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141 Main Street, Suite 6
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www.vpirg.org

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Liz Edsell
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Field Organizer



Taylor Johnson
Environmental Health
Advocate



Julia Michel
Campaign Coordinator



Falko Schilling
Consumer Protection
Advocate



Laura Seeman
Membership Coordinator



Zach Tomanelli
Online Coordinator



Eliza Walp
Field Organizer



Ben Walsh
Clean Energy Advocate



Cassie Wills
Office Manager



Dylan Zwicky
Clean Energy Associate

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Simonne Valcour, Burlington
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VPIRG
VERMONT'S VOICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2014



FROM THE DIRECTOR



The highlight of 2014? I know this sounds like a cop out, but it's really hard to say.

We began with a major legislative victory to promote the growth of clean, solar energy. Already, Vermont has been hailed as the number one state in the country for solar jobs per capita. This will keep those jobs and the local, renewable energy coming.

Speaking of energy, the troubled Vermont Yankee nuclear plant was taken offline for good by year's end. This was a milestone VPIRG members, staff and activists had been seeking for decades.

For a feel-good highlight, it would be hard to beat the bill signing ceremony for the GMO labeling legislation. I had the honor of addressing the huge crowd gathered on the State House steps to celebrate the fact that Vermonters had taken on Monsanto and won.

As the proud parent of a very active four-year-old, I have to say that our victory in passing comprehensive chemical reform legislation was also deeply satisfying. The new law will help protect kids from toxic chemicals in children's products. Why do we have any toxic chemicals in children's products? That's an excellent question.

And of course, together with a diverse group of allies, we launched what will probably be the largest campaign in our history in late November. This is a campaign to take on the biggest problem we face today: climate chaos.

As Vermonters, as human beings, we have a responsibility to do our part to stop global warming. Through the Energy Independent Vermont campaign, we have a chance to cut climate pollution in a way that will improve our state's economy and produce jobs.

So, while I can't pick just one highlight, I can tell you I love my job!

Paul Burns, Executive Director

ABOUT VPIRG AND VPIREF:

Founded in 1972, the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG) is the largest nonprofit consumer and environmental advocacy organization in the state. As a 501(c)4 nonprofit advocacy group, VPIRG conducts non-partisan public interest advocacy in support of priority public interest issues and campaigns and seeks legislative and policy solutions to issues affecting Vermonters. Donations to VPIRG are not tax deductible.

VPIRG established the Vermont Public Interest Research and Education Fund (VPIREF) in 1975 as its 501(c)3 outreach and education arm in order to conduct independent research and public education on the range of issues on which we work. Donations to VPIREF are tax deductible.

For 43 years, we have brought the voice of Vermont citizens to public policy debates concerning the environment, health care, consumer protection and democracy. The common mission of VPIRG and VPIREF is to promote and protect the health of Vermont's people, environment and locally-based economy by informing and mobilizing citizens statewide. VPIRG advocates and organizers use independent research, policy analysis, public outreach and grassroots mobilization to design and implement effective strategies for each of our campaigns.

VPIRG
Vermont Public Interest
Research Group
141 Main Street, Suite 6
Montpelier, VT 05602
phone: 802-223-5221
fax: 802-223-6855
vpirg@vpirg.org

www.vpirg.org

www.facebook.com/vpirg

Cover photos

Main photo: Paul Burns and Ben Cohen, flanked by dozens of VPIRG canvassers, launched our Taking on Big Money in Politics campaign in June. *Bottom left:* Braeden Schuren Burns was one of dozens of children who came to the State House on Toxic-Free Families Day to ask legislators not to "duck" reform. *Bottom center:* Activists at the State House rally to close Vermont Yankee in 2012. *Right center:* Burlington Free Press cover photo captured VPIRG Advocate Falko Schilling embracing Senator David Zuckerman in celebration of passage of the GMO labeling law. *Right bottom:* VPIRG canvassers showing off some of the campaigns our summer staff have brought to front porches across the state.



"The Alchemist was nearly wiped off the map by Tropical Storm Irene. I support putting a price on the pollution that causes global warming because I want to do everything I can to keep other Vermonters from losing their homes and businesses before it's too late."

—Jen Kimmich, co-owner of the Alchemist Brewery in Waterbury

"There is widespread agreement among economists that taxing carbon pollution is the best option for addressing climate change. We have decades of experience with pollution taxes that shows positive environmental outcomes alongside stronger economies."

—Jon Erickson, economics professor at UVM's Gund Institute for Ecological Economics.

Photos

Top left: Standing next to an image of his Irene-destroyed home, Rochester resident, John Graham, spoke at the Energy Independent Vermont launch in support of holding polluters accountable.

Middle: VPIRG rallied supporters of local renewable energy throughout the year, including this send-off rally for the thousands of Vermonters that headed to New York for the People's Climate March in September.

Right: The 400,000+ participants in the People's Climate March included many VPIRG staff, friends, and members, some pictured here.



Global Warming Solutions

The climate's changing and there's no denying it

Worldwide, 2014 was the hottest year on record. Across the country, we had chart-topping heat waves, droughts and floods. Meanwhile, a majority of Republicans in Congress denied the reality of global warming, as did a key Vermont legislator, who chaired the Senate's Natural Resources and Energy Committee.¹

Scientific facts may have little sway over some politicians, but 2014 also proved the public isn't willing to wait. Citizens took to the streets as more than 400,000 people — including over 2,000 from Vermont — participated in the People's Climate March in New York City. Renewable power projects surpassed fossil fuel development for the first time. And VPIRG launched our biggest campaign ever, focusing on climate solutions.

VPIRG launches visionary pollution pricing campaign

Vermonters know that we have a moral responsibility to protect our kids and grandkids from the environmental, economic, and social havoc that fossil fuels are wreaking. The good news is that there's broad agreement among economists and climate experts on how to accomplish this: Fossil fuel companies must be held financially accountable for the damage their pollution is doing.

It's time to put a price on carbon pollution. That's why VPIRG partnered with a "who's who" list of Vermont's environmental, businesses, and low-income advocacy groups to launch the Energy Independent Vermont campaign at a November press conference in Barre.

Every major media outlet was there, covering speakers who were impacted by Tropical Storm Irene, like John Graham of Rochester and The Alchemist brewery's co-owner Jen Kimmich, as well as policy experts like economist Jon Erickson of UVM.

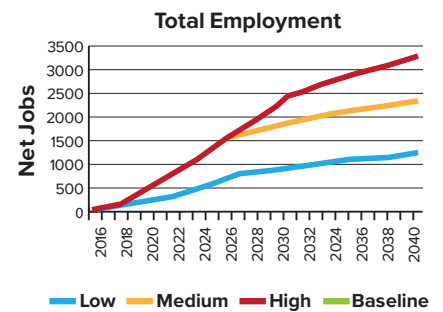
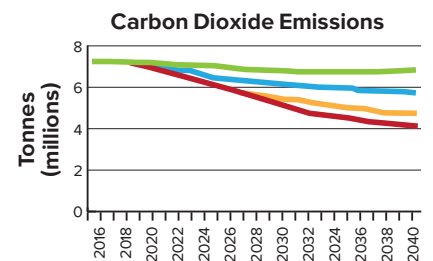
The facts are on our side. VPIRG commissioned an independent economic modeling firm — Regional Economic Models, Inc., or REMI — to research our plan. The results were clear: A tax on carbon pollution won't just reduce climate-roasting emissions, it will put money in Vermonters' pockets by reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and add thousands of jobs to the economy.

While it took a tremendous amount of time and resources to build the coalition and launch the campaign, it was only the beginning. There's lots more work to do if we're going to beat the fossil fuel industry, and we will.

ANALYSIS: POLLUTION GOES DOWN, JOBS GO UP

Economic analysis found that a price on carbon beginning at \$10 per metric ton of carbon dioxide and rising to \$100 per ton over ten years would yield:

- More than 1,500 new jobs in the state in the first 10 years.
- An increase of Vermont's annual Gross State Product of nearly \$100 million.
- A reduction in Vermont's CO₂ emissions of more than 2 million tons per year — that's equivalent to taking over 450,000 cars off the road, for good.



For more details, see the full report at vpirg.org/remi

¹ Senator Robert Hartwell (D-Bennington) decided not to run for reelection in 2014 after he admitted to a reporter for *Seven Days* newspaper that he did not believe in the science of climate change.



BEYOND DIRTY ENERGY

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Members and activists opposing Vermont Yankee's continued operations took over 75,000 actions — sending postcards, emails and photo petitions, as well as phone calls and in-person meetings with legislators — in just the final four years of VPIRG's four decades of campaigning to close the nuclear plant.
- VPIRG organizing efforts helped generate thousands of public comments from Vermonters to state regulators, asking them to deny a permit for the misguided fracked gas pipeline.
- VPIRG-commissioned expert research presented to the Public Service Board showed that cold climate heat pumps, a new clean energy technology, could cut heating bills up to 50%, further highlighting the fracked gas pipeline as costly and unnecessary.

Stopping dirty energy



In 2014, we completed a decades-long campaign to see Vermont Yankee retired and put substantial resources into the fight to stop the construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure in the state.

RIP Vermont Yankee – 1972-2014

It's possible that no single issue has received more attention from VPIRG staff, activists, and attorneys over the past 42 years than Vermont Yankee. From the beginning, VPIRG advocated for less costly and more sustainable ways to generate the power we need in Vermont.

Over the years, our organizers and volunteers fought to hold plant owners accountable in many forums. We opposed plans to develop a high level nuclear waste site in state, pressed for tough cleanup and closure requirements, urged legislators to retire the plant as scheduled in 2010 and later stood ready to oppose another 20-year license for the plant.

As 2014 came to an end, so too did the operating life of Vermont Yankee. With no contracts to sell power in Vermont, and facing a changing energy market and an uphill battle to renew its operating license, the owners of VY decided to shutter the plant. There is no doubt that the tireless efforts of citizen activists helped turn the tide.

Stop the fracked gas pipeline

After leading the charge to ban fracking in 2012, VPIRG determined that a proposal by Vermont Gas Systems (VGS) to dramatically expand its fracked gas pipeline infrastructure in the western part of the state was overpriced and unnecessary, to say nothing of the technology's devastating environmental impacts.

We hired experts and a seasoned attorney, Jim Dumont, to make the case against the pipeline at the Public Service Board (PSB). Our organizers launched a public outreach campaign explaining why the fracked gas pipeline was an unnecessary climate threat. And VPIRG members and supporters submitted thousands of public comments urging state regulators to deny a permit for the pipeline.

All of this, together with another massive cost overrun, caused VGS to abandon Phase II of its three-phase pipeline in early 2015. At the same time, the PSB is reconsidering its initial approval of Phase I of the project.



Photos

Top: VPIRG members and other concerned citizens turned out in numbers to oppose the project at two standing room only public hearings held by the PSB. Bottom: Citizens rallied at the State House against Vermont Yankee dozens of times over the years, including the day of the legislature's historic vote against relicensing the plant in 2012, pictured here.



Advancing and defending clean energy

At VPIRG, we agree with the majority of Vermonters who want to cut our dependence on fossil fuels and invest in clean, renewable power. To that end, in 2014 we helped expand the state’s successful net metering program and fend off attacks on Vermont’s clean energy future.

Helping more Vermonters go solar

In 2014, our state was second in the nation for solar jobs per capita,¹ thanks in large part to a policy called “net metering,” which allows Vermonters to go renewable and get credit on their electric bills for the power they produce.

While many other states were forced to play defense to save their net metering laws, Vermont updated its program in 2014 to be one of the best in the country. Our advocates provided testimony in support of the bill and our organizing team ensured that lawmakers heard from their constituents. As a result of the bill’s passage, Vermonters are continuing to save money and go solar at record pace.

YES in our backyards

Whether it’s solar panels on rooftops or wind turbines dotting the state, clean energy solutions aren’t just symbols of our “green” reputation — they’re testaments to our Vermont values. We take responsibility to generate sustainable electricity right here in Vermont.

To celebrate and share that sense of pride, VPIRG helped organize two tours of the Georgia Mountain Wind Farm so over 100 VPIRG members and hundreds of other Vermonters could see, experience, and learn about the benefits of building our clean energy future.

We also had to fend off attacks from those who would rather not see renewable energy generated in Vermont. When a few senators introduced legislation that would have made it harder to build clean energy, we analyzed the legislation and exposed the false and inaccurate claims being made to support it. Armed with the facts, more than 1,000 VPIRG members urged legislators to reject this attack on clean energy. The Senate listened.

Beyond the State House, we rallied concerned citizens to oppose siting standards that would have made it nearly impossible for new solar to be built in Rutland Town and ensured that pro-renewable voices were represented on the editorial pages of newspapers around the state.

Increasing our energy independence through more in-state solar, wind, and other renewables is a win-win-win — creating green jobs, decreasing reliance on fossil fuels, and reducing carbon pollution.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Over 15,000 Vermonters are now employed in clean energy, including over 1,500 in solar alone, and that number is expected to grow by nearly 2,000 jobs in 2015. (*Vermont Clean Energy Fund 2014 Industry Report*)
- After the VPIRG-backed expansion of net metering early last year, 1,455 Vermont households went solar in 2014.
- Investments in energy efficiency and Vermont renewables, like net metering, have saved nearly \$400 million in transmission and distribution costs. (<http://governor.vermont.gov/newsroom-shumlin-budget-speech-2014>).



¹ <http://pre.thesolarfoundation.org/solarstates/vermont>



HIGHLIGHTS:

- GMCB cut proposed rates for Vermont Health Connect plans after VPIRG members supplied 234 comments calling for affordable health care.
- VPIRG helped stop efforts to eliminate dental and vision coverage from Green Mountain Care.
- VPIRG collected over 700 signatures in support of allowing mid-level dental care providers to practice in Vermont, helping the bill pass out of a Senate Committee and pave the way for action in 2015.

Small victories and an uphill battle ahead

At VPIRG, our guiding principles for health care reform sound simple — ensure all Vermonters have access to quality, affordable health care. Getting there is anything but.

As long-time supporters and advocates for publicly financed universal health care, Gov. Peter Shumlin’s decision at the end of 2014 to halt implementation of Green Mountain Care was a major disappointment. VPIRG and many other groups and citizens spent years working toward this goal. Was all that time and energy for naught? Not in the least. Our work continues.

VPIRG is focused not just on the big goal of universal care, but on watchdogging the incremental decisions and policy steps that can improve care and services and save money for thousands along the way. A great deal of work takes place behind the scenes at the Green Mountain Care Board (GMCB) and in the oft-overlooked legislative health care committees, and that’s where VPIRG made a lasting impact in 2014.

For instance, during the summer and fall we worked with the GMCB to make Vermont’s health care system more accessible and affordable. After receiving over 200 comments from VPIRG members and supporters, the Board reduced Blue Cross Blue Shield and MVP’s proposed rate increases by 2.2% and 4.4% respectively — a decision projected to save consumers millions of dollars in insurance premiums.

VPIRG advocate, Falko Schilling, was also instrumental in stopping efforts to remove dental and vision coverage from Green Mountain Care, ensuring that the final benefits package will be decided in an open deliberative process at the GMCB.

To increase transparency, VPIRG members called on the Board to let consumers compare health care prices before getting care. And, building upon earlier legislation requiring insurers to report data on claims denials, as well as how much money is spent on lobbying and advertising, VPIRG found that approximately 50% of all denied claims were reversed when appealed.

The improvements that we helped to bring about are important, but they are no substitute for the kind of fundamental reform that it will take to make health care sustainable in Vermont and across the country. We remain on the case.



Personal messages, such as these photo petitions, from VPIRG members delivered to decision makers have helped drive home that it’s people at stake, not just policy details.

“VPIRG’s health care advocacy is invaluable at the State House. Our partnership with VPIRG strengthens our policy positions and helps us accomplish more for consumers than we could on our own.”

—Trinka Kerr, Chief Health Care Advocate, Office of the Health Care Advocate



Protecting Vermont's kids and the bottle bill

Victory for public health: Toxic-Free Families Act becomes law

Lead. Mercury. BPA. Phthalates. Tris. Over the past eight years, VPIRG has orchestrated successful campaigns to eliminate these and other dangerous toxins from consumer products — often children's products — sold in Vermont.

Our goal has always been to build support for a more comprehensive approach to chemical regulation — one that would provide substantially greater protection from toxic exposures. In 2014, Vermont legislators took a giant step in that direction by passing the VPIRG-backed Toxic-Free Families Act — one of the nation's strongest chemical reform policies.

This act establishes a list of 66 dangerous toxins (which can be expanded over time), requires businesses that use any one of those chemicals in children's products to report to the state, and sets up a process so that the experts at the state Department of Health can regulate or even ban those toxins.

Passing this law was an incredible victory for children in Vermont, and it wasn't easy.

VPIRG members and coalition partners turned up the heat on lawmakers at several events leading up to the law's passage. In February, we brought children to the State House for Toxic-Free Families Day, and delivered rubber duckies to lawmakers, asking them not to "duck" reform. A month later, VPIRG partnered with Professional Firefighters of Vermont in the national Give Toxics the Boot Day.

Despite broad public support for the bill, it nearly died at the end of the legislative session when industry lobbyists made a last ditch effort to kill it.

We mobilized a quick response from members, generating dozens of calls to key legislators, and at the end of a tense roll call vote, we got exactly the number of votes we needed in order for the bill to survive.



June 10th, 2014, Gov. Shumlin signs the Toxic-Free Families Act at the Seventh Generation offices in Burlington. Among those present were VPIRG's Paul Burns and Taylor Johnson.

REPORTS:

• VPIRG released the 29th annual *Trouble in Toyland* report in late November, highlighting dangerous toys we found on Vermont store shelves. VPIRG's Taylor Johnson was a guest on WCAX's *The 30* to spread awareness about the report and the dangers we uncovered.

• VPIRG staff contributed to a report by HealthyStuff titled, *Floored by Phthalates* that revealed dangerous chemicals in popular vinyl flooring.

Read the full text of the reports at vpirg.org/resources

VERMONT'S BOTTLE BILL SURVIVES ATTACK

Once again in 2014, VPIRG led state efforts to defend the Bottle Bill from a legislative attack supported by the beverage industry.

Senator Bob Hartwell, then-Chairman of the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee, introduced a bill to eliminate the deposit on liquor bottles and containers greater than one liter in volume.

The reaction from VPIRG and allies was swift. VPIRG advocates provided evidence of the law's effectiveness in testimony, and shared statewide polling results that showed more than 90% of Vermonters support the Bottle Bill.

The controversial proposal was soundly defeated in committee.



DEMOCRACY

HIGHLIGHTS:

- More than 20,000 Vermonters signed on to the VPIRG campaign Taking on Big Money in Politics by reining in lobbyists, increasing transparency and amplifying citizens' voices in the political process.
- VPIRG partnered with Stamp Stampede, an organization founded by Ben & Jerry's co-founder Ben Cohen, to host events and stamp bills with messages like "Not to be used for bribing politicians."
- Dozens of young Vermonters turn out to vote at VPIRG's Early Election Day march and rally in Burlington.

REPORT:

VPIRG released the 5th annual *Following the Money* report, a state-by-state report by U.S. PIRG that grades states based on their transparency of governmental spending. Vermont was one of only eight states to receive an "A" rating.



VPIRG student organizers and their peers — many of them first-time voters — marched to Burlington City Hall along with candidates from at least three major parties to register and cast their ballots early. This "Early Election Day" certainly got the media's attention, demonstrating the growing power of young voters and the importance of voting.

"Toxic-free products. Clean water. Action on climate change. Too often, good ideas are blocked by special interests backed by big bucks."

—VPIRG Director Paul Burns

Taking on big money in politics

Super PACs, million dollar checks, and DC-style negative ads are all now part of Vermont politics, and they're drowning out the voices of Vermont citizens. Our State House is crawling with lobbyists for corporations like Monsanto, Exxon Mobil and Dow Chemical. And after hours, these industry lobbyists go to political fundraisers at the same time they're trying to kill important bills.

That's why VPIRG set our sights on a package of reforms designed to lessen the political influence of very wealthy individuals and corporations. Over the summer, we knocked on over 50,000 doors across the state to explain our plan: Rein in lobbyists, restrict corporate and lobbyist contributions, require Super PAC funders to "stand by their ads," and encourage voter participation.

Millenials vs. Big Money

Working on VPIRG's record-breaking summer outreach team taking on big money in politics wasn't enough for scores of University of Vermont students. They wanted to keep up the pressure. So VPIRG devoted resources to training our youngest members how to make an impact.

Over the fall, VPIRG's student organizers hit the pavement with clipboards and flyers, registering students to vote using an online voter registration page powered by Rock the Vote and holding events like "Stampede the Vote" with Ben Cohen from Ben & Jerry's, where voter registration forms ran out before the free ice cream.



VPIRG's Executive Director gave Gov. Peter Shumlin the good news: Vermont is a national leader when it comes to government spending transparency, according *Following the Money 2014*, the fifth-annual transparency report released by VPIRG. One of only eight states to receive an "A" rating, Vermont has made significant progress to increase spending transparency since 2010 when the state received an "F" on this same report.



CONSUMER PROTECTION

Vermont becomes first state to label GMOs



VPIRG members contributed mightily to a first-in-the-nation victory against Monsanto and the junk food industry with the passage of Vermont's GMO food labeling law.

Surrounded by legislative champions and members of the Right to Know GMOs coalition, Gov. Peter Shumlin signed Act 120 into law on May 8, 2014. Many states had attempted to pass GMO labeling legislation, but Vermont became the first state to actually require genetically engineered foods to be truthfully labeled.

Having passed the Vermont House in 2013, we needed to win in the Senate in 2014. Early in the year, we delivered more than 30,000 postcards collected by VPIRG canvassers, and that was just the start of the massive grassroots action to come.

The Right to Know GMOs coalition brought over 200 hundred citizens to the State House for a public hearing in March. Many of those testifying focused on a key sticking point — a potential “trigger” provision that would have prevented our law from taking effect until other states passed similar laws. These citizens asked their senators not to rely on other states.

When the bill finally came up for a vote on the Senate floor, it was clear that senators were not going to be swayed by the lobbyists and lawyers representing the biotech and food industry giants. They voted 28-2 in favor of a strong, no-strings-attached GMO labeling bill.

Shortly after the new law passed, a coalition of corporate interests filed suit to try to block the law from taking effect. VPIRG was quick to act, partnering with the Vermont Law School and the Center for Food Safety, to seek permission to help defend the law in court. Our team was granted amici curiae (friend of the court) status for the duration of the case and filed our first briefs in November.

“I hope very much that Vermont will become a leader on this issue nationally and I think as a result of the work that the young people of VPIRG have done that may just be what will happen.”

—Senator Bernie Sanders

Photos

Top: VPIRG helped turn out over 200 Vermonters to a State House hearing where they unanimously called for labels on GMO foods.

Right: Some of the VPIRG canvassers that built the GMO labeling campaign's grassroots base in 2013 celebrated the law's passage at the bill signing at the State House in May 2014.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- VPIRG Executive Director Paul Burns was invited to speak at the GMO bill signing event — the largest bill signing celebration of 2014.
- In July, VPIRG's Consumer Protection Advocate Falko Schilling appeared as a guest on NPR's *On Point with Tom Ashbrook* to defend the state's labeling law.

CAMPAIGN EVENTS INCLUDED:

- Citizen Rally to Support GMO Labeling at the State House.
- Six consumer education workshops on GMO label held across the state.
- Businesses for GMO Labeling press conference at the State House.
- Six film screening and receptions on the *GMO OMG — What Are We Eating Tour*.
- Two events with Vandana Shiva, internationally recognized scientist and activist on “Food System Transformation and Reversing the Climate Crisis: How Vermont's GMO Labeling Law is Part of the Solution.”

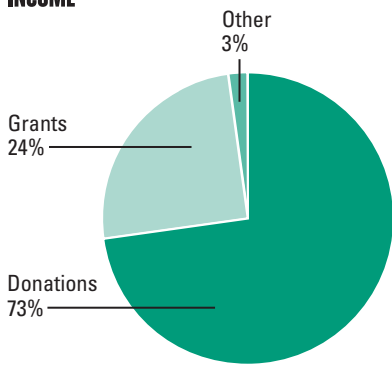


Donors invest, we deliver results

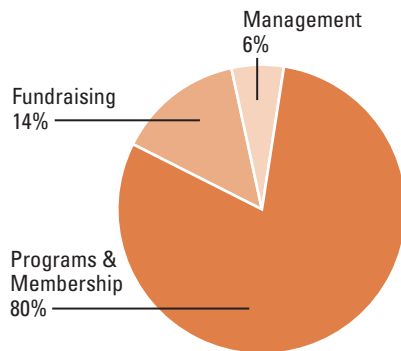
VPIRG's financial strategy is simple: run strategic, compelling campaigns on issues that matter to the majority of Vermonters and those Vermonters will invest in their success. Many members cite our ability to deliver concrete, tangible results year after year as a major reason they chose to support VPIRG. We remain honored by their trust, humbled by their generosity, and empowered by their belief that together we can make positive change on a precedent-setting scale.

In 2014, that generosity totaled \$2,052,735 in income, once again coming primarily from individual contributions from Vermonters across the state. In turn, we spent \$2,044,691 running campaigns in seven different program areas, supporting the organization's infrastructure, and improving our capacity to deliver victories for our members and for Vermont.

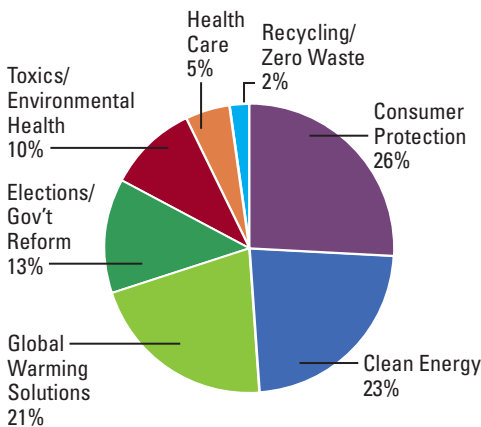
INCOME



EXPENSES



EXPENSES BY PROGRAM



Grassroots giving:

VPIRG believes in the power of people to bring about change. That's why we spend more than 3,400 staff days each year reaching out to engage Vermonters all across the state. Each and every one of you that stepped up this year — whether it was making one of the 52,208 donations we received to support our work or taking one of the roughly 37,500 actions (sending emails, making phone calls, writing letters to the editor, turning out to rallies) to support our campaigns — YOU are the reason we've been able to achieve such success this year.

While we wish we could thank every single member, donor and supporter here, the generosity of those listed below deserves special recognition.*

GRANTS & FOUNDATIONS:

- Blittersdorf Family Foundation
- Harris & Frances Block Foundation
- Community Catalyst
- Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps
- Educational Foundation of America
- John Merck Fund
- Kelsey Trust
- Lintilhac Foundation
- Merck Family Fund
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Organic Consumers Fund
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- SAFER
- Sustainable Markets Fund
- Voices for Vermont's Children

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

- Dylan and Janice Airoidi
- Mark Alexander
- Jessica and Paul Alfarone
- Debbie Allen and Floem Mahoney
- Jody Andreoletti
- Marcia Angermann
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