



INSTITUTE FOR  
**Sustainable  
Communities**

what's possible

[sustain.org](https://sustain.org)

REDEFINING  
**RESILIENCE** IN  
**CHALLENGING  
TIMES**

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

# Our Mission

TO HELP  
communities

AROUND THE WORLD ADDRESS

ENVIRONMENTAL  
ECONOMIC &  
SOCIAL CHALLENGES

TO BUILD A BETTER  
future

SHAPED &  
SHARED BY

ALL



# Message from the President



**Rarely has there been such a time of upheaval as we all witnessed in 2020.** The world experienced a global pandemic, a transformative racial justice and equity movement, and widespread political turmoil – all on top of accelerating economic inequality and increasingly devastating climate change impacts. The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) grappled with our own share of internal and external changes but remained focused on investing in growth and in our ongoing organizational equity and inclusion journey.

Like most – if not all – organizations, the spread of the COVID-19 virus in 2020 ushered in radical shifts in the ways we work. To protect everyone's health, we converted ISC's traditionally in-person convenings to virtual gatherings. Among our staff, Board, and partners, this often meant upskilling to deploy new virtual technology platforms. ISC's programs in the U.S., China, India, and Bangladesh excelled notwithstanding the pandemic, and we closed the year with the launch of the Mekong Sustainable Manufacturing Alliance, which will expand our work on creative climate change solutions to Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

In 2020, ISC doubled down on our mission and living the values of equity and inclusion. Two prominent African Americans joined the Board of Directors, Nathaniel Smith, Executive Director of the Partnership for Southern Equity, and Dr. Marshall Shepherd, Professor and Director of the University of Georgia's Atmospheric Sciences Program. We hired our first new President in 30 years, the first African American woman to helm a U.S.-based international climate change organization.

We listened to the voices for racial justice and equity we heard around the world. ISC already strengthens and facilitates community and local leadership and equitable climate change and sustainability solutions through our mission. Now, we're even more focused on embedding the science, data, and best practices of equity and inclusion into decisions and investments that reduce climate impacts and advance a low carbon economy that benefits everyone.

As ISC enters its 30th year, our two co-founders retired – George Hamilton as President and former Vermont Governor Madeleine Kunin from the Board of Directors. This anniversary is a great opportunity to celebrate their dedication, leadership, and the incredible global impact they spearheaded, delivering over 130 groundbreaking projects in 30 countries. Their vision and collaboration set ISC apart as a community-led changemaker and holistic problem-solver.



**I am thrilled to be entrusted with ISC's stewardship. Let's continue to lean on each other, pursuing our mission, doing what we know, and helping to ensure that equity and communities are at the center of the world's climate change and sustainability solutions.**

Change is never easy, and ISC's road ahead is certain to have bumps. However, our successful track record holds us in good stead. Over 30 years, Madeleine, George, our Board, donors, staff, and partners established ISC as a global environmental leader, cementing our core allegiance, to unleash the power of people to make positive changes where they live, work, learn, and play.

I am thrilled to be entrusted with ISC's stewardship. Let's continue to lean on each other, pursuing our mission, doing what we know, and helping to ensure that equity and communities are at the center of the world's climate change and sustainability solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deohn Ferris', written in a cursive style.

Deohn Ferris  
*President*

# Our COVID-19 Response

\$500,000

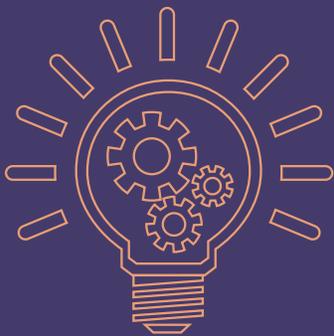


Provided in emergency relief funds to community-based organizations working on climate and equity around the U.S.

Equipped community partners across the U.S. to establish

## Resiliency Hubs,

communicate the links between **public health and climate risks, and advocate for equity-centered recovery**



Convened the **Re-emerging and Resilient India Conclave**, bringing together leaders from government, industry, nonprofits, and academia **to build a rapid recovery framework that supports long-term resilience**



Introduced **energy saving and clean technology measures** in India's apparel factories that helped them **boost operations and meet the global demand for facemasks**

## Industry Readiness Protocol

Compiled a **toolkit** that helps factories determine **when and how to resume operations safely and prioritize worker health** during the pandemic

# Impact Highlights

## CLIMATE CHANGE, HEALTH, & EQUITY

In 2020, issues of health, equity, and climate change were top of mind for many, and much of ISC's work was grounded in the intersection of all three. For example, The Kresge Foundation's Climate Change, Health, and Equity Initiative (CCHE), for which ISC serves as the national program office, convened healthcare institutions, health practitioners, and community advocates from across the U.S. to develop **cross-cutting strategies and policies led by and prioritizing low-income communities and communities of color**. The success of the CCHE led to ISC being selected to manage a second network: the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health and Climate Solutions program. In this role, ISC is bolstering grantee communities as they identify and share effective solutions that **improve health, advance health equity, and address climate change**. In both of these programs - and in ISC's work across the U.S. and Asia - there is a focus not only on responding to climate and health emergencies, but on **addressing the historical and structural inequities** that exacerbate crises and lead to disproportionate suffering.



When you engage communities of color around climate change, they become your strongest advocates.

Once you connect the dots, it just makes sense.



**SHAMAR BIBBINS**  
Senior Program Officer  
for the Environment at  
the Kresge Foundation

## WATER STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS



We learned how to reduce costs while increasing the cotton produced through sustainable farming methods and efficient water use.

**ARCHANA BHOIR**  
Water steward  
from Pardi Village,  
Maharashtra, India



In recent years, cotton production has been devastated by climate variability. Rapidly changing climatic conditions coupled with poor resource management and misplaced incentives have put rural farming communities at risk of collapse. ISC has been working with the textile industry to look beyond the factory walls at the larger community, and that means supporting farmers in responding effectively to climate change. This year, ISC began **training 120,000 farmers and entrepreneurs, 45% of whom are women**, in sustainable water stewardship practices. Such techniques focus on reducing harmful farm inputs while protecting natural resources and improving yields. Equipped with this knowledge, these farmers will be better able to **safeguard their crops, mitigate climate risks, and bring economic opportunity to their communities**. The long term goal of the project is to scale this community-centric approach across Southeast Asia, **reducing the overall environmental footprint of cotton cultivation** while empowering women entrepreneurs and community leaders. ISC was proud to showcase this work and lead the discourse on agriculture, climate resilience, and equity at SIWI World Water Week, a major global conference, in August 2020.

# Our Equity Journey

For many organizations, 2020 was a turning point for highlighting racial equity. At ISC, our drive to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in both our organization and our work began several years ago and 2020 marked an opportunity to look back at our progress thus far.

5

formal **equity trainings** for staff and board since 2017

Deeohn Ferris

**Hired as President**, the first Black woman to lead a U.S.-based international climate change organization

36% **board members** are **people of color**  
up from **6%** in 2016

31% **senior level staff** are **women**  
up from **26%** in 2018

44% **U.S.-based staff** are **people of color**  
up from **11%** in 2018

72% **global staff** are **people of color**  
up from **57%** in 2018

4 years of **Partnership for Resilient Communities**, ISC's flagship program led by and serving people of color

Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

Granted funding to continue **enhancing our equity capacity**

## Equity Lens and Values Statement

Developed to guide the **organization moving forward**

# Board of Directors

**Madeleine M. Kunin** (Founder) *Fmr. Governor of Vermont*

**Jonathan Lash** (Chair) *Former President, Hampshire College*

**LuAnn L. Bennett** (Vice Chair) *President, Bennett Group*

**Ann Condon** (Secretary) *Former Director, GE Corporate Environmental Programs*

**John A. Dooley** (Treasurer) *Fmr. Vermont Supreme Court Justice*

**Deohn Ferris** (Ex-Officio) *President, Institute for Sustainable Communities*

**Rick Barton** *Fmr. Ambassador, Assistant Sec. of State and UNHCR High Commissioner*

**Nisha Desai Biswal** *President, U.S.-India Business Council*

**Jan Blomstrann** *Co-founder and former CEO of NRG Systems*

**Bryan Garcia** *President and CEO, Connecticut Green Bank*

**David Grant** *Former President & CEO, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation*

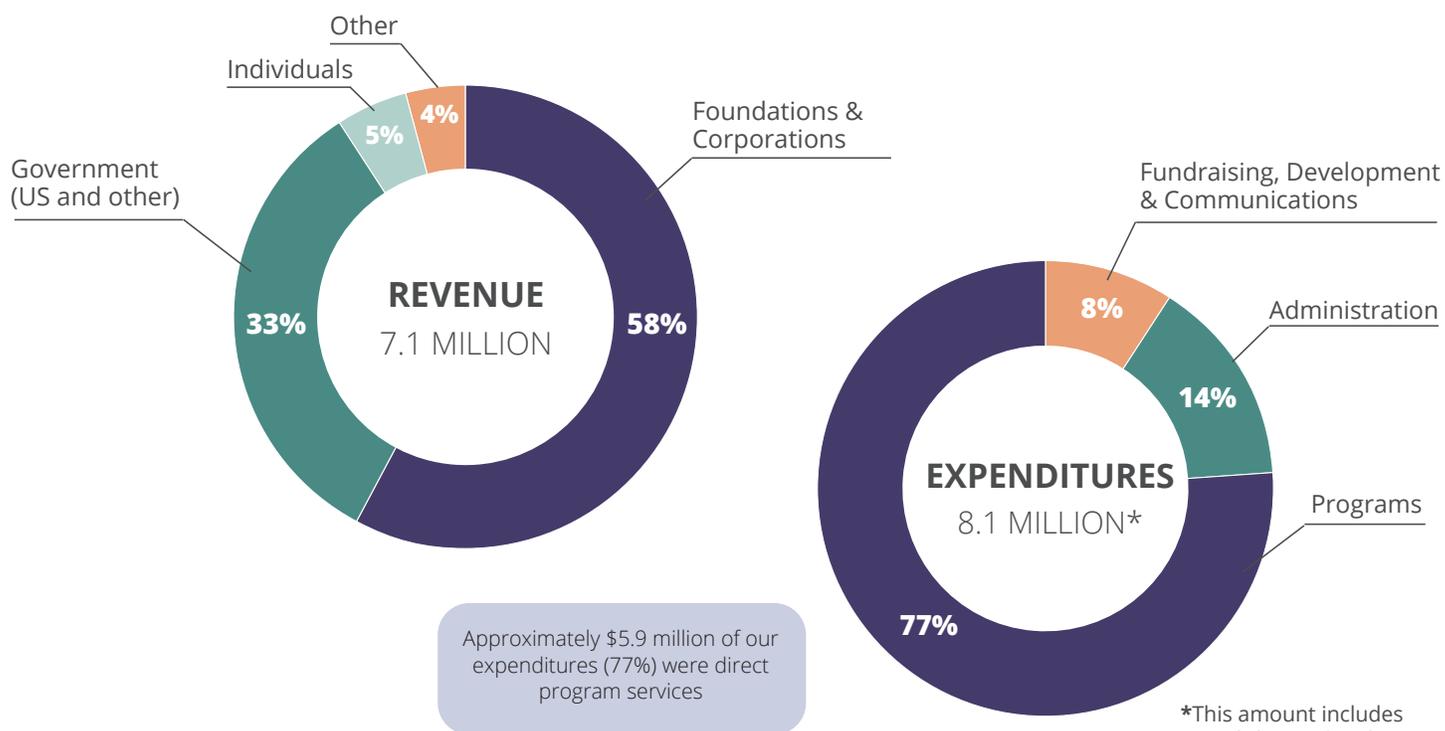
**Dr. Susan M. Pepin** *Managing Director, Arizona State University's Health and Clinical Partnerships*

**Dr. J. Marshall Shepherd** *Professor of Geography and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Georgia*

**Nathaniel Smith** *Founder and Chief Equity Officer, Partnership for Southern Equity*

**Right Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton** *Bishop of Maryland*

# 2020 Financials



For audited financial statements, please visit our website [sustain.org/about/annual-reports-and-financials](https://www.sustain.org/about/annual-reports-and-financials)

## GET INVOLVED

As a nonprofit organization, we rely on the generosity of people like you. Join us in building sustainable, equitable, resilient communities and pulling the power, policy and institutional levers that tackle climate change, economic, social and health inequalities.

**Support our work today at [sustain.org/donate](https://sustain.org/donate)**

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2020