Envisioning a Dynamic Network for Great Lakes Islanders

Bolstering social capital through the Great Lakes Islands Alliance by developing organizational structures and processes

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Executive Summary

Inhabited islands within the Great Lakes region represent some of the most unique communities in North America. Local cooperation, volunteering, and resourcefulness are essential components of everyday life; however, these communities have long been underrepresented in state, provincial, and regional affairs due to demographic constraints, economic turbulence, and relative geographic isolation.

The Great Lakes Islands Alliance (GLIA), a network of U.S. and Canadian Great Lakes Islands, was founded in 2017 to develop links across these extraordinary communities and provide islanders with a support network to communicate more effectively and connect on issues that matter to them. This report was created to help develop dynamic structures and processes within GLIA to guide the Alliance as it grows and evolves in the coming years. Our recommendations are based on 18 months of data gathering including islander interviews and surveys, professional outreach and networking, and analysis of current organizational structures.
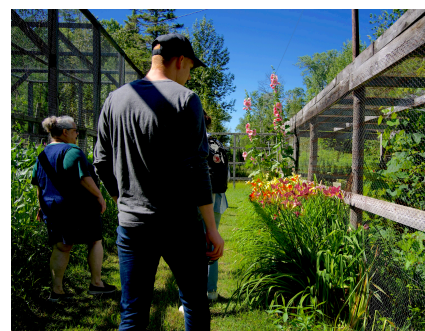
This has culminated in the creation of an Action Plan for GLIA, in which we have laid out detailed strategies and recommendations for enhanced member communication, funding techniques, outreach tactics, and more. Additional organizational capacity gained from this report will assist GLIA in developing platforms for action and discussion within the Great Lakes region while providing a valuable space for connection across states, provinces, and nations.

Introduction

United by a powerful sense of autonomy and a common attachment to the abundant natural resources of the Great Lakes, Great Lakes islanders promote local cooperation and resilience to propel supportive communities. Over seasons and generations, islanders forge novel skills and relationships unique to their distinctive settings. Residents share resources and assist each other in routine community functions such as transportation, construction, health care, and recreation. They demonstrate a strong desire to enhance the quality of their lives and the lives of their neighbors. Islanders are interested in actionable causes, from waste treatment facility improvements to support for local schools to the protection of vital environmental resources. Committed island activists advance their communities' ability to accomplish these goals with the help of various educational and professional organizations.

In the face of a rapidly changing climate, dramatic population shifts, and an unreliable economy[1], island communities will have to rely on each other now more than ever. Island-derived knowledge and resources provide the power needed to address many of these challenges, while residents' drive to improve their communities provides the potential for action. Improving inter-community connections can activate Great Lakes island communities' power and potential by leveraging a broad, supportive network of islanders positioned to help overcome these increasingly complex challenges. Not developing these connections will limit the magnitude of benefits from similar power and potential of other islands.[2]

Responding to the power, potential, and needs inherent to Great Lakes island communities, the Great Lakes Islands Alliance (GLIA) was established in 2017. Five years on, GLIA remains a fledgling organization seeking greater cohesion, stability, and impact. The founding mission of the Alliance is to "encourage[] relationship building, foster[] information exchange, and leverage[] resources to address shared challenges and embrace opportunities to benefit islands."[3] Two significant grants from the Mott Foundation supported the creation of the Alliance's basic structure and the hiring of two individuals who jointly constitute one full-time employee. GLIA now includes 20 island communities across Canada and the United States, with over 175 member islanders.[4] Together, GLIA leadership and its membership propagate fruitful relationships among island communities, promote access to funds for projects, and facilitate knowledge exchanges.

GLIA's steady growth strains the founding organizational structures (the internal functioning of the organization, such as the mission, staffing, and leadership responsibilities) and operational processes (the operations used to act on the mission of the organization, such as membership onboarding and community workshops). However, facilitating the implementation of various community development endeavors while recruiting, maintaining, and connecting members requires significant capacity and resources. Sparse staff availability and inconsistent revenue streams currently limit GLIA's ability to support islanders within and across these allied island communities.

GLIA now requires tactical planning for the development of the organization. Guidance must encourage productive investments in structural and procedural decisions that make organizational capacities resilient to changing tides and conditions. Clear direction can harbor an environment of stability within the organization while promoting flexibility in the face of shifting economic and social realities.

As students at the University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability, we have developed a visionary Action Plan at the behest of GLIA. This plan outlines actionable structural and procedural recommendations to guide GLIA toward a compelling, sustainable future. To develop this plan, we: (1) familiarized ourselves with the Great Lakes Islands Alliance, its members, contemporaries, and progenitors; and (2) identified shared strengths and challenges among Great Lakes island communities through meeting with professionals, interviewing islanders, and conducting a survey. This knowledge, supplemented with a rich review of contemporary literature on collaborative community development, revealed areas of potential within GLIA's structures and processes that can propel the organization forward.

Methods

Region of Interest

The North American Great Lakes system is one of the largest freshwater ecosystems in the world and is home to roughly 35,000 islands. This massive, interconnected hydrologic system includes Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario. These five lakes border eight U.S. States and the Canadian Province of Ontario and are sites of invaluable natural, cultural, and economic resources. Among inhabited islands, social characteristics are highly variable, and the communities are generally considered rural. The Great Lakes Islands Alliance is a growing network that seeks to connect and support island communities across the five lakes, plus the smaller Lake St. Clair. For this project, we considered all Great Lakes island communities while holding a particular interest in the 20 GLIA member communities.

Figure 1 displays the vast region spanned by the 20 GLIA member-islands across all five Great Lakes and Lake St. Clair.

Foundational Information Gathering

In preparation for more engaged research with Great Lakes islanders, we assayed the current state of GLIA in their own words. Outside of GLIA, we sought valuable information from the growing academic field of community development that can inform the progress of the organization.

State of GLIA

Our research into organizational design included reviewing foundational GLIA documents found on the official Great Lakes Islands Alliance website. These documents included the original GLIA Charter from 2018 and GLIA Annual Reports (2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021). In addition, the GLIA website holds the Mott Foundation's 2021 Reports on Communication & Marketing, Institutional

Stability, and Areas of Focus. The Stewardship Network (TSN), GLIA's fiduciary and author of the 2021 Mott Report, shared the unabridged version, including all tables and other information informing recommendations and conclusions.

Contemporary Community Development Literature

We examined contemporary literature on community development theories and practices from academic and popular sources. Theories covered in these articles included: place identity, place attachments, social capital, and futures thinking. Recommended strategies and practices included: asset-based community development and critical pragmatism. We compared these topics to the information we collected about GLIA and its members and then identified subjects relevant to GLIA structures and processes to be included in the Action Plan.

Capturing Islander Values and Perspectives

Systematic collection of qualitative data from interviews with islanders and relevant professionals across the Great Lakes region was a critical component of this project. To complement the qualitative results of the islander interviews, we surveyed GLIA members to gather quantitative metrics. Additionally, we attended the 2022 Great Lakes Islands Alliance Summit.

Qualitative Snapshot: Semi-Structured Islander Interviews

GLIA leadership provided a directory of current GLIA members that included names and email addresses, enabling us to contact members via email with an invitation for an interview. Professional connections were made predominantly through recommendations from GLIA leadership and The Stewardship Network.

Interviews consisted of semi-structured conversations framed by predetermined prompts and talking points. Interview questions were derived from our overall research question. Most questions concerned general island life, while others addressed how structures and processes within GLIA affect or could affect Great Lakes islanders. See Appendix 1 for the interview guide. In all cases, interviewees were free to steer the discussion and elaborate on pertinent topics. We provided a privacy statement to assure the interviewee that all interviews would be conducted anonymously and that personally identifiable data would not be shared with GLIA or included in the final project report. All interviews were in-person or online using Zoom video calls. Each lasted approximately one hour.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2022, we traveled to six islands to conduct in-person interviews. We explored Beaver Island, Mackinac Island, Bois Blanc Island, Sugar Island, Drummond Island, and Harsens Island, interviewing 13 islanders. Some islanders interviewed were active members of GLIA, some were former members, and others were unaffiliated with the organization.

In-person interviews were recorded using a SONY ICD-UX570 Digital Voice Recorder and stored on the internal 32 GB microSD card. Interviews over Zoom were recorded using Zoom platform recording capabilities. We uploaded all interviews to a shared team Google Drive for eventual

interpretive analysis. One month after the completion of this report, we will erase the interview recordings from these storage sites.

Interview analysis involved listening to the recorded conversations and extracting critical quotes or concepts that we found enlightening or pertinent to GLIA and island life. We initially found 30 consistent topics, which we referred to as specific "codes." We later categorized these codes under five main themes. Our chosen categories are inspired by the prompts and talking points that structured the interview process, though some originated from unprompted topics discussed by interviewees. Specific codes included the following: Transportation, Child Care, Connectedness to Mainland, GLIA Satisfaction, Roles and Responsibilities. We grouped these under the following five central themes: Physical Infrastructure, Social Infrastructure, Connectedness, Economy, and Perceptions of GLIA. See Appendix 2 for the descriptions of each theme.

Quantitative Snapshot: Surveying Islanders

Survey design originated from synthesized research on organizational structure and findings from preliminary interview analysis. We opted to use Qualtrics for design and eventual analysis. See Appendix 3 for a list of survey questions.

This survey was introduced to the target audience (a subsample of GLIA membership) at the 2022 GLIA Summit on South Bass Island, Ohio. Before introducing our survey, we introduced ourselves and our work. We then shared a QR code and a URL link for people to access the survey. Additional responses were collected via a URL link sent to GLIA membership later the same week and again a month later. Most respondents completed their surveys online via personal electronic devices, but a few responded via pen and paper.

We collected 47 responses, although some surveys were incomplete. Once collected, we ran responses through Qualtrics analytic tools and produced summary graphs, charts, and tables. Due to the small sample size, we limited our analytics to organizing and ordering data. The response sample was helpful for our research but remained inadequate for representing the region's total islander population or leveraging more powerful statistical tools.

Attending the 2022 GLIA Summit

This four-day summit was based in Put-in-Bay, OH, and included visits to Kelleys (OH), Middle Bass (OH), South Bass (OH), and Pelee (Ont.) islands. On these visits, we toured each island's various businesses, community spaces, and natural spaces. We did not conduct formal interviews during the summit but had informal conversations with islanders and mainlanders. In these conversations, we gathered information about island living and brainstormed ideas with islanders about how they would like GLIA to develop as an organization.

Professional Connections & Collaborative Brainstorming

Developing connections with comparable external organizations and learning from challenges similar groups have faced is vital to building GLIA's knowledge base. We attended professional conferences and met with field experts to supplement the information gathered through our interviews and survey.

Organizational and Professional Outreach

Over the duration of the project, we attended multiple networking opportunities and discussed forward-thinking strategies for GLIA. These discussions often focused on the following: approaches to expanding structural and procedural capacity within developing organizations, techniques for the procurement of external funding sources, and visions for future management of Great Lakes water resources. Conversations like these helped to broaden our understanding and vision for how GLIA can promote strategic growth in several critical areas within the organization. We connected with the following organizations: The Maine Islands Institute, The Stewardship Network, The Mackinac Island Community Foundation, and the Fluid Thinking Symposium: Water Justice in a Changing Climate. Each connection supplied valuable conversations and ideas. All organizational outreach efforts were conducted by Zoom video call or in-person conversations initiated by an introductory email or a personal handshake.

Creating Plans For Sustained Action

We synthesized the information gathered from our background research, islander interviews, informal discussions, and professional connections to inform the bulk of our Action Plan. Cafer et. al.'s Community Resilience Framework[5] guided our integration of multiple systems and capitals affecting community resilience. This framework informed our first conversations with GLIA leadership and project clients. During the meeting, GLIA leadership and project clients brainstormed current assets, hazards, and vulnerabilities for GLIA. Then, as a group, we organized these ideas by applicable community capitals. We collected these ideas using the collaborative software Miro during a Zoom video meeting. See Appendix 4 for the meeting notes.

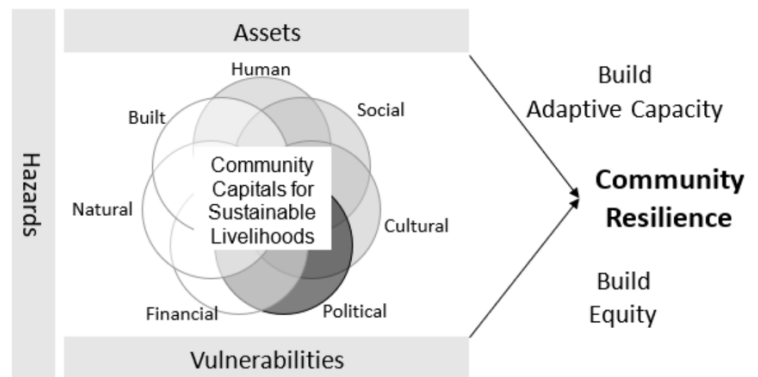*Figure 2 displays Cafer et al.'s community resilience framework with integrated and overlapping dimensions of community capitals.*

With this knowledge, we developed, conducted, and analyzed our islander interviews. Through conversations as a group, we collectively and iteratively developed the recommendations in the Action Plan and ensured each recommendation related to our founding research.

Results of Interviews, Survey, and Literature Review

Collecting Islander Perspectives via Interviews

The team retrieved qualitative data through interviews with islanders and relevant professionals from around the Great Lakes region to learn about the benefits and challenges of island life. From local islanders, we found detailed insights on issues ranging from transportation and healthcare to community dynamics to connection with mainland cities. From the various professionals we interviewed – many of whom worked for island community organizations and networks similar to GLIA – we gained valuable information about successful organizational structures, funding techniques, and community outreach tactics.

	Connectedness	Economy	Physical Infrastructure	Social Infrastructure	Perceptions of GLIA
Assets	Intra-island community connection is critical and valuable Every interviewee expressed gratitude for their supportive island community	Many interviewees expressed a cautious optimism about their island's economy	Roads, bridges, ferries, airplanes, and cars are all essential Prospect of future infrastructure development was often met with cautious optimism	Facebook and texting are widely used for intra-island communication EMS and police are often volunteers from the island, develop close connections with community members	Members enjoy speaking with each other and sharing opinions, knowledge, and resources GLIA provides a needed voice for islanders
Hazards	Mixed levels of connection to other Great Lakes islands Lack of routine connections to other islands	Rapid increases in housing prices and demand in recent years Mixed support for increased development on islands	High transportation costs (particularly ferry rates) burden some islanders Limited access to broadband and sufficient solid waste management	Some school districts struggle to find enough teachers	GLIA's outreach is inadequate to attract new members (specifically younger islanders and business owners)
Vulnerabilites	Infrastructure (such as ferries or bridges) and geographic differences (distance from mainland) can hinder inter-island and island-mainland connections	Increased tensions between tourists and local communities	Each island faces unique transportation challenges	Schools are facing significant fluctuations in student population size	Mixed opinions on GLIA's role as a political entity

Figure 3 highlights islander interview insights grouped by one of five themes.

The Islanders

Connectedness

"If something bad happens on the island, island members respond before any government. Islanders know who's living where, and they help those who need it. That's the kind of life human beings should have."

- GLIA Member

Islanders consistently emphasized the critical role of community connection and cooperation within island communities. Nearly all interviewees agreed that a willingness to share resources and knowledge amongst community members is vital to island life. Interviewees also mentioned the benefits of social connection through opportunities presented by local sportsman clubs, bingo nights, farmers markets, or local newspapers. Islanders rarely voiced any sense of individual isolation or disconnectedness from their local island community.

Despite the significant strength of intra-island connection, interviewees expressed mixed levels of connection to other Great Lakes islands. Despite being aware of other nearby island communities, many interviewees said they lack routine connections or reasons to interact with those on neighboring islands. Inter-island connection most commonly comes through social opportunities such as local lighthouse associations and high school sports programs. Nonetheless, most interviewees expressed some interest in community life and dynamics on other islands and believed that GLIA's capacity to connect island communities is beneficial for all islanders.

Interviewees expressed mixed opinions about the strength of connectedness between islands and nearby mainland communities. While some respondents expressed a strong connection to mainland communities due to professional, educational, cultural, and familial ties, others reported little to no connection with the mainland. Regardless of personal connection, many respondents identified the necessity of receiving goods and packages from mainland ports via ferries, planes, and other transport. While not all responses directly correlated to the amount of local travel infrastructure available between mainland and island communities, it is important to note that infrastructure and geographic differences significantly impact the ability to connect.

Economy

"Change is good if it's addressing something that's vital to the community."

- GLIA Member

Many respondents expressed cautious optimism about their island's present and future economic status. Increasing numbers of tourists and developers bring economic opportunity to island communities, but they can also alter an island's status as a place of quiet and serenity for long-time residents.

The increasing involvement of non-islanders in island communities can result in tensions over economic benefits and cultural differences, according to interviewees. While many islands rely on tourists and summer vacationers to bring revenue to local communities, increasing visitor numbers can

take a toll on small island towns and nearby ecosystems. Some islanders expressed excitement at the economic opportunities from added development to accommodate tourists and seasonal renters and expected it to continue. Others regarded added development on their island as unnecessary and expressed concerns about protecting local trails, forests, and waters. Almost every islander interviewed noted the rapid increase in housing prices and demand over the past few years. Many expressed mixed opinions on the benefits of increased housing development for island communities. It is important to note that the wide variety of islands within the Great Lakes makes general economic analysis difficult, as economic capacity and needs are highly localized to each island.

Physical Infrastructure

"A ferry ride is one of the most peaceful things in the morning . . . 20-minute boat ride, cup of coffee, take in the scenery."

> \- GLIA Member

Interviewees were consistently concerned about the maintenance of travel infrastructure. Islanders highlighted roads, bridges, ferries, airplanes, and cars as the essential physical infrastructure on various islands, connecting communities and transporting goods across land and water routes. Each interviewee spoke about the strengths and weaknesses of their respective island's infrastructure, often noting the unique challenges of living on an island without a mainland connection via bridge. Islands such as Sugar Island, Drummond Island, and Harsens Island were described as "commuter islands" due to the short ferry crossings from the mainland that allow for multiple daily trips to school, work, and other events. Islands such as Bois Blanc and Beaver represent communities with significantly longer transportation distances between the mainland and the island, limiting daily connection to the mainland and requiring longer travel times. The prospect of future infrastructural development was often met with cautious optimism, and the addition of bridges and housing plans was commonly seen as a challenge to an island's status quo.

Interviewees expressed mixed reactions to transportation prices (most commonly regarding local ferries), with some interviewees mentioning their displeasure with high ferry crossing rates. Other mentions of physical infrastructure included limited waste management capacity for recycling and trash and the limited presence of broadband internet on some islands. The ecological and demographic diversity of islands within the Great Lakes results in highly localized physical infrastructure, with many residents relying on various transportation services to complete daily tasks.

Social Infrastructure

"Caring about community means you have to volunteer, especially in a small community."

> \- GLIA Member

Social infrastructure on Great Lakes islands is highly localized due to ecological barriers and the rural nature of many island communities. Interviewees noted that many services, including healthcare, childcare, and emergency medical support, depend upon island residents' willingness to coordinate

services and utilize their limited local resources. Police and EMS services on some islands are performed by local community members that volunteer their skills in times of need. Essential childcare and healthcare services often require local volunteers and the help of neighbors in lieu of professionally established, year-round programs. Educational opportunities differ with each island, as noted by interviewees, and schools commonly undergo significant fluctuation in size and resources depending on demographic changes on the island.

Interviewees commonly identified the social media platform Facebook as a critical tool to keep local communities in touch and update neighbors about current events and programs.

Perceptions of GLIA

"I feel like [GLIA] gives us a voice, a little more power if you want to try to accomplish something, whether it be environmental, or boat lines, or whatever. You've got all these people behind you. That's really cool."

> \- GLIA Member

Interviewees expressed general satisfaction with the development and intentions of the Great Lakes Islands Alliance in its present form. Still, they noted that clearer organizational goals and greater community involvement could make GLIA more impactful. Almost all interviewees agreed that GLIA has helped islanders connect by providing a common platform through monthly meetings and annual events like the GLIA Summit. Islanders enjoy speaking with each other and sharing opinions on island-related issues, with regular meetings offering opportunities to share valuable knowledge and resources. However, many interviewees expressed concerns that GLIA's current outreach efforts lack the adequate breadth to sustainably grow the organization. Some islanders worried about a lack of engagement with younger island residents and the general visibility of the organization within island communities. One interviewee suggested including more island business owners would support the organization's longevity.

GLIA's status as a facilitatory network rather than an organization with dedicated political stances also garnered mixed opinions. While some islanders appreciated the growth of GLIA as a conversation platform and a social link between Great Lakes islanders, others expressed frustration at GLIA's lack of policy advocacy on pertinent issues. Some interviewees said they would like GLIA to be more engaged with local island community efforts and initiatives, which would help GLIA gain increased visibility and membership. Another interviewee stated that GLIA must identify needs for specific islands and advocate for them in order to be relevant to larger numbers of people. Despite these differences of opinion about the political ambitions of GLIA, nearly all respondents felt empowered by the presence of GLIA, with many saying that the Alliance provides a needed voice for islanders across the region.

Relevant Professionals

Funding

Interviewees offered a range of funding strategies for GLIA. Of those shared, the three most plausible funding sources for GLIA are grants, individual donations, and the establishment of an endowment.

Most of GLIA's current funding comes from sequential grants from the Mott Foundation; GLIA has received three thus far. In addition to the Mott grants, the Alliance receives some funding through smaller, individual donations. Leading concerted outreach efforts to wealthier island community members and high-earning donors across North America was mentioned as a strategy to increase individual donation funds. One interviewee advised acquiring contacts within major universities in the Great Lakes region to start the process of an endowment application. By examining models from similar organizations, such as the Maine Islands Institute (which relies on a mix of endowment and donation funding), GLIA can learn from the successes of others in developing dynamic funding plans. Grant applications, donations, and endowment-related processes require specific outreach tactics and personnel to moderate these efforts. The Stewardship Network, the fiduciary of the Great Lakes Islands Alliance, would manage this.

Subcommittees

Enhancing the role of subcommittees within GLIA's organizational structure was a primary recommendation from interviewees. Interviewees regularly expressed optimism about the potential for subcommittees or similar groups to further connect islanders across the Great Lakes by offering concentrated areas of support for relevant issues. Some pointed out that subcommittees are essential to similar organizations like the Maine Islands Coalition and have been highly beneficial for broader community engagement. It was also noted that subcommittees could be valuable in linking GLIA members to GLIA leadership as they reaffirm organizational structure and communication. Support for creating subcommittees or similar groups was unanimous among the professionals interviewed.

Identifying Member Opinions via Survey

We built, distributed, and analyzed our survey to understand islander preferences and thoughts about GLIA more uniformly. We made the survey available for five weeks, distributed the survey three times (once via QR code at the GLIA 2022 Summit and twice via URL in general GLIA membership emails), and received 47 responses. The survey included 24 questions with four short answer questions (three as follow-up questions for more information via closing comments or questions and 21 multiple choice questions). As no questions were required to complete the survey, only some respondents answered every question. Most questions returned between 38 and 41 responses, although short-answer questions, on average, returned far fewer responses.
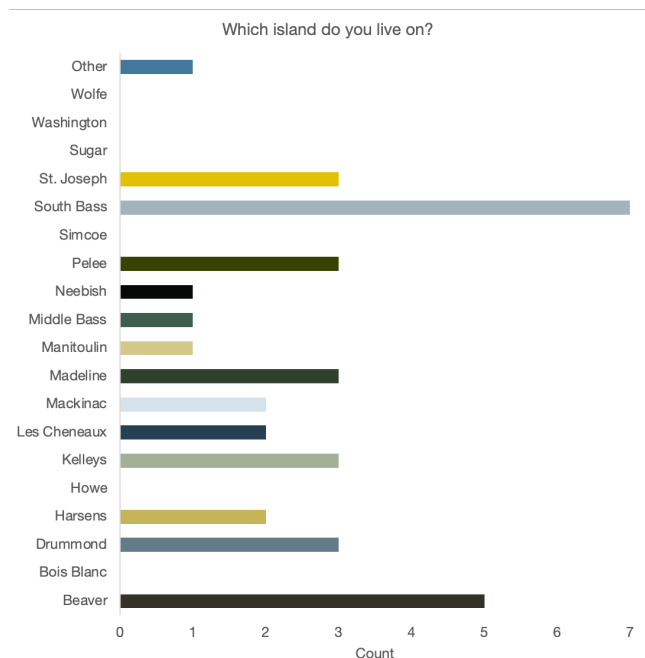

Figure 4 displays the island of residence for survey respondents.

GLIA Membership & Islander Connectedness

Desiring greater resources and connectedness across island communities, growing numbers of Great Lakes islanders have joined GLIA since its founding in 2017. GLIA members report becoming more connected and consider organizational efforts successful.

Islander respondents represented 14 islands across the Great Lakes, most of which are located close to the Summit location. South Bass Island had the largest number of survey respondents of any island, likely because the 2022 GLIA Summit was hosted there; Beaver Island had the second largest number of respondents, perhaps due to the island's GLIA members tending to be heavily involved in the organization since its founding.
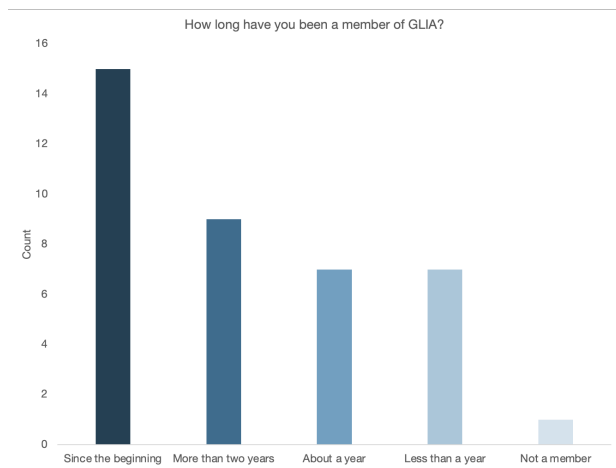
Figure 5 displays respondents' GLIA membership duration.

Long-time members made up a sizable portion of survey respondents. Over half of the survey respondents had been members of GLIA for more than two years. The most selected timeframe option in the survey was "since the beginning," with an equal amount selecting "about a year and "less than a year."

According to the survey, respondents joined GLIA for knowledge sharing, connection to greater resources, and meeting like-minded people; in addition, they found GLIA provided space for the pursuit of these goals quite well. All respondents thought GLIA was doing a respectable job, and none thought GLIA was doing a poor job. Most of those who answered said they joined for knowledge sharing; however, the question design did not allow for selecting multiple options. The desire to connect with more resources and to meet like-minded people comprised the remaining reasoning for joining GLIA. Everyone who answered "Other" commented that they joined for all the reasons provided.

Figure 6 displays respondents' feelings of GLIA efficacy.
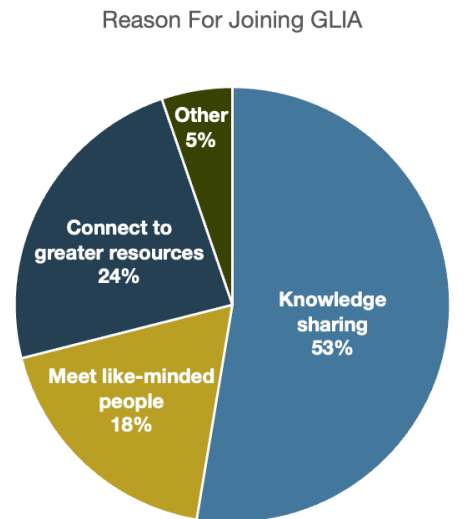
Figure 7 displays chosen reasons for joining GLIA.

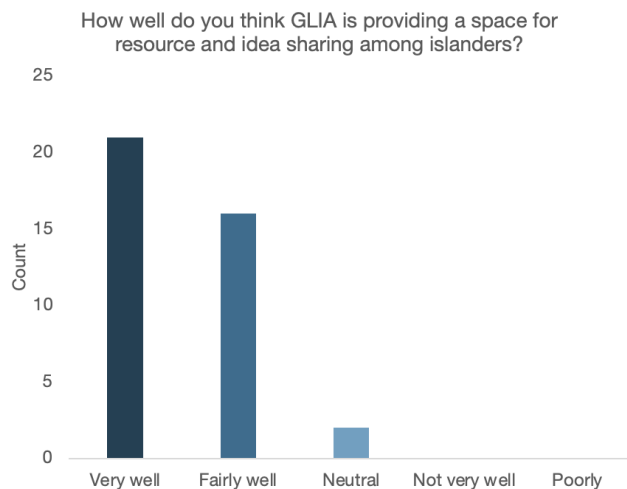Respondents had similar feelings about connectedness within their island, with other islands, and with their mainland community; moreover, they stated GLIA enhanced island relationships among at least one connectedness type. Almost all islanders confirmed they were very connected to people on their island but loosely connected to people from other islands. We found that perspectives about inter-island connectedness were less polarized than intra-island connectedness. Respondents felt least connected with their 'sister' mainland community, and 87% shared that relationships and connectedness with at least one of the mentioned groups had been enhanced since becoming involved with GLIA.
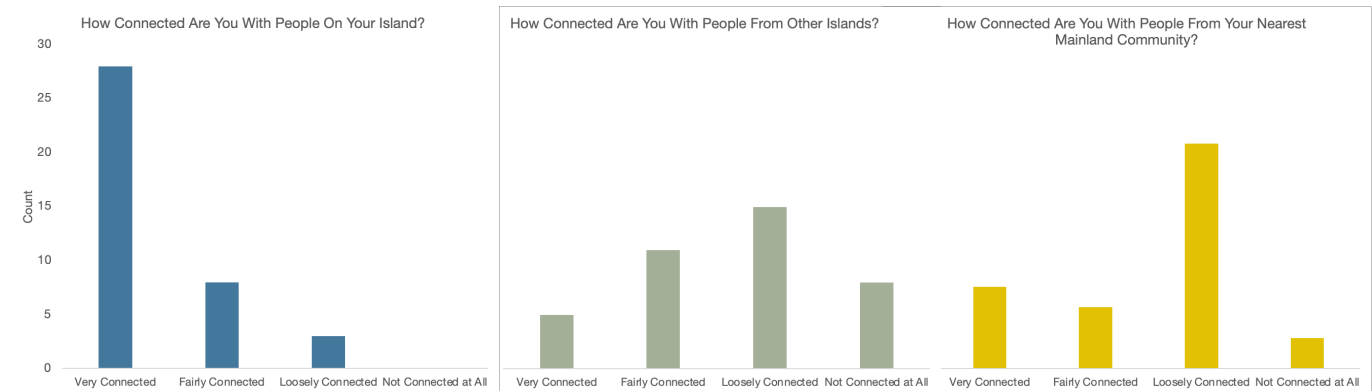
Figure 8, 9, and 10 together display islander connectedness across geographic contexts.

Interests & Activism

Considering the implications of islander passion, we inquired about interest in subcommittees and found 71% of respondents were interested in being involved in a subcommittee within GLIA. All of the options made available in the survey (Housing, Economic Sustainability, Environmental Conservation, Recycling and Waste Management, Education, Healthcare, Transportation) presented substantial topics of interest. All topics received an importance value of 100 (on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being most important while 0 is least important) by at least one respondent; however, education and transportation received at least one 0.
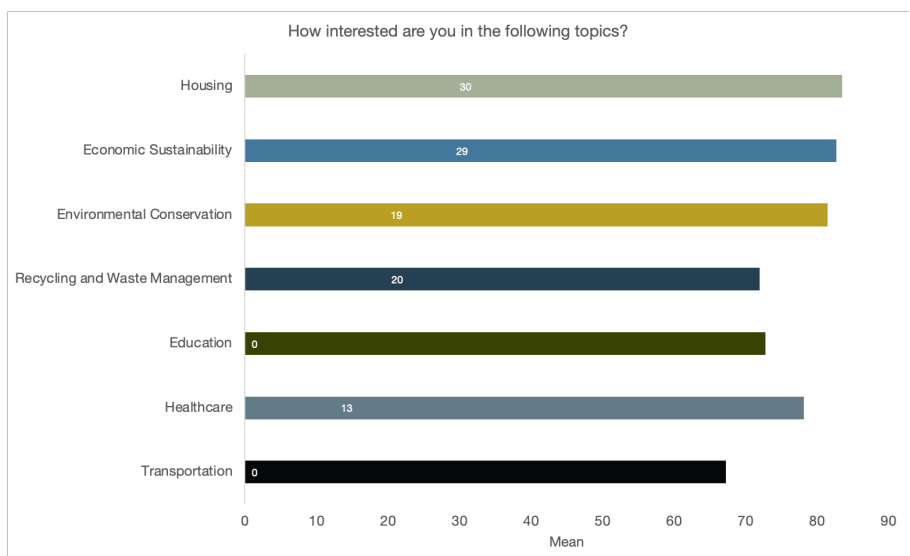
Figure 11 displays the interest of respondents' across a variety of topics.

Perceived Organizational Efficacy & General Feedback

Using the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as a proxy for the likelihood of GLIA members recommending membership to others, we found islander respondents enjoy their time with the organization and consider it effective in accomplishing member-driven objectives. We asked respondents to grade on a scale of 1 to 10 the likelihood of recommending GLIA to a friend or colleague: if they graded a 2 or lower, their response was factored in as a detractor; if 8 or greater, they were a promoter; if any number between 2 and 8, they were passive. 87% of respondents graded with an 8 or higher, meaning we found GLIA to have a net promoter score of 87. This is a positive value, especially given that there were no detractors surveyed, but it would be more meaningful if placed in context with other scores. In a follow-up question where respondents were asked to explain the reasoning behind their grading, we found that knowledge sharing and the general helpfulness of the organization - and the people within it - made people answer positively.
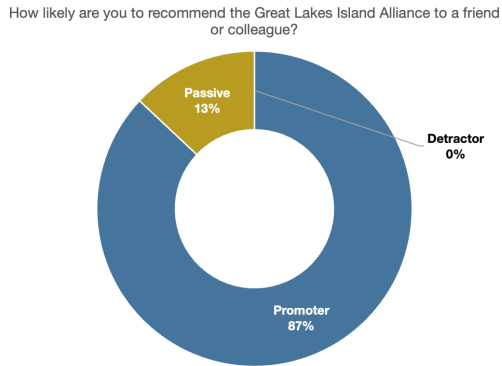
How likely are you to recommend the Great Lakes Island Alliance to a friend or colleague?

Passive 13%

Detractor 0%

Promoter 87%

Figure 12 shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents rate GLIA highly.

Short answer questions were included to explain chosen responses to relationship questions and perceptions regarding GLIA. Responses to these questions were thank you notes and survey design critiques.

Understanding Community Development: Best Practices for GLIA

The Great Lakes Islands Alliance has an opportunity to create dynamic spaces for islanders to realize community development objectives. The practice of community development can be defined as the "people-centered change process facilitated with a community of people to take action to increasingly actualize their fundamental human needs to enhance the quality of their own lives and those of the wider community they are a part of."[6] To break this down, let us first define *community* vis-à-vis GLIA. To develop a complete definition, the concept of community can only be understood when placed in context of the unique history and geography of the community in question. With this approach, a community is defined by the experiences and physical realities shared by its members that manifest through their relationships with each other. As the author Gerald Creed says in his book, *The Seductions of Community*, **"communities are imagined, but they are also embodied in social relations."**[7] In this way, the meaning of community can affect the social relationships developed within a group and vice versa.

Implementation of *people-centered change processes* is truly at the heart of community development. At its core, the people and their needs are the guiding forces for change within a community. This is counter to other top-down planning approaches in which an outside planner determines the future of a community and the path to get there. By allowing members within a community to direct their own

evolution, long-lasting change is possible. Additionally, community development is an ongoing and persistent *process*. It is not meant to be a one-off solution to an emergent problem. Instead, it is a dialogical process of collective decision-making developed by the community that evolves over time. Crucially, it involves cycles of planning, action, and reflection.[8]

With these understandings, several theories and best practices prevalent in the community development literature can help guide GLIA through this work.

Guiding Theories

We outline contemporary theories regarding *social capital* and *place attachment* as they relate to community development. Social capital and place attachments are both resources that GLIA can help island communities nurture.

Social Capital

Social capital is the most valuable asset that GLIA can harness. There are varying definitions of *social capital*, but generally, it is related to the ability of individuals to gain access to benefits as a result of their membership in a social structure.[9] Usually, social capital is conceived as both a resource and a tool that can be leveraged to gain access to direct and indirect resources from family, friends, or community members.[10] While social capital is critical for successful development efforts, it can also be developed *through* community development efforts. The iterative nature of community development allows time to form new relationships. With an understanding of the social capital available to a group, Great Lakes islanders will be able to focus effort and resources to solve problems. By experiencing this work with other community members, individuals can develop the trust and familiarity needed to establish social capital with one another.

There are three ways to operationalize social capital: *bonding, bridging, and linking*.[11] *Bonding* relies on relationships among members of a community who share some similarities (i.e., age, race, income, or education) The term is usually used for short-term solutions to emergent problems. Island communities showcase a strong sense of bonding in the form of intra-island social capital. For example, residents of the same island regularly rely on their neighbors for health care, construction, education, and more. This interdependence can develop trust within an island as well as the skills and knowledge necessary for a functional island community. *Bridging* relies on relationships amongst people who are dissimilar in some way(s). *Linking* relies on relationships between individuals and institutions or other individuals who have power over them. *Bridging* and *linking* both constitute long-term support for complex or continuous problems.

GLIA is poised to create the bridges and links needed for island communities to gain access to a larger web of resources. Utilizing the strengths developed within bonded island communities, GLIA can establish support systems that allow for relationships to be developed between islands and with external individuals or institutions. Establishing, maintaining, and strengthening relationships between dissimilar groups, citizen organizations, and various government institutions requires deliberative care. GLIA can

provide the structural support needed for island communities to establish and maintain these connections, ultimately strengthening the social capital across all Great Lakes island communities. However, GLIA will also need to be careful in this process. Social capital is not always expended in a benevolent manner. Harmful stereotypes and power imbalances can negatively influence how and whether certain communities receive support. GLIA will need to be aware of these differences and ensure methods to counteract their potentially harmful effects.

Place Attachment

While sometimes difficult to articulate, when engaging with Great Lakes island communities, we witnessed palpable *place attachments*, or "the affective bond between people and places."[12] This bond converts space into place by steadily imbuing meaning and sentiment over time. A similar term, *place identity*, or the "dimensions of self that develop in relation to the physical environment by means of a pattern of beliefs, preferences, feelings, values and goals," refers to the individual expression of such a bond.[13]

Understanding islanders' place attachments and place identities is crucial to mobilizing forces for community development. Place meanings developed over time influence how community members perceive, commit to, and take part in neighborhood processes. For example, feelings of loss due to changes on the island can mobilize participation in development or conservation efforts. Research has shown that communities with high levels of attachment exhibit greater social cohesion, and their neighborhoods have more outward signs of physical revitalization.[14]

However, living in the same place does not inherently build a sense of community. Each person develops their own emotional attachment to a place. Not addressing these differences will lead to conflict as individuals struggle to understand the perspectives of their neighbors. The more perspectives are welcomed in community discussions, the more robust and resilient attachments will be. Including more people, with special consideration to labor, locale, and culture dimensions, will uncover greater islander wisdom increasingly representative of Great Lakes islander identity. Excluding groups will entrench growing inequities in wealth and quality of life. Uncovering and addressing differences will provide a new and shared place attachment and regional identity that embraces the diversity of islands and islanders across the Great Lakes. Additionally, uncovering place attachments relevant to an area can reveal the identities formed within a community and the resulting power relations.[15] This view is made salient when a community decides who is an "insider" and who is an "outsider." In an island community, this may seem straightforward: those who live on islands are considered "insiders." Often, such judgments are more complicated. For example: are part-time residents on an island considered insiders? What if they live on the island during the winter (considered a more challenging time to live on an island) and not in the summer? What if they did not grow up on the island but lived there for ten years?

Understanding how an island community conceptualizes insiders and outsiders is crucial for conducting community development projects. If members consider a project highly beneficial for

outsiders but see little benefit for insiders, they may be less likely to support such a project. Additionally, when a community is faced with unclear boundaries of who is considered part of a community, such as when there is a high turnover of full-time and part-time residents, they might scramble to find clear boundaries to define their community.[16] This may lead to unintended injustices if the definition becomes too exclusive or restrictive.

Differing place attachments need not lead to conflict. Embracing the various place attachments within a community can uncover aspects of the physical or social environment that are relevant or even sacred to community members.[17] If these attachments conflict with one another, it can lead to tension. However, if these differing attachments are presented and cared for with respect and curiosity, members may develop an appreciation for the myriad of perspectives within their community. By not allowing hardline positions on issues and instead fostering curiosity for their neighbors, community members can collectively develop new and shared place attachments.

Approaches

How can GLIA best harness the social capital of islanders and uncover their various place attachments? Two approaches seem best suited for GLIA's work: *Asset-Based Community Development* and *Critical Pragmatism*.

Asset-Based Community Development

Traditional community development approaches are largely problem-based: planners first define a problem and then research what can be done to fix it. This process usually disregards interventions already in place by the community. Additionally, the hierarchical nature of this process can discourage community members if they are treated as less important than the planning agency. If this discouragement becomes pervasive, it may lead to the community being dependent on the planning organization. According to an exploratory study of community development projects in Africa,[18] traditional top-down methods of planning were particularly prevalent during apartheid in Sub-Saharan African countries. *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) counters this trend; it begins with a focus on the strengths and capacities already present in a community and works to facilitate members to use their talents to create wealth for themselves and their community. This process is "relationship-driven, embraces cultural traditions and values, stimulates citizenship and spontaneity, and uses external resources to enhance internal resources without undermining the initiatives of the community."[19] By focusing on a community's assets and not its deficits, members are better able to take ownership of their lives and rely less on external resources. While time-consuming, this process creates more long-lasting results than traditional planning practices.

To employ ABCD, a thorough understanding of resources available within a community must be gained. Commonly understood resources include the financial capacities of municipalities and island residents, technical knowledge or skills, and environmental resources; however, social, spiritual, and cultural capital are also deeply valuable assets that islanders already possess and can be strengthened. One way to inspire islanders to recognize their assets is to foster an abundance mindset instead of a

scarcity mindset. When people view their resources and capacities as abundant and not dependent on outside support, they are encouraged to work creatively to solve a problem. An abundance mindset can lead to greater sharing of knowledge and resources, which can spread to the greater community. Then, people realize their leadership capabilities and drive their development.

A common critique of this approach is that it can divert attention away from the responsibility of the State to support its citizens. This can marginalize conversations about structural inequalities and power dynamics. For GLIA, this is important to be aware of, especially in their *bridging* role. At its best, ABCD is meant to foster collaborative work between communities and governments or institutions. In this way, while community development projects can start with a focus on the assets already present in a community, there is an argument to be made that the State should still fulfill its duties to support its citizens. Utilizing ABCD can strengthen communities so they can be best suited to work with the State. However, this does introduce the possibility of community development efforts being co-opted or corrupted by institutionalized planning operations.[20] GLIA must provide support for islanders to utilize the technical expertise of professionals and institutions while protecting them from abdicating control over the agenda or goals of potential projects.

Critical Pragmatism

GLIA can flourish by attending to both processes and outcomes of community development efforts, thereby balancing critical thinking and imaginative visioning. Managing the varying social capitals, place attachments, goals, desires, and other complexities present in island communities is a monumental task for GLIA. *Critical pragmatism* can help GLIA and its members address complexities and contradictions while collectively designing and implementing equitable and creative plans. Critical pragmatism is a mindset change from "deconstructive skepticism to reconstructive imagination."[21] pragmatism requires recognizing the fallibility of knowledge claims; it recognizes that knowledge claims sometimes reflect a community's or society's systematic failings. A critical pragmatist, therefore, attends to process (i.e. the form of a problem question, relevant power dynamics, political history) *and* outcome (i.e. the real consequences of an action, not just the intention). Understanding the process and outcomes in this way is not the result of debate or argument; instead, it results from a series of reflective actions. In this process, communities design and implement an action related to their community development goals and collectively reflect and analyze its consequences. This reflection informs the next series of actions.

This analysis must not fall victim to the common pitfalls of naïveté or cynicism. The community must engage in a critical, realistic reflection of the consequences, recognizing both where the action was successful and unsuccessful. Once recognized, they can explore the reasoning behind such consequences. All told, this is a complex process. Any action taken by a community is unlikely to either be entirely successful or entirely unsuccessful, and these contradictory effects may be difficult to uncover. Due to the multiple place attachments and place identities in a community, members may

each have different opinions on what counts as successful or unsuccessful. To untangle these complexities, discussions with community members require critical pragmatism.

GLIA can provide the arena for such conversations. In doing so, it can guide members as they uncover and understand the complexities inherent to community development. Conversations with community members should not focus solely on fundamental differences; if conversations end prematurely because of a real or perceived difference, members may miss secondary agreements with the differing group that may catalyze alternative solutions. The tension or anger that results from such differences should not be entirely dismissed. GLIA must foster environments of curiosity where members can recognize and address differences in pursuit of a new, shared understanding of an issue. By modeling critical pragmatism, GLIA can inspire community members to work in this way. From our interviews, we know islanders are interested in more than simply talking about issues. They wish to work on projects where they can see a real and tangible outcome. The reflective action process of critical pragmatism will support this mindset, as it allows islanders to actualize their desires for the development of their island and create a thoughtful process to allow for learning and change.

The work of the Great Lakes Islands Alliance is complex. Supporting the development of dozens of island communities commands great care and deliberate focus. Many of the "wicked problems"[22] facing islands are complex and ever-changing. With the practices of *Asset-Based Community Development* and *critical pragmatism,* GLIA can provide the scaffolding needed for island communities to recognize their *social capital* and uncover their *place attachments*; ultimately empowering this network of island activists to drive the future of their communities.

Action Plan

This Action Plan is a guide for GLIA leadership that envisions productive futures and pathways for the organization and its membership. Included are a number of recommendations based on current organizational capacities, interviews with islanders and field experts, our survey, and contemporary community development literature. **With this Plan, GLIA can lead conversations and work collectively to chart a path forward over the short, medium, and long terms.** New questions and opportunities will arise as GLIA grows and changes. While some of the particularities of the plan may not be relevant within all changing contexts, the underlying procedures and proposals may still be applicable.

We divided this plan into two main sections. (1) **Organizational Structures**, which includes recommendations for the internal functioning of the organization. It includes everything from core organizational philosophies to leadership positions to committee roles. (2) **Operational Processes**, which includes recommendations for operations to promote the goals of the organization. They are the strategies employed to boost organizational development through islander connection and participation. We organized each recommendation into short (1-2 years), mid (2-5 years), and long (5-10 years) term goals. Ultimately, it is up to GLIA leadership to decide how to prioritize the recommendations. See Appendix 5 for a larger image of the plan overview.

	Structures					Processes				
	Organizational Model	Canadian and Indigenous Representation	Fundraising	Marketing and Comms	Transitions	Interest Groups	Liaisons	Onboarding	Discussion Boards	Islands Summit
Short Term	Continue as a network Continue TSN relationship	Conduct outreach to Indigenous groups Invite Indigenous leaders to speak at GLIA meetings Use French in GLIA communications	Apply for grants Maintain small-gift donor base	Establish a Marketing Committee Create GLIA social media sites and update the website	Conduct exit interviews for leaders leaving roles Share strategic decisions with GLIA membership	Conduct a survey to gauge shared interests	Appoint Liaisons within from within the Steering Committee Outline available resources	Introduce new members at General Membership Meetings Conduct entrance surveys	Determine need and use for the discussion boards Find appropriate software	Establish a procedure for reporting out after each summit
Mid Term	Engage members in envisioning GLIA's future Create a DEI statement	Formalize relations with a Canadian fiduciary Establish a Canadian and Indigenous Project Manager	Grow large-gift donor base Grow use of TSN	Develop bi-monthly newsletter Increase TSN involvement in GLIA outreach	Create 'historian' leadership role	Hold a fair or teleconference for members to connect via shared interests	Start regular gatherings with GLIA Leadership and relevant interest groups	Develop orientation modules	Establish procedure for use and moderation Pilot use of discussion boards	Organize an Interest Group Fair
Long Term	Increase support staff capacity	Partner with Canadian and/or Indigenous Education Institutions	Hire a Fundraising Specialist Research endowment opportunities	Utilize interest groups to increase visibility	Mentor up-and-coming islander members	Coordinate events to maintain involvement Establish procedures for changing Interest Groups	Establish procedures for changing Liaisons	Hold a seminar for new members	Train members to use discussion boards	

Figure 13 overviews Action Plan recommendations organized by short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals.

Organizational Model

Summary

In its current state, GLIA provides a valuable platform for Great Lakes islanders to connect and share information relevant to regional island communities. As a network, it allows flexibility to reach a wide audience of members without requiring large organizational capacities in areas like staffing and funding. This relieves it from a variety of pressures that can challenge a young organization. GLIA's partnership with The Stewardship Network (TSN) provides external financial expertise and reliability that allows GLIA leadership to focus on other avenues for development. This flexibility within GLIA's organizational structure has helped it succeed thus far, especially given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will continue to be necessary for GLIA's development over the short and medium terms.

Challenges

Continuing as a network could limit GLIA's capacity for effective outreach to local island communities in ways that garner visibility and energy for the organization. Its lack of political advocacy and resources to pursue specific initiatives leaves it vulnerable to shifts in leadership or loss of key members. A network provides an engaging platform for communication among islanders, but organizational energy largely comes from the members who engage with each other (bottom-up) around specific issues, rather than from organizational purpose or mission (top-down). GLIA must continue to present a space for islanders to connect on timely and relevant issues that build on member interests and provide growth opportunities for everyone involved.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Continue as a network**	Limited capacities in funding, membership, and outreach mandate that GLIA continue as a regional network. The lack of consensus from current members about the purpose and future of GLIA stipulates that additional time and consideration be given to any decision to change the current organizational model. GLIA must utilize current resources, including this Action Plan, to strengthen its organizational structures and processes over the next 5-7 years before considering a sustainable transformation to a nonprofit. Transitioning away from the network approach is contingent upon the development of GLIA's internal and external capacities and organizational desire to adopt policy stances on regional issues.
	Continue current partnership with TSN	Regularly engage with TSN regarding their potential support for additional marketing, outreach, funding, and other services.
Mid Term	**Engage with the broader membership about their visions for GLIA**	Administer occasional anonymous surveys to document how members understand GLIA's purpose and how they'd like to see the Alliance operating within their community. These will update leadership on member opinions, increase communication, and inform decisions about GLIA's future.
	Commit to BIPOC and LGBTQ+ support through an official Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statement	This statement should be the result of discussions with the wider GLIA membership. Similar statements from other organizations can inspire the statement GLIA would like to make. The statement should be on the GLIA website and present in official GLIA communications. It can serve as a first step and guidepost for supporting BIPOC and LGBTQ+ members and islanders. After a statement is approved, GLIA should continually evaluate its other structures and processes to ensure that it addresses the DEI statement's goals.
Long Term	**Hire 1-2 more full or part-time employees**	Additional staff is needed to coordinate internal support. One of these positions should focus on the consistent procurement of funds.

Canadian and Indigenous Representation

Summary

To achieve organizational development goals and create a stronger network with region-wide representation, GLIA must pursue more effective engagement strategies with Canadian and Indigenous residents who care for and live on Great Lakes islands. Half of Great Lakes waters are under Canadian jurisdiction, and more than one-third of GLIA-affiliated islands are located in Canada, including Manitoulin, the highest populated. Additionally, there are numerous Indigenous nations and communities that provide essential care for island health and resilience and have developed relationships with the islands and their ecosystems for centuries. GLIA was created as a network that welcomes a diverse range of voices from around the Great Lakes region, but at present, it is overwhelmingly represented by U.S. residents of European ancestry. GLIA must engage and partner more effectively with these communities for the sustainability of the organization and for better representation within the Great Lakes.

Challenges

Currently, most of GLIA leadership is based in the United States, with the current Director working for the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy and the Project Manager residing on South Bass Island in Ohio. Our project team was based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Most of our clients for this project also work in this state. These factors have created a heavy U.S. influence on GLIA, and it will be challenging to begin incorporating non-U.S. residents into leadership positions for several reasons. Most notably, any GLIA financial initiatives based in Canada or involving Canadians' employment would need to go through a Canadian fiduciary that would act as the Canadian version of TSN. This would involve large organizational investment but could be aided by TSN's guidance. Given GLIA's limited staffing capacities, additional outreach to Canadian and Indigenous groups could be challenging. GLIA has spent minimal time engaging Indigenous communities. The organization must be respectful of cultural and jurisdictional differences in efforts to include Indigenous peoples. Outreach toward newer Canadian GLIA member islands such as Howe, Wolf, and Simcoe in Lake Ontario needs to be inviting and offer tangible ways to engage with GLIA despite long distances from leadership headquartered in U.S. states.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Conduct outreach to Indigenous groups**	Conduct outreach to regional Indigenous and First Nations groups inviting them to take part in GLIA discussions. Inquire about the issues they are invested in and reflect on how GLIA may incorporate these areas of interest.
	Invite Indigenous leaders to speak at GLIA meetings	Invite Indigenous island leaders to speak at GLIA meetings on causes that Indigenous groups are championing locally and around the region. This will support a broader range of voices and ideas within GLIA that can help the organization mature and establish connections across different communities.
	Include French in official GLIA communications	Include the French language in official GLIA communications to signal companionship and receptiveness to Canadian members. Follow official Canadian language standards for guidance.
Mid Term	**Formalize relations with a Canadian fiduciary**	Formalize relations with a Canadian fiduciary so that future funding and administrative support for Canadian islanders can take place. With over one-third of GLIA member-islands located in Canada, establishing a Canadian fiduciary is paramount. Some guidance for this process can be provided by TSN.

Mid Term	**Establish Canadian and Indigenous Project Managers**	These positions can mirror current role of the Project Manager. The title of the current Project Manager would become the U.S. Project Manager and would work primarily with U.S. islands, although constant communication with the Canadian Project Manager and Indigenous Project Manager would be necessary to ensure stable organizational direction and advancement. We recognize that there are multiple Indigenous nations on Great Lakes islands; GLIA should defer to Indigenous leaders to determine methods of engagement and leadership appointment structure for this position.
Long Term	**Partner with Canadian and/or Indigenous educational institutions**	Partner with a Canadian and/or Indigenous educational institution for the next GLIA support project. This collaboration will prioritize voices and ideas from currently underrepresented communities within GLIA. It will also serve to expand GLIA's reputation as a truly multi-national organization that seeks to foster new and sustained connections beyond the United States.

Fundraising

Summary

Fundraising initiatives represent important opportunities for GLIA's development as a network over the next few years. Increased organizational resources can lead to added capacity in a number of areas critical to GLIA's future, including staffing, marketing and outreach, and member events. Analyzing the benefits of different funding strategies is integral to identifying an option – or options – that works for GLIA at different stages of the organization's life cycle. It may be the case that multiple strategies are combined to reach organizational goals or fund time-sensitive projects.

Challenges

Challenges vary with each form of fundraising mentioned above; however, all fundraising requires outreach strategies and tactics that scale with organizational capacity. Currently, GLIA needs more capacity for sustained and aggressive funding outreach efforts, so it will have to start with a limited scope and continue to build. Additionally, GLIA faces visibility challenges within Great Lakes communities and needs to pursue strategies to grow its name regionally. This will engage more members and communities, increasing organizational capacity and influence. Increased demands of TSN and the hiring of a fundraising specialist can lessen the administrative burden of enhanced outreach during the coming years.

Grants

Currently, GLIA's main source of funding comes from several time-limited grants from the Mott Foundation. An award in 2019 to develop GLIA's policy and communication objectives marked the first in a trio of grants. Subsequent grants have provided funds for GLIA's first paid employee and to support other near-term organizational goals. The Stewardship Network has provided essential support and expertise in the acquisition of these grants and serves as the main handler of GLIA's financial documentation as the organization's fiduciary.

This grant-based funding structure represents GLIA's current participation in, and reliance on, the "grant cycle," a fundraising strategy based on continuous application to individual grant opportunities offered by governments, public foundations, or private firms. This strategy can be useful in acquiring short-term funds for specific objectives but does not provide long-term organizational stability. GLIA's status as a young organization with relatively little capacity for immediate large-scale funding initiatives mandates that grant applications remain critical in GLIA fundraising operations over the short and medium term.

Private Donation Partners

Small-scale individual donations from private citizens and partnerships provide valuable funds for GLIA initiatives and organizational development. Many of GLIA's private donations come in gifts from resident islanders and local groups that total <$1,000. These gifts have partly been a product of the GLIA Fundraising Committee's campaign efforts, such as the "5 Reasons to Donate to GLIA" effort. Still, GLIA fundraising efforts have generally remained limited and regional in scope. Private donations mainly contribute to the planning and costs of events such as the annual Islands Summit. Small-scale donations will remain essential in GLIA fundraising operations throughout the organization's life cycle.

Large-scale individual donations would represent a significant step forward for GLIA's organizational development and capacity. Great Lakes islands are home to considerable private wealth, and developing strategies to fully realize donation opportunities can boost GLIA in a number of important growth areas.

Outreach efforts directed towards private large-scale donors can also grow GLIA's name within the Great Lakes region and establish visibility in local communities. Many full-time and seasonal residents on the islands are retirees and wealthier homeowners, some of whom could be inspired to help a community-based organization like GLIA. Enhanced visibility through interest group development and community connection can also garner credibility and authenticity that helps to attract additional donations. Partnering with TSN and other local organizations can help to identify charitable contributors and build internal databases for funding opportunities. Large-scale donations represent a medium-term objective for GLIA, with outreach efforts and strategies developing over the next 2-5 years.

Despite achieving moderate success with local and regional funding partners, GLIA has the potential to significantly increase its funding capacity by more effectively utilizing its partnership with TSN. As GLIA's fiduciary, TSN has the potential to provide support and expertise for outreach campaigns to secure donors who support community development and freshwater resource initiatives like GLIA. TSN is a widely connected 501(c)(3) with partners across the United States who can provide blueprints for campaigning and utilizing funds from large donors successfully. TSN's headquarters in Ann Arbor, MI, and its connection with the University of Michigan make TSN an invaluable funding outreach partner for GLIA.

Endowment

The establishment of an endowment fund remains a long-term goal for GLIA. The significant research and coordination necessary to begin setting up an endowment fund remain beyond organizational capacity within short and medium-term timelines. Acquiring contacts within major universities, foundations, or other partnerships that could oversee documentation and personal connections to help support the fund requires the employment of a GLIA fundraising coordinator and increased organizational visibility within the Great Lakes region. Meeting these requirements could take a number of years for GLIA. In addition, GLIA's current role as a network means that the organization does not require huge amounts of funding for large community initiatives or expensive projects to serve its purpose – perhaps a transition to a nonprofit would justify a more concerted effort to establish a high-capacity endowment fund. However, considering the long-term benefits of establishing an endowment fund for GLIA remains advisable.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Continue applying for grants**	Grant money will remain critical for GLIA's development throughout the organization's lifetime and is especially crucial during these formative years.
	Maintain development of small gift donor base	Continue to lead campaigns such as "5 Reasons to Donate to GLIA" but increase demographic reach and messaging frequency by employing the use of social media accounts, newsletters, or other communication strategies. Small donors will always have a role to play for GLIA.
Mid Term	**More aggressively utilize GLIA's relationship with TSN**	As GLIA's fiduciary, TSN can be called on to provide expertise and guidance on fundraising strategies that can prove highly beneficial for GLIA. They can also help support outreach campaigns and gather knowledge from partner organizations to help GLIA grow sustainably.

Mid Term	**Grow large gift donor base**	Utilize the development of interest groups and enhanced outreach techniques to engage large-sum donors throughout the Great Lakes region. Add capacity and knowledge by partnering with TSN and learning from other organizations to create a donor database. This can help to keep track of potential donors and identify donation opportunities across North America.
Long Term	**Hire a fundraising specialist**	This is the next position that GLIA should fill within the organization.
	Conduct research for the establishment of an endowment fund	Direct a fundraising manager to acquire contacts and knowledge from prominent institutions that may be able to support GLIA (e.g., major universities, public foundations, or private donors). Learn from the challenges and successes of the Maine Islands Institute and other TSN partners who have developed endowment funds.

Marketing and Communications

Summary

Effective marketing and communication are essential to the development of young organizations like GLIA. Although GLIA does not sell a product, the organization represents a unique community gathering place for islanders across the Great Lakes region. It offers a space for socializing, networking, and proactive discussion of local issues. To continue to provide this platform to as many interested parties as possible, GLIA must continuously strive to enhance its organizational visibility.

Organizational visibility can come in many forms, but success is based on effective marketing outreach and communication. Monthly emails comprise the bulk of GLIA's outreach efforts and have been used for advertising upcoming seminars, events, donation opportunities, and organizational updates. However, while sufficient for small-scale outreach, email has limited reach for certain demographics and parties. As organizational capacity grows over the coming years, GLIA will have to strengthen its marketing efforts by adopting a growing suite of physical and digital mediums that reach a wider audience. The 2020s will see the world continue to connect and share ideas through globalized connections and mass communications. GLIA can find value in social media accounts, regular newsletters, website design, and more. Many of the recommendations below have the benefit of high feasibility despite low organizational capacity and can be implemented in short and medium-term timelines.

Challenges

Many of the challenges with marketing and communications stem from the need for persistent and regular messaging. People who do not feel strongly about the mission or tasks involved can lose motivation over time and eventually burn out. Subsequently, the quality and consistency of organizational outreach can decrease. It is vital that GLIA choose people for these tasks who feel strongly about developing GLIA from a visual and social standpoint. Other challenges could arise from misuse of social media platforms, so it is vital that GLIA create community guidelines and expectations for its digital pages. Finally, it is important to consider the older average ages of island residents, and how best to connect with the majority of GLIA members while still providing space for kids and younger adults to feel welcome. GLIA strives to be an inclusive organization, and so it must consider a variety of ways to engage all islanders.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Establish a Marketing and Communications Committee**	This could be comprised of Steering Committee members who express interest or at-large members who hold relevant skill sets. This Committee would handle social media accounts and GLIA website updates, provide support for email communications, develop newsletters, and more.
	Create social media accounts and update the GLIA website	Create a Facebook and Instagram account. These can be overseen by the Marketing and Communications Committee (MCC). These sites can announce new events, share member stories, and promote island successes. Revamp the GLIA website design to add a fresher, more modern appearance. **Ask TSN for partner organization examples and professional contacts.**

Mid Term	**Develop a bi-monthly GLIA newsletter**	This would be separate from monthly emails and could feature local islander insights, stories, news, updates, sports, art, and more. It would represent a showcase for islanders and increase communication and interest sharing between contributors. This would be a core responsibility of the MCC.
	Increase involvement of TSN with GLIA outreach and communications strategies	Discuss relevant examples of successful strategies from TSN partner organizations. Understand the limits of TSN's capacity to support GLIA outreach (e.g., digital design, professional connections, or communications).
Long Term	**Utilize interest groups to increase GLIA organizational visibility across island communities**	Interest groups spread over the island communities will be poised to increase visibility. Connecting the GLIA name to interest group activities can raise awareness about the benefits of joining the organization.

Transitioning Leadership and Preserving Institutional Knowledge

Summary

Formalizing leadership and documentation into GLIA's structures and processes will ease transitions and preserve institutional knowledge. As the founders of GLIA are still with the organization, knowledge preservation has not been an obstacle; however, key partners within and adjacent to the organization have left or taken on different roles. GLIA needs to minimize disruption when people move on to new or different things. Planning and preparing now for a dynamic organization will save time, energy, and frustration in the future. For example, this report and action plan (as well as the supporting data and research) function as a form of institutional knowledge preservation that should assist with leadership and strategic transitions. Existing preservation and transition mechanisms include alternate steering committee members, annual reports, and annual Summit summaries.

Challenges

Tools for leadership transitions and institutional knowledge preservation in a volunteer network must reckon with responsibility, balance accessibility with privacy, and remain consistent. Responsibility for these needs could be delegated to a GLIA historian. Exit interviews, expanded transparency, and mentorships would diversify this responsibility. Diversification and inclusivity in decision-making will make structures more versatile and better able to accommodate change.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Conduct exit interviews for leaders leaving or changing roles**	In-person or virtual interview with a pre-determined list of questions to provide insight into what leaders would have done differently programmatically, or what GLIA could further do to retain leaders. Feedback accumulated over time will inform ongoing leadership expectations and strategies.
	Share and explain strategic decisions and accomplishments with greater membership	Notify the general membership of upcoming decisions and discourse via email/newsletter/blog/meeting to keep everyone up-to-date, receive and understand critical feedback, and give folks a chance to respond to change. Updates to milestones on the strategic roadmap (for both the core organization and tangible initiatives) should be acknowledged, and accomplished goals should be celebrated. Displaying a strategic trajectory or map on the GLIA website and discussion boards will keep people updated on the work. Individuals or organizations interested in partnering with or joining GLIA will quickly understand where the organization has been and where it intends to go.
Mid Term	**Establish a 'Historian' leadership role**	Establish Historian mission, responsibilities, and expectations. For example, they could document and archive events and discussions. This could be a new position or the duties could be shared across the steering committee. Once established, the steering committee can determine the interest and suitability of interested islanders in fulfilling defined responsibilities and expectations for the Historian.
Long Term	**Mentor up-and-coming GLIA members**	Island members could be contacted by GLIA as potential future leaders based on desired leadership criteria, as outlined by GLIA values. And current or incoming members could contact present leaders or steering committee appointees to display interest. Active, formal mentorship will prepare new members for future strategy and decision-making. Mentees could shadow or listen in on steering meetings, or mentors could make themselves available for Q&A sessions. Sessions could be held in person or virtually. Recorded sessions could be stored for later use and future guidance.

Interest Groups

Summary

Islanders have interests beyond supporting and expanding GLIA; interest groups offer space for members to group by interest and identity rather than professional skills (as may happen with liaisons/subcommittees). These will likely be informed by islander's place attachments and will be the main avenue for leveraging members' social capital. Interest group structure and process resemble a club: people with shared passions will come together for knowledge sharing and socializing. If inclined, interest groups could coordinate with their liaison or the steering committee at large to take up initiatives. Bringing islanders together to learn, share, and interact with peers is the ultimate goal of the interest groups, which is also the goal of GLIA as an organization.

Challenges

Internal variation within shared identity groups pose challenges to the conceptualization and creation of interest groups. Surveys and conferencing will spark interest group creation, while focused events and established procedures will expedite adoption and enhance support. Respect for the disparate interests across the Great Lakes and within GLIA (and even within interest groups!) will depend on the already demonstrated willingness of islanders to listen, share, and collaborate. The practices of Asset-Based Community Development and critical pragmatism will be useful when designing and engaging Interest Groups.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Survey to gauge the most shared interests**	Example interests could be: women's empowerment; LGBT+/queer rights; camping/environment; sailing; fishing; birding; mudding/four-wheeling/Jeeping; or history. The survey could be designed and published via Survey Monkey, Google Forms, Qualtrics, or ArcGIS Survey 123. Distribution might garner the most interaction during the Summit when islanders are planning ways to keep in touch and apply what they've learned. Survey results will determine what interest groups are expected to have the greatest engagement and, therefore, which should be established first. Additional surveys will likely show changes in interest over time.
Mid Term	**Host a regular fair or teleconference to connect islanders and coalesce around shared interests**	Connect islanders with an activity at the Summit or as a standalone event (virtual or in-person); however, different methods and times for hosting would affect who participates. Those with interests that peak in the summer might have more free time for meeting in late spring or early fall.
Long Term	**Coordinate communication tools and events to maintain regular involvement in interest groups**	Involvement and interest could be sustained with active discussion boards. Outreach and recruitment by networking with similar groups and clubs across the Great Lakes will maintain growth and inclusivity.
	Establish procedures and mechanisms for creating, altering, and ending interest groups	Determine indicators for healthy and productive interest groups. Example indicators include membership numbers, frequency of meetings and other communications, and volume of information shared with the greater GLIA membership body. When indicators fall below predetermined and desired levels (or exceed expected levels), steering committee members or liaisons could intervene and support the management of the interest group. If nothing can be done to help a failing interest group, the interest group will be shut down.

Liaisons

Summary

Liaisons can serve as the main bridging and linking apparatus for members to access resources and support from GLIA. Due to GLIA's current low organizational capacity, we recommend that each member of the Steering Committee serve as a Liaison for a specific Interest Group. As a Liaison, Steering Committee members would provide valuable information, connections, and resources to GLIA Interest Groups while also serving as a communicator with GLIA leadership regarding the direction and progress of individual groups. This way, Interest Groups have clear points of contact among themselves, GLIA directors, and project managers. Ideally, the Liaison would have some personal interest and/or professional ties to an Interest Group's focus (e.g., invasive species management, education, transportation). Regular meetings between Interests Groups and Liaisons, and Liaisons and GLIA Leadership could cultivate valuable knowledge sharing a support structure that will benefit GLIA's development.

As organizational capacity and membership increase over GLIA's lifetime, these Liaisons may grow into full subcommittees comprised of multiple individuals who can more effectively support Interest Groups. The function of a subcommittee would remain the same as the Liaison but would hold additional worker power and capacity. A transition from utilizing Liaisons to utilizing subcommittees may occur in the event that GLIA becomes a nonprofit or if membership and resources grow to extent that greater support for Interest Groups is needed.

Challenges

GLIA will need to decide if Liaisons dictate the direction and priorities of Interest Groups or if Interest Groups decide the direction and Liaisons are responsible for connecting them to resources. Our recommendation for now: allow islanders to determine the Interest Groups and their activities. As GLIA grows and potentially becomes a non-profit, Liaisons can have a stronger leadership role. GLIA needs to remain flexible and update the Liaison/Interest Group structure as needed. Liaisons will not be compensated financially, and there must be a procedure to replace Liaisons who choose to step down from their position.

Recommendations

| Short Term | Appoint Liaisons within the Steering Committee | Liaisons will be appointees that have significant experience, connections, interests, or other associations with a given topic that an Interest Group takes up. If there are not enough members within the Steering Committee to satisfy all Liaison positions, look beyond the Committee to other interested GLIA members. |
| | Outline resources that may be useful for interest groups | Resrources outlined should include mix of financial and social capitals. Financial resources would be grants or loans. Social resources would be existing interests groups and clubs on islands or organizations with relevant connections and expereince. |

Mid Term	**Hold regular meetings between Liaisons and Interest Groups**	Regular Liaison-Interest Group meetings will ensure the needs of interest groups are being met while liaisons can enforce organizational procedures and regulations. Both will be able to share status update and plan for change.
	Hold regular meetings between Liaisons and GLIA leadership	This will provide a space for Liaisons to update GLIA leadership on the goals and work of Interest Groups. It will also provide an avenue for communication from regular members to the Director and Project Manager.

Long Term	**Establish a procedure for changing Liaisons**	Change procedures will streamline processes and maintain order and confidence in stability and staying power of interest groups and subcommittees. Agreed upon procedure will ensure greater knowledge sharing from outcoming to incoming liaisons.

Below is a visual of our proposed **Liaisons and Interest Group Formation**. This is a representation of how GLIA can effectively connect these groups. At the core is GLIA support staff. This would include staff members such as the Marketing Director, Discussion Board Administrator, and grant writers. They would provide resources and support to the Liaisons. The Liaisons would then act as the connectors for the Interest Groups to these resources and professional knowledge. The Interest Groups then use these resources as needed for their efforts. Included are imagined Interest Groups to illustrate the possible areas of interest. The groups with a cloud icon indicate transient groups. For example, a Storm Recovery Interest Group may be formed after a large storm disrupts an island, but may not need to be a standing group.

Figure 14 envisions the relationship dynamics across interest groups, liaisons, and GLIA support staff. Outermost ring is the most direct representations of islander expression.

Onboarding

Summary

Thoughtful, considerate onboarding will welcome and inform new members, so they can "catch up" and maximize their involvement with GLIA. Much like how island newcomers need to learn how to make relationships on an island to take full advantage of island living, new or prospective members of GLIA may struggle with acclimating and navigating the organization and all that it has to offer. As GLIA offers more resources and the organization grows more complex, members will need more instruction and direction. Improved onboarding will lead to greater inclusion and a more efficacious membership body.

Challenges

The onboarding strategy will need to address the following questions: Who will handle creation, maintenance, and monitoring? What does onboarding include and involve? How will onboarding tools be shared and accessible to as many people as possible? When should onboarding be provided to prospective or incoming members, and how long should onboarding be expected to take? What are the mechanisms for feedback and change? Who decides what should be included in onboarding? Will this embolden the status quo or equip members with the tools to effect and enact change?

Recommendations

Short Term	**Introduce new members at General Member Meetings**	At the start of general membership meetings, the list of new members with some basic information (island of residence, occupation) could be presented. If time is too limited at the monthly meeting, the list of new members with their brief bios could be included in the monthly newsletter.
	Conduct entrance surveys	An entrance survey would provide insight into what new folks expect from GLIA, how they learned about GLIA, how they wish to get involved, and their interests. These questions (and others similar) would help GLIA connect new members to resources and opportunities (like interest groups or subcommittees).
Mid Term	**Develop training module(s) to dispense as new GLIA members join**	Online documents and videos could inform newcomers about the ways of GLIA. Information could include a brief history of the organization, important events, and an extensive list of ways to get involved. For those less dependent on electronics, brochures and other print formats could be distributed with identical information as contained in the digital content.
Long Term	**Hold a seminar for new members**	The seminar could be held at the annual Summit or as its own event. If held as its own event, it could be held virtually so that more people would be able to attend without committed time and resources to travel. However, new members will likely feel more included if they attend in-person events. Seasoned GLIA members would welcome new members, and new members could share their immediate impressions and questions about the organization.

Discussion Board

Summary

Currently, many islanders use Facebook and texting for intra-island discussions. However, relying on disjointed text threads and Facebook groups is not feasible for a large organization like GLIA. A centralized, managed discussion board can streamline group discussions as well store shared documents. Per our talks with islanders, a discussion board could be helpful for facilitating ongoing discussions between meetings as new information or ideas arise. The beginning of a discussion board should be simple and ramp up to more consistent use. Observe how current text threads and Facebook groups function to inform the needed capabilities of a GLIA discussion board.

Challenges

Disorganization, duplication, and technical difficulties will be the main challenges of any discussion board. This will be just one of many tools for members, so files and discussions may become disorganized. Members with fewer computer skills or unreliable internet access may need help using the board and could feel left out if they are unable to access the discussion board. Additionally, a discussion board with a large user base should have a dedicated moderator, or a team of moderators, to ensure that community guidelines are followed. GLIA should have internal support staff or reliable GLIA members ready and able to assist with technical assistance and moderation, which may require hiring additional staff. If members are not familiar with online discussion boards, it will take time to get used to, and each group may use the discussion board in different ways. Because of this, the discussion board should allow for flexibility.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Determine the use and need for the discussion board**	Before creating a discussion board, the need for the board must be determined so that the initial designs will be appropriate for member goals. Some ideas for the use of a discussion board: a space for more casual or ongoing discussions outside of meeting times, assistance for document storage for subcommittees and interest groups, or a place to easily ask a large group of members questions or share resources.
	Identify appropriate software	There are many free and paid options available. Start out with a few free options or free trials and test to see what works and what doesn't. Also, set up a few workshops with islanders to understand exactly what features will work. See the next page for some options.

Mid Term	**Establish a procedure for using and moderating the discussion board**	Assign a centralized discussion board administrator responsible for moderation and technical support. Create a discussion board for each interest group (a member of an interest group could be the moderator of the interest group board). Also, clear and reasonable community guidelines are essential for a functional discussion board and should be included in the board's procedure. Similar organizations can provide ideas for a standard set of guidelines from other organizations, but additional guidelines specific to GLIA may need to be developed as a group.
	Pilot use of a discussion board	Gather a group of members that would be willing to test out the discussion board, preferably a group with mixed levels of computer skills. Have them use the board for a couple of weeks and report back with what does and does not work, what features were and were not used, etc. If the pilot goes well, scale up the use of the board to include more groups, and offer it as an option people can use.

| | Long Term | Train members to use the discussion board, and actively tailor to changing needs. | Create standardized training documents or guides and establish regular trainings for members. As more groups become accustomed to the site, start encouraging all groups to use it. |

Options for Discussion Board Software

Software	Cost	Pros	Cons
Facebook	Free	• Many members already familiar with the software	• Distracted by ads • May be difficult to keep some items private • Have to make new pages each time an interest group starts or changes
Mighty Networks	Tiered payment options	• Created to support online community platforms • Growing user base and very popular • Can embed events and Zoom, store documents, make sub-groups, collect payments	• Can be difficult to learn how to navigate • Don't have total control of some of the features
Wild Apricot	Tiered payment options	• Created specifically for nonprofits • Includes membership tracking software • Able to make groups and blogs, collect payments for new members or donations	• Functionality of blogs/subgroups seems limited

Islands Summit

Summary

The annual Islands Summit is currently one of the best inter-island and island-mainland connections opportunities. Allowing for a mix of formal and informal conversations over multiple days helps nurture bonds between attendees and excitement for GLIA. When speaking with attendees at the summit, one attendee remarked that she noticed a difference in dedication and faith in GLIA from members who have attended the Summit for a number of years and those who joined after the outbreak of COVID-19 and have only attended virtual meetings. Continuing this summit is crucial to jumpstarting new connections and nourishing old connections between island and mainland communities.

Challenges

The first three summits all took place on one island, while the fourth included travel among four islands. This structure of the fourth summit was seen as valuable by some attendees. In contrast, others felt there was not enough time for formal meetings or workshops. When designing future summits, there should be opportunities to travel to numerous sites. This promotes both informal and structured conversations, and allows chances for workshops where islanders can digest and reflect on the experiences presented in the summit.

Recommendations

Short Term	**Establish a procedure for reporting out and sharing information after summits**	As GLIA continues to transform, the summit will need to adapt to fit the needs of the growing member base. Surveys that gather islander-specific insights after summit conclusion can provide feedback on which parts of the summit were helpful and enjoyable, and which parts may need changing. Implementing a standard survey process will streamline the analysis of this data each year.
Mid Term	**Organize an Interest Group Fair**	A formalized group fair would bring islanders together to connect and share their own community experiences. During this event several interest groups and local organizations could set up a small table or booth to share current updates or project ideas. This could allow for newer members to get an idea of the current projects in GLIA as well as allow Interest Groups to make connections or recruit new members. Additionally, the fair could include interdisciplinary workshops carried out by Liaisons or Subcommittee Chairs. In these workshops, members from differing Interest Groups can work together to brainstorm new projects, think of creative ways to solve current challenges, or simply develop new relationships.

Discussion

Team Reflections

This project required all three team members to grapple with complex questions about effective community engagement and organizational development to produce meaningful deliverables for GLIA. As individuals, we each brought different skills, experiences, and knowledge to the project, making it essential that we found positive and supportive ways to engage cooperatively in every aspect of our work. We exceeded our goals as a team, and we hope GLIA will benefit and grow from our experiences as much as we did as students and professionals.

Both the Great Lakes Islands Alliance and The Stewardship Network provided appreciable flexibility over the course of the project. They granted us the latitude to shape our work in ways that allowed us to best engage with island communities for the strategic purposes of the project. When we needed added guidance, they showed us dedicated support. This environment allowed us to lead with our most effective skill sets, resulting in more creativity and the ability to work within project constraints.

However, we recognize that the findings and recommendations included in this report are not entirely objective, and we acknowledge that our team's personal and logistical limitations may influence results. We are not islanders. We are not members of GLIA. We know these characteristics hold inherent constraints, but we hope they can also benefit the organization in our role as a third party bringing fresh perspectives and ideas.

Some of our team's limitations are based on our positionally as younger, white, graduate students who have not spent much time in the communities we focused on. Coming from the University of Michigan, we realize that we represent an institution that promotes values and lifestyles that may be different from those of various communities on Great Lakes islands. We were visitors to places with deep contextual and cultural roots that we needed to familiarize ourselves with. It is likely and reasonable that our inquiries were not always met with responses that detailed every piece of relevant information about a given topic.

Our assessment also includes clear sampling holes. During this project, we were limited by the logistical feasibility of visiting and connecting with islanders across the vast Great Lakes region. Our team had limited capacity to travel to and stay on islands, and we were unable to immerse ourselves in each

community for extended periods. We could not visit every GLIA-affiliated island, and most notably, we failed to engage sufficiently with Canadian and Indigenous communities.

This report's lack of engagement with Canadian communities represents a significant shortcoming. We were only able to visit one Canadian island during the project, and there remains a dearth of Canadian voices and ideas represented in this product. GLIA is a multi-national organization, and its future should include direction from Canadians across the region who remain engaged and supportive of GLIA. Increased Canadian representation must be a key objective for GLIA in the coming years.

We were equally disappointed by the project's lack of Indigenous representation. We regret not engaging more with Indigenous Great Lakes islanders, which is again a major limitation of this report. Indigenous communities hold deep knowledge of and connection to Great Lakes land and waters, and GLIA could grow and mature from increased Indigenous representation and community partnership.

Because of these limitations, this report is a starting point for GLIA and not a strict guide. Subsequent work must include more islands and islanders with greater diversity. We expect future initiatives will fill gaps in knowledge, values, and ideas that our project may hold.

Project Reflections

Our initial project proposal was centered on hyper-local quantitative data collection on GLIA member islands. As we planned our work and spoke with other organizations, we determined that qualitative research composed of in-person interviews, surveys, and a synthesis of collected research would benefit GLIA's future success and our academic and professional development.

While more time-consuming and resource-intensive than some quantitative data work, our semi-structured, on-location data collection left

Inspiration From the Freedom Quilting Bee

As GLIA grows, it will be important for the organization to have a stable governing and operating foundation so that its leaders and members will be able to act on new possibilities.

The Freedom Quilting Bee, a Black quilting co-op established in Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement, is one organization that showcased an ability to capitalize on new opportunities.[23] The co-op began as a relatively small operation that made and sold unique and individualized quilts. While this did raise significant funds for the community, it was difficult to remain profitable. Then one day in the late 1960's, one of the supporters of the co-op was in taxi pool in New York City with Robert B. Menschel, a partner of Goldman, Sachs and Company. Menschel heard about the co-op and soon joined the cause. At that time, Sears, Roebuck was a client of Goldman, Sachs. Menschel used his connections to win a lucrative contract for the Freedom Quilting Bee with Sears, Roebuck. With this contract, the Bee was able to blossom into a stable, profitable business.

While the Bee was not necessarily searching for a contract with Sears, Roebuck, the governing structure and culture within the organization allowed them to act on the opportunity without losing their leading vision or harming the relationships between members. It is impossible to say whether or not the Freedom Quilting Bee would have received a similar contract without this coincidental conversation with Robert B. Menschel. However, without this proper foundation, the Bee would not have been able to take advantage of this fortuitous chance.

us with greater understandings of what it means to be an islander. We found this more important to the report than any tangible dataset. Our method also aligns with ongoing scholarship on community development that stresses the importance of operating on community-defined conceptions of place and

environment. Any similar reports done in the future will need recurring and consistent qualitative data collection.

GLIA Reflections

Despite the numerous obstacles faced by island communities, we found that islanders continuously build the *social capital* needed to support local success, reflected in their various place attachments. In every interview conducted - sometimes without the interviewer's prompting - interviewees expressed profound gratitude and respect for the local community on their respective islands. These community bonds emerge from the desire to be close to one's neighbors but also out of necessity due to limited access to resources.

To establish and maintain the same community feel within GLIA that we witnessed on the islands, the voices of wide and diverse groupings of peoples across Great Lakes islands must be incorporated and valued. Including more perspectives will link islanders across geographic, social, and economic confines.

At its core, the cooperative underpinnings of islander identities will provide a foundation for GLIA regardless of the financial resources accessible to the network. While a lack of resources can impede GLIA's goals, GLIA leadership should prioritize relationships over the pursuit of growth or financial goals. Change will blossom by getting people talking and interacting, and new opportunities will arise. The best way to capitalize on these opportunities is to have faith in the relationships with the people pursuing such change. Asset-Based Community Development will help GLIA recognize and celebrate the strengths already present in island communities, while critical pragmatism will help to discern and shape what opportunities GLIA and its island communities can take advantage of.

The Great Lakes Islands Alliance's purpose is to foster shared visions for the Great Lakes island community, thereby bolstering islanders' social capital and strengthening the ability to shape their futures. With the islander-derived guidance, knowledge, and recommendations contained within this report, GLIA will optimize local social capital to meet the collective needs of Great Lakes islanders.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Research Question: What structures and processes are most effective for GLIA operations?

Interview Translation: What structures and processes are most effective to meet the needs of islanders?

- What are the needs of islanders?
- What needs are met?
- What needs are not met?
- What are the barriers to meeting those needs?

Leading Questions/Prompts	Potential Follow-up Questions
Describe your life on the island.	What are the difficulties? What are the biggest environmental/political/economic issues facing the island? What issues are you personally interested in? How long have you lived on the island?
Do you feel connected to other islands in the Great Lakes?	If yes: 　　What does that connection look like? 　　What does it mean to you to be connected to other islands? 　　Do you want more connection? 　　How do you connect? If no: 　　Why do you say that? 　　Would you like to be more connected? 　　What would more connection look like to you?
Do you feel connected to the mainland?	If yes: 　　What does that connection look like? 　　What does it mean to you to be connected to other islands? 　　Do you want more connection? 　　How do you connect? If no: 　　Why do you say that? 　　Would you like to be more connected? 　　What would more connection look like to you?
What kind of relationships do you have with other people on your island?	What makes it possible for you to maintain those connections? How do you connect?

Leading Questions/Prompts	Potential Follow-up Questions
If you couldn't live where you are right now, where would you live?	Why would you want to live somewhere else? Why would you not want to live somewhere else?

Do you feel represented at the local/regional/state/province level?	If yes:
	    Why do you feel represented?
	    How does that representation affect your role on your island?
	If no:
	    Why do you not feel represented?
	    Do you want better representation?
	    How might you be better represented?

Do you feel represented by GLIA?	How might GLIA better represent your interests? Do you think others on your island also feel represented by GLIA?
How has island changed since you've resided here?	What might be the causes of these changes? What are your opinions about the changes?
What would you like your island community to look like in 10/15/20 years?	Do you think it is likely your island community reach those goals? What would need to happen to reach those goals? Are there any challenges you think might arise?
What is your favorite memory on the island?	Why is that your favorite memory? Do you think others share this as a favorite memory?

Appendix 2: Theme Descriptions

Central Theme	Related Topics
Connectedness	Intra-Island Connection, Inter-Island Connection, Mainland Connection, Adaptation to Island Life
Economy	Housing, Population Numbers, Local Businesses
Physical Infrastructure	Roads, Ferries, Waste Management, Broadband Internet
Social Infrastructure	Education, Childcare, Healthcare, Volunteer Service Departments, Social Media
Perceptions of GLIA	GLIA Satisfaction, GLIA Structure, GLIA Processes, Future of GLIA

Appendix 3: Survey Questions

Question Type	Prompt
Multiple-choice	Which island do you live on?
Multiple-choice	How many years have you lived on the island?
Multiple-choice	What is your most common mode of travel between the island and the mainland?
Multiple-choice	What is your most common mode of travel within the island?
Multiple-choice	Did you receive any K-12 schooling on the island?
Slider	How interested are you in the following topics?
Multiple-choice	How connected are you with people on your island?
Multiple-choice	How connected are you with people on your nearest mainland community?
Multiple-choice	How connected are you with people on other islands?
Multiple-choice	Has your relationship with any of the above groups been enhanced by your involvement with GLIA?
Multiple-choice	How long have you been a member of GLIA?
Multiple-choice	How did you learn about GLIA?
Multiple-choice	Why did you become a member of GLIA?
Multiple-choice	How well do you think GLIA is currently providing a space for resource sharing and idea sharing among islanders?
Multiple-choice	Do you regularly attend GLIA monthly meetings?
Text entry	If you do not regularly attend monthly GLIA meetings, why is that?
Multiple-choice	Would you want to be involved in a subcommittee within GLIA to focus on issues you're presonally interested in?
Text entry	What is your short- or long-term vision for the future of GLIA?
NPS	How likely are you to recommend GLIA to a friend or colleague?
Text entry	What is your reasoning for being likely to recommend being a part of GLIA?
Text entry	What is your reasoning for not being likely to recommend being a part of GLIA?
Text entry	Please share any additional comments.

Community Resilience

Build Collective Voice

Build Adaptive Capacity

	Built	Individual	Social	Cultural	Political	Financial	Natural
Assets	Similar org.'s support system; Relation w Islands Institute and Maine Islands Coalition; TSN connection; High interest from other organizations; Volunteer network	Organic community knowledge /engagement; Matt/ EGLE connection; Island leaders	Potential for growth and connections; Diversity of knowledge/expe rience in island members (island poll)	Valuable coastal narrative	Potential political/advoca cy capacity (for individ and community); Local Gov	Fed/state money	Strong bond with land
Hazards	Tech. limitations in rural areas		Shifting population numbers; Demographic changes; Transient populations; Lack of consistent healthcare access	Language barriers; Hard to find common motivations	Jurisdictional differences (2 countries, 4 states); Political power imbalances; Political priorities	Population instability	Fragile Ecosystems; Niagara escarpment- vulnerable groundwater source
Vulnerabilites	Inconsistent transportation; Limited full time GLIA staff; Lack of island specific data/metrics	Hesitation to join without structure and $	Competing needs (year round v temp residents)	Islands that are interested but not engaged; Perceptions of vulnerability/ina bility to function as an advocacy group	Local Gov; Encouraging political/advoca cy capacity (for individ and community)	Tourism- centered economies	Climate change

Relation w local gov varies by island, complicated btwn islands and mainland

Project Proposal
- Build organizational structure and processes
- Design, collect, analyze, and organize set of data and metrics

Research Question
- What organizational structures and processes are most effective for GLIA operations?

Appendix 5: Action Plan Overview

	Structures					Processes				
	Organizational Model	Canadian and Indigenous Representation	Fundraising	Marketing and Comms	Transitions	Interest Groups	Liaisons	Onboarding	Discussion Boards	Islands Summit
Short Term	Continue as a network; Continue TSN relationship	Conduct outreach to Indigenous groups; Invite Indigenous leaders to speak at GLIA meetings; Use French in GLIA communications	Apply for grants; Maintain small-gift donor base	Establish a Marketing Committee; Create GLIA social media sites and update the website	Conduct exit interviews for leaders leaving roles; Share strategic decisions with GLIA membership	Conduct a survey to gauge shared interests	Appoint Liaisons within from within the Steering Committee; Outline available resources	Introduce new members at General Membership Meetings; Conduct entrance surveys	Determine need and use for the discussion boards; Find appropriate software	Establish a procedure for reporting out after each summit
Mid Term	Engage members in envisioning GLIA's future; Create a DEI statement	Formalize relations with a Canadian fiduciary; Establish a Canadian and Indigenous Project Manager	Grow large-gift donor base; Grow use of TSN	Develop bi-monthly newsletter; Increase TSN involvement in GLIA outreach	Create 'historian' leadership role	Hold a fair or teleconference for members to connect via shared interests	Start regular gatherings with GLIA Leadership and relevant interest groups	Develop orientation modules	Establish procedure for use and moderation; Pilot use of discussion boards	Organize an Interest Group Fair
Long Term	Increase support staff capacity	Partner with Canadian and/or Indigenous Education Institutions	Hire a Fundraising Specialist; Research endowment opportunities	Utilize interest groups to increase visibility	Mentor up-and-coming islander members	Coordinate events to maintain involvement; Establish procedures for changing Interest Groups	Establish procedures for changing Liaisons	Hold a seminar for new members	Train members to use discussion boards	