

# GOVERNORS ISLAND

2023 Year In Review

# **In the two decades following its transfer from federal to local control, Governors Island has become one of New York City's most treasured resources.**

Over the past 20 years, public access has increased from just eight days a year to 365, more than \$400 million—including to support the completion of a 43-acre, award-winning park—has been invested in the Island's growth and preservation, cultural programs have expanded to serve artists and visitors in every season, and the Island's community of year-round tenants has grown, with thousands of New Yorkers traveling to the Island every day to work, learn, teach, research, and further enliven this dynamic place.

The Trust for Governors Island works together with its fundraising partner the Friends of Governors Island and in close collaboration with the National Park Service/Governors Island National Monument to ensure the Island is a beloved destination for New York City.

THE TRUST FOR  
GOVERNORS ISLAND

THE FRIENDS OF  
GOVERNORS ISLAND



# From Our Leadership

Dear supporters, friends, and advocates of Governors Island,

As we look back on another transformative year, we reflect with gratitude on the remarkable journey we have shared in our mission to make Governors Island a beloved resource for New Yorkers. Through your generous contributions and dedication, we have been able to make significant strides in our commitment to the preservation, sustainability, and accessibility of Governors Island. We are so pleased to share the following highlights from the past year in this report, which include:

- **Innovating in climate and environment:** Following a two-year competitive process, the New York Climate Exchange—a cross-sector consortium led by Stony Brook University—was selected as the anchor research and educational institution for the Center for Climate Solutions initiative.
- **Growing our reach as an accessible destination for recreation and open space:** We partnered with hundreds of community-based nonprofits, public schools, and NYCHA communities across the city to enhance the Island’s accessibility and continued to provide free ferry access to nearly half of the Island’s total visitors for the year.
- **Creating one-of-a-kind cultural experiences for New Yorkers:** We welcomed the largest ever group of arts, cultural, educational, and environmental nonprofit Organizations in Residence to enliven the Island’s historic houses, opened a new work from artist Sheila Berger, and bid farewell to Charles Gaines’s *Moving Chains*; the piece, presented by Governors Island Arts, Creative Time, and Times Square Arts, closed in October 2023 after welcoming 36,500 visitors.
- **Investing in the Island:** We made history with the announcement that a new hybrid electric ferry would join the Island’s fleet in 2024. In December, the Trust and the City were awarded \$7.5 million from the U.S. Federal Transit Administration to support shoreside rapid changing infrastructure on Governors Island—a monumental step forward for sustainable infrastructure in New York City.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the dedication of our valued visitors and supporters. As we reflect on 2023, we look forward to continuing to deliver on our mission to make Governors Island a cherished resource for all New Yorkers. May this coming year be filled with new opportunities for collaboration. Thank you for being an integral part of our journey and for making a lasting impact on Governors Island.



Clare Newman  
President and CEO  
The Trust for Governors Island



Patti Davis  
Executive Director  
The Friends of Governors Island

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# INNOVATION IN CLIMATE & THE ENVIRONMENT



Aerial rendering of The New York Climate Exchange, showing the iconic forms designed to evoke the dramatic landscapes and hills of Governors Island. © SOM | Miysis

# A New Anchor Institution on Governors Island: The New York Climate Exchange



Mayor Eric Adams announces the selection of the New York Climate Exchange

In April, following a two-year competitive process led by the New York City Mayor's Office and the Trust for Governors Island, the New York Climate Exchange—led by Stony Brook University—was selected as the anchor research and education institution for the Center for Climate Solutions project.

Through the **Center for Climate Solutions**, Governors Island will serve as a first-of-its-kind global hub for researching and demonstrating equitable climate solutions for urban environments, while advancing education, training, and workforce development opportunities for New Yorkers.

**The Exchange** represents the single most transformative investment in the Island to date. Scheduled to open in 2028, its initiatives include:

- Expanding education, job training, and public programs for all Island visitors and creating new educational, laboratory, and classroom facilities.
- Accelerating the development of urban climate solutions through competitively awarded research opportunities.
- Restoring and preserving over 200,000 square feet of historic buildings, including the Fort Jay Theatre and portions of Liggett Hall.
- Leading the charge in sustainable design, including an all-electric campus and NYC's first Living Building Challenge-certified buildings.
- Adding 4.5 acres to the Island's existing 120 acres of open space.

**The New York Times**

## Governors Island to Be Site of \$700 Million Climate Campus

A "living laboratory" for climate solutions will rise on the idyllic 172-acre island off Lower Manhattan, led by Stony Brook University.



## IN THE NEWS

"The climate hub will serve as a 'living laboratory' that features resilient design, with renderings showing shiny sloped buildings covered in vegetation that are intended to evoke the hills of Governors Island."

*The New York Times, April 2023*

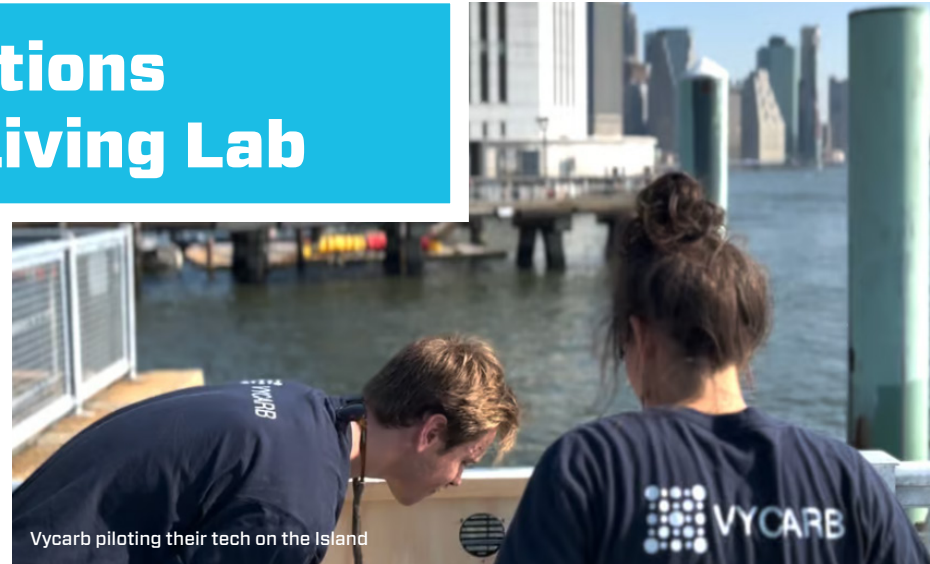
# Demonstrating Innovative Solutions Through the Governors Island Living Lab

In June, we announced the Living Lab, a new platform for research, partnerships, and programs to amplify climate action on Governors Island.

The program includes the launch of an **annual climate solutions challenge** open to nonprofit organizations, entrepreneurs, and start-ups; **climate field trip programs** in collaboration with Brooklyn-based nonprofit organization El Puente de Williamsburg; and **investment in a new convening space** for climate events and activities on the Island.

Governors Island provides a unique opportunity to test innovative products and projects designed to help cities adapt to climate change. In early 2024 we will announce the first cohort for the annual climate solutions challenge through the Living Lab—featuring projects that explore how water helps to power climate solutions—but there are already several innovations already being piloted on the Island today:

- Brooklyn-based company **Vycarb** is actively detecting, measuring, and mitigating carbon dioxide in the East River through their VyCube device located at Pier 102 on the Island.
- **GrowNYC** has teamed up with Con Edison to install an entirely sustainable indoor farm inside a shipping container. The container will use innovative technology to showcase the future of urban agriculture and will grow kale to be donated to food-insecure communities through nonprofit partner Harlem Grown.
- **Circular Economy Manufacturing**, whose MicroFactory is located inside a refurbished shipping container near the Island's Lavender Field, regularly holds demonstrations of their renewably powered technology that turns post-consumer plastics into usable products.



Vycarb piloting their tech on the Island



GrowNYC container farm



Governors Island was featured in *Pilot: New York City*, a roadmap to make our city the global hub of urban innovation developed by the New York City Economic Development Corporation. The Living Lab was highlighted as a key initiative for climate piloting citywide, and Vycarb was given special mention as one of the city's most exciting current pilot projects.

# Climate Solutions in Action

Governors Island has long been home to a collaborative community of year-round tenants and seasonal partners working to advance climate solutions. Take a look at some highlights from 2023:

- **Billion Oyster Project** engaged more than 9,000 students through its partnership with the Harbor School and its K-12 STEM curriculum, continued its groundbreaking conservation work around New York City, and welcomed a historic visitor when William, the Prince of Wales, visited the Island to meet with students and witness reef restoration efforts firsthand.
- The Trust, New York City Department of Education, and the School Construction Authority announced plans to expand the **Urban Assembly New York Harbor School** growing the school's footprint from two to four buildings to support their unique career-technical education program. This extraordinary growth will allow 500 additional students to attend high school on Governors Island, along with new classroom space, a pool, a competition gymnasium, and specialty lab facilities.
- The **GrowNYC** teaching garden hosted thousands of students and older adults from across the city for urban farm field trips and donated more than 2,000 pounds of produce grown on Governors Island to food pantries in Brownsville, Harlem, and the Lower East Side.
- **Earth Matter** processed hundreds of thousands of pounds of organic material in 2023, including landscape materials, food vendor scraps, materials from our public composting stations, organics from every event held on the Island, and oyster material from Billion Oyster Project.



Community engagement with Billion Oyster Project



Maritime research with the Harbor School



Earth Matter NY's compost operations on Governors Island



In February, acclaimed composer and cellist Yo-Yo Ma visited Governors Island to learn about Billion Oyster Project's restoration work as part of his "Our Common Nature" project. He presented several pop-up performances before leading a climate art workshop with students from the Harbor School.

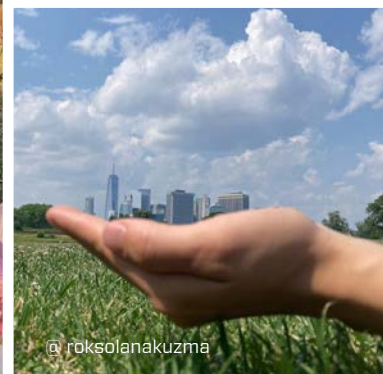
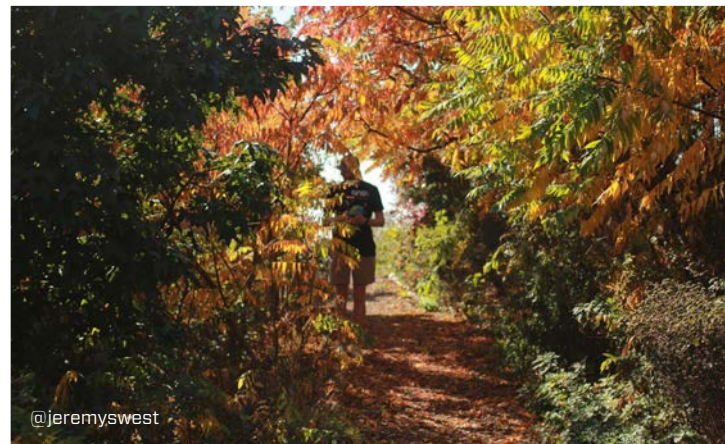
# ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE & RECREATION





# Through Your Lens

Visitor Photos



# A Resource for All New Yorkers

## TOP 10 VISITOR NEIGHBORHOODS FOR 2023

Morningside Heights

Upper West Side

East Village

Lower East Side

Financial District

Downtown Brooklyn

Prospect Heights

Red Hook

Park Slope

Kensington

This year, Governors Island welcomed nearly **930,000** individuals over twelve months via daily ferries from Manhattan and Brooklyn. The Island remains a destination for all New Yorkers; every residential zip code in New York City was represented by our visitors in 2023.

We partnered with **340** community-based nonprofits, public schools, and NYCHA communities across the city to emphasize the Island's accessibility and continued to provide **free ferry access** to NYCHA residents, IDNYC holders, community groups, nonprofit organizations, military servicemembers, seniors, kids under 12, and all visitors on weekends before noon. This year, **43%** of visitors took advantage of free ferries across twelve months.

# Our Open Space Shines

With 120 acres of unparalleled open space now welcoming visitors year-round, Governors Island is one of New York City's most exciting destinations in every season.

This year, visitors enjoyed the Island's **43-acre, climate-resilient park**—including 7 miles of car-free bike paths, urban hiking in the Hills, playgrounds, hammocks, slides, stunning views, and more recreation opportunities.

The Island's 12 acres of athletic fields were used for more than **200 games, practices, and events** by youth and adult leagues, schools, and nonprofit organizations.

Nearly **700 groups** held barbecues and other gatherings across the Island's two outdoor grilling areas.

## What Visitors Are Saying

New Yorkers and visitors from around the world travel to Governors Island to take in arts and culture, relax in nature, enjoy open space, participate in sports and recreational activities, and more. But don't just take our word for it—hear what they have to say about this jewel in New York Harbor via quotes from our Visitor Survey:

*"As a New Yorker, I am happy to have such a great island in our backyard."*

*"Had no idea what was here before I came and I was honestly blown away by how amazing this island was. Great view of the Statue of Liberty, amazing open spaces and native plants, art, cultural houses, and hammocks. This place is phenomenal and I'm recommending it to everyone I talk to."*

*"Great place to escape in the city. I always really enjoy coming out here to relax and enjoy the views and peacefulness of Governors Island."*



Biking at Discovery Hill



NYC Footy's Gov Cup 2023

# Stewarding Our Green Spaces



Tree planting in the Historic District



Summer blooms in the Hills

With a mix of historic and newer, manmade landscapes—many of which were engineered to mitigate the impacts of climate change—Governors Island provides New Yorkers with a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in nature in an urban environment.

Our dedicated team of horticulturists, arborists, landscapers, and groundskeepers work year-round to care for the Island’s 120 acres of open space. Horticultural highlights from 2023 include:

- Implementing our Community Forest Management Plan by planting **56 trees** around the Island comprising **21 different species**—diversifying our canopy and bringing our tree count to nearly 3,600.
- Planting more than **13,000 perennials, grasses, bulbs, and other plants** around the Island—half of which were propagated in-house.
- Welcoming back a flock of sheep from Friends of Tivoli Lake Preserve and Farm for the third year in a row to provide eco-friendly landscape care. The flock, including two newcomers, cleared **four acres of invasive plants** in Hammock Grove, ensuring the area’s 1,400+ trees have ample space to thrive.
- Continuing to utilize solarization, a method of invasive species eradication that involves suppressing harmful plants beneath tarp, to control weeds in the Hills. This year, the team successfully employed this method in a **1,800-square-foot plot in the Hills**—the largest area to be solarized on the Island to date—clearing the way for a biodiverse native habitat to thrive in 2024.



In 2023 we launched Governors Island Nature, a new program designed to increase visitor engagement with the Island’s natural spaces through learning, events, and community science. The program included new digital content like an interactive tree map, a plant watch page tracking seasonal growth, and in-depth information on each of the Island’s natural areas; and hosted ten public events throughout its inaugural year—including monthly nature walks, insect ecology activities, and guided tree tours, with more set for 2024.

# Year-Round Events & Amenities

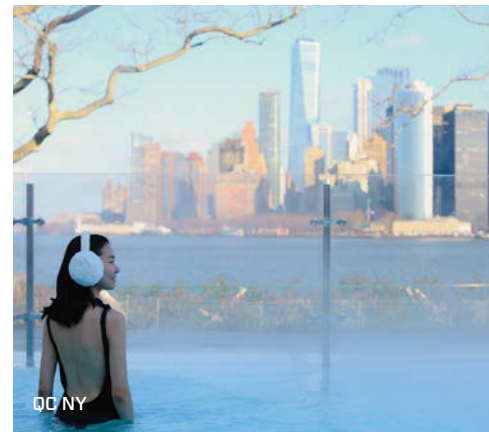
The Island continues to grow as a culinary destination. This year **over 20 NYC-based small businesses** brought a diverse menu of offerings to Island visitors. **The Foodie Spot**, a unique partnership with NYCHA's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment & Sustainability, continued in 2023 with a rotating group of small businesses operated by NYCHA residents occupying a seasonal location in Liggett Terrace.

Along with dozens of partners and organizers from throughout the five boroughs, we hosted **nearly 70 public events** on the Island this year—the majority of which were free to attend.

- The Island hosted its first-ever **Egg Hunt** in the spring, where thousands of New Yorkers enjoyed spring activities and performances alongside 10,000 brightly colored eggs scattered throughout the Island.
- **Pumpkin Point**, our annual fall festival, welcomed a record-breaking 34,000 visitors across two weekends. Expanded programming in 2023 included performances, crafts, photo opportunities, costume contests, trick-or-treating, and—of course—pumpkin picking.
- The **16th Annual African Film Festival Family Day** presented short films, double-dutch, crafts, dance classes, and more events honoring communities from the African diaspora.
- Ten artists and artist teams carved their designs into ice live at Governors Island Arts' annual **Ice Sculpture Show** in February.
- Governors Island Arts held the Island's inaugural **Winter Solstice Celebration** in December with a day full of free art activities and performances centered on ideas of community and healing.



Governors Island Egg Hunt



QC NY



Pumpkin Point



Fogo Azul performs at Governors Island's Winter Solstice Celebration

# New Yorkers Give Back

Volunteers play a vital role in caring for Governors Island year-round. 2023 far surpassed volunteer records across two key areas: visitor services and horticulture.

This year, more than **2,000 individual and corporate volunteers** with the Friends of Governors Island contributed **10,000** combined hours of service at the Island's Welcome Centers, leading free public tours, providing support at the Island's free public programs, and assisting our horticulture team.



Volunteers in Hammock Grove



Weeding in Liggett Terrace



Two new positions were added to the volunteer roster in 2023:

## SHEEP STEWARDS

This group of passionate caretakers joined us every weekend from May through September to help tend to the Island's flock of sheep in Hammock Grove.

## WINTER TREE CREW

Each Friday in the winter months, this group of a dozen plus arboreal enthusiasts joined our horticulture team to prune branches and help track general tree and root health.

# DYNAMIC ARTS & CULTURE



GOVERNORS  
ISLAND  
ARTS

*Moving Chains* by Charles Gaines, presented by Governors Island Arts, Creative Time, and Times Square Arts

# Public Art Commissions

**Governors Island Arts continued to present public art projects created specifically with the Island in mind, existing in dialogue with the space's layered histories, contexts, and environmental conditions.**

Charles Gaines's ***Moving Chains***, a multi-year installation presented in partnership with Creative Time and Times Square Arts, closed after welcoming 36,500 visitors over 10 months on view.

To accompany the work, the presenting organizations held two events on Governors Island in 2023: **Toward Abolition**, a weekend-long convening that brought together leading voices in abolition for discussions, activations, and workshops; and a **closing weekend celebration** featuring an artist talk with Charles Gaines and a guided Black Gotham Experience walking tour with Kamau Ware.

***Bird MMXXIII*** by Sheila Berger debuted on the Island in Hammock Grove in November 2023, providing visitors an introspective, peaceful experience in the heart of one of the Island's most unique natural areas.

***Bird MMXXIII*** joins a vibrant collection of long-term public art commissions on Governors Island:

- ***Yankee Hanger***, Mark Handforth PICTURED
- ***The Open Orchard***, Sam Van Aken
- ***The Field Station of the Melancholy Marine Biologist***, Mark Dion
- ***Cabin***, Rachel Whiteread
- ***Not for Nutten***, Duke Riley



*Moving Chains*



*Bird MMXXIII*





# Growing a Cultural Community in the Historic District

This year, 28 arts, cultural, educational, and environmental nonprofits—the largest cohort in the program’s history—utilized space in the historic houses of Nolan Park and Colonels Row to host residencies and other opportunities for more than 575 artists and curators and present more than 350 exhibitions, performances, and public programs that directly engaged Island visitors. Some highlights:

- **iOye! Group** hosted the Mercedes Healing Room, an exhibition that integrated augmented reality, video, audio, photography, and family heirlooms, along with arts workshops for citywide older adult centers.
- **The Lower Eastside Girls Club** presented Memory Lab, an exhibition of student work that explored nostalgia and celebrated family histories.
- **The Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art (MoCADA)** presented *The M'Dear Project*, a multimedia exhibition that featured rising women-identified artists, and a residence program in collaboration with the Asian American Arts Alliance as part of their annual MoCADA Abolition House.
- **American Indian Community House** held residencies for and exhibited works by Indigenous artists, held community events including artist markets, and presented workshops centering Indigenous traditions and culture.
- **Fountain House Gallery**, operated by the national mental health nonprofit Fountain House, held monthly residencies and exhibitions that challenged the stigma surrounding mental illness.
- **Staten Island Urban Center** presented a multimedia art exhibition that centered Staten Island’s north shore waterfront as a hub for social change and environmental justice.



ArtCrawl Harlem resident artist Sandy Clafford in her Governors Island studio



Staten Island Urban Center

# Governors Island Arts Expands Programming



Performance by Taiwanese American Arts Council at House Fest 2023

Governors Island Arts produced and presented a host of groundbreaking free performances and events this year, increasing the diversity of offerings for Island visitors and all New Yorkers.

The 2nd annual **House Fest** brought 40+ arts and cultural activations to one weekend, all in celebration of the Organizations in Residence in Nolan Park and Colonels Row.

**THIRD Saturdays** officially launched in 2023, with special performances and activations in Nolan Park and Colonels Row each month from May through October.

***iHarken!***, an immersive guided performance journey from artist Modesto “Flako” Jimenez, offered visitors a look into the Island’s—and New York City’s—complex past and examined legacies of colonization, experiences across the African diaspora, and who gets to author the stories that stand the test of time.

The world-renowned cultural and dance collective **Indigenous Enterprise** performed in Nolan Park in honor of Indigenous People’s Day in October.



Modesto “Flako” Jimenez performs *iHarken!*



Indigenous Enterprise in Nolan Park



## IN THE NEWS

"This Saturday isn't just any Saturday. It's the THIRD Saturday of the month, which means that the Governors Island Arts initiative is rolling out a whole day's worth of special indoor and outdoor programs on Saturday, July 15—and did we mention it's all completely free?"

*Time Out New York, July 2023*

# PLANNING, INVESTMENT, AND A GROWING YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY



# Updates From Our Year-Round Tenants

Governors Island is home to a diverse group of educational, nonprofit, and commercial tenants working in sectors including arts, climate, hospitality, and youth development.

**Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Arts Center** granted residencies to 40 artists, hosted monthly free public programs including winter open studios, and displayed three exhibitions where artists responded to ideas about time, personal history, the legacies of activism, collected objects, and intergenerational relationships.

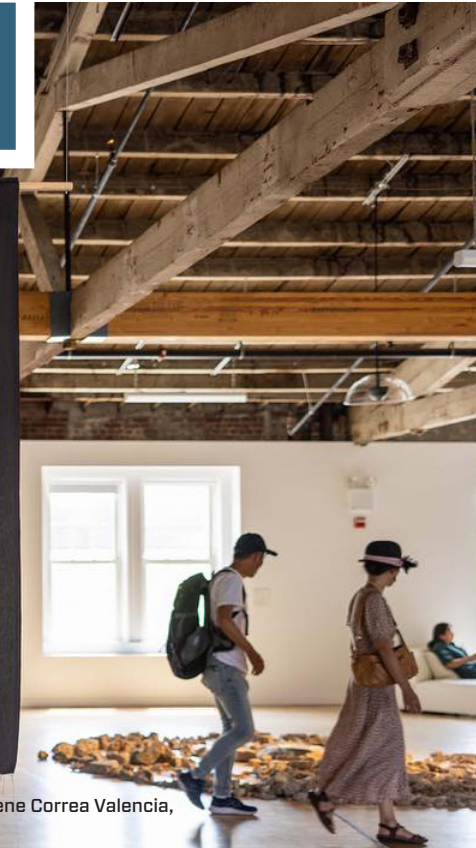
During its second year open on Governors Island, **QC NY** welcomed 100,000 guests for relaxation and restoration in their state-of-the-art wellness facility. They also debuted a new indoor bistro for guests, open year-round.

Brooklyn-based youth nonprofit **Beam Center** utilized their Maker Space on Governors Island to give participants hands-on opportunities to work on artistic and STEM projects. Their annual Beam Camp City welcomed 400+ young New Yorkers for a unique summer day camp experience on Governors Island, allowing them to connect with nature in the heart of New York City.

The **Institute for Public Architecture (IPA)** expanded their programming year-round by hosting two residency cohorts, 11 fellows, and four open calls. In addition to their residency programs, the IPA held more than 50 events and open houses for Island visitors and all New Yorkers in 2023.



*Where Time Runs Backwards*, Daniel Shieh with Chia-Lun Chang and Arlene Correa Valencia, LMCC's Arts Center



Resident lecture with the IPA



Beam Camp City on Governors Island

# Supporting the Next Generation of Real Estate Leaders



Fellows participate in a construction site tour

**The Real Estate Pathways Fellowship program—a collaboration with the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation—is providing students enrolled in the City University of New York (CUNY) with direct experience across the real estate industry and related fields and working to increase diversity within the New York City real estate sector.**

The Real Estate Pathways Fellowship program provides senior-year CUNY students with the opportunity to gain real-world experience in year-long paid positions at both organizations, focusing on real estate development, design and construction, property management, horticulture, and more.

Since its inception, the fellowship has served 25 CUNY students, with 80% of program graduates going on to gain full-time employment in their chosen field.



Fellows, mentors, and program staff at a networking event

# Capital Projects Update

Since its transfer from federal to local control two decades ago, nearly \$400M has been invested in Governors Island. In 2023, the Trust made significant progress in projects dedicated to the vision for an accessible, year-round resource.

In 2023, we continued working towards expanding the long-running seasonal Organizations in Residence program to a **permanent, year-round hub for the arts in Nolan Park**. Historic Building 20 will complete renovations in 2024, with **Billion Oyster Project** and **NYU Gallatin** set to move in; joining the Institute for Public Architecture as the district's year-round tenants, and restoration work will soon begin on the neighboring Building 19. This project is generously supported by the New York City Council, the Office of the Manhattan Borough President, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and Empire State Development.

We finalized the design to provide **new site lighting infrastructure throughout the Island's Historic District**, which will allow us to create a safer, more welcoming environment for Governors Island's visitors and year-round tenants. Construction is expected to begin in 2024.

The Trust announced that a **new hybrid electric ferry**—the first in New York Harbor—would join the Island's fleet in 2024. A citywide naming contest was launched, with more than 800 New Yorkers submitting their best ferry names. The winning name will be announced in 2024.

Following that announcement, **the Trust and the City were awarded \$7.5 million from the U.S. Federal Transit Administration** to support shoreside rapid charging infrastructure on Governors Island, which will enable the new hybrid ferry to operate 100% electric, giving it the ability to reduce New York City's emissions by 800 tons each year.



Nolan Park Building 20 progress, with the newly restored wraparound porch visible



Rendering of Governors Island's new hybrid electric ferry

# Leadership

**The Trust for Governors Island and Friends of Governors Island work together to ensure Governors Island is a beloved resource for New York City.**

## THE TRUST FOR GOVERNORS ISLAND

The Governors Island Corporation, doing business as The Trust for Governors Island, is the 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization created by the City of New York and charged with the planning, redevelopment, and ongoing operations of 150 acres of Governors Island. The Trust's mission is to realize the full potential of Governors Island for the inspiration and enjoyment of all New Yorkers, demonstrating a bold vision for public space.

### Board Members

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Daniel Squadron  
Carl Weisbrod

Clare Newman, *President and CEO*

## THE FRIENDS OF GOVERNORS ISLAND

The Friends of Governors Island is an independent nonprofit that works to ensure the Island's continued growth and accessibility as a vibrant public resource. As the designated fundraising partner of the Trust for Governors Island and the National Park Service, the Friends stewards the Island's green spaces, enhances the visitor experience, and builds a community dedicated to the Island's future.

### Board Members

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Marc Treviño  
Lauren Wolf  
Clare Newman **Ex Officio**  
Patti Davis *Executive Director* **Ex Officio**

# Thank you to our supporters.

Donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations are critical to helping Governors Island thrive as an accessible, vibrant, year-round destination for all New Yorkers.



## **\$500,000+**

Empire State Development  
Federal Transit Administration  
Ford Foundation  
New York City Council  
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

## **\$100,000 - \$499,999**

Amazon  
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Blackstone Charitable Foundation  
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Charina Endowment Fund  
Con Edison  
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New York Community Trust

## **\$25,000 - \$99,999**

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TP ICAP  
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## **\$5,000 - \$9,999**

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## **\$2,500 - \$4,999**

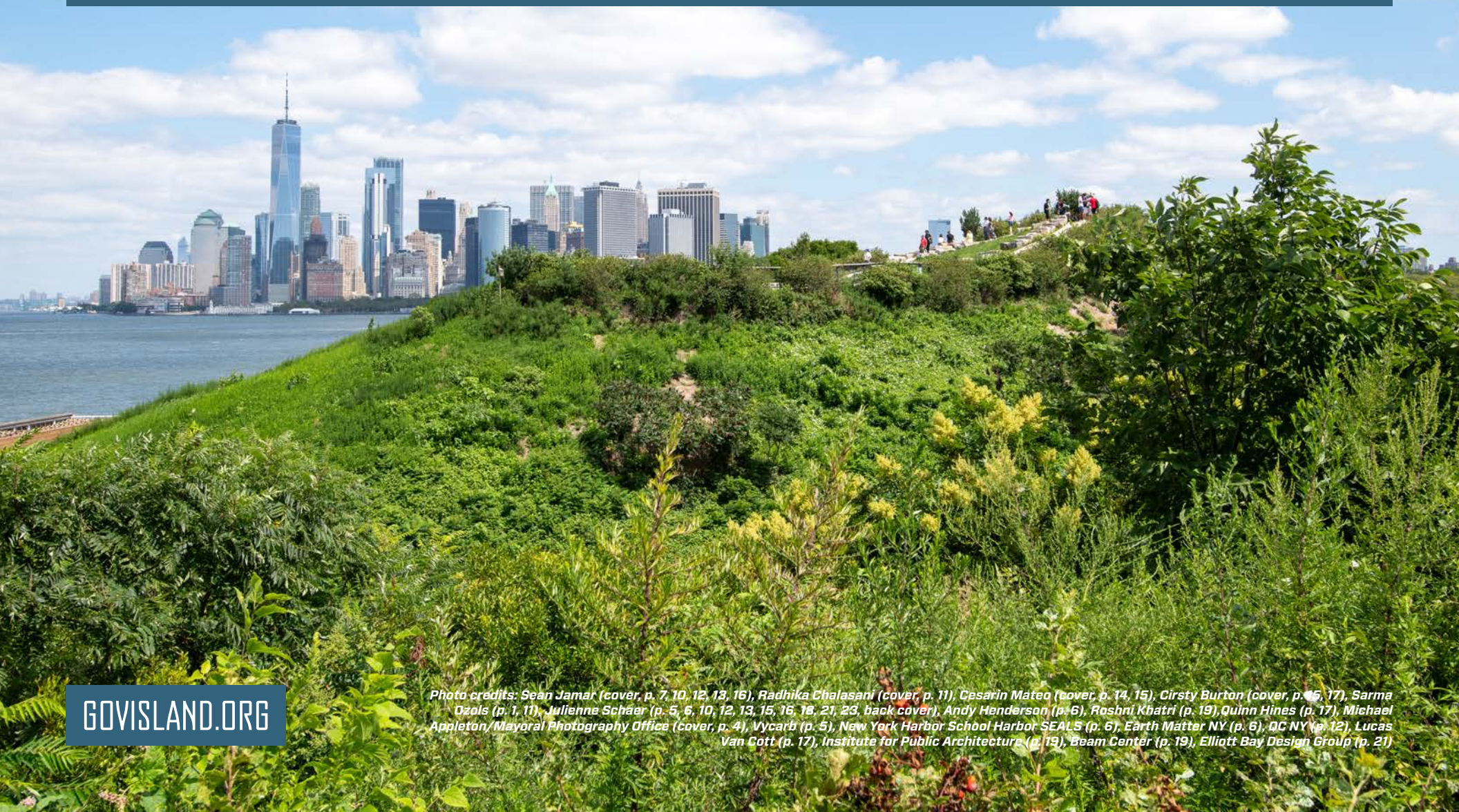
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**Special thanks to Mayor Eric Adams, Senator Chuck Schumer, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Congressman Jerry Nadler, Governor Kathy Hochul, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, City Council Member Christopher Marte, State Senator Brian Kavanagh, Assembly Member Charles Fall, and Manhattan Community Board 1 for their support of Governors Island.**

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**In the two decades since Governors Island was transferred to the City of New York, it has become a truly singular destination for recreation, open space, arts and culture, education, research, and more. We cannot wait to see what the next two decades have in store.**



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