

First Nations Strategic Recommendations Report

TRANSFORMING THE GOVERNANCE OF
ISLAND COASTAL ECONOMIC TRUST:
A PATH TO PARTNERSHIP



PREPARED BY SANALA PLANNING FOR
The Government of British Columbia
AND **Island Coastal Economic Trust**

MAY 30, 2025

Acknowledgements

**Gila'kasla | ʔimot | Kleco kleco | Huy'ch'qa | HÍSW̱KE | ʔul nu msh
chalap | číʔí4ət sn̓ ʔə məkʷ | Huy chexw a**

Thank you to the First Nations who offered their time, energy, and wisdom to S̱anala Planning throughout this engagement process. This work could not have taken place without the participation of rights holders across the ancestral territories of the Kwa'kwala/Bak'wam'kala, Nuuča̱a̱nuł, Éy7á7juuthem, Ligwilda'xw, Pəntl'áč, She shash-ishalhem, Hul'q'umi'num', diitiidʔaatx, SENĆOŦEN, Skwxwú7mesh, Lekwungen, and T'Sou-ke speaking peoples.

Thank you to the Government of British Columbia for investing in Island Coastal Economic Trust to undertake this work and for committing to consider new legislation for the Trust based on the input, insights, and direction from First Nations whose territories span the geographic region the Trust serves.

Thank you to the Trust for engaging S̱anala Planning to lead the design and facilitation of meetings and engagement in dialogue with First Nations governments about its co-governance transformation.

Terminology

The term “First Nations” is used broadly to refer to all Indigenous governing bodies engaged in this process while recognizing that several identify as “Tribes,” “Governments,” or “Modern Treaty Nations,” or “Self Governing Nations.” As outlined in Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), an Indigenous governing body is an entity authorized to act on behalf of Indigenous peoples* that hold rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

It is important to acknowledge this to uphold the autonomy of those participating to self-determine their own governments, political structures, social orders, territories and rights inherited from their ancestors and how they choose to represent themselves and engage with others. However, for the purposes of communication and developing clear and cohesive recommendations from all engagement participants, “First Nations” has been utilized throughout the project and in this report.

*As described in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, the term “Indigenous Peoples” includes First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples in Canada.

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Executive Summary

In 2024, the Government of British Columbia made a critical investment in Island Coastal Economic Trust, enabling an Indigenous-led engagement process to explore the future of the Trust's governance with First Nations across the region. *Sanala* Planning was hired to lead this process and facilitate in-depth discussions with 53 First Nations as rights and title holders in the region to inform strategic recommendations on the governance and sustainability of the Trust moving forward.

"Transforming Governance: A Path to Partnership" was carried out independently by *Sanala* from July 2024 to May 2025, with periodic updates provided to the Trust's board and committees. This Indigenous-led approach ensured the integrity of the engagement and upheld the principle of self-determination, recognizing that First Nations must lead conversations about their inclusion and governance in regional economic development.

Action 4.39 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) Action Plan (linked in Appendix B), assigned to the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation (JEDI) by the Government of B.C., actioned the ministry to work alongside the Province's economic trusts and First Nation partners to create mechanisms for regional decision-making that include First Nations in a meaningful and sustained way. As outlined in the Declaration Act, the province has committed to a distinctions-based approach, requiring that "the Province's dealings with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples be conducted in a manner that acknowledges the specific rights, interests, priorities and concerns of each, while respecting and acknowledging these distinct Peoples with unique cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments."

Grounded in what was heard during the engagement sessions and supported by past legislative reviews, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the Declaration Act, the recommendations in this report are forward-looking and designed to support transformational change.

Key recommendations to the Government of B.C. include:

- Amend Island Coastal Economic Trust legislation to enable First Nations representation on Regional Advisory Committees (RACs);
- Increase the number of RACs to allow for full First Nations inclusion across the region;
- Establish a co-governed Trust board with at least equal representation by First Nations appointees;
- Ensure that the Trust receives long term sustainable funding to enable collaboration and foster a stronger and more resilient economy for the region.

Key recommendations to the Trust include:

- Work in partnership with First Nations, local governments, and the Government of B.C. to co-create a consensus-based approach to evolve the Trust into a permanently financed, co-governed regional development organization;
- Invest in the development of institutional capacity;
- Evolve governing policies and practices to support equitable and effective co-governance with First Nations.

This is a historic opportunity for First Nations and local governments to come together to create meaningful, lasting impacts across the region and begin to build an economy of wellbeing. By embracing this vision and moving forward with continued momentum, the Government of B.C. has the chance to build a new, lasting partnership rooted in reconciliation and shared prosperity. The groundwork has been laid over many years, and the vision articulated by First Nations through this process provides a clear and actionable path forward. Now is the time to move forward, in alignment with First Nations' recommendations, to realize a new future for regional economic governance in B.C.

The Sanala team has deep gratitude for the many First Nations leaders who generously contributed their time, insights, and commitment to this process. Their wisdom and vision have laid the foundation for recommendations that reflect both the diversity of regional priorities and a shared commitment to reconciliation, equity, and self-determination.



Jessie Hemphill
CEO, Sanala Planning

Introduction

Island Coastal Economic Trust (the Trust) is a regional development organization working for Vancouver Island and coastal communities that strategically invests in inclusive economic development and innovation. In 2023, the Trust's board of directors established its priority strategic goal to "transform the Trust into a permanent, co-governed, regional development organization for coastal communities." This strategic priority was formed based on the vision established by the mayors of municipalities, chairs of regional districts, and Members of the Legislative Assembly of B.C. who comprise the independent Regional Advisory Committees formed in law by the B.C. Government. To work towards this goal, the Trust initiated a collaborative Indigenous-led engagement process to co-develop a governance model that reflects the needs, priorities, and aspirations of all communities in the region.

Project Objectives

Through this project the Trust sought to engage with as many of the 53 First Nations in the service region as possible to:

- Raise awareness of the Trust, its unique role and funding programs, and the Board's vision for the future;
- Describe the desired path for transformation of the Trust into a permanent, co-governed, regional development organization for coastal communities;
- Strengthen new and existing relationships between the Trust and First Nations governments;
- Produce an independent strategic recommendations report for the Government of British Columbia that is inclusive of the perspectives of First Nations governments, local governments (through the Regional Advisory Committees), and the Trust's board of directors on a consensus-based approach to transforming the Trust;
- To embody the phrase: Nothing about us, without us;
- To create an authentic and meaningful engagement process that First Nations have contributed to, and see themselves within, and;
- To ensure balance and reciprocity for knowledge-sharing, ensuring that participants receive compensation, recognition, and receive copies of & retain rights to their data.

Project Team

Transforming Governance: A Path to Partnership was an Indigenous-led process facilitated by Sanala Planning.



Sanala Planning is an Indigenous-owned company that uses planning to support Indigenous self-determination for the well-being of all. Sanala was contracted by the Trust to lead the following work:

- Conduct outreach to all 53 First Nations within the region
- Plan and facilitate in-person and virtual meetings with First Nations
- Compile & analyse input from First Nations to develop a What We Learned Report for feedback as well as this Strategic Recommendations Report
- Participate in additional meetings as needed, including presentations to the Trust's Board and Regional Advisory Committees

The following Planners contributed to this engagement process:



Jessie Hemphill

CEO, Senior Planner, Facilitator

Jessie is Kwakwaka'wakw ('Nakwaxda'xw and Ligwítla'xw by blood, Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations band member) & Métis (Red River Valley, Marion family). She grew up in Kwagwł territory (Port Hardy, BC) and currently lives in Snuneymuxw territory (Nanaimo, BC). Jessie has been working as a planner since 2008 and co-founded Sanala (formerly Alderhill Planning) in 2016. She believes that Indigenous planning has a pivotal role to play in making the world a better place. In addition to her role as CEO of Sanala, Jessie teaches an Indigenous planning practicum program at the University of British Columbia and has taught Indigenous planning and facilitation at Vancouver Island University, Simon Fraser University, and elsewhere. She was elected into local government twice, as Councillor for the District of Port Hardy, and served on regional and provincial advisories in that role. She was also a member of her Nation's Economic Development Corp. Board of Directors and is currently on the editorial board for the journal *Planning Theory & Practice*.



Dana Moraes

Senior Planner, Facilitator

Dana's Indigenous name is Gid Uuwans, and she belongs to the Ts'aahl Haida Eagle Clan of Kaay'Llaanas. She is of Haida, Musqueam, and settler descent. Dana has vast experience in Economic Development planning, Indigenous Community Planning, and Proposal Writing. Specialties include a diverse range of comprehensive community planning, land use, and strategic and project-based planning. Her passion for planning and proposal writing emerged while running the Swan Bay Rediscovery Program, where she recognized the need for programs connecting youth, elders, language, and community resilience. Dana's work consistently honors tradition, language, and protocol, aligning perfectly with *Sanala* values. For the past 9 years, Dana has also proudly been a mentor with Indigenous and Northern Affairs' Mentorship Initiative (ISC), where she has had opportunities to present, facilitate, and share knowledge of her community's planning experience, nation to nation.



Ali White

Planner, Project & Facilitation Support

Ali is a settler of Irish, English, and Welsh ancestry, currently residing on the unceded ancestral territories of the shíshálh and Skwxwú7mesh Nations. As a Planner who joined the *Sanala* team in early 2022, she has contributed to wide range of projects including the International Marine Protected Areas Congress 5 (IMPAC5) Indigenous Events Coordination, the Ehattesaht First Nation Comprehensive Community Plan, and the Taku River Tlingit First Nation Joint Visioning Process among many others. Ali holds a Master of Community and Regional Planning degree with a concentration in Indigenous Community Planning from the University of British Columbia.

In addition to the Sanala team, several others contributed their time and wisdom to this process:



Ashley Wright

Indigenous Advisor, Island Coastal Economic Trust

Ashley Wright is a K'ómoks First Nation member and consultant, who works with a number of First Nations and organizations across B.C. on governance, planning, capacity building, and project management. She was engaged by the Trust to:

- Advise the CEO on strategic matters with respect to the project, First Nations engagement, government relations, and more
- Provide regular briefings to the Trust's board of directors and regional advisory committees
- Liaise with the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
- Attend engagement sessions with First Nations
- Guide strategic decision-making throughout the project
- Contribute to strategic content creation post-engagement

Island Coastal Economic Trust (the Trust) staff members had a number of important roles throughout the project, including to:

- Provide regular briefings to the Trust's board of directors and regional advisory committees
- Liaise with the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
- Provide a presentation about the Trust and the Transforming Governance project during First Nation engagement sessions
- Administer honoraria payments to First Nations following engagements



Background

What is Island Coastal Economic Trust?

Island Coastal Economic Trust was established in 2006 with an initial investment of \$50 million by the Province of British Columbia under the North Island-Coast Development Initiative Trust Act. The Trust's mandate has been to support economic diversification and growth across Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and islands and inlets from the Salish Sea to Cape Caution.

The Trust's vision is that island and coastal communities are thriving with a resilient economy that strengthens the wellbeing of all people and the environment. The Trust strategically invests in inclusive economic development, diversification, and innovation in partnership with communities to strengthen economic prosperity and peoples' well-being. To date, the Trust has committed \$67 million in economic development projects, amounting to a total of \$370 million of new investment in the region (see 2023-24 Impact Report).

Vision for Co-Governance Transformation

Since its founding, coastal people have been uplifting one another and building healthy, resilient, and more sustainable communities through investments with the Trust. The Trust works in close collaboration with people; forming high-trust relationships and working directly with First Nation governments, local and regional governments, and non-profit organizations in communities across the coast.

However, the lack of First Nations co-governance (notwithstanding eligibility for funding) has been a clear gap since the Trust was first established. The Act that governs the Trust only enabled local governments and Members of the Legislative Assembly to serve on advisory committees and appoint fellow committee members to the Board, with some additional Board members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. The gap has been noted by multiple independent reviews, resulting in consensus among all 35 local governments that are members of the Trust in favour of co-governance between First Nations and local governments.

Since inception, the Trust has depended on government funding transfers. At its founding the Trust was mandated by the Government of B.C. (including the Minister of Economic Development and M.L.A.s) to invest its founding capital into the region to create immediate positive economic impact. The Trust consequently had an initial five-



year investment timeframe. Subsequent B.C. Governments and independent legislative reviews found the Trust played an important role in regional development. The B.C. Government decided to extend the Trust's mandate with a \$10 million commitment in 2017 and again in 2023. In total, the Trust's Regional Advisory Committees and board have prepared for the winding up provisions in the Act across three separate periods since the Trust was founded. We noted in our conversations with leadership and in our literature reviews that the island coastal region has not yet been capitalized like other regions of B.C. to enable financial stability, institutional capacity, or long-term regional development or investment strategies.

The goal for this project is to transform the Trust into a permanent, co-governed, regional development organization led by coastal communities.

As the Trust moves forward, investing to build a resilient coastal economy, it believes in the power of collaboration between First Nations and local governments to invest in each other and govern the Trust through shared decision-making. This goal aligns with Action 4.39 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan, wherein the Province of British Columbia has committed to building a mechanism for inclusion of First Nations in the Trust's governance at a regional decision-making level (see Appendix C).

Three Independent Legislative Reviews

Under the North Island-Coast Development Initiative Trust Act (the Act), an independent legislative review committee must be formed to provide an independent assessment of the Act every five years. There have been three independent legislative reviews of the Act since the Trust was founded by the Government of British Columbia: 2011 ([link](#)), 2016, ([link](#)), and 2022 ([link](#)).

Across all three independent reviews, the committees highlighted the following points:

- The Trust's legislated governing model and operations have worked well
- **The Trust has created significant value financially and through non-fiscal benefits such as building collaboration on regional development among governments and communities**
- Money is invested in regional priorities with minimal operational expenditure
- The cap on the Government of B.C.'s contribution to the Trust (section 17 of the Act) should be removed

Regarding new investment in the Trust, each review committee made a number of observations:

- **2011** — All those engaged stated the Trust should continue its existence with ongoing provincial funding. **The uncertainty around the constraints on the provincial contribution to the fund impacts strategic planning significantly. It is difficult for the Trust to know whether to plan for a “sunset” strategy or for continuance of the same model.**
- **2016** — **Without new provincial investment, the Trust will be wound up** (the committee focused on the winding up provision in the Act).
- **2022** — **After 15 years, the time has come for the provincial government to remove the legislative cap on provincial contributions and make a significant investment in recapitalizing the Trust. There is an opportunity to combine recapitalization with a renewed vision for the Trust that sees it as a 3-way partnership between Indigenous governments, local governments and the provincial government.**

Each independent review emphasized the need for First Nations to be represented on both the Regional Advisory Committees and the Trust Board of Directors.

- **2011 — Make First Nations representation on the Board, through provincial appointees, a requirement in the Act;** and review options for meaningful inclusion of First Nations representation on the Regional Advisory Committees so as to enhance the operations and effectiveness of those bodies.
- **2016 —** Allow those regional district directors appointed to a regional district board by Treaty First Nations to serve on both Regional Advisory Committees and the Trust board of directors. **Further, First Nations should be provided with a clear community-based route to Board membership. The design of such provisions will need to be developed via consultation and with the consent of First Nations.**
- **2022 — The current legislation has worked well but it is past time that Indigenous governments be given a defined role in Trust governance.** The B.C. Government should work with First Nations in Vancouver Island-Coast region pursuant to s. 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act to align the Trust legislation with United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The most recent independent legislative review committee was comprised of the following leaders:



Kekinusuqs
Dr. Judith Sayers

Su-taxwiye
Dr. Sarah Morales

J. Wayne Rowe

Frank Leonard

Trust governance was also the subject of a review by the Office of the Auditor General and the Trust was the subject of an internal audit by the Ministry of Finance, both occurring in 2011. Since their creation, there have been nine independent legislative reviews of the three economic trusts in B.C. In the words of the 2022 independent committee, “All have affirmed the usefulness of the Trusts”.

Engagement

Methodology

Sanala's engagement approach is grounded in Indigenous values and practices including nested systems, respect for all living things, and respect for cultural differences as well as patterns. As Indigenous communities are unique, Sanala facilitates respectful, effective, place-based, and culturally-informed planning processes. Sanala practices trauma-informed facilitation that seeks to ensure participant safety, control and comfort in recognition of direct, intergenerational and historic traumas endured by all Indigenous peoples. Finally, Sanala utilizes participatory engagement techniques that empower participants and provide rich dialogue and outcomes.

This approach was applied via:

Relationship Building

At the core of the engagement approach was affirming First Nations' right to self-determine whether and how they chose to participate in this process. Meeting with First Nations individually rather than collectively in large or small groupings was intentional to respect their sovereignty and diverse systems of governance. As invited and where possible, the project team travelled to meet with First Nations in person in order to build strong connections. At each dialogue, whether it was virtual or in person, the conversation began with roundtable introductions to provide an opportunity for participants from the First Nations to share who they are, including their Nation's history and values.



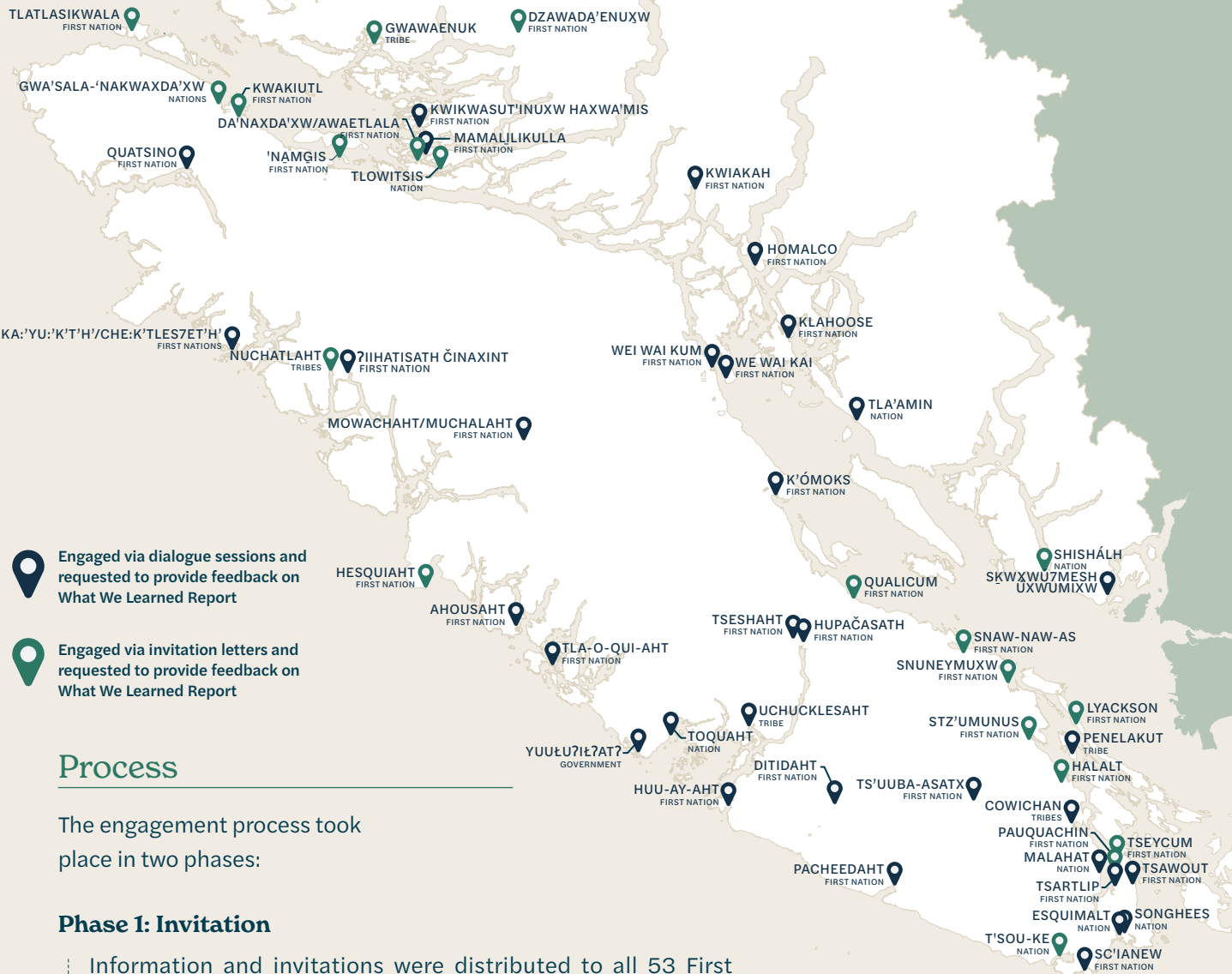
Communication

During the outreach process, Sanala continually followed up with First Nations through emails and phone calls to ensure information about the project was well communicated and accessible. Sanala prioritized timely follow up from meetings with summary notes and virtual questionnaires, as well as sharing the What We Learned Report with all First Nations in the region, whether they participated in a dialogue session or not. This emphasis on ongoing communication and invitation for feedback was designed to ensure that information gathered was accurate and that the process was inclusive regardless of participation levels and Nation capacity. This practice of reporting back follows First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP™), making sure Nations have ownership of the data collected from meetings and can control how it is used.

Reciprocity

Recognizing the time, expertise and valuable insights rooted in culture and lived experience for each participant was a core pillar of this work. The project team believes strongly that First Nations, Treaty Nations and Indigenous partners should always be fairly compensated for their time. For all meetings, reciprocity in the form of honoraria was offered. For in-person meetings, additional reciprocity in the form of food and small tokens of appreciation were brought and shared with Nation representatives.





Process

The engagement process took place in two phases:

Phase 1: Invitation

Information and invitations were distributed to all 53 First Nations governments within the region to participate in discussions on co-governance. Virtual open house meetings were hosted on August 13th and September 24th, 2024, to share further information about the project and how it began. In August 2024 and October 2024, a Knowledge Exchange took place with Gwaii Trust, Coast Funds, and a number of organizations in Haida Gwaii to share information about models of co-governance and shared decision making.

Phase 2: Engagement

Meetings with First Nations governments, offered both in-community and online, took place from September 2024 to May 2025. These meetings, discussing the Governance and Future of Island Coastal Economic Trust, shaped the findings presented in the What we Learned Report shared with all Nations and informed this First Nations Strategic Recommendations Report.

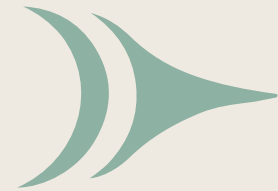
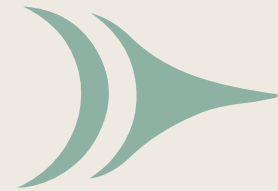
JULY TO
SEPTEMBER 2024

SEPTEMBER 2024
TO MAY 2025

SPRING 2025



To date, the following work has taken place:



"We're focused on developing a shared plan among First Nations, local governments, and the Province to transform the Trust into an impactful and co-governed institution that will be a catalyst for sustainable development for generations to come."

Sayaačath John Jack, Vice Chair of Island Coastal Economic Trust, Chief Councillor of Huu-ay-aht First Nations, Chair of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District.





Recommendations for the Government of British Columbia



The following recommendations, grounded in a shared vision for respectful partnership and co-governance, reflect the perspectives of the majority of First Nations across Vancouver Island and the surrounding coast. They demonstrate a commitment to working together—First Nations, local governments, and the Government of B.C.—through the Trust’s advisory committees and board, to facilitate strategic long-term economic investments that build and diversify BC’s coastal economy.

The recommendations are specific to the Government of British Columbia’s [North Island-Coast Development Initiative Trust Act](#) [SBC 2005] CHAPTER 36 (“the Act”) and the [North Island-Coast Development Initiative Trust Regions Regulation](#) [Last amended by B.C. Reg. 37/2021] (“the Regulation”)

RECOMMENDATION 1

First Nations on Advisory Committees

Amend or replace the Act to enable each First Nation whose territories span the service region to appoint an individual to Regional Advisory Committee(s) of the Trust.

100% of the 33 First Nations engaged in dialogue by Sanala Planning responded YES: their Nation/Tribe/Government is interested in appointing a representative to a Regional Advisory Committee of the Trust.

For details, see Question 2 (page 12), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

"It would provide some structure to the collaborative work we are already doing with other Nations and municipalities in the region"

MALAHAT FIRST NATION

"It would facilitate discussion and bring us together with the [local government] to work together, as we don't always have the same vision"

SQUAMISH NATION

RECOMMENDATION 2

Permanently Capitalize the Trust

Permanently capitalize the Trust to enable First Nations, local governments, and the Government of British Columbia to realize effective and collaborative co-governance.

100% of the 33 First Nations engaged in dialogue by Sanala Planning responded that the Trust SHOULD HAVE A PERMANENT CAPITAL BASE to invest, manage and self-determine regional priorities through an inclusive and strategic co-governance model on a long-term basis.

Over \$660 million in proposed projects eligible for Trust investment were identified by First Nations during dialogue with Sanala Planning. The Trust's current funding allocation is limited to \$2 million annually for the entire region, and is declining year-over-year without new investment. The Trust has come close to enacting the winding up provisions in the Act twice (2017, 2023) based on the scarcity of capital. For example,

we estimate it would take 33 years for the Trust to provide 10% equity contributions to catalyze the \$660 million in identified economic projects (and this is not viewed as a complete list of eligible planned projects). First Nations' proposed projects demonstrate a clear need for a higher amount of funding to increase the capacity of the Trust and support a growing number of regional priorities as the coastal economy diversifies.

In addition to First Nations perspectives, we noted in our literature review that the vision for permanent capitalization of the Trust has been resolved by all 35 local governments in the region at municipal councils, regional district boards, and the Regional Advisory Committees. This was further expressed via a resolution that was unanimously passed by local governments from across the province at the 2022 Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) convention.

Without permanent investment in the Trust, continued uncertainty about its future and constraints on its impact may result in a lack of interest from co-governing partners and inability to fulfil the legislated mandate - namely to drive economic growth and diversification - if the Trust cannot facilitate win-win outcomes and invest in impactful projects.

For details, see Question 1 (page 9), Question 11 (page 21), Question 13 (page 23), and Question 14 (page 24), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

"This is important to provide stability - uncertainty and loss of staff/staff retention [for the Trust] is a major risk"

COWICHAN TRIBES

"This is an absolute must for the continuity and commitment from local governments and First Nations. It's harder to commit to something that is short term rather than a trust that is going to be there for future generations."

TLA-O-QUI-AHT FIRST NATION

"1/4 of First Nations in B.C. live on Vancouver Island, so we should have at least 1/4 of total funding being allocated to Trusts"

MAMALILIKULLA FIRST NATION

"There is clearly an imbalance in how the money is invested in certain areas... its pretty drastic to see the difference between the [investments in different Trusts]"

PENELAKUT TRIBE

"It's important to account for inflation and how this will impact purchasing power - you should be asking for a lot more than \$150 million"

TSAWOUT FIRST NATION

RECOMMENDATION 3

Establish More Advisory Committees

Amend or replace the Act and the Regulation to establish more than two Regional Advisory Committees of the Trust.

In discussions with First Nations leaders, *Sanala Planning* heard general agreement that there needs to be ONE OR MORE ADDITIONAL Regional Advisory Committee(s) established, given inclusion of 53 First Nations, 35 local governments, and 10 Members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia on the advisory committees. This would bring the total number of Regional Advisory Committees to at least three.

Having 98 members on the two current advisory committees (resulting in an average of 49 members per committee) as established in the existing Act is not seen as practical or conducive to effective co-governance of the Trust.

For details, see conceptual map for Question 3 (page 12), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

RECOMMENDATION 4

First Nations Appointments to Advisory Committees

Amend or replace the Act to enable First Nations governments to appoint an individual to the Regional Advisory Committee(s) that their territory spans through a formal resolution and/or letter of appointment by their governing body.

The existing Act directs that it is the mayor of a municipality, the chair of a regional district (or an electoral area director where a regional district spans more than one Regional Advisory Committee), or a Member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia who is eligible to serve on a Regional Advisory Committee.

In contrast to the Act prescribing the role/title of the eligible government representative, First Nations have expressly stated, in dialogue with *Sanala Planning*, that they need to SELF-DETERMINE THE INDIVIDUAL THEY APPOINT to represent their government at the Regional Advisory Committee(s).

For details, see Question 4 (page 13) and Question 5 (page 14), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

“It should be up to each Nation to identify the best suited person”

TS’UUBAA-ASATX FIRST NATION

RECOMMENDATION 5

At Least 50% of the Board are First Nations Appointees

Amend or replace the Act to balance First Nations’ directors with local government and Lieutenant Governor in Council directors on the Board .

The existing Act enables only local governments and Members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia as eligible members of the Regional Advisory Committees. Further, the Board is composed of 4 appointees from each Regional Advisory Committee (8 in total) and 5 appointees by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The Act states that Members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia cannot be appointed to the Board of Directors.

100% of the 33 First Nations engaged in dialogue by Sanala Planning responded that there should be AT LEAST EQUAL representation of First Nations appointees on the Board of Directors.

For details, see Question 6 (page 15), Question 7 (page 16), and Question 8 (page 17), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

“Nothing says co-governance [more] than both of us making a decision together”

HUPAČASATH FIRST NATION

RECOMMENDATION 6

Define Co-Governance and Shared Decision-Making

Amend or replace the Act to define the spirit and intent of co-governance and shared decision-making by First Nations, local governments, and the Government of B.C. with respect to the new approach to governance of the Trust.

The Act has not allowed First Nations to participate in governance of the Trust since its inception. Given the consensus vision First Nations and local governments are forming for co-governance of the Trust (inclusive representation across advisory committees and a balanced composition within the board to facilitate shared decision-making), we recommend that the spirit and intent of co-governance and shared decision-making be acknowledged in the amended or replaced Act.

For details, see Question 6 (page 15), Question 7 (page 16), and Question 8 (page 17), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

“There is a lot of learning and unlearning that some non-Indigenous people need to do, as well as a commitment to this learning. The people that are appointed need to be committed to this, as allies in a shared learning process.”

TLA'AMIN FIRST NATION

RECOMMENDATION 7

Review and Define the Role of Government Appointments

Review and define the role of the Lieutenant Governor in Council appointments to the Trust Board in relation to First Nations' support for co-governance and shared regional, grassroots decision-making.

100% of the 33 First Nations engaged in dialogue by Sanala Planning responded that there should be AT LEAST EQUAL representation of First Nations membership on the Board of Directors.

The Act establishes that five of thirteen directors are appointed by the Lieutenant

Governor in Council. The five appointments are a minority of the existing Board of Directors given that the Government of B.C. founded the Trust as an independent organization that is not a government-related entity (i.e. the Government of B.C. does not control the board).

Considering First Nations perspectives described under Recommendation 4, in addition to the 60% of First Nations that suggested removing Lieutenant Governor appointments, we recommend the Government of B.C. review the number and role of, and criteria for, Lieutenant Governor in Council appointments to the board.

For details, see Question 6 (page 15), Question 7 (page 16), and Question 8 (page 17), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

"It is an important structure to give opportunity to others, folks with subject matter expertise (ie. someone from the private sector who is adding value to the Island economy). [However], there should be a skills matrix that identifies the gaps for the Lieutenant Governor to follow."

COWICHAN TRIBES

RECOMMENDATION 8

Enable Director Remuneration

Amend or replace Division 2, 13(1) in the Act to enable the Trust to provide director remuneration comparable to other publicly funded trusts and funds in order to recognize the value of directors' contributions and the responsibilities they carry.

94% — 31 of 33 First Nations engaged in dialogue by Sanala Planning - responded that there should be SOME REMUNERATION for directors' time on top of any required travel expense coverage.

Recruitment of qualified individuals to serve as appointees on the Trust Board of Directors is adversely affected by the lack of remuneration. Providing some remuneration would be consistent with other publicly funded trusts and funds in British Columbia and result in a diverse and qualified Board.

We note that the existing Act enables the Trust to remunerate Regional Advisory Committee members but not the directors.

For details, see Question 9 (page 18), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

RECOMMENDATION 9

Remove the Legislated Funding Cap

Remove (17) “Limit on the North Island-Coast one-time development allocation” in the Act to enable the Government of British Columbia to permanently capitalize the Trust.

100% of the 33 First Nations engaged in dialogue by Sanala Planning responded that the Trust SHOULD HAVE A PERMANENT CAPITAL BASE to invest, manage and self-determine regional priorities through an inclusive and strategic co-governance model.

Through knowledge exchanges with other trusts conducted during the project, Sanala Planning notes that Gwaii Trust and Coast Funds have no such “cap on funding” written into B.C. law. From literature reviews, the Government of B.C.’s Act governing the New Relationship Trust also has no such “cap on funding” enshrined in law — the Government of British Columbia has contributed more than \$200 million to that trust since its inception.

Sanala Planning notes that all 3 independent legislative reviews of the Act governing the Trust have recommended to the Government of B.C. that the “one-time development allocation” be removed from the Act governing the Trust. These legislative reviews were conducted for the Government of British Columbia by Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders working with independent consultants in 2011, 2016, and 2021 in compliance with the Act.

Without a permanent investment in the Trust, continued uncertainty about its future and constraints on its impact may result in a lack of strategic engagement by co-governing partners if the Trust cannot facilitate win-win outcomes and impactful economic investments among diverse coastal communities and sectors.

For details, see Question 1 (page 9), Question 11 (page 21), Question 13 (page 23), and Question 14 (page 24), and Knowledge Exchange (page 6), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).



Recommendations for the Trust



Sanala Planning's engagements with First Nations identified key considerations with respect to the bylaws, governing policies, and practices of the Trust's board of directors and the Regional Advisory Committees. The following are strategic recommendations for Island Coastal Economic Trust as the organization moves forward towards realizing the consensus vision shared by First Nations and local governments for its transformation:

RECOMMENDATION 1

Facilitate Development of a Consensus Action Plan

Support collaboration among First Nations, local governments, and the Government of British Columbia (“the partners”) to form a consensus action plan that will capitalize and transform the Trust as a co-governed, permanently financed regional development organization for Vancouver Island and the coast.

First Nations and local governments have individually and collectively formed a vision for the Trust to be transformed to a model of co-governance and shared decision-making. Importantly, these governments have stated that co-governance cannot be achieved without permanent capitalization of the Trust. Such capitalization will bring the partners together in strategic and collaborative roles focusing on win-win outcomes, foster impactful economic investments that leverage and attract increased investment to the region, and transform the Trust from a short-term granting entity to a strategic long-term investor working with each of the partners to develop and diversify the coastal economy.

Based on the engagements and literature reviews, Sanala Planning believes the Trust plays an important role in convening leadership among First Nations, local governments, Members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, and further partners.

The Trust should focus on bringing the partners — First Nations, local governments, and the Government of British Columbia — together towards building a consensus action plan to realize transformation of the Trust.

For details, see Questions 1 to 14, Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

RECOMMENDATION 2

Work with B.C. to Ensure Sufficient Institutional Capacity

Work with the Government of British Columbia to ensure the Trust has sufficient human, institutional, and organizational capacity to resource the governance and administration required to uphold effective co-governance that drives regional economic impact.

Transforming the Trust to the envisioned co-governance model will require the Government of British Columbia to resource the Trust, and for the Trust to operate effectively to:

- administer and convene more and larger Regional Advisory Committees;
- create space for deeper relationship building between governments and the Trust;
- ensure sufficient staffing and infrastructure needs, including Indigenous staff members, to enhance accessibility and frequency of communication with more communities and organizations and to develop a higher number of impactful economic projects than the Trust is currently resourced to invest in;
- ensure there is sufficient annual investment income from a permanent capital base to resource the Trust to govern and manage the Trust effectively in compliance with the requirements stated in the amended or replaced Act and associated new bylaws, terms of reference, and governing policies; and,
- partner with organizations with consistent support to develop a higher number of impactful projects with viable business plans and capital expenditure plans.

For details, see Question 1 (page 9), Question 2 (page 11), Question 3 (page 12), Question 6 (page 15), Question 7 (page 16), Question 9 (page 18), Question 11 (page 21), Question 13 (page 23), Question 14 (page 24), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

“All First Nations should be engaged in this process in a way that develops capacity, it is important that the process itself is accessible”

TLA'AMIN FIRST NATION

RECOMMENDATION 3

Evolve Governing Policies and Practices

Develop new bylaws, terms of reference for Regional Advisory Committees, governing policies, procedures, and operating practices for the Trust to support effective co-governance, long-term investment of permanent capital, and impactful project investments.

With inclusion of First Nations in the Trust's governance and transformation to co-governance, based on the dialogue held with First Nations leaders, we recommend that the Trust develop the following with leadership and insights from the co-governing appointees:

- new bylaws, terms of reference for regional advisory committees, governing policies, procedures and operating practices;
- review and evolve funding programs, application, and reporting practices;
- ensure meaningful engagement with and recognition of the host First Nation(s) whose territory meetings take place on;
- include Elders and youth wherever possible. For instance, invite an Elder from the host Nation(s) to provide an opening prayer and remain throughout meetings as a witness;
- uplift local economies by supporting Nation-owned or member-owned businesses for venue and catering needs for meetings; and,
- regularly report back to First Nations to communicate and engage.
- The Trust should focus on bringing the partners — First Nations, local governments, and the Government of British Columbia — together in order to create a consensus action plan to realize transformation of the Trust.

For details, see Question 2 (page 11) and Question 9 (page 18), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

"The role of an Elder... is to keep the peace and focus on collective vision and maintaining positive relationships"

MOWACHAHT/MUCHALAHT FIRST NATION

"Offering snacks - it is our teachings that people absorb the information and digest it when they are consuming food and beverages"

COWICHAN TRIBES

RECOMMENDATION 4

Strive for Consensus-based Decisions

Work as a board towards consensus-based decisions while allowing decisions to be made by a majority vote if necessary.

76% of First Nations engaged in dialogue with Sanala Planning responded that decisions should be made by majority or consensus-1 (used by the Gwaii Trust). Full consensus was recognized by many as the ideal decision-making process, but acknowledged as difficult to obtain and a possible barrier to conducting businesses.

Assuming that there will be at least equal representation of First Nations appointees on the board, the bylaws could continue to allow for decisions to be made by a majority vote if necessary. We understood through our conversations with directors and staff with the Trust that the existing board is focused on consensus-based decisions and does not typically require voting to make decisions.

For details, see Question 7 (page 16) and Question 10 (page 20), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

RECOMMENDATION 5

Increase Project Investment Maximum

Increase the funding limit for the Capital and Innovation program from \$200,000 to at least \$1 million and offer a range of funding programs for investing in major projects to smaller or economic capacity-building investments.

First Nations have expressed through engagement sessions that the Trust should have a flexible and tiered funding approach, ranging from small grants up to \$1 million. This is seen as important to create opportunities for large-scale projects without removing the potential for smaller projects.

Over the years, we note that the Trust board has reduced the amount available per project from +\$1 million to the current \$200,000 maximum. With an annual funding budget limited to \$2 million available for investment in economic development across Vancouver Island and the coast, the Trust board can currently invest in only ten projects a year. Based on the limited capitalization of the Trust, it is forecasted to wind up in the coming years. First Nations cited that more funding is needed from the Trust (the

amount per project and the number of project investments annually) as a key condition for effective co-governance with First Nations. We also note that the Trust is a private source of non-repayable capital that can be leveraged to secure private financing and to match with government funding sources for major project investments that diversify Indigenous, rural, and urban economies on the coast.

The Trust board should work with the B.C. Government in partnership with First Nations and local governments to secure new investment as a condition of co-governance transformation to enable the newly constituted Trust board to increase the amount available for large-scale strategic or impactful economic investments.

For details, see Question 13 (page 23) and Question 14 (page 24), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

RECOMMENDATION 6

Prioritize Partnerships

Prioritize funding for projects that involve multiple First Nations, local governments, and/or private sector partners to encourage collaboration and partnerships.

Given representation from 35 local governments and 53 First Nations in the Regional Advisory Committees and equal representation among these governing entities at board of the Trust, First Nations expressed there should be more projects funded than the Trust has the current financial capacity to invest in.

Specifically, First Nations offered the following suggestions for the Trust board to consider:

- Ensure flexibility on the number of applications funded per year
- Assess the prioritization and impact of each project

For example, First Nations stated that priority should be given to collaborative projects that involve multiple First Nations and/or local governments (i.e. strategic regional economic development projects).

For details, see Question 14 (page 24), Appendix A (What We Learned Report).

“It is important to think about who is involved in a project and who is benefitting - not just looking at the applications but those who developed those applications and their capacity.”

MAMALILIKULLA FIRST NATION

Conclusion



An emerging consensus is taking shape among First Nations, local governments, and regional stakeholders regarding the future governance of the Island Coastal Economic Trust. With First Nations unanimously supporting the idea of co-governing the Trust, there is immense potential for strategic economic collaboration among communities on the coast. This alignment marks a significant and positive shift toward a more inclusive approach—one that acknowledges the unique roles and perspectives of all partners in shaping regional economic development.

This process highlighted the incredible leadership of many First Nations who are pursuing robust, sustainable economic development that supports human and environmental flourishing, while contributing to the overall economy in a way that benefits Vancouver Island, the Coast and beyond. Meaningful First Nations participation in the economy is integral to our collective prosperity. As stated by an engagement participant, “greater First Nations representation will enable more economic development to address the many issues in our communities... if we build up First Nations all other folks rise.”

The outcome of this process presents a key opportunity for the Government of B.C. to pursue reconciliation and strengthen relationships with First Nations and local governments. Enabling the participation of First Nations in the Trust’s governance upholds First Nations’ fundamental right to self-determination by respecting their governing authority over decision making in their territory.

Furthermore, by adopting the recommendations outlined in this report, the Government of B.C. can help to solidify an inclusive and collaborative governance model that strengthens local and regional economies by enabling the Trust to deliver long-term, strategic investments across Vancouver Island and coastal B.C.

APPENDIX A

What We Learned Report

The attached What We Learned Report was prepared by Sanala Planning and provided to all First Nations across the Trust service region for input on March 26th, 2025, and updated on May 7th, 2025.



Transforming Governance of Island Coastal Economic Trust: A Path to Partnership



What We Learned Report

Published March 25, 2025
Updated May 7, 2025

Prepared By :

Sanala Planning



An Invitation for Strategic Input

If you have yet to meet with Sənala and Island Coastal Economic Trust, we welcome an opportunity for dialogue to ensure your Nation's voice is heard. If your Nation has generously provided your time and insights on this work, we welcome your feedback on what we've learned across the island and coast.

Introduction

Island Coastal Economic Trust (the Trust) is at a pivotal moment in its evolution, working toward a transformation that will embed co-governance with First Nations at its core. Since its establishment in 2006, the Trust has played a critical role in supporting economic development across coastal communities, yet its governance structure has not fully included First Nations decision-makers. In response, the Trust has initiated a collaborative engagement process to co-develop a governance model that reflects the needs, priorities, and aspirations of all communities in the region.

To guide this transition, the Trust invited Sənala Planning, an Indigenous-owned planning company, to facilitate an engagement process across the region served by the Trust that is home to 53 First Nations. Through open discussions, virtual meetings, and in-community sessions, this process aimed to shape a governance framework that ensures First Nations are fully represented in decision-making for the Trust. Insights gained will contribute to a First Nations Strategic Recommendations Report that will be shared with First Nations, the BC government, the Trust, local governments, and the public in June 2025. The report will inform legislative change toward co-governance and serving the broader goal of securing the Trust's long-term stability and impact as a permanent regional economic development organization.

This report includes an overview of the engagement process to date, a compilation of responses from discussion with 33 First Nations, and next steps.

Note: for reporting purposes, all engagement participants will be referred to as "First Nations," while recognizing that several identify as "Tribes" or "Governments."

Background



What is Island Coastal Economic Trust?

Island Coastal Economic Trust was established in 2006 with an initial investment of \$50 million by the Province of British Columbia under the North Island-Coast Development Initiative Trust Act. The Trust's mandate has been to support economic diversification and growth across Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and islands and inlets from the Salish Sea to Cape Caution.

The Trust's vision is that island and coastal communities are thriving with a resilient economy that strengthens the wellbeing of all people and the environment. The Trust strategically invests in inclusive economic development, diversification, and innovation in partnership with communities to strengthen economic prosperity and peoples' wellbeing.

Vision for Co-Governance

Since its founding, coastal people have been uplifting one another and building healthy, resilient, and more sustainable communities through investments with the Trust. The Trust works in close collaboration — forming high-trust relationships — with people, working directly with First Nation governments, local and regional governments, and non profit organizations in communities across the coast.

There has been a clear gap in the Trust's governance since its establishment with First Nations not at the table, despite being eligible for funding. The Act that governs the Trust only enabled local governments and MLAs to have members serve on advisory committees and appoint their members to the board. The gap has been noted by multiple independent reviews, resulting in consensus by all 35 local governments that are members of the Trust resolving to enable co-governance by First Nations and local governments.



For the past decade, the Trust has been dependent on government funding transfers: \$10 million in 2018 and again in 2023. The island coastal region has not yet been capitalized like other regions of B.C. to enable permanence, financial stability, capacity, and a long-term strategy.

The goal for this project is to transform the Trust into a permanent, co-governed, regional development organization led by coastal communities. As the Trust moves forward, investing to build a resilient coastal economy, it believes in the power of collaboration among First Nations and local governments to invest in each other and to govern the Trust through shared decision-making.

As stated in Section 4.39 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan, the Province of British Columbia has committed to building a mechanism for inclusion of First Nations in the Trust's governance.

Engagement

The engagement process took place in two phases:

» Phase 1: Invitation

Information and invitations were distributed to all 53 First Nations governments within the region to participate in discussions on co-governance. Virtual open house meetings were hosted on July 30th and September 24th, 2024, to share further information about the project and how it began.

» Phase 2: Engagement

Meetings with First Nations governments, offered both in-community and online, took place from September 2024 to February 2025. These meetings, discussing the Governance and Future of Island Coastal Economic Trust, shaped the findings presented in this “What we Learned Report”, and will inform a First Nations Strategic Recommendations Report to be shared with participating First Nations as well as the provincial government.

Objectives

By engaging with 53 First Nation partners through a number of approaches this process was designed to:

- Raise awareness of the Trust, its unique role and funding programs, and the board's vision for the future
- Gain insight from First Nations on a consensus based approach to transforming the Trust into a permanent, co-governed, regional development organization for coastal communities
- Strengthen new and existing relationships between the Trust and First Nations
- Ensure balance and reciprocity for the sharing of knowledge with First Nations communities, Nations, and organizations, through the distribution of payment/recognition as well as copies of, and retained rights to, all data

Timeline



To date, the following work has been completed:



2 Virtual Roundtables



2 Knowledge Exchanges



14 In-Person Meetings



19 Virtual Meetings

What We Learned

Knowledge Exchange



Board members and leadership teams from the Gwaii Trust and Island Coastal Economic Trust, as well as Sənala Planning representatives met for an important knowledge exchange.

Photo by Joey Rudichuk, Marketing and Communications Manager, Gwaii Trust Society.

From August 12th-14th, 2024, the “Transforming Governance” project team, including representatives from the Island Coastal Economic Trust and Sənala Planning, travelled to Haida Gwaii to learn about models of co-governance and shared decision making. During this visit, in subsequent phone calls, and a follow up meeting in Vancouver on October 4th, the project team spoke with members of Gwaii Trust, Haida Gwaii Management Council, Haida Gwaii Solutions Table, Skidegate Band Council, and Coast Funds. Key lessons learned from these conversations that will support the Trust in working toward its goal of co-governance included:

» Invest in Communication

Prioritize communication by committing to providing regular updates to the 53 First Nations and 35 local governments. Storytelling on community wellbeing and impacts of the Trust will deepen community understanding about how the Trust works and its benefits. Investing in internal capacity to support this work will add value and lead to greater opportunities.

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» **Cultivate a Shared Vision**

Invite appointed representatives to share their priorities and goals to identify common threads and collectively establish a shared vision to guide the group. By co-creating a common purpose, representatives can better work as a collective to fund projects that serve that shared vision rather than individual needs.

» **Develop Tools for Evaluation**

Identifying a list of competencies for Board appointments will ensure equitable representation and a diverse range of knowledge and experience (i.e. forestry, social welfare, tourism). Further, establishing a sorting matrix provides a valuable tool for classifying funding applications into different categories or scenarios during the assessment process.

» **Establish Structure**

Provide a clear mandate by outlining the roles and responsibilities of Regional Advisory Committee members and Board members. Meeting preparation and follow up should detail key deliverables, action items, and outcomes to provide clarity on expectations of appointed representatives. Additionally, developing protocol agreements with the Nations to clarify how they would like to work with one another will support in building trust and strengthening relationships.



Board members and leadership teams from the Gwaii Trust and Island Coastal Economic Trust, as well as Sənala Planning representatives met with a Haida matriarch and Knowledge Keeper to gain insight on their experience with co-governance and co-management as a former Councillor on the Council of the Haida Nation.

First Nation(s) Engagements

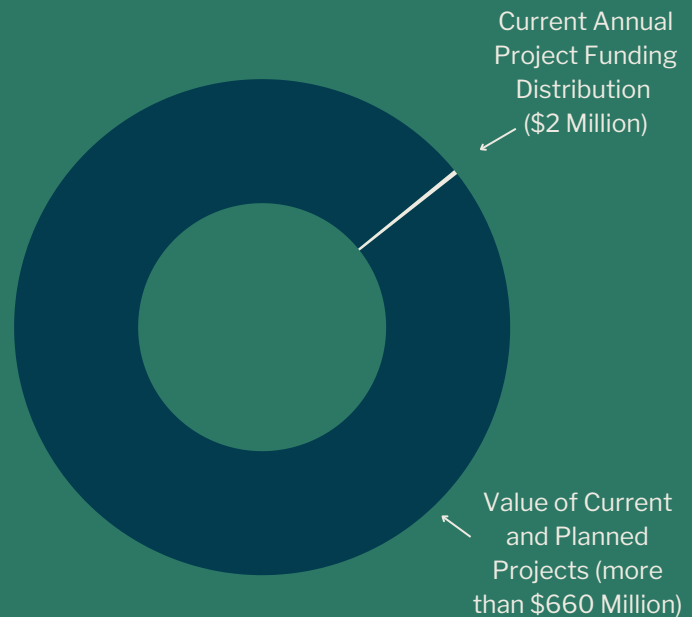


Map illustrating First Nation engagement status throughout Island Coastal Economic Trust's service region

The following 14 questions were developed in collaboration by Sānala Planning and Island Coastal Economic Trust. Responses from the 33 First Nations who directly engaged have been compiled and summarized for review and feedback from all 53 First Nations who were invited to participate. Quotes are attributed to each First Nation where they have provided expressed consent.

We welcome continued conversations with First Nations into Spring 2025, in particular with Nations that we have not met with so far.

In response to this question, First Nations spoke about a diverse range of current and planned economic development projects, totalling more than \$660 million, that would be eligible for funding with the Trust. Given the Trust's existing, limited capital enables only \$2 million for project investments annually, First Nations have indicated there is significantly higher demand for the Trust to invest in Indigenous-led economic development going forward.



In the discussions with First Nations, a number of shared themes arose:

Acquiring and developing land to support community needs through mixed-use commercial and industrial ventures, as well as market housing and improvements to infrastructure (e.g. roads, utilities, and transportation).

Growing Nation-led tourism through guided tours and investing in hotels and campgrounds, while supporting environmental conservation and cultural revitalization goals.

● = 1 First Nation

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Marina Development & Revitalization ■■■■■■■■

Purchasing and/or revitalising existing marinas to support tourism, boating, or related revenue generating ventures.

Sustainable Forestry ■■■■■■■■

Securing forestry tenures and transitioning from traditional forestry to a more diversified economy with value-added forestry products.

Food Production ■■■■■■■■

Enhancing community food security while exploring income generating activities such as fish processing, sustainable farming, aquaculture, commercial kitchens, among others.

Green Energy ■■■■■■■■

Investing in renewable fuels, and clean technologies, such as biodiesel co-ops and micro-hydro projects to improve energy access and generate income.

Marine Transportation ■■■■■■■■

Improving the mobility of community members and meeting supply needs with water taxis and barge businesses.

Alongside the above themes, many First Nations spoke to a focus on the provision of community-based employment and training opportunities for members. There also was a clear emphasis on ensuring long-term economic growth is established through businesses that are sustainable, culturally aligned, and enhances the wellbeing of their people and surrounding communities. In addition, collaborating with other First Nations and local communities on joint ventures was a common priority.



Question 2: What would a good relationship between the Trust and your Nation look like from your perspective?

“The funding is almost secondary, [it’s] more about getting to know each other and what the vision is moving forward”

Responses to this question centred on building strong relationships through clear and transparent communication and collaboration. Having the Trust accessible to answer questions or address any needs throughout the application process was highlighted as a key component of a good relationship. A number of First Nations with smaller populations spoke to the value of having the Trust as a resource for capacity building, providing guidance, expertise, and support with identifying possible economic development opportunities.

“All First Nations should be engaged in this process in a way that develops capacity, it is important that the process itself is accessible” - Tla'amin First Nation

“It would be helpful for Nations without the internal technical capacity to access technical support or funding for it from the Trust, in order to develop the full application for an economic development project”

There was also a clear emphasis on inclusivity, with one Nation sharing the importance of including Elders and youth wherever possible. Regular updates and communication on the activities of the Trust to First Nations were requested to ensure communities are informed and included regardless of regular Regional Advisory Committee attendance.

“Economic development in a way that benefits wellbeing, health, and culture before generating revenue for profit.”



Regional Advisory Committee

An appointee to a Regional Advisory Committee would:

- Attend 3 meetings/year
- Represent your Nation alongside First Nations appointees, Mayors, the Chairs of the Regional Districts, and Provincial MLAs
- Review staff due diligence on project proposals
- Provide recommendations and strategic advice to the Trust's board
- Elect committee members to represent your region on the Trust board



Map illustrating one concept for a shift to 3 regional advisory committees to facilitate proportional representation among First Nations, local governments, and MLAs conducive to co-governance of the Trust.

Question 3: Would your Nation be interested in appointing a representative to a Regional Advisory Committee of the Trust?

100% of First Nations unanimously responded YES to appointing a representative to a Regional Advisory Committee.

“It would provide some structure to the collaborative work we are already doing with other Nations and municipalities in the region” - Malahat First Nation

“There has to be some contemplation about the municipalization of First Nations - the problem is the fundamental erosion of self determination and the loss of distinction of identity and rights... there might need to be some serious cultural training at the table to ensure they know the local rights and knowledge of the Nations”

Question 4: If your Nation were to appoint a representative to an independent Regional Advisory Committee, how would that appointment be made?

Responses to this question were consistent in all meetings, with nearly all First Nations noting this appointment would be made by their elected leadership in a duly convened meeting. Flexibility is important however, as one Nation noted that they would invite community input on determining who would be the best fit for the role. Where a First Nation is governed by hereditary leader(s), a letter of appointment rather than meeting was indicated as the method of decision-making for appointments.



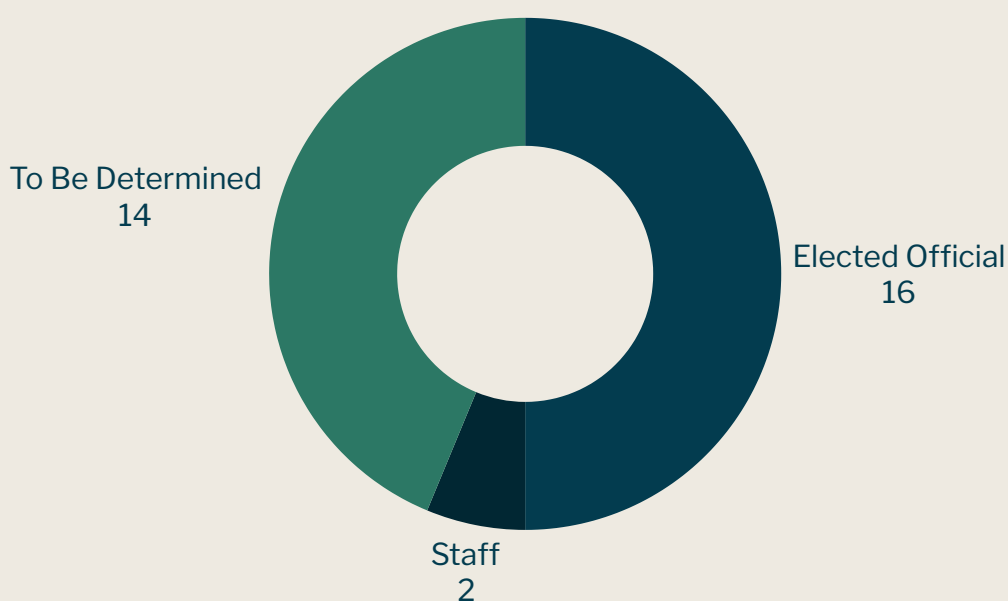
Chief Rick Johnson, Councillor Sandy Johnson, and Tamara Alfred, Band Manager, Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation, welcomed the Trust staff and Ashley Wright, Indigenous Advisor to the Trust, in Gwa'yasdām's to meet about the future of the Trust. Sanala Planning facilitated the meeting via zoom.

“Having First Nations at the table to provide strategic direction is valuable for determining criteria - there is a level of knowledge and expertise that could only come from having First Nations present”

Question 5: The current legislation requires appointees to be “elected officials”. Would you appoint an elected official, or?

“It should be up to each Nation to identify the best suited person”

The majority of First Nations stated they would appoint an elected official, however 42% of First Nations require further internal discussion to determine if the appointment would be an elected official, a hereditary leader, or staff member of either the Nation or their economic development corporation. A small number of Nations noted that the appointment would likely be a staff member due to the limited availability of their leadership. Flexibility is therefore essential, enabling Nations to determine who is the best fit for this role. Several Nations suggested the need for alternates, taking into account the busy schedules of elected leaders.



“The comprehensiveness of this opportunity is more than economic development, it's about closing the gap and bringing back generational wealth for our people”

"This should be up to each Nation and should be skill-based to an extent, with some economic development knowledge" - Ts'uubaa-asatx First Nation

Board Appointments ↔ Co-governance

The Regional Advisory Committees each, from their membership, appoint 8 of the 13 members of the Trust board. The Lt. Governor of B.C. appoints the other 5 appointees.

Question 6: Do you believe the Regional Advisory Committees should elect/appoint equal numbers of First Nations and local government members from each region to the Board? Or?

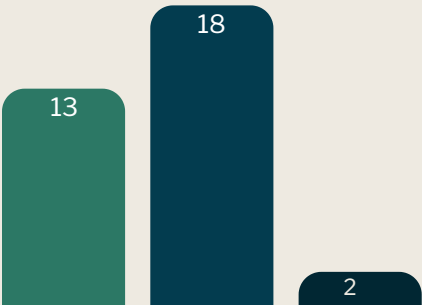
"A plan needs to be developed if not all Nations have the capacity to appoint someone to the board or RAC - how will equal representation be achieved?" - Cowichan Tribes

The majority of First Nations agreed there should be at least equal representation of First Nations and local governments on the Board. 39% of First Nations suggested that there should be proportionate representation recognizing the number of First Nations is greater than the number of local governments, in addition to the fact that these economic development projects are taking place in their traditional territories.

"Greater First Nations representation will enable more economic development for First Nations to address the many issues in our communities - if we build up First Nations all other folks rise"

2 First Nations suggested that the Board appointments could rotate who has the slight majority (ie. 7 First Nations and 6 local governments one year, and 6 First Nations and 7 local governments the next).

- Proportional Representation
- Equal Representation
- Rotating Slight Majority



"There should be equal representation at the forefront, but ultimately get to the place where, regardless of the Board makeup, Indigenous interests are well represented"

"Is there harm in having more First Nation representation over local governments considering it is our traditional territory? It's important that everyone has the same view in terms of vision and values - not about the numbers but about the commitment and showing up."

Question 7: Do you believe equal representation by First Nations and local governments on the board would facilitate co-governance and shared decision-making?



The vast majority of First Nations agreed that being at the table and having equal representation on the board is an important step toward co-governance and shared decision-making. However, many Nations expressed some uncertainty as to what this would look like in action.

"Nothing says co governance than both of us making a decision together"
- Hupačasath First Nation

"It would facilitate discussion and bring us together with the [local government] to work together, as we don't always have the same vision" - Squamish Nation

"It's a step in the right direction but depends on how the Board is operated and its policies. There is a lot of ground work to do in order to have true co-governance, such as how the Board deals with conflict, how it communicates, etc."

"Having conversations will open our eyes to things we previously were not aware of. If we can overlap by co-governing at an economic level, it will open up conversations Nation to Nations and also Nations to local governments, that otherwise is completely lacking. This would be the benefit [of the Trust], regardless of the funding."

"There is a lot of learning and unlearning that some non-Indigenous people need to do, as well as a commitment to this learning. The people that are appointed need to be committed to this, as allies in a shared learning process." - Tla'amin First Nation

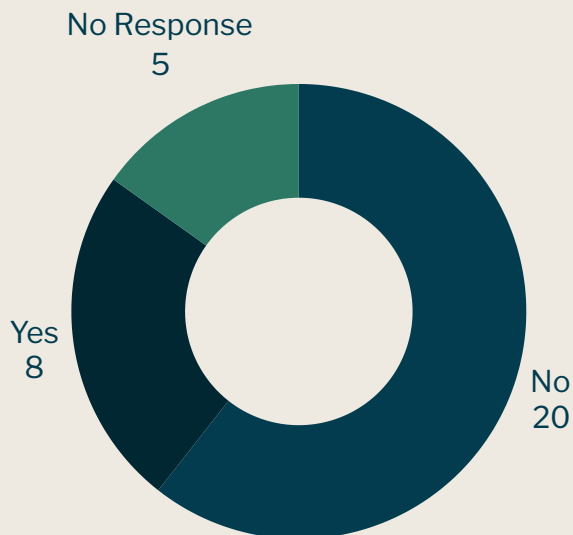
"What happens when a First Nation is placed in an ordered/tiered governance structure? We effectively become a part of the government with quasi municipal powers... important to have language that outlines First Nations as a distinct group."

Question 8: Should the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia continue to appoint some members?

The majority of Nations felt strongly that the Regional Advisory Committees should have full agency to appoint from within their own members to the Board. Some First Nations expressed a concern that Lieutenant Governor appointments could introduce outside influence.

"[The Lieutenant Governor making Board appointments] was always quizzical to me, as they are a representative of Canada's colonial history"

"Is it co-governance if the government is making appointments?"



Out of the 8 First Nations who agreed the Lieutenant Governor should continue to appoint members to the Board to address gaps, 4 felt that the number of appointments should decrease to maximum of 2 or 3 instead of the current 5 on a Board of 13. They noted that this would help support a strong relationship with the province.

"It is an important structure to give opportunity to others, folks with subject matter expertise (ie. someone from the private sector who is adding value to the island economy). [However], there should be a skills matrix that identifies the gaps for the Lieutenant Governor to follow." - Cowichan Tribes

"[Appointments from the Lieutenant Governor] adds some independence to the process and avoids any preferential treatment"

Serving on the Trust's Board of Directors

Question 9: When thinking of a board of directors operating in co-governance among First Nations and local governments representing each region of the island and coast, what considerations come to mind in terms of:

- *Director remuneration*
- *Nation-specific Protocols*

Remuneration

Almost all (91%) First Nations agreed there should be some remuneration for Board members' time on top of any required travel expense coverage. They shared that beyond being an incentive for regular participation, offering remuneration recognizes the value of their contributions and the responsibility that Board members carry. For representatives who already receive a salary for their role however, it was suggested that remuneration could instead go to the Nation.

“Receiving compensation would support more interest in participating, as there is an opportunity cost for everything we do and it takes time away from time that could be spent on direct issues for our government”

Protocols

The majority of First Nations spoke to the importance of meaningful engagement with and recognition of the host First Nation(s) whose territory the meeting is taking place on. Many recommended inviting an Elder from the host Nation to provide an opening prayer and remain throughout the meeting as a witness.

“The role of an Elder... is to keep the peace and focus on collective vision and maintaining positive relationships” - Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation

“Our people should be included... why can't our Elders and youth be observers, or be able to speak with us”

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Beyond an opening and acknowledgement, it was suggested that the meetings could be an opportunity to uplift the local economy by supporting Nation-owned or member-owned businesses for venue and catering needs.

“The meetings should look and feel different depending where it takes place, there is no universal approach, but should honor the protocols of the local Nation and economy, putting the host Nation at the forefront.”

“Offering snacks - it is our teachings that people absorb the information and digest it when they are consuming food and beverages” - Cowichan Tribes

Other recommended protocols to follow included regular reporting back to First Nations to communicate what work is taking place and invite input. This is especially important for any Nations unable to regularly attend all meetings. Consistent follow up, using multiple methods of communication, will help to ensure all communities are being heard and represented.



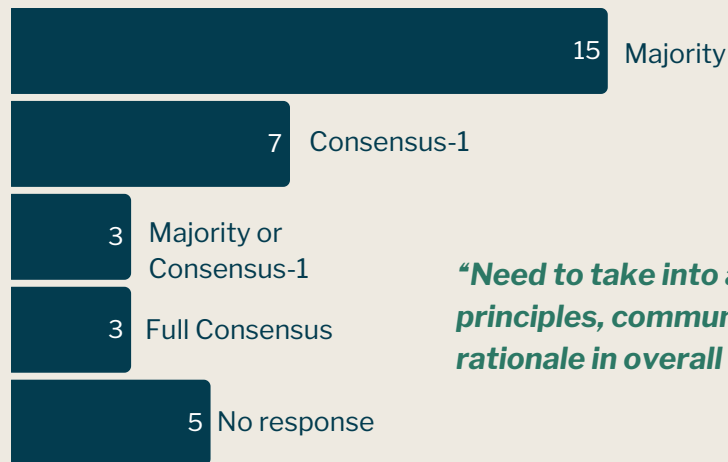
Megan Hanacek, Director, and Brodie Guy, CEO, Island Coastal Economic Trust, reported about the Sanala-led engagements to First Nations and local governments at the North Island Economic Forum hosted on the traditional territories of the Quatsino and Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations in March 2025

» Co-Governance, Shared Decision Making

Question 10: Imagine, as has been envisioned, the Trust board is comprised equally of First Nations and local government appointees. When the Trust board looks at projects recommended from each Regional Advisory Committee, do you believe decisions should be made through:

Full Consensus? Consensus -1? Majority? Other?

Full consensus was recognized by many as the ideal decision making process, but acknowledged as difficult to obtain and a possible barrier to conducting business. Consequently, 15 First Nations suggested a majority vote as a more realistic alternative, with 8 Nations expressly stating that majority should have the “spirit of consensus.”



“Best case scenario is developing consensus, but it's not always feasible”

“Need to take into account things we see as sacred principles, community benefits locally, transparency and rationale in overall decision making.”

Several Nations proposed that voting be anonymous in order to ensure decisions can be made without bias or influence by others.

“A true honest real vote should be anonymous and not impacted by relationships”

Finally, it was noted multiple times that First Nations should have the ability to veto a project happening on their territory.

“It would be essential to prevent projects that would be destructive to another Nation’s environment”

» Co-Governance, Shared Decision Making

The island coastal region has not been capitalized by the Government of B.C. in comparison to other parts of the province (e.g. northern BC's trust has \$608 million currently). In setting their vision for the Trust, local governments have stated an objective of securing \$150 million to capitalize the Trust to enable:

- \$7 to \$10 million in annual investment into coastal communities' economic projects and priorities with decisions made by First Nations and local governments
- Ensure the Trust has stable administration and capacity to support regional co-governance
- That the capital itself is never expended – it is invested long-term and sustained for current and future generations

Question 11: Do you believe the Trust, governed by First Nations and local governments, should have a permanent capital base to invest, manage and self-determine regional priorities?

First Nations unanimously agreed that the Trust should have a permanent capital base to invest, manage and self-determine regional priorities.

“This is important to provide stability - uncertainty and loss of staff/staff retention [for the Trust] is a major risk” - Cowichan Tribes

“This is an absolute must for the continuity and commitment from local governments and First Nations. It's harder to commit to something that is short term rather than a trust that is going to be there for future generations.” - Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation

Discussions with First Nations highlighted the importance of remedying the clear inequity in funding that has been allocated to Island Coastal Economic Trusts in comparison to the province's other Trusts.

“1/4 of First Nations in BC live on Vancouver Island, so we should have at least 1/4 of total funding being allocated to Trusts” - Mamalilikulla First Nation

"There is clearly an imbalance in how the money is invested in certain areas... its pretty drastic to see the difference between the [investments in different Trusts]"
- Penelakut Tribe

“It's important to account for inflation and how this will impact purchasing power - you should be asking for a lot more than \$150 million” - Tsawout First Nation

Question 12: How do you think the B.C. Government should be involved with the Trust?

91% of First Nations stated that the provincial government should simply focus capitalizing the Trust, supporting co-governance, and receiving annual reporting focused on transparency and public accountability.

“We want to have accountability but we don’t want to be micromanaged because it defeats the purpose of UNDRIP”

“Ongoing partnership, putting their money where their mouths are, holding DRIPA up, economic reconciliation, apology vs actually providing capital for projects that are benefitting our communities in real ways”

“Put the trust in the Trust”

“How many times in our decades of growth are they going to limit us? How many more times are we going to include them for them to make our choices? When is it our turn? They should take the backseat instead of us. We’ve been doing it for too long.”

“The Trust is arms length, a-political - this is important to be able to focus on the communities”

In terms of those who felt the provincial government should have more involvement, one First Nation leader recommended a multi-sectoral approach to ensure continuity with this work, bringing numerous departments all together to talk to as a collective. Another echoed similar sentiments, suggesting the province de-silo their work and facilitate communication across departments to enhance internal efficiencies.

Question 13: Imagine you are applying to the Trust for a priority project — how much funding do you think the Trust should make available per project to catalyze economic opportunities?

Over the years, the Trust has reduced the amount available per project from +\$1 million to the current \$200,000 maximum. This is as a result of the lack of a financially sustainable model and sufficient capitalization when the Trust was founded by government.

“It is important to think about who is involved in a project and who is benefitting - not just looking at the applications but those who developed those applications and their capacity”
- Mamalilikulla First Nation

The majority of First Nations suggested a flexible and tiered funding approach, ranging from small grants to \$1 million, to provide opportunities for large scale projects without removing the potential for smaller projects.

“More funding is needed as it is harder for leadership to make a decision when they need to put a lot of money up front, and report to the community that they are at a loss.”



“\$200k doesn’t go far when you think about the costs of building and transporting goods to remote communities, so there would be value in having higher amounts available”

An additional suggestion from a First Nation include exploring the feasibility of having the Trust offer loans to First Nations for economic development projects.

“More funding is needed as it is harder for leadership to make a decision when they need to put a lot of money up front, and report to the community that they are at a loss.”

Question 14: If the Trust had representation from 35 municipalities and 53 First Nations, how many projects per year should be funded?

The Trust's service region currently spans the territories and locations of 88 First Nations and local governments, funding up to 10 capital projects per year.

While some Nations offered specific suggestions, the majority of responses spoke to the need for flexibility depending on the number of applications as well as the prioritization and impact of a project. For example, priority could be given to collaborative projects that involve multiple First Nations and/or local governments.

“There will be variance every year, [the Trust Board should] Look at different regions and serve them as broadly as possible”

“Having more First Nation representatives at the table will help keep the pressure on to ensure that funding comes through” - Hupačasath First Nation



The Trust staff and Ashley Wright meeting with Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation in Gwa'yasdām's.

Engagement Tracking

Below is a list of First Nations who have taken part in an engagement session, as well as a list of those who have been invited but have not yet taken part in a session.

For Nations receiving this report who have not engaged in this process but would like to - please contact ali.white@sanalaplanning.com to schedule a meeting.

First Nations Engaged	First Nations Invited to Engage
• Ahousaht First Nation • Hupacasath First Nation • Huu-ay-aht First Nations • Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation • Uchucklesaht Tribe • Yuułu?iłʔath̓ Government • K'ómoks First Nation • Esquimalt Nation • Pacheedaht First Nation • Scia'new First Nation • Tsawout First Nation • Cowichan Tribes • Ditidaht First Nation • Malahat First Nation • Penelakut Tribe • Ts'uubaa-asatx • Tla'amin Nation • Songhees Nation • Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation • Mamalilikulla First Nation • Quatsino First Nation • Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw • Ehattesaht First Nation • Homalco First Nation • Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations • Klahoose First Nation • Kwiakah First Nation • Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation • Tseshah First Nation • We Wai Kai First Nation • Wei Wai Kum First Nation • Tsartlip First Nation • Toquaht Nation	• Hesquiaht First Nation • Lyackson First Nation • Pauquachin First Nation • T'Sou-ke Nation • Tseycum First Nation • Halalt First Nation • Stz'uminus First Nation • Snaw'naw'as First Nation • Da'naxda'xw First Nation • Dzawada'enuxw First Nation • Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation • Gwawaenuk Tribe • Kwakiutl First Nation • 'Namgis First Nation • Tlatlasikwala First Nation • Tlowitsis Tribe • Qualicum First Nation • Snuneymuxw First Nation • shíshálh First Nation • Nuchatlaht First Nation

Thank You

We are so grateful for all participating First Nations for the time, energy, and valuable ideas shared with Sənala Planning and the Island Coastal Economic Trust team.

gila'kasla huy'ch'qa
?imot kleco kleco
HÍSWKE
?ul nu msh chalap
ći?íłət sń ?ə mək^w
Huy chexw a

Reciprocity

An important component of the engagements was reciprocity. Reciprocating participants for their time, expertise and valuable insights rooted in culture and lived experience should be a core pillar of this work. We believe First Nations, Treaty Nations and Indigenous partners should always be fairly compensated for their time dedicated to this process. For all meetings, reciprocity in the form of an honoraria was offered, to be distributed either individually or directly to Nations. For in person meetings, additional reciprocity in the form of food and small tokens of appreciation were brought and shared with Nation representatives.

Next Steps



Sanala Planning is inviting feedback and input from First Nations on this What We Learned Report for four weeks to allow for further contributions and additional meetings as requested.

- Feedback & Final Engagements | March 25th to April 30th, 2025
- First Nations Strategic Recommendations Report | June 2025





Transforming Governance of Island Coastal Economic Trust: A Path to Partnership



To provide feedback on this report or schedule a meeting between your Nation, the Trust, and Sanala Planning, please email:

ali.white@sanalaplanning.com



APPENDIX B

UNDRIP, the Declaration Act, & TRC Calls to Action

This work requires real and meaningful systemic change. The transformation of the Trust will form a new three-way partnership between the Government of British Columbia, First Nations governments, and local governments that is uniquely positioned to deliver on key Articles in the UN Declaration outlined below. None of the three parties could achieve these outcomes as effectively, meaningfully or sustainably on their own without the Trust's convening, regional governance, and financing role.

United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

The following table identifies the UNDRIP articles that are related to this work and indicates which recommendations take direct steps toward implementation of the articles.

Articles		Relevant Recommendations
3	Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.	For the Government of B.C. • #1 Amend or replace the Act to enable each First Nation whose territories span the service region to appoint an individual to the Regional Advisory Committee(s) of the Trust. • #2 Permanently capitalize the Trust to enable First Nations, local governments, and the Government of British Columbia to realize effective and collaborative co-governance. • #4 Amend or replace the Act to enable First Nations governments to appoint an individual to the Regional Advisory Committee(s) that their territory spans through a formal resolution and/or letter of appointment by their governing body. • #5 Amend or replace the Act to realize at least equal First Nations' appointed directors to local government and Lieutenant Governor in Council appointed directors within the Trust's board composition. • #6 Amend or replace the Act to define the spirit and intent of co-governance and shared decision-making by First Nations, local governments, and the Government of B.C. with respect to the new approach to governance of the Trust. • #7 Review and define the role of the Lieutenant Governor in Council appointments to the Trust board in relation to First Nations' expressed desire for co-governance and shared decision-making (i.e. at least equal board representation by First Nations appointees).
4	Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.	
5	Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.	
11(1)	Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.	
18	Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions.	
19	States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the Indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.	

Articles	Relevant Recommendations
21 1) Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security. 2) States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.”	For the Trust • #1 Foster collaboration among First Nations, local governments, and the Government of British Columbia (“the partners”) to form a consensus action plan that will capitalize and transform the Trust as a co-governed, permanently financed regional development organization for Vancouver Island and the coast. • #3 Develop new bylaws, terms of reference for advisory committees, governing policies, procedures, and operating practices for the Trust to support effective co-governance, long-term investment of permanent capital, and impactful project investments. • #5 Increase the funding limit for capital and innovation projects from \$200,000 to at least \$1 million and offer a range of funding programs for investing in major projects to smaller or economic capacity-building investments. • #6 Prioritize funding for projects that involve multiple First Nations, local governments, and/or private sector partners to encourage collaboration and partnerships.
23 Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.	
25 Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.	
32(1) Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.	
39 Indigenous peoples have the right to have access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, for the enjoyment of the rights contained in this Declaration.	

Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (the Declaration Act)

The [Declaration Act](#) (2019) establishes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the UN Declaration) as the Government of B.C.'s framework for reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

The Government of B.C. assigned responsibility to the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation for the following action, organized under Theme 4. Social, Cultural and Economic Well-being. The Ministry is responsible for publicly reporting on its progress on the Action and its completion by 2027.

DRIPA Action 4.39. Work with the Province's Economic Trusts and First Nation partners to develop a mechanism that ensures inclusion of First Nations at a regional decision-making level.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action

This work directly addresses the following [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#):

- **43. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.**
- **44. We call upon the Government of Canada to develop a national action plan, strategies, and other concrete measures to achieve the goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.**
- **92. We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:**
 - **i. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.**
 - **ii. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.**



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