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RI 2025 Climate Action Strategy and Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) Stakeholder Feedback Summary

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Contents

Introduction

RI's Office of Energy Resources (OER) and Department of Environmental Management (DEM) are partnering with Energy and Environmental Economics (E3), Lighthouse Consulting Group, and BW Research Partnership to develop the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) as required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program,[1] as well as the RI 2025 Climate Action Strategy,[2] as required by the Act on Climate.[3] Between January and May 2025, the State and consulting teams (hereafter referred to as "the team"), focused efforts on collecting feedback from a broad range of Rhode Islanders to inform the CCAP and Climate Action Strategy. This phase of the engagement process was called the "Action Plan Development" stage.

Overall, the project team held 11 formal stakeholder engagement sessions throughout the Action Plan Development stage, with some meetings focused on general topics related to the plan development, and some focused on specific topic areas. The meetings were as follows:

1. Stakeholder Kickoff Meeting – January 9th, 2025
2. Transportation Focus Area Meeting – March 13th, 2025
3. Environmental Justice and Equity Focus Area Meeting – March 19th, 2025
4. Buildings Focus Area Meeting – March 27th, 2025
5. General Meeting – March 31st, 2025 *(Woonsocket, RI in-person)*
6. Municipalities Focus Area Meeting – April 4th, 2025
7. Workforce Focus Area Meeting – April 8th, 2025
8. General Meeting – April 17th, 2025 *(Providence, RI in-person)*
9. General Meeting – April 29th, 2025 *(Virtual)*
10. General Meeting – May 5th, 2025 *(Newport, RI in-person)*
11. Energy Focus Area Meeting – May 9th, 2025

Since the final meeting concluded on May 9th, the team has been working to analyze and summarize the feedback received across the 11 sessions and in the follow-up surveys for each meeting. This memo outlines the key takeaways on themes and topics heard by participants over the course of the Action Plan Development engagement process from January through May 2025.

[1] https://www.epa.gov/inflation-reduction-act/climate-pollution-reduction-grants
[2] https://climatechange.ri.gov/act-climate/2025-climate-update
[3] https://climatechange.ri.gov/act-climate

Data Analysis Methods

The team gathered feedback using a number of methods, such as:

- Verbal comments made during meetings
- Comments made in the Zoom chat box during meetings
- Comments made during breakout group sessions in virtual meetings
- Notes made on posters during in-person meetings
- Survey responses
- SmartComment responses

The team has analyzed this feedback and organized it into categories, including:

- Crosscutting themes
- Transportation
- Buildings
- Energy
- Municipalities
- Environmental Justice and Equity
- Workforce

The team then synthesized the findings from each of these categories into key takeaways based on broad themes and frequency that each topic was mentioned.

Findings

Crosscutting Themes

Stakeholders across meetings emphasized several overarching themes critical to the success of Rhode Island's climate action strategy. These include a shift in focus from planning to implementation, the need for interagency coordination, equitable and transparent community engagement, and the integration of resilience in climate efforts.

Prioritizing Implementation Over Planning

Participants broadly agreed that the state must shift from ongoing planning to concrete implementation. Stakeholders underscored the importance of execution, accountability, and the establishment of measurable outcomes. Many called for swift and well-funded implementation efforts to ensure progress on climate goals.

Coordination and Holistic Planning

There was strong concern about fragmented planning efforts across different levels of government and agencies. Stakeholders highlighted the need for greater coordination among state agencies, municipalities, transit authorities, and utility providers, particularly to streamline the deployment of electric vehicle infrastructure and other climate initiatives. Participants also emphasized the value of cross-sectoral planning that holistically integrates transportation, housing, energy, and land use.

Community Engagement and Education

Participants advocated for deeper, more sustained engagement with communities, particularly Environmental Justice (EJ) in communities. They recommended the formation of advisory groups composed of local representatives to ensure community voices are meaningfully included in decision-making processes. Additionally, stakeholders identified a critical need to increase public education on climate change and its impacts.

Funding Access

Stakeholders expressed that complex and fragmented grant and other funding processes pose a significant barrier to accessing climate-related funding. To address this, participants suggested the development of centralized funding application portals, increased availability of technical assistance during pre-application phases, and simplified reporting requirements to make funding more accessible, transparent, and equitable.

Trust and Transparency

Participants stressed the importance of transparent decision-making, the publication of clear goals, and regular progress updates. They also emphasized the need for accessible public data and continuous opportunities for stakeholder feedback throughout the lifecycle of climate projects. Building trust, particularly in historically marginalized communities, was identified as essential for long-term success.

Resilience

Many stakeholders connected decarbonization efforts with the imperative to build resilience to climate impacts such as sea-level rise, flooding, and extreme heat. Specifically, stakeholders called for integrated planning that accounts for future risks and prioritizes investments in vulnerable and frontline communities.

Transportation

Policy

Expand and Improve EV Charging Infrastructure

Stakeholders underscored the urgent need to expand Rhode Island's electric vehicle (EV) charging network, with a focus on ensuring equitable access in rural areas and Environmental Justice (EJ) communities. Recommendations included improving charging reliability, integrating EV infrastructure into local planning processes, increasing coverage along major transportation corridors, and supporting advanced technologies such as vehicle-to-grid (V2X) systems.

Increase Investment in Public Transit

There was broad consensus on the importance of strengthening Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) services. Participants advocated for expanding RIPTA's service area – especially into rural or underserved regions, enhancing system reliability, increasing the agency's budget, and fully implementing the existing Transit Master Plan.[4] Stakeholders emphasized that public transit should be treated as a critical public service with sustained, long-term funding.

Prioritize Mode Shift to Transit, Biking, and Walking

Stakeholders highlighted the need to reduce car dependence through the development of multimodal transportation networks. Priorities included expanding public transit, building safer sidewalks and protected bike lanes, and investing in greenways and walkable infrastructure. Many participants stressed that these transportation strategies must be coordinated with land use reform to support compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development.

Electrify Public and School Bus Fleets

Participants expressed support for the electrification of both school buses and public fleet vehicles as part of broader efforts to reduce emissions and modernize Rhode Island's transportation infrastructure.

Implement Existing Transportation Plans

Participants called for the full implementation of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation's Long Range Transportation Plan[5] and the RIPTA Transit Master Plan as foundational frameworks for action.

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[4] https://www.ripta.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TFRI-Recs-Briefing-Book-Final-201230.pdf.
[5] https://planning.ri.gov/planning-areas/transportation/long-range-transportation-plan.

Process

Ensure Equity and Affordability

Stakeholders noted the importance of ensuring that transportation systems are affordable, accessible, and reliable for all residents, including low-income and underserved communities. Participants emphasized the need for equitable EV adoption through expanded access to rebates and incentive programs targeted toward low-income households.

Education and Cultural Change

Participants noted that achieving significant shifts in transportation behavior will require more than infrastructure investments, including consideration of alternative fuels, particularly over the process of decarbonization. Public education campaigns were identified as a critical tool to foster cultural change, raise awareness about climate impacts, and reduce car dependence through informed behavioral shifts.

Buildings

Policy

Electrify Buildings

There was broad agreement among participants that electrifying Rhode Island's building stock is essential to achieving the state's climate goals. Some stakeholders strongly opposed the development of new natural gas infrastructure, advocating instead for the decommissioning of existing gas systems. Many expressed supports for mandating all-electric requirements in new construction.

Stakeholders highlighted that to achieve equitable building electrification, key barriers must be addressed. These barriers include the split incentive across landlords and renters, potential displacement of tenants after building upgrades, and high upfront costs.

To support electrification, participants emphasized the need for reliable and accessible incentives for heat pump adoption, along with robust financing mechanisms such as grants and low-interest loans for both homeowners and businesses. Stakeholders also called for pre-weatherization programs to ensure all buildings are electrification and weatherization ready. Additionally, stakeholders identified the importance of electricity rate structures that encourage electrification and do not penalize electric heating.

Set Benchmarking and Performance Standards for Large Buildings

Benchmarking energy use and emissions in large buildings was seen as a foundational step toward decarbonization. Stakeholders recommended the establishment of performance standards and enabling legislation to support compliance. Tools such as Strategic Energy Management Plans (i.e.,

a structured approach to reducing energy use and lowering emissions) were proposed to guide building owners in reducing energy consumption and emissions over time.

Retrofit Old Building Stock

Participants highlighted the critical role of retrofitting older buildings, especially to improve insulation and building envelope performance. Stakeholders highlighted that some buildings are not weatherization or electrification ready, due to existing structural deficiencies, the presence of mold/lead, or other health and safety concerns. Participants emphasized the importance of providing pre-weatherization support to ensure these buildings are ready for upgrades and can benefit fully from electrification and efficiency improvements.

Process

Focus on Implementation and Accountability

Participants expressed strong concern about delays in building-sector climate action due to prolonged planning processes. They called for a focus on implementing existing strategies and ensuring accountability for progress, rather than launching new initiatives without adequate follow-through. Execution, funding, and measurable outcomes were emphasized as top priorities moving forward.

Energy

Policy

Prioritize Distributed Energy Resources (DERs), Virtual Power Plants (VPPs), and Smart Grid Development

Participants consistently advocated for greater investment in distributed energy resources (DERs) and virtual power plants (VPPs) as strategies to reduce grid infrastructure costs, enhance resilience, and enable flexible demand-side energy management. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of smart grid technologies to support the integration of renewable energy sources more efficiently.

Expand Distributed Solar Resources and Siting Innovation

There was widespread support for expanding rooftop solar and solar deployment in non-traditional spaces such as carports, disturbed lands, roadway medians, and municipal properties. Stakeholders also emphasized interest in models that increase equitable access, including community solar initiatives and “Solar for All” programs.

Develop Thermal Energy Networks and Avoid Locking in Natural Gas

Some participants expressed interest in developing thermal energy networks, such as district heating, cooling systems, and networked geothermal with the potential to repurpose existing gas infrastructure. Across the board, many stakeholders voiced the need to avoid long-term investments in natural gas that would lock in fossil fuel reliance and delay decarbonization.

Accelerate Offshore Wind Development

Stakeholders expressed support for accelerating the pace of offshore wind development to meet state renewable energy targets and diversify the clean energy supply.

Leverage Market Mechanisms and Electricity Pricing Reform

Participants proposed regulatory and market-based strategies, such as implementing a carbon tax or levies on high-consumption industries, to generate revenue for clean energy investments. Additionally, stakeholders supported modernizing electricity rate structures including time-of-use pricing, seasonal rates, and rates tailored for electric heat pumps to align consumer behavior with grid needs and decarbonization goals.

Process

Removing Structural Barriers to Renewable Energy Deployment

Stakeholders emphasized that regulatory and structural obstacles are slowing progress on renewable energy deployment. Common concerns included restrictive net metering caps, slow interconnection processes, and outdated utility policies. Participants called for policy and regulatory reforms to streamline clean energy project approvals and accelerate implementation.

Municipalities

Policy

Advance Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency, and Electrification in Municipal Facilities

Stakeholders voiced strong support for deploying renewable energy technologies on municipal properties. Recommended strategies included installing solar systems on carports, parking lots, and streetlights. Participants also supported energy efficiency upgrades, such as improved building envelopes and the installation of heat pumps in municipal buildings, as effective decarbonization measures.

Support Municipal Energy Aggregation

Some participants expressed interest in municipal energy aggregation as a tool to increase local control over energy sourcing, lower costs, and support for renewable energy procurement.

Promote Regional Clean Energy Planning

Attendees highlighted the need for more regional collaboration in energy planning to ensure consistency, efficiency, and shared benefits across municipal boundaries.

Process

Capacity Building, Coordination, and State Support

Smaller municipalities raised concerns about limited staffing, technical expertise, and funding capacity to effectively pursue climate action. Participants requested clear, actionable guidance from the state to align local efforts with broader climate goals. Stakeholders also stressed the need for coordination across key sectors like workforce boards, labor groups, utilities, municipalities, and economic development officials to ensure a coherent and equitable clean energy transition.

Additionally, participants proposed the development of local "resilience hubs" to maintain essential services and power during emergencies.

Equity and Community Engagement

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of prioritizing decarbonization of investments in low-income and Environmental Justice (EJ) communities. Improved municipal access to disaggregated data was seen as essential for targeted climate planning in these areas. Participants also noted the need for economic support, realistic implementation of pathways, and community trust-building to ensure inclusive and equitable outcomes.

Environmental Justice (EJ) and Equity

Policy

Prioritize Decarbonization Investments in Low-Income and Environmental Justice (EJ) Communities

Participants strongly emphasized the need to prioritize clean energy and efficiency upgrades—such as electrification, weatherization, and solar installations for underserved households and renters, who often face structural and financial barriers. Stakeholders identified key challenges to address, including pre-weatherization needs (e.g., mold remediation, structural repairs) and upfront capital costs that limit access to decarbonization programs.

Attendees also highlighted the importance of community engagement and trust-building to ensure that solutions reflect the lived realities and priorities of EJ communities.

Address Displacement and Gentrification Risks

Participants expressed concern that building decarbonization efforts, if not designed equitably, could contribute to the displacement of low-income renters. Suggested solutions included

embedding tenant protections into building upgrade programs to safeguard housing stability and ensure equitable outcomes.

Target Transportation Investments to Benefit EJ Communities

Stakeholders called for transportation decarbonization strategies that deliver direct benefits to EJ communities. Recommendations included bus electrification, expanded and reliable bus service, improved bus stop infrastructure, and investments in safe, accessible sidewalks and bike lanes. Participants also urged action to mitigate pollution from highways and freight corridors, which disproportionately impact EJ neighborhoods.

Process

Ensure Programs Are Equitable and Accessible

Participants stressed the need to reform incentive and rebate programs to make them simpler, more accessible, and more responsive to the needs of underserved populations. Other proposed safeguards included implementing affordable electricity rate structures, enacting utility shutoff protections, and offering debt forgiveness to reduce energy-related burdens on vulnerable households.

Increase Community Engagement and Participation

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that climate programs must be rooted in community-led planning. They advocated for ongoing, inclusive engagement, culturally appropriate education, and mechanisms to elevate local voices, particularly those from EJ communities, throughout the planning, design, and implementation process.

Workforce

Process

Training and Upskilling

There was broad agreement among participants on the urgent need for accessible and affordable training programs to grow a skilled local clean energy workforce. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of partnerships with community colleges, labor unions, and nonprofit training providers to prepare workers for emerging roles in solar energy, EV infrastructure deployment, and related sectors.

Secure, Livable Jobs and Transition Support

Participants stressed that the clean energy transition must deliver secure, good-paying jobs with benefits particularly for workers currently employed in fossil fuel-related sectors. Specific attention was given to supporting oil and gas delivery workers, HVAC technicians, and tradespeople.

Stakeholders highlighted the need for transitional support, trust-building, and public recognition of these workers' role in the shift to a clean energy economy.

Inclusion and Equity in Workforce Development

Stakeholders emphasized that equity must be central to workforce planning. Participants called for wraparound services such as childcare, language access, and transportation assistance to ensure broader participation in training and employment opportunities. There was a clear call for green jobs to come with family-sustaining wages and benefits, and for stronger coordination among workforce development boards, municipal governments, labor organizations, and economic development planners to ensure an inclusive and well-aligned transition.

Summary and Key Themes

Key Takeaways

Implementation and Coordination

Stakeholders broadly expressed frustration with slow progress and emphasized the need for immediate, well-funded implementation of climate strategies, rather than additional planning phases.

Participants frequently noted the fragmentation of climate-related efforts across agencies and called for better coordination, especially in areas like transportation, land use, housing, and energy infrastructure.

Equitable Access and Community Trust

Equity was a dominant concern especially in the context of electrification, transit investments, and incentive programs. Stakeholders called for prioritization of low-income and environmental justice (EJ) communities when pursuing GHG reduction strategies, more user-friendly program/funding design, and meaningful community engagement that builds long-term trust.

Clean Energy and Electrification

Electrification of buildings and transportation paired with grid modernization and expansion of distributed energy resources was seen as central to achieving climate goals. There was strong interest in heat pumps, EV charging, and solar access. At the same time, stakeholders stressed the need to address barriers to building electrification, find solutions to prevent displacement or gentrification after building upgrades, and address the split incentive between landlords and renters. Participants also emphasized the need for broader EV charging infrastructure to support transportation electrification and expanded public transit access.

Affordability and Workforce Transition

Stakeholders expressed concern about affordability impacts of climate policy, especially on vulnerable populations. There was strong support for workforce transition planning, job training, and protecting workers currently in fossil fuel-related industries. Participants highlighted the need for the growing workforce to include jobs with good wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement.

Most Frequently Mentioned Topics from Stakeholders

Policy

- **Expand EV charging infrastructure**, especially in areas lacking chargers, like multifamily housing and rural areas
- Ensure transportation options are affordable, reliable, and accessible for all Rhode Islanders, through strategies such as **expanded public transit services and infrastructure for increased active transportation**
- Address **barriers to building decarbonization**, such as the high cost of retrofitting existing buildings and lack of knowledge of available incentives
- Prioritize emissions reductions in communities historically overburdened by pollution, such as areas with high industrial emissions, transportation pollution, and urban heat islands

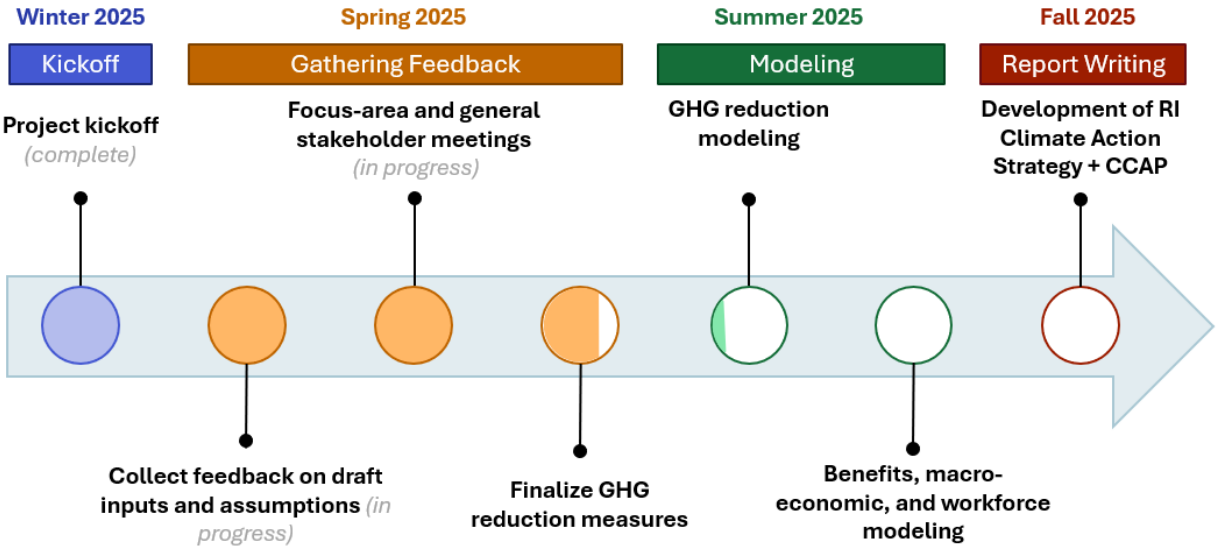
Process

- Focus the RI 2025 Climate Action Strategy on **implementation and actionable strategies**, including funding availability, authority to implement, and cross-sectoral coordination
- Improve **decarbonization funding processes** (e.g., grants, rebates) to increase accessibility, such as through streamlined application processes, technical assistance, and set-asides for community-based organizations in EJ communities
- Invest in **capacity building for municipalities** to allow local governments to effectively work with the state on climate goals
- Focus on ongoing, two-way communication and **public education** with communities
- Prioritize the development of a **clean energy workforce** through accessible training programs, apprenticeships, and certification pathways
- Ensure green jobs offer **good wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancements**

Next Steps

The project timeline is shown below in Figure 1. E3 and BW Research are kicking off quantitative modeling efforts from now through the end of the summer. In Fall 2025, the project team will be focused on report-writing for the CCAP and RI 2025 Climate Action Strategy.

Figure 1: CCAP and RI 2025 Climate Action Strategy Timeline



E3, Lighthouse Consulting, and BW are working with OER and DEM to integrate the stakeholder feedback received into the development of the plans. Specifically, E3, OER, and DEM are considering the feedback when selecting the list of GHG reduction measures to include in the CCAP and RI 2025 Climate Action Strategy. BW Research is considering the feedback received when setting up the modeling for job impacts and low-income and disadvantaged community (LIDAC) benefits. Stakeholder input will also be used to inform the development and narrative of the reports this fall. Additional engagement opportunities will be available this fall to provide input on the modeling results and reports, with the timeline of those meetings to be announced later in summer 2025.