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Despathy: Behind closed doors, wealthy buy a Vermont climate change ‘network’

BY GUY PAGEON JULY 5, 2023 • (8 COMMENTS)

by **Alison Despathy**

If you were wealthy and you wanted something, what would you do? You would most likely buy what you want. This summarizes the beginnings of the [Energy Action Network of Vermont](#) (EAN). Money can buy a lot these days, even a detailed, step by step, blueprint for the formation of a “Network” designed specifically to break down regulatory barriers and create policy to achieve the goals you desire. Even if your goals are based on coercion and result in collateral damage and discriminatory policy that bypasses representative government, this “network” design and implementation plan can be utilized to achieve the goals that a well funded, select, exclusive private group has determined is the answer. Meet Vermont’s Energy Action Network—designed and committed to completely altering the face of energy policy in Vermont without the consent or voice of the people.



Alison Despathy

In 2009, Jennifer Berman, the Executive Director of the [Maverick Lloyd Foundation](#) became frustrated with the lack of coordination happening between the

climate and energy organizations receiving grants from her foundation. This deficiency inhibited success and in order to have a greater impact, Berman sought “models of collaboration” to achieve the goals that the foundation, their grantees and strategic partners found worthy and believed should become policy in Vermont.

This search led Berman to the [Rockefeller Deloitte Social Impact Network design](#). A network playbook used to coordinate actors and create a guide to achieve the shared goals of the stakeholders. Stakeholders included those from industry, nonprofits and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with specific goals, none of whom are bound to represent the people or ensure legal and ethical policy. These Networks are driven by the agendas of the organization, industries and their demand for sales of products and services, and ideology often to the point of zealotry in which dissenting voices are not welcome.

In a case study report on the development of the Energy Action Network of VT, issued by the [Rockefeller Foundation](#) working in conjunction with the Monitor Institute, an offshoot of Deloitte Consulting LLC, Berman and her foundation determined their goal would be to shift Vermont to 100% renewable energy by 2030. The framework for this goal would be this pre-designed network, soon to become the Energy Action Network of Vermont. Berman specifically stated,

“We were keenly aware of the many previous processes around climate and energy that had happened in Vermont, but we also saw that they had all been oriented towards putting out a report. Nothing had brought together a strategically chosen group of folks to think about where the state needed to go, mapped out how to get there, and created the capacity for that group to do work over time.”

In other words, how do you force your agenda with regards to policy and legislation on the people? Well- you buy a blueprint and form a [Network](#) based on an intricately detailed, systems-thinking guidebook designed by Rockefeller and Deloitte- two highly successful consulting firms and leaders in the realm of manipulation of systems to achieve outcomes including legislative change. These players have long been at work successfully breaking down regulatory barriers to service their needs and their clients.

Berman came to the right place and found the right tool to achieve her goals related to fundamentally altering energy policy in Vermont. The questions of course are: At what cost to Vermont and Vermonters? Should Berman and her Network consisting of industry and non governmental organizations design energy policy and make these decisions for Vermont? Why are so many legislators under the spell and captivated by their campaign, shiny reports, champion awards and “expert knowledge”?

In 2009, Berman brought in Growing Edge Partners and Jim Ritchie-Dunham, author of Ecosynomics to aid the process of interviewing and engaging stakeholders to

build their envisioned network and achieve their climate and energy goals. After comprehensive interviews, Berman and her team created a map and realized that achieving their goals involved putting “simultaneous pressure on four ‘leverage points’ that represented the greatest opportunities for change- public engagement, regulatory reform, technological innovation and capital mobilization.” Essentially with money and targeted campaigns, the government could be used to alter policy and ensure achievement of the network’s goals.

After this process, in 2010 the Energy Action Network was officially born and consisted of 70 leaders stepping out in a unified front to transform policy in Vermont. Regardless of the fact that they were not elected officials and there was not a transparent public process incorporated into the development of this network, their mission was clear- Vermont would be 100% renewable by 2030.

In fact, this was their first significant policy win at the statehouse, as described on the Rockefeller website:

“In the fall of 2011, the State of Vermont’s Comprehensive Energy Plan featured a bold new goal: moving the state to 90% reliance on renewable energy by 2050. To many Americans scanning the headlines, that announcement may have sounded like a logical extension of the state’s reputation for progressive politics; but the advocates involved in securing the victory knew that it was not only hard-won, but reflected a radical transformation of the dialogue on the energy policy at the state level. This story sketch details how that transformation was enabled by a new social impact network, the Energy Action Network of Vermont, catalyzed and developed through three years of hands-on engagement by a small, local family foundation.”

This network excludes the voice of the people who would be directly impacted by this altered policy and legislation. This network is not the will of people but they are heavily coordinated, highly funded, loud enough and have positioned themselves as “experts”.

The rise of pre-made, step by step social impact network models and campaigns such as that utilized in the creation of Energy Action Network is a fast growing industry in high demand as NGOs, nonprofits and industry work to create space for the success of their products, services, agendas, and ideology. Breaking through regulatory barriers brings in big money as it is often necessary to force paths. There are multiple tools and companies dedicated to this work for their high paying clients.

Vermont is in the thick of this network campaign wave at this time. In addition to EAN, [Hunger Free Vermont](#) funded by venture capitalist [Bradley Tusk](#) and the [Let’s Grow Kids Action Network](#) have a similar design base including significant funding. All of these causes are worthy but the bottom line questions of economic impacts,

risks, and burdens to Vermonters must be addressed by legislators while creating policy. These causes are fiercely lobbied by well-funded campaign networks. Often the campaign is so intensely coordinated, every base is covered and it seems difficult for legislators to say No even if the details do not add up or serve. Often in this situation what appears to be a people's movement is the result of this corporate formulated network design, essentially guaranteed for success.

Vermont has experienced the force of corporate designed, [Network](#) campaigns first hand since the Energy Action Network (EAN) started in on their work in 2010. Vermont is in the midst of this vision catalyzed by EAN's involvement in creating highly controversial, destructive legislation including the Global Warming Solutions Act and S.5 the Unaffordable Heat Act. Both are unpopular and received significant opposition from Vermonters. These bring high risk and burden to Vermonters yet the majority of legislators ignored their constituents and voted in favor.

As a result, the current climate goals and energy policy within Vermont are a product of a long term, manipulative process that utilized the development of this [pre-designed network](#). It is not the result of elected officials working with their constituents to solve problems with an unbiased eye and goals directed at a successful future for Vermont. This network is not the will of the people, in fact in direct contrast, it is the will of industry, organizations and philanthropic foundations buying a playbook to ensure the success of their goals and agendas regardless of the ramifications to the people and the state.

In essence, the Energy Action Network facilitated and provided the space for nonprofits, non governmental organizations, and industry with stake in the game to develop legislation, dictate policy and essentially transform and regulate entire industries within Vermont such as the heating sector. The transportation sector is next in line to come under attack due to the Global Warming Solutions Act and its legal requirements to reduce carbon emissions which has led to impulsive, destructive and high risk legislation.

Currently there are over 200 EAN [members](#) consisting of business and finance, utilities, nonprofits, higher education and local, state and federal public sector partners. This highly coordinated network works in lockstep to alter policy in Vermont based on the wishes and goals of their private members.

What's ironic is that on their website, EAN states:

“EANs systems work started with a core team and using a ‘concentric circle’ approach has continued to engage an increasingly wider circle of people at each point

in the process. This approach encourages the development of effective working relationships and high levels of trust across sectors and organizations and has ensured that divergent points of view are heard and considered.”

On June 1, EAN held a meeting for legislators and members only. Several dedicated Vermonters who hold “divergent points of view” regarding energy and environmental policy concerns were told they were not welcome when they attempted to register for the meeting. Yet here we have a “network” of players including elected officials heavily influencing energy and environmental policy and creating legislation in Vermont with large scale impacts and the public is not welcome and dissenting voices are discouraged, ignored and excluded.

Energy Action Network is not a grassroots Vermont movement. EAN is a highly coordinated, top down, corporate network framework bought and installed to force change determined acceptable by industry, non profits, and NGOs who align and are favored by the network and their mission. Vermonters deserve to know where Vermont’s extreme and destructive energy and environmental policy came from. Vermonters deserve to know why Energy Action Network holds tremendous influence in the statehouse. They need to know that many legislators work closely with EAN and that conversations to consider alternative approaches that are supportive not coercive are near impossible. It is time to hear from the people, the voice of Vermonters, not the Networks who know how to work the system and have the money and blueprint to do so.