

About ISC

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Who We Are

At the Institute for Sustainable Communities, we give passionate, committed people around the world the tools, skills, and resources they need to make their communities a better place to live. Since our founding in 1991 by former Vermont Governor Madeleine M. Kunin, ISC has led transformative community-driven projects across the globe, and over the years we have developed an approach that accelerates a community's ability to meet challenges head on.

What We Do

We believe in the power of communities—and their ability to help themselves grow stronger, healthier, more stable, more prosperous and more peaceful. We combine the passion and commitment of a nonprofit with a business-minded approach to project management. The result is cost-effective projects that achieve lasting impacts. At the same time, we build the capacity and infrastructure of communities to ensure lasting change. We get people involved in shaping their future and cultivate local talent—enabling people to become strong advocates and effective leaders in their communities. Some of our areas of expertise include:

Community Building. ISC's work is based on the idea that ordinary people have the ability to transform their communities. We catalyze this transformation by bringing together groups that may not have worked together before—residents, nonprofit leaders, elected officials, business owners, educators—to identify community issues, prioritize them, and achieve concrete results.

Environment. ISC has helped people bring clean air, water, and land to their communities while conserving precious resources. We have found that our approach—of engaging communities and building the capacity of local organizations to solve problems—is critical to addressing issues like environmental health and climate change, where a groundswell of citizen commitment is needed to have the most impact.

Climate Change. Since 2001, we have helped communities make energy efficiency improvements in district heating systems and public and residential buildings, creating community development revolving loan funds with the money saved. In Russia, for example, 39 community energy efficiency projects secured annual reductions in CO₂ emissions of over 12,000 tons per year and in some cases reduced heating costs by 75%. We are now bringing this approach to China.



Our Offices

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Health. Solving some of the world's most critical health problems—from water- or air-borne diseases to HIV/AIDS to cancer—depends on grassroots community involvement and local and national advocacy. ISC has helped small, isolated villages rid themselves of a waterborne disease through new sewer systems—and helped coalitions of nonprofits secure national laws to protect public health.

Advocacy. We view advocacy as the practice through which all people can make their voices heard—not just a specialized activity carved out by a few organizations or policy makers. Through our advocacy work, we give ordinary people—who are passionate about and committed to a cause—the tools, skills, and support they need to make their vision happen. Our intensive Advocacy Fellows program has over 800 graduates in 60 countries worldwide.

Leadership. At ISC, we believe that leadership is not measured by the power or resources one wields, but in the ability to inspire action and deliver results. We believe that this potential is in each of us, and our programs tap into this ability. Finding and nurturing leadership—among government officials, nonprofit and business leaders, youth, and ordinary citizens—is at the core of ISC's work around the world.

Where We Work

Since 1991 we have managed 70 projects in 19 countries, leaving a legacy of strong community leaders, organizations, and networks that continue to build on our work.

China has recently become the world's largest emitter of carbon, further exacerbating its severe air and water pollution. ISC is involving businesses, government, and communities in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency. We focus on practical projects that reap immediate returns and build the momentum needed to sustain widespread change.

The Balkans. Since our founding in 1991, ISC has helped citizens in the Balkans have a voice in public decision making, beginning in Bulgaria. Since 1995, ISC has worked with Macedonians to help them build a strong and stable nonprofit sector. In 2002, we began helping Serbian teenagers and young adults, many of whom are unemployed, develop leadership skills and create positive change for themselves and their communities. A current focus of our work in both countries is helping nonprofits become more influential partners with business and government. On the fall of 2008, ISC launched a program in Kosovo to help ease this new country's transition to an inclusive and democratic government.

Ukraine. ISC is working in Ukraine to increase transparency and accountability of the judicial system and to encourage the adoption of policy and legislative reforms that promote the rule of law and anti-corruption. For example, ISC works to engage civil society organizations in monitoring court functions and legal proceedings and helps identify ways that courts could make the justice system more fair, transparent, and accessible.

United States. On the Katrina-ravaged Gulf Coast, we are helping small cities and towns find opportunity in the crisis of the storm, building stronger leaders and communities in the process. We are also working in New England to help the six states coalesce around a strategy for securing the region's future.

Funding

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