

# Electricity Policies and Programs Review: Proposed Public Engagement Plan

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PUBLIC SERVICE DEPARTMENT

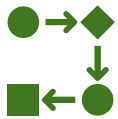
NOVEMBER 29, 2022



# Overview

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As the Public Service Department (“Department”) seeks to review Vermont’s policies and programs related to renewable electricity, this document provides a proposed plan for how the Department will approach public engagement during this process. The following sections cover:



## Context

for why the Department is conducting this process and the steps taken to date



## Goals

for the process & mechanisms for accountability



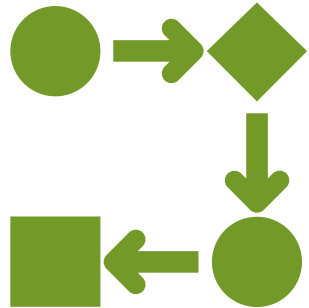
## Engagement Plan

that describes different proposed phases of engagement and types of outreach that will be used



## Next Steps

in the process and information on how to get involved



# Context

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WHY ARE WE DOING THIS & HOW DID WE GET HERE

# Context

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Vermont currently has several programs and policies that have helped to increase the amount of renewable electricity in the state.

These include:

- The **Renewable Energy Standard (RES)**, which requires electric utilities to buy a specific amount of electricity from renewable energy resources
- The **Standard Offer** program, a program to deploy small-scale renewable energy by having State government manage purchasing of the energy, and
- The **Net-Metering** program, which allows Vermont homes, businesses, and communities to generate their own power, such as by putting solar PV on their homes

In order to meet State renewable energy goals and greenhouse gas reduction requirements, the [2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan](#) recommended that the State should:

*“Consider adjustments to the Renewable Energy Standard and complementary renewable energy programs comprehensively, through a transparent and open process....The considerations should include:*

- *Consideration of a low-carbon or carbon-free standard, in addition to a 100% renewable energy standard;*
- *Consideration of a cohesive set of programs to support the standard “ (pg. 270)*

This recommendation is consistent with recommendations included in the [2021 Climate Action Plan](#).

# What have we done so far?

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To begin implementing the recommendation to review Vermont's Renewable Energy Standard and related programs in a transparent process, on July 5, 2022, the Public Service Department issued a [Request for Input \(RFI\)](#).

This RFI aimed to collect feedback from the public on three core issues related to the review:

- **Issue 1:** How should the process to review these programs and policies occur? In particular:
  - What timeline should be used to engage with the public and conduct necessary technical analyses?
  - What stakeholders should be at the table to shape recommended policy and program recommendations?
  - What types of ways should the Department engage with those stakeholders?
- **Issue 2:** What criteria should the Department use to make decisions and how should those criteria be prioritized?
- **Issue 3:** What key issues should be considered?

The Department collected responses to the RFI until August 15<sup>th</sup> and recently released [a summary report](#) of the initial results from that process. That report and the individual responses can be accessed on the Department's website:

[https://publicservice.vermont.gov/renewable\\_energy](https://publicservice.vermont.gov/renewable_energy).

# What did we hear in the Request for Input?

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Responses to the Request for Input (RFI) offered valuable information on how the Department might conduct a process to review these policies and programs. Reviewing those responses led to a number of key takeaways that inform this proposed public engagement plan:

❖ **The weight of the responses supported a longer timeline to allow for a more inclusive and robust process.**

- Taking such an approach could offer more time to bring a broader array of stakeholders to the table.
- Utilizing variety of public engagement methods could help understand stakeholder needs and ideas about policy and program changes, including polling or surveys, interactive workshops and stakeholder forums, attendance at community events, and public comment forums, among others.
- A longer timeline would also allow for educational and capacity building engagement early in the process to establish common knowledge about core issues under review.

❖ **Responses to the RFI highlighted the complexity of the topic under consideration and the ways considerations extend beyond the types of resources that produce electricity.**

- Holistically and comprehensively addressing the issues highlighted will take time, a shared understanding of terms, and careful scoping of what can be accomplished within this process and what issues may be addressed in complementary processes, programs, and policies.
- Several responses suggested that developing a fact sheet and/or hosting a workshop or other public process could be useful to discuss and identify priority criteria to consider when making decisions.

# What's in this Public Engagement Plan?

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This public engagement plan aims to build off the core takeaways from the Request for Input and proposes a process for engaging with stakeholders across Vermont on renewable electricity over the coming year. By design, it leaves flexibility to adjust the plan, as necessary, as more voices come to the table. This document includes two main sections:



**Goals** – Puts forward a proposed set of goals for this process and ways the Department intends hold itself accountable to those goals



**Public Engagement Phases** – Outlines a process divided along three core phases:

- **Phase 1:** Awareness & Capacity Building
- **Phase 2:** Policy & Program Review
- **Phase 3:** Recommendations & Reporting



# Goals

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WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO &  
HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS



# Scope of Work & Goal Outcomes

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## Scope of Work

The Department views of the scope of this process as a review of existing renewable electricity programs and policies. These programs and policies include, but are not limited to, the Renewable Energy Standard and the Net-Metering and Standard Offer programs.

## Goal Outcomes

In undertaking this process, including both the public engagement effort described in this document and supporting technical analyses, the Department aims to produce the following outcomes:

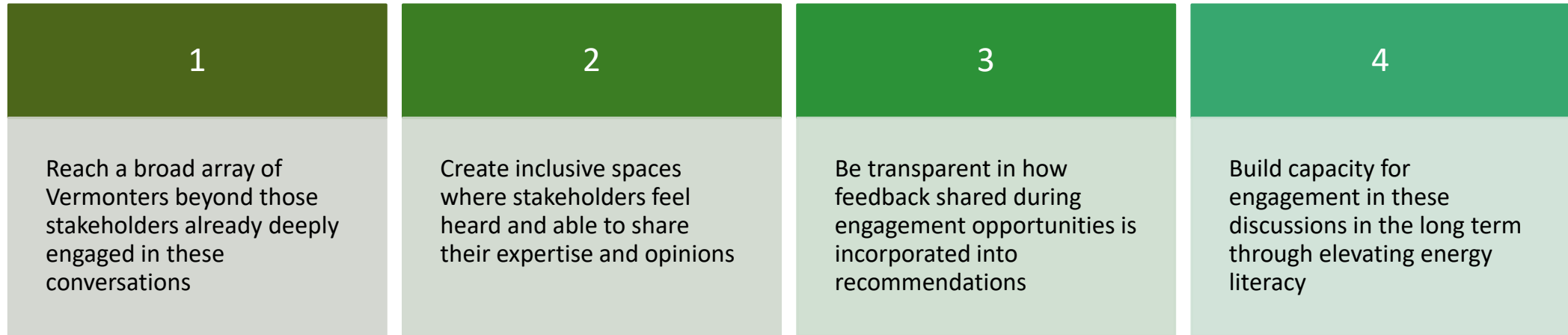
- ❖ A comprehensive suite of recommendations related to how Vermont policies & programs should be modified to balance State energy policy and related goals outlined in the 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan.
- ❖ A report on the process, including:
  - A summary of the public engagement conducted (ex. how it was conducted, who was engaged, what ideas, concerns, considerations emerged)
  - The results of technical analyses conducted to assess potential policy or program changes and their tradeoffs with respect to core considerations like equity, cost-effectiveness, carbon impact, grid impact, and economic development\*.
  - Completed equity impact assessments (EIA; both the state executive branch EIA and VCC Guiding Principles Assessment developed by the VCC Just Transitions Subcommittee) for relevant programs, policies, and/or recommendations

\*The Department expects these considerations will be discussed through a public process, as indicated in the discussion of Phase 2 of this plan on Slide 16.

# Goals for the Public Engagement Process:

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The Department views public engagement as core to the success of this effort and through this process the Department hopes to:



# Pathways for Accountability

The Department proposes to measure success in reaching these goals through the following ways:

	1	2	3	4
GOAL	Reach a broad array of Vermonters beyond those stakeholders already deeply engaged in these conversations	Create inclusive spaces where stakeholders feel heard and able to share their expertise and opinions	Be transparent in how feedback shared during engagement opportunities is incorporated into recommendations	Build capacity for engagement in these discussions in the long term through elevating energy literacy
ACCOUNTABILITY	Collect and report demographic information on who participates in engagement opportunities to develop a baseline understanding of who is (and is not) engaged	Develop feedback surveys to request input on how accessible and inclusive engagement opportunities are and understand how to improve moving forward	Continue to publish all feedback received and record where it was or was not included in final recommendations, where appropriate	Develop accessible educational materials to support engagement opportunities and include in feedback surveys, where appropriate, questions on how people feel their understanding of the concepts under consideration has changed



# Public Engagement Plan

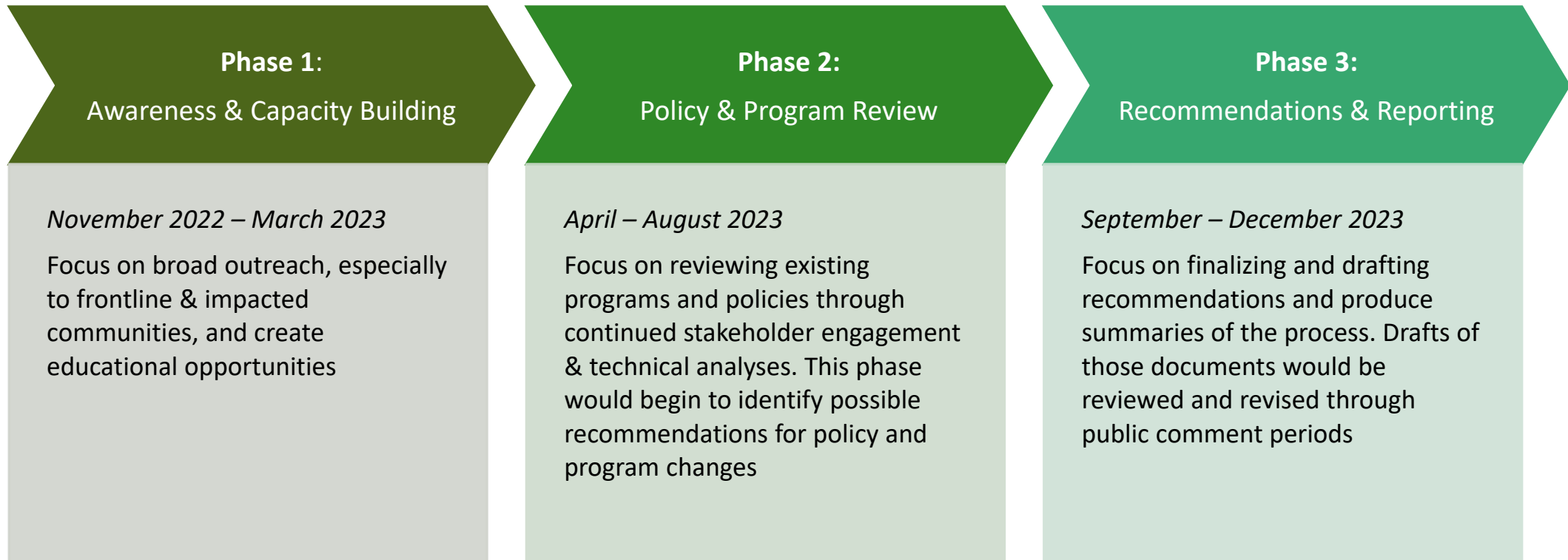
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WHAT DO WE PROPOSE TO DO AND WHEN

# Overview

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The Department proposes to review renewable electricity programs and policies through a process with three core phases:



**The Department expects the results of this process would be published in time to inform the 2024 legislative session.**

# Phase 1: Awareness & Capacity Building

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## Focus of Public Engagement

Broad outreach, especially to frontline & impacted communities, and creation of educational opportunities

## Rationale for this Phase

Through the Request for Input, the Department heard that:

- The Request for Input was technical in nature and challenging to access for those stakeholders not deeply involved in this work
- That the topics under consideration in this process are complex and technical in nature and take time to understand
- That the Department did not offer or provide some basic information on the current electric system and existing policies and programs required to answer some of the questions asked, and
- That a broad array of stakeholders should be at the table for this process, many of whom were not reached by or who did not respond to the Request for Input

Given this input, the Department aims to spend the first phase of outreach focused on **meeting stakeholders where they are** and **offering basic education materials and opportunities for discussion**, discussed further on the next slide.

# Phase 1: Awareness & Capacity Building

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## Meeting Stakeholders Where They Are

The Department aims to accomplish this through several avenues, including:

- Direct outreach by Department of Public Service staff to stakeholders identified through the Request for Input process and others that may be identified through subsequent conversations
- Partnering with regional and community-based organizations, in addition to the Vermont Climate Council Public Engagement Task Group, to conduct outreach to communities through existing events and other avenues as appropriate

## Educational Materials and Events

Through this phase, the Department hopes to help increase the capacity of stakeholders to engage in these discussions through:

- The development of flyers and other materials that can be shared at events or with organizations used to support conversations on the status of renewable electricity in the state
- A short webinar series in early 2023 led by Department staff to cover foundational topics related to renewable electricity in Vermont. The third, “parking lot”, session would be utilized to address major questions that emerge from the first two sessions.
  - The Department expects the webinar series would begin in late January. The Department expects to announce the dates of each webinar by the end of December 2022 and advertise widely through a variety of channels.
  - For each of the webinars, agendas and slides will be posted in advance and recorded for those who cannot attend in person. The Department aims to offer ample time for questions at each event. Content will be informed by responses to the Request for Input and the policies & programs under review as appropriate.

# Phase 2: Policy & Program Review

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## Focus of Public Engagement

In the second phase of this effort, the Department proposes to shift conversations to more specifically review aspects of existing policies and programs. The Department expects to begin this phase with a discussion of decision-making criteria to consider when evaluating current policies and proposed recommendations. During this phase, technical analyses would be ongoing in parallel to public engagement efforts to support those discussions and be informed by their outcomes in an iterative fashion.

## Rationale for this Phase

Through the Request for Input, the Department heard:

- Many different criteria should be considered when making decisions about renewable electricity policies and questions exist about how these criteria are currently defined.
  - A few responses suggested this topic could be the focus of a public process or workshop to further refine.
- Support for a multitude types of engagement efforts, including support for polling or surveys to potentially reach a broader audience and interactive workshops or stakeholder forums to allow for dialogue on topics.

Given this input, the Department believes **a series of interactive workshops and some form of surveys or polling** could be used to reach a broad array of stakeholders on key issues raised during the RFI process and through Phase 1 of this plan. The Department intends to release more specific details on the engagement opportunities for this Phase in **early Spring 2023**.



# Phase 3: Recommendations & Reporting

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## Focus of Public Engagement

In the third and final phase of this effort, the Department proposes to utilize more traditional public comment periods and forums to solicit feedback on drafted recommendations that emerge from this process and the reports that summarize the work conducted to inform those recommendations. This phase would include time for the Department to synthesize the results of Phases 1 and 2 of this effort in addition to supporting technical analyses into reports and summary presentations, releasing those reports for a period of public review, and conducting events and efforts to hear feedback on whether those documents accurately represent the processes undertaken and how they could be improved before being finalized.

## Rationale for this Phase

As previously mentioned, through the Request for Input the Department heard support for multiple methods of public engagement throughout the process, including traditional public comments, through both **written comments** and **public comment forums**. The Department would aim to support these engagement methods through strategies such as:

- Releasing documents for public comment for extended periods (ex. 45 days) to allow for wide circulation and review
- Releasing short summaries alongside full documents, which highlight key areas for review and discussion



# Next Steps

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

The Department views this Public Engagement Plan as a proposal for how the review of renewable electricity programs and policies could occur based on feedback received during the Request for Input and available Department resources. However, the Department hopes this proposal leaves room for flexibility as new ideas about or needs for public engagement emerge throughout the process.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions about this public engagement plan or next steps in the process, please don't hesitate to reach out to the Department!

Specific comments or suggestions on this document can be submitted through this online form and Department staff will review submissions on a rolling basis: <https://forms.office.com/g/H75xr0wk9w>

Other questions or inquiries can be directed to the Department via email at: [PSD.REPrograms@vermont.gov](mailto:PSD.REPrograms@vermont.gov)

## Summary & Next Steps