

CURRENTS

Informing Decisions in a Changing World



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW INSTITUTE
2025 IMPACT REPORT

ANCHORED IN PURPOSE

Dear Friends,

This past year, powerful and unpredictable currents reshaped the environmental community.

Across the environmental landscape, long-standing assumptions are being tested. Legal frameworks shift rapidly. Institutional roles are evolving. These are not mere surface-level disruptions; they encompass deeper undercurrents reshaping the foundations of environmental law and governance.

We were not immune from these forces at ELL. Our team is smaller today than at the start of 2025. Long-planned restructuring was accelerated to keep up with the pace of change. For the first time in its long history, ELL faced intense pressure to alter our mission.

Yet, we remain moored in the core principles that have sustained us for decades: evidence-based decisionmaking is critical for people, the places we live, and our planet. The value of those principles has never been greater. The consequences of today's decisions will ripple for decades, shaping outcomes for communities, regional ecosystems, and global economies.

This is where our work is essential.

For over 50 years, ELL has provided support for the development and implementation of our community's interconnected laws, policies, and institutions. From energy systems and public health to water, oceans, and emerging technologies, we drive conversation and explore nuance, knowing that resulting actions and policies touch every aspect of our lives.

We are deeply grateful to our partners and supporters whose commitment ensures ELL remains a steady source of insight, integrity, and action in a time of institutional strain. Together, we are not only navigating this moment—we are shaping what comes next.

For people, places, and the planet,



Jordan Diamond
ELL President



Robert C. Kirsch
Chair of the Board

COLLECTIVE IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

506

experts featured across ELL webinars, podcasts, research reports, and publications

22,278

downloads of ELL research reports and publications

35,144

registrants for ELL webinars, workshops, conferences, and other events

201,352

total listens to ELL's People, Places, Planet podcast

CHANGING TIDES

REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

INTERNATIONAL

Environmental Governance in a Shifting Global Order

Beyond recent changes in the United States, broader long-term shifts are reshaping the global context for climate and environmental action, including evolving international agreements and rapid technological change.

ELI has engaged a wide range of experts and practitioners to take stock of evolving geopolitical, economic, environmental, technological, and social dynamics. Building on this assessment, ELI is convening collaborative discussions to identify pathways for advancing policy and practice in this changing global landscape.

This work reflects the increasing interconnectedness of environmental challenges, where decisions in one region can shape outcomes far beyond its borders. It also highlights the need for new models and coalitions of the willing to carry forward those models, even in the absence of consensus. These models need to be able to adapt to rapid change and complexity. Through this engagement, ELI is translating complex global trends into actionable policy insights.



EXPERT STAFF

Carl Bruch

LOCAL

On the Frontlines: Community-Led Resilience

With the drastic pullback on the scope of federal Clean Water Act protections, long-standing safeguards for the nation's waters and wetlands are eroding. In the wake of these changes, local governments are increasingly exercising their land use authorities to protect their valuable resources.

There is growing recognition that wetland protection extends beyond habitat conservation; wetlands are vital community infrastructure, providing benefits tied to public safety and livelihoods, including flood control, groundwater recharge, and water quality. Like all infrastructure, sustained investment delivers benefits for current and future generations, while neglect can lead to costly failures, degraded ecosystems, and increased flood risks.

To address emerging challenges, communities are increasingly turning to "natural infrastructure" or "nature-based strategies," such as wetland restoration, for flood resilience and sea-level rise protection. ELI works with localities and nonprofit partners to promote proactive policies that preserve wetland function and help make communities more resilient.



EXPERT STAFF

Rebecca L. Kihslinger

EMPOWERING DECISIONMAKERS

WATER & OCEANS

Integrating Technology in Fisheries Management

Countries in the Caribbean region are experiencing significant challenges related to the governance of marine resources. These challenges include illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; overfishing; climate change; pollution; limited capacity and resources; and data issues.

Through collaborative engagement, research, development of guidance materials, and peer-to-peer learning, ELI is working with governmental representatives, local and regional organizations, fisher organizations, and others to help Caribbean countries safeguard the sustainable use of their fisheries. In 2025, ELI focused its efforts on supporting countries' incorporation of newly available technologies and ways to effectively address technology in legislation to improve fisheries management.



EXPERT STAFF

Sofia O'Connor

INTERNATIONAL

Protecting the Rights of Environmental Defenders

Environmental defenders stand at the frontlines of protecting our planet, safeguarding natural resources and advancing human rights—often at great personal risk. Since 2012, more than 2,100 environmental defenders have been killed. However, few cases are ever prosecuted. ELI is collaborating with partners in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico to track these investigations and prosecutions in an effort to curb impunity.

By building robust quantitative and qualitative evidence, ELI empowers governments, civil society, and international institutions to improve accountability, advance protection measures, and safeguard those defending our environment. This initiative is supported by the Swedish Postcode Foundation and engages regional experts, UN bodies, and human rights organizations.



EXPERT STAFF

Kristine Perry

PEOPLE, PLACES, PLANET PODCAST
*Land Rights, Impunity, and the Fight to Protect
Brazil's Environmental and Land Defenders*



CLIMATE & ENERGY

Building Judicial Capacity Through Climate Science Education

With more than 2,000 cases filed in the U.S. courts where climate law, policy, or science plays a central role, judges—who are often generalists—need tools to understand the scientific and technical evidence that may come before them. ELI’s Climate Judiciary Project (CJP) helps meet this need by providing evidence-based judicial education on climate science and how it arises in the law.

“ This program prepared me to be a thoughtful and informed jurist. I feel confident that I can fairly, impartially, and intelligently approach this complicated subject matter when it presents in my courtroom. -A participant judge

CJP partners with leading judicial education institutions on events that bring scientific and legal scholars together to teach judges about climate science, impacts, and solutions and how they are arising in the law. The project also maintains a written self-study curriculum available online to anyone.

Similar to judicial education that occurs on a wide variety of scientific and technical topics, this type of education serves the public interest and strengthens the rule of law by helping to ensure that judges have the knowledge that they need to make independent, objective, and fair decisions.

EXPERT STAFF

Helene T. Krasnoff



John M. Doherty



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

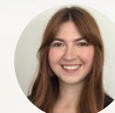
Powering Equitable and Sustainable AI Infrastructure

Communities across the country are working to balance environmental protection, public health, and economic opportunity. As AI systems and large-scale data centers place unprecedented demands on local infrastructure, water resources, and energy systems, local leaders need better tools to make informed decisions. The Digital Economy & the Environment Program (DEEP), an ELI initiative, equips decisionmakers to meet these challenges.

Last year, ELI hosted researchers, policymakers, and civil society representatives for a workshop to examine how these pressures affect community health and resilience. Participants explored issues such as the public health impacts of on-site diesel generators and the lack of transparency around cooling water quality. This work demonstrates ELI’s unique ability to convene diverse stakeholders, generate actionable insights, and support policies that protect healthy communities.

EXPERT STAFF

Alexandria Nelson



WATER & OCEANS

Safeguarding U.S. Waters for the Long Term

Identifying and restoring polluted waters presents persistent scientific, technical, and programmatic challenges. In this dynamic context, effective policy depends on strong communication and integration across jurisdictions.

Since 2008, ELI has annually brought together water quality leaders from all 50 states, dozens of tribes, all 5 U.S. territories, D.C., and EPA. These workshops have provided a rare national forum for candid discussion of challenges and emerging needs, as well as an opportunity for collaborative problem solving and innovation.

By creating and maintaining this lasting forum of dialogue and expertise, ELI helps decisionmakers navigate water quality challenges, strengthen program strategies, and safeguard U.S. waters for the long term.

EXPERT STAFF

Adam Schempp



STRENGTHENING

IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



WATER & OCEANS

Harnessing State Power in Offshore Wind Development

The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) is a key federal statute that empowers state coastal management programs to influence federal activities, such as offshore wind leasing and permitting. ELI works directly with states to strengthen cooperative federalism and build states' capacities to meaningfully participate in planning processes.

By translating complex regulatory regimes into actionable knowledge and recommendations, ELI helps states advance their priorities, align projects with local needs, and implement environmental and energy policies. These efforts enhance state and local voices in sustainable energy decisionmaking and protect coastal communities and ecosystems.



EXPERT STAFF

Adam Schempp



Amy Reed

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Improving Indoor Air Quality for Public Health

Americans spend nearly 90% of their time indoors, making indoor air quality (IAQ) a critical determinant of public health. ELI convenes state and local officials across jurisdictions to share tools and advance healthier air in the buildings where we live, work, and learn.

In 2025, ELI held its 18th “Workshop for Indoor Air Quality Officials,” focused on peer learning across state and local governments and addressing IAQ comprehensively. ELI also worked with the Brown School of Public Health, the International WELL Building Institute, the U.S. Green Building Council, and others to develop a guide for state leaders to improve IAQ.

Building on this work, ELI continues to advance practical strategies to improve IAQ across building types and jurisdictions. By connecting officials with peers and technical experts, ELI helps translate shared challenges into actionable solutions that can be adapted and implemented nationwide.

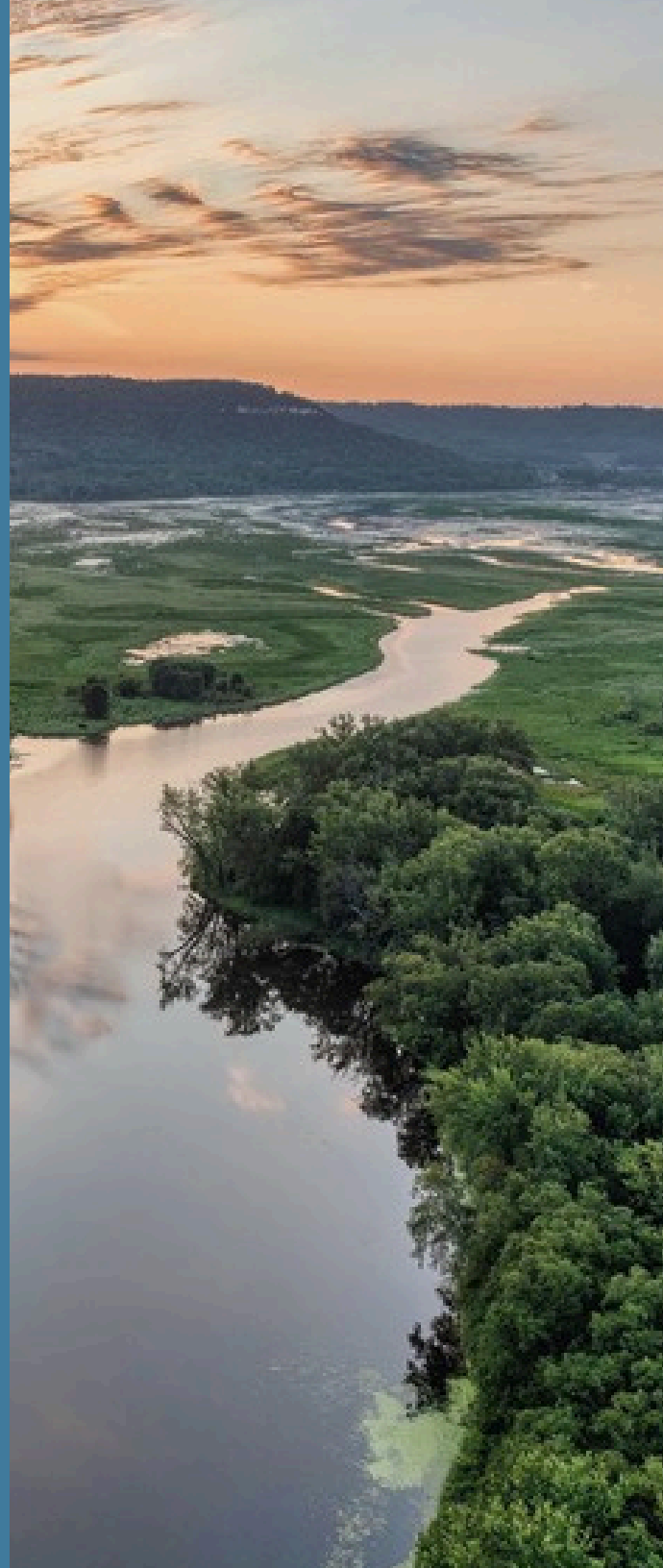


EXPERT STAFF

Amy Reed



ELI RESEARCH REPORT
Clean Indoor Air: A Guide for State Leaders to Improve Indoor Air Quality



INTERNATIONAL

Reinforcing Compliance and Enforcement Through Technology

AI is transforming how environmental laws are monitored, enforced, and complied with. For example, AI is being used to analyze data from satellite and drone footage, digital sensors, and even citizen-generated reports, all highlighted in our recent “Advanced Water Pollution Monitoring” webinar.

As Secretariat for the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (INECE), ELI is taking stock of approaches from around the world in how AI can effectively and responsibly strengthen compliance and enforcement in a range of environmental and natural resource contexts. ELI is also convening leading experts in environmental law, technology law, and AI to examine these questions, including through a co-sponsored 2025 conference at Georgetown Law. This body of work is graciously supported by the Wasserman-Slotkin Family Charitable Giving Fund.



EXPERT STAFF

Susannah Dibble

CLIMATE & ENERGY

Leading Local Action on Food Waste

Food waste is a systemic driver of climate change, responsible for an estimated 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. It strains waste systems and exacerbates food insecurity. Local governments are uniquely positioned to act by preventing waste, rescuing surplus food, and recycling scraps.

To build capacities of state and local governments and help fill a needed gap in under-resourced jurisdictions, ELI provides toolkits as well as model ordinances, laws, and executive orders based on best practices research that can be tailored to specific local contexts. The city of Albuquerque recently advanced community composting based on an ELI model ordinance developed with NRDC.

ELI works with NRDC and Urban Green Lab on the Nashville Food Waste Initiative, where its research, convenings, and publications inform strategies nationwide and demonstrate how local innovation can scale.



EXPERT STAFF

Linda K. Breggin



ELI PUBLIC WEBINAR
Creating a Glide Path for Municipal Action: An Overview of Model Ordinances and Executive Orders on Food Waste Reduction

INFORMING

THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

CLIMATE & ENERGY

Rebuilding the Foundations of Environmental Governance

At the federal level, environmental challenges have been addressed by foundational statutes like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which has helped guide federal decisionmaking for over five decades, and the Clean Air Act, which directly regulates air pollution. While the drafters of these laws saw them as capacious and forward-looking, recent judicial opinions and executive actions have limited their applicability to multifaceted challenges like the climate crisis.

ELI is contributing to a national conversation on the consequences of these decisions and potential paths forward. Our webinars and reports offer evidence-based analysis and commentary that illustrate how legal frameworks influence environmental decisionmaking in practice. ELI experts have tracked agency and court decisions, educated the public on the basis for the endangerment finding, and briefed congressional staff on NEPA and federal permitting, injecting real-world data into the discussion. And we have partnered with the Federation of American Scientists in an effort to reform and update environmental law to meet modern challenges while continuing to protect public health and ecosystems.

By identifying emerging legal issues, convening experts, and providing stakeholders with deeply informed analyses, ELI helps shape the trajectory of environmental law in a rapidly evolving regulatory landscape.



EXPERT STAFF

Jay Austin



Jarryd Page



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Tracking Emerging Toxics Litigation

In the United States and around the world, litigation related to emerging chemicals and concerns about toxicity is on the rise. It is a rapidly evolving field, with cutting-edge science, heightened public awareness, changing regulatory frameworks, and multiple, sometimes overlapping, theories of liability. And that evolution will continue for the foreseeable future.

To better understand the evolving legal landscape, ELI has published “Current Trends in Toxics Litigation” as the first in a series of trends analyses and in conjunction with a forthcoming toxics litigation database. The report aims to illuminate current trends in the landscape of toxics litigation and how scientific advancement and uncertainty, state and federal law, and judicial doctrine intersect.

EXPERT STAFF

Cecilia Diedrich



ELI RESEARCH REPORT
Current Trends in Toxics Litigation

INTERNATIONAL

Advancing Equitable Water Tenure

Equitable access to water depends on the legal recognition of communities' water tenure rights, particularly in contexts of severe scarcity.

In eastern Chad, such scarcity is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, an ongoing influx of refugees, and unsustainable resource management. ELI assessed the gaps in water and land governance frameworks to identify pathways that promote secure, equitable, and sustainable water tenure for Chad's rural communities.

ELI's work on water tenure around the world is providing important evidence for efforts undertaken in partnership with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to develop global principles for the responsible governance of water tenure. This work shapes how water tenure is defined and implemented to strengthen protections for communities and sustainable development globally.

EXPERT STAFF

Jessica J. Troell



WATER & OCEANS

Guiding the Conversation on Deep-Sea Mining

The world's deep ocean is vast and largely unexplored, spanning across countries' exclusive economic zones and areas beyond national jurisdiction. It contains unique ecosystems rich in biodiversity, and metals and minerals formed over billions of years.

To meet the growing demand for critical resources, there are increasing calls for deep-sea mining (DSM). This includes a recently issued executive order, which calls for "immediate action."

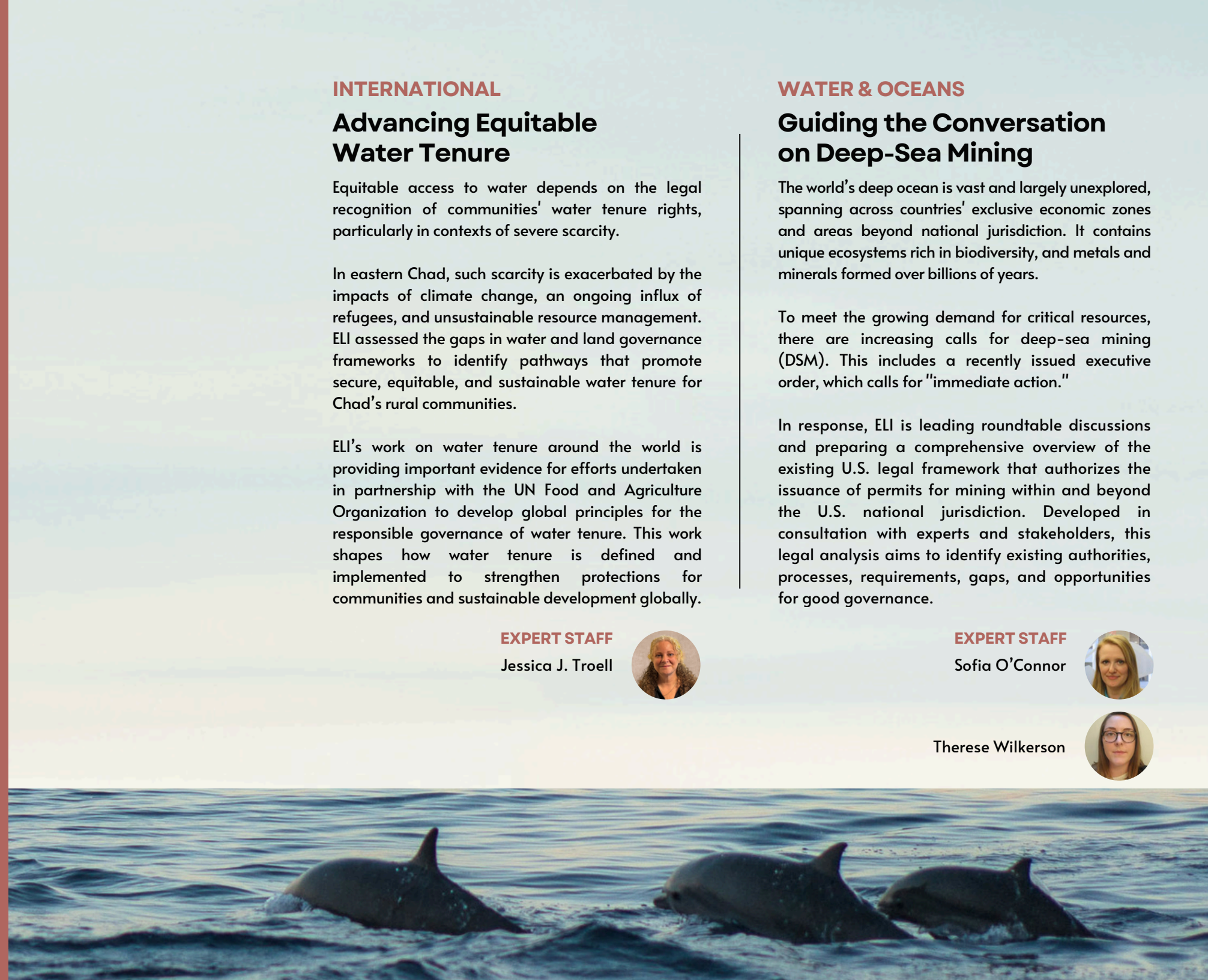
In response, ELI is leading roundtable discussions and preparing a comprehensive overview of the existing U.S. legal framework that authorizes the issuance of permits for mining within and beyond the U.S. national jurisdiction. Developed in consultation with experts and stakeholders, this legal analysis aims to identify existing authorities, processes, requirements, gaps, and opportunities for good governance.

EXPERT STAFF

Sofia O'Connor



Therese Wilkerson



OUR COMMUNITY

CHAMPIONS AND CHANGEMAKERS



2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In 2025, EII's Board was a powerful force for change. As a group, they were an incredible resource to the organization, providing essential expertise and resources. As individuals, they served as champions for the organization. We cannot thank them enough.

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ELI's impact is made possible by a community of generous supporters.

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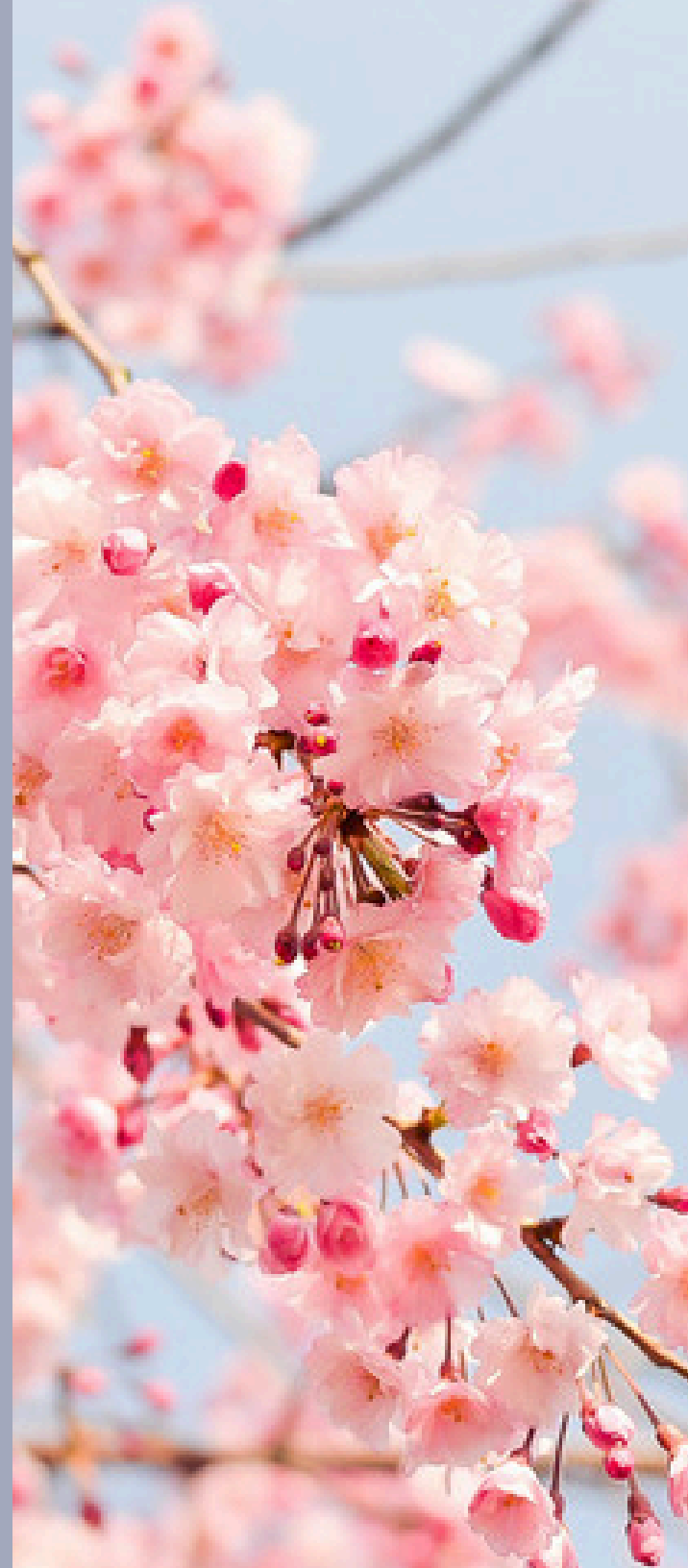
The Founder's Circle honors those who choose to secure the long-term future of ELI through a planned or estate commitment.

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*Remembered with gratitude



**HONORING
CRAIG MATHEWS**
1929 - 2026
Co-Founder, ELI



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The Leadership Council recognizes leaders who support ELI with a gift of \$5,000 and more.

We are especially grateful to the steering committee, chaired by Kathy Robb, for their support throughout the year.

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Donor support powers our work.

The following programs were made possible in whole or in part by generous individuals.

FIRESTONE POLICY FORUM

In honor and in recognition of Judge Nancy B. Firestone, and with the generous support of Patricia Payne and the rest of the Firestone family, ELI continues her legacy of service. The Firestone Policy Forum serves as an annual occasion to bring the environmental community together around a cutting-edge question. Our 2025 Forum focused on cooperative federalism and state-level approaches to environmental and energy policy.

“ ELI has played an instrumental role in various aspects of... environmental law, in education, and in furnishing of objective data that can be useful for decisionmakers... I think it's particularly important to develop forums for people with different perspectives on the environment and other issues in our society to come together.

- Edwin Kneeder
Former Deputy Solicitor General



LEARN MORE
Judge Firestone's Legacy

Jordan Diamond, Edwin Kneeder, Shawn LaTourette, Julie Moore, James Jennings, David Paylor



Western Boot Camp participants, hosted by Holland & Hart in Denver, CO.

INVESTING IN OUR PLANET'S FUTURE LEADERS

Through our Future Leaders Program, ELI invests in exceptional talent: pairing emerging leaders with mentors, immersing them in hands-on work, and connecting them with a community of peers who share their drive.

This year, our connections were more important than ever. Through the Jim Rubin Fellowship and the Research Associate program, we wove future changemakers into the community. Through Boot Camp and Summer School, we shared tools and reference points to understand the big picture. With the Women in Environmental Law and Leadership community, we helped facilitate conversation and build connections between dedicated practitioners.

By reaching these individuals, and uplifting each other, we can transform the future of environmental law.

“ Because of ELI, I gained lifelong mentors, as well as invaluable experience that I am excited to bring with me to Harvard Law School.

- Taalin RaoShah
Research Associate
2023-2025

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ELI's programming to advance environmental protection through law, policy, and science is made possible by our corporate, foundation, and other institutional donors and partners.

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Jordan Diamond, Serena McIlwain, Ben Grumbles, William K. Reilly, Robert C. Kirsch

2025 ANNUAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD DINNER

HONORING BEN GRUMBLES & THE ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL OF THE STATES

ELI proudly recognized Ben Grumbles and the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) for their outstanding contributions to cooperative federalism. Their commitment to collaborative governance demonstrates how shared understanding can drive meaningful solutions. Their leadership provides a critical forum for states to collaborate, share best practices, and foster their role in environmental governance.

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For decades, ELI's Environmental Achievement Award Dinner has connected environmental professionals from around the world. New bonds of cooperation are forged amongst our community each year, made possible thanks to the involvement of our outstanding sponsors.

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ELI empowers Members with cutting-edge, evidence-based research; timely updates on professional developments; and cross-cutting insights from our esteemed legal, policy, and scientific experts. We are grateful for our 2025 Members, and look forward to sharing our work with them in 2026.

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas William S. Boyd School of Law

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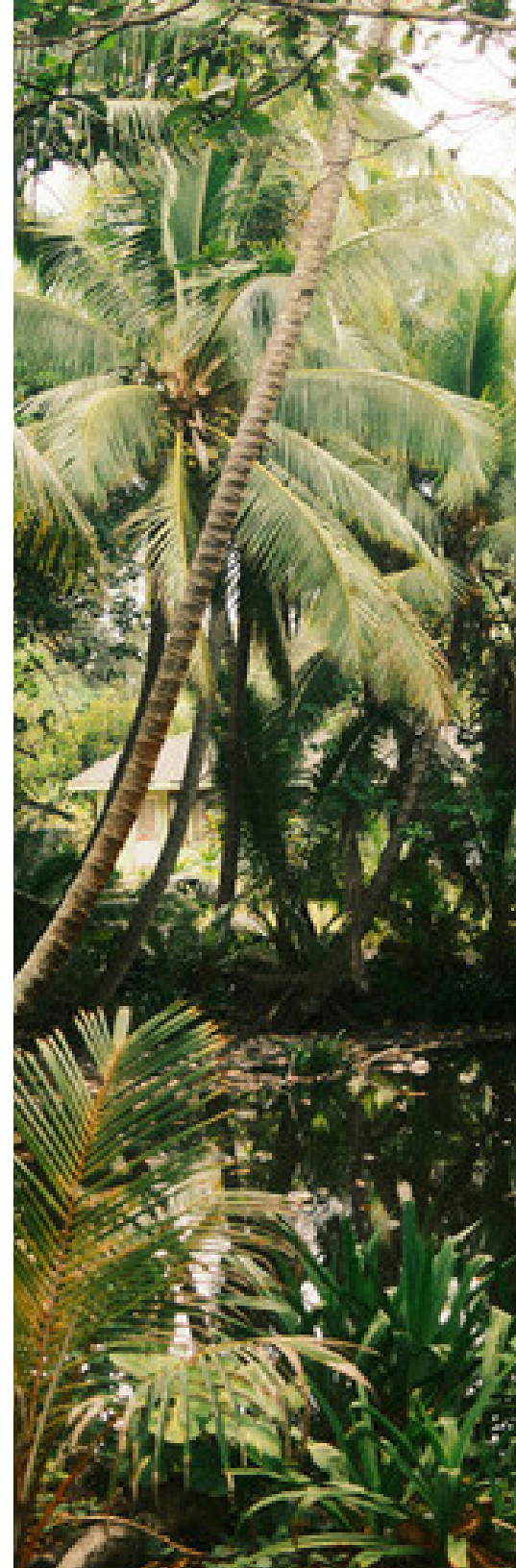
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Kayleigh Marshall
Interim Chief
Financial Officer



Sandra Nichols Thiam
Vice President,
Research & Policy

“As a former head of the EPA, I want to say this clearly: the values that ELI upholds—rigor, evidence, collaboration, integrity—are not partisan values. They are the foundation of effective environmental governance. They are the same values that have animated the best of EPA’s work for over half a century.

– William K. Reilly
Former EPA Administrator



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Sr. Attorney; Editor-in-
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Sr. Attorney; Director of
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and Local Governance



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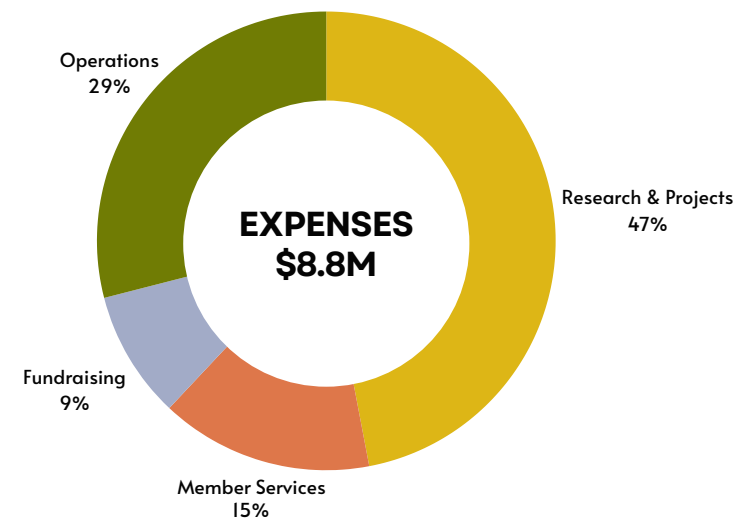
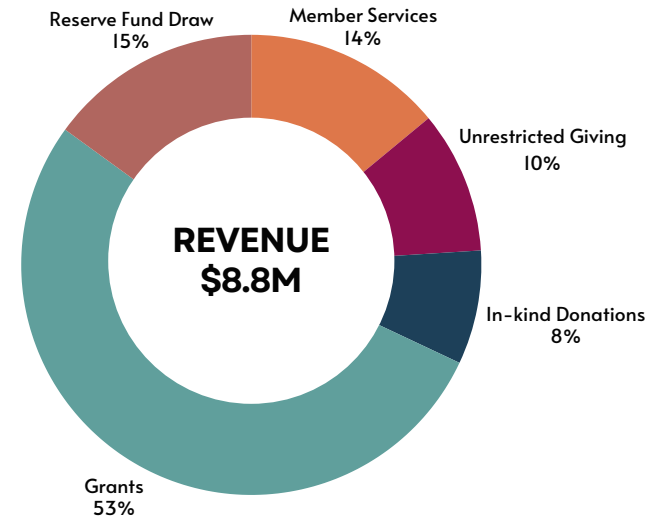


Pabu Collins
Chief Crumbs
Co-Officer



Sunshine Marshall
Chief Crumbs
Co-Officer

FINANCIAL RESOURCES



A complete, audited 2025 financial statement is available on our website at www.eli.org/annual-report.

MANAGING FOR IMPACT AND RESILIENCE

Dear ELI community,

For many nonprofits, 2025 was a challenging year. Changes at the federal level shook the foundation of ELI’s budget—forcing difficult choices about how to align our resources with our work.

Those choices were not easy. We reduced costs, including staff, while working to protect what makes ELI effective: the quality of our work and the people behind it.

At the same time, we saw real progress. Our efforts to diversify revenue are beginning to take hold, including our strongest year of individual giving to date. This was made possible by the generosity and trust of our community. You make this work possible.

In short, the pressures facing our field are real, but we are confident in ELI’s direction and the steps we are taking to grow our resilience.

LOOKING AHEAD: LEADERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

This year also marks a transition in financial leadership. After more than two decades of service, Loretta Reinersmann is retiring as Chief Financial Officer. We can’t overstate our gratitude for her steady leadership, deep compassion, and unwavering commitment to ELI’s mission.

We are now pleased to welcome Kayleigh Marshall into the role of Interim Chief Financial Officer and look forward to what’s ahead.

“As ELI looks ahead, its institutional strength and steadfast commitment to its mission remain evident. My priority is to advance the financial clarity and stability that position the organization’s continued progress with confidence.”

Loretta Reinersmann
Vice President, Finance
& Administration



Kayleigh Marshall
Interim Chief Financial
Officer





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