



STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VERMONT TAX STRUCTURE COMMISSION

Public Engagement Plan - DRAFT

Overview

In the [Adopted Work Plan](#), the Commission set a target of holding public hearings in the September-October 2019 timeframe. The Work Plan also calls for public outreach, including press coverage of commission work, in November-December 2019 and for public comment on the Commission's draft report in December 2020-January 2021.

This document proposes that the Commission fulfill these engagement measures by connecting with a diverse group of stakeholders throughout the state and scheduling public meetings in each region. The meetings will start with a short presentation about the Tax Structure Commission's charge and initial work, then focus on listening to feedback on Vermont's tax structure broadly, specific input that attendees want to raise, and stakeholder reactions to materials and questions posed by the Commission.

This document covers:

1. Stakeholders to Invite
2. Resources to Invite
3. Scheduling Plan
4. Outline of Public Sessions
5. Open Questions

1. Stakeholders to Invite

The initial list was drafted with a goal of identifying stakeholders who represent Vermonters across various geographic regions, income levels, and age groups. The list includes the following categories:

- Business groups
- Tax professionals

- Education advocates
- Housing and land use advocates
- Local governments and commissions
- Low-income advocates
- Advocates for seniors

<p><u>Business groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated General Contractors of Vermont • Associated Industries of Vermont • Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce • Vermont Association of Realtors • Vermont Business Roundtable • Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility • Vermont Chamber of Commerce and regional chambers <p><u>Tax professionals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vermont Chapter of the National Association of Tax Professionals • Vermont Society of CPAs • Vermont Tax Practitioners Association <p><u>Education advocates</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vermont Independent Schools Association • Vermont National Education Association • Vermont Principals’ Association • Vermont School Boards Association • Vermont Superintendents Association <p><u>Housing and land use advocates</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition • Vermont Housing and Conservation Board • Vermont Housing Finance Agency • Vermont Land Trust 	<p><u>Local governments and commissions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies • Vermont League of Cities and Towns <p><u>Low-income advocates</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Action Agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community Action in Southwestern Vermont (aka BROCC) ○ Capstone Community Action ○ Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity ○ Northeast Kingdom Community Action ○ Southeastern Vermont Community Action <p><u>Advocates for seniors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AARP • Area Agencies on Aging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Age Well VT (formerly Champlain Valley Agency on Aging) ○ Central Vermont Council on Aging ○ Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging ○ Senior Solutions: Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont ○ Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging
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The Tax Structure Commission recognizes that this list of stakeholders does not include advocacy groups for young adult Vermonters, domestic in-migrants, and international immigrants – three groups that are essential to the future of Vermont’s workforce and the sustainability of its tax base. The Commission is not aware of groups that advocate on tax issues related to these groups. Certainly, all interested Vermonters are welcome and encouraged to attend the regional events or provide feedback in the manner that is easiest for them to do so.

2. Resources to Invite

Some academics and think tanks in the state have addressed issues related to the Commission's work and should be invited to public sessions, including:

- Center for Rural Studies at University of Vermont
- Environmental Tax Policy Institute at Vermont Law School
- Ethan Allen Institute
- Gund Institute at University of Vermont
- Public Assets Institute

3. Scheduling Plan

This draft proposes combining the September-October and November-December portions of the work plan and holding five sessions during that timeframe, one in each of five regions of the state: northeast (Newport or St. Johnsbury), northwest (Burlington), southeast (Brattleboro or Bellows Falls), southwest (Rutland), and central (Barre, Montpelier, or Randolph). Each of these regions has a number of organizations (e.g., community action agencies, area agencies on aging, planning and development agencies) familiar with the area and could prove valuable in advertising the public sessions. In addition, the business groups, tax professionals, and other stakeholders identified above would presumably have chapters or affiliates in that region. An editorial board meeting could be scheduled for the same day.

This draft tentatively proposes that the Commission return to the five regions in November 2020 with an update and presentation of preliminary findings, although that plan can be adapted based on the experience of the first round. This timeframe is slightly ahead of the target stated in the adopted work plan for two reasons: 1) because early to mid-November is more conducive to public participation than the holiday season, and 2) to allow more time to incorporate feedback into the Commission's final report.

To ensure maximum participation, staff will reach out to the stakeholders by June to identify a fall date for each region. Ideally, the meetings will be piggybacked on an existing meeting of a chamber or other membership organization, as long as they are amenable to making this portion of their meeting open to the public. Once the five dates and locations are finalized, staff will issue a statewide media advisory and also inform the identified stakeholders, as well as legislators and relevant state agencies.

4. Outline of Public Sessions

For Public Meetings in Fall 2019

- Intro
 - Commission's charge, goal, and purpose
 - Principles
 - Overview of Vermont's current tax structure
- High level overview of work to date/initial areas of exploration
 - Demographic context (and rural context?)
 - Business taxes
 - Education funding
- Anticipated future work
- Q&A, comment period

For Public Meetings in Nov 2020 (on work plan for Dec 2020/Jan 2021 but attendance might be better post-election/pre-Thanksgiving)

- Intro
 - Commission's charge, goal, and purpose
 - Principles
- High level overview of draft report's findings and recommendations
- Q&A, comment period

5. Open Questions

- Do the Commissioners have the capacity to travel to five regions?
- If not, would it suffice for staff to go alone, or for one Commissioner to go with staff to each location?