

Indigenous-led Engagements Begin on New Vision for Island Coastal Economic Trust

Since 2022, local governments across Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast have committed to partnering with First Nations governments and the Province of British Columbia to transform Island Coastal Economic Trust into the first permanently financed, co-governed regional development organization in Canada.

The Association of Vancouver Island & Coastal Communities (AVICC) is inspired to see the board of [Island Coastal Economic Trust](#) working in partnership with [Sanala Planning](#), an Indigenous-owned planning company, to begin engagements with First Nations across Vancouver Island and the surrounding coast about the future of the region's Trust. Since 2022, local governments, First Nations, and regional organizations across the coast have committed to working in partnership to transform the Trust into a model of co-governance and shared decision-making.

AVICC President and City of Nanaimo Councillor Ben Geselbracht stated that "First Nations and local governments collaborating in shared decision-making through the co-governance of the Trust is an exciting and positive step towards strengthening the ability of our region to support the well-being and prosperity of Island and coastal communities."

"As we move forward, investing to build a resilient coastal economy, we believe 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," said Sayaačath̓ John Jack, Vice Chair, Island Coastal Economic Trust; Chief Councillor, Huu-ay-aht First Nations; Chair, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District.



Mayors from Vancouver Island who serve as board members of Island Coastal Economic Trust met with Haida and rural leadership of the Gwaii Trust for an important knowledge exchange recently. Photo courtesy Gwaii Trust Society

Since Island Coastal Economic Trust was founded, coastal people have been uplifting one another to build healthy, resilient, and more sustainable communities through investments with the Trust. Serving communities across Vancouver Island and the surrounding coast, the Trust works in close collaboration — forming high-trust relationships — with people and organizations in First Nations communities, urban areas, small towns, and unincorporated communities across the coast.

In 2023, the Trust published its [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) with a clear vision and dedication to build consensus to transform the Trust:

Our Vision

Island and coastal communities are thriving with a resilient economy that strengthens the wellbeing of all people and the environment.

Our Priority Strategic Goal

Transform the Trust into a permanent, co-governed, regional development organization for coastal communities.

Sanala Planning is leading outreach and extending invitations to 53 First Nations governments whose territories span Vancouver Island and the surrounding coast from Howe Sound and the Salish Sea to Smith Inlet and Cape Caution.

“At Sanala, we approach planning to support Indigenous self-determination for the wellbeing of all”, says Jessie Hemphill, CEO, Sanala Planning. “I’m excited for our team to be engaging in conversations with First Nations governments about a new model of co-governance through Island Coastal Economic Trust.”

“This is important work, the transformation of the Trust paves the way for collaboration, inclusion, and sustainable development. I am thrilled to be a part of this project and feel honoured to be able to work with the Trust and the 53 First Nations within the region. This new model marks a significant step forward honoring the voices of Indigenous leadership and will integrate their perspectives into the decision-making processes that impact their lands and communities. Co-governance fosters a unified vision for regional development and establishes a grassroots foundation for future economic prosperity,” said Ashley Wright, Indigenous Technical Advisory Lead for Island Coastal Economic Trust.

In relation to this Indigenous-led process, the Province of British Columbia, who founded and has funded the Trust, has committed to building a mechanism for inclusion of First Nations in the Trust’s governance in the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan](#) (Action 4.39).

The Association of Vancouver Island & Coastal Communities is proud to highlight this transformative initiative and looks forward to seeing the shift to a co-governed Trust. The continued collaboration with the Trust, Sanala Planning, and the First Nations communities will build a thriving, resilient coastal economy.

Invitation to Share Perspectives on Co-governance of the Trust

First Nations governments are invited to participate in an engagement process facilitated by Sanala to provide strategic input and direction on transforming the Trust as a model of shared decision making. This includes economic development funding decisions, regional strategies, and co-governance of the Trust by First Nations and local governments across Vancouver Island and the surrounding coast. The engagement process is taking place in two phases:

Phase One

Invitation
Virtual

Information and invitations are shared with all 53 First Nations governments within the region to participate in discussions on co-governance. Two virtual roundtable meetings were hosted in August and September where Sanala and the Trust shared further information about the project and how it began with First Nations leaders and staff from across the Island and coast.

Phase Two

Engagement
In-Person and Virtual

Meetings with First Nations governments, offered both in-community and online, will be scheduled to take place from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025. These meetings discussing the Governance and Future of Island Coastal Economic Trust will inform a Strategic Recommendations Report to be shared with participating First Nations as well as the provincial government.

What would we like to talk about?

We would be grateful to speak with and learn from First Nations government leaders on:

- Your perspectives on transforming the region's economic development Trust into a new co-governance model of shared decision-making led by First Nations and local governments, investing in projects to build the coastal economy and strengthen peoples' wellbeing together.
- Your insights on regional economic development and leveraging the Trust to create new opportunities.

- Your interest in serving or appointing individuals to represent your Nation and to make project investment decisions at regional committees and the board of directors of the Trust
- Your priority economic development projects that we can partner and co-invest in together.



To schedule an in-person or virtual meeting with your Nation's leadership, please contact: ali.white@sanalaplanning.com

Learn more and download our backgrounder: [Transforming Governance: A Path to Partnership \(PDF\)](#)

About Sanala Planning

Sanala Planning is an Indigenous-owned company using planning to support Indigenous self-determination for the well-being of all. Specializing in Indigenous planning and engagement, the company emphasizes reciprocal, culturally safe Indigenous engagement while embracing a holistic approach in its work. Sanala understands that our communities are unique, and that we all deserve respectful, effective, place-based, and culturally-based planning processes.

Sanala believes that Indigenous planning has a key role to play in addressing the great challenges of our time and creating a better future. The company's passion lies in collaborating with Indigenous-led and/or Indigenous-serving communities, organisations, and governments to revitalise and adapt Indigenous planning practices and principles for modern times, affirming Indigenous rights and self-determination for the benefit of all.

About Island Coastal Economic Trust

Founded by the Province of British Columbia in 2006, the Island Coastal Economic Trust works to build a sustainable and resilient coastal economy in reciprocal relationships with First Nations, municipalities, and regional districts across Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and islands and inlets from the Salish Sea to Cape Caution. Serving over half a million residents, we partner with communities in the development

and financing of their economic infrastructure and diversification efforts through our unique structure that is led by, and accountable to, communities.

Since our inception, Island Coastal Economic Trust has approved more than \$64 million to economic development initiatives that have attracted over \$338 million in new investment to our region. These investments have created over 3,001 permanent jobs, and countless positive impacts, across the coast.

Island Coastal Economic Trust acknowledges that we work for communities across the ancestral territories of the Kwákwala, Nuučaan̓uṭ, Éy7á7juuthem, Ligwilda'xw, Pəntl'áč, She shashishalhem, Skwxwú7mesh, Hul'q'umi'num', diitiid7aatx, SENĆOŦEN, Lekwungen, and T'Sou-ke speaking peoples.

Learn more [about the Trust](#).

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