



RRU Salt Spring Island

Recommendations for a strategic plan and operational framework

Community Engagement Report
April 2026

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Land acknowledgement

RRU Salt Spring Island is located on the traditional ancestral and unceded territory of the SENĆOTEN and Hul'q'umi'num' speaking peoples. These include the Semiahmoo First Nation, Tsawwassen First Nation, Snuneymuxw First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, Halalt First Nation, Tsu-uubaa-asatx First Nation, Stz-uminus First Nation, Cowichan Tribes, Tsawout First Nation, Tsartlip First Nation, Pauquachin First Nation, and Tseycum First Nation, who may have had ongoing relationships with these lands since time immemorial.

With gratitude, we work and learn here where the past, present, and future of Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, faculty and staff come together.

Funding acknowledgement

This strategic planning and community engagement process would not have been possible without the support of the late Susan Bagley Bloom (Bloom Canadian Alter Ego Trust 2020) and Island Coastal Economic Trust. With deep gratitude, we extend our thanks to them for their contributions to this important work.



Introduction

Message from the President



Royal Roads University (RRU) is very excited to bring programming to Salt Spring Island. While we are new to the neighbourhood, we know how important it is to centre programming offered through this one-of-a-kind space in community need and collaboration. It's why we've spent the past year and a half cultivating relationships with and seeking guidance from Gulf Islands communities through a comprehensive engagement process.

This process was an important first step toward building trust, support, and ongoing engagement with the communities that RRU Salt Spring Island aims to serve and benefit. We look forward to continuing to grow lasting relationships with Indigenous Elders and knowledge holders, Gulf Islands residents, and on-island partners as programming progresses.

Thank you for your interest and engagement in this exciting work. Together, I know that we can offer something truly inspiring and unique through RRU Salt Spring Island.

Philip Steenkamp

President & Vice-Chancellor
Royal Roads University

About RRU

Royal Roads University (RRU) is a public, applied research university focused on transformative education. Established in 1995 by the Province of B.C., the university holds a distinct mandate to provide high-quality, applied, and professional programs and research, designed to meet labour market needs in B.C. and beyond. Our flexible admissions, blended learning, and innovative programs equip learners to advance meaningful change.

Today, we are proud to be known as Canada's university for changemakers among a growing community of more than 37,000 alumni from more than 90 countries across the globe.



About RRU Salt Spring Island

A future home for transformative learning, RRU Salt Spring Island was established through a generous donation made by the late Susan Bagley Bloom in July 2024 and includes two adjacent acreages on Salt Spring Island (SSI), near Beddis Beach.

RRU Salt Spring Island represents the first physical presence of a post-secondary institution on the Gulf Islands and offers significant opportunities to expand learning, teaching, and research. Working collaboratively with on-island partners and local Indigenous communities, the collective vision for RRU Salt Spring Island is to offer one-of-a-kind experiences focused on **regenerative sustainability** for the Gulf Islands and beyond.

Regenerative sustainability means taking care of the world in a way that restores and improves it, rather than just trying to do less harm. Its focus is on net positive outcomes, vital connections, and putting the future of all living things at the heart of everything we do. The goal is a future where people and nature thrive together, not just survive.

A shared vision for RRU Salt Spring Island

Co-created by RRU and the Bloom Trust

RRU will establish a dynamic centre for changemakers (the Bloom Castle by the Sea) in honour of the extraordinary legacy of Ms. Susan Bloom and her commitment to pursue excellence in land and ocean stewardship, and to advance creativity in learning that enriches and improves our world.

RRU will bring together students, scholars, researchers, writers, artists, musicians and other members of the community at the Bloom Castle by the Sea to exchange ideas, reflect on life experiences and, through engagement and collaboration, grow and share knowledge. This will be facilitated through workshops, seminars, arts and cultural events and field trips, and through classes offering a rich array of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary programming inspired and informed by the beautiful gardens and orchards, the rich foreshore and the stunning architectural heritage of the property. An overarching focus will be to inspire changemakers to advance the values of regenerative sustainability in ecological, social, cultural, economic and political spheres on the Gulf Islands and beyond for generations to come.

About the report

In January 2025, Royal Roads University (RRU) launched a comprehensive community engagement process, including an environmental scan, to inform the future of the space, in collaboration with [SSI Farmland Trust](#). The contents of this report identify and explore key findings and recommendations for a strategic plan and operational framework for RRU Salt Spring Island.

Summary of key findings



Leadership and governance: A shared leadership approach is recommended. An Advisory Circle of knowledge holders, leaders, and youth from local First Nations and Gulf Islands communities would help guide and support RRU Salt Spring Island programs and operations.



Operational sustainability and revenue streams: RRU Salt Spring Island should consider programming and partnerships that diversify revenue streams, with a strong focus on growing a philanthropic legacy fund, to ensure long-term sustainability.



Subject matter and structure: Offering short-term accredited courses on land and ocean-related topics, along with community workshops, events, gatherings, and ceremonies, will help create strong community impact.



Challenges and considerations: Accessibility, affordability, and communication are the most significant challenges to consider and address when developing the strategic plan and operational framework for RRU Salt Spring Island.



Audience and importance of the space: Indigenous communities, and Gulf Islands residents – in particular high school graduates and post-secondary students, and seniors and retirees – should be the primary audiences for RRU Salt Spring Island programming.



Measures of success: Key measures of success for RRU Salt Spring Island include working closely with the community, offering diverse programs that support lifelong learning, and ensuring accessibility and inclusion.

Honouring Susan Bagley Bloom's legacy

In July 2024, RRU received the largest gift in the university's history—a visionary contribution of \$9.93 million from the Bloom Canadian Alter Ego Trust 2020—to expand programming to Salt Spring Island (SSI).

This transformative gift includes two exceptional acreages featuring waterfront gardens, an orchard of heritage fruit trees, a West Coast modern house (referred to as the Bloom Castle by the Sea in recognition of the donor), outbuildings, and a foreshore lease, located near Beddis Beach. The property was home to the late Susan Bagley Bloom, an environmental philanthropist and pioneer in land conservation and regenerative sustainability, and a long-time resident of SSI.

The Estate is being transformed into a vibrant hub for local and global changemakers. It will provide students, researchers, and community members with unparalleled opportunities to learn, collaborate, and innovate in harmony with SSI's natural beauty.

The donation to RRU included \$5.268 million in funds (\$4.6 million of which is endowed). This funding will be used to maintain and improve the land and buildings, including upgrades needed to transition the property from a private home into a public space. It will also support academic programs, community activities, events, curriculum development, and staffing.

Inspiring people with the courage to transform the world

Guided by our values—caring, creative, and courageous—this dynamic centre for changemakers will nurture a diverse and supportive community, empower innovation, and inspire bold action.

- **Any age, any stage, any place**—bringing lifelong learning to Gulf Islands communities;
- **Explore, share, advance**—offering unique opportunities for interdisciplinary research to address critical issues;
- **Invite in, venture out**—creating new partnerships that invite knowledge exchange and reciprocity; and
- **Vibrant and sustainable**—championing sustainability and reconciliation through this one-of-a-kind landscape.

Strategic planning & community engagement process

In January 2025, RRU started a comprehensive community engagement process in collaboration with SSI Farmland Trust. An inclusive approach was designed to ensure that RRU Salt Spring Island programs and services are deeply rooted in community priorities and aligned with RRU's vision, while honouring the intent of Susan Bloom's gift.

The process involved



an environmental scan and literature review



broad engagement with Indigenous First Nations and communities connected to SSI*



a programming survey shared publicly with local residents, partners, organizations, businesses, and RRU's wider university community



workshops and discussions with Gulf Islands community leaders and RRU academic programming staff and faculty

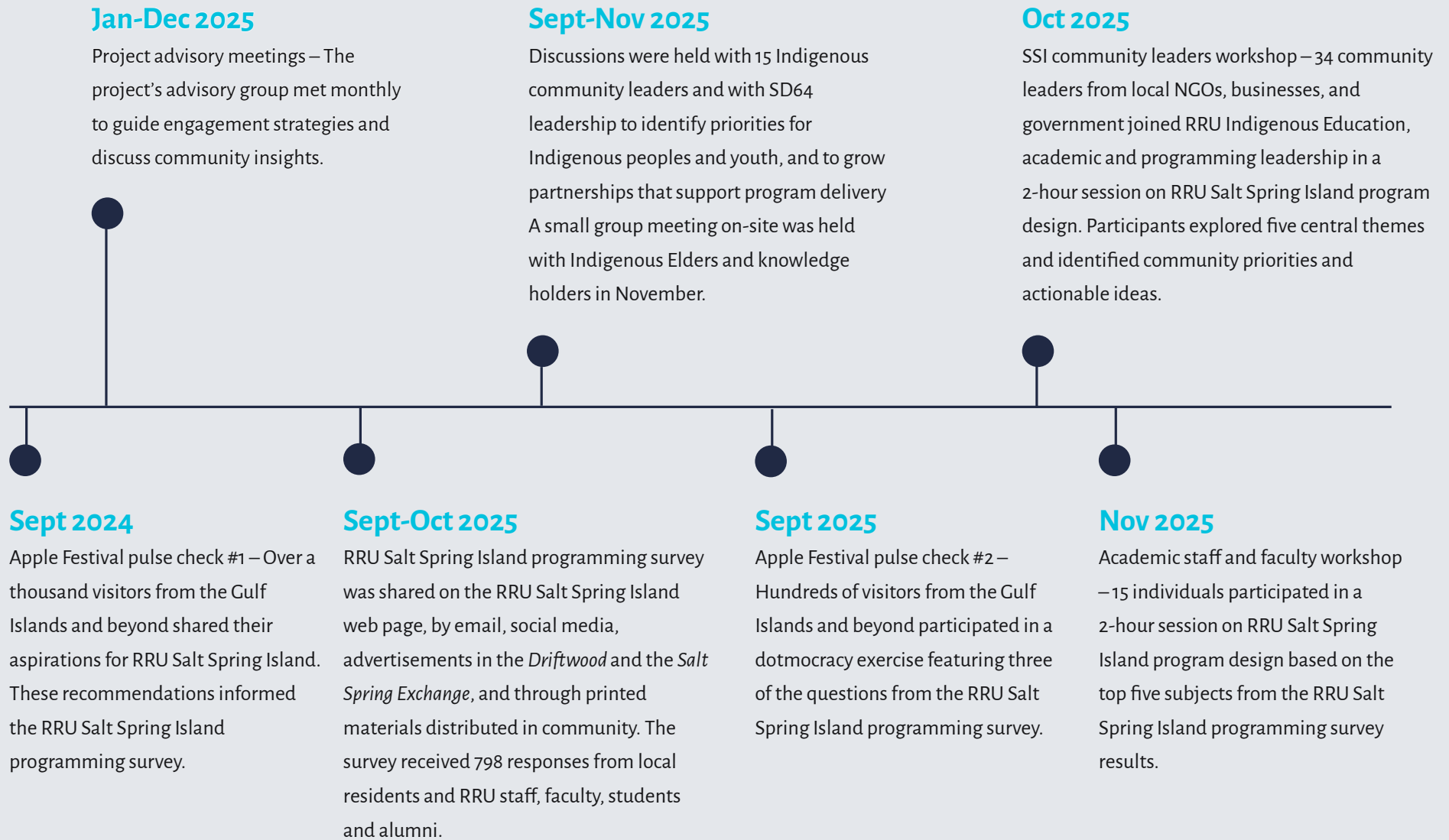
The engagement process was guided by the following principles:

- Community-centered
- Open-minded
- Respect and reciprocity
- Grounded in humility
- Relationship-driven
- Collaborative

An advisory circle was established to provide oversight and support for the project, which included representatives from RRU, the SSI Farmland Trust, and Indigenous leaders.

* Indigenous community engagement was led by Adam Olsen.

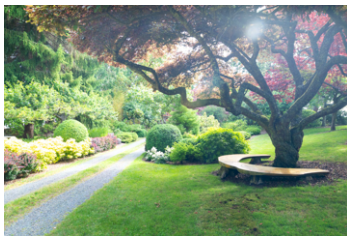
Engagement milestones



Environmental scan

Land considerations

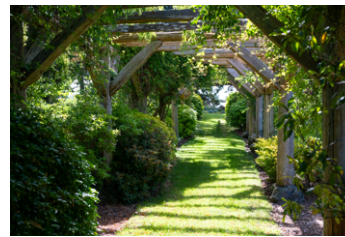
Located on the Southwest side of SSI and directly adjacent to the Salish Sea, the site of RRU Salt Spring Island is unique and features:



Cultivated, naturalistic gardens with heritage fruit trees



John di Castri-designed house



Long walking pergola



Outdoor kitchen



Large outer heritage orchard*

The site presents several important considerations:

- Housing and accommodation on the site are limited, suggesting partnerships with island and nearby off-island venues may be required.
- Parking for outdoor programming and public events will need to be sensitively accommodated.
- Despite ongoing improvements to meet accessibility requirements, building codes and public security and safety standards, the house itself cannot accommodate groups larger than six, or individuals with mobility challenges (no wheelchair access; uneven spiraling staircases).
- Water supply at the property may be a constraint.
- The property is in a residential neighbourhood, and all uses of the space must be planned with care and respect for the surrounding community.

Importantly, the property holds cultural significance and reflects a long and rich Indigenous history. This cultural context calls for thoughtful stewardship and means that programming be approached with appropriate protections and oversight. RRU Salt Spring Island's archaeological and environmental context will continue to be thoughtfully considered in strategic planning and program development.

**The orchard is permanently protected from development through a registered covenant held by the SSI Conservancy. It contains productive heritage fruit trees planted by the settler Beddis family, with origins that date back over 100 years.*

Indigenous heritage and connection to the lands

Prepared by Adam Olsen

Salt Spring Island, situated in the heart of the Salish Sea, is home to the Hul'qumi'num-speaking Qu'wutsun Peoples and the SENĆOŦEN-speaking WSÁNEĆ Peoples. They have belonged to the Straits territory since time immemorial, establishing and maintaining complex social and economic systems.

Despite the linguistic differences, the Qu'wutsun and WSÁNEĆ, both in the past and today, are deeply integrated through a web of interrelated families connecting communities from Snuneymuxw in the north, southwest to T'Souke on the southern tip of Vancouver Island and including all the Southern Gulf Islands. The familial and cultural integration is not contained by the international boundary, as it is displayed on a map today; the territory continues through the San Juan Islands, including territory from Point Roberts south to Bellingham, Port Anacortes and beyond. As in the past, today Salt Spring Island continues to be a place of linguistic and cultural confluence.

Historically, Salt Spring and the surrounding Islands were exceptional places to live and harvest the remarkable biodiversity of the land and sea. The passes and channels flowing in between were vital transportation and trade routes for people and goods.

Interrupted with the arrival of European traders and dramatically reshaped by the colonial settlement that came with the gold and land rush in the mid-19th century, the historic social, cultural, and economic systems that governed the territory were replaced by new systems grounded in British law.

Post-Confederation, Canada legislated the governance of Indigenous Peoples through the Indian Act. This included the definition of “Indian” people, the creation of Indian Bands, and a range of other policies. British Columbia, and the colonial predecessor, was responsible for setting aside land for the establishment of Indian Reserves.

During that process, the Qu'wutsun and WSÁNEĆ Nations were fragmented into multiple Indian bands, governed by the structure laid out by the Indian Act. Cowichan Tribes includes seven traditional villages: Kwa'mutsun, Qwum'yiqu'n', Xwulqw'selu, S'amunu Lhumlhumuluts', Xinupsum, and Tl'ulpalus. The Qu'wutsun Nation includes the Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, and Stz'uminus First Nation. The WSÁNEĆ include five villages: Malahat, Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tsawout, and Tseycum First Nations.

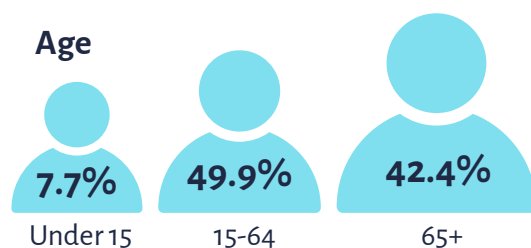
The implementation of this fractured governing structure is culturally complex and administratively challenging. Each governing body has produced its own engagement process to more or less rigorously steward their territory. The complexity created in the relationship between the ancient and current geopolitical reality of Salt Spring Island needs to be carefully considered in strategic planning, community engagement, and programming and operations for RRU Salt Spring Island.

The Gulf Islands: A growing population

Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands have seen significant population growth over the past 10 years

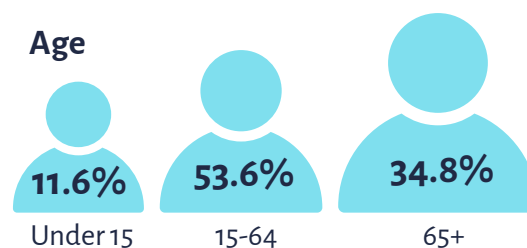
Southern Gulf Islands: 6,101

2021 +28.9% from 2016



Salt Spring Island: 11,635

2021 +10.2% from 2016

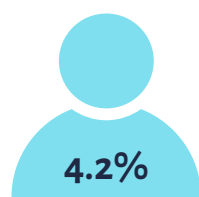


Median age: 56.4 years (compared to 42.8 in B.C.)

Southern Gulf Islands

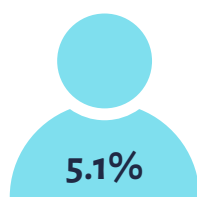
- Galiano
- Mayne
- North and South Pender
- Saturna
- Piers and associated islands

Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands



Indigeneity

(compared to 5.9% in B.C.)



Visible minority



Primary language spoken



self-employed
(of employed population
ages 15+)



median household income
(after-tax)

****50% make less than
\$50,000 per annum
after taxes**

Gulf Islands educational landscape

A strong commitment to education:



90% obtained a high school diploma or equivalency certificate

65% high school-to-post-secondary transition rate
(provincial rate: 68%)

64.1% credentialed post-secondary education
(Canadian: 55.3%, BC: 55.0%)

Despite strong educational attainment, the 2022 Vital Signs Report identifies a gap in accessible, ongoing credentialed adult education offerings that support career development (Salt Spring Island Foundation, 2022).

SSI, and the Gulf Islands, are home to many environmental education programs, including but not limited to:

- Institute for Sustainability Education and Action (I-SEA) sustain – Sustainability Business Management Certificate Program (“mini green MBA”)*
- Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning – Summer Earth Education Program (SEEP)
- Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) – a year-long place-based experiential learning program
- Salt Spring Island Nature Academy – a parent learning collective
- Wisdom of the Earth (WOLF) – wilderness school
- Wildhaven – alternative home-school programming

Apart from I-SEA, these programs are designed for children and youth under 17.

* The program does not appear to be continually offered but serves as an example of community interest in accredited sustainability programming.

Gulf Islands School District (SD64)

- Serves Salt Spring, Pender, Galiano, Mayne, and Saturna islands communities
- Hosts 64GO – the district’s online school for K-12 students and adult learners
- Facilitates dual credit programs with Camosun College, University of Victoria, and Thompson Rivers University, trades awareness, skills and knowledge programs, and work experience programming.

Satellite campuses in B.C.

Many post-secondary institutions operate satellite or branch campuses to extend reach, serve dispersed populations, and strengthen brand/expertise. Satellite campuses vary in size, distance, accreditation, and governance. Many share administration but not budgets or resources.

The following post-secondary institutions have branch campuses throughout B.C.:

- BC Institute of Technology (BCIT) – Vancouver, Richmond, Delta
- Camosun College – Langford
- North Island College – Comox Valley, Campbell River, Port Alberni, and Port Hardy
- Simon Fraser University (SFU) – Surrey, Vancouver
- Thompson Rivers University (TRU) – Williams Lake, 100 Mile House, Clearwater, Barriere, Ashcroft, Lillooet
- University of British Columbia (UBC) – Kelowna, Vancouver
- University of Victoria (UVic) – Langford
- Vancouver Island University (VIU) – Duncan, Parksville, Qualicum, Bowser, Powell River

Beyond expanding reach, the satellite or branch campuses operated by these post-secondary institutions each offer programming specific to community need. They are designed to not only bring in-demand applied learning closer to home, but also to play to the strengths and unique learning opportunities of the region they're operating within.

Comparable models

Broadbent Institute – Emerging Leaders Program: An intensive leadership program for early- to mid-career professionals. The 9-month program offers mentorship, networking, and skills-building opportunities to support progressive leadership in Canada. Most activities take place online, with occasional full-day workshops and summits. These in-person sessions focus on hands-on learning and sharing leadership best practices.

Chatham University – Eden Hall Campus: Eden Hall Campus is a purpose-built sustainability campus designed as a “living lab” for research and hands-on learning. Located on 388 acres of woodlands and fields in Richland Township, Pennsylvania, it is often described as the world's first university campus created to showcase sustainable solutions. Programs focus on energy, water, food and agriculture, air quality and climate, and how natural and built systems work together.

Queen's University – Bader College: Bader College is an international learning campus in the United Kingdom that emphasizes small class sizes and intercultural learning. It is located in a 15th-century moated castle surrounded by hundreds of acres of English countryside. The campus offers Queen's students a global learning experience and hosts events and activities for the local community. The castle also includes a café and farm shop, which help generate income to support the campus.

Sunnylands Retreat: Sunnylands is a retreat centre focused on peace, diplomacy, the arts, and community programs. Formerly the home of Ambassadors Walter and Leonore Annenberg, it is located in Rancho Mirage, California. The centre hosts art workshops, wellness activities, film screenings, and music events. It also brings together world leaders and experts to address national and global issues, supporting its mission to promote peace and international cooperation.

Implications for RRU Salt Spring Island

Complexity in past and present realities

Colonial resettlement deeply changed Indigenous relationships with the land, the ocean, and one another. The division of the Qu'wutsun and WSÁNEĆ Nations into multiple Indigenous communities created cultural and administrative challenges that affect how relationships are built today. RRU Salt Spring Island offers an opportunity to move beyond surface-level engagement and work collaboratively with Indigenous partners to explore shared use and stewardship of the site.

Operating a site with cultural significance in a residential neighbourhood

The site's cultural significance, along with strict limits on development, noise, and impacts on nearby homes, means that large buildings or long-term residential programs are not possible. Instead, RRU Salt Spring Island should focus on low-impact, land- and ocean-based activities such as short workshops, day programs, and small group hands-on learning that respect the site's cultural significance and the surrounding community.

Life-long learners focused on career growth

While programming at RRU's Colwood and Langford campuses mainly serves undergraduates and mid-career professionals, RRU Salt Spring Island can also be relevant for older learners. This includes late-career professionals and retirees who want to continue learning and developing new skills. In line with RRU's mandate, programming can focus on applied learning that supports career development, rather than academic study alone.

A foundation for regenerative sustainability

SSI is a hub for environmental learning and activity. Its diverse landscape offers strong opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning that supports environmental stewardship and regenerative sustainability. RRU Salt Spring Island can fill a gap by offering programs for learners aged 18 and over, building on the many programs already available for children and youth.

Reaching new audiences by meeting community needs

Many satellite campuses across B.C. were created to offer specialized programs not available at the main campus. These programs are designed to involve local residents and benefit the surrounding community. Community engagement and local relevance should continue to be central to planning for RRU Salt Spring Island.

Programs shaped by the region

Institutions with similar models design programs based on the strengths of their location. RRU Salt Spring Island should draw from the land and shoreline to create programs that offer unique, place-based learning experiences.

Diverse programs and revenue sources

Satellite campuses and comparable institutions often use a mix of programs and revenue sources to reach different audiences and support long-term operations. RRU Salt Spring Island should explore programs and partnerships that create multiple revenue streams. This could include using orchard harvests for value-added products, events, or community offerings as part of a long-term sustainability plan.

Community engagement findings

Through the programming survey, pulse checks, workshops, site-visits and meetings, key community insights covered the following themes:



Leadership and governance



Subject matter and structure



Audience and importance of the space



Operational sustainability and revenue streams



Challenges and considerations



Measures of success



Leadership and governance

Establishing an effective leadership and governance structure for RRU Salt Spring Island is critical. This was a priority for all groups who participated in the community engagement process.

Communities want to see:

- shared leadership structures – such as the creation of an Advisory Circle with representatives from local First Nations and the Gulf Islands community – to inform planning and programs
- a whole systems, relational governance model
- a vision, guiding principles, and responsibilities unique to RRU Salt Spring Island
- an on-island programming manager to grow relationships, engage community, and support program development and delivery



Subject matter and structure

The community engagement process showed strong support for RRU Salt Spring Island as a hub for environmental stewardship, reconciliation, and knowledge sharing.

Top five topics from the programming survey:



Many ways RRU Salt Spring Island could explore regenerative sustainability:

- Marine systems
- Regenerative farming
- Indigenous land-based practices
- Local food systems
- Seasonal cycles



A program or micro credential that builds the skills of support work would directly impact our need for local retention.

– Local resident and survey respondent



Opportunities to strengthen community partnerships

Gulf Islands community leaders identified opportunities where RRU could fill training gaps for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local businesses, in areas such as:

- communications and marketing,
- support work and assisting individuals with diverse needs,
- non-profit leadership and self-governance, and
- conflict resolution.

RRU was encouraged to leverage the knowledge of local NGOs and Indigenous communities through its programming. SSI community leaders suggested creating an online portal or forum for people to pitch program ideas that they could facilitate at RRU Salt Spring Island.



Subject matter and structure

Workshops and short-term courses are a priority

Top four structures from the programming survey:



Pairing learning with community engagement

Community members encouraged RRU to pair hands-on learning opportunities with community events and gatherings, including live music, art displays, theatre, and long table meals. Indigenous Elders, knowledge holders, and community members expressed excitement about the possibilities the site offers for Indigenous-led education, cultural revitalization, and community gathering. They shared a desire for arts-based programming, noting the wooden platform in the gardens overlooking the beach would be an ideal space for performances and creative practice.

Program formats that benefit youth

Youth showed a significantly higher interest in research and fieldwork compared to other respondent groups. This aligns with the insights from SD64 leadership to integrate programming with capstone high school research projects, in addition to exploring dual credit and/or summer programming.

Short-term land-based opportunities for learning in collaboration with SD64 would give youth the opportunity to sample post-secondary experiences closer to home. While SD64 leadership noted that post-secondary interests are varied among high school students, many recent graduates are pursuing environmental, business and sustainability and care economy programs. Short-term programs that explore career opportunities within these fields of interest would benefit high school graduates.

Hosting scholars and knowledge holders in residence

While community members showed less interest in retreats and residencies, many noted the opportunities for RRU Salt Spring Island to become a hub for scholars-in-residence. Using the house in particular to host scholars, Elders, and knowledge holders, would complement workshops and short-term course offerings and enhance knowledge sharing.



Subject matter and structure

Program offering suggestions

Examples of programming suggestions from the community engagement process reflect the desire for short-term applied learning:

- An SSI stewardship diploma – exploring coastal and island stewardship and best practices;
- Master classes in foraged traditional food preparation – relearning traditional food systems and medicines through a “land and table” approach;
- Living labs exploring intertidal studies, ocean systems, land restoration, and permaculture;
- Day and field trips for RRU and SD64 environmental science programs;
- Short term courses on the history of the lands and waterways – from Indigenous ways of being to colonial usage;
- A learning series on decolonialization of the lands – turning the process of decolonializing the space into opportunities for intercultural understanding;
- Facilitated sessions to support land use planning and conservation; and
- Capacity-building workshops for local businesses and NGOs – exploring conflict analysis, leadership and governance structures

Scheduling considerations

- Make use of Fridays and summers to reach local audiences: SD64 has a 4-day school week (Monday-Thursday), and many Gulf Islands NGOs and businesses are closed Fridays, making it an ideal day for workshops and short-term course scheduling.
- Consider seasonal cycles instead of the academic year: Planning programs, site access, and land-based activities around the seasons respects the teaching that work and movement follow natural patterns and purpose. This approach becomes a clear, practical choice that supports decolonizing design.



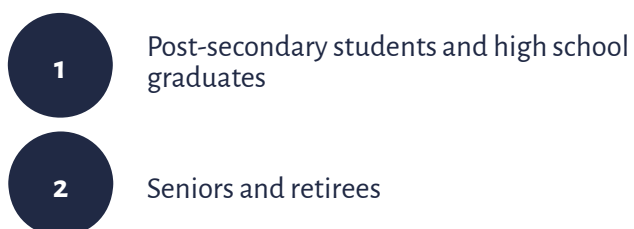
Audience and importance of the space

The community engagement process reinforced the need for programming available to learners 18 years and older.

Top three audiences from the programming survey:



Top two priority audiences by age:



Communities engaged want to see a balance between:



Top three priorities for the space from programming survey:





Audience and importance of the space

RRU Salt Spring Island: A storied place

RRU Salt Spring Island has an opportunity and responsibility to share the history and heritage of the lands. The outdoor spaces, including the outdoor kitchen, dock and foreshore, intertidal pool, and orchard, offer an ideal landscape to advance land and ocean stewardship initiatives and to share Indigenous heritage, practices, and ways of knowing and being.

Indigenous Elders, knowledge holders, and community members felt the space could be used for:

- ceremonies and community gatherings
- Indigenous-led education
- cultural revitalization and exchange
- healing-oriented land-based practices
- retreat-style gatherings as respite for Indigenous cultural workers, leaders, and knowledge keepers

All community engagement activities recognized the importance of meaningful and deep engagement with local First Nations to co-design and co-lead RRU Salt Spring Island programming.





Operational sustainability and revenue streams

Reducing financial barriers to post-secondary education

RRU should focus on approaches that reduce financial barriers, such as:

- offering sliding-scale fees and subsidies
- providing scholarships and bursaries
- pursuing government and corporate grants
- renting the space to other post-secondary institutions with “field school” programming
- focusing on using the outdoor spaces already well-suited for programming (e.g., outdoor kitchen, boat dock)

Focus on community market value

Community fundraising campaigns were strongly discouraged and received significantly lower support among survey respondents (45.3%), suggesting RRU should focus on major giving rather than annual giving. SSI residents were also apprehensive about driving revenue through corporate events and ceremonies. Survey respondents suggested many alternative revenue opportunities that emphasize local market value:

- concerts
- theatre
- art shows
- summer camps
- guest speakers
- cooking classes and farm-to-table meals
- wellness retreats
- modest venue rental for local businesses and NGOs

Communities engaged showed a willingness for campus tuition and course fees, with additional revenue streams through major gift fundraising and community events.

Top three revenue streams from the programming survey:



But, nearly 50% identified affordability as a primary challenge.



Challenges and considerations

Accessibility challenges:

- public access to the gardens and grounds – concerns around the availability of the space to the public
- transportation – limited means of transportation to and from the property, reliance on BC Ferries and its schedules, lack of nearby bus routes, limited on-site parking
- accommodation – the property cannot accommodate more than ~6 overnight visitors at a time, off-site accommodation (two hotels in Ganges, B&Bs, and short-term rentals) is limited in peak tourism season (April-September)
- physical safety – mobility challenges, particularly inside the house
- cultural and psychological safety – the potential for exclusivity and elitism that could create barriers and make equity-deserving and underserved groups feel unwelcome.

Addressing transportation and accommodation challenges

The delivery of on-site programming could be supported by new transportation nodes to increase accessibility to local communities, including:

- water taxis, canoes, and private boats, enhancing travel by waterway
- an RRU shuttle that could transport people to and from the property from core locales (e.g., Ganges)

Top three challenges identified across all community engagement activities:

- 1 accessibility
- 2 affordability
- 3 communication

Similarly, some community engagement participants recommended temporary outdoor accommodation, such as tents or yurts, to facilitate multi-day program opportunities. While retreats were discouraged through most of the community engagement activities, temporary outdoor accommodation could increase accessibility for field school programming.



Challenges and considerations

Considering affordability in program structure

Programming costs should reflect that household income and living and travel expenses vary significantly across the Gulf Islands.

RRU could look at sliding scale models for tuition and course fees, and offering scholarships, bursaries, and financial aid for RRU Salt Spring Island programming to enhance accessibility for low- to mid-income learners.

Communication challenges:

- limited communication contributing to perceptions of elitism and exclusivity
- lack of community integration with Gulf Islands' communication channels and approaches to ensure information is more widely shared
- risk of misinformation and distortion



Challenges include high tuition costs - in particular for marginalized people such as Indigenous people, farmers, low-income folks, etc. Please don't turn this into another academic institution that only engages the privileged.

– Local resident and survey respondent



Defining RRU Salt Spring Island as a hub

When thinking about what RRU Salt Spring Island could be, many described it as a hub that could be known for:

- critical thought and dialogue
- research and knowledge exchange
- changemaking
- land and ocean-based learning and research

Positioning RRU Salt Spring Island as a hub will accommodate varied programming to meet diverse needs, guided by a coherent focus and priorities. It will also contribute to clear, consistent messaging on RRU Salt Spring Island to communicate more broadly with communities.

Grounds for Emergence and Social Change:

A space for imagination, resilience and solidarity to arise and be nurtured to spark deep systems change and network/movement building at community and global levels. A Canadian and regional hub to experiment, think, facilitate, learn and share emergent strategy.

– RRU staff member, academic and provost workshop



Measures of success

A relationship-based pace to achieve success

Top three measures of success from the programming survey:

1

Collaboration and engagement with community – deep cross-sectoral partnerships that nurture relationships with Gulf Islands residents;

2

Dynamic programs and lifelong learning – a rich array of programming, from public low-to-no-cost events to market-responsive micro credentials and diplomas that support career development; and

3

Accessibility and inclusivity – enhancements to access that cultivate a greater sense of belonging at RRU Salt Spring Island for diverse communities.

Many throughout the community engagement process stressed the importance of moving forward slowly and thoughtfully to reach these measures of success.

Success at RRU Salt Spring Island looks like:

- partnership, collaboration, and continued engagement with local communities
- reconciliation, reciprocity, and combining Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews
- enhanced access to relevant learning and skills development
- a dynamic hub with programming unique to the space



[Success looks like] programming that is contributing to decolonizing policy and practice in higher education, or that is contributing to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

– RRU faculty and survey respondent





Measures of success

Partnerships

It was recommended that RRU Salt Spring Island build on existing Gulf Islands projects, programs, and initiatives, and work with local knowledge holders and subject-matter experts to focus programming on community needs. Prospective partners to support program design, delivery and amplification include but are not limited to:



- ArtSpring
- Gulf Islands Families Together Society
- Institute for Sustainability Education and Action (i-SEA)
- Islands Trust
- Restorative Justice Salt Spring Island
- Salt Spring Arts Council
- Salt Spring Health Advancement Network
- School District 64
- Seven Ravens Farm
- SSI Agriculture Alliance
- SSI Arts Council
- SSI Conservancy
- SSI Chamber of Commerce
- SSI Farmland Trust
- SSI Foundation
- Stqeeye' Learning Society
- Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership
- The Circle Salt Spring Education Society
- Thriving Roots / Wisdom of the Earth
- Transition Salt Spring
- WSÁNEĆ College

Conclusion

RRU Salt Spring Island: A dynamic hub

Emerging strategies and social change, grounded in relationships

The findings from the community engagement process, coupled with environmental scan insights, suggest the vision and guiding principles for RRU Salt Spring Island should centre



community



collaboration



reciprocity



relationality

RRU Salt Spring Island represents a unique opportunity to build a place of learning, connection, and change that honours the lands, waters, and communities who have shaped it since time immemorial. The findings outlined in this report provide a pathway for translating community insights, Indigenous knowledge, and environmental considerations into a purposeful and relational approach to programming, governance, and operations.

Realizing this vision will require ongoing collaboration, careful stewardship, and a sustained commitment to shared leadership with local First Nations and Gulf Islands communities. By centering community, collaboration, and reciprocity, the university can create a vibrant hub where knowledge exchange, land-based learning, and social innovation thrive.

With mindful implementation, transparent communication, and continued relationship-building, RRU Salt Spring Island can grow into a place that reflects the values of truth, respect, and co-creation, while offering transformative experiences for learners and meaningful benefits for the communities to whom this land is deeply connected.



For more information on RRU Salt Spring Island,
visit Royalroads.ca/saltspring.