

METCALF INSTITUTE STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

This plan represents the second of two linked strategic phases for the University of Rhode Island's Metcalf Institute. In Phase I (2020-2024), Metcalf Institute began expanding its training partnerships and built and strengthened URI relationships and infrastructure to increase capacity and financial resources to support the implementation of Phase II (2025-2028).

In Phase II (2025-2028), Metcalf advances its evolution as a global leader in supporting journalists, scientists, science communicators and the public in communicating and understanding climate and environment science to catalyze communities to have agency and take action in face of the world's global climate crisis. The Institute does this in collaboration with URI's College of the Environment and Life Sciences, Harrington School of Communication and Media, and other key partners across the university and beyond with the goal of raising Metcalf and URI to international prominence in science communication education, research, and practice.

METCALF: 1997 TO TODAY

Metcalf Institute was established in 1997 at the University of Rhode Island (URI) to support accurate environmental reporting by connecting professional journalists and academic researchers. In its early iterations, Metcalf training for journalists emphasized immersion in coastal and marine environmental science and the research process. This immersive learning model has evolved during the 25-plus years of the Institute's existence to encompass climate and environment science across the scientific landscape and to include intensive seminars, webinars and resources on a wide range of climate and environment science topics, including energy transition, ocean and water systems, food and agriculture and beyond.

This shift beyond coastal and marine sciences was solidified in the Institute's move to URI College of the Environment and Life Sciences (CELS) in 2017. The move helped to root the Institute's work more deeply in URI, creating new synergies and greater financial opportunity. A central mission of URI CELS is the extension of environmental knowledge through community engagement. Metcalf Institute's focus on climate and environmental communication embodies this facet of the CELS mission.

With this move, the Institute also expanded its training beyond journalists to include scientists, researchers and other communicators seeking to advance the public's understanding of climate and environment science. This training is grounded in inclusive science communication (ISC), a communication practice based on three principles—intentionality, reflexivity and reciprocity. The goal is to shift science communication from the traditional deficit, or lack of knowledge, model of science communication to an asset model that positions communities as partners in communication instead of passive recipients. Through the practice of ISC, which is core to Metcalf's values, the Institute offers training to scientists, researchers, policy makers, government officials and community organizers in equitable and accountable practices to communicate their scientific discovery and applications to the public. In 2023, the Institute welcomed a new executive director, Fara Warner, and its first inclusive science communication

specialist. This role has now been re-imagined as a training program coordinator who oversees project management of all Metcalf's training programming, not only inclusive science communication. In 2024 the Institute brought on its first assistant director, Erin Edmonds, and alumni and donor engagement manager, Mel Thibeault, tasked with increasing Metcalf's engagement with alumni, donors and funders. Metcalf improved its communications and marketing through expanded collaboration with URI's communications department and the hiring of Abbie Lahmers into the role of communications specialist. This cohesive professional team is charged with implementing this strategic plan, which will expand the Institute's networks globally, dramatically expand its programming to support communities around the world to be resilient and adaptive to a changing climate, and solidify the Institute's long-term sustainability.

Today, URI's Metcalf Institute is an internationally recognized science communication resource that unites networks of researchers, journalists and science communicators in non-profit, government, and private sectors through a wide range of collaborative training opportunities, networking opportunities and community engagement.

Areas of growth and impact:

- *Expand focus from solely on individual journalists to entire newsrooms with a focus on "climate readiness."*
- *Expand Metcalf journalism training from reaching dozens of journalists a year to hundreds of journalists a year by 2028.*
- *Increase capacity for teaching inclusive science communication through a Train the Trainers program that will serve the community; shift from a single Inclusive Science Communication symposium to multiple engagements, events and activities by 2028.*
- *Work at a systems level with the inclusive science communication community to make the practice of ISC the "norm" in science communication, not separate or only practiced by a small percentage of scientists*
- *Shift from passive engagement with public and communities (i.e. advancing the public's understanding as per Metcalf's historical mission) to catalyzing communities to have agency and take action in the global climate crisis.*

MISSION: Where science and journalism connect for the public good.

Metcalf Institute envisions an expansive science communication network—including scientists, journalists, policy makers, and the public—that engages in informed, inclusive discourse and actions about science to catalyze communities to take action.

VISION

To realize this mission, Metcalf Institute provides education, training, support and resources to a broad spectrum of communicators—encompassing but not limited to journalists, scientists, informal and formal science communicators, to engage diverse public audiences and support them in making informed, inclusive actions about science, climate and the environment.

VALUES

Lifelong Learning and Adaptation: Metcalf Institute embraces curiosity, hands-on experience, and community feedback to successfully bring together scientists, journalists, and community

members for dialogues and experiences that enhance their ability to unlearn exclusionary practices and work together.

Scientific Thought: Metcalf Institute emphasizes the importance of scientific research, critical thinking, and evidence (including lived experience) in accurately and holistically analyzing current societal issues and solutions, and advances this process without advocating any specific economic or policy agenda.

Diversity as an Asset: Metcalf Institute builds inclusive, accessible environments and actively reaches out to people representing diverse cultures, identities, and experiences to join Metcalf's staff, Advisory Council, fellowship cohorts, and the broader practice of science communication, with the recognition that the inclusion of different perspectives improves these collectives.

Local Involvement: Metcalf Institute serves and collaborates with our Rhode Island and New England community through our programming, which includes seeking the expertise of underserved and Indigenous groups who may be left out of traditional science but bring essential knowledge and experience to these programs.

Collaboration for Systemic Change: Metcalf Institute fosters partnerships with aligned organizations to drive and scale meaningful change, and ensures any obligations from these partnerships align with Metcalf's mission.

Goal A: Expand Metcalf's networks internally and externally to increase institutional capacity and influence.

Strategy 1: Grow existing and establish new partnerships and collaborations within URI and other Rhode Island academic institutions that advance Metcalf's strategic plan and align with its vision, mission and values.

Action: Create and implement Metcalf Affiliated Faculty program as a mechanism for increasing the Institute's capacity for program implementation.

- Convene a working group of URI faculty and staff to develop a strategic plan for the affiliated faculty program.
 - Process: Past faculty and staff that have supported and/or benefited from Metcalf programs
- Pilot program with 8-10 faculty members by mid-2026.
- Rollout program to broader URI membership by December 2026.
- Convene a working group of URI and external faculty from other land and sea-grant universities to determine the need to expand the affiliated program beyond URI in 2027.

Action: Expand inclusive science communication offerings to the URI community, including but not limited to fee-based training within the universities' colleges, institutes and centers.

- Conduct an audit of existing inclusive science communication efforts/needs at URI by third quarter 2026.
- Develop an inclusive scicomm training program strategic plan for multi-year, statewide EPSCoR-supported programs by the end of 2026.
- Determine whether and how to create sustainable inclusive scicomm training across Rhode Island academic institutions, such as a certificate program, major, or formal courses, by December 2026.

Strategy 2: Deepen connections between Metcalf and its alumni networks of journalists, scientists and other science communicators to advance the Institute's strategic plan.

Action: Develop and implement plans for outreach and engagement to journalism alumni to shift approach from passive engagement to active engagement through a network approach.

- Launch survey of journalism alumni to determine network needs by the first quarter of 2026.
- Create an alumni task force to help develop a journalism network engagement plan based on survey results by the second quarter of 2026.
- Implement engagement plan beginning July 2026.

Action: Develop and implement plans for outreach and engagement to inclusive science communication communities to shift focus from passive engagement to active engagement through a network approach.

- Conduct audit of ISC organizations connected with Metcalf that have existing, active engagement networks by the first quarter of 2026.
- Develop collaborative partnerships with related ISC organizations to deliver sustained, virtual programming and communication streams around ISC and environmental ISC by second quarter 2026.

Action: Create, foster and support communities of practice that connect Metcalf's disparate alumni networks (journalism, science, and other communicators), to increase engagement and activities between these networks.

- Develop plan for bringing Metcalf networks together by December 2026 as part of the work being developed within the two network groups (see above) to determine what activities the networks would like to engage in that connects journalists, scientists and other science communicators with each other that advances the vision and mission of the Institute.

Strategy 3: Establish external partnerships to increase the Institute's capacity to scale its reach and impact on journalists, scientists, science communicators and the public.

Action: Collaborate with other journalism support organizations that align with the Institute's vision, mission and values to bring Metcalf's inclusive climate and environment science training to their networks.

- Develop partnerships and/or collaborations with news organizations and journalism support organizations including but not limited to the Associated Press, Agence France Press, Solutions Journalism Network, Knight Center for the Americas, Online News Association, and Poynter Institute's Beat Academy through 2028.
- Deepen relationships with journalism support organizations aligned with diversity, equity and inclusion including but not limited to the Uproot Project, National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Indigenous Journalists Association through 2028.
- Activate these external partnerships through training, workshops and other offerings as described in Goal B: Strategy 1 and 2 (see below).

Action: Collaborate with other organizations engaged in inclusive science communication that align with the Institute's vision, mission and values to expand the practice of inclusive science communication globally

GOAL B: Diversify and expand Metcalf's programming in journalism, inclusive science communication, and public engagement.

Strategy 1: Create an inclusive repeatable training and coaching model for a local newsroom fellowship that focuses on "climate readiness" that can be implemented nationally.

Action: Launch pilot program for local journalism fellowship in Southern New England states in January 2025. Accomplished

Action: Revise fellowship based on pilot and launch second cohort in Northern New England in September 2025. Accomplished

Action: Implement fundraising plan in First Quarter 2026 to expand fellowship nationally with support from national, regional and local funders.

Action: Launch national rollout of local journalism fellowship by 2028.

Strategy 2: Unlock knowledge from Annual Science Immersion Workshop for Journalists and make it available globally through virtual, asynchronous, inclusive training offered on multiple platforms through partnerships.

Action: Re-imagine immersion workshop as learning lab for inclusive, systems-level climate and environment science training by 2028.

- Create at least two workshops with a clear vision and plan on how the knowledge will be made available in other trainings by 2027.

- Develop programming, including training, based on past immersion topics (i.e. energy, water, food) and provide to Metcalf networks and collaborative partners beginning in 2027.

Strategy 3: Develop a system-level change program that will transform how inclusive climate and environment science is communicated to the public by journalists, scientists and science communicators globally.

Action: Pilot an inclusive scicomm ToT program (with an environmental and climate theme) by mid-2027.

Action: Create an immersive public education program that brings communities, scientists, and journalists together to expand awareness of climate change and engagement in solutions and responses to a rapidly warming planet by January 2027.

Strategy 4: Transform the Institute's public engagement offerings to meet the increasing demand for accurate and accountable scientific communications, notably as it relates to climate and environmental science.

*Action: Reimagine Metcalf's Annual Lecture Series to be a collaborative program that partners with URI entities and external organizations to bring the lectures to more diverse audiences by June 2025. **Accomplished***

Action: Create process for Metcalf's approach to "broader impacts" training opportunities with URI scientists and researchers to provide the public access to information on cutting edge science in the climate and environment space by the first quarter 2026.

Action: Launch new public event series to engage with Rhode Island communities beyond the University of Rhode Island, including book talks with Metcalf alumni by mid-2027.

GOAL C: Build resilient internal structures and processes for the long term sustainability of Metcalf Institute

Strategy 1: Diversify revenue streams to create a more sustainable financial base through a multi-faceted approach leveraging both existing programs and the development of new ones.

Action: Build on Metcalf's existing and new fee-based training to offer a diverse range of training programs for various audiences including both in-person and online options to maximize reach and accessibility.

- Develop a tiered pricing model to cater to different budget levels.
- Consider offering discounts or packages to incentivize bulk registrations or long-term commitments.

- Create a comprehensive communications plan to promote training programs via digital channels, social media, and industry events.
- Leverage existing networks and partnerships to reach potential clients.

Action: Boost individual donor contributions (via Rhody Now) through targeted campaigns and engagement strategies.

Action: Secure increased funding from major corporations and nonprofit philanthropic organizations to support Metcalf goals.

Action: Partner with faculty to develop high-quality government grant proposals.

Action: Develop new URI online certificate(s) to provide education and training opportunities for students and professionals in environmental communication and/or inclusive science communication.

Strategy 2: Ensure leadership continuity, enhance team satisfaction and support overall success of The Metcalf Institute.

Action: Develop a proactive approach to ensure that key roles are filled efficiently and that Metcalf is prepared for staff transitions.

Action: Enhance team skills and capabilities to improve performance and career growth by fostering an environment that values continuous learning and recognizing those who are actively engaged in professional development.

Action: Provide the Metcalf team with opportunities to advance their careers with enhanced responsibility, new projects and cross-functional team participation.

Strategy 3: Create and sustain support systems that ensure financial stability, operational efficiency and support data-driven decision-making.

Action: Develop and maintain a user-friendly, effective website that supports organizational goals, engages stakeholders, and enhances operational efficiency. Ongoing

Example/model: (<https://constructiveinstitute.org/explorer-product-page/>)

- Redesign a user-centric website that is visually appealing, easy to navigate, and optimized for mobile devices by mid-2026
- Ensure the website includes essential features such as an intuitive menu, search functionality, and accessible contact information.
- Optimize the website for search engines (SEO) to improve visibility and drive traffic.
- Integrate analytics tools to monitor website performance, user behavior, and engagement metrics.

Action: Maintain effective fiscal management systems to ensure financial stability, transparency, and accountability.

Action: Reimagine and/or maintain a robust database management system to support data organization, accessibility, and analysis.

- Reimagine the current database management system (DBMS) to meet Institute needs and scalability requirements by the end of 2026.
- Integrate data from various sources, such as donor information, alumni records, and greater impacts tracking.
- Regularly update and clean the database to remove duplicates, correct errors, and maintain data integrity.