



Meaningful Engagement for New Hampshire's Climate Action Planning

Opportunities for Moving Forward

Memo by NH Listens, July 2024

Purpose

In August 2023, New Hampshire (NH) was granted federal funding to update the state's Climate Action Plan to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). The four-year program runs from 2023-2027. Objectives of the plan are to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions while supporting the creation of good jobs and lowering energy costs for families.
- Empower community-driven solutions in neighborhoods overburdened from pollution and impacts of climate change by directly seeking input from those communities.
- Deliver cleaner air by reducing harmful air pollution in places where people live, work, play and go to school.

Between December 2023 and early February 2024, NH Listens worked with the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) [Climate Pollution Reduction Grant \(CPRG\)](#) team to host a series of community conversations that offered time for people to learn, listen, and talk with each other to help develop a [priority climate action plan \(PCAP\)](#). From these conversations, NHDES will identify priority projects and linking measures based on community engagement and a comprehensive series of analyses to move New Hampshire forward with air pollution reduction – [See the Spring 2024 update](#).

The purpose of this document is to compile 'what was heard' about continued engagement suggestions shared by participants to inform potential implementation processes and the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP). Source information includes:

- the online Spring 2024 CPRG update,
- individual interviews,
- online community conversations,
- online cross-sector stakeholders, and
- in person community conversations from around the state

The following information is also summarized in the PCAP Outreach and Coordination section and in the engagement event summaries posted on the [Carsey School website](#).



Please note that some of the suggested opportunities may not fall within the scope of the CPRG grant but are included here to inform the general engagement process.

Participant Feedback – Themes and Key Points

“What should CPRG meaningful engagement include going forward?”

During interviews, workshops and online events held during the PCAP process, community members and key stakeholders worked together to identify priorities, barriers, and potential partnerships. Feedback from participants ranged from thoughtful observations, lessons learned, to actionable programming. When asked, “What should CPRG meaningful engagement include going forward?” participants shared the following.

Overall Process and CCAP Input

- **Outreach and engage with the specifically affected parties**, including most affected communities, and consultation with experts in the field for each project.
- Go directly to the implementers to gauge their capacity and input, rather than rely on them to come to community conversations.
- Increase small group opportunities for online meetings (i.e. Zoom) by talking together, utilizing less overview of grant info – instead highlight engagement and time hearing from NH stakeholders
- Focus on internal engagement with NHDES - how do they want to structure the dollars out the door once they come from US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA)?
- Focus on external engagement and develop relationships with project partners and municipalities now to anticipate collaborate when funding arrives to the state.

Further Education & Information Sharing

- Provide education and updates around the various projects, programs, and policies discussed to increase understanding, awareness, and engagement.
- Develop accessible, comprehensive public education that provides information, resources, and potential programs or projects that can be funded.
- Offer ongoing outreach and community engagement to increase buy in, support, and relationships for implementing projects.
- Share how NH’s Climate Plan will approach implementation, on-the-ground and how communities can be involved.
- Continue to raise and address barriers. Local projects experience barriers due to lack of community buy-in and understanding of the long-term investment and advantages.
- Stay alert to patterns of NIMBY-ism (or “not in my backyard”) from community members that resist change that can impede climate-related progress
- Persist with transparency, communication, and participation – key in this large scale effort.



- Clarify, clarify, clarify – substantive context is needed for communities to give meaningful input. Provide workshops, information, and resources in multiple languages.

Continue to Strengthen Connections and Outreach – Community Members, Partners, Organizations, Municipalities, and Industry

- Develop the workforce and pipeline for good jobs; there is need for more contractors, skilled workers, and education programs to provide weatherization and infrastructure efforts that will support reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Coordinate with educational and career pathway programs and institutions. High schools, community colleges, trade schools and other post-secondary institutions to share energy and building sector careers to high school students.
- Build strong partnerships with municipal departments and managers to achieve much of the climate reduction measures discussed.
- Continue outreach to key partners, industries, and most affected communities to build awareness and learn about priorities.
- Connect with utility companies to understand how distribution automation will be implemented.
- Get youth engaged. Use projects as an educational opportunity for students to get student engagement. Youth education and workforce development for the future is important.

Offer Regional, Geographic, and Project-Specific Engagement

- Local issues, regional impact can be an ongoing focus. For example, the Bow Power plant, large regional landfills, and other local examples impact the immediate communities and have broader consequences. There is interest in how NH can collaborate across the state and the region to address current needs in major projects, as well as upcoming projects.
- Collaborate with organizations like NH Saves and New England states on a regional effort to address and combat climate change, energy efficiency, workforce development.
- Recognize ongoing efforts of towns creating their own Climate Actions Plans and how they can fit into NH DES' Climate Action Plan.
- Provide some specific focus on coastline and watershed challenges. Coastline gets support for coastal resilience; opportunities exist to support upper watershed needs and potential support.

Integrate Funding focused Engagement Statewide, Regionally, and in Local Communities

- Coordinate with elected officials, NH's other departments, and maximize the opportunity.
- Ensure that NH receive fair funding to make a difference. Stakeholders at all levels of NH climate action work are eager to learn how implementation and funding will be structured, if NH is awarded. Participants have some concern that NH does not have robust available matching funds that would help an implementation grant go further.



- Develop implementation structures that support coalition-based projects and address the capacity challenges faced by many towns.

Ensure Communities with fewer resources receive equitable attention and opportunity

- Develop informed, community-based approaches and funding structures to ensure that low-income communities benefit from funding opportunities. Increase education and awareness of climate pollution and emissions reduction projects in all areas of NH is important. Some NH communities can take advantage of current and potential programs, like creating community solar, while others have less access nor resources to uplift commonly suggested priorities (e.g., heat pump installation, access, or resources to purchase to electric vehicles, etc.).
- Reduce categorical burdens strategically. Attention needs to be focused on how to reduce categorical burdens further using the Low Income Disadvantage Communities (LIDAC) benefits analysis and speaking to communities who are struggling to access resources to reduce greenhouse gases and air pollution.
- Focus on the transportation sector. Incentivize electric vehicles and infrastructure at scale, expanding public transportation and active transportation options, and ensuring that there is benefit to all NH communities, especially communities experiencing more barriers and air pollution affects.
- Develop measures that reflect equitable solar opportunities. Some NH communities can take advantage of current and potential programs, like creating community solar, while others have less access nor resources to uplift commonly suggested priorities (e.g., heat pump installation, access, or resources to purchase to electric vehicles, etc.).

Share Lessons Learned and Technical Assistance

- Plan for and provide technical assistance: NH's local communities often do not have the capacity and technical education to navigate complicated regulations and funding sources.
- Seek to build bridges among funding sources that are often siloed and complicated: Residents are concerned about energy costs and weatherization programs, rebates, tax credits are difficult to navigate.
- Work with local collaborators who are working around pollution reduction and coordinating efforts through partnerships and knowledge-sharing exchanges. NH has small, involved communities with local control and decision-making. Local communities need stronger networks and resources to advance projects, especially in low-capacity or disadvantaged communities.
- Identify towns that are pursuing existing grants and opportunities that align with the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants to amplify parallel efforts
- Leverage what is learned in each project for future projects.



Considerations for CCAP Measures

Participants also discussed potential measures that can be actualized under the CPRG project. The following considerations detail the programs, projects, and incentives that were brainstormed by key stakeholders and community members across online and in-person conversations. We've also identified potential policy actions shared by participants that could be incorporated in the CCAP under '*Policy Recommendations.*'

Transportation

- E-bike loan programs for schools, e-bike rebate program
- Improved connectivity among regional bus and rail systems to increase access to key destinations
- Incentives for landlords and low and moderate income (LMI) housing providers to install affordable electric vehicle charging stations
- Improved biking infrastructure – trail network maps, online tools, locking stations, wider shoulders, measures that improve pedestrian and cyclist safety
- Active Transportation – convert state-owned abandoned rail corridors into trails
- Partner with NH Department of Transportation to align plans and funding opportunities with the Complete Streets policy.
- Intentional electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure siting; not just in urban centers, fast chargers at highway rest areas
- Develop public-private partnerships to expand existing public transit systems
- Increased opportunities to learn about available financial and technical assistance to support partners with existing project plans
- No-idling campaign research and outreach
- Commuter rails services to connect the various regions of the state
- *Berlin/North Country*: Incentivize transition to electric All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV)s with charging stations along trails

Residential Buildings

- Enable income-qualified programs for weatherization, energy efficiency and heat pump installations.
- Funding opportunities for residential energy audits (single and multi-unit)
- Align incentives for landlords and tenants
- Integrate indoor air quality considerations into weatherization programs
- Increased public education opportunities for homeowners to understand weatherization, opportunities for residential energy efficiency improvements, available incentives
- Establish community work groups to weatherize housing
- Funding opportunities for energy efficient windows
- Increase incentives for energy efficient appliances



- Increase incentives for residential renewable energy e.g. solar panels

Policy Recommendations:

- Renter protections for maintained affordability in the case of residential building upgrades that increase property values

Local Government Buildings and Facilities

- Adopt EV readiness in building codes
- Installation of heat pump infrastructure in municipal buildings and schools
- “Roof Ready” solar program for schools

Waste and Materials Management

- Improve management of construction and demolition debris
- Updating aging infrastructure to improve efficiency
- Incentives for anaerobic digesters to recycle waste for energy back to grid
- Reconsider single stream recycling approach
- Greenhouse gas emissions capture from landfill sites

Policy Recommendations:

- Recommend a food waste disposal ban that focuses on large waste generators
- Support introduction of a single-use plastic bill

Workforce Development

- Industry training for HVAC professionals - focusing on health impacts with energy efficiency
- Paid apprenticeships in weatherization
- Training for contractors in heat pump installations
- Living wages
- Incentives through school programs to compensate students

Commercial Buildings

- Incentives for commercial building weatherization
- Incentives for solar on commercial and multi-family parking lots
- Incentives for commercial building owners to install EV charging infrastructure for their tenants
- Provide incentives for businesses to reduce energy usage/GHG emissions

Policy Recommendations:

- Recommend introducing limits for construction of high emission producing facilities in densely populated areas



Natural and Working Lands & Agriculture

- Electrified agricultural equipment
- Incentives for the adoption of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices
- Establish urban tree planting and maintenance programs, with a focus on LIDAC communities
- Support for planting and maintaining native trees and plants in urban areas
- Replacement of urban ash trees

Electricity Generation and Industry

- Transmission upgrades across the grid (both short and long-term plans)
- Community solar projects and microgrids
- Enable vehicle-to-grid transmission
- Improved energy storage systems
- Smart Grid improvements to better utilize renewable energy generation

Policy Recommendations:

- Recommend increasing the state's Renewable Portfolio Standards.
- Increase support for distributed generation and storage
- Improve regional coordination across states for grid planning efforts

Next Steps

NH Listens and NHDES hosted online update sessions in [June 2024](#) to inform key stakeholders and community members on the status of the CPRG project. Across the two sessions, 46 respondents answered questions about continued engagement for the implementation and CCAP process. When asked how they would like to stay engaged with the process,

- 87% said they would like more online opportunities,
- 37% would like in-person presentations for community groups and organizations (such as a climate action groups, healthcare workers, and town planners), and
- 35% would like in-person workshops.

Participants also shared who they would like NHDES to engage with during the CCAP process. The organizations mentioned included groups, coalitions, and committees that were also often mentioned through the PCAP process that began in October 2023. NH Listens and NHDES will continue to design meaningful engagement opportunities during the CCAP. Updates will come through the [NHDES mailing list, website](#); and [Carsey School of Public Policy webpage](#) dedicated to the project.



Outreach and Project Partners Suggested by Engagement Partners

- 350 New Hampshire
- ACLU
- Arbor Day Foundation
- Black Lives Matter NH
- Clean Energy NH
- Climate Action NH
- Community Action Program - weatherization programs
- Community College System of NH
- Community Development Finance Authority
- Community Power Coalition of NH
- Consumer Advocates
- County Conservation Districts
- Energy circuit riders
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Eversource
- Freshstart Farms
- Granite State Organizing Project
- Habitat 4 Humanity
- High Roads Training Partnership Programs
- Hospital groups
- Housing Authority (Portsmouth, Keene)
- Kearsarge Climate Action
- Lakes Region Community College
- Legislature
- Local banks
- Local Energy Committees
- Municipalities & municipal planners
- NAACP
- National Forest Service
- Natural Resources Conservation Services
- NE Onsite Energy TAP tech assistance
- Neighborworks Southern NH
- New England Municipal Sustainability Network (NEMS)
- New Hampshire Municipal Association
- NH Brazilian Council
- NH Community Loan Fund - ROC NH
- NH Community Power Coalition
- NH Department of Agriculture
- NH Department of Transportation
- NH Division of Forests and Lands
- NH DNCR (State Parks)
- NH farming community
- NH Food Alliance
- NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action (CHICK)
- NH Housing
- NH Land Trust Coalition
- NH Legislature
- NH Municipal Association
- NH Network for Energy Environment and Climate
- NH Public Health Association
- NH Public Utilities Commission
- NH Saves
- NHDES Wetlands
- NHSaves Contractors
- Nonprofit housing authorities
- Portsmouth High School Climate Action Committee
- Regenerative Roots
- Regional Planning Commissions
- Residential and commercial builders
- Revision Energy



- School districts
- Service Link Community Action Programs
- Society for the Protection of NH Forests
- Solar energy installers and providers
- Southern New Hampshire Services
- State Low Income Home Energy Assistance
- The Nature Conservancy
- Third Act
- Town & City Sustainability Committees
- Town of Durham
- Transportation agencies (public, private)
- UNH Cooperative Extension
- UNH Sustainability Institute
- University of New Hampshire
- US Dept of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA Rural Department
- Vital Communities
- White Mountains Community Colleges
- Workforce development programs