

**Readiness Assessment for Sustainability:
A Report for Rhode Island with
Recommendations**

The Last Humans Project's Analysis of Climate Change Readiness in Localities

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The following report includes my ideas solely and does not represent the ideas or position of any other individual or organization in Rhode Island

This report is offered with faith in the positive qualities of humans and as a gift to my home State. It is, essentially, a consulting report on the climate crisis readiness in Rhode Island based on my work in RI from March to August, 2020, work that is part of the global Last Humans Project. This report has been created at the point where Rhode Island has the opportunity to join the US Department of Energy's Wind for Schools Project, started in 2006. The potential for the State to be included is active. But, it is necessary at this point to plan for how that initiative goes forward. Wind for Schools is, I believe, a way to build on work already going forward in the State.

The report recognizes the climate crisis context that affects all human efforts for survival as climate disasters increase and multiply in variety. The climate crisis is the biggest challenge humans have faced in recorded history. Localities, communities, states and other demographic entities around the world can become sustainable and humanity can use this challenge to build a better civilization, a sustainable civilization.

Context: I am a higher education leader working on the transformation of American and global higher education around technology, new insights into learning, and in response to the pandemic and the climate crisis. I direct The [Last Humans Project](#) aimed at higher education globally to create sustainable communities led by higher education. This work is entirely volunteer work - I do not seek a position or recognition.

Since there are 19,400 institutions of higher learning in the world, higher education, working with other non-profits and local governments in their regions can significantly improve the chances for human sustainability during this century of the climate crisis.

Because I live in Rhode Island, I have worked since March to build on the already great work going on in the State by engaging RI higher education to work toward goals in the Last Humans project.

In April 2020, I saw The Department of Energy's Wind for Schools Project as a potential catalyst for Rhode Island's efforts to move to 100% renewable energies, not just to create a workforce for the renewable energy sector in the State -- a necessary and laudable goal in itself -- but to move toward sustainability.

In other words, I saw that the State is already *exemplary* in climate action since it has created an offshore wind farm and is building a renewable energy workforce in the State, but I also saw an opportunity to build on that action towards sustainability. As the State moves to renewable energy, it has the opportunity to add important and necessary steps toward a more efficient and sustainable community across the board. To do one without doing the second would be a major and short-sighted mistake. To have a workforce for renewable energy but then experience disruptions in too-distant supply chains, or experience disruptions because of flooding in the state will disrupt the State economy and make the workforce initiative seem very shortsighted.

An example of sustainability work in RI: Save the Bay Narragansett is working to restore salt marshes around the Bay. Paving in RI has, over the years, increased stormwater runoff into the bay and therefore spawned freshwater grasses that replaced saltwater grasses along the shoreline and in the marshes. Those freshwater grasses are being killed by rising saltwater, making some areas in RI more prone to flooding. Save the Bay, therefore, is replanting saltwater species in those areas, so that the communities and ecology have a natural buffer. <https://www.savebay.org>

Another example: At the University of Rhode Island, the Coastal Resources Center advocates for resilience planning in communities around the State. https://www.crc.uri.edu/contacts_page/pam-rubinoff/

The Rhode Island Environmental Education Association promotes environmental awareness in K-12 and higher education. <http://rieea.org>

Climate Action RI, CARI, is the local 350.org chapter and actively advocates for the move away from fossil fuels. <https://world.350.org/rhodeisland/>

The University of Rhode Island's Cooperative Extension Energy Fellows program is, of course, another example. <https://web.uri.edu/offshore-renewable-energy/meet/kate-venturini-2/>

Ocean State Community Energy aims to place small wind turbines and solar panels in municipalities around the state: <https://oceanstatece.info>

And, many other examples in RI could be included: The RI government supports initiatives for resilience and environmental action. Dozens of agencies and organizations that work toward environmental sustainability and balance. The State is poised not only to become 100% renewable energy (across all uses of energy in the State), but to become sustainable over time. An offshore wind farm is a major contribution to sustainability, but much more is needed.

Silo issues need to be addressed: is it best to let so many efforts work *independently* or would it be far better to coordinate among all RI efforts and quickly arrive at shared sustainability planning? Jobs depend on a functioning economy, obviously, but will the State economy continue functioning continuously during climate change disruptions?

The pandemic is an example of a climate change effect that disrupts the economy. It is not an isolated event: novel coronaviruses continue to arise. Covid-19 is the third one in this century. And the viruses are only one effect of the climate crisis. No one is guaranteeing that covid-19 won't evolve and start a new spread during the 2020-2021 flu season. Given the collapse of our global ecosystem, a re-emergence seems possible. And, new viruses and pathogens are emerging in greater numbers each year as humans continue to damage the global ecosystem.

To be ready to survive, or just continue to function as a society during this century of the climate crisis and mass extinction, every locality in the world has to accomplish two goals:

1. Achieve 100% renewable energy installation.
2. Coordinate toward a locality-wide sustainability plan to deal with ongoing disasters.

Rhode Island is moving quickly toward number 1, but is not moving enough, or hardly at all, toward number 2. So, Rhode Island is lagging on what it can and should do for "readiness." This report explains this problem and points to how the State can do better.

Last Humans

The Last Humans Project recognizes that global civic society -- government -- has failed to address climate change and will continue to fail humanity, at least at the national level. In general, we cannot rely on government alone. Climate change effects are cascading so people need to cooperate and coordinate more urgently than ever.

Therefore, the Last Humans Project recommends ("insists"?) that civil society -- non-profits, education, NGOs, foundations, associations, and so on -- representing most of us humans and aimed at "social good," not "profit," lead the world toward survival in partnership with government. Civic engagement is necessary but so is *civil* engagement. Government and civil society partnering for permanent change is the answer.

To see how this idea would actually function in a locality, I chose Rhode Island as a test case to see if a locality actually could move to the second goal of sustainability through Statewide coordination. From March to August, I focused all my efforts on Rhode Island, made good progress in many ways, but ultimately found that hierarchical siloes militate against Statewide coordination. This is no different than anywhere else and, in normal times, would just be the reality we work within. However, these are not normal times and won't be for the rest of this century. Siloes are now counter-productive to real human action on sustainability.

Even though this readiness report concludes that RI is not doing enough coordinated work toward sustainability, so much is happening in the State that it “succeeds” in terms of activity, succeeds in having many parts already in place, and only lacks a sense of urgency.

Let’s unpack that statement: if there were no climate crisis, “jobs” could remain a sufficient goal in the State, and jobs in the renewable energy sector is even better. But, with the climate crisis, with the earth’s human population at the tipping point -- total global population is beginning to decline -- with the current pandemic that is part of the climate crisis, we humans cannot continue “business as usual.” We need to change “jobs” to “jobs+.” Jobs in renewable energy technologies, but with jobs also in sustainability efforts. Both step one and two.

The Department of Energy Wind for Schools Program

In January, I heard about the RI 100% renewable energy goal, not just from the Governor’s announcement but from a person actively involved in raising funding for community energy to pay for small wind and solar energy technology. In the same month, I also attended the annual Summit of the Rhode Island Environmental Education Association (RIEEA) where I was amazed at the number of people involved in environmental education and the number of people involved in environment efforts in the State.

By the time covid-19 shut down the country and the world, and my work in higher education had to be suspended since higher education colleagues were simply trying to “survive” for the rest of the school year, I shifted my efforts to Rhode Island.

By April, 2020, I had learned about the Wind for Schools program through the US Department of Energy. <https://windexchange.energy.gov/windforschools> Twelve states are in the program that started 14 years ago. The goals of Wind for Schools are precisely those of Wind Win in Rhode Island. <https://windwinri.com> The only difference is that the DOE’s program focuses on small wind (and now solar) as both environmentally good and also educationally rich -- students get involved in the actual installation of small wind generators at both the K-12 and higher education levels -- whereas the focus in RI now is with “big wind.”

Because the US Wind for Schools project requires coordination between higher education and K-12 education, I thought that I was and am in a good position to help bring the State into the program and reinforce efforts in the State already underway.

And, for a time, that effort moved ahead during April, May, June, and July. By July, the DOE was ready to include RI as the 13th state in the program.

However, as I said above, Rhode Island already enjoys the presence and efforts of numerous initiatives on behalf of renewable energy. When we got close to being officially included as the 13th state in the DOE Wind for Schools Project, I knew I needed to alert a broader range of people in the State that we were close. I did so in mid-August, just a short while ago.

Talking with this wider ring of stakeholders in the State made it clear to me and others that there were some key stakeholders who did not feel ready to take on Wind for Schools. No one is against moving to adopt Wind for Schools in the State, but they just didn't know how to go about doing it. At the moment, there are, however, new suggestions being considered about how to move forward. This report is in response to those suggestions.

Recommendations

Below are my specific recommendations for the State to move toward, first, to a renewable energy workforce and, second, toward statewide sustainability efforts.

1. [Wind Win](#), an initiative of the Governor, led by the North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce, has a mandate to work with primary and secondary education in RI toward developing graduates who are qualified for jobs in the renewable energy sector. It is focused on offshore wind and expects more offshore wind installations to go forward in the near future. This is a laudable effort ready to add significantly to the economy in Rhode Island.

The effort toward including Rhode Island as the 13th state in the national Wind for Schools program must therefore be coordinated with Wind Win.

The Wind for Schools project goals are to:

- Improve wind energy workforce development through wind-focused deployment and educational activities
- Introduce teachers and students to wind energy
- Equip college juniors and seniors with an education in wind energy applications
- Engage America's communities in wind energy applications, benefits, and challenges.

From: <https://windexchange.energy.gov/windforschools>

These goals seem to align with Wind Win goals. But, the goal of including college juniors and seniors adds another aspect for developing the workforce in Rhode Island. And, its focus on "small wind" -- wind generators that can be installed on school grounds and college campuses -- adds another element to Wind Win. Adding small wind and higher education element to Wind Win would make it a far more powerful initiative, I believe.

2. Because Wind for Schools aligns with and adds to the Wind Win effort in RI, it will add benefits to the State. The State should accept the invitation to be included as the 13th state in Wind for Schools.
3. Wind for Schools can serve as a platform for coordination around the State not only among primary and secondary education, but among higher education institutions as

well. This is an additional reason to go forward with Wind for Schools.

4. At the University of Rhode Island, Kate Venturini runs the Energy Fellows Program and is offering to help move Wind for Schools forward in coordination with Wind Win. There is similar interest from Rhode Island College and College Unbound. The higher education element should go forward.
5. Wind for Schools requires a “champion” in the State as a primary contact and coordinator with the national program. The Wind Win program, it seems to me, should determine, along with URI, who will be the ongoing Wind for Schools champion. I have served as the initial point person but at this point the University and Wind Win will need to decide leadership for Wind for Schools. Should it be the leadership team for Wind win? Should it be a faculty or professional staff person at the State University? Or both?
6. The State needs to inform Remy Pangle at James Madison University and Heidi Tinneland at the National Renewable Energy Lab in Colorado how RI will move ahead as the 13th State in Wind for Schools. There is no formal time limit to inform them, but it does need to be timely. Informing them of the State’s acceptance of Wind for Schools does not obligate the State to do anything but it will open opportunities for collaboration with other states and, I believe, also improve Rhode Island’s chances to receive grants and corporate contributions.
7. The K-12 systems that, in the spring, volunteered to be part of CAREER, the Coalition for Renewable Energy Education RI, should coordinate with Wind Win. Kristin Urbach at the North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce can decide how to include those school systems in Wind Win and the Wind for Schools programs.
8. My strongest recommendation is for higher education to be included in Rhode Island’s move toward renewable energy and toward the crucial second step beyond jobs, the State sustainability plan for climate survival and social good over this century. URI is already active in this area and other campuses need to be included as well.
9. I will continue to be involved where I can be helpful in Rhode Island. I have found amazing work going on, but was surprised that coordination was sparse, surprised how organizations dedicated to the environment in some cases are doing almost nothing, and, as always in my work, sad at the complacency among leaders regarding climate change. (A common problem around the world).

In particular, I have offered to help develop a grant proposal to bring funding to the State to build out Wind for Schools. Starting in 1987, I was able to get large consortium grants in higher education from the Annenberg Foundations, IBM, Boeing, The Software Institute of America, the US Department of Education and the Mellon Foundation. To support the non-profit that I founded in 2009, I solicited corporate support and received

corporate annual contributions from over 15 different companies.

All of these grants and contributions were for consortia or for a professional association. The more entities you include in a grant proposal, the more likely you are to succeed. Funders like to see that dissemination of your work already has a guarantee because you are working with a group or a consortium, or, in our case, with many organizations in the State. I offer my expertise in raising funding for projects.

As I write, California is on fire, Texas and Louisiana have been hit by the strongest storm to hit their coastline in a century, the country is in the grips of a pandemic, and Rhode Island, more specifically, has experienced the greatest increase in annual global warming of any state in New England. The climate crisis accelerates everywhere.

My hope is that this report will be helpful to all efforts in Rhode Island to improve the economy in the State and raise consciousness about the need for sustainability planning. The most pressing need is for *coordination* around the State so that all efforts can be reinforced and accelerated.

I personally am thankful for the efforts of our Governor and others for the good work going on in the State. It is inspiring to learn of the efforts in RI toward environmental advocacy and renewable energy. The State is poised to become a showpiece for the world for environmental responsibility and adaptation to the climate crisis. It just needs *active* statewide leadership that includes all elements to get it there.