

SECTION



III. EQUITY

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III. EQUITY

Defining equity is important for this plan and NRPC's continued work.

1. Distributive equity recognizes disparities in the allocation of resources, health outcomes, the inequities in living conditions and lack of political power place frontline / impacted communities.
2. Procedural equity includes equitable planning and implementation that requires communities have a meaningful opportunity to participate.
3. Contextual equity ensures that mitigation and adaptation strategies consider that low-income communities, black communities, indigenous communities and people of color, and people with disabilities, historically marginalized people, are often more vulnerable to climate change.
4. Corrective equity ensures that mitigation and adaptation strategies provide communities with clear processes to hold the state accountable to its commitments to pursue equity.

A. NRPC'S EQUITY WORK

NRPC has and will continue to broaden its consideration of equity in its planning and implementation work. In 2021, NRPC contracted with a consultant to:

- Improve the ability to respond effectively and respectfully to complex social, economic, and political issues that impact the community.
- Improve the decision-making processes to ensure that decisions are fair and balanced.
- Create and support the development of a more inclusive workspace and external community culture.

Early in 2022, the NRPC Board of Commissioners adopted a statement of inclusion to help guide our work. This statement was modified from the Municipal Declaration of Inclusion, which was first adopted in Vermont by the town of Franklin. The NRPC Board of Commissioners has identified ways to implement the statement of inclusion and tasked each of its committees to identify how to consider equity and inclusion within their work. These themes and ideas have been incorporated into this plan and will be considered further in the implementation of this plan. NRPC will continue to partner with regional organizations to ensure regional projects and programs support improved access to opportunity for all people in the region.

This plan's Guiding Principles for a Just Transition are adapted from those developed as part of the Vermont Climate Action Plan. They are meant to create practices and systems that ensure equity in all energy work undertaken by NRPC.

1. Ensuring *Inclusive, Transparent, and Innovative* Engagement in the development of the plan and associated policies and program.
2. Creating *Accountable and Restorative* recommendations that recognize inequality and seek to resolve them using clearly identified strategies.
3. *Moving at The Speed of Trust* where candor and honesty are recognized as essential for public trust and preparing residents for the transition to a sustainable climate future.
4. *Incorporating Solidarity* to create inclusionary spaces for all traditions and cultures, particularly for Indigenous communities, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant Vermont.
5. *Prioritizing The Most Impacted First* through recommendations that address the needs of impacted and frontline communities first, providing the greatest benefits of transitions to these communities.
6. Developing *Supports for Workers, Families, and Communities* that consider and plan for potential impacts on workers, families and their communities based on the implementation of NRPC's Comprehensive Energy Plan and the green transition in our region.

B. EQUITY MAPPING TOOLS

It is important for NRPC to understand areas of vulnerability within the region so that planning efforts can keep overburdened areas from becoming even more so and can strategically prioritize efforts that positively

affect some populations more. Several mapping and analytical tools have been developed by state and federal agencies that aim to identify areas of vulnerability and weakness in communities. Vulnerable communities are understood to be those that are less able to respond to the impacts of a certain hardship—this could be exposure to chemical contaminants, limited access to housing, health care or food, or responding to higher temperatures and increased flooding. As climate change exacerbates many existing dangers including food insecurity, natural disasters, and extreme temperatures, addressing and investigating equity in NRPC’s work and in our communities is more important than ever.

Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: Two census tracts in the Northwest region have been highlighted as disadvantaged in this analysis, by meeting the associated socioeconomic thresholds.

- Richford and Montgomery have been identified as disadvantaged in areas of energy, health, and transportation. Specifically, energy costs, asthma rates, and transportation costs are all in the top 10% nationwide.
- The western half of St. Albans City has also been identified as disadvantaged in three areas: health, housing, and water and wastewater. This part of the city ranks in the lowest 10% nationwide for low life expectancy and leaking underground storage tanks within 1,500 feet of homes.

Social Vulnerability Index: In this tool, indicators that are over the 90th percentile statewide are flagged, indicating higher vulnerability when considering community health. It should be noted that some of the data from the Northwest region have high relative standard errors due to its relatively low population density, meaning the results may not be as accurate as desired. Regardless, it can provide context for further energy and equity work.

Heat Illness Vulnerability Index: The Heat Illness Vulnerability Index is a composite of six indicators. In the Northwest region, the index identifies St. Albans Town and St. Albans City as more vulnerable overall to heat illness than the rest of the state. **EPA Environmental Justice (EJ) Screen:** The EPA EJ Screen includes six environmental indicators that focus on air and air pollutants; four are areas of concern in the region. The particulate matter 2.5 and ozone indicators had the farthest ranging areas of concern for the region, with 11 census groups falling within the 90th to 100th percentile within the state. In Northwest Vermont, traffic proximity is only an issue in St. Albans, and similarly, the diesel particulate matter index indicated higher percentiles in St. Albans City and Swanton. Although there are no superfund sites in Northwest Vermont, the block groups surrounding St. Albans City, including ones in St. Albans Town and Swanton, are located near facilities that have highly toxic substances. St. Albans City is noted as an area with a high percentile for the environmental indicator of underground storage tanks (USTs) and leaking USTs.