



Thursday, April 10th 2025

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
Formal Input, Draft Climate Action Plan
Re: Priority Actions

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR) represents 600+ members ranging from small and large businesses across all economic sectors, and in every county in Vermont. We are a statewide, nonprofit business association with a mission to leverage the power of business for positive social and environmental impact. For over 30 years VBSR has championed “business as a force for good” through education, networking, advocacy and thought leadership.

With decades of steadfast commitment to environmental advocacy, VBSR has been pivotal in achieving numerous legislative milestones in climate resilience. We’re proud of the leadership Vermont has shown in the nation. On Friday, November 8th VBSR participated in the “Climate Action Input Session: Rural Resilience and Businesses” where we provided feedback to the Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee on the needs of businesses in the 2025 Climate Action Plan¹. We are proud to represent our members with this formal input on the Draft Climate Action Plan Priority Actions for the consideration of the Vermont Climate Action Office and the Vermont Climate Council.

¹https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/climatecouncil/Shared%20Documents/Rural_Resilience_Subcommittee/Documents/ResilienceBusinessesInputSummary11-8-24.pdf?_gl=1*1lfn91u*_ga*NzE1NDMwMjQ3LjE3MjE5Mzc2MzE.*_ga_V9WQH77KLW*MTc0NDIzODc5My45Mi4wLjE3NDQyMzg3OTcuMC4wLjA

Climate Impacts to VBSR Members

We are Vermont's network of students, entrepreneurs, sole proprietors, small businesses, largest employers, policymakers, advocates, nonprofit organizations and inspired individuals – collectively working toward a *just, thriving and transformative economy that works for all people and the planet*. Our changing climate is having increasing impacts on Vermont's businesses and our economy. While our changing climate is affecting all businesses, small businesses are particularly vulnerable.

Warming temperatures, more precipitation, and the frequency of extreme weather events are impacting businesses across the state and across industries². Whether you're a bricks and mortar general store or a virtual marketing team, on a dirt road or downtown, climate-related business disruptions are likely impacting your staffing, customers, operations, and supply chains, making climate adaptation and preparedness essential to business viability.

Continuing to support Vermont's energy transition to renewables not only reduces climate causing emissions, but these businesses also contribute to economic prosperity in all of Vermont's communities — including some of Vermont's most rural towns and residents. But the battle against climate-related hazards is far from over, they continue to challenge our communities, ecosystems and the very fabric of our shared economy. The escalating impacts of climate change are far-reaching and affect many different areas of our society.

In July 2023, a series of federally declared emergencies hit Vermont, with widespread flooding in most counties leading to catastrophic damage in downtown districts and residential neighborhoods. July 2024 brought unwelcome echos of the summer prior. Businesses need state action to promote resiliency including a comprehensive and actionable Climate Action Plan which includes resources for business adaptation and preparedness— as well as a coordinated approach to future emergency response efforts.

Comments in Support of Draft Priority Actions

Priority Action— Community Capacity and Planning:

Create and facilitate a business support network that connects and engages local economic development and small business support organizations for

² <https://www.uvm.edu/news/gund/vermont-getting-warmer-and-wetter-climate-change-study> (2021)

the purpose of developing and providing coordinated support for business and local economic resilience and disaster response.

Climate action is crucial for addressing the affordability crisis in Vermont. Our businesses need real, concrete, programs to support their transitions away from expensive fossil fuels and towards affordable heating and electricity bills. Our changing climate is having increasing impacts on Vermont's businesses and our economy. We believe Vermont can leverage our small scale, tight-knit communities, and legendary fortitude to once again lead on climate mitigation and resilience policy.

VBSR advocates for this business network to be an open group, with invitations to key community leaders to represent their work from the following categories:

- Business and Trade Associations
- Regional Planning and Economic Development Authorities
- State Agencies, especially the Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- Nonprofits
- Individual business leaders, and organizations led by businesses owned by BIPOC, women & LGBGQIA+, disabled, and rural individuals — as well as small businesses— who have all been underserved while facing the worst impacts of climate disruptions.

A business support network with organizations and individuals who are already working to advance climate mitigation and resilience policies and programs can only further the goals of promoting climate mitigation and building real climate resilience for businesses. VBSR supports the inclusion of this proposal in the 2025 Climate Action Plan.

Priority Action— Community Capacity and Planning:

Secure sustainable, long-term funding to expand and maintain a permanent Flood Resilient Communities Fund (Community Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Fund) for the design and implementation of local and regional climate change adaptation projects and community resilience. Funding may be used as local match for federally funded hazard mitigation programs as well as non FEMA eligible hazard mitigation activities.

From 1980 to 2024, Vermont experienced 19 confirmed weather/climate disaster events with losses exceeding \$1 billion each³. Following the July 2023 floods, just 30 days after President Joe Biden declared a major disaster for the state of Vermont, more than **\$27.9 million** in federal assistance had been provided by FEMA and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to support the state’s recovery— with FEMA reporting over \$54.7 million being provided to Vermont in total⁴. The Vermont Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program, or BEGAP, granted \$19.4 million to Vermont businesses and nonprofits in 2023 to repair physical damage to their property. The new, revamped version of BEGAP in 2024 had \$7 million for businesses damaged by the 2024 July floods as well as \$5 million for businesses with remaining damage from last year’s flooding⁵.

As a part of the proposed “Flood Resilient Communities Fund” we recommend a long-term funding source specifically for businesses, especially those most underserved and most impacted by climate disruptions. These funds have proven essential for our communities and the Vermont economy, and should be institutionalized in preparation of future climate disasters. VBSR supports long-term sustainable state funding for businesses who are impacted by climate disasters and disruptions.

Priority Action— Workforce Development:

Support workers already in Vermont to join the trades. Continue to support training programs and recruitment for diverse workers. Support workers who have additional needs to succeed in these careers by resourcing readiness and retention and wrap around services.

Vermont’s workforce shortages are due to the host of crises converging on our state, including multiple climate disasters in short succession with the 2023 and 2024 July floods which have collectively put our social contract out of balance. Household buying power is on the decline, the cost of housing is skyrocketing, and key social supports like affordable,

³ <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/state-summary/VT#:~:text=From%201980%2D2024%2C%20there%20were,and%209%20winter%20storm%20events.>

⁴ <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20250122/two-months-later-recovery-july-storms-well-underway#:~:text=Two%20months%20after%20the%20federal%20disaster%20declaration,to%20Vermonters%20to%20aid%20in%20their%20recovery.>

⁵ <https://www.vermontpublic.org/local-news/2024-08-29/state-brings-back-popular-business-flood-recovery-grant-program>

accessible, high-quality childcare remain out of reach for countless Vermonters. When taken together, these challenges have created a worker shortage decades in the making.

As an organization committed to the triple bottom line of people, planet, and prosperity VBSR members pride themselves of running people first workplaces—offering robust benefits, competitive wages, and other supports to ensure their employees are happy, healthy, and justly compensated for their work. VBSR will continue to advocate for policies that recognize that healthy people and healthy communities are central to keeping a productive and sustainable workforce. This includes working to create an accessible, affordable, high-quality childcare system to building affordable housing for low-to-moderate income Vermonters. It will take significant state investment if we’re going to build our workforce and create a truly just, thriving, and sustainable Vermont economy. VBSR supports the workforce development efforts being included in the 2025 Climate Action Plan.

Recommendation for Priority Action

In addition to supporting the above Priority Actions in the final 2025 Climate Action Plan, VBSR recommends formal state support for expanded Business Technical Assistance, especially for small and underserved businesses, be included.

While our changing climate is affecting all businesses, small businesses are particularly vulnerable. **Approximately 40% of small businesses fail to reopen after a disaster, and an additional 25% fail within a year of reopening**, according to FEMA⁶. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), **75% of small businesses without a continuity plan will fail within 3 years of a natural disaster**⁷

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In response, VBSR is actively leading our thought partners into designing policies and programs aimed at enhancing small business preparedness and resilience in this era of climate crises. Last year we launched a free training program in partnership with VLGS’s Small Business Law Center entitled “ClimateReadyVT”⁸ which has trained dozens of small businesses and service providers across the state.

⁶ <https://www.iii.org/article/when-disaster-strikes-preparation-response-and-recovery>

⁷ https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/ready_business_hurricane-toolkit.pdf

⁸ <https://www.climatereadyvt.org/>

VBSR is proud of this program – and the work we do to support business in building climate resilience – **but we need real action from the state of Vermont to prepare our communities for future climate disasters and disruptions.** VBSR strongly encourages the Vermont Climate Action Office and the Vermont Climate Council to include a priority action proposing expanded state support for one-on-one business and technical assistance in business climate resilience.