Climate Jobs RI—a labor/environment coalition committed to an equitable green economy

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The Rhode Island Foundation is a proactive community and philanthropic leader dedicated to meeting the needs of the people of Rhode Island.
The Equity Leadership Initiative at the Rhode Island Foundation aims to inspire a deeper commitment to social justice and racial equity in Rhode Island by working with existing leaders of color on their journey—cultivating and mentoring individuals who identify as Black, Hispanic or Latino, Indigenous, Asian, and multiracial from across sectors to build a pipeline of leaders of color.

In August, we celebrated the graduation of the program’s second cohort at the Aldrich Mansion in Warwick.
October, 2023

How exciting—this is my first issue of Rhode Island Foundation’s twice-yearly magazine. Before taking the helm here, I always enjoyed reading the stories that demonstrate time and again, the Foundation’s unique ability to provide funding, leadership, and support to Rhode Islanders.

In this Fall 2023 issue, we see Rhode Islanders stepping up to the new promising jobs that climate change is demanding; we hear from Peggy Warner, who has established a fund to support urban planning and community development. With our support, the New England First Amendment Coalition is strengthening local journalism, and a Providence woman is launching a film career. And we profile a prominent estate planner who is leading the way on charitable giving.

Together, we will continue the Foundation’s legacy of innovation, and bring the full force of the Foundation’s resources and advocacy to bear as we continue to build a more equitable and prosperous economy, improve health outcomes, and provide greater access to high-quality education and affordable housing. We will work to advance climate resiliency, civic leadership, and a healthy democracy, all while ensuring that diversity, equity, inclusion, and access are at the forefront of all these efforts to promote a thriving community.

We look forward to your continued partnership and support, as we continue to steward donor dollars responsibly to meet the needs of all Rhode Islanders. Feel free to reach out any time with feedback—our doors are always open.

David Cicilline, President & CEO
A challenge so big, there’s only one way to solve it: together

By Jenny Pereira, vice president of grants & community investments
“Five years ago, if you had told me environmentalists would be working with labor, I would have laughed. The fact is that we have come together and are working to build a ‘just transition’ to green energy,” says Michael Roles, policy director at Climate Jobs Rhode Island (CJRI), a broad labor/environmental coalition committed to an equitable, pro-worker, pro-climate green economy. Earlier this year, the Rhode Island Foundation supported the organization to the tune of $75,000 to help them maximize current federal funding opportunities.

Climate change is widely acknowledged as one of humanity’s greatest and most urgent challenges. Rhode Island is uniquely positioned as a state to lead on these issues—in 2019, it had the lowest energy consumption per capita across all the United States. As a small state, Rhode Island can be innovative and nimble at implementing approaches to reverse climate change and inequality.

In June 2022, Governor Dan McKee signed legislation requiring the state’s electricity use to be completely offset by renewables by 2033. The electric infrastructure in the US was built to bring energy from where fossil fuels are burned to where the power will be used. Renewable, zero-carbon sources of energy, especially wind and solar energy, are replacing fossil fuels, which will require a new transmission and energy delivery grid.

Experts agree that we are nowhere near having sufficient human capital with green talent, skills, or jobs to reach desirable climate targets. Union apprenticeship programs have waiting lists, high school career and technical programs have been neglected in favor of the college track, and community colleges are facing budget cuts.

In partnership with the Worker Institute at Cornell University, Climate Jobs Rhode Island has compiled a report that takes
a comprehensive approach to limiting carbon emissions. It contains recommendations on retrofits, public transportation, renewable energy, and climate resilience: “Building a Just Transition for a Resilient Future: A Climate Jobs Program for Rhode Island.”

“Rhode Island has the potential to be the first state in the country to fully decarbonize and build out a net-zero economy with high-quality union jobs,” says Lara Skinner, Director, Labor Leading on Climate Initiative at the Worker Institute at Cornell.

The report lays out wide-ranging policy recommendations to transition the Ocean State’s building, school, energy, and transportation sectors to renewable energy with the most robust labor and equity standards. But it will require a sizable workforce to construct new power plants and transmission lines, modernize older buildings, and plan and deliver more resilient communities. Core provisions of the plan include decarbonizing the state’s K-12 public school buildings, installing 900 MW of solar energy statewide and 1300 MW of offshore wind energy, and modernizing the state’s electrical grid by 2030.

“The transformation includes investing in individual workers to manage these projects, where new tasks, skills, and competencies are needed,” says Patrick Crowley, Co-Chair, CJRI and Secretary-Treasurer, Rhode Island AFL-CIO. “The transition to a green economy must offer durable and growing career pathways while it cleans the air.

“There are many very smart people working in this space,” says Crowley. “We didn’t have a template for doing this. Instead, we trusted people and said, ‘I don’t know anything about this issue. Can you help?’ There was no turf to protect, no preconceived notions. We had listening sessions. Environmental people are teaching us what resilience really means and we are telling them about prevailing wages and labor agreements.”

While the federal government has been and will continue to play a significant role in addressing climate change challenges, the bulk of the actual ‘green on the ground’ work will fall to states and cities. Training the next generation of green workers hinges on intentional, proactive local leadership. The onus is on local leaders to identify various sectors in need of talent and to collaborate with other institutional partners such as colleges, community-based organizations, and other groups essential to engaging new workers, training them, and providing supportive services.

“Climate Jobs Rhode Island has been bringing together the stakeholders—the state, cities, and towns—and they have been very responsive,” says Michael Roles. “We’ve been leveraging the strength of the Coalition, which is 100% bought in. When we run into brick walls, we find ways around them, using the political leverage of the environmental and labor movements.”

“When you are using union labor, the job is going to be done on time, and it’s going to be on budget,” says Crowley. “Could you do this without labor? Maybe, but I don’t think so.

“The whole premise is that we cannot wait to do this. We have an existential interest in making this happen. This is an opportunity to eliminate carbon emissions, increase equity, and create high-quality jobs to make Rhode Island’s economy stronger, fairer, and more inclusive.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Providence, Jenny grew to love the natural world and urban greenspaces like neighborhood parks. She received a B.A. in International Service and Economics at American University in Washington, D.C., and later earned an M.A. in Marine Affairs at the University of Rhode Island.

As part of her graduate studies, she conducted research in Ecuador, exploring the social impacts of shrimp aquaculture on coastal households and communities.

Jenny went on to serve as a project coordinator with the Clean Water Trust in D.C., working with boaters and fishermen on environmental issues and promoting practices that protect the marine environment.

Five years later, she returned to her home state of Rhode Island and became the first executive director of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council in Providence, where she helped facilitate the development of the bike path, revitalize parks and green spaces, and clean up the Woonasquatucket, one of the country’s “American Heritage Rivers.” Her first grant was from the Rhode Island Foundation.

Jenny Pereira joined the Foundation in 2008 as a grant officer focused on environmental issues. The Wakefield resident now manages the Foundation’s discretionary and sector grants programs as well as its staff and budget. Although her organizational responsibilities have broadened, Jenny remains a stalwart advocate for the environment.
REVOLUTION WIND
Rhode Island and Connecticut’s first utility-scale offshore wind farm will create thousands of direct and indirect jobs, as well as permanent operations and maintenance jobs across both states. Once complete, the 704-megawatt Revolution Wind will deliver 400 megawatts of clean, affordable offshore wind power to Rhode Island and 304 megawatts of the same to Connecticut, powering more than 350,000 homes across the two states and helping the states reach their climate goals.

The Danish company Ørsted has constructed a foundation component manufacturing facility at ProvPort; has partnered with two Rhode Island shipyards to build five crew-transfer vessels; has signed offshore wind helicopter agreement for new crew helicopters, including a $1.8 million investment in Quonset State Airport; and has invested $1 million in a training partnership with Community College of RI, RI Department of Labor & Training, RI Commerce, RI Building & Construction Trades Council, and Building Futures. The project is expected to be operational in 2025.
Their talent made our world more beautiful—their gift will keep it going

By Daniel Kertzner, senior philanthropic advisor
Peggy Warner is putting the finishing touches on her “new” studio—she has converted the Icehouse on the Farm in Exeter, where she lived for 32 years with her renowned architect husband, Bill Warner* until he died in 2012.

“C’est fini!” she recently wrote to a friend. “I finished the restoration of the Icehouse, which was moved from its location on the mill pond to the hayfield in 2004 to build a basement under the footprint for our new house. We loved the proportions and the location so much that we poured a foundation and left it at the northern edge of the western hayfield. It was filled to the brim with ‘thangs’ for 16 years, pieces of interiors, and office furniture from 10 buildings we had renovated on the farm. In 2020, I had a carpenter raise the roof six inches in the middle of the ridge. I started replacing the red cedar shingles and windows in 2021, and this year, the interior was designed by me and built by my carpenter. It is a three-season art studio for me. No heat or AC, no plumbing. Just a source of well water and a sink for watercolor boards and coffee. I only bought wood and labor and paint, new lamps and pendants. Everything else I had repurposed from my house and the office. The electrician and carpenter packed their equipment and rolled down the drive, finished June 30. Will be sending photos shortly. Probably one at a time..."

Needing something to go forward with after Bill died, she decided to return to her own art roots. As a young artist, Peggy spent the first six months after graduating from the University of Illinois as an art teacher and decided she didn’t like teaching art.

She made her way to Princeton, NJ, spent a summer there running an art gallery, then sold her watercolors, making a living for four years selling them at art festivals in the region, a co-op, and even had a one-woman show in Princeton.

Peggy also had experience as a theater set painter, which brought her to Providence. During her summers in college, she had worked with Bob Soule—a friend, mentor, and resident set designer at Trinity Rep—in summer stock theater in Illinois.

“He said he needed someone in Providence right away. ‘Can you come and be here in one week?’ I took the leap, getting older, single, sublet my apartment in Princeton, and moved to Providence.” She worked with Soule, Eugene Lee, and Adrian Hall for four years painting sets for Trinity and spent all her time at the theater, which is where Bill came into the picture.

“We were working on Night of the Iguana by Tennessee Williams. He asked me out to dinner, and I moved to the farm a month later—we just fit.”

A year later, wearing a red dress, she married him on the State House steps under the words ‘a lively experiment.’

“I had no time for my own painting anymore, basically worked closely with Bill full time for the architecture firm.” She was just 30 when they met and worked with him until he closed the office in 2011. “Since he died, I have been organizing 52 years’ worth of papers and drawings and models.”

And last year, Peggy established the William D. and Margaret H. Warner Legacy Fund at the Foundation, leaving a bequest to support organizations engaged in urban planning or community development. “I want the community to benefit from our work in urban design.”

A few of Peggy’s early watercolors are displayed in her new studio. A grouping of antique farm tools hangs from one wall next to an old barn door. The wood inside is original. A paint room with a custom-built curtain system for encircling her and the canvas so she’s free to throw and splatter the paint. A staircase and a loft stabilize the entire building. Boxes and boxes of old paint tubes. “I don’t know if they’re good anymore. Will the tubes burst when I squeeze them?”

“I don’t even know where I’m going with my painting. I’m not going to show it to anyone. No deadlines, no TV, no phone. I think this space is special—it gives me hope that I can do something worthwhile here.”

* William D. Warner (1929-2012): Warner’s enduring legacy is Providence’s River Relocation and Waterplace Park Project, for which he received the 1997 Presidential Design Achievement Award from Bill Clinton. He was also responsible for the I-Way Bridge across the Providence River, the Rt. 195 Relocation Project, redesigning the Manchester Street Station power plant, the redesign of India Point Park, and his first big job in the city, in 1959, heading the Providence Preservation Society’s study that resulted in the restoration of College Hill.
The unassuming expert—Kristin Matsko, Esq.

By Bridget Baratta, vice president of development

A law colleague once said Kristin Matsko “takes pride in her profession and is a compassionate advocate for her clients.”

The rising star in trusts and estates law, particularly elder law, is also beyond humble.

“I have been lucky to fall into a lot of opportunities,” said Matsko, who was raised in Pennsylvania and has called Rhode Island home for nearly 20 years. “I think I have just been in the right place at the right time.”

She is co-chair of Adler, Pollock & Sheehan P.C.’s Trust & Estates Group and, among other honors, was named a Rhode Island Super Lawyers “Rising Star” in elder law from 2016 to 2022. She is also co-chair of the Rhode Island Bar Association’s Probate & Trust Committee, responsible for making legislation, practice, and procedure recommendations to improve this area of law.

The Roger Williams University School of Law (RWU Law) graduate is also in her ninth year on the Board of Directors of Meals on Wheels of RI, Inc. and is a Lifespan Planned Giving Advisory Council member. In addition, she is one of the newest members, having started at the beginning of 2023, of the Rhode Island Foundation’s diverse Professional Advisory Council that helps the Foundation with its charitable giving, endowment planning, and any other insight and counsel it may need.

“I think it is so nice that we have somewhere like the Rhode Island Foundation that’s able to handle the mechanics of [charitable administration] because to attempt to set up a charity alone is hard,” she said. “The Foundation has just a wealth of knowledge, and having all the resources in one place is invaluable.”

“Getting to know families deeper is really fulfilling. I don’t know anything about criminal property. I don’t know anything about intellectual law. It is a very narrow niche. I gravitated toward elder law because I like working with older people, so I do a lot of Medicaid planning, which can be hard and leave families feeling overwhelmed. I just want to help.”
Fake news allegations are rampant, politicians and candidates hire lawyers to kill damaging stories before they are published, and newsrooms often lack the bandwidth or money to give their reporters professional development beyond on-the-job, sink-or-swim training. Access to trustworthy and reliable sources of local news is essential to a functioning democracy.

The New England First Amendment Coalition (NEFAC) helps reporters know their rights while accomplishing its mission to advance understanding of the First Amendment, freedom of speech, and others. While it helps reporters from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, the Rhode Island Foundation’s Civic Leadership Fund dollars specifically assist reporters in our Ocean State.

“We have a fairly long history with the Rhode Island Foundation, and that support really has been critical,” NEFAC Executive Director Justin Silverman said. “The Foundation’s help has a direct and profound impact on journalism.”

With the $20,000 the Foundation gave NEFAC last year, for example, the money supported six of NEFAC’s programs, including its freedom of information tutorials, three-day intensive First Amendment investigative fellowship that one participant called “a game changer,” and local programming and events like “How to be Literate Citizens” that was held at the University of Rhode Island. The money also helped pay for a pilot newsroom certification and onboarding program that armed seven seasoned and new reporters with more knowledge about defamation, libel, privacy, and the critical Open Meetings Law that has changed since COVID.

Silverman said there is a genuine “eagerness to learn” from journalists, and “overall, we want to make sure newsrooms have these tools at their disposal.”

Rhode Island Monthly Magazine’s Associate Editor Lauren Clem was first a NEFAC First Amendment fellow, so when she heard about its mentorship program, Clem said she “jumped at the chance to continue furthering” her journalism skills.

When she applied, she had just left reporting at a weekly local newspaper and started her current position at RI Monthly.

“I wanted to continue using my reporting and investigative skills in this new role, but I was having trouble figuring out how to adapt them to the longer, narrative features now that I write for the magazine,” she said.

She chose longtime, award-winning investigative Providence Journal alum Mike Stanton as her mentor and said Stanton was “a great fit because he’s not only been known for his investigative work in Rhode Island, but also produced a lot of longer-format, narrative-style writing and even combined the two, as in his work on Buddy Cianci.”

Silverman said the six-month program is different from other journalism mentorship programs because the objectives of the pair are set by the mentee’s needs, and the mentee picks their mentor from NEFAC’s growing list of mentors, depending on availability.

He described Clem as “bright, talented, and eager to learn and better herself as a journalist.”

The Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and author said the two met monthly over coffee as she gave her advice and suggestions.
formal program at the Projo where experienced reporters were assigned to mentor young reporters. Today, with smaller newsrooms, a 24-7 work culture heightened by the Internet, and more people working from home since the pandemic, younger reporters can feel more isolated and not have those opportunities.”

Clem said Stanton weighed in on several of her pieces and was one of the few people outside the magazine who gave her feedback prior to publishing the monthly feature profiling the most powerful individuals in Rhode Island this past April. Her biggest lessons from Stanton were to let ideas flow organically and find sources even if they were not the ones you expected initially. She also said she “just enjoyed hearing about his work and watching the trajectory his career has taken.”

When asked if she would recommend the program to others, Clem said, “Yes, absolutely. There’s nothing to be lost from working with a mentor and it’s always eye-opening to see your work through someone else’s perspective.”

She continued, “In Rhode Island, I think we have a very tight-knit, supportive journalism community, which is wonderful, but it also means you’re constantly trying to hide some scoop or angle from the very people you respect and interact with all the time online. A program like this takes things out of that competitive environment where you can just sit and talk with another journalist whose work you admire.”

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

Ocean State Stories

Last summer, the Rhode Island Foundation committed $87,500 to a project at the Pell Center at Salve Regina University to revitalize long-form journalism in Rhode Island. Along with support from other philanthropists, Ocean State Stories (OSS) was launched in February 2023 with G. Wayne Miller, an award-winning journalist with decades of experience reporting on Rhode Island and its citizens at the helm.

Their Goals:

• to publish stories that matter to Rhode Islanders
• to develop a diverse network of freelance journalists to help nurture the next generation of reporters
• to cultivate an audience of readers of long-form journalism

OceanStateStories.org launched on Feb. 7 with the first of a two-part series on food insecurity and a Q&A with Paige Clausius-Parks, executive director of Rhode Island Kids Count. Since then, Ocean State Stories has published a story and Q&A every week—ranging from behavioral health to domestic violence, from antisemitism to book censorship.

From the first week of publication, OSS’s reach has been broadened by publication in print partners: The Warwick Beacon, Cranston Herald, and Johnston SunRise, which circulate in the state’s second-, third-, and 12th largest municipalities, respectively. More recently, new print partners have been added.

All of Ocean State Stories’ content is published in Spanish and English. A growing roster of freelance writers—established journalists and college students on a journalism track—has already brought distinguished reporting to the site.
When you search famous quotes from iconic filmmaker Spike Lee, a man who helps define Black culture in America and provokes discussion on the country’s widespread prejudice and racism, several of his sayings reveal the kind of person and director his teaching assistant Manya Glassman is becoming.

“All directors are storytellers, so the motivation was to tell the story I wanted to tell. That’s what I love.”

“I believe in destiny. But I also believe that you can’t just sit back and let destiny happen. A lot of times, an opportunity might fall into your lap, but you have to be ready for that opportunity. You can’t sit there waiting for it. A lot of times, you are going to have to get out there and make it happen.”

“I’m just trying to tell a good story and make thought-provoking, entertaining films. I just try and draw upon the great culture we have as people, from music, novels, the streets.”

At just 26, Providence born and raised, Glassman has already produced more than 11 short films for students all over the world and has directed, edited, and written six of her own. Her works are thought-provoking visual storytelling, such as her first that asked strangers in Boston who they love and why. Sometimes, they are poetic, but they are always driven by people—their behaviors, experiences, and what’s meaningful to them.

Not only has she been Lee’s assistant for the last four semesters, but the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) candidate at New York University’s (NYU) Tisch School for the Arts is also a recipient of the Spike Lee Film Production and Sandra Ifraimova Funds grant to help pay for her latest script, How I Learned to Die. It is a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story about a 15-year-old girl who finds out she has a 60 percent chance of dying in four days. In real life, Glassman learned during her first year of high school at the Moses Brown School that she had a benign cyst in her third vertebrae, and 18 surgeries later, she is living life to her fullest with the aid of a titanium brace that is fused to part of her spine.

Glassman also won New England Best Director for Acquiescence in 2022 and audience pick for Sofia’s Tapestry in 2021 at the Flickers’ Rhode Island International Film Festival. In addition to those successes, Glassman was picked for a fellowship and two scholarships, including the Antonio Cirino Memorial Scholarship from the Rhode Island Foundation, which is given to Rhode Island graduate students in arts education or the arts with an intention to teach. The $12,000 a year scholarship, said Glassman, is a chief reason she can afford graduate school.

“How I Learned to Die”

“I always say two of the best days of my life were getting into NYU and then when I got a job with Spike Lee,” said Glassman, who received her bachelor’s degree from Providence College. “And it is all thanks to the Rhode Island Foundation because they are partly why I am at NYU, which led me to Professor Lee.”

Among the many lessons from her professor, Manya learned to be punctual—Lee is always early—as well as to have a consistent writing schedule, validate your own work rather than seeking external approval, be humble, give back, and pursue what you love most to do. She says he is the “most impressive person in the world,” mainly because of how much he pours into his students despite how busy he is.

“The [Cirino scholarship] is about being an educator and also a creative, and I like how he wants to do both as well, and I want to also,” Glassman said. “It’s nice to give back to where you come from, and he’s so successful now, and it started at NYU, and he acknowledges that.”

Glassman’s love of movies started with her parents. Her father, Gary Glassman, is a documentary filmmaker whose company, Providence Pictures, produces films for PBS, Discovery Channel, History Channel, BBC, and other networks. Her mother, Joan Branham, is an art history professor and Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences at Providence College. Glassman said the family watched movies nightly, and her mother would stop during multiple scenes to discuss the light, shadows, and imagery. She said that was how her family connected and showed love. Young Glassman then started making fun music videos with friends.

“I have been blessed,” she said in reflection. “My parents supported anything I wanted to do, and then one day, I just realized, I guess I am doing film because that’s how I love and connect. Meaning for me is being connected—to someone else, to Earth, and to myself.”

She continued, “We’re all connected in some way.”
“I always say two of the best days of my life were getting into NYU and then when I got a job with Spike Lee, and it is all thanks to the Rhode Island Foundation because they are partly why I am at NYU, which led me to Professor Lee.”
The 1916 Society at the Rhode Island Foundation

How do you repay a place and keep it strong? By leaving your own legacy for people who may never meet you, in the place you called home.

Rhode Islanders who name the Foundation in their estate plans or establish deferred gifts become members of the 1916 Society. You can name the Foundation in your will or trust, make it the full or partial beneficiary of an insurance policy or retirement plan, or make a deferred gift. Generous Rhode Islanders who have done exactly that gathered at the Hope Club this past June.

Setting up a legacy gift is simple and deeply satisfying. Our experienced staff can work with you to support your favorite organizations or causes forever. To learn more, contact Kelly Riley, Stewardship & Cultivation Officer, at (401) 427-4028, or send her an email at kriley@rifoundation.org

Lead. We have earned the trust of our donors, community leaders, and Rhode Islanders through a century of effective investments, strategic grants, and responsible decisions.

Transform. We align our fundraising, grantmaking, and leadership to inspire and engage Rhode Islanders to address today’s challenges and create lasting improvements in our community.

Inspire. We challenge and encourage Rhode Islanders to become active and involved in the community, to form meaningful partnerships, and to work together for the good of Rhode Island.