

Rhode Island Municipal Resilience Program (MRP)

In response to rising sea levels, increasing storm surges, and a need for flood resilience projects, Rhode Island's then-Governor Gina Raimondo signed an [executive order](#) in 2017 to develop a state-wide comprehensive climate resilience action plan. By July 2018, the governor's office completed the "[Resilient Rhody](#)" plan, which identified projects to build statewide resilience to climate concerns in the coastal state, especially flooding. In 2019, the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank (RIIB) created the [Municipal Resilience Program](#) (MRP) to carry out the goals of the plan.

The Challenge

With over 400 miles of coastline and large inland watersheds, Rhode Island has infrastructure that is extremely vulnerable to flooding. The state is seeing [more rain and severe storms every year](#), and since 1930 the state has seen nine inches of sea level rise. Future storms will likely be [stronger with even more rainfall](#).

Policy Design

Modeled after Massachusetts's [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program](#), MRP combines planning and capacity-building workshops with action grants. MRP was established by the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank (RIIB) — the central hub for financing infrastructure improvements for the state's municipalities, businesses, and homeowners.

In 2019, Rhode Island piloted MRP with five municipalities. RIIB supplied most of the first two years' funding, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) funded the workshops, using the same [Community Resilience Building](#) (CRB) workshop process created for the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Program. MRP has three components:

1. **Municipal-driven workshops:** Participating municipalities hold workshops, facilitated by TNC, that combine climate data and local knowledge to identify top hazards, challenges, community strengths, and ultimately, priority projects and strategies. These workshops bring together municipal staff, residents, partners, and volunteers and use TNC-created tools, like the [CRB workshop guide](#) and the [Risk Matrix](#). At the end of the process, communities have a prioritized list of actions.

MRP goals

- Understand connections between ongoing community issues, climate change and natural hazards, and local planning and actions in a municipality.
- Understand how climate change will exacerbate or lead to new community issues, hazards, and other challenges the municipality faces.
- Identify infrastructural, societal, and environmental vulnerabilities and evaluate strengths that help make the community more resilient to climate change and natural hazards.
- Explore nature-based solutions to build resiliency in the municipality.
- Develop, set priorities and delineate next steps for the municipality, local organizations, businesses, private citizens, neighborhoods, and community groups.
- Implement identified actions and apply for available MRP Action Grants.

2. **Action grants:** After completing workshops, municipalities become “Resilient Rhody Municipalities” and can apply for MRP Action Grants. Municipalities must match grants with a 25% local cost share.
3. **Project pipeline:** Having completed the program, municipalities are better prepared to enact climate resilience projects and apply for funding outside of RIIB. So far, over \$6 million has been awarded from outside RIIB to carry out MRP-identified projects.

State Role

RIIB connects Resilient Rhody Municipalities to funding, including MRP Action Grants, for resilience projects the municipalities identify in their CRB workshops. RIIB reviews MRP Action Grant applications in partnership with state environmental and planning agencies, including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Coastal Resources Management Council, Department of Health, and Division of Statewide Planning.

Cost and Funding

From 2019–2020, TNC funded MRP workshops. In 2021, FEMA began funding the workshops through its Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant. TNC is now under contract with RIIB to deliver CRB workshops to the remaining Rhode Island municipalities who have not yet participated in MRP.

From 2019 to 2020, RIIB committed \$2.5 million in Action Grant funding for MRP through the 2018 Green Economy and Clean Water Bond (\$47.3 million in total). This [funding was supplemented](#) by a 2021 voter-approved measure that added \$7 million to the state funding pool — this was in addition to the over \$6 million in funding received from NOAA and EPA climate grants, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Coastal Resilience Fund, Southeast New England Watershed Grant Program, Climate Resilience Fund, and Wastewater Treatment Facility Resilience Grants. In 2022, Rhode Island voters also approved a \$50 million Green Bond that will provide an additional \$16 million to MRP Action Grants.

MRP is now connecting municipalities with new and increased federal funding from the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act to leverage state funds for larger capital projects.

Impact

So far, \$7.4 million in MRP Action Grants and \$6 million in other state and federal funding have been awarded to MRP-identified projects. Of this funding, 54% was for stormwater management, 19% for coastal restoration, 12% for dam repair, 8% for infrastructure upgrades, 4% for dredging, and 4% for backup power. MRP has also

increasingly emphasized social equity: Of the first 46 projects, 52% of projects were in disadvantaged communities.

27 of the state's 39 municipalities have participated in MRP. TNC and RIIB aim to bring the workshop to the remaining 12 municipalities by the end of 2023. Additionally, 38 out of 39 municipalities now have active Hazard Mitigation Plans.

Example Project: Warwick, MRP-certified in 2019: In 2021, the city of Warwick [received](#) a \$225,000 MRP Action Grant for a bioretention stormwater system and coastal embankment restoration in the Oakland Beach community. The project complements larger efforts to include nature-based solutions along the Oakland Beach coastline, aided by \$1,160,000 in grants.

Example Project: Barrington, MRP-certified in 2019: A \$201,000 MRP Action Grant funds a project to reconfigure shoreline along a 48.5-acre site owned by the town of Barrington. The site comprises upland, salt marsh, and ponds along the Barrington River. The project will increase stormwater filtration, buffer waves, and store floodwaters, all while moving recreation areas inland to provide floodable open space.