

# May 23, 2022 Rhode Island Workshop: Opportunities to Improve How Regulatory Agencies Address Climate Change

## Workshop Goals & Outcomes

Brown University engaged Synapse Energy Economics and Climable to host a series of workshops in New England states. The purpose of these workshops is to collaborate and crowdsource ideas from stakeholders on the opportunities and challenges for regulatory agencies implementing lasting and equitable climate and energy solutions.

The effort includes:

- a background report to summarize research about best practices, barriers, and opportunities across New England states.
- public workshops in each state to gather stakeholder input and facilitate collaboration on solutions.
- a final report to accumulate and enable action on lessons learned and next steps for all New England states.

## WORKSHOP AGENDA

8:30-9:00	Sign-In, Coffee & Snacks
9:00-9:10	Welcome & Logistics
9:10-9:30	Briefing on Rhode Island Climate Goals, Progress, Best Practices, and Barriers
9:30-10:20	Breakout Session #1: Idea Brainstorming
10:20-10:30	Break
10:30-11:20	Breakout Session #2: Force Field Analysis and Idea Prioritization
11:20-11:50	Wrap Up and Next Steps

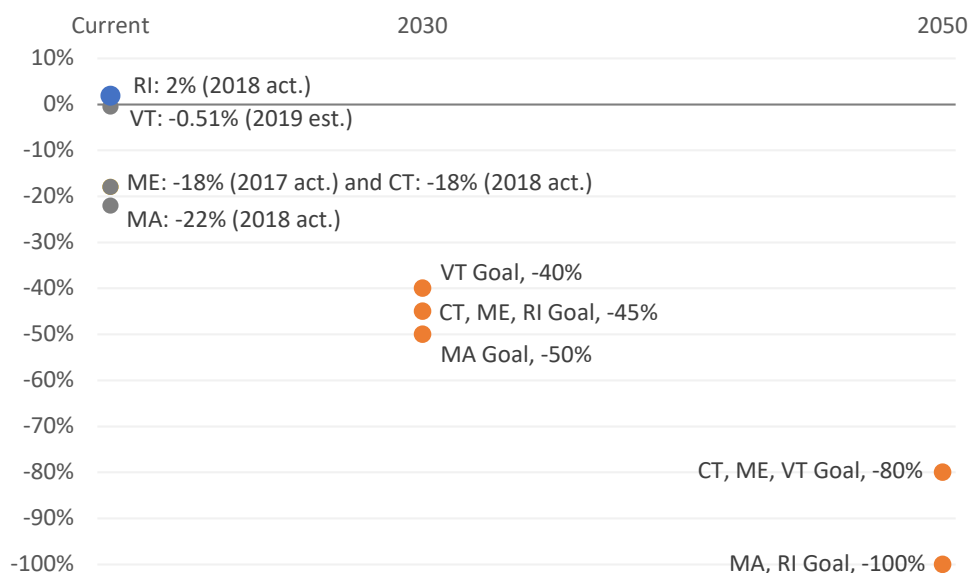
## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In addition to what is already underway, what else can be done to meet Rhode Island's climate goals? How does equity fit in with these ideas?
2. What policies and programs need to be in place to support the development of equitable utility regulation and climate action in Rhode Island?
3. What non-climate effects of climate action do the people of Rhode Island care about?

## CLIMATE GOALS & PROGRESS

Rhode Island adopted climate goals and supportive policies but is showing less progress towards its 2030 greenhouse gas reduction goal than other New England states. Bills proposing a 100% renewable energy standard have not passed and the 2030 renewable energy target is not binding. The Rhode Island Public Utility Commission has taken up multiple dockets concerning the implementation of community-choice aggregation programs in targeted communities and four cities received approval from RIPUC to expand access to renewable energy electricity at competitive rates through community-choice aggregation. Rhode Island reduced its funding for heating electrification through energy efficiency programs in recent years. Rhode Island is not facilitating installation of storage because interconnection rules exclude it. Also, Rhode Island does not have an energy storage procurement target.

**Figure 1: Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions Compared to Goals & Other States**



**Source:** Rhode Island data from RI Department of Environmental Management. (2022). Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory QuickFacts. Available at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/air/ghg-emissions-inventory.php>.

**Note:** For ME, MA, RI and VT, the percent change is from the 1990 baseline.  
For CT, the percent change is from the 2001 baseline.

**Table 1: New England State Climate Goals and Achievements**

Climate Goals		CT	ME	MA	NH	RI	VT
Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Goals	Baseline	2001	1990	1990	None	1990	1990
	By 2030	45% (18%, 2018 act.)	45% (18%, 2017 act.)	50% (22%, 2018 act.)		45% (-2%, 2018 act.)	40% (0.51%, 2019 est.)
	By 2050	80%	80%	100%		100%	80%
Renewable Portfolio Standards		40% (by 2030)	80% (by 2030) 100% (by 2050)	40% (by 2030)	25% (by 2025)	39% (by 2035)	75% (by 2032)
Energy Efficiency Savings Targets (% of Total Sales)		1.1% (2019-2021)	2.3% (2020-2022)	2.7% (2019-2021)	0.6% (2022 est.)	2.5% (2018-2021)	2.4% (2018-2020)
Energy Storage Requirements		1,000 MW (by 2030)	300 MW (by 2025) 400 MW (by 2030)	1,000 MWh (by 2025)	None	None	None

*Source: Synapse Energy Economics. (2022). A Better New England Regulatory Framework for Mitigating Climate Change. Available at: <https://www.synapse-energy.com/project/study-climate-action-and-public-utility-commissions-new-england-states>. Updated 5/2/2022.*

## RHODE ISLAND BEST PRACTICES

- Rhode Island has set economy-wide, legally binding goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and implemented supporting policies such as renewable energy standards and energy efficiency targets to enable goal achievement.
- Rhode Island established a Climate Council.

## RHODE ISLAND BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- Rhode Island is not making progress towards its greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.
- Rhode Island does not require its Public Utility Commission to address climate change or environmental justice in its mission and decision-making.
- Though Rhode Island has a climate council (referred to as EC4), there are questions about its effectiveness. The latest assessment by Civic Alliance for a Cooler Rhode Island (CACRI) concluded for the third time that the EC4 was making insufficient progress and suggested that EC4 is underperforming because it lacks authority, staffing, and funding. Although EC4 has access to powerful tools, comprehensive datasets, numerous climate adaptation and mitigation studies, and reports which outline what needs to be done, efforts to aggressively pursue decarbonization and adaptation measures are hampered by limited financial investments and technical capacity.
- Resilient Rhody, the state's first comprehensive climate preparedness strategy, does not prioritize climate actions and hold agencies accountable for implementation. Action may be limited by the lack of clarity regarding the state agencies that are responsible for carrying out the recommendations and inadequate funding.
- Rhode Island has very little in statute related to environmental justice and no singular, dedicated, public-facing office, council, or position for environmental justice. Rhode Island lacks a definition for environmental justice, which may make implementation of its plans for an equitable climate transition in support of marginalized communities difficult. Also, the EC4 continues to meet during times that are inaccessible to the working public.
- Rhode Island may also experience issues mentioned in other states such as: lobbying and legislative challenges, a lack of technical support for decision-makers, limited public awareness and participation in Public Utility Commission proceedings, and disproportionate utility power and influence.

## SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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11. Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources. December 12, 2018. Massachusetts Comprehensive Energy Plan. Available at: <http://www.merrimack.edu/live/files/3300-massachusetts-comprehensive-energy-plan-2018pdf>.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Acronym	Name	Definition
DER	Distributed Energy Resource	Technology for generating and managing electricity at the place of consumption
DR	Demand Response	Reducing energy consumption on the consumer side during peak demand
DSM	Demand-Side Management	Managing demand for energy on the consumer side to reduce overall consumption
DSP	Distribution System Planning	Planning for the incorporation of DERs into the grid, oftentimes by improving grid flexibility
FERC	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission	An independent agency that regulates the interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas, and oil. FERC also reviews proposals to build liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and interstate natural gas pipelines as well as licensing hydropower projects.
FIT	Feed-In Tariff	A policy guaranteeing a price for each unit of renewable energy generated
ISO	Independent System Operator	An independent organization that coordinates, controls, and monitors the operation of the electrical power system. New England's system operator is ISO New England (ISO-NE)
PIM	Performance Incentive Mechanism	A policy that encourages utility performance in areas such as reliability, safety, customer service, and energy efficiency
PTC	Production Tax Credit	Federal tax credit that incentivizes renewable generation
REC	Renewable Energy Certificate	Certificate representing renewable energy generation that utilities must purchase to fulfill RPS requirements
RGGI	Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative	A cooperative, market-based effort among the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Virginia to cap and reduce CO2 emissions from the power sector
RPS	Renewable Portfolio Standard	A regulation requiring increased production in renewable energy, usually involving a percentage goal by a specified year

### Sources:

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