

# IMPACT REPORT

2025





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Annual "All Aboard" meeting  
with board members and staff  
June 2025 | Rockport, Maine



## Anchored in Our Mission, Ready to Meet the Moment

The past year brought tremendous change and uncertainty to the communities we serve, reflecting a nationwide sense that the ground beneath us is shifting. As we look ahead to a future that can feel both overwhelming and uncertain, **we remain anchored in our mission, ready to meet the moment.**

In 2025, Island Institute refreshed its strategy to ensure our focus remains where it matters most: on the people, places, and partnerships that define Maine's coast. We know our communities, readers, and supporters rely on us to be a steady, trusted presence amid complexity and contention.

That's why we've sharpened our work around four strategic priorities designed to strengthen island and coastal communities:

- **Build a prosperous and enduring marine economy**
- **Advance community-led climate solutions**
- **Increase critical community capacity**
- **Be the most trusted voice on coastal issues**

These priorities reflect both who we are and what the moment demands: focus, collaboration, and bold action. They guide our work, ensuring that our impact endures even as conditions change.

Despite the fluidity of the moment, one truth remains: **we're built for this.**

Sincerely,



Doug Henderson  
*Board Chair, Island Institute*



Kimberly A. Hamilton, Ph.D.  
*President, Island Institute*



### MISSION

We boldly navigate climate and economic change with island and coastal communities to expand opportunities and deliver solutions.

### VISION

Maine's island and coastal communities thrive in a rapidly changing world, leading as models of innovation.

### VALUES

- Hopeful Persistence
- Connection to Place
- Authentic Collaboration
- Clarity of Purpose
- Resourcefulness

# The Year At a Glance

Partnered with  
**2,281 individuals,**  
**572 organizations, and**  
**93 municipalities**

Awarded  
**\$214,000** in grants  
to **56 small businesses**  
and organizations

## WHERE WE'VE WORKED

- Community-led Climate Solutions
- Resilient Working Waterfronts
- Enduring Marine Economy
- Energy Transitions
- Critical Community Capacity

### CASCO BAY

Exploring Nature-based Solutions  
**PAGE 6**



### FREEPORT

Electrifying the Working Waterfront  
**PAGE 5**



### ST. GEORGE

Supporting a Community Planning Its Future  
**PAGE 9**







Supported  
**191 communities**  
with projects, grants,  
and technical assistance

Awarded  
**\$135,535** in scholarships  
to **61 students** from  
island communities



**BUCKSPORT**  
Building Skills  
on and off  
the Water  
**PAGE 8**



**THE CRANBERRY ISLES**  
Powering Locally  
Led Energy  
Solutions  
**PAGE 7**



**ADDISON**  
Diversifying Downeast  
**PAGE 4**

# Building a Prosperous and Enduring **MARINE ECONOMY**



Maine's coast is changing. As economic and climate forces reshape how people make a living on the water, income diversification is essential in fishing communities.

Island Institute helps small businesses innovate: harvesting new species, launching new products and services, and reaching new markets.

We believe diversification isn't about leaving tradition behind; it's about building resilience and finding new ways to work on the water in a changing world.

Island Institute provides tools, mentorship, and access to funding, but leadership comes from the people who know the tides, the markets, and the risks best.

## **EASTERN EDGE SEA SALT: Diversifying Downeast**

Kelly Hinkle, known as the Downeast Cowboy by hundreds of thousands of social media followers, is a second-generation lobsterman and one of only two second-generation kelp farmers in Maine. When the small kelp processing business he runs with his father, Ronnie, lost access to their sea salt supply, they did what lobstermen do best: they adapted. This industrious father-son duo set out to make their own, launching Eastern Edge Sea Salt.

This winter, Kelly and Ronnie will sell their first batches of sea salt, cultivated from seawater sourced from a Downeast cove and evaporated in their greenhouses. With support from Island Institute, they bought a moisture meter—an essential piece of equipment for salt production—and purchased packaging to bring their Maine-made sea salt to market. By building on their deep connection to the ocean, the Hinkles are proving that innovation and tradition go hand in hand along Maine's working coast.





## MAINE OCEAN FARMS: Launching a Fully Electric Aquaculture Work Boat

In 2017, Willy Leathers and Eric Oransky joined Island Institute's Aquaculture Business Development program and went on to launch Maine Ocean Farms, an oyster farm in South Freeport, that same year.

With environmental sustainability as a top business priority, these innovative business owners partnered with Island Institute, Greater Portland Council of Governments, and others to launch Heron, one of the first fully electric aquaculture vessels in the state! At 28 feet long, the work boat is powered by dual 120-horsepower electric outboards and can carry 4,000 pounds of oysters and gear.

Using electric propulsion has significantly lowered Maine Ocean Farm's emissions and fuel costs and has created cleaner, quieter work conditions. Since 2020, Island Institute has led Maine's marine electrification movement, supporting the launch of more than two dozen electric boats.

“If you drive into Downeast Maine, the first question that probably comes to mind is, ‘What do these people do down here?’ We have to make up our own jobs. We are fishermen, but we don’t just lobster fish. We do a bunch of different jobs.”

— Ronnie Hinkle, Eastern Edge Sea Salt

● **\$115,000+**  
awarded to small marine-based businesses

● **1,146**  
community members engaged in marine economy efforts

● **60**  
marine economy projects supported

● **8**  
trainings hosted on financial management and income diversification



# Advancing Community-led **CLIMATE SOLUTIONS**

In a climate-changed world, Maine's island and coastal communities are confronting rising seas, intense storms, high energy costs, and vulnerable infrastructure—threats that touch daily life, from roads and harbors to homes and livelihoods. With decades of experience and deep staff expertise, Island Institute supports communities as they address their most pressing climate and energy challenges. Up and down the coast, communities are turning knowledge, plans, and funding into climate action.



## Exploring Nature-based Solutions

Intensifying storms and rising seas are accelerating shoreline erosion along Maine's coasts, threatening people, homes, and community infrastructure. Traditional “hard” or “gray” infrastructure—concrete seawalls, rip rap, and other human-engineered solutions—can protect shorelines but are costly and often create negative impacts on nearby areas. Many municipalities and landowners are turning to nature-based solutions, innovative approaches that use natural processes to reduce erosion while benefiting coastal ecosystems.

Island Institute staff, with support from Island Institute Fellow Lorren Ruscetta and Maine Conservation Corps Fellow Emma Polhemus, help island communities in Casco Bay explore these approaches. Through site visits, education, peer-to-peer learning, and technical resources, we're helping communities address climate challenges with the best available science and practices.



## THE CRANBERRY ISLES: Powering Locally Led Energy Solutions

Like many of Maine's communities, the Cranberry Isles face high energy costs and unreliable power. At the very end of the line, these island communities rely on an underwater cable from Mount Desert Island. For several years, Island Institute has worked with the municipality, community members, and local businesses to explore and adopt innovative energy solutions. With Island Institute's support, Cranberry Isles was accepted into a federally funded program and awarded \$50,000, along with 12 months of technical assistance from national energy experts and Island Institute. Together, this support helped the community develop a strategic energy plan by engaging residents, building consensus around priorities, developing energy models, and collaborating with the local utility. With this strong foundation in place, the community was recently selected for technical support to explore the possibility of a microgrid as a solution for long-term energy resilience.



● **\$400,000+**  
granted to 35 communities for  
climate planning over six years

● **1,100+**  
hours of community energy  
transition support

● **113**  
community members  
participated in nature-based  
solutions peer learning sessions

“ Emma (Polhemus) provided a new way of seeing and understanding the impact sea level rise is having on coastal bluffs. Her work has provided valuable insights for navigating effectively for the future. ”

— Eliza Adams, Chebeague Island Selectboard

# Increasing Critical COMMUNITY CAPACITY

In Maine's remote coastal towns, residents face big challenges with limited resources. With small populations and volunteers who contribute in countless ways, it's difficult for municipalities to advance projects to combat climate change, sustain the businesses and services that keep communities vibrant, and grow new jobs.

To meet the urgent need for increased community capacity, Island Institute provides expertise, grant funding, scholarships, and connections that help local leaders build skills, launch businesses, and advance the projects that matter most. By delivering solutions and expanding opportunities for people to live and work locally, we help communities retain their workforce, strengthen their local economy, and tackle big challenges with bold solutions.



## CADEN BLACKWOOD: Building Skills on and off the Water

Caden Blackwood of Bucksport is passionate about lobstering: the early mornings, the sunrise over the water, and the thrill of hauling traps. He fishes with *F/V Family Ties* out of Stonington and is determined to keep working on the water for years to come. To expand his skills, he set out to learn welding—a trade that complements his fishing career and creates new opportunities. With support from Island Institute, Caden purchased the equipment and materials needed to launch his welding business. Since earning his certification, he's installed a new rail on his captain's boat and built a grappling hook to help fishermen retrieve lost gear—applying his new skills to strengthen both his livelihood and his community.



[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)







## **ERIN DENT:** **Supporting a Community Planning Its Future**

Erin Dent, Island Institute Fellow in St. George, worked closely with the community to gather input, interpret data, and ensure residents' priorities shaped the town's planning. She facilitated the community-driven planning process and authored St. George's comprehensive plan, guiding the town's development over the next decade—from housing to protecting working waterfronts—while charting strategies for long-term climate resilience. Erin has helped St. George craft a plan that reflects the town's values and strengthens its ability to adapt and thrive.



**WATCH THE VIDEO**



“ We feel so lucky that we’ve had Erin working with our town, and I really wish that every community in Maine could have a fellow, every little town like ours could use this. ”

— Jane Conrad, St. George Selectboard

● **\$100,000+**  
workforce grants awarded to 82 young adults over six years

● **11,000+**  
hours of Fellows community support

● **64**  
stakeholder meetings participated in by St. George Fellow Erin Dent

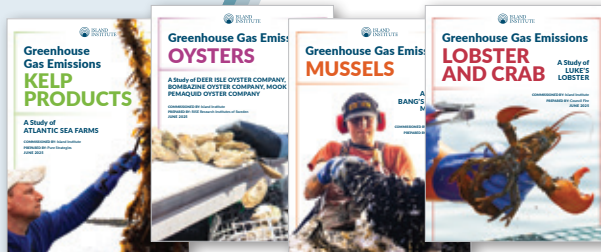
● **61**  
island students, from 15 unique communities, supported with scholarships

# Being a TRUSTED VOICE

In a time where information moves fast and facts can feel uncertain, access to timely and trusted information has never been more important. Drawing on deep relationships with industry, policy, and community partners—and with staff on the ground in coastal towns and islands—Island Institute provides insight and analysis to help communities navigate change. Through our publications, webinars, reports, storytelling, and science translation, we connect people with the knowledge they need to adapt, collaborate, and lead through uncertainty.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Mussel farming, processing, and distribution produces 30% fewer emissions than tofu and 97% fewer than beef per gram of protein, according to a new greenhouse gas assessment of Maine seafood commissioned by Island Institute.



## Bringing Big Ideas to the Big Screen

Island Institute's seventh installment of the Climate of Change film series, *Aquaculture for People and Planet*, reached more than 500 attendees across Maine, from Freeport to Mount Desert Island. The short film features findings from Island Institute's new greenhouse gas assessments of Maine's lobster, kelp, mussel, and oyster supply chains. These reports and accompanying film identified opportunities for seafood businesses to reduce emissions and increase their bottom-line. To inspire action that strengthens Maine's coast, we use storytelling to spark curiosity, create connections, and share knowledge.



**WATCH THE VIDEO**



## Rapidly Responding for Fishing Communities

With tariff announcements looming, Island Institute hosted a timely webinar the day after key U.S. trade measures were announced, drawing nearly 300 industry members, community leaders, and stakeholders. The panel featured industry experts—including Luke’s Lobster CEO Luke Holden, State Economist Amanda Rector, and trade strategist Eric Miller—who discussed how potential tariffs could impact Maine’s lobster economy, from trade and processing to local communities. The conversation highlighted the global integration of Maine and Canada’s lobster industries, economic vulnerabilities, and the resilience built into Maine’s fishing communities. As a trusted source of information, Island Institute helps coastal communities navigate complex issues and make informed decisions that sustain their livelihoods.



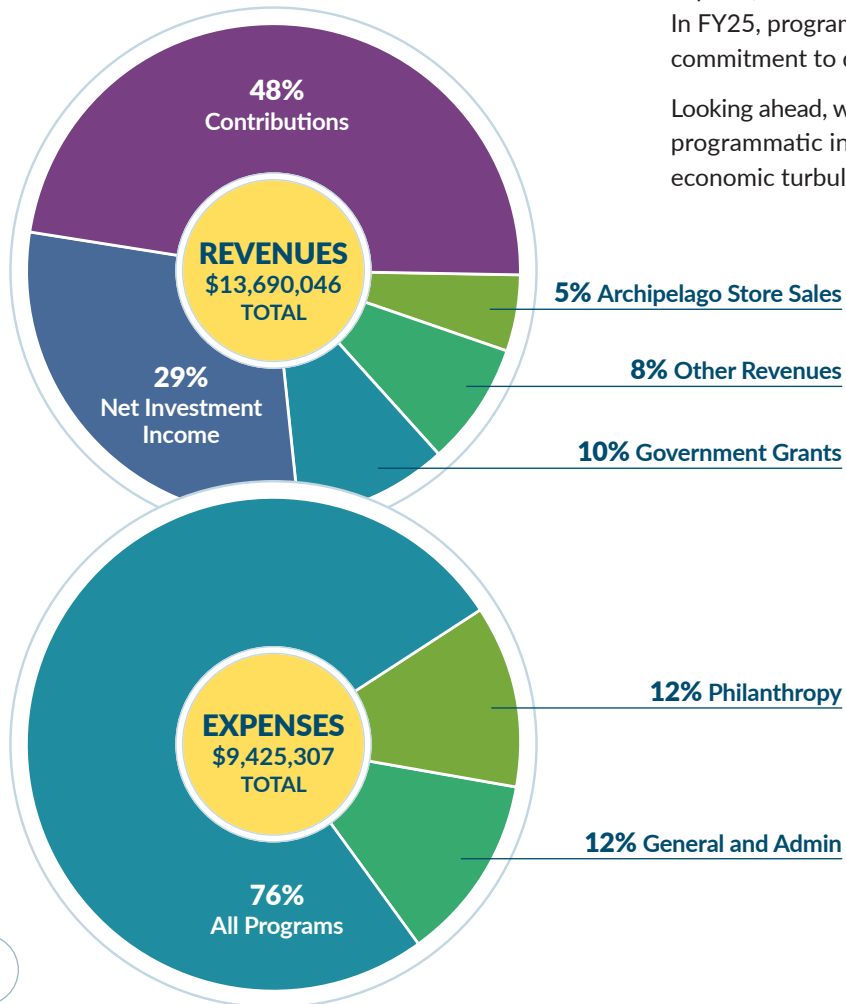
- **280,000**  
copies of *The Working Waterfront* newspaper distributed
- **47,000+**  
clicks on *The Working Waterfront* e-weekly newsletters
- **500+**  
attended *Climate of Change: Aquaculture for People and Planet* film screenings
- **41**  
years of archived *Island Journal* publications made available online

“ Thank you so much for this great presentation! I learned so much and will continue to enjoy this and other topics in the Island Institute newsletter. We need this organization more now than ever. ”

— Lobster Tariffs Webinar Attendee

# Financials

For more information, please contact Peter King, Chief Financial Officer, at [pkking@islandinstitute.org](mailto:pkking@islandinstitute.org) or (207) 578-7987.

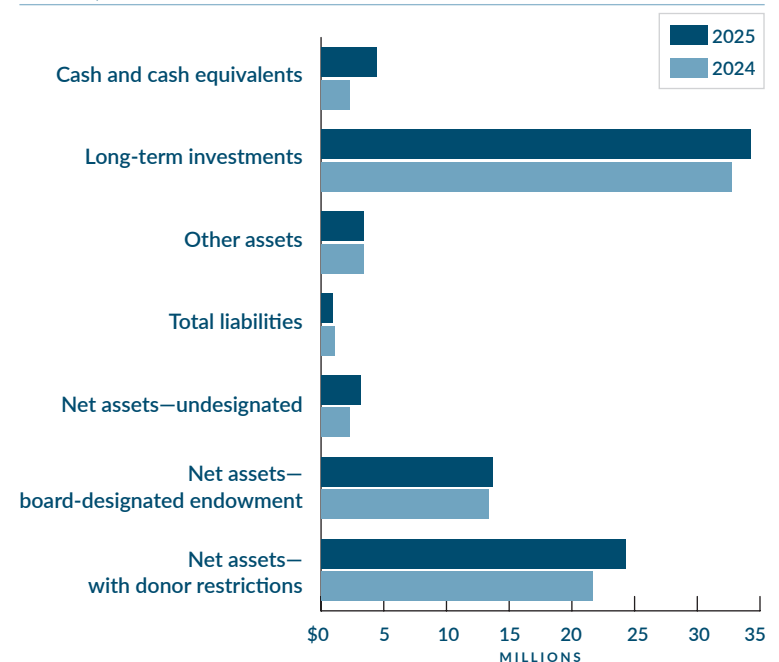


Island Institute's fiscal year 2025 (FY25) results reflect an organization in strong financial health, sustained by the generosity of our donors and the careful management of organizational investments. Long-term investments comprise approximately 81% of the Institute's total net assets and grew by 11% in value during FY25. This growth, coupled with strong philanthropic revenues, provides essential support for our programmatic efforts.

Our balance sheet remains resilient, with no organizational debt and multiple financial reserves in place, including board-designated funds, a contingency fund, and operating cash reserves. In FY25, programmatic work accounted for 76% of total expenditures, underscoring our commitment to directing resources toward impact.

Looking ahead, we are confident that continued fiscal discipline, strong fundraising, and meaningful programmatic investments will ensure Island Institute remains well-positioned to navigate economic turbulence and create lasting impact along Maine's coast for many years to come.

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION JUNE 30, 2025 AND 2024





## Donors Empower Our Work with Maine's Island and Coastal Communities.

Island Institute is grateful to the donors and grantmakers whose support enables us to deliver the impact outlined in this report. Your generosity allows us to mobilize resources, build partnerships, and create lasting solutions to the challenges faced by Maine's island and coastal communities. Thank you!

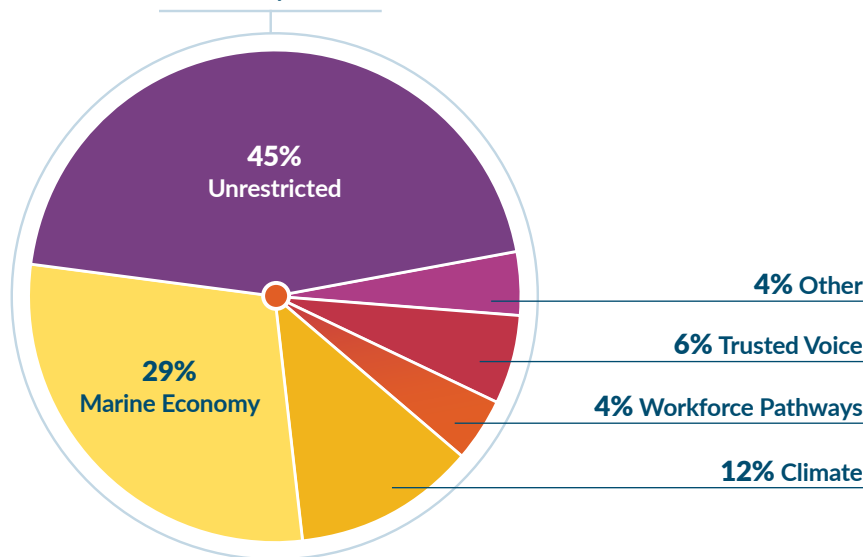
The top funds supported by donors in FY25 reflect our continued work at the intersection of climate change and the coastal economy. Unrestricted support remained a critical source of funding for Island Institute's operations and ability to respond quickly to community needs. New this year, the Trusted Voice Initiative was introduced to support science communication and storytelling, reinforcing Island Institute's important role as a resource for understanding the complex issues facing Maine's island and coastal communities.

# The Impact of Philanthropy

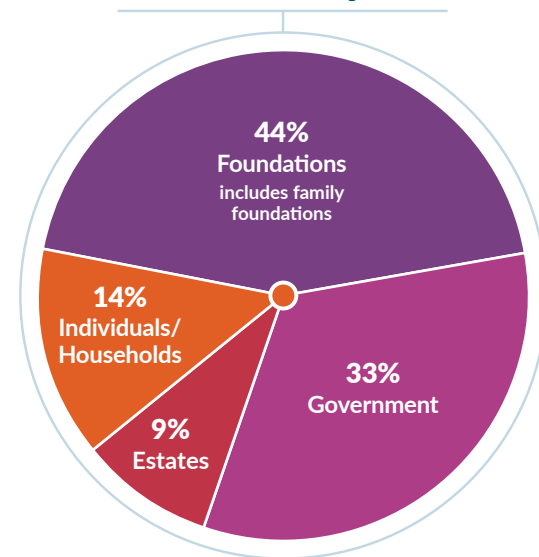
To learn about specific philanthropic priorities and explore ways you can make a meaningful impact, reach out to our Philanthropy team at [membership@islandinstitute.org](mailto:membership@islandinstitute.org) or (207) 747-1180.

**GIVE TODAY!**

**TOP FUNDS**  
*as directed by the donor*



**SOURCES OF FUNDS**  
*Sum of Gifts as Percentage of Total*





Hear from Maine Ocean Farms' Willy Leathers as he puts one of Maine's first fully electric aquaculture boats to work on his oyster farm in Freeport.



[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)



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