April 11)

Background Context

[The Vermont Releaf Collective](#) is a member-driven organization of 350+ BIPOC Vermonters. Our mission is to cultivate connection, share resources, and amplify the voices of people of color in Vermont within our focus areas of **Land, Environment, Agriculture, and Foodways**. They are a collaborative ecosystem for growing power and community for their members. The Collective's primary goal is to nurture and grow community for their members, with external work focused on advocating for conditions where that community can thrive.

Since its inception, the Collective has filled what was previously a gap in the four focus areas - direct support and affinity spaces created by and for BIPOC in Vermont. Releaf was created to resist and oppose racism in the many forms and at the many levels that it manifests in the lives and experiences of their community members. The Collective provides an affinity space specifically for BIPOC to gather in community, process, heal, and ultimately organize in resistance to the racism and marginalization that our community faces - from interpersonal to systemic and structural racism. Approaching our work with an intersectional lens is crucial as we recognize and emphasize that our experiences as a BIPOC collective are not monolithic; various other identities, both salient and visible, impact the way we navigate the world as individuals. Our guiding star is to support and uplift the joy and the power of our vibrant BIPOC community.

Vermont Releaf Collective believes that alternative economies and models for community support are vital to the success of their members, and will be vital to a [just transition](#). Releaf members represent many marginalized identities, identities that are not only left out of the successes of traditional economic models but are often required to bear economic inequality for those models to function⁸. While "[mutual aid](#)" is not a new concept, most mutual aid groups are organized and administered by volunteers during the peak of a crisis. This has been evident throughout Vermont in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and state-wide flooding.^{9,10} Because most mutual aid groups are administered by volunteers, there is often restricted capacity to sustain successful function of a mutual aid system over time¹¹. Understanding the benefits of the mutual aid model, Vermont Releaf collective is considering how to integrate mutual aid into a non-profit business model, and therefore

⁸ <https://vermontcf.org/our-impact/community-impact/economic-equity/>

⁹ <https://www.vermontpublic.org/show/vermont-edition/2023-07-17/how-volunteers-and-mutual-aid-groups-are-helping-vermonters-recover-from-flooding>

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<https://frontporchforum.com/directory/categories/mutual-aid-groups>

¹¹ <https://vtdigger.org/2023/12/10/many-vermont-mutual-aid-efforts-born-during-covid-19-continue-their-work/>

maintaining its function over time. There exists very little information or guidance for how non-profit organizations can do this, further restricting what could otherwise be an equitable way to share and grow community capacity and resources.

Project Need

Vermont Releaf Collective proposes a project that meets the following three goals:

- Creation of a ***Mutual Aid for Non-Profits Guide*** aligning with the values of The Vermont Releaf Collective¹²
- That this guide explores the legal and tax implications of establishing mutual aid, including potential best practices.
- To examine how promoting mutual aid within marginalized communities might differ from traditional approaches and to provide suggestions on best practices for doing so.

Because Releaf views itself as part of a collaborative ecosystem, they hope this guide will be disseminated to and used by peer organizations throughout the region, creating a strong network of mutual aid partners and bolstering the formal legitimacy of this alternative economic model.

Project Objectives

- Become familiar with the vision, values, and work of Releaf Collective, their members, and collaborators.
- Understand the history and precedents associated with mutual aid economy models.
- Identify barriers, challenges, and opportunities of integrating a mutual aid economy into a non-profit business model.
- Identify stakeholders and audience/s associated with this project.
- Determine best practices for outreach and engagement within marginalized communities.
- Develop an outreach and engagement plan for reaching stakeholders.
- Develop a process for drafting (and *drafting*) a 'Mutual Aid for Non-Profits Guide' (as described above) reflecting the needs of the stakeholders.

Questions to ask include: What would the operational and legal structure of a mutual aid economy look like if it were organized and administered by a non-profit entity? Are there successful precedents in and outside of Vermont for this economic model? What would be the benefits of such a model and how could those benefits be measured? What must be considered when designing and promoting a mutual aid model for and within marginalized communities? Who should be involved in building this concept?

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