

Talanoa Dialogue Submission  
The Climate Reality Project: Northern Virginia Chapter, United States  
Prepared for October 2018 Submission Deadline

## Introduction

The Climate Reality Project, founded by former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, is an organization dedicated to catalyzing a global solution to the climate crisis. Its main mechanism for achieving this goal is training “Climate Reality Leaders,” grassroots activists who work to achieve climate goals in their communities. In 2018, The Climate Reality Project launched regional chapters to facilitate activities among Climate Reality Leaders living in the same geographic area. The Climate Reality Project: Northern VA Chapter has been active since January 2018.

## Where are we?

*The commitment (planned and/or announced) as well as the actions taken so far that are in line with aims of Paris Agreement, the 1.5/2 degrees’ goal and the transition towards a net-zero emission society by this mid-century.*

The Climate Reality Project aligns with the Paris agreement through its dedication to education around climate change and catalyzing action to help solve the climate crisis. Climate Reality Leaders, in turn, take action in their communities by educating their peers about the climate crisis and advocating for policies that will help reduce emissions and protect the environment.

*Progress made so far against the above commitments, including success stories, case studies and gaps.*

The Climate Reality Project: Northern VA Chapter has made progress in several areas including education, policy advocacy, and direct action.

- Our main educational methods are climate change presentations, where Climate Reality Leaders teach information about climate change to various audiences. We present to school groups, religious organizations, community groups, and members of the public.
- Our policy advocacy includes meetings with Virginia influencers such as city, county, and state officials, during which we advocate for environmentally friendly policies. We are also involved in several ongoing campaigns, including: 100% Committed, State Renewable Portfolio Standards, Solar in Schools, Carbon Pricing, Anti-Fracking, Compact of Mayors, US Climate Alliance, and Community Solar. To support these campaigns, we have participated in petitioning, phone banking, letter writing campaigns, town hall events, presentations, and organizing events. In addition, Climate Reality Leaders in our chapter have testified at Fairfax County and Alexandria County government Environmental Quality Advisory Council hearings and attended Virginia Conservation Network’s Lobby Day in Richmond, Virginia. Several members also addressed the Northern Virginia State legislators at a hearing preceding the General Session where the issues of the environment and clean energy needs were stressed.
- Additional policy advocacy includes Climate Reality Leaders in our chapter testifying at several federal agency hearings. These include the US EPA hearing on the Clean Power Plan and the US Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management hearing on the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program.
- Our direct action includes writing letters to the editor of various local papers; attending public demonstrations such as the Science and Climate Marches in Washington, DC and the Mother’s Day Climate Rally in Fairfax, Virginia; and tabling at community events, such as running Climate Reality Project booths during local Earth Day programs and the Miss Earth United States pageant. Chapter members were interviewed by a staff writer at the *Sun Gazette* which resulted in a large article about The Climate Reality Project and local work being done to help the environment. Members have also appeared in several network and cable television interviews on the subject of the Clean Car Act and the pipeline fight in Virginia (here is a link to the [Clean Car Act interview](#), which was picked up by the AP and viewed as far away as Alaska and Bulgaria). The pipeline interview was conducted by news reporter Kiona Dyches and aired on the local independent network WDVM-TV.

***Quantitative impact so far with respect to mitigation, adaptation, resilience and/or finance.***

We have identified several direct outcomes from our efforts.

- The Virginia State Water Board re-opened their comment period on a proposed pipeline due to the number of protests, comments, and testimonies received that addressed the potential negative impacts of the pipeline.
- The city of Alexandria, VA purchased enough Renewable Energy Offset Credits for the next budget year to have its operations covered by 50 percent renewable energy.
- The Fairfax County School Board commissioned a report on how to move the school district to renewable energy alternatives.
- We have motivated people into action who previously were not engaged with climate issues; for instance, after attending Climate Reality Leaders' presentations, several audience members have converted their homes to solar energy.
- Leaders in the Northern VA chapter have given dozens of presentations so far this year, educating over 500 people in the community.

**Where do we want to go?**

***Vision of the future for your organization and/or sector in terms of its possible role in achieving the 1.5/2 degrees' goal and a net-zero emission world by this mid-century.***

The Climate Reality Project: Northern VA Chapter aims to support both northern Virginia and the state of Virginia to play their part in achieving the 1.5/2 degrees goal and net-zero emissions. We direct our efforts toward the counties and cities in northern Virginia as well as the state-wide legislature. Over the next year, we have several methods to enhance these efforts.

- Ramp up our presentations, including engaging with communities and groups we have not yet reached.
- Support energy-efficiency and other pro-environment bills, both at the local and state levels.
- Encourage citizens to vote for political candidates who share our concern for moving to a renewable energy future and who have strong "green" agendas.
- Establish a coalition between environmental groups, our elected officials, labor groups, and the military to force Dominion Energy to proceed with their off-shore wind farm project – they won the lease rights more than four years ago. Based on their lack of efforts to move forward, we surmise that Dominion only bid on the project to prevent someone else from getting the opportunity to build the project. It is time to apply pressure and get the project built.

***Possible and potential new commitments and pledges of to achieve the 1.5/2 degrees' goal and a net-zero emission world by this mid-century.***

One future focus area for our chapter is a push to adopt more electric vehicles, especially as Virginia embarks on several major road infrastructure projects. Developing a policy to incorporate electric vehicle charging stations into Virginia's broader infrastructure plan is critical to ensuring that the state supports the phasing out of fossil-fuel based vehicles.

***Foreseen positive impact of these commitments once they are realized, including contributions to the sustainable development agenda.***

In general, any environmental policies in northern Virginia can have a large impact on the rest of the country.

- Within the state of Virginia, the northern Virginia region is a population and economic center, and so the policies of this region strongly impact the broader state's agenda. The state of Virginia is the 12<sup>th</sup> largest in the United States, and so the state, in turn, plays an important role in influencing the direction of the country. Therefore, climate policy advancements influenced by the Climate Reality Project: Northern VA Chapter in our part of Virginia can impact the entire United States.
- Virginia is also one of 17 states belonging to the U.S. Climate Alliance, a bipartisan group committed to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement despite the federal government's withdrawal. Therefore, the Northern VA Chapter will play a role in helping Virginia to achieve its emissions reductions per the Paris Agreement.

## How do we get there?

*Ways in which the UN Climate Change process can help you achieve your vision and goals, and how your actions can help in expediting sustainable transitions to climate neutral societies.*

The UN climate change process can help The Climate Reality Project: Northern VA Chapter by continuing the UN's efforts in recent years to heighten involvement of non-state actors in the COP and other climate processes. Granting states, cities, and organizations a more central role in UN climate conferences will help us increase the profile of our agenda and raise international support for our mission.

*Concrete solutions that have been realized while implementing your commitments, including lessons learnt from success stories and challenges, and case studies that are in line with the 1.5/2 degrees' goal and can support the Parties in achieving their NDC goals, enable higher ambition and inspire engagement of other non-state actors.*

We have learned several lessons from our community engagement efforts.

- We have identified the importance of: storytelling and communication for achieving our goals; engaging children and students in the climate change conversation; and direct involvement and conversation with legislators.
- Our success stories include: Climate Reality Leaders' presentations leading to new supporters and partners; an interview with state legislator Ken Plum that aired on cable TV; and our "solar in schools" campaign, where we are partnering with local students and school systems to encourage the adoption of solar energy in schools.

*Collaboration models with other stakeholders and, in particular, between non-Party stakeholders, national governments and the UN Climate Change process that have been successful in helping you, or can help you, achieve your commitments.*

We are working on building a local environmental coalition which includes representatives from several environmental, faith, and political groups. We are aiming to grow the coalition and are currently communicating with several unions about joining.

*Opportunities to further scale up action and means to address barriers that can enable even further action by non-Party stakeholders based on the actions you have taken to implement your commitments. ("We've made progress and have made new commitments as described above. This is what I need from national governments, other non-Party stakeholders and the UN Climate Change process to take even further action...").*

- **Policy levers:** Through our policy advocacy efforts, we have made critical connections with local and state legislators. These channels to local and state governments can be shared with other non-state actors through partnerships and resource sharing.
- **Collaboration/cooperation opportunities:** We have begun to collaborate with other grassroots organizations (such as the Sierra Club and 350.org), local schools, and individual community members. There is an opportunity in this area to ramp up our partnership and collaboration activities to increase the impact of our actions.
- **Lessons learned based on the experience and progress so far:** Climate Reality Leaders trained by The Climate Reality Project have expertise in communications and community engagement. We can share the lessons we have learned through working with local groups and communicating with a variety of stakeholders.
- **Public and private financing models:** Our climate advocacy has not, at this point, included a focus on financing climate action. This is an area where we could benefit from connecting with other groups that are more expert in this topic.
- **Impact on non-Party stakeholders if these actions by national level governments and the UN Climate Change process and other opportunities are implemented and how much further they could go:** With national and UN-support, The Climate Reality Project's chapters throughout the US could enhance their activities and impact. There is an opportunity for greater collaboration and coordination among the different chapters, but since we consist entirely of volunteers, we lack the capacity to realize this opportunity. Support from national governments and the UN could help provide this capacity.