

## Community Priority

# Climate Action and Sustainability

Together we protect the place we call home.

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As proud Rhode Islanders, we strive to mitigate the impacts of climate change and develop real resilience, especially within communities deeply and disproportionately affected by environmental pollution.

Through deep engagement and discussion with the public, collaboration with our partners, research, and data analysis, we identified a set of community priorities that are essential for a thriving Rhode Island - **Civic and Cultural Life, Climate Action and Sustainability, Education and Student Success, Healthy and Strong Communities, and Housing and Economic Mobility.**

These priorities were consistently voiced by the community we serve and will guide our efforts in the years ahead. As the state's community foundation, we will continue to address Rhode Island's most pressing needs and advance promising solutions, with an eye for equity and a heart for all.

With a challenge of this magnitude, Rhode Islanders must work together to turn the tide and protect the places we love. Our state's unique susceptibility to climate change requires coordinated attention.

## Focus areas

- Supporting implementation of policies and community-based strategies that strengthen climate resiliency and adaptability, particularly for historically under-resourced and environmental justice communities.
- Stewarding the natural environment and improving access to local green and open space, especially in environmental justice communities.
- Supporting circular food systems and improving food sustainability, including a focus on creating networks to connect local producers and consumers.
- Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on climate action and sustainability - particularly those that address inequities and/or advance solutions across multiple community priorities.

# Case Studies

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## Rhode Island School Recycling Projects

The Rhode Island School Recycling Project (RISRP) helps schools reduce food waste and build sustainable practices through its Get Food Smart program. The initiative teaches students to effectively sort lunchroom waste, divert organics for composting, recycle materials, and recover healthy food for donation. By implementing proven best recycling practices, students develop new habits around food waste, sustainable behaviors that reduce what schools send to landfills.

The work addresses a critical environmental challenge: more than 40% of Rhode Island's unused food ends up in landfills, where it creates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Food waste is the top single material in the state's waste stream, and Rhode Island's central landfill is anticipated to reach capacity by 2046. Reducing food waste ranks among the most impactful climate solutions available today.

Through hands-on participation in the program, students develop environmental awareness creating habits that extend beyond the cafeteria and become advocates for waste reduction in their schools and communities. In 2024, the Rhode Island Foundation awarded a \$10,000 capacity building grant to RISRP to strengthen program sustainability. Most recently, in 2025, a collaborative effort brought \$750,000 in support to RISRP. The Foundation contributed \$500,000, including \$250,000 through its Catalyst Grant program, with a portion of the Foundation's contribution funded by a grant from the EverHope Foundation. 11th Hour Racing, a Newport-based organization dedicated to addressing the climate crisis and protecting ocean health, added \$250,000. Together, these investments underscore Rhode Island's commitment to tackling food waste and climate challenges.

## Movement Education Outdoors

Movement Education Outdoors (MEO) empowers Black, Brown, and low-income youth in Rhode Island to connect with the land and communities they call home. Founded in 2018, the organization guides young people in developing leadership skills for transformative change toward environment and racial justice through land and water-based learning experiences that center the knowledge, joy, and liberation of people of color.

MEO provides multiple access points for youth of color and those with limited economic resources to experience wellness in outdoor environments. Activities include hiking, kayaking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, water and air quality testing, and mindfulness and movement practices. Through place-based education, both youth and practitioners build connections to their environment while developing tools to heal, adapt, and lead in the face of environmental and social change.

Rhode Island Foundation funding assists MEO in providing experiential training and peer support for a cohort of frontline youth workers, practitioners, and outdoor educators. Through this program, participants gain frameworks, tools, and networks to shift power dynamics with young people and create culturally affirming, community-driven learning environments. Each participant will develop a personalized Plan for Change to extend their impact across Providence, Pawtucket, West Warwick, Central Falls, South Kingstown, and the East Bay.