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Advancing Clean Energy & Climate Action in Vermont

A Citizen's Guide for Becoming a More Engaged, Effective Advocate

Addressing the challenges of the climate crisis can be overwhelming. But there is tremendous opportunity to meet these challenges in Vermont by building upon the following:

- Vermont's legal obligation to do so. In 2020, Vermont passed the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA), creating a legally binding, broad-based framework to reduce Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions in line with the milestones set by the world's leading scientists and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The GWSA set the stage for the state to create the Vermont Climate Council to develop a Climate Action Plan.
- The initial Climate Action Plan was officially adopted in December 2021, and includes recommended actions for state, regional, local, private, and non-profit sector partners. While many of the plan recommendations will require new policy adoption, policy reform, rule making. It also includes actions that individual Vermonters can take, highlighting the request the Council heard many times for a set of implementable actions at all levels of society and government. This Plan is organized around five areas:
 - Emissions reductions;
 - Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont's natural and working lands;
 - Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont's communities and built environment;
 - Enhancing carbon sequestration and storage; and
 - Cross-cutting pathways (those that are particularly impactful in supporting both the emissions reduction and resilience and adaptation efforts called for by the GWSA).

Vermont is also primed for success with:

- A still-working democracy, reflected in a Town Meeting Day tradition, active local governments and an accessible, proactive citizen Legislature.
- Commitment to and a reputation for entrepreneurialism, such as the creation of the first statewide efficiency utility — Efficiency Vermont — which has taken root around the world and become a powerful driver for significant energy and cost savings.
- An engaged citizenry — YOU. Vermont has a strong foundation upon which to create action and advance clean energy and climate action programs, projects and policies at the local and state level. Vermont's network of over 120 community energy committees, along with a diversifying farming community and many businesses, organizations and stakeholders committed to social, environmental and climate justice, offers tremendous hope and opportunity to shape and realize a 21st century renewable energy economy.

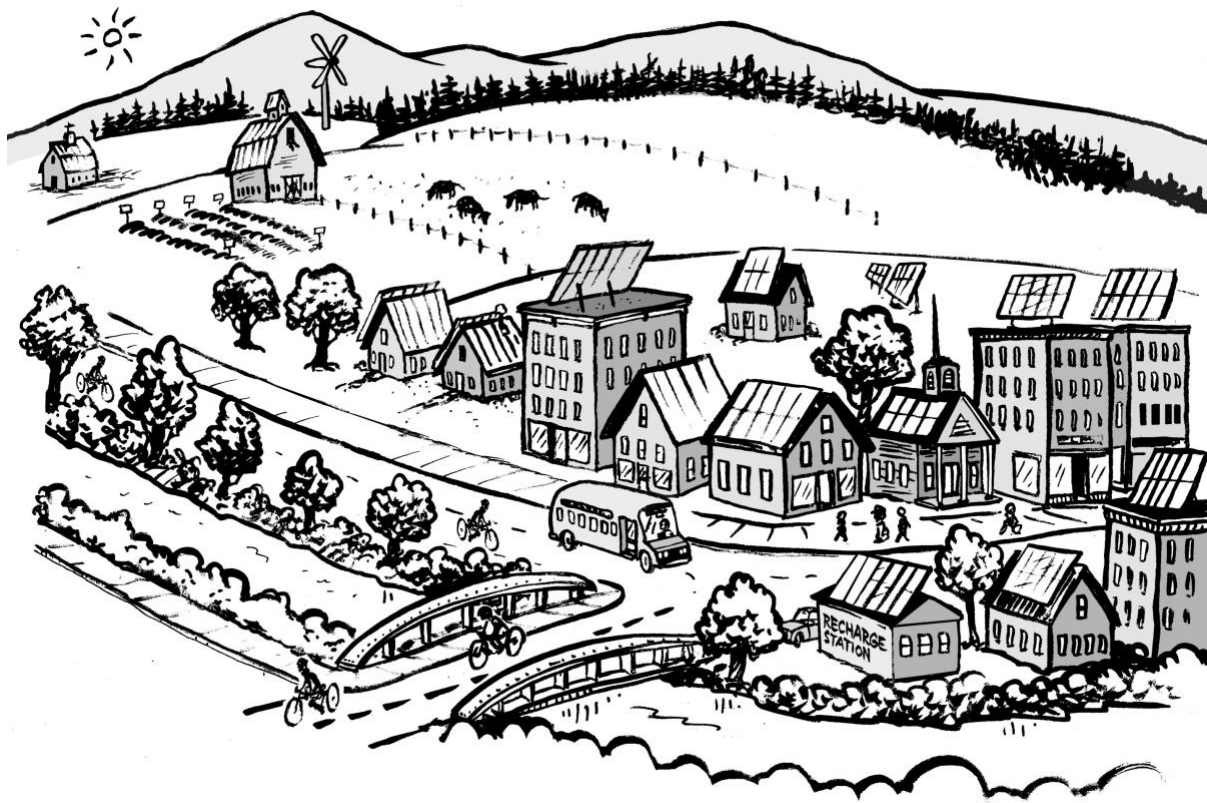


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Together, we can create a vision — and a Vermont — that thrives in a rapidly changing world. A more engaged, bigger, diverse rapid-response-ready network of grassroots clean energy advocates helping shape public policy is one important piece. Let's stay in touch —
Johanna Miller, VNRC Energy Program Director — jmiller@vnrc.org or 802-223-2328 ext.112.

What Is Lobbying and How Do I Know If I am Doing It?

The Citizen Lobbyist

You don't need to be a high powered, big name, professional lobbyist to make an impact. It is to your advantage that you are just your average voter from your legislative district! As a constituent you have a level of credibility that professional firms do not. No elected official can survive with a reputation for ignoring his or her constituents.

Know, Know, Know — Lobbying 101 — Effective Lobbying Tips

***Know* the Target**

A significant component of lobbying is knowing whom to target and knowing about that target. Taking the time to map out who has influence over an issue and who has influence over that decision maker is one of the most effective tools for understanding an issue and creating change.

The first critical step in pressuring public officials is determining which official actually has the power to do what is needed. This person is your *target*. Most of the time this is a simple matter of paying attention as public officials tend to be very outspoken on the matters people care about. When you are unsure of who can do what, just ask! Officials will be forthcoming about what lies within their purview. This will also be extremely helpful in the future as no one wants to meet with an official who cannot address the issue at hand.

Next, research your target. Find out: Who is important to the elected official? To whom is she or he accountable? Does the official receive contributions and if so, from whom? Who are the major employers and institutions in the district and would they be affected by your position? Simply put, you are looking for the major influences already affecting this official. Ideally you want to get these influences to work with you.

***Know* the Issue**

It's important to know the issues you are speaking to, which is to understand some of the benefits, opportunities, drawbacks and concerns around it. Background research into both sides of the issue will help you understand the other forces acting on the public official. A history of the issue always helps and understanding and being prepared to discuss the local impact of the issue is important too. One of the most powerful ways to know the issue and speak to it is from personal experience. If you have first-hand experience with an issue — or know others who do — using that story to paint a picture and make your case can be really effective. Lastly, *only say what you know*. A white lie or exaggeration can damage a group or person's reputation.

***Know* the Solution**

Come prepared with a solution that the target can enact. Be specific and direct. The more specific the solution, the better the chance of a positive outcome. For example, instead of asking a legislator to write a bill, write it for them and ask them to introduce it. They will want to edit it, so be prepared to work with him/her. If the solution is a vote, be prepared to discuss the specific merits/flaws of that bill. Every meeting should have one person asking the "pin down" question. Simply put, the more prepared you look the more likely it is that you will be taken seriously and you'll get the solution you want!

State House Lingo

On the Wall – means a bill has been referred to a committee, but they haven't done anything about it yet. You can literally walk into any committee room and look at the wall to see what bills have been referred to a committee and whether there has been any action on a particular bill.

Taking the Bill off the Wall – means the committee is going to start discussing the bill.

Mark up – means a committee is editing a bill. They literally all sit around and the chairperson (or "chair") reads one line at a time, then they discuss it or accept it. The chair marks it up with a pen and then gives it to the legislative council to re-draft, often for a vote. This is the most important time to be present if you care about a bill, and it is often difficult to predict just when it will happen.

Straw Vote – is a vote that doesn't count for anything, but gives the chair a chance to see whether people are agreeing on the bill's language or not. Most times, if a legislator votes one way on a straw vote, it is very difficult for him/her to change his/her position on the final vote.

Call the Question – a legislator will call the question when s/he thinks there has been enough discussion and s/he wants a vote. The chair will then take the vote.

Roll Call – any legislator can ask that a vote be taken by a call of the roll. If this is not requested, then the vote will be by voice and the legislator's votes will not be recorded individually. For a roll call vote, the clerk in either body (Senate or House) will call each legislator's name. The legislator must be present in his/her seat in order to vote. In the House the first person present on the roll votes and then there is a five minute break to give people a chance to talk about the vote or to get to their seats. In the Senate, the roll is just called and people vote unless a recess is requested. Usually the clerk will go thru the roll call three times to make sure everyone has a chance to vote. After the vote, the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate will announce the results of the vote. After the roll is closed, a legislator may not vote but s/he may ask for the floor and say how s/he would have voted if s/he had been present, for the record.

Voice Vote - a voice vote is the most common way that bills are voted on. The Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate will say "All those in favor, say aye" and those who approve the bill in question will say "aye" or yes. And then the Speaker or President will say "All those opposed say nay" and those opposed will say nay or no. Then the Speaker or the President says what they think happened, e.g. "The ayes appear to have it." If nobody objects, then they will say "The ayes have it. You have passed (bill number)." If the Speaker/President thinks the nays have won then they will indicate that the bill did not pass.

Point of Order – at any time, a legislator can ask a question about the process that is happening by standing up and requesting of the Speaker or the President a "point of order." A point of order is simply a clarification of the rules and whether the process that is happening fits within the rules.

Legislative Council – these are the staff of the Legislature. They draft bills and do research for

the legislators. Usually, the specific people are assigned to committees but they do move around when necessary, especially at the end of the session. The legislative council workers are the collective staff of all the legislators and committees.

Sergeant at Arms – this individual is in charge of keeping order in the State House. They are in charge of security guards and pages. If you have a question about what kinds of actions are allowed in the State House, this is the person to ask. This is also the office you call if you want to reserve a room in the State House or leave a message for a legislator (802-828-2228). Leaving messages for legislators by page is an effective way to communicate a brief message to legislators during business hours, while the action is happening.

Pages – 8th grader students from Vermont who work in the State House during the legislative session to deliver messages for the members of the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the various legislative offices.

Pink slips – the notepads on which the Sergeant at Arms writes messages for legislators, to then be delivered by pages, are pink and thus referred to as “pink slips.”

Clerks - in the House and Senate the clerks are the individuals who know all the rules. You will often see the Speaker or the President of the Senate confer with the clerks to check on whether they can or should do something. If you have a process question, ask the clerks.

The Card Room – this is the little area right by the ramp that leads to the cafeteria. You can reserve it to do a display (be sure to reserve at least a year ahead of time!)

The Well of the House – this is where the House of Representatives sits when they are voting as a full body. Individual committees meet in smaller rooms down the hall.

Lit Drop – short for “literature drop.” If you’d like to leave information in the mailboxes of some or all legislators, the materials must include a name and contact phone number. You must then leave the copies at the Sergeant at Arms office for delivery by pages.

Citizen Lobby Visit

Goals/Purpose of a citizen lobby visit:

1. Familiarity – Elected officials need to see the human face of the issues and the citizen lobbyist provides that face. Getting to know your legislator makes it more likely that they will meet with you in the future.
2. Press them to vote the right way on issues that will better society.

Principles:

Speak from the heart. Tell your story. It will be the most passionate thing your representative hears all day and it's the easiest for you to remember. We call this 'Speaking from the Heart' and in practice it means that one person in the meeting should tell a first person account of why your issue is important to you.

Use the facts. A few (2-3) compelling facts will make your case. Make sure the facts have a credible source and use statistics in your story that will bring a face to the numbers. Also, make sure to discuss the local implications of your facts.

Ask for one thing and stay focused. Never leave without asking your public official to do something. Make sure your request is clear and that you understand the response. This will allow you to stay focused and leave your official little room to avoid a commitment.

Prepare for the meeting. The elected official's job is to know the issues at hand. Citizen lobbyists add to the official's knowledge and ask for a specific commitment. Know the officials priorities, record, and major supporters. Also know the local impact and cost of the issue.

Tips for Lobbying:

Identify everyone in the room. The elected official should know exactly who you represent, where your organization is based and how many members your group has. Be sure to point out which advocates are constituents of the legislator. Name tags make it very easy for everyone to be identified!

Briefing materials should be just that; brief. Elected officials will read a well-assembled 1 page fact sheet, but usually not much more.

Anticipate the arguments of your opponents. It is better to address your opponent's arguments early in the dialogue. Do this directly and openly without being defensive.

Pitfalls:

Going on too long. Keep your story powerful by keeping it short (2 minutes)

Providing laundry lists and irrelevant details. A few facts are great but avoid the laundry list. Only provide a few facts for a legislator in one meeting. Put other facts on handouts that can be left with them.

Getting the run-around. Legislators will not want to commit to voting for or against a bill after one meeting. This is ok, but be sure to create a follow up plan to get an answer from them.

Being unprofessional. Every meeting with a public official should be considered worthy of forethought and preparation. The citizen lobbyist competes for the attention of their public official with other lobbyists. Being prepared and organized will impress the official.

A Sample Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

- Legislators will want to know that they are talking with their constituents.

2. Agenda and time check

- Go over agenda so everyone knows what's coming.

- Everyone's time is valuable; set a length of time for your meeting and stick to it.

3. Speak from the Heart

- Short and powerful.

4. Deliver the facts

- Back up your personal story with 2-3 facts that bolster your case.

5. Ask for one simple thing

- Your ask should be short, and phrased as a yes or no question whenever possible

6. Ask for questions

- Your legislators will ask questions. This shows that she or he has been listening and that you know what you are talking about.

7. Set up a follow up time

- If you can't nail down a 'yes' or 'no' commitment from your legislator on your first ask, establish a solid follow-up plan and then follow-up!

Connecting With Your Legislator

Purpose:

You should never hesitate to meet with or call your elected officials and comment on any issue or bill being addressed at the local, regional, state or national level. These individuals were voted into office by you – their constituent – and they are there to represent your views.

Principles:

Your request for a meeting or call should be relevant to an issue being discussed. If you want to meet outside of the legislative session, in an in-district meeting, your focus should be on issues that are likely to be discussed.

Have a specific agenda or statement prepared before you meet with or call your official. In it, be sure to include:

1. The issue(s) and bill number(s) where appropriate, or other relevant information to be clear what you are talking about.
2. Your personal opinion (for or against).
3. An ask – i.e. “Senator Smith, please vote against bill S.123.”
4. Be sure to tell them your name and where you live.

When calling your legislator, and you are leaving a message, be sure to include your “ask,” your name and where you are from. The more you meet with or call your legislator with thoughtful and constructive opinions, the better your relationship with this individual will be. In time, this will help legislators be more responsive to you and, hopefully, your interests.

Tips:

Be prepared – Know what you are going to say before you meet with or pick up the phone to call your lawmakers. Know your facts.

Don’t argue – Ask questions and push back but do not yell, scream or otherwise be argumentative. Constructive, respectful discourse has been at the heart of some of the hardest issues ever successfully tackled.

Speak from the heart – Telling your story and why you personally care about this issue is the most important part of the meeting or call.

Follow up and follow through – If they ask for more info, provide it or send it. If you promise to check back after the vote, do it.

Pitfalls:

Rambling – Keep the call short and sweet.

Getting the run around – Ask for concrete solutions or actions from your legislator, and if they can’t answer your question right then, make a plan for getting the answer from them.

Too much information – Too many facts and figures will only confuse the person on the other end of the phone. Pick one fact to send your message.

How to Address Your Legislators: Testimony and Letters

Purpose:

The main focus of oral and written testimony is clear and concise communication of an opinion. Many of the same guiding principles for testimony apply in every other form of communication.

Testimony

Principles:

When testifying it is essential to have a strong, fact-based approach that is logical, reasoned, and rational. When you attack an issue from an emotional perspective or rely on loaded language you often lose credibility. Let the facts and the content of your testimony carry your message. To gain the respect of everyone listening, it is important to be professional, levelheaded, rational, business-like and articulate.

Tips:

Reserve time - Make sure there is space for you on the docket. Call in advance to reserve a place. Some committees require notice weeks in advance, so call early! If you're not sure how to reserve time, call us. We can help.

Introduce yourself - Tell them who you are, where you are from and if appropriate a brief description of your organization or background.

Thank those listening for the opportunity to express your view.

Always be respectful!

Overview - Begin with a brief summary of your testimony. It is important to provide listeners with the gist of your testimony at the beginning.

Keep it simple - Don't get muddled down in trying to elaborate on each of your points. People will follow along and read most of your testimony as you present the information orally.

Be clear, direct and concise - Have your written testimony in front of you so that you don't miss any of the main points. Testimony is more formal than public comments and it is important that you are professional, accurate and direct.

Relax!

Pitfalls:

Too many themes - Don't try and make every point about why someone should be for or against a bill. Pick a theme and build your examples around it.

Don't debate - Testimony is time to present facts; don't spend time trying to argue about the bill. That's what lobbying is for!

Reading instead of testifying - Avoid the tendency to read from the material you have provided. Explain your theme and why it is relevant and then elaborate on the major points.

Letters to Legislators

Principles:

1. Be brief and clear
2. Punctuate correctly and use good grammar
3. Be reasoned and friendly
4. The most important thing to consider is your audience!

If you are writing lawmakers...

Be extra sensitive and respectful when you are writing letters to lawmakers. These individuals are extremely influential. When addressing a letter to a lawmaker there is a formal salutation: The Honorable. Correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar are also extremely important. In the body be friendly, respectful, interested and aware of their current position on an issue.

To reiterate: It is crucial to be clear, concise and succinct. Some public officials receive dozens of letters every day and don't have time to read through pages and pages of dense information. To convince them of a point, be direct and clear about exactly what you want them to do.

Tips:

Get to the point (no more than a page!)

Be congenial, interesting and accurate with facts

Thank them for their time

Pitfalls:

Too many facts – People try to cram too much information into a letter to their legislator. Instead, focus on one major point and avoid flooding the individual with information.

Too long – When you write a letter it's better to be short than long. 300 words is often plenty for a letter.

Disrespectful – It can be tempting to place blame and accuse officials of causing problems. Focus on your story and what you want the official to do now, rather than placing blame for past actions.

Spreading the Word Further: Getting Issues Into the Press

Writing a Letter to the Editor as a Powerful Communication Tool

About Writing a Letter to the Editor

- Include your name, address and telephone number so the newspaper can verify you as the letter's author.
- Note: Most papers will not run letters that are more than 300 words long, but each paper differs. To avoid problems with letters that are too long, try to keep your letters to a maximum of 300 words.
- If a newspaper calls you to confirm that you are the author of the letter, you must return their call in order for the letter to run.
- Emailing your letter is the most efficient way to send a letter to the editor, since papers won't have to retype it. In your email, write "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line.

Newspapers often run letters from outside their traditional circulation area. Sending your letter as far and wide as possible is a powerful way to spread your message.

Find a comprehensive list of daily and weekly Vermont papers and other key media outlets here: <http://vnrc.org/take-action/writing-letters-to-the-editor/>.

Tips for writing an effective LTE? Here's one way to structure your letter:

1. **Have a "hook" that explains why your letter is relevant.** Best is if you can relate your letter back to something that was recently printed in the paper, or something that is noteworthy enough that others will know the reference. This is the first sentence of your letter. Example: Three cheers for your editorial last Sunday in support of the landfill solar project.
2. **Clearly, upfront, outline point you're trying to make.** Your English teacher would have called this the "thesis sentence." You make your point either in the first or second sentence of your letter, then repeat it in the last sentence. Example: Net metering is one of Vermont's most successful renewable energy programs, making solar affordable and accessible for most anyone. Fixing it to ensure all Vermonters can go solar is essential.
3. **Have strong supporting argument(s) to back up the point you're trying to make.** Try to think of arguments that will be most persuasive to your audience (i.e., local opinion leaders and elected officials). It's very effective to identify yourself as part of a group that elected officials care about: a business owner, person of faith, a hunter or angler, a long-time resident, a parent, a scientist. Don't try to put too much into your letter—2-3 points at most.

General Contact Information for Elected Officials

Contact the Governor:

Governor Phil Scott
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609
(802) 828-3333

Web: <http://www.vermont.gov/governor/>

Contacting Your State Senators and Representatives:

Find their contact information here to write or email them:
<https://legislature.vermont.gov/>

Or, send a letter to them directly at the Vermont State House:

NAME OF LAWMAKER
Vermont State House
State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Key Vermont State House Numbers:

- Sergeant at Arms, Janet Miller (where you can call and leave messages for lawmakers): 802-828-2228
- Speaker of the House Jill Krowinski: 802-828-2245
- Vermont Senate President Pro-Tempore Phil Baruth: 802-828-3806
- President of the Senate (the Lieutenant Governor) Lt. Gov David Zuckerman: 802-828-2226
- Vermont Legislative Council: 802-828-2231

Key House and Senate Committees That Focus on Energy and Climate Issues:

- [House Environment and Energy](#)
- [House Appropriations](#)
- [House Transportation](#)
- [House Agriculture, Food Resiliency & Forestry](#)
- [House Ways and Means](#)
- [House Commerce & Economic Development](#)
- [Senate Natural Resources and Energy](#)
- [Senate Finance](#)
- [Senate Transportation](#)
- [Senate Appropriations](#)

These committees are the primary arenas where lawmakers introduce, consider and act on climate-related legislation. Connecting with your lawmakers on energy and climate issues in general is important, but if your representative or senator is on one of these committees, they

could play an increased leadership role in shaping and advancing clean energy and climate solutions. Find the contact information for all lawmakers – your senators and your representative(s) and what committee they are on here: <https://legislature.vermont.gov>