



Updating New Hampshire's Climate Action Plan

Online Community Conversations

*Summary Report by NH Listens, February 2024
Courtney Wrigley, Mikayla Townsend, & Carrie Portrie*

Purpose and Background

In August 2023, New Hampshire was granted federal funding to update New Hampshire's Climate Action Plan to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. **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.

These plans are part of the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. **They lead to additional implementation funding that will support community-engaged projects with an effort to focus on Justice40 investments among the sectors of air pollution and greenhouse gas reductions ([see more on Justice40 here](#)).**

New Hampshire Listens is working on behalf of the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) to design and facilitate community engagement—an essential component of NH's Priority (PCAP) and Comprehensive Climate Action Plans (CCAP).

Each climate action plan requires meaningful community engagement. The design and initial efforts to identify climate action priorities must actively involve the participation of people who live in communities that experience a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards that affect their quality of life [...] There is much to talk and engage about across New Hampshire!

(NH DES - <https://www.des.nh.gov/climate-and-sustainability/climate-change/climate-pollution-reduction-grants>)

Between December 2023 and early February 2024, NH Listens hosted a series of conversations and gatherings that offered time for people to learn, listen, and talk with each other to help develop a priority climate action plan for the state. From these conversations, NHDES will identify priority projects and linking measures based on community engagement



along with a series of analyses by (March 1, 2024; [see more about the CPRG process](#) and [training/technical tools](#)). The PCAP allows the state to apply for implementation funding from the federal government (April 1, 2024) to move projects forward in New Hampshire ([see more about the implementation grants](#)).

The conversations focused on talking about local issues and potential solutions in many different areas of concern:

- Agriculture
- Commercial and Residential Buildings
- Electricity Generation and/or Use
- Industry
- Natural and Working Lands
- Transportation
- Wastewater
- Wastewater & Materials Management

Goals and Facilitation

In December 2023 and January 2024, NH Listens and NHDES held three online community conversations for New Hampshire residents and community members. These sessions were one part of a multi-pronged community engagement approach. The purpose of the gatherings was to share information about the Climate Action Plan and implementation grant goals, and to gather input and create connections about projects that can be implemented in New Hampshire. The meetings continued ongoing conversations about key priorities for reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in New Hampshire. Additionally, NH Listens and NHDES were interested in identifying and building a list of local and statewide partnerships, so that projects locally and statewide include a robust mix of perspectives to move work forward.

Participants engaged in three interactive online community conversations. Participants were welcome to join any one of the three online community conversations or the series. Each session opened with an informational overview, including project and implementation goals, timeline, Justice 40 guidelines and NH Low-Income and Disadvantage Community (LIDAC) mapping, and ‘what we’ve heard so far’ during community engagement. **The majority of session time was spent in small group breakouts to hear directly from community members about project ideas, barriers, partners, and local context in NH to inform the development of NH’s PCAP and CCAP.** For a detailed review of agendas, information shared and gathered ([see slides and notes on the Carsey School of Public Policy Page](#)). The online community conversations included participant breakout sessions that were guided with the questions:

Online Community Conversation 1 – December 6, 2023

- What actions would reduce greenhouse gas emissions where you live, work, learn, and play?
- By sector, what are your ideas for near-term, high priority, implement ready projects, programs, and policies that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions in NH?
- What is achievable in your home and community? How do we work better together at the local level in NH?

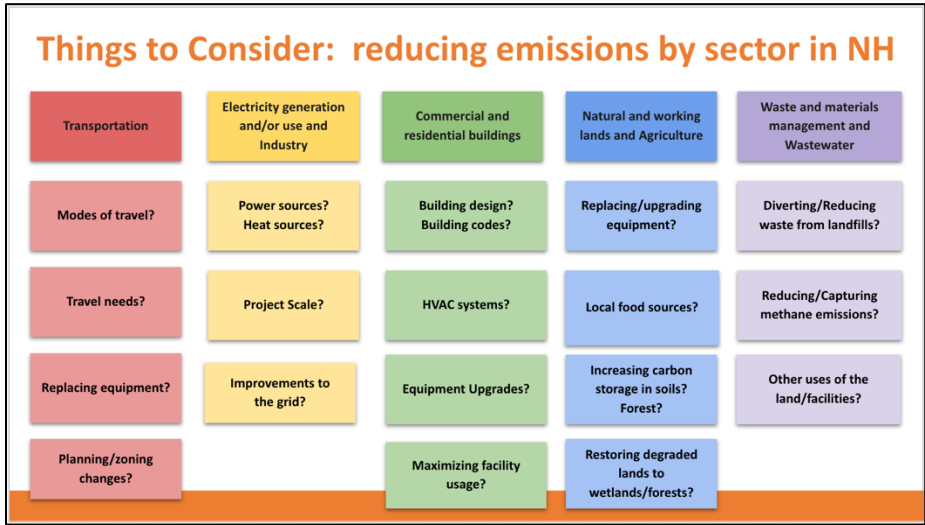


Figure 1. Screenshot of Interactive Google Slides Online Community Conversation 1

Online Community Conversation 2 – January 9, 2024

Review the relevant sector-based projects gathered so far:

- What is needed to effectively achieve projects in this sector? What would make success possible in NH?
- What successful examples have you seen?
- What prevents progress or acts as a barrier?
- Who needs to be involved? Identify partners on the ground.

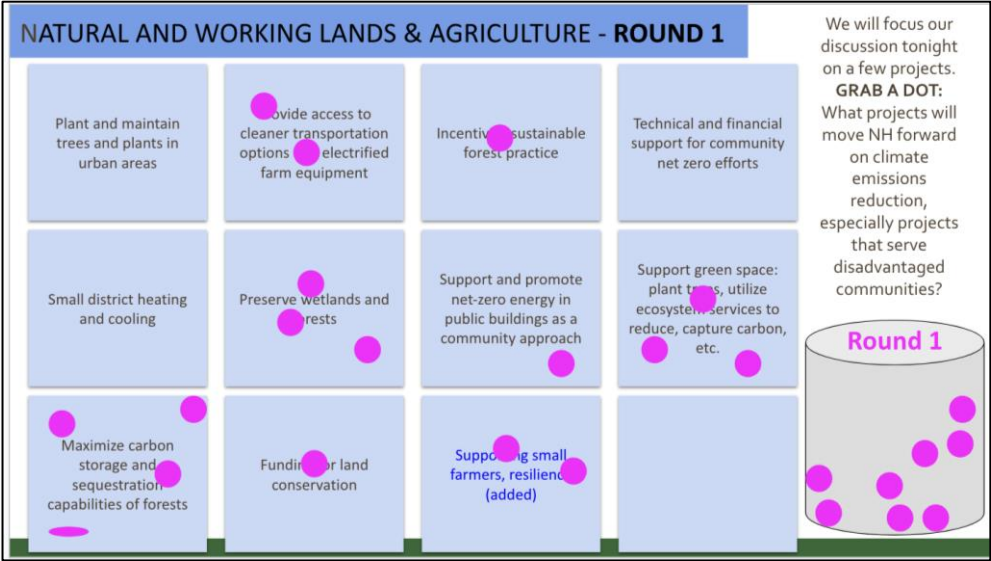


Figure 2. Screenshot of Interactive Google Slides Online Community Conversation 2

Online Community Conversation 3 – January 24, 2024

- What is going on in your local community related to reducing climate pollution?
- What’s missing and needs to be added to the project list compiled so far?
- What important takeaway messages should NH DES keep in mind as NH’s PCAP is completed?

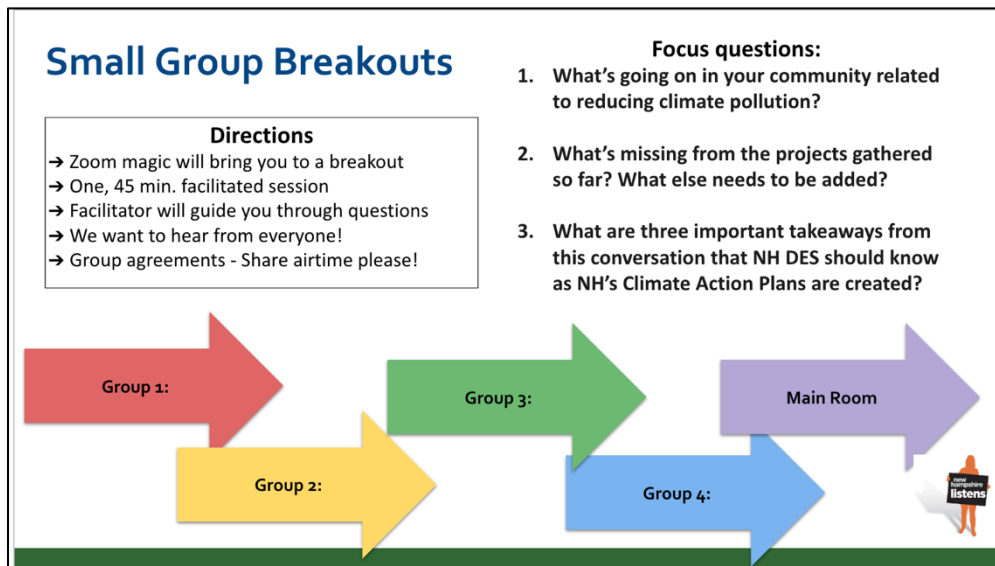


Figure 3. Small Group Instructions from Google Slides Online Community Conversation 3

During the online community conversations, NH Listens and NHDES provided information, facilitated small group discussions, recorded information, and made sure all participants could contribute.

Participation

Across all three online community conversations **70 different people attended**. One person attending two and another attending all three number of people. Collectively, their input contributed to identifying key climate pollution reduction projects in NH, identifying barriers and partners on the ground, and providing context and considerations at the local level in NH communities.

Table 1. Online Community Conversation Participant Counts¹

Date and Time	Participant Count
---------------	-------------------

¹ See full list of where participants attended from and list of affiliations in the appendix



December 6, 2024, 5-6:30pm	34
January 9, 2024, 5-6:30pm	19
January 24, 2024, 6:30-8pm	21

**Note the participant counts do not add up to a total of 153 as some participants attended more than one gathering.*

Themes and Key Points from Online Community Conversations

Over the three online community conversations, participants identified key project priorities, implementation barriers, partnerships, and shared takeaways from local NH experiences to inform the process. Small group conversations ranged from brainstorming and addressing specific project details to sharing community experiences when working to reduce climate pollution at the local level. For a detailed review of input gathered at each online community conversation, please refer to the facilitator notes in the meeting slides in the appendix. The following is a summary of high-level themes and input heard during the three online community conversations.

Transportation

Participants shared wide-ranging ideas about reducing greenhouse gas emissions in transportation, and other wide-ranging projects related to living in NH. The need for more public transportation, bus routes and higher ridership, walkable cities and towns, awareness, and education, and close to home opportunities for recreation. Participants noted that the sector is a large source of emissions in NH, there is opportunity to focus on transportation alternatives to reduce emissions.

Projects highlighted for additional discussion

- Increased funding for public transportation and bus routes
- Infrastructure for low-emission transportation, such bike lanes and rail trails
- Public and community electric vehicle charging stations, especially for renters.

Barriers to highlighted projects

- Low priority in state funding for public transportation
- NH's low population density and land use patterns, including sprawl
- Car-dependent infrastructure and behaviors
- Low ridership, awareness, and perception
- Access and infrequency; workforce availability
- Renters and landlords have different incentives towards EV charging
- Focusing solely on EV charging is not equitable or reduce car-dependency.



Potential partners for highlighted projects

- NH Department of Transportation
- NH Legislature
- Local governments
- Service Link Community Action Programs
- Workforce development programs

Electricity Generation and/or Use and Industry

Priorities in this sector include updating the grid and adding more residential and community solar arrays. Expedited closure of Bow Power and increasing community-based solar programs were emphasized. Examples such as Green Mountain Power and increasing and diversifying energy storage were noted. Participants expressed passion to ‘think big’ and remove fossil fuel from the grid. Other wide-ranging projects were discussed including indoor air quality, induction stoves, and weatherization.

Projects highlighted for additional discussion

- Small and medium size community solar projects and storage systems
- Community microgrids
- Incentives for landlords to install electric vehicle charging stations, solar, and weatherization efforts.

Barriers to highlighted projects

- Community support and cost to municipalities
- Technical support to municipalities
- Costs to landlords when housing and rents are a considerable issue in NH.

Potential partners for highlighted projects

- NH-based utility companies
- Solar energy installers and providers
- Regional Planning Commissions and energy circuit riders, Weatherization programs.

Commercial and Residential Buildings

Participants emphasized weatherization programs and limitations with NH SAVES program. Adding alternative energy infrastructure to commercial and municipal buildings was also a focus. Expanding energy audits, heat pumps, adaptive building reuse, and connecting existing funding programs (ex. Lead abatement) with other weatherization funding were noted as opportunities.

Projects highlighted for additional discussion

- Incentives for building efficiency measures, like audits, heat pumps, and weatherization
- Workforce development and training, including paid apprenticeships in weatherization



- Build out contractor capacity
- Create opportunities for renters to secure effective approaches to heating, home energy, and EV charging.

Barriers to highlighted projects

- Lack of centralized place for all weatherization information and funding; siloed funding streams that result in stalled projects
- Few qualified contractors and lack of training opportunity and time
- Renters cannot access incentive programs and landlords unable or unwilling
- Housing affordability

Potential partners for highlighted projects

- Town energy committees
- Community Action Program weatherization programs
- Contractors
- Workforce development and community colleges
- Multi-family housing developers.

Natural & Working Lands and Agriculture

Priorities in this sector include maintaining and expanding green spaces and tree canopy, and addressing heat islands, specifically in disadvantaged areas. Protecting wetlands, open space, forests, and agricultural lands were emphasized, as well as connections with NH's forest economy. Education, legislation, and raising community awareness about wide-ranging greenhouse gas reduction efforts were discussed.

Projects highlighted for additional discussion

- Preserve wetlands and forests to maximize carbon storage and sequestration capabilities
- Support small farmers
- Provide access to electrified farm equipment and cleaner transportation options

Barriers to highlighted projects

- Challenging economics of NH's forest economy
- Complex state regulations to wetlands
- Technical assistance for municipalities and small farmers; tractor options (no mid-sized EV) and costs are limited to small farmers

Potential partners for highlighted projects

- National Forest Service
- NHDES Wetlands
- US Dept of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service
- NH farming community



Waste & Materials Management and Wastewater

Participants discussed recycling waste back into the grid and reducing waste at the local level. Air pollution from Penacook Incinerator was an example of impacts disproportionately affecting low-income communities. Participants discussed wide-ranging projects and community education about waste and materials management, including local waste stations could not install the desired solar systems due to complex regulations.

Projects highlighted for additional discussion

- Waste reduction and reuse (i.e., preventing waste from being generated in the first place)
- Recycling and waste diversion (i.e., avoiding disposal of items in a landfill or incinerator).
- Incentives for anaerobic digesters to recycle waste for energy back to grid

Barriers to highlighted projects

- Educating the public
- Legislation and political will
- Technical assistance
- Funding at municipal level.

Potential partners for highlighted projects

- Natural Resources Conservation Services
- Municipalities
- Legislators
- Product manufacturers

Opportunities for Engagement Moving Forward

The Online Community Conversations were one layer of community engagement hosted by NH Listens and NHDES during the first phase of engagement under the Climate Pollution Reduction Planning Grant. Participants spent time brainstorming climate pollution reduction projects that would make a difference where they live, work, learn, and play in NH. Specific projects were discussed in more detail to learn about the barriers and potential partners to move these projects forward. Participants shared what was happening in their NH communities related to projects reducing climate pollution. Finally, participants shared takeaways for NHDES to keep in mind as NH's Climate Action Plans are updated. The following are themes and opportunities for engagement moving forward.

Additional priorities heard from Online Community Conversations:

- **Equity in NH communities:** Some NH communities can take advantage of current and potential programs, like creating community solar, while others have little access nor resources to uplift commonly suggested priorities (e.g., heat pump installation, access, or resources to purchase to electric vehicles, etc.). Attention needs to be focused on how to



reduce categorical burdens further using the LIDAC benefits analysis and speaking to communities who are struggling to access resources to reduce greenhouse gasses and air pollution.

- **Awareness, education, and engagement:** Ongoing outreach and community education is needed. Local projects experience barriers due to lack of community buy-in and understanding of the long-term investment and advantages.
- **Connection and partnership are needed:** 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.
- **Technical assistance:** NH's local communities do not have the capacity and technical education to navigate complicated regulations and funding sources.
- **Funding sources are siloed and complicated:** Residents are concerned about energy costs and weatherization programs, rebates, tax credits are difficult to navigate.
- **Developing 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.
- **Local issues, regional impact:** The Bow Power plant, large regional landfills, and other local examples impact the immediate communities and also have broader consequences. There is interest in how NH can collaborate across the state and the region to create projects that will address local needs.

Additional Resources

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. Climate Pollution Reduction Grants. <https://www.des.nh.gov/climate-and-sustainability/climate-change/climate-pollution-reduction-grants>.

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (2023). NHDES using EPA grant to update state's Climate Action Plan. <https://www.des.nh.gov/news-and-media/blog/nhdes-using-epa-grant-update-states-climate-action-plan>.

Executive Office of the President of the United States (n.d.) Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: Frequently asked questions: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CEQ-CEJST-QandA.pdf>.

The White House (n.d.). Justice 40: A whole-of-government initiative. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>.

United States Environmental Protection Agency (2023). Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program: Planning grant question and answer document. <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-11/climate-pollution-reduction-grants-frequently-asked-questions.pdf>.



NH Listens and NH Department of Environmental Services Contacts

NH Listens

- Carrie Portrie, PhD., Research Assistant Professor & Program Manager, Carrie.Portrie@unh.edu
- Mikayla Townsend, Program Coordinator, Mikayla.Townsend@unh.edu

NH Department of Environmental Services

- Kurt Yuengling, Community Engagement Specialist, Environmental Health Program, Air Resources Division, kurt.r.yuengling@des.nh.gov

Appendix

Participants attended from:

- Alexandria
- Alstead
- Bath
- Bedford
- Berlin (x2)
- Boston, MA (x2)
- Canterbury
- Chichester
- Claremont (x2)
- Concord (x6)
- Cornish
- Dover (x5)
- Durham (x3)
- East Andover
- Exeter
- Franklin
- Goffstown
- Hampton (x4)
- Hampton Falls
- Hopkinton
- Hudson
- Lebanon (x2)
- Litchfield
- Loudon
- Lynnfield
- Manchester (x3)
- Marlborough
- Merrimack
- Nashua (x3)
- New Boston
- Northfield
- Pelham/Manchester
- Penacook
- Peterborough
- Portsmouth (x6)
- Rindge
- Sandwich (x2)
- Seabrook
- Somersworth
- State of NH
- Tamworth
- Warner
- No community recorded

Participant organizations/affiliations:

- 350 New Hampshire (x3)
- 350 NH Youth Team
- 350NH, NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action, Manchester NAACP/Granite State Organizing Project/ Unitarian Universalist Action Coalition
- Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust
- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Berlin Planning Board
- Bike-Walk Alliance of New Hampshire



- Canterbury Community Power Committee
- Community College System of NH
- Concord Environment and Energy Advisory Committee
- Energy Committee
- Food Solutions New England, University of New Hampshire
- Hampton
- Hudson Sustainability Committee
- Ingeniator Group, LLC
- Kent Street
- Lebanon Energy Advisory Committee
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council
- Monadnock Climbers Association and Appalachian Mountain Club
- Merrimack energy committee
- New Hampshire Public Radio
- NH Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees
- NH Department of Environmental Services
- NH Department of Health and Human Services
- NH Department of Transportation
- NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action (x2)
- NH House of Representatives (x2)
- NH Network: Environment, Energy, Climate
- NH Public Health Association
- NH Public Radio
- NH Solar RECs
- NH State Climatologist
- Planning Department
- Portsmouth Climate Action (x2)
- Resource Management Incorporated
- Retired Professor
- Rindge Conservation Commission
- Rockingham Planning Commission
- Sandwich Conservation Commission
- Self (x2)
- Southern NH Services
- The Nature Conservancy NH
- Third Act New Hampshire
- Town of Hampton, NH
- Town Peterborough / PREP
- University of New Hampshire (x2)
- Utilil
- Unitarian Universalist Action NH
- Unitarian Universalist Action, NH, Portsmouth Climate Action, and South Church Social Justice Associates
- Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
- No affiliation record (x8)