

NICE THINGS *for* RHODE ISLAND

A Playbook for Governing Rhode Island to Prosperity



The Economic
Progress Institute

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INFORM • ADVOCATE • TRANSFORM



Introduction

A Playbook For Prosperity

A Rhode Island...

- ...where there is an inclusive economy
- ...where there are excellent schools and multiple career paths
- ...where there is affordable, quality child care
- ...where there is affordable, accessible, quality healthcare
- ...where there is affordable, safe housing
- ...where there is reliable, readily accessible public transit
- ...where workers and business owners thrive together
- ...where, at the very least, everyone can meet their basic needs
- ...where we can prosper and thrive regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, zip code, or age
- ...where all Rhode Islanders can have nice things

Heather McGhee begins and frames her book **The Sum of Us** around the question “Why can’t we have nice things?” She explains that too many of us look at life and the world and our cities and states as zero-sum games, where there must be winners and losers. Some people are even willing to lose something so others do not win more, and so they do not have to share.

If we want to achieve the Rhode Island imagined above, we must refuse to play the zero-sum game.

Instead of adopting a defeatist attitude and convincing ourselves that we must scale back our ambitions and vision for the future of the state, we must commit to finding the resources to create the conditions for broadly shared prosperity and insist that **we can afford nice things in Rhode Island.**

That is the vision above. What follows is a playbook for how we get there.

Not a list of policies, but a rethinking of how we do government in Rhode Island. This playbook aims to change how we think about the purpose of state government and the work of legislation and administration.

This playbook should serve as a guide to how state government can build capacity and make strategic investments, creating opportunities for a more vibrant and inclusive economy.

We begin by recognizing that we already possess the resources, talent, and imagination to invest in and build prosperity.

The five plays presented here require thinking creatively, building new relationships, and expanding beyond traditional policy silos. They are approaches for advancing constructive policies and governing for a better Rhode Island.



Who is this playbook for?

If you are a **policymaker**, whether elected or appointed, or a **candidate** for office, this playbook will provide insights into how to think about designing policies and governing more broadly.

If you are in the **media**, this playbook will help provide your audiences with a tool of accountability for policymakers and help tell stories about how government can work for its people.

If you are a **community partner**, this playbook will help you connect what matters to your communities to the work of government and policymaking. It will be a useful tool as you engage with allies and policymakers in advancing specific policies that impact your communities while demanding responsiveness from the people you elect to represent you.

If you are a **Rhode Island resident**, this playbook will provide you with some new ideas of how government can work for you, how to urge your elected officials to govern better, and how you can be more involved in making change happen.



Rewrite the Narrative

Let us rewrite the story of Rhode Island into one in which everyone can thrive.

Too often, the stories we tell about the economy, workers, business, poverty, taxes, government, and opportunity reinforce negative stereotypes and mistaken notions of how the world works. They lead to policy and budget decisions that reduce opportunity while benefitting those who already have the most.

Research and data are invaluable, but they are not enough and are intentionally and continuously disregarded in some current narratives. It is not enough to present the same or better data. We need to change the conversations that shape how we structure our economy and how we prioritize families and communities.

For example, decades of data have refuted the claims that trickle-down economics and drastic tax cuts are engines of economic growth, yet the story of wealthy individuals creating jobs on their own, without help from the government or anyone else, continues to be a narrative that drives policy. This is not how the world really works.

As we rewrite the narrative for Rhode Island, it is important to write a story that acknowledges that businesses can only succeed when we have a stable economic system, including affordable child care, courts, financial institutions, and transportation networks as well as a basic research infrastructure and policies that provide businesses with appropriate financial incentives. Business owners need a system that is regulated by the government and generally funded through taxes and public spending. Their success derives, to a significant degree, from the support of family, community, and, above all, employees. This is the narrative that advocates, elected officials, and the media should hold on to as we work towards forming good policies.

Together, we need to tell new stories. Better stories. Ones that describe how the real world works while simultaneously envisioning the future we seek.

Let us start by dropping the scarcity mindset and the idea that we are playing a zero-sum game, in which only a few can win. We can replace it with a story that we, as a state, have abundant resources for education, healthcare, child care, infrastructure, and economic development. One in which we can all be winners. When we play a zero-sum game, the standard outcome is that those communities and individuals with the fewest resources and greatest historical exclusion – including Black, Latino, and Tribal communities – are those who wind up on the zero side of the game. By rejecting the scarcity mindset, we can build a multiracial democracy in which economic, educational, employment, and other disparities shrink and all Rhode Islanders can succeed.

Let us discard the failed story of trickle-down economics, which claims that the economy is only driven by the wealthy and that tax cuts favoring the wealthy will boost the economy. Let us replace it with the story that we build the economy together, in part through targeted public investments that provide the foundations for businesses to thrive.

Let us build a world where business owners prioritize their employees' well-being and ensure they're being paid a living wage while still making a decent living themselves instead of an economy that prioritizes profit at the cost of everything else and pits owners and workers in a seemingly unending opposition. Let us tell and live out a story of owners and employees playing out a win-win situation.

Let us abandon the idea that taxes are bad – and recognize that taxes are public money, our money, and that through representative democracy, we have a say in how these public monies are spent on essential and beneficial public services.

Let us abandon the narrative that improving conditions for one group requires a loss for another. Let us instead create policies that promote inclusivity and lead to societal gains that uplift everyone. Let us demonstrate that cooperation can yield better outcomes.

These are some of the new stories we should be telling, stories of a Rhode Island where everyone can thrive. Policymakers can help rewrite the narratives that frame the policies we enact and the money we spend through state government.

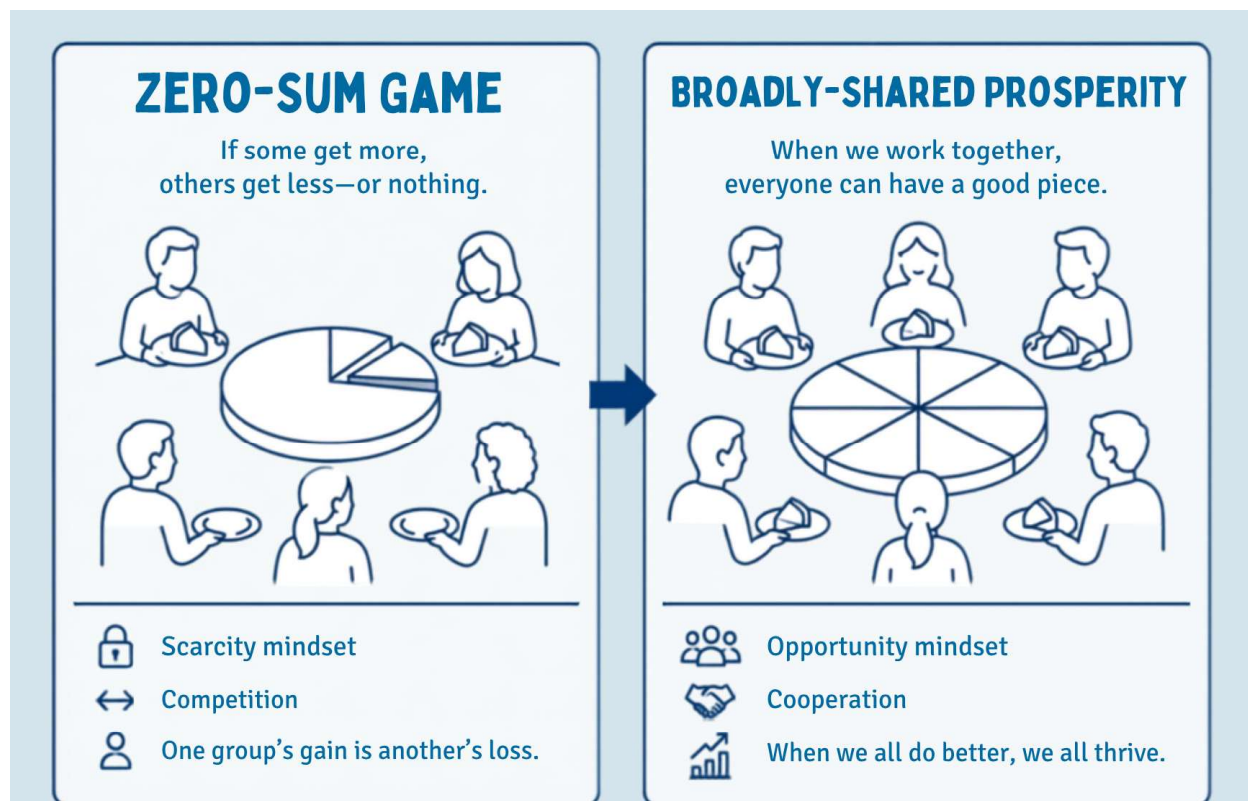


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MAKING THE PLAY



When developing policies, think about the larger narrative guiding these policies. Who shapes this narrative? Is it accurate? Does it benefit those in power the most? Is there a better, more accurate story we can tell instead? Are there facts or people being left out of this narrative?



Be inclusive in developing new narratives, by welcoming to the table new and diverse perspectives.



When advocating for policies, combine stories and data to make your case. Data is great but enhancing it with a new narrative and personal examples will really drive the point home.

2

Engage in Systems Redesign

Systems are excellent at producing what they are designed to produce, even when the results are unwelcome.

Donella H. Meadows explains in her *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* what systems are and how they change:

Hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, economic instability, unemployment, chronic disease, drug addiction, and war, for example, persist in spite of the analytical ability and technical brilliance that have been directed toward eradicating them....That is because they are intrinsically **systems problems—undesirable behaviors characteristic of the system structures that produce them**. They will yield only as we reclaim our intuition, stop casting blame, see the system as the source of its own problems, and find the courage and wisdom to restructure it. (emphasis added, p.4)

Meadows tells us that poverty and unemployment and these other phenomena are not unfortunate and negative side effects of systems, but rather are what we should expect from the systems producing them. If year after year and decade after decade, income and wealth inequality and employment and unemployment disparities increase, this is what our systems have been engineered to do, even if the intention might have been otherwise.

This also means that if the output is not what you want or expect, you need to change the system, not play around along the edges.

By understanding how systems work, including their pieces and how the pieces interact with each other, it becomes possible to change these systems into different systems and produce better outcomes.

Let us consider the public policy example of public transit and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA). Recently, a number of RIPTA routes have been cut due to a “lack of funding,” and riders have been negatively impacted. As an example, it takes some high school students over an hour just to get to school in the morning. Rhode Islanders have been forced to find other, more convenient ways to reach their destinations, and, as a result, ridership levels have decreased. Policymakers then cite decreased ridership as a reason to further cut RIPTA spending. This negative feedback loop, where routes are cut for financial reasons, resulting in greater inconvenience and lower ridership, which in turn justifies lower funding and further cuts, is detrimental to a well-functioning public transit system.

A *systems redesign* approach would look beyond current riders and routes and consider the broader goals of the system: to ensure that Rhode Islanders are connected to school, work, groceries, businesses, entertainment, community, and more. A good public transit system should make getting to all these places affordable, accessible, and timely for anyone who needs it. Instead of focusing on what already exists, one could imagine implementing systems redesign and restructuring the system to make it easier for more people to get to more places.

One might also consider how public transit intersects with other public policy domains. If the goal is to connect people with work and diminish the need for two or more cars per family, one might consider connections between housing construction and public transit, such as the value in locating new housing near RIPTA bus stops or locating new bus stops near housing. One might also want to think of how our road and highway systems are primarily designed with cars in mind and rethink this to accommodate buses, or even light rail. Instead of policymaking by program, department, or other silos, one ought to go beyond a narrow focus on transportation.

In a state where many students take public transit to school, how has RIPTA facilitated or inhibited access? Why do some students require multiple buses and have more than an hour of waiting or transit time to get to school in the morning? If this is the result the system is producing, then its design may be causing this, and redesign is warranted.

By working across silos, redesigning systems, and creating positive feedback loops, policymakers can solve more problems – many of which are, after all, connected – and enact better policy.

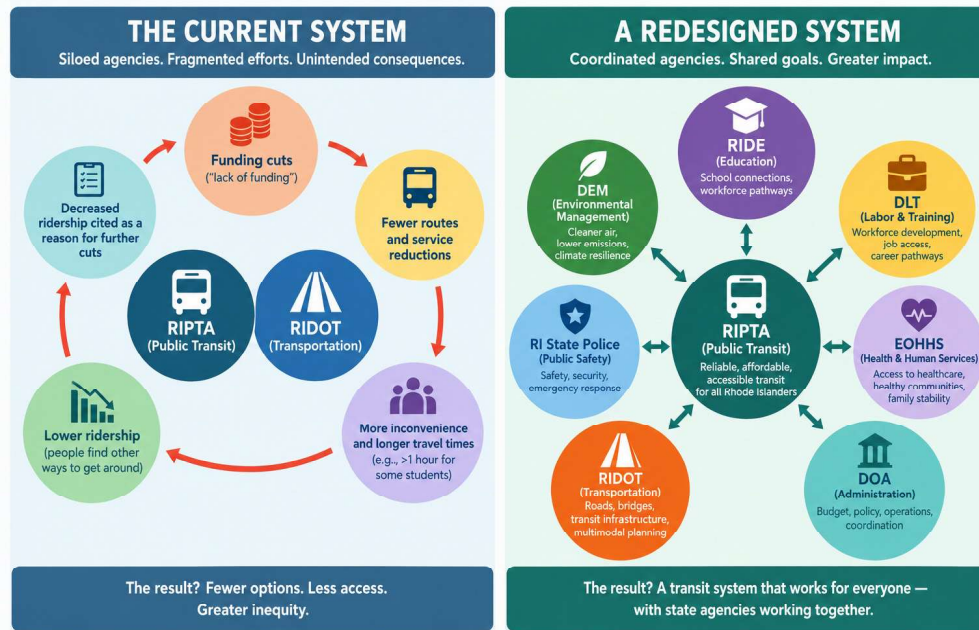


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MAKING THE PLAY



Like with the existing Rhode Island Children's Cabinet, apply a systems redesign approach to other policy areas and create cross-agency cabinets, such as Economic Development or Healthy Communities.



Appoint agency and commission heads who can work across silos to align systems and increase opportunities and solutions.



Organize RIPTA redesign and funding for a system that gets Rhode Islanders where they need to go in an affordable, convenient, and reliable manner, while recognizing the intersection of public transit with other policy and program areas, including housing, education, workforce development, environmental protection, and the needs of formerly incarcerated Rhode Islanders.



Because many systems produce racial, gender, and other disparities, employ an equity lens and produce equity impact statements to identify such disparities and the structures that produce them – and then restructure systems to reduce and eliminate disparities.



Recognize that many legislative proposals do not fit neatly into committees dedicated to individual policy areas. Hold joint committee hearings to better tackle and understand the connections. For example, a bill addressing the situation of formerly incarcerated Rhode Islanders might traditionally receive a hearing only at a judiciary committee, but it could also involve housing, education, labor, and/or transportation matters.



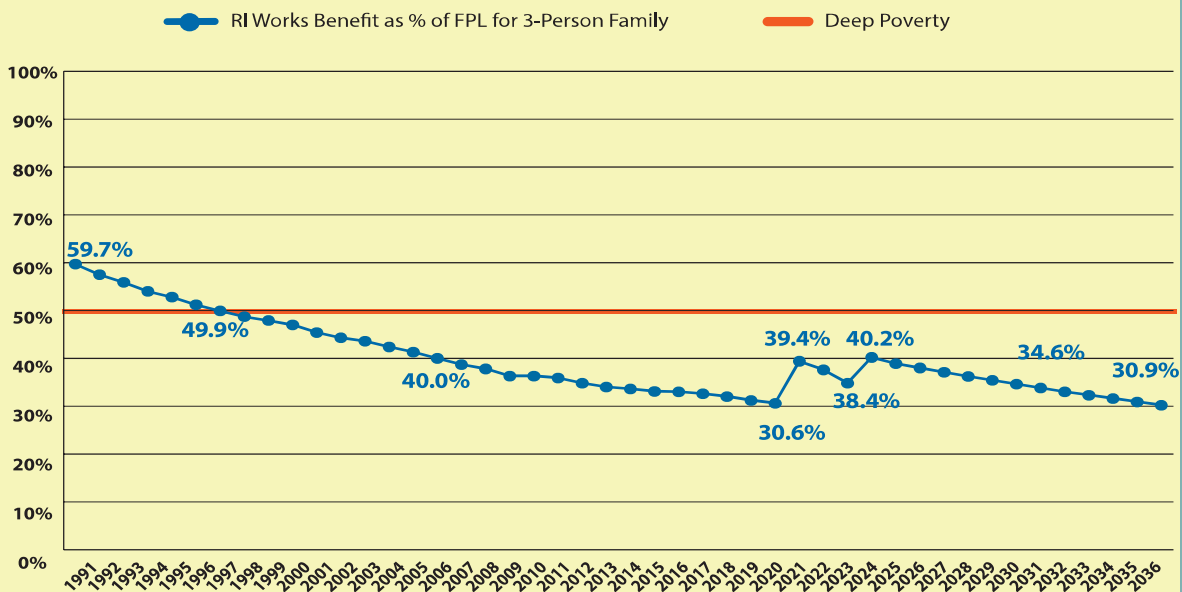
Address the Greatest Needs First

We should begin the work of governing and the budget process by addressing the greatest needs of Rhode Islanders. This contrasts with the usual approach of seeking to give everyone, every constituency, a little bit, regardless of a more strategic assessment of need.

This means identifying and quantifying basic needs and doing more to make sure all the state's residents can meet their basic needs. In understanding that basic needs are the greatest needs, the ones to be addressed first, we ought to examine, research, and incorporate the thoughts of Rhode Islanders trying to get by on the minimum wage and/or living in "deep" poverty, defined as income that is below 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, already an inadequate measure of poverty.

And this requires doing more than making minor modifications to critical programs and spacing out these modifications over several years. For example, Rhode Island Works, the state's cash assistance program for those with the lowest incomes, went *three decades* without any increase or even inflation adjustment in the monthly benefit. While policymakers have twice bumped up the benefit in recent years, they have done so without including an annual inflation adjustment. As the chart shows, the Rhode Island Works benefits fell below the deep poverty threshold in 1997 and have not gone above ever since. For a family of three, the deep poverty income level for 2026 is \$13,660 per year, or \$1,138 per month. Rhode Island Works families continue to receive an amount that leaves them in deep poverty, losing ground each year.

THE RI WORKS BENEFIT DROPPED BELOW THE DEEP POVERTY LEVEL IN 1997 AND REMAINED THERE



Sources: For 1991–2026, the percentage of the RI Works benefit as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are based upon actual benefit and FPL levels; for 2027–2036, the benefit level is assumed as unchanged, while the FPL is based upon February 2026 inflation projections as published by the Congressional Budget Office (<https://www.cbo.gov/data/budget-economic-data>).

Rhode Island's minimum wage of \$16 per hour in 2026 ranks highly across the nation, yet at \$33,280 per year before taxes, it remains too low for most full-time workers without children to make enough money to pay for rent, healthcare, food, transportation, and clothing and other basic items and services. The Economic Progress Institute's **2026 Rhode Island Standard of Need** shows that in 2025, families with children required much more than \$16 per hour to cover basic needs. A single parent with one child needed to earn \$41.99 per hour working full-time to cover basic needs.

Some say that the minimum wage was never meant to be a living wage, but how can we expect people to work challenging jobs full-time without earning enough income to house and feed themselves, to get themselves to work and to keep themselves healthy, and to make sure their children have quality care?

Government addressing the greatest needs first is not engaging in a charity effort. It is good policy. The money from cash assistance, as well as any increased wages for those with the lowest incomes, stimulates the economy, as the money typically gets reinvested quickly in the economy. Because these Rhode Island residents generally need to spend immediately what they have earned to meet their basic needs, this creates a strong multiplier effect on economic activity. Furthermore, addressing greatest needs first is usually a sound investment because it often prevents problems from becoming larger and more expensive down the road, like investing in replacing healthcare subsidies to prevent hospitals and clinics from being overwhelmed by uninsured patients.

We often consider economic security to be a goal for individuals and families, but we forget that it is also a necessary building block in creating an inclusive and thriving economy. We need to think of taxation and spending in ways that do more than make poverty a little less bad. We need to move beyond the goal of poverty reduction and instead aim for widespread prosperity. One approach worth considering would be providing some form of a guaranteed basic income, which helps give everyone a start.

We should also recognize that the concept of needs and *greatest* needs applies not only to individuals and families, but to communities as well. It requires addressing racial and other disparities in income and the capacity to meet a basic needs budget. Certain communities and neighborhoods have been historically marginalized when it comes to government spending priorities. These communities and neighborhoods have not had access to good schools, safety, employment, homeownership, or capital. When we think about the state budget addressing first the greatest needs in housing, education, labor, and business support, we ought to put these communities at the front of the line.



MAKING THE PLAY



Address the greatest needs of Rhode Islanders first, which means that everyone should be able to meet their basic needs; such efforts might include adding an annual inflation adjustment to the RI Works cash assistance program and an annual inflation adjustment to the state's minimum wage.



Consider new proposals for helping people meet their greatest needs. For example, policymakers could review pilot programs to provide a guaranteed basic income.



When drafting a budget, whether from the Office of the Governor or from the General Assembly, begin the process by identifying the greatest needs – for individuals, families, and communities – and then make sure the budget addresses them.

4

Build an Inclusive Economy

To create jobs and a prosperous economy, policymakers should focus on where people actually work, across all sectors of the economy. “Hot” sectors, such as biotech and the blue economy, tend to get most of the attention and, while these jobs often pay well, their growth is limited. We should continue to focus on high-demand jobs - such as child care, elder care, teaching, and healthcare - and investing in making those jobs desirable.

With over a half-million employed workers in Rhode Island, and the “hot” clusters together generating a couple of thousand new jobs per year at most, there is no future in which we move *most* workers to the promised, higher-paying jobs. Indeed, we need workers in every economic sector and at all levels. Valuing all workers and their contributions to the economy means paying them as valued workers. It means paying them wages that allow them to cover their basic needs.

We will fail to raise household income across the board if we keep our focus narrow. If everyone moved to the higher-paying biotech and high-tech jobs, the blue and green economy jobs, who would then take on the essential and critical jobs, including caring for children and elders, or work in the grocery and hospitality industries? If we recognize the value of all sectors and workers, we will improve the wages and working conditions of the people who care for our children and elders, and for the workers who staffed and held the frontlines during the coronavirus pandemic and were rightfully recognized as essential workers.

**Rhode Island Covered Employment and Wages
2025 Statewide Average Employment by Industry Sector
(Total Private & Government Employment = 499,281)**

Industry	Employment	Percentage
Health Care & Social Assistance	86,123	17.2%
Accommodation & Food Services	52,345	10.5%
Retail Trade	46,477	9.3%
Manufacturing	39,247	7.9%
Local Government	32,326	6.5%
Professional & Technical Services	31,171	6.2%
Administrative & Waste Services	27,650	5.5%
Finance & Insurance	25,321	5.1%
Educational Services	23,480	4.7%
Construction	22,577	4.5%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	18,006	3.6%
State Government	17,477	3.5%
Wholesale Trade	16,382	3.3%
Transportation & Warehousing	15,074	3.0%
Federal Government	11,510	2.3%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	9,785	2.0%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	8,958	1.8%
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	6,565	1.3%
Information	5,664	1.1%
Utilities	1,782	0.4%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	1,146	0.2%
Mining	154	0.0%
Unclassified	61	0.0%

vs

Employment and Job Growth for Targeted Sectors

Blue Economy	Employment
Defense	16,011
Marine trades	13,337
Fisheries & related	2,965
Aquaculture	194
Hotels & lodging (indirect)	3,999
Total	36,506

Life Sciences
Annual average increase of 305 jobs from 2015 through 2024 (11% vs 7% for all private employment)
27,279 direct jobs (2024)

Priority Clusters	Employment
Advanced Business Services	40,194
Biomedical Innovation	36,288
Defense, Shipbuilding & Maritime	19,513
IT-Software, Cyber-Physical Systems & Data Analytics	14,296
Design, Food & Custom Manufacturing	10,581
Total	120,872

Note: Fewer than half of these jobs are identified in the report as “good jobs,” in the sense that they do not provide adequate income

Note: Because employment by industry and employment by sector are two different things, there is no single dataset covering both; here we compare industry-level data with information from special reports.

Sources: Ri Department of Labor Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages; <https://dlt.ri.gov/labor-market-information/data-center/employment-wages-industry-qcew>; The Value of Rhode Island’s Blue Economy (March 2020), https://web.uri.edu/gso/wp-content/uploads/sites/916/BE-Report_2020_FINAL_edited-3-14-24-1-compressed.pdf; Rhode Island Life Science Industry Economic Impact Report (December 2025), https://a76592ab-5923-45a2-9af2-934c6c9b5643.filesusr.com/ugd/c995e5_1db39a0c84c944a8966d5de968659107.pdf; Rhode Island Innovates 2.0 (2019), <https://www.wpri.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/01/RI-Innovates-2.0-Draft-for-the-Council-2020-01-28.pdf>.

An inclusive economy also means supporting the tens of thousands of micro business owners and sole proprietors who, along with workers, serve as an engine of the state economy. Many of these business owners need to find second jobs just to afford health insurance and make ends meet. They would benefit from financial and technical assistance to scale up their businesses to make a living and possibly expand their businesses. As shown in the Economic Progress Institute's 2024 report on ***The State of Small and Micro Businesses in Rhode Island***, small and micro business owners account for close to 99 percent of all businesses and employ over half of the state's workforce. Micro businesses – those with zero to 10 employees – provided a source of income for more than 130,000 individuals.

The graphic on the previous page shows the distribution of jobs in Rhode Island by industry, on the left, with the much smaller number of jobs in high-wage sectors targeted by traditional economic development approaches, on the right. While some Life Sciences jobs do fall within hospitals and healthcare, the highest employment areas include retail, hospitality, and direct care (such as child care and elder care). Even if the jobs on the right increase at a higher rate than other jobs, the absolute number of new jobs each year is often in the hundreds – not enough to revolutionize Rhode Island's economy, which has close to a half-million jobs.

Too large an emphasis on the right side of the graphic has proven, and will continue to prove, inadequate for engaging with Rhode Island's full economic picture.

An inclusive economy approach considers all sectors of the economy, and both business owners and employees. Policymakers ought to take a comprehensive and balanced approach to sustaining and improving the entire state economy.



MAKING THE PLAY



Create a cross-agency cabinet dedicated to economic growth and mobility, and ensure that this cabinet includes a broad and diverse membership, well beyond the traditional chambers of commerce, industry associations, and even organized labor; include representatives with expertise in public transit, healthcare, child care, workforce training, and business financing; charge this cabinet with addressing not only "hot" sectors and large employers, but small and micro businesses as well, and also investments in making Rhode Island a great place to live because this is what generally attracts businesses and people.



Given the mission of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation ("to work with public, private and non-profit partners to create the conditions for businesses in all sectors to thrive and to improve the quality of life for our citizens by promoting the state's long-term economic health and prosperity"), ensure that it fulfills this mission by making clear that the Corporation's focus must include foundational economic sectors and not concentrate too narrowly on the blue economy, biotech, defense, and related industry clusters.



Increase capital grants and access to credit for micro business owners.



Build on existing efforts to support equity efforts on behalf of minority-owned, women-owned businesses, and veteran-owned businesses, as well those owned by Rhode Islanders with disabilities.



Expand Democracy

Democracy promises equal opportunity for all. Yet, that promise is incomplete without applying an equity lens.

Equity in two different, if overlapping, senses.

Equity in the sense of the absence of disparities, whether those disparities are based upon race, ethnicity, gender, income, neighborhood, disability, age, or other factors. If some people have greater access to the ballot box and voting rights, democracy remains incomplete. If those individuals or corporations with the most money capture the greatest access to elected officials, democracy remains incomplete.

Equity also in the sense of having a stake in something. We talk about people who own stocks as holding equity in a business. Using this metaphor, we can see that some people possess greater equity, a greater stake, in democratic institutions, in being able to access them, while others possess little access, or at least experience the world this way. If many people do not hold equity or feel like they hold equity in our democracy, then democracy remains incomplete.

State government belongs to all Rhode Islanders, and we must ensure that everyone has meaningful access to it.

This means greater transparency and accountability from both elected and appointed officials, and from both the legislative and executive branches.

It means bolstering trust in government as well as securing voting rights in the face of reduced federal voter protections and the threat of additional voting restrictions. It means making power less concentrated, while opening government to a greater diversity of perspectives and easing access to active participation. It means making the government more representative, more responsive, more collaborative, and more effective.

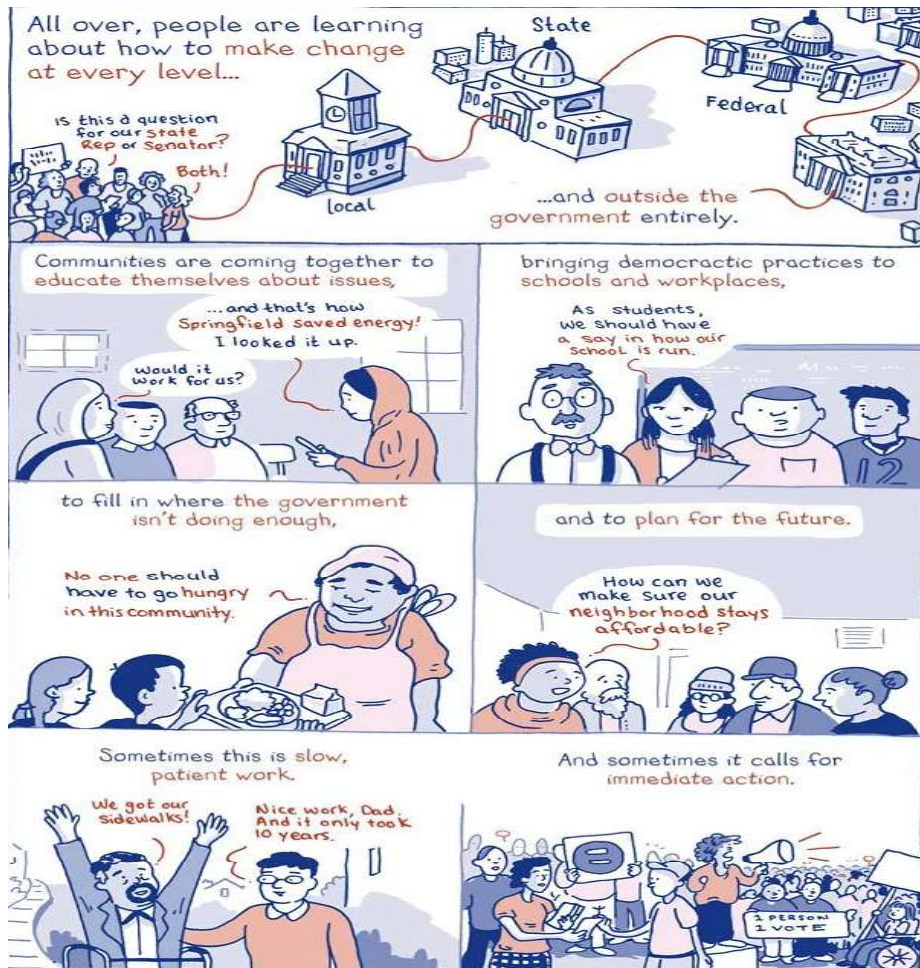
For the General Assembly, greater transparency, accountability, and effectiveness would mean holding bills for further study only when further study is needed, and not for legislation that has received hearings year after year without any vote, sometimes for over a decade, as was the case with storefront payday lending reform. If community members are calling for a bill to be considered on the House and Senate floors, we need to let democracy work by allowing the legislators - who were elected by voters - the opportunity to do their jobs by voting on bills.

It also means making access more convenient. With our part-time legislature holding most hearings after 5 p.m., we need to develop a system that does not require members of the public, including youth, to spend anywhere from one to six hours waiting to provide their two or maybe three minutes of testimony to a committee too often short of quorum.

We must ensure that people feel like their voices matter, and that their voices actually do matter, in the work of government and policymaking, no matter who they are or how much or little money is in their bank accounts or pockets.

We need to make sure our democracy lives up to the promise of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which not only defines birthright citizenship, but also guarantees both due process and equal protection for all persons, and not only citizens.

It is time – more than overdue – that the State House lives up to the ideal of serving as the People's House.



(from **This Is What Democracy Looks Like, A Graphic Guide To Governance**, a 32-page comic book created by The Center for Cartoon Studies (CCS) <https://www.cartoonstudies.org/css-studio/cartooningprojects/democracy/>)



MAKING THE PLAY



Expand democracy by making voting easier, including by allowing registration on election day.



Demand more transparency from government agencies and quasi-government agencies, including livestreaming and recording more meetings than currently required; for example, Commerce Corporation meetings should be recorded and made publicly available.



Review how other state legislatures manage committee hearings, with the aim of developing more convenient options for members of the public to testify – perhaps by reserving appointment slots or perhaps by fully randomizing the process and setting consistent procedures across committees; one might also consider giving preference to younger Rhode Islanders and/or those appearing for the first or second time.



Fund one or more General Assembly policy analyst positions dedicated to researching and writing equity impact statements on proposed legislation and the proposed and enacted state budgets.



Expand decision-making power by holding more votes on bills – in committee rooms and on the House and Senate floors – even when the outcomes are unknown.



Conclusion

Realizing The Dream of Nice Things for Rhode Island

With the 2026 Midterm elections, we recall that elections provide us with the opportunity to dream big and generate new energy. We offer this Playbook in the hope that we will spark some of this energy and some of those big dreams.

This playbook is not the usual candidates guide. It is not a collection of basic information on different policy areas nor is it a set of policy recommendations (though it does include some of these). Rather, it is a framework for policymaking and governing and a means of bringing to life the dream of a Rhode Island where all people are treated equally, where all of us can more than meet our basic needs, and where all of us can access opportunities to thrive. A means of bringing to life a Rhode Island where we can create and have nice things.

These five plays offer us a way to obtain nice things for Rhode Island.

- We need to tell new stories to reshape how we understand the work and value of policymaking, revenue raising, and government. We need to see government as belonging to us, the people, and make it work for us.
- We need to emerge from our silos and talk to each other, across agencies and systems. We need to recognize the moving parts and interconnections and build new systems, ones that produce the outcomes we desire.
- We need to begin by addressing the greatest needs – making sure we are doing everything we can to help people meet their most basic needs first – so no Rhode Islander remains in deep poverty, without access to safe housing, adequate food, and reliable healthcare.
- We need to consider the entire state economy, not leaving out any sectors, and including workers and business owners. We need to sustain an inclusive economy where all jobs and all people are valued for their contributions.
- We need to expand our democracy, valuing and encouraging the participation and contributions of all Rhode Islanders. We need to increase accessibility, transparency, and effectiveness in government.

Running throughout all the plays is a call for reducing disparities. Activating these plays requires an equity mindset and produces greater opportunity for all, in the state economy and in the art and outcomes of policymaking.

Just as we are meant to treat the federal and state constitutions as living documents, we should also treat this playbook as a living document. Readers should be encouraged to modify the five plays – and add additional plays.

We dream of a Rhode Island where we can have nice things, and we can make these dreams come to life. It will take some more dreaming, and many conversations, and lots of hard work – but if we abandon the zero-sum game and choose to play a different sort of game, we can create and have nice things here in the Ocean State.

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