

# Climate Workforce: Community Feedback & Findings

EAN Network Action Team Report on Winter 2023 Focus Groups

## Executive Summary

The EAN Climate Workforce Network Action Team was established in 2021, in response to broad recognition that Vermont cannot meet its climate commitments without developing and growing the climate workforce.

In the winter of 2023 the Climate Workforce Team collaborated with six community organizations to learn about how people in different demographics might view job opportunities in the climate workforce, and how they get information about jobs. CVOEO, ReSOURCE, Rights & Democracy, St. Johnsbury Community Hub, Vermont Energy Education Program and Vermont Works for Women each hosted a focus group in January or February of 2023. In all there were 86 people involved in the focus group conversations, more than half of whom identified as female, and more than half as non-white/BIPOC. The majority of participants also had low- to moderate-incomes, with only 36% in full-time employment.

### What is the Climate Workforce?

We have defined the **climate workforce** as clean energy jobs and careers in efficiency and renewables (from the annual PSD and CEDF [Vermont Clean Energy Industry Report](#)), plus some jobs in industries like forestry, agriculture, public transit, materials recovery, and education.

From the focus groups, the Network Action Team was able to highlight key priorities for participants in their employment decisions and how they learn about career pathways and job opportunities. We were also able to understand how these individuals feel about the jobs in the environmental and climate-related fields. These conversations resulted in two lists of recommendations: one directed at employers, and the other at community or statewide policymakers.

### Most important job considerations

Dominant themes about what is important to participants in their job considerations included good wages, health insurance, training, making a difference, safety on the job, and a job that was flexible and met one's personal needs/schedule. Part 1 of this report details these priorities.

	% of participants saying this is a main consideration
Wage or Salary	93%
Health Insurance	85%
Having a job that helps the community, other people, or the natural world.	80%

Flexibility in scheduling or work location	76%
On the job training and support	75%
Transportation support	53%
Housing support	51%
Child care assistance	47%
English language support	32%

### **Communications and interest in environment and climate jobs**

Part 2 of this report highlights how focus group participants learn about jobs, and what they need to know to choose a job. Most participants look for jobs through social media or web searches and word of mouth from trusted contacts like family, friends, neighbors, teachers, or school counselors.

Part 3 of the report highlights the conversation about whether participants are interested in environment and climate jobs. It finds that many are interested, but don't know enough about these career options. Other participants are concerned about climate change, but are not interested in working in climate careers, in part because of perceptions that these jobs may not pay as well, or that they may be overly physically demanding or dangerous.

### **Recommendations for Employers**

Part 4 of this report gives recommendations for employers to create an inclusive workplace that is attractive to workers. These recommendations include offering fair compensation, wage transparency in job postings, and making sure the application requirements align with the skill needs for the job. There are also recommendations for offering flexibility, providing chances for people to job shadow or get training on the job, and making sure the workplace is physically and emotionally safe.

### **Key Policy and Program Recommendations<sup>1</sup>**

This report concludes (in Part 5) with policy recommendations to support the needs of a more diverse climate workforce.

- **Invest in efforts that build awareness of Climate Jobs:** A well thought out, multi-partner, awareness campaign about climate jobs is needed to bring new workers into the field.
- **Adequately fund job training and make sure there are equitable pathways for skillbuilding:** Paid training opportunities are needed that build skills and connect trainees with job opportunities.
- **Build employer capacity to hire and support a diverse workforce:** Support small and medium size businesses with human resources development, and other aspects of business planning.
- **Prioritize development of housing, transportation, and childcare:** Support for development of solutions in these sectors - in a manner that considers co-location - needs to be prioritized and funded if these career gaps are to be filled.

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<sup>1</sup> EAN staff serve in the role of neutral conveners, and neither they, nor the EAN Network as a whole, make policy recommendations. Any policy recommendations mentioned in this report come from focus group participants and are not made on behalf of EAN the non-profit organization or the EAN network.

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# Introduction

The EAN Climate Workforce Network Action Team was established in 2021 out of the recognition that achieving Vermont’s required greenhouse gas emission reduction targets will require thousands of Vermonters with the skills to electrify our transportation sector, install clean energy solutions, weatherize homes, build net zero commercial buildings, and sustainably manage our working lands, forests and waterways. (Learn more about the Climate Workforce Team here: <https://www.eanvt.org/network-action-teams/climate-workforce/>)

As part of this effort, the Climate Workforce Team needed to learn from potential climate workforce employees, including individuals who have not traditionally participated in climate occupations. Specifically, the group wanted to learn from these demographics about their employment needs and desires, and the best messaging and approaches to communicate with them. This information is intended to help employers better hire, support, and retain people from these communities, and will inform an outreach campaign to help potential workers know more about climate careers.

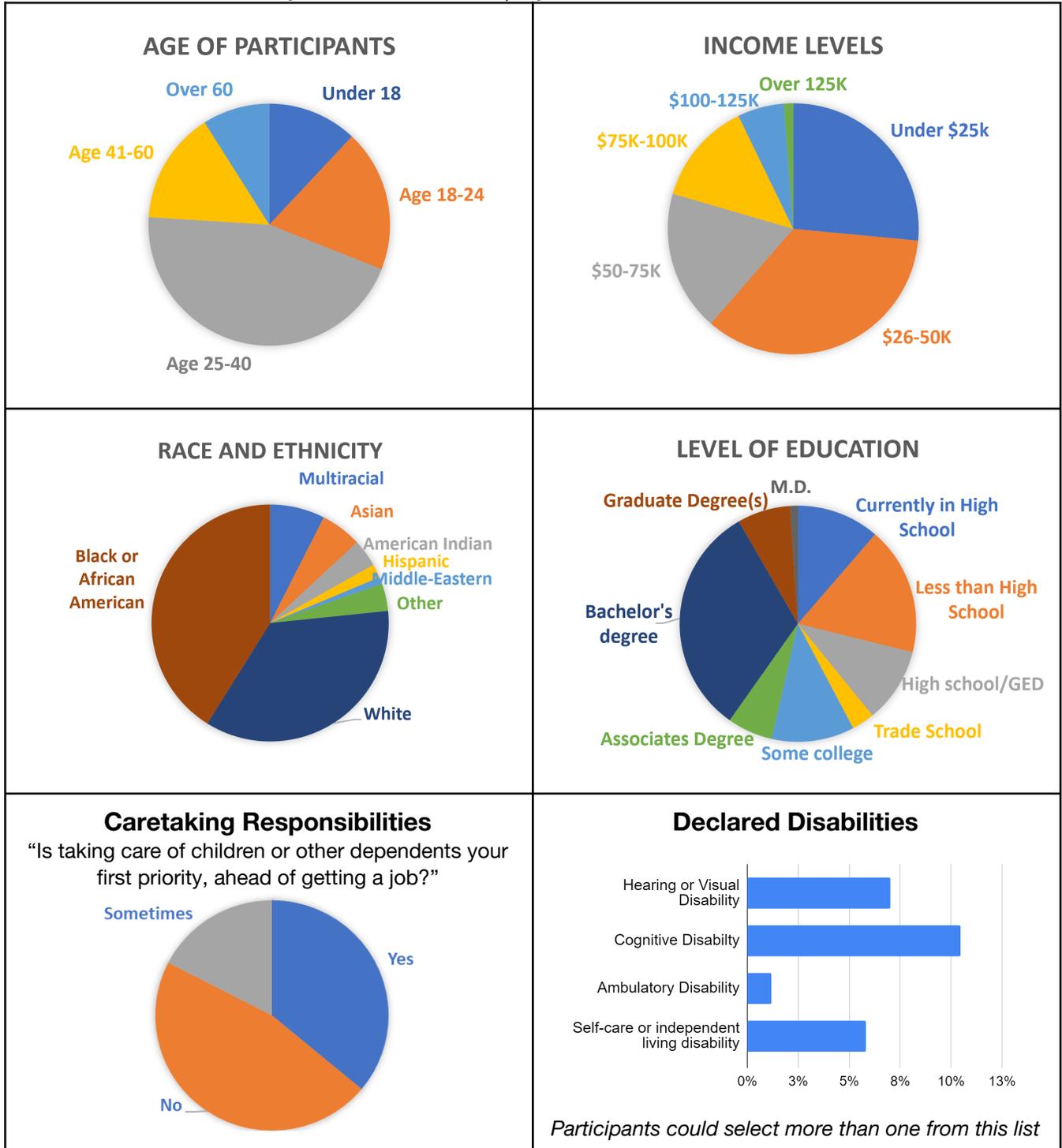
In an effort to ensure procedural equity, the Network Action Team chose to utilize an organizational regranteeing process to work with groups already engaging with communities on the ground. We put together a request for proposals, and partnered with organizations who could host focus group conversations during January or early February of 2023 with the communities they serve.

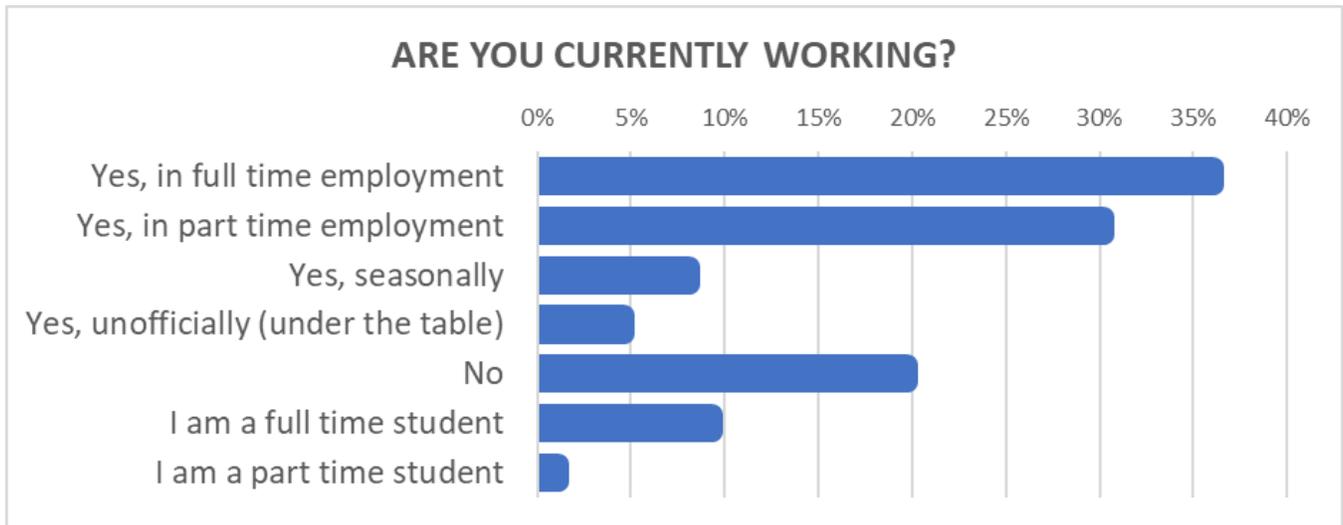
Partner organizations that ran focus groups with members of their community include:



# Demographics of Focus Group Participants

In total, these community organizations recruited a total of 86 focus focus group participants. Participants varied in age from teenagers to seniors. Over half identified as female. The majority of respondents were Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Approximately 12% of participants identified a language other than English as their primary language, these languages include French, Spanish, Nepali, Mai Mai, and American Sign Language. The majority of participants had low to moderate incomes, with only 36% in full time employment.

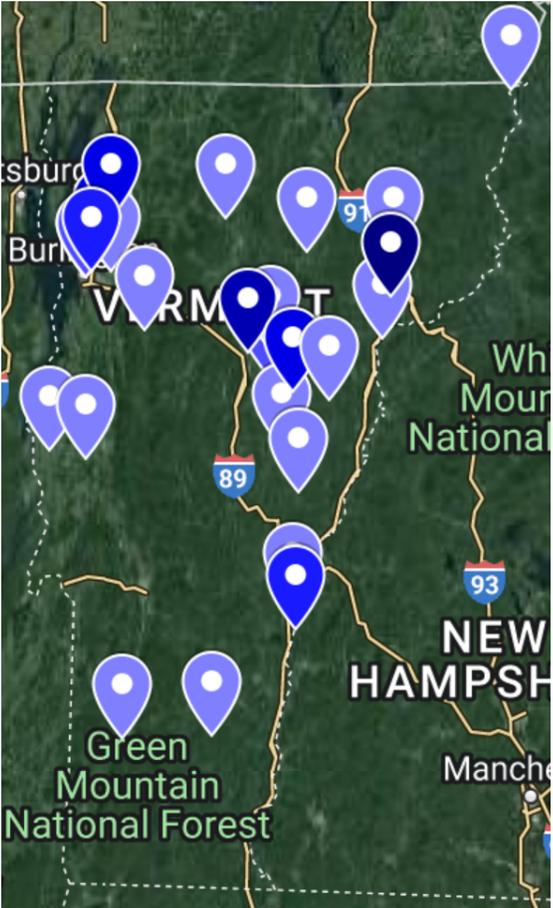




### Geographical Participation

The Network Action Team had feedback from 26 Vermont cities and towns. This map shows the geographic distribution, with darker colors indicating more participants.

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Barnet: 1         | Manchester: 1     |
| Barre: 2          | Milton: 4         |
| Bridport: 1       | Montpelier: 7     |
| Burlington: 15    | Orange: 4         |
| Canaan: 1         | S. Burlington: 2  |
| Chelsea: 1        | St. Johnsbury: 12 |
| Colchester: 4     | Strafford: 1      |
| Cornwall: 1       | Topsham: 1        |
| E. Montpelier: 1  | Windham: 1        |
| Essex Junction: 1 | Windsor: 3        |
| Hardwick: 1       | Winooski: 1       |
| Hartland: 1       |                   |
| Huntington: 1     |                   |
| Johnson: 1        |                   |
| Lyndon: 1         |                   |



# Focus Group Methodology

Each of the selected organizations was asked to conduct a focus group, or similar types of conversations, with roughly 10 of their participants to learn about what people look for in a job, where they get information about jobs, how interested they are in climate careers, and what programs and policies they would recommend. The organizations worked with the Network Action team to develop prompts for focus group participants. These were the main questions posed to participants (\* indicates a priority question).

1. \*What is most important for you [and people like you] as you are looking for a job?
  - a. Has this changed through time?
  - b. I am going to read through a list, please raise your hand when I mention something that is important to you when you look for a job
    - i. Wage or salary
    - ii. Health insurance
    - iii. Flexibility in scheduling or work location
    - iv. On the job training and support
    - v. English language support
    - vi. Child care assistance
    - vii. Transportation support
    - viii. Housing support
    - ix. Having a job that helps the community, other people, or the natural world.
  - c. Can you tell us more about the things in the list we just went through that are most important to you?
2. \*Where and how do you normally get information?
  - a. How do you learn about work opportunities and make career decisions?
  - b. What do you need to know more about to choose jobs?
3. \*Would you be interested specifically in doing a job that helps the environment and the climate?
4. Optional: If you were thinking about taking a new job, which of the following would you be interested in?
  - a. Being paid while being trained to do a job and being introduced to potential employers
  - b. Being hired and trained on the job
  - c. Being hired with other people like you (maybe the same language, gender identity, race, or community)
  - d. Getting a training certificate or college degree before looking for a job
  - e. Learning through doing paid service with others for a summer or a season

## Part 1: Most important job considerations

Dominant themes about what is important to participants in their job considerations included good wages, health insurance, training, making a difference, safety on the job, and a job that was flexible and met one’s personal needs/schedule.

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### **Adequate Pay and Pay Transparency**

Adequate pay was critical and one of the most important factors in employment across all of the groups, though how this was described varied for different demographics. For most, the focus was on their families' need for financial stability and access to healthcare benefits. However, a youth participant framed it as a job that “pays enough to live a happy life”.

Focus groups of women, BIPOC individuals, and New Americans all brought up the issue of pay transparency and the need to list pay in the job description and to be open about salaries within the workplace. Survey participants stated that this approach feels more fair. It is also important for pay to be listed in a job posting so applicants know if that pay will meet their expenses before going through the application process. Finally, pay transparency helps to address issues with wage inequity.<sup>2</sup>

A group of New Americans had a detailed conversation about ways that they or people in their communities have been taken advantage of. They spoke of having no choice but to accept low salaries, because they lack credentials from the U.S., and also due to their status as foreigners. For New Americans, jobs were described as precarious and often found through employment agencies who care more about their contractors than the employees. Those jobs often come with low pay and are without health benefits. As one said “You do not know where to find a job, and the only way you get a job as a newcomer here is through employment agencies.” Another explained that “Employment agencies do not assure you to get a job that will last a long time. They are running a business. They move people around every ninety days.” Transitioning from job to job leads to financial instability. Folks also end up with several W2s, which caused an issue with the IRS for some saying the “IRS will use

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<sup>2</sup> [Pay transparency laws can help fix the wage gap — but not erase it - Vox](#), [How To Introduce Pay Transparency To Help Close The Gender Pay Gap](#)

that and sanction you because you were working without insurance.” This focus group recommended folks be recruited directly by the employers instead of Temp agencies and that they are offered jobs with full benefits.

### **Health Insurance**

Participants in the focus groups all shared their families’ desire to access jobs with full benefits. However, a group of women also expressed concern about the “benefits cliff,” i.e., the gray area between making too little money and having Medicaid, and making more money but not being able to afford your own health insurance. A group of youth also contributed the idea that having access to therapy is also an important aspect of health care, “for helping people manage eco-anxiety, burnout, etc.”

### **Value Alignment**

The values, mission, and operations of a workplace was also highly valued, though it was noted that this could not come at the expense of safety, wellbeing, or compensation. Participants noted that an employer should not only act with values that lead them to care for the community or environment, but also for their employees; supporting training, skill development, and wellbeing. Community members spoke about purposefulness and noted that doing something of value that is satisfying and aligns with their interests was important to them. For youth, being able to see the impact of the work they are doing, to see how their work connects to work in the broader community (and the world) helps counter the burnout that many young folks have around climate change. As one participant stated: “One of the most important things for me is waking up and looking forward to going to my work. If there is no impact, if I do not find any joy, it’s going to be hard for me to keep that job ... A job where I am able to have an impact with what I’m doing. I want to enjoy going to work.”

### **Flexibility**

In many of the groups, particularly among women, flexibility was a very important factor and an important component of work-life balance. Participants saw flexibility as a critical element to a healthy and sustainable workplace. Flexibility can be important for both part-time and full-time jobs. One group noted that the standard 40 hour, 9-5 work week was demanding and difficult to navigate for many, especially those that were primary caregivers or dealing with chronic illness. Flexibility was also noted in relation to health and childcare; it was important that if participants or their children got sick, they were able to change their schedules to allow for recovery and caretaking.

### **On the job training, support, and career pathways**

On the job training scored highly in the survey of what people found important. The group with the most conversation about this seemed to be the group representing the New American community. They would welcome training opportunities, though they also pointed out that it would be helpful if their credentials and knowledge from other countries were accepted. One participant made the point that: “Parents have to make a living and take care of their families. They do not have time to add to their education.” A group of women said that if they were thinking of a new job, they were most interested in being paid to get training to do the job. Very few would be able to consider internship-type situations (seasonal or summer). A group of youth on the other hand liked the idea of trying a job before they commit to it (job shadow, apprenticeship).

In a different group, youth specifically mentioned wanting to have clear pathways for growth, including being able to change their title and position within the same field, with growing responsibilities. Having opportunities was also brought up in a different group, where a couple of participants expressed more

interest in smaller companies than bigger ones. Their perception is that although bigger companies have better benefits, smaller ones treat their employees better and give more opportunities. Both smaller and larger companies that do not conform to this, might see increased interest in open positions if these items were made transparent to potential employees.

### **Trust, Acceptance, & Diversity**

There was broad agreement that having a positive work environment and getting on with fellow workers and management was seen as a way to create and contribute to building social meaning. Many of the groups discussed the need for a “comfortable” environment, free of discrimination and working with people they trust, where they are respected for who they are, and where they can express themselves and collaborate with coworkers.

For BIPOC groups, it can be difficult finding this kind of an environment in Vermont, especially in trade industries. One participant noted that heterogeneous, white workplaces often fostered a “racial naiveté” that led to discomfort, misunderstandings, microaggressions, and a lack of camaraderie. In some cases, outright racism led to challenges to an individual's position. Others noted that even the conversation of work and job-seeking sparked intense emotions rooted in past trauma in workplaces and interviews. Trust was a recurring theme in this focus group, whether it came to accessibility, acceptance of diversity, or even services offered by an employer. For example, as one participant explained, if an employer offers childcare, but there is not adequate trust in an employer and the childcare provider, then this service is useless to them. Rather, this only serves as an excuse not to support a person's other priorities and needs around childcare. Cooperative management and/or participation around decisions, and an effort to provide community-based and culturally relevant services may remedy this issue of trust.

New Americans also wanted to be able to work in a place “that has a lot of diversity”, “where you are comfortable with your religion”, “in a culturally responsive workplace where you are allowed to be yourself”, and in a place “where I can communicate easily.” As a specific detail, one participant pointed out that “Some jobs do not allow you to wear a hijab. They need to know that it is a religious thing. Some jobs require you to wear a hair net instead of a hijab.”

### **Safety & Wellbeing**

Among those who have worked in the trades, physical safety was the top priority. In one group, two women said they hadn't considered safety or wages when starting out in the trades; they were just glad to be hired. This has changed with time and experience. Another participant explained; “If you look at job descriptions now [sic] say things like ‘ability to work in all working conditions, ability to travel, and ability to work over 40 hours’ [even] for young people, that is hard. People shouldn't be expected to hurt their bodies or spend all of their time doing their jobs”.

One group had a conversation about ways that BIPOC communities may understand and experience health differently than White individuals, drawing on different cultural understandings and influenced by historical racial disparities in health. This influenced a wariness to work in jobs that exposed them to unsafe materials or toxins. Participants want a workplace that values and prioritizes safety, supplies necessary safety equipment, and understands the connection between flexibility and wellness.

### **Transportation**

Transportation was also discussed as a challenge for many. Those that worked in trades explained that personal transportation was often required, and not compensated fairly. It was also noted that one's access to affordable transportation to and from work was dependent on

their ability to find affordable housing with public transit accessibility, as well as one's responsibility to care for children. For other groups working near where they work and/or having access to good transportation was mentioned as contributing to work-life balance. In a group of youth there was a lot of agreement that jobs that are designed to help the environment should be accessible by public transit.

### **Accessibility including Language Support**

It was noted that interviews and application processes often failed to accommodate accessibility needs and often based eligibility on criteria rooted in whiteness and ableism rather than accounting for differences, whether they be in ability, race, ethnicity, or primary language. One participant called for more flexible, inclusive metrics for job eligibility and an effort to abandon singular modes (such as resumes and cover letters) of demonstrating a person's eligibility as a successful applicant. A disabled participant explained the need for workplaces that accommodate disabilities, and the lack of workplaces that do so.

For New Americans, limited English and reading skills were reported as challenging and cited throughout the session by focus group participants as a barrier to accessing desirable jobs. Parents sometimes relied on their children to explain what they were asked to do. "I have a hard time explaining my skills. In my mind I have the knowledge but to explain it in a different language is difficult." Another described their experience saying: "At home, younger generation is expected to read the mail, to translate. I grew up and my parents had a hard time reading government documents. I was going to school and my parents expected me to know". A group of youth did not have challenges with English, but felt language support was important, including for the deaf community as well.

### **Location and Housing**

Housing and location of a workplace were also important, especially in the relatively culturally and ethnically heterogeneous state of Vermont. As one participant living in Burlington explained; "I used to have to go out of state to get foods and ingredients from my culture, but now I can get them in my neighborhood and that is important to me". Another participant noted that "if there's not a community with affordable housing [near a workplace], that tells me I don't belong there".

### **Childcare Assistance**

The New American focus group participants all agreed that child care assistance is a crucial concern for the families they represent. They also used the focus group platform to point out families' need for multilingual childcare. "Child care with multi-lingual abilities is so important. We need to promote cultural assets." The focus group recommended access to workshops/training opportunities to learn the needed requirements and how to run childcare.

## Part 2: Communications: How workers learn about jobs

When asked where they look for information about jobs, the most mentioned location was social media followed by word of mouth. The full list included all of these:

- Social media: specifically Instagram and Facebook marketplace
- Friends, family, neighbors, teachers, or school counselors
- Online searches including indeed.com and Handshake
- Newspapers such as Seven Days
- Vermont Department of Labor's job board
- Career centers, career explorations through school, job fairs (job fairs with interpreters)
- Field trips to job sites
- Apps and notifications on their phone
- Paper flyers/bulletin boards
- Vermont Releaf Collective

Community members noted that information was gathered from the “web”, through search engines and social media; some reported using the local papers, word of mouth, “pounding the pavement”, and networking/referrals and by socializing with people. Knowing who you would be working for influenced choice and career decisions along with one's personal health and education. It was noted that how information about work is shared and how you actually “apply” for jobs has changed. The influence of technology on people's job search was noted to have changed over time; for example reviewing the Want Ads versus searching online using Indeed or other job search sites. This follows through to the jobs themselves as “you have to look for jobs that fit your technology skills/levels”.

Among a BIPOC group, all participants noted that they highly valued The Vermont Releaf Collective. “Releaf” offers job and training announcements (among other information) to those who are connected to the collective, vetting the opportunities based on criteria that are especially relevant to their base of BIPOC Vermonters. This includes the number of BIPOC employees in a workplace, the number of LGBTQ+ employees, and other criteria. Focus group participants found this information to be critical, and also appreciated the Releaf community as a place to gather community input on workplaces.

One of the groups of youth suggested a combined approach is best, for example posting on social media about a climate jobs panel, but then hosting the panel in-person with real examples of what the day-to-day is like for the job, and to do so at a convenient location (school, tech center, etc.). Other focus groups pointed out useful opportunities offered by some community groups such as those offering educational workshops about building skills like writing cover letters, building resumes, and even website navigation, or training programs that include connections to employers.

From a group of youth there was a suggestion to do more outreach, such as through climate job panels that go from college to college (or visit high schools) to teach about career opportunities, and possibly reaching out through environmental clubs or environmental majors. They also noted that these jobs could be described more clearly through things like noting in the job description, the ways that the job or company is environmentally-friendly or using graphics to show impact, i.e., how does this little job play into the big picture of tackling climate change. Finally they recommended outreach to college students (including outside of VT, because folks in nearby NY are interested people who are okay with winters here and want to move here).

## **What do you need to know more about to choose a job?**

It was noted that many workplaces claim that they value or support diversity and inclusion, but these claims can be misleading or lack shared definition. One participant suggested that workplaces should explain what “diversity” means to them, and what support is offered to BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disabled, and non-english speaking job-seekers. Others emphasized that some workplace dynamics can be unseen until it is too late, suggesting paid “trial days” and mentioning the importance of speaking with BIPOC community members that currently or previously worked with an employer.

Another group talked about information they might get from current employees. Is there high turnover? Is there room to move up? Are people happy working there? Others also said they would research the company to see if they align with participants’ values, talk with people in their networks, and look at reviews or online ratings. For those who have worked in the trades, knowing what physical effort will be required: “How exhausting a job is / what my recovery time would be; for example, winter carpentry jobs [can provide fewer hours of work because of the cold and weather].” Knowing the requirements/ qualifications, and tools/equipment provided.

### Part 3. Interest in Environment and Climate Jobs

There was a wide variety of answers in terms of whether participants would be interested specifically in doing a job that helps the environment and the climate. A lower percentage of people in these conversations were interested in climate jobs than the percent who were concerned about climate change. For some this was because they perceived climate jobs as being less well compensated, more physically demanding or even dangerous, or because they felt they didn't know what the jobs would entail. With that said, jobs that help the environment or the community were of interest to many people in the focus groups, many wanted to learn more about these opportunities.

Many groups reported that between 30%-50%, or more, would be interested in jobs that help the environment and climate. In one group where 92% of participants considered climate change to be an important issue, the group was fairly evenly split on the question of "Would you be specifically interested in a job that helps the environment/climate?", with 58% saying yes, and 42% no. For some participants saying no, it was because of the perception that: "The pay's not great in climate jobs. You don't get benefits." For those that liked the idea of this work, some said it was because they want to help the planet, want cleaner water, better fishing, want to feel good about their work, and want to help people make their houses warm and energy efficient. The conversation in a youth focus group echoed this sentiment, with one participant saying: "I want a job that is helpful from a climate perspective—maybe all climate, or maybe something else that takes climate into consideration. All jobs need to start having an understanding of this." Another youth said "If a job acknowledges climate change and broader need to repair society, give back, then it is more appealing."

In another group of older participants, no one felt strongly about getting a job that would help the environment and climate, although the majority of people in that group reported having worked in the field. That group was more concerned with jobs that cause harm and wanted to work with and for someone/ a company who wasn't a polluter. One community member reported that they "don't believe whatever we would or could do would help make it better" and a 2<sup>nd</sup> person shared that they "really don't care because the damage is already done....I'm more interested in a job that strengthens community connections and/or shifts our culture to be less materialistic, more connected with -- and respectful of -- nature. I see these things as the underlying critical success factors to any specific efforts to help the environment". A 3<sup>rd</sup> community member acknowledged that "...working with the environment is a crucial thing to do in today's world especially when you think about what's going on in the world today....pollution-air, water, and more."

In a BIPOC group, there was resounding interest in work that contributed to mitigation of and resilience to climate change, but it was clear that there were some caveats. Many expressed concern that these jobs might come at a sacrifice of compensation or wellbeing. As one participant explained; "I want to make the world a better place for my kids, but at the same time I have to feed my kids right now". Additionally, because climate careers such as weatherization often involve toxic materials, arduous physical labor, and dangerous working conditions, there was some hesitancy from BIPOC in this focus group to involve themselves in this work.

In several groups, participants noted that lack of awareness of these jobs and what they entail is a barrier. Although some groups were very interested, they also had questions about how they would get trained to do the work, and whether the result of the work authentically improved things or was just greenwashing. Youth do not have a good understanding of what counts as a "climate career", and lots of folks expressed a lack of knowledge of what jobs are out there. Many of the terms we routinely use

like “weatherization” or “electrician” don’t necessarily mean anything to these students. It is critical to not only make explicit how these jobs help Vermont reach climate goals, but also note what the day-to-day activities actually include.

Young folks expect their employers to provide lots of support– some that they need themselves, but also some that their co-workers may need. Their new job needs to fit into the life they envision for themselves, rather than the other way around. And they want to work for a company that takes care of its employees. Motivation is high when it comes to being involved in something that makes the world a better place, thus, it will help employers to be explicit about this, naming the impact of the particular work and how it will make a positive difference.

A group of New Americans also shared their hope that Vermont’s efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change would contribute to the collective effort, and asked “Are you helping the world environment or just Vermont?” “I could see how the climate is a very big problem. People are suffering from climate change. If there is a way that everybody can contribute by working in this field it would be very helpful to improve the global climate change situation.” “In Africa with solar power people can have a way to recharge their phones. When there are opportunities for solar, I always see how this can help many people in that part of the world.”

Some members of a BIPOC focus group also felt that the conversation around “Climate Careers” was too narrow. They suggested that careers in women’s education, land management or food security, for example, should also be encouraged and included in these conversations. Others emphasized the interconnectedness of all work and our economy as a whole in its role in climate change: “We need to take a holistic approach to all of our jobs. Sustainability is not separate from community or the environment... Why is it that the jobs that actually do good are paid so little? I know it's connected to profit...”.

For another group the term “climate workforce” as it related to environmental jobs did not resonate; they saw it as an academic, abstract concept/categorization. This group questioned the “end goal” of any positive climate work. Is it to minimize the burden, increase recycling, or change the state of the world? The consensus was that multiple impact strategies’ are needed at the same time and everything is important and that a coordinated effort is needed. This group commented that the infrastructure that is needed for this coordination has not yet been set up. Additionally, this group felt there were too many barriers to making significant change around an improved workforce and environment.

## Part 4: Recommendations for Employers

### **Offer fair compensation**

Both wages and benefits are important to employees. Offering the best your company can afford will help with recruitment and retention. Be transparent about salaries and benefits within the company. Articulating the value of the benefits you offer can also help employees understand that your investments in them extend beyond just their wages.

### **Improve transparency in job postings**

It is important for pay to be listed in a job posting so applicants know if that pay will meet their expenses before going through the application process. Also potential employees may assume these jobs pay less well than they do, and articulating the payscale in a job posting may be helpful in combating that assumption. Clearly identifying a job as being part of the climate workforce can help recruit candidates who are mission focused. Many applicants are also looking for information about staff diversity, and employer sentiments and programs that support equity, diversity, and inclusion.

### **Revamp application requirements**

Consider more flexible, inclusive metrics for job eligibility. For example, don't include degrees or experience that isn't actually needed in the job in a job posting. Consider adapting what you ask of applicants if a resume and cover letter doesn't demonstrate a person's eligibility as a successful applicant, E.g., is there another way to have people apply? Mention and explore ways to accept foreign credentials when a candidate has done similar training or jobs outside the US.

### **Articulate how your work helps the climate and the community**

Workers are motivated by the mission of the company or organization.

### **Provide flexibility**

Flexible scheduling can be hard to achieve in some industries, but is essential for strong recruitment and retention of workers. This is particularly true of workers who have children or other dependents. "Human-friendly" initiatives such as all-female construction crews which start a bit later in the morning after daycare dropoff; longer, shorter, or staggered production line shifts; and increased personal/sick time availability can attract and retain employees.

### **Offer on-the-job training and support/job shadowing**

Many people are looking for jobs where they do not need additional credentials before applying. Trainings that can be offered on-the-job are welcome. Many training programs will help connect employers with potential employees, and may offer short on-the-job trials that are helpful for both the employer and the employee. For example, [Vermont Works for Women](#), [ReSOURCE](#), and Vermont Adult Learning's [Energy Works](#) are non-profit organizations which provide Vermonters with skills training as well as arranging work experiences, internships, and on-the-job trainings. Note that this is not an exhaustive list – there are other organizations also doing this work that are not listed here.

### **Outreach and communications**

Most workers are looking for jobs online or through word of mouth. There are a number of specific outreach suggestions in Part 2 of this report.

### **Safe and supportive workplaces**

Workplaces need to be physically and emotionally safe—free of harassment, microaggressions, and threats— particularly, but not exclusively, in the trades. According to national data, "More than 44% of

tradeswomen report wanting to leave the industry; lack of respect and discrimination are the highest reported reasons and workplace environment is the #1 reason women leave the skilled trades.”<sup>3</sup> Employers should invest in racial and gender equity trainings beyond the “one and done” workshop model.

**Direct and fair employment**

Recruit directly instead of through temporary hiring agencies. Make sure newcomers, non-native English speakers, and non-citizens are treated well in the workplace, and offered decent salaries and full benefits.

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<sup>3</sup> [A Future Worth Building: What Tradeswomen Say about the Change They Need in the Construction Industry - IWPR/](#)

## Part 5: Key Policy and Program Recommendations<sup>4</sup>

### **Invest in efforts that build awareness of Climate Jobs**

A well thought out, multi-partner, awareness campaign about climate jobs is needed to bring new workers into the field. This campaign could be modeled on successful campaigns like Vermont's Button Up Vermont campaign or Drive Electric Vermont campaign. While a web presence will be needed for this campaign, the majority of funds would not be for website building, but instead for outreach and communication with a wide variety of potential climate workers in many venues across the state targeted to diverse demographics.

### **Adequately fund job training and make sure there are equitable pathways for skillbuilding**

Many members of the focus groups were interested in paid training opportunities. They would be unable to take on training or credentialing that they would have to pay for, or even that they would have to take time away from earning for. Paid training is needed that builds skills and connects trainees with job opportunities. Luckily there are a number of partners around the state doing this work already<sup>5</sup>.

### **Build employer capacity to hire and support a diverse workforce**

Many employers seeking to hire employees within the climate workforce are small companies. These businesses will be better poised to hire and support new employees if there is more support for human resources development, and other aspects of business planning.

### **Prioritize development of housing, transportation, and childcare**

Developing the climate workforce is made more difficult because of the lack of affordable housing, transportation options, and childcare available to potential workers. Support for development of solutions in these sectors - in a manner that considers co-location - needs to be prioritized and funded if these career gaps are to be filled.

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<sup>4</sup> EAN staff serve in the role of neutral conveners, and neither they, nor the EAN Network as a whole, make policy recommendations. Any policy recommendations mentioned in this report come from focus group participants and are not made on behalf of EAN the non-profit organization or the EAN network.

<sup>5</sup> For example, [Vermont Works for Women](#), [ReSOURCE](#), and Vermont Adult Learning's [Energy Works](#) are non-profit organizations which provide Vermonters with skills training as well as arranging work experiences, internships, and on-the-job trainings. Note that this is not an exhaustive list – there are other organizations also doing this work that are not listed here.

## Appendix: Other suggestions originating from focus group discussions<sup>6</sup>

The following are suggestions that were each made by one of the focus groups. They are presented in no particular order.

- **Low or No Cost Supplemental Pay, Services, & Benefits:** Some employers in the climate sector may be unable to entirely provide benefits and pay to attract workers to the industry, a third party could provide benefits, supplemental pay, or other services at no, or low cost to the employer or employee.
- **Ensure Non-Traditional Climate Work is Included In Climate Workforce Programs:** Include “non-traditional” climate work in programs and policies that work to bring workers into climate careers. This could include, but is not limited to; land management, food production and distribution, women’s education and support, public and alternative transit, community engagement, and community planning.
- **Job training in other necessary fields:** The New American focus group recommended access to workshops/training opportunities to learn the needed requirements and how to run childcare. Translations of existing resources on this topic may be needed.
- **Mandate Shorter Work Weeks:** Research demonstrates that shorter hours (while maintaining payment commensurate with a 40-hour work week) improves health and safety of workers, as well as their efficiency. Furthermore, reduced hours would foster greater flexibility for all and improved accessibility for those caring for dependents or dealing with chronic health issues.
- **Independent Safety and Complaint Board with Meaningful Power:** To ensure adequate oversight, enforcement of regulations, and avenues for complaint (including those related to discrimination) and conflict resolution, an independent board should be established and entrusted with the power, capacity, and funding to enforce and uphold these goals. This is especially important in industries where employees belong to marginalized communities and may not be adequately served by existing laws, policies, and oversight. An example to emulate, developed and led by industry workers, is the Milk with Dignity program. This program establishes workplace standards that are adopted by participating buyers and are enforced and overseen by an independent council that also provides education to workers about their rights and responsibilities within the program and other regulations. Furthermore, clear information, support and resources should be provided for workers who experience discrimination on the job.
- **Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) in Climate Career Hiring:** Employers that receive benefits from the state should be required to:
  - 1. Receive training, guidance, and assessments from third party equity professionals
  - 2. Create an equity plan with implementation overseen by equity professionals
  - 3. Designate a percentage of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, non-english speaking, and/or disabled people that must be hired
- **Monetary support for The Vermont Releaf Collective and Other Similar Organizations:** The Vermont Releaf Collective was the most highly valued career resource for the BIPOC focus group - it offers community, job screening, and information for BIPOC community interested in the climate and agriculture. Existing organizations, led by BIPOC community members, should

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<sup>6</sup> These recommendations were made by a single focus group. There may not be general agreement from other focus groups or Climate Workforce Network Action Team members on these recommendations.

be funded to continue the work they are doing. Other organizations doing this work include; Every Town Project, Just Construction, Seeding Power, Yestermorrow School, The Susu Community Farm, AALV, and Community Resilience Organizations.

- **Diversity In Job-Support Staff and Related Programs:** Ensure that work-support organizations and agencies (such as the Department of Labor’s workforce training and unemployment programs) are made up of diverse staff that understand the emotional and physical challenges unique to marginalized communities.
- **Ensure Policy and Program oversight by Equity Professionals:** Equity professionals and established boards (including but not limited to; the Land Access and Opportunity Board, The Vermont Environmental Justice Network, The Environmental Justice Advisory Council, The Vermont Office of Racial Equity, and The Vermont Racial Equity Advisory Panel) should oversee, advise on, and serve as final decision makers regarding any programs or policies established to support a Climate Workforce. Where applicable, the capacity of these boards to engage in this work should be supported through additional funding.
- **Implement the Crown Act in Vermont:** New American focus group participants recommended The Crown Act -Ending hair discrimination- that was passed in 2019 in CA be also passed in Vermont: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2116/text>
- **Financial Support and Technical Assistance for Cooperative Ownership and Transitions:** Cooperative ownership ensures democratic management and participation of workers, reducing the ability for individuals to wield power in harmful ways or place employees into positions of harm. Cooperative ownership also allows for workers to have a more pronounced influence over the systems of support, benefits, and operations of a workplace. This also contributes to improved employee retainment, economic resilience, and skill-building for workers. Capital and technical assistance for the development of new cooperatives and transition of traditional businesses into cooperatives should be provided, with a focus on Climate Careers.
- **Unionization Support:** Union membership allows workers to advocate for themselves in more meaningful ways, protects them from harm, and often begets improved benefits, support services, and compensation. Climate Careers should be connected to strong unions in Vermont.
- **Support policies that protect people in other places:** Hold the countries that take African children out of school to work in mines for clean energy activity or fossil fuel activities accountable for this crime.
- **Recycling:** Provide incentives for the restaurant businesses regarding packaging food items and all others to have some recycling responsibilities. Anything that would lead to less consumption, more sharing of resources such as recycling on a larger scale rather than the individual sorting.
- **Information Campaigns:** Towns/regions could create PSA campaigns specific to the local issues. There could be policy funding that could promote not just reusable water bottles but handheld kits of dishes, cups and silverware; reusable bags could be provided using taxpayer money. Training and awareness, using schools and school curriculums to engage the community and workforce. Policy could lead to companies taking some responsibility (Snapple sells both plastic and glass bottles or Amazon and its extra packaging).