



STRATEGY OVERVIEW

2023

MISSION

The Island Institute works to sustain Maine's island and coastal communities, and exchanges ideas and experiences to further the sustainability of communities here and elsewhere.

VISION

We envision that Maine's year-round island communities will thrive and lead as examples of sustainability.

DEI STATEMENT

We envision a future where Maine's island and coastal communities lead as examples of inclusion and equity; where diversity is welcomed, respected, and celebrated.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Island Institute is setting our course into an uncertain future. Maine's island and coastal communities are facing unprecedented challenges: a pandemic that upended many facets of community life, warming waters in the Gulf of Maine that are altering the future of Maine's fisheries, and new economic pressures that are stressing already fragile communities.

To face these challenges, Island Institute staff and trustees have worked with community members, partner organizations, and local and state government representatives to create a strategic response.

Our plan is an extension of the Institute's 40-year history of successful community development work with Maine's island and coastal communities. While the challenges are many, so are the solutions. The innovation and leadership found within the Gulf of Maine are worth celebrating—and each of us has a hand in building a stronger future. We hope our approach will inspire you as it has inspired us.

40 YEARS OF SUCCESS

The Island Institute was founded in 1983 by Peter Ralston and Philip Conkling with a single goal: protect Maine's island communities from extinction. The Gulf of Maine once nurtured more than three hundred island towns and villages. Only fifteen remained when Peter and Philip got to work. They recognized that Maine's island and coastal communities were facing a distinct set of challenges shaped by time and place. Fishing families were adapting to reduced catches. Energy costs were spiking. Community members were migrating off islands. A changing ecosystem in the Gulf of Maine was evident.

By listening to the concerns of the community and working in partnership, Peter and Philip helped connect resources and knowledge to the most pressing needs. Gradually, small successes in community development grew into towns saved. Now, forty years later, thanks to the tireless work of thousands of people, not a single year-round island community has been lost since the Institute's founding. Challenges thought to be insurmountable were overcome; problems said to be set in stone were fixed.

Today, we build on this deep, 40-year history. We are here to ensure that solutions to the most intractable challenges facing the Gulf of Maine are centered around the needs of Maine's island and coastal towns and shared nationally. The challenges may change. Our commitment has not.

SETTING OUR COURSE FOR THE FUTURE

As Island Institute enters its 5th decade, communities along the Gulf of Maine face a triple threat to their future. The compounding impacts of climate change, a destabilized fishery, and an acute labor shortage are already shifting the ground beneath our feet. If we do nothing, future generations will look upon a coastline we would not recognize.

“DOING NOTHING” IS NOT IN OUR VOCABULARY.

This strategy outlines our intention to stand alongside these communities in the face of daunting challenges. It is our toolkit for creating resilient communities, sustaining livelihoods, and investing in the tools, skills, and leadership needed for the next decade.

**This is our plan to
Build Community from the Sea Up.**



CENTER FOR CLIMATE & COMMUNITY

Building climate resilience through mitigation, adaptation, and hope

PROBLEM

Impacts from climate change pose significant threats to the viability of Maine's island and coastal communities—and the stability of the fisheries, infrastructure, and energy systems that support them. "Business as usual" won't cut it. System-scale change is required to prevent catastrophe.

OPPORTUNITY

With our strong history of climate change education, research, policy work, and an influx of state and federal funding for climate solutions, we have the chance to help communities build enduring climate resiliency. Building smart, scalable solutions in island and coastal communities helps meet the larger goals set forth in Maine's 2020 climate action plan, Maine Won't Wait, and presents models for what is possible.

THREE-YEAR GOALS

1. Support community and business transitions to socially, economically, and technologically feasible lower carbon energy strategies
2. Support practical solutions for communities and businesses to adapt to climate change
3. Ensure the best available data and science, and coastal and island community input are used to inform climate action priorities at the local and state level
4. Elevate solutions in Maine as national models

STRATEGY

Our work is powered by an appreciation for a simple truth: resilient economies and strong leadership are inextricably connected to climate solutions. Our most effective engagement involves investing in local leaders and regional economies and integrating community priorities into climate solutions. Our strategy intentionally focuses on crucial climate and energy infrastructure projects. We add value through science translation, partnerships with technical experts, and advocacy for better policies. We also connect partners to solution-sharing networks throughout Maine and beyond to enhance the success of their projects and those of their peers.



INITIATIVES

▶ **MITIGATION: REDUCING THE RELIANCE ON FOSSIL FUELS**

We support island and coastal communities and working waterfront businesses to transition away from reliance on fossil fuels in a way that prioritizes historically marginalized communities and those most impacted by climate change. By reducing reliance on fossil fuels, directly for heating and transportation and indirectly from electricity use, we support these communities to stabilize long-term energy costs, reduce carbon pollution, and prepare for the global transition away from fossil fuels.

Example:

Energy Transitions Initiative Partnership Project (ETIPP)

The Institute was selected by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) to serve as a regional partner for the ETIPP program, which supports energy system planning and projects in island and remote communities with unreliable and expensive energy systems. We provide tools and support to assist communities in making effective energy resilience decisions. Through this work we have already helped deliver energy planning solutions and set the stage for access to clean, reliable energy for more than 36,000 people in five remote and rural communities. With additional communities in the pipeline, we are demonstrating what it takes to attain energy resilience in Maine and beyond.

▶ **ADAPTATION: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS**

We help island and coastal communities assess, plan, and implement projects tailored to their specific climate-driven challenges. By engaging communities in state and regional initiatives and supporting real-world adaptation projects, we cultivate informed, resourced, and action-oriented communities.

Example:

Community Resilience Partnership (CRP)

The Institute is working directly with the communities on the frontline of climate change in Maine. Working with the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF), we are ensuring that all 15 year-round island communities are well-positioned to achieve Maine's climate action plan benchmarks. Our work to date has already helped dedicated community volunteers

leverage state and federal funds to support resiliency improvements to critical infrastructure such as a drinking water treatment facility, with plans underway to secure resources for projects that will ensure safe groundwater, resilient energy systems, and more.

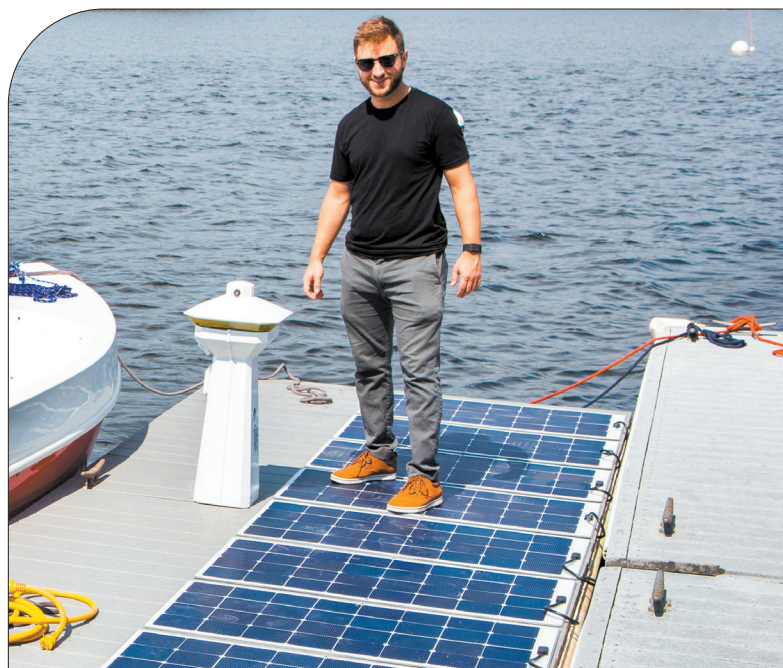
▶ **COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY**

We work with local, state, and federal experts to translate complex climate information—from ocean climate science to renewable energy. Our translational work puts cutting-edge science in the hands of communities. Our community experience helps us inform state-level climate policy, and our testimony to the state legislature and beyond ensures rural coastal communities are part of climate solutions. Our data-driven approach, strategic partnerships, and emphasis on community input enables us to be effective advocates for our communities.

Example:

Maine Climate Council

The Institute is a leader in the statewide response to climate change. Our staff works directly with the Maine Climate Council. Susie Arnold, PhD, serves as the co-chair of the team charged with informing the scientific strategy in Maine's climate action plan. She is guiding the 2023 scientific assessment and will help shape the next state climate action plan in 2024.



CENTER FOR MARINE ECONOMY

Creating the diversified, climate-friendly marine economy of the future

PROBLEM

The dimensions of uncertainty along the coast are multiple. Our task is to turn uncertainty into opportunity. We do this by supporting innovation in the marine sector that builds diversified and resilient coastal economies. The working waterfront underpins Maine's marine economy, and it is under threat. Climate change, increasing operational costs, new regulations, and labor shortages are forcing businesses to adapt. To weather this ever-changing economic, environmental, and regulatory setting, the marine sector needs to rapidly innovate towards solutions that can bring certainty to the industry.

OPPORTUNITY

Our work sits squarely at the intersection of the working waterfront and business growth. By protecting our most important asset, the working waterfront, and supporting economic innovation and employment diversification through Maine's burgeoning aquaculture industry, we can help communities steward their fisheries and communities towards a sustainable future.

THREE-YEAR GOALS

1. Sustain, protect, and prepare critical waterfront assets for future use
2. Grow Maine's burgeoning aquaculture industry as a driver of family, community, and state economic growth
3. Transition the marine sector towards a low-carbon future through clean energy solutions
4. Provide economic diversification options for fishing communities with the highest reliance on fishing

STRATEGY

We build resilient communities from the sea up, starting with the people and businesses who steward our fisheries. Our focus is on expanding the economic impact of aquaculture in Maine, bringing fresh energy into the marine economy, minimizing the impact of uncertainty on marine businesses, electrifying the coast, and maintaining a vibrant working waterfront.



INITIATIVES

▶ WORKING WATERFRONT

Maine's marine economy is built on wharves that dot our island and coastal communities. Focused investments at critical business locations can serve as a model for and connection to the wider marine economy. Our work includes protecting the working waterfront, business planning, infrastructure improvements and operational diversification.

Example:

Legislation for Working Waterfront Preservation

Stewardship of the Gulf of Maine's resources requires perpetual shoreline access. Maine's working waterfronts are under intense pressure due to rapid development and sea level rise. We are proud to have secured protections for the working waterfront through new legislation that ensures key working waterfronts are retained and maintained in perpetuity.

▶ SEAWEED AND SHELLFISH AQUACULTURE

Diversity builds fortitude. Aquaculture helps fishing families alleviate the current economic and environmental impacts felt in Maine's traditional catch markets. We are supporting the expansion of shellfish and seaweed aquaculture by partnering with major businesses in the sector to elevate the sector, reducing technological barriers to current and emerging farming technologies, and creating opportunities for new entrants from underrepresented populations.

Example:

Women on the Water

Women are historically underrepresented in the Maine fishery. We seek to reverse this imbalance by supporting emerging women entrepreneurs in aquaculture along Maine's coast. The program focuses on identifying and removing key barriers for new and existing women in aquaculture.

▶ PATHWAYS FOR LOBSTERING COMMUNITIES

In response to shifting regulations and environmental changes, we are collaborating with research partners, policymakers, economic development organizations, community leaders, and lobster industry experts to help communities adapt and diversify economically. Our plan involves investments in career expansion opportunities for fishing families, synthesized climate data for better decision making, direct business support for marine and marine-adjacent businesses, advocacy for sensible state and federal regulation fishery regulation, and educational events and publications to cultivate a broad public awareness of this issues.

Example:

25 Communities on the Frontlines of Change

We know which communities are most likely to bear the biggest brunt of changes in the lobster industry. Our efforts are focusing on the 25 communities most dependent on Maine's lobster industry. Working throughout Knox, Hancock, and Washington Counties, we are helping these hardest-hit communities, businesses, and young people entering the workforce develop strategies to thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

▶ MARINE ELECTRIFICATION

By investing in clean marine energy solutions, we are helping forward-looking marine businesses compete, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Example:

Electric Boats

As with electric cars and solar energy, the first step in transitioning Maine's marine fleet from fossil fuel to electric motors is putting the proven technology in the hands of those who will rely on it. By deploying demonstration boats in harbors, building out the supporting shoreside infrastructure for expansion, and raising Maine's profile as a leader in electric propulsion, we are accelerating the adoption of climate-friendly technology and protecting our waters.

CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Fueling community-led innovation with capital, networks, and leadership

PROBLEM

Isolated and rural towns are uniquely vulnerable to economic and climate changes. Unplanned failures in infrastructure, financing, or sufficient workforce can quickly become a community-wide problem. For young people, life in rural communities can be especially challenging and they often leave to seek better opportunities. Building the next generation of problem solvers and supporting today's leaders to make thoughtful, innovative decisions is essential for creating a vibrant rural future for these small but mighty communities.

OPPORTUNITY

The coast of Maine is dotted with unique and isolated communities that are facing intractable challenges—from climate change to housing. By connecting these communities—and the individuals who live there—to capital, talent, and the wisdom of other communities, we help them grow stronger together.

THREE-YEAR GOALS

1. Meet community-identified needs by fielding exceptional Island Institute Fellows
2. Reduce barriers to accessing economically relevant workforce training
3. Build local capacity for community-driven broadband and digital equity planning
4. Connect island communities to critical resources to help them thrive

STRATEGY

We support community-driven efforts to improve access to education, expand workforce opportunities, and to maximize the enormous potential of rural broadband. By placing and cultivating leaders, facilitating community conversations, connecting capital with ideas, and partnering with similar efforts across the country, we are helping communities grow stronger today and remain strong tomorrow.



INITIATIVES

▶ ISLAND INSTITUTE FELLOWS

The Island Institute Fellows program is one of Island Institute’s signature programs. We place 10 Fellows in Maine’s coastal and year-round island communities for one to two years, helping to build sustainability within communities whose way of life and identity face many challenges. Since 1999, 151 Island Institute Fellows have provided 350,000 hours of service to Maine communities. Fellows aid in the local management of historical, cultural, natural, economic, and information resources, and assist in local research, planning, education, and technology projects.

Example:

At the heart of community climate solutions

Meet Paige Atkinson, a former Peace Corps volunteer and committed environmental educator. For two years, she has worked in the coastal city of Eastport, Maine (population 1,288). Working with the city manager, she has had a front-row seat to the impact of climate on small communities. She has also rolled up her sleeves to create programs and find funding to help Eastport transition to clean energy and become more resilient in the face of rising sea levels, flooding, and increasingly extreme weather.

▶ WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

We develop and promote career pathways within the digital economy, seafood sector, and clean energy trades—all areas critical to sustaining rural, coastal communities. We also connect students, teachers, and parents—sometimes in the most remote locations—with educational resources to maintain strong, vibrant schools and employment pipelines.

Example:

The Outer Islands Teaching & Learning Collaborative (TLC)

Schools are at the heart of vibrant communities, and they are increasingly under threat. Island education presents enormous challenges for both students and teachers. With our help, Cliff Island, the Cranberry Isles, Frenchboro, Isle au Haut, Matinicus, and Monhegan formed the TLC—a collaborative inter-island education network—in 2007. The TLC is a lifeline for island schools and teachers. It maintains connection among teachers, supports a common curriculum that can be shared among island schools, and it provides meaningful training and gatherings for teachers and students to break the isolation of island education. The TLC maintains a network of lifelines between islands—ensuring that even the smallest schools survive and thrive.

TOM GLENN COMMUNITY IMPACT FUND

The Tom Glenn Community Impact Fund provides funding to small businesses and community infrastructure projects critical to Maine’s island and coastal communities. Using grants, loans, and other financing tools, the Glenn Fund amplifies the impact of Island Institute’s community development work. In FY23 alone, we deployed \$200,000 in funding to 48 organizations.

- **Broadband Planning grants** to support Maine municipalities, local institutions, or nonprofits working to bring community-driven broadband projects to underserved communities.
- **Spark! grants** to provide funding for working waterfront clean energy projects that improve energy efficiency, focus on renewable energy, and/or reduce consumption of fossil fuels.

- **ShoreUp grants** to help island and coastal communities plan for sea level rise through risk assessments, infrastructure planning, or community engagement programs.
- **Business Resilience grants** to help small businesses become more economically resilient with support for everything from financing to ecommerce development.
- **Revolving Loan Fund** Island Institute has created an initial fund of \$500,000 to support small and emerging businesses based in rural and remote island and coastal communities. Loans are provided for capital improvements, equipment purchases, and other major business expenses. Typical loan periods range from 2-5 years to recoup and redeploy these funds for maximum community impact.

▶ BROADBAND ACCESS

Island Institute has been one of the earliest proponents of broadband in Maine, knowing it is a gateway to opportunity for the communities we work in. Today, federal agencies have prioritized bringing high-quality internet to rural America. Funds are available to begin work—but only for states that have produced solid plans of action. We work with communities, nonprofits, and town officials to build capacity for community-driven broadband and strengthen state broadband institutions from within, thereby ensuring they also reap the benefits of federal and state investments.

Example:

The Impact of Partnership

Beginning in 2017, we led the statewide push for rural broadband access and moved quickly to deploy seed capital for these critical infrastructure projects. Since then, we have deployed \$370,000 in planning grants to 27 towns—leveraging more than \$33 million in state and federal investments in these communities.

▶ ISLAND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Maine’s 15 year-round island communities are vulnerable to increasing climate and economic challenges. They have fewer resources and capacity to address these issues. Community leaders need a hotline: someone to provide resources or technical assistance, someone who can find the answers when they can’t find the time. The island community support team works across our organization to connect our staff to community leaders and partners. The team tracks recurring issues, and when the time calls for action, they convene islanders to talk through challenges and brainstorm solutions.

CREATIVE ECONOMY

For centuries, artists have come to Maine in search of inspiration. The light and tones cast across the Gulf of Maine allowed artists such as Winslow Homer, Louis Nevelson, and Andrew Wyeth, to see their worlds in a new way and leave their indelible marks on American art. Generations of artists have followed in the wake of their inspiration—growing, sharing, and molding the creatives of tomorrow.

Maine’s ecosystem of creatives is stronger than ever. From micro businesses to major industry leaders, from soap makers to jewelers to fine furniture makers to encaustic painters, this creative economy provides jobs, fosters innovation, drives tourism, and promotes culture. Through the Island Institute’s small business work, including business advising and retail support offered by Archipelago, we strive to support and showcase the businesses and work of the artists and makers who, in addition to diversifying Maine’s economy with its many small businesses, help promote the beauty and endurance of Maine’s islands and coast.



ARCHIPELAGO

The Island Institute’s store and gallery showcase Maine artists and makers whose work reflects the beauty and endurance of Maine’s islands and coast. Archipelago provides a vibrant mainland, Main Street retail space and website which provide artists and makers access to customers from all over the world. Since opening in 2000, Archipelago has advanced the careers of more than 1,500 Maine residents, while playing a pivotal role in Rockland’s emergence as a dynamic center of arts and culture. Since 2000, Archipelago’s artists have received more than \$4.9 million dollars in sales income. Our Artists and Makers conference brings practitioners, small business experts, marketing gurus, and others together to help strengthen the creative economy in Maine. We ensure that artists and makers in even the most remote locations have access to best-in-class training.

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

PROGRAM AREA

OUTCOME

RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

Maine's island and coastal leaders have the skills and resources to respond to rapid change.

QUALITY INTERNET CONNECTIONS

Maine's island and coastal residents have equal access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet.

SKILLS FOR TOMORROW

Maine's island and coastal workforce have access to relevant skills and training opportunities to succeed in Maine's changing economy.

BUSINESS READINESS

Maine's island and coastal businesses are prepared to meet challenges wrought by climate change, and social and economic shifts.

COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS

Maine's island and coastal communities have defined pathways and actions to prepare for an adapt to climate change.

RESILIENT ISLAND COMMUNITIES

Maine's 15 unbridged year-round island communities continue to have viable year-round populations and increasing levels of resiliency.



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