



From: Roxanne Vought, Executive Director, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR)
To: Members of the Vermont Climate Council, House Committee on Environment & Energy, Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Speaker Krowinski.
Re: ClimateReadyVT Progress Report
Date: February 15, 2024

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR) is a statewide, nonprofit business association with a mission to leverage the power of business for positive social and environmental impact. VBSR is the oldest state-level socially responsible business association in the nation, home to the highest number of certified B Corporations per capita and represents over 700 member businesses across 46 industries.

In a letter submitted to Secretary Clouser on August 25 of 2023, Speaker Krowinski urged the Vermont Climate Caucus to prioritize climate adaptations and resiliency recommendations after the historic flooding. In her letter, Speaker Krowinski identifies the need for *toolkits aimed at Vermont's business community and preparing individual businesses for adaptation and greater resiliency*.

We write to share a program VBSR is piloting that meets this call to action: In the fall of 2023, VBSR partnered with Reframe Lab, a Vermont-based consultancy, to develop [ClimateReadyVT](#), a program designed to **help small businesses in Vermont adapt to our changing climate and prepare for climate-related business disruptions**. We worked collaboratively with a network of trusted stakeholders to design and plan this comprehensive climate adaptation and resilience program for Vermont small businesses - with no cost to participants. Vermont Community Foundation and Mascoma Bank have funded the pilot, and several other funding partners have been recommended to us for consideration.

ClimateReadyVT is a Product of Diverse Partnership:

The program's format and content were informed by a broad base of expertise, including the experience of developing [VBSR's Flood Recovery Guide for Businesses](#), our partners in developing that resource, and by consulting with the following individuals and organizations on the concept of ClimateReadyVT:

- Liz Schlegel, formerly with the Institute for Sustainable Communities, which produced the [Vermont's Roadmap to Resilience](#) in 2013, following Hurricane Irene
- UVM Extension Farming & Climate Change Program
- Vermont Small Business Development Center
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- Vermont Small Business Administration
- Sarah Waring, USDA
- Vermont Outdoor Business Association
- Vermont Professionals of Color
- Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
- Vermont Community Foundation
- Pennywise Foundation
- Mascoma Bank
- VBSR Public Policy Committee
- VBSR Board of Directors

After an extensive assessment of the need, we identified the following themes for the program's content:

- Performing a Risk Assessment
- Identifying Hazard Mitigation Strategies
- Understanding which local, state, and federal resources are available to support businesses
- Understanding how legal, financial, and insurance services can assist businesses
- Guidance for communicating internally and externally re: business disruptions and continuity
- Guidance for supporting owners/employees during climate-related businesses disruptions, including tools and methods for emotional resilience, mental health, and wellness
- Business Continuity Planning incorporating the knowledge and learnings above

The core elements of ClimateReadyVT include:

- Eight virtual program sessions, complemented by an in-person closing session aimed at building relationships with regionally focused business support organizations, including the Regional Development Corporations and regional Chambers of Commerce.
- Content delivered by subject matter experts in a variety of relevant areas, including the Vermont Small Business Development Center (VtSBDC), Vermont Emergency Management, Vermont Law School, and OGGI BE (an expert on emotional resilience and climate anxiety).
- Access to curated resources, including risk indexes and the U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit
- Creating a customized Climate Risk Assessment and "Roadmap to Resilience" for each business
- Peer learning, including case studies, scenario planning, learning from and with a network of peer business owners and/or managers, and small group learning, including "peer councils" organized by industry
- Trauma-informed program design and facilitation, led by professional facilitators
- 1:1 counseling sessions and relationship building with VtSBDC advisors (optional)

ClimateReadyVT in Motion:

The application period opened in the fall of 2023, with a total of 14 organizations (10 businesses and 4 nonprofits) participating in the pilot cohort. The program launched in November 2023 and will conclude in April 2024. We anticipate the next cohort will launch in fall 2024 with a larger group (20-25 projected).

We encourage the Vermont Climate Council to explore opportunities to partner with VBSR on this critical work and welcome the opportunity to speak directly to the Council representative on the successful launch of ClimateReadyVT. We thank you for your time and commitment to the future of Vermont's economy and the health of our people and planet.

"I appreciate the careful thought that has gone into this program – I am optimistic that this is the start of something that will help Vermont businesses with resilience in the future."

– Phyllis Ershowsky, Small Business Development Center and current ClimateReadyVT participant.