



Strategic Plan

2024-2028

ELI in Context

1969

ELI incorporated in December 1969, the day before NEPA passed in Congress.

1970s

ELI launches the *Environmental Law Reporter*, begins research and education work.

Bedrock environmental laws enacted.

1980s

Environmental laws are tested in the judiciary but remain largely intact.

1990s

Partisan differences prevent further environmental statutes in the U.S.

ELI's corporate membership grows significantly.

ELI establishes its membership program.

2000s

Massachusetts v. EPA and *Rapanos v. U.S.* simultaneously expand and contract environmental protections.

2010s

195 countries ratify the Paris Climate Accords, setting global targets and mechanisms to limit warming.

ELI publishes *The Environmental Consequences of War*, anchoring the field.

ELI analysis of federal energy subsidies informs Obama Administration policies.

2020s

IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report finds that warming due to human activity is "unequivocal." U.S. climate action takes the form of increased spending, while SCOTUS decisions contract environmental protections.

ELI launches new branch of its judicial education program focused on educating judges about climate science and the law.

Navigating New Waters

For over 50 years, ELI has been a respected, independent source of expertise in environmental governance, providing leading analysis, scholarship, and educational programming. Over the decades, we have grown into a trusted forum for good-faith dialogue on persistent and emerging challenges. Today, ELI is a distinguished force in environmental law, known for its nonpartisan integrity, cross-sector reach, and emphasis on long-term solutions at the intersection of law, policy, society, technology, and markets.

At the same time, the environmental challenges we are wrestling with today are complex, requiring multifaceted and often cross-jurisdictional solutions. From climate change to food systems to plastic pollution, effective legal frameworks require deliberation across and between myriad constituencies, who often have differing goals, considerations, and needs. Solving for these distinct differences requires more discussion and collaboration than ever before, yet, despite this, there is notable and expanding polarization surrounding environmental issues.

We are uniquely positioned to address today’s urgent environmental problems.

Five-Year Strategic Plan

In 2023, ELI initiated a strategic planning process. That process engaged an external consultant and involved conversations with over 100 staff, board of directors, supporters, and environmental professionals. Those conversations emphasized that ELI is not currently in decline but, without intentional remodeling, the Institute is not realizing its full potential and invites risk. Eventually, those led to the creation of two documents: a strategic framework, which laid out our positioning and competencies in the environmental sector; and an organizational development plan, which includes a series of tasks to be completed. This document is a concise summary of those two documents, created intentionally to provide a roadmap of where we’re headed. It focuses on necessary and relevant changes to ensure that we not only avoid decline, but amplify our impact at a pivotal moment. Specifically, it highlights three strategic imperatives:



Values-Based Approach

Many decisions will be made over the next five years to implement this strategic plan. Decisions and actions in the immediate future are more clearly identifiable, but actions in the medium term and beyond are harder to anticipate—especially given today’s polarized world. The strategic plan proposes* a set of values to adaptively guide all organizational decisionmaking. We view these principles as core to the Institute’s identity and paramount to successful implementation of the strategic plan.

- ELI’s theory of change is that the implementation **of good governance**,** whether in the form of policy, rule of law, institutions, and/or widely adopted standards, leads to equitable and durable solutions to critical environment problems. These solutions must be rooted in environmental justice and ensure representation from overburdened communities.
- ELI’s work is **evidence-based**.** ELI uses data, information, practices, and processes based on proven facts, and incorporates science, legal practices, traditional knowledge, and all relevant information, including community needs and priorities.
- ELI’s work is **independent and nonpartisan**,** incorporating multisector, multistakeholder, evidence-based perspectives toward the best solutions. ELI is not beholden to party politics, donor directives, or anyone else, and maintaining its deep-rooted integrity, exhibited through transparency, is key to trust and credibility.
- ELI **tracks and identifies**** persistent and emerging environmental problems in order to determine opportunities to facilitate solutions based on our cross-sector, multidisciplinary approach.
- ELI strives to advance **diversity, equity, and inclusion** in its organizational policies and practices, staffing, and in its relationships with partners, stakeholders, and communities.

** It is important to emphasize that these principles are proposed—meaning that plan implementation includes soliciting input and fostering discussion by the end of 2024 in order to develop a final, codified statement of ELI’s core principles.*

*** In addition to agreeing on these core values, we envision a process of **deciding on shared definitions** of specific words and phrases to guide us internally and communicate publicly.*

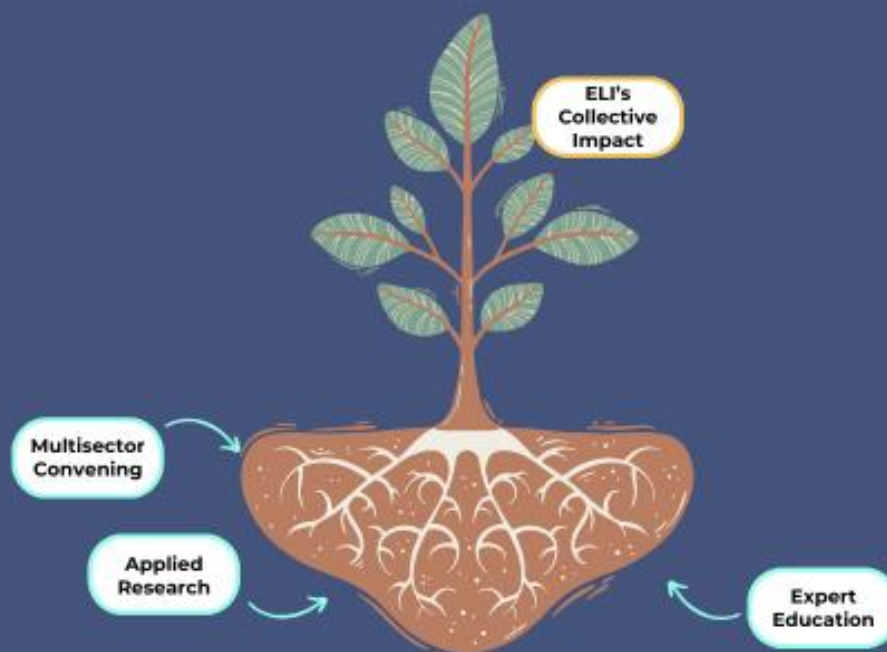
Maximize Our Impact

Strengthening and Harmonizing Our Approach to Good Governance

ELI is a preeminent name in environmental law, with a rich, deep history and a beloved and respected reputation among a small, dedicated, and highly credentialed constituency. However, the field has greatly expanded since the Institute was founded to now include a number of prestigious academic centers, private-sector law firms, and business media enterprises. This is the Institute's first challenge.

The success of ELI—and its influence in the environmental field—is due to the excellence of the organization's staff and its focused approach to solving environmental problems. That approach consists of three core competencies: advancing applied research, convening multisector constituents, and building the field through education. It has touchpoints in all aspects of law, policy, and institutions. The approach also centers on service by recognizing the importance of empowering people—partners, communities, stakeholders, and other decisionmakers—with information and tools to effectively manage the resources around them.

To maximize our impact, we need to do all three as effectively as possible *and* we need them to work in harmony with each other. In some cases, this is about building bridges *between* our existing functions; in others, it's about expanding capacity *within* a particular function.



1. Clarify and Deepen Our Substantive Focus (Maximize Within)

Applied Research

Overview: ELI’s research advances rule of law by identifying and advancing approaches for accomplishing established environmental goals and objectives, such as existing legal provisions, government targets, and environmental rights principles.

Strategy: Sharpen focus of and align diverse activities into programs, clarify our theories of change, build on our core strengths, and deepen subject matter expertise for emerging issues.

Multisector Convening

Overview: ELI convenes and facilitates multisector, multi-perspectives dialogue to attract thought leaders and to identify and discuss complicated problems, both to inform the Institute’s life-cycle work on environmental protection and to help craft pragmatic, effective solutions.

Strategy: Build out on-demand convening capacity (dedicated, trained staff) that can help us nimbly respond to opportunities for targeted, high-impact initiatives.

Building the Field Through Education

Overview: ELI’s education programs advance constituents’ knowledge, abilities, and skills to apply good governance to solve environmental problems. This includes ELI’s publications, panels, podcast, blog, boot camps, private workshops, and more.

Strategy: Align publication and education offerings with organization-wide mission as relevant to target audiences [see Core Audiences section].

2. Integrate Core Competencies (Maximize Between)

Overview: Optimizing ELI’s core strategies for greater impact requires that they be integrated for leverage, greatest exposure, and influence. Program-level funding is key to enabling this at meaningful scale [see Resource Development section].

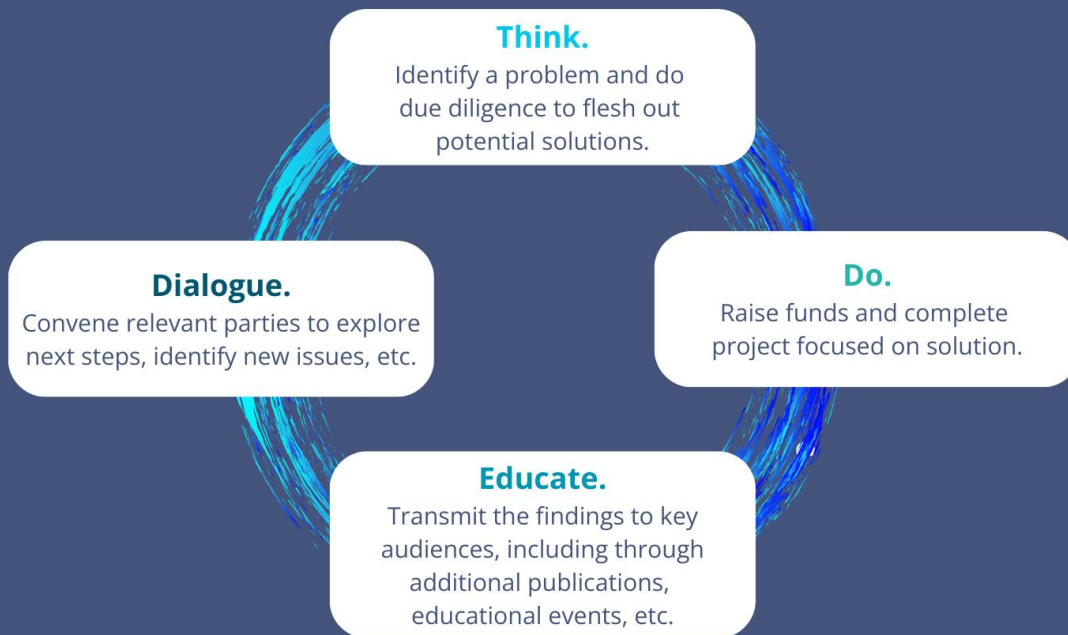
Integration is more than coordination; it requires all divisions and departments to work collectively to achieve organization-wide goals, with an understanding of how all the pieces mesh. For example, how does an individual project in a local jurisdiction complement a forum on that topic, lead to an educational webinar, and get exposure through publications and more in a deliberate and planned manner? Not every effort will

leverage all tools, but every effort should consider the full suite and proactively decide which are appropriate.

A formal mechanism to do so might be a project “filter.” Not only would that support focusing and alignment of activities, but it would also create a structure for considering the tools mentioned above when developing and proposing new initiatives. Another such mechanism might include shared metrics that measure success.

There is also an element of emergence to integration. In other words, we may need to organize ourselves differently to maximize integration opportunities, and we can explore that now; but it’s also true that as we begin to focus more on the need for and benefit of greater integration, new ways to do so will become clear. As the saying goes, “what you pay attention to grows.”

Strategy: Implement formal and informal coordination and collaboration mechanisms designed to integrate our work streams.



Amplify Our Message

Prioritize Strategic Communications to Support Systems Change

Our substantive approach has the potential to create systems-level changes. ELI's fundamental theory of change is that good governance, when applied, can create solutions that work for people, places, and the planet. In a world experiencing foundational challenges to the rule of law and cascading environmental challenges, ELI offers an integral piece of the puzzle. And yet, our value has not been clearly communicated to potential supporters and partners, which limits our reach and impact; and we have not always clearly centered audiences in our approach, which can limit the utility of our products and outputs. This is ELI's second challenge.

This is an area where ELI has not historically invested. Making progress here requires intentional efforts marked by clear theories of change and targeted engagement.

1. Consistently Communicate Our Value-Add

Overview: With an impressive array of programs and activities, many of which operate on a grant-by-grant project structure, it has been difficult to solidify organization-wide articulations of our value-add. By taking time to clarify this and build alignment across the Institute, ELI can better communicate this value-add to potential partners, supporters, funders, and decisionmakers. This is deeply connected to our nonpartisan and independent reputation, and our commitment to providing unbiased information, analysis, and educational offerings.

Strategy: ELI will build organizational alignment around our distinctive competencies and clear articulation of our role in good environmental governance.

2. Adopt an Audience-Centered Approach

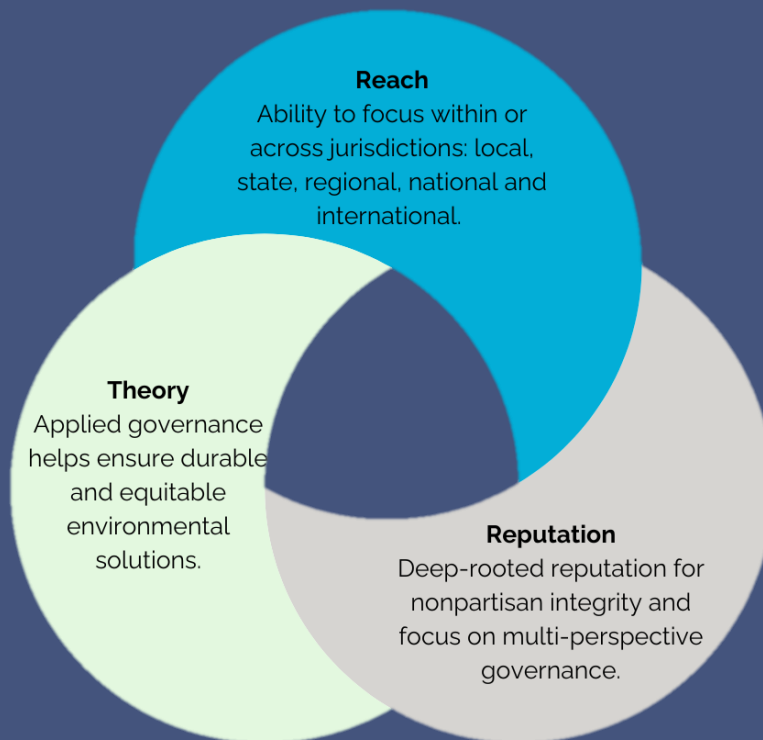
Overview: By taking a more explicit audience-centered approach, ELI can better design its communications and increase implementation of its applied research and learnings. Part of this process necessarily requires the Institute to align on organization-wide audiences. That does not mean ignoring other audiences, nor does it mean we can't identify tailored audiences for a specific effort. However, it will help us generally prioritize with available resources. We will first convene a task force to identify and confirm these core audiences. This could include, for example, decisionmakers across jurisdictional levels and environmental practitioners including non-lawyers. For each core audience identified, we'll develop and clearly articulate our value propositions.

Strategy: ELI will identify its core audiences—i.e., the people most likely to act on our work—and center those audiences in our organizational structure and approach.

3. Prioritize Strategic Communications

Overview: Communications is a critical function of ELI, and the organization will grow its strategic communications approach so as to reach and engage (i.e., move to action) its core audiences. Messaging must be deliberate and consistent, and requires an in-depth understanding of our audiences so that products and services meet their needs, are relevant, and delivered in the most helpful format(s).

Strategy: Using the core audiences matrix, ELI will build a strategic communications framework to maximize the effect of our work.



Enable Our Work

Laying the Operational and Financial Groundwork for Long-Term Success

ELI has excelled at building out its activities and creating impact while remaining lean, often filling needed gaps in the field. This organic evolution has contributed to our reputation and notability in the field of environmental law. But the organizational infrastructure, from systems to fundraising structure, is no longer in sync with its programmatic breadth, scale, and scope. Together, these obstacles mean that the organization cannot operate at its full capacity—a stress acutely felt by staff. As such, ELI’s third challenge is the need for improved efficacy in its operations and a new approach to fundraising.

To truly unleash our staff, we need solid ground to stand on. Doing so will require the Institute to evaluate and change long-standing processes, create new ones, and invest in foundational elements of a modern nonprofit.

1. Resource Development

Overview: ELI’s philanthropic model must be mission-driven, comprehensive, and diversified, with clear and consistent communication about impact. Fundraising must be centralized, coordinated, and disciplined. This will require additional investment in the development team.

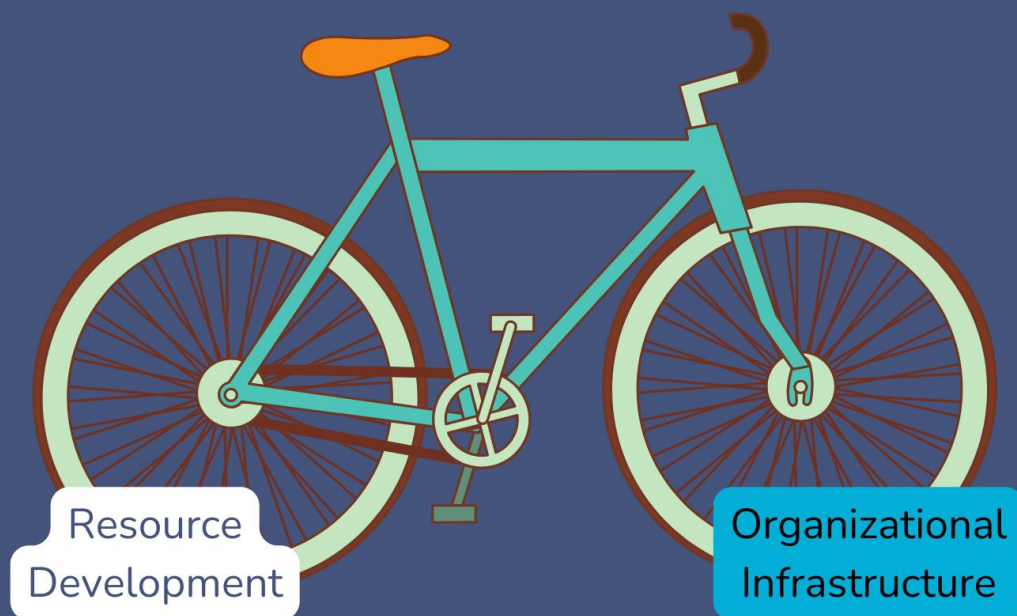
Within the organization’s existing revenue streams, emphasis will be placed on growing individual and legacy giving, enhancing the value of the membership program, and seeking programmatic support for key initiatives. To support this, key infrastructure upgrades will be made including migration to a new customer relationship management software (CRM), development of a new website, and related new systems and experiences for members and supporters.

Strategy: ELI needs to invest in and grow its resource development program, with a deliberate emphasis on increasing unrestricted giving to the organization. Significant growth is needed in unrestricted funds in order to, at a minimum, support the organization’s activities and impact. Increasing our impact will require exponential growth in unrestricted funds raised per year. This must utilize an organization-wide journey of engagement and strong “moves management” systems.

2. Organizational Infrastructure

Overview: The organization would benefit from increased alignment of and improvements to the tools and supports that staff and affiliates need and use. Improvements could also include enhanced clarity and adjustments to existing structures, organization, and goal-setting. Finally, investments should be made in professional development opportunities, including specialized training, and assessing and improving inclusivity.

Strategy: ELI will assess its structures and systems to best support and optimize staff and affiliates, and institute processes for keeping them up-to-date on an ongoing basis.



Concluding Remarks

The Environmental Law Institute's success is largely due to the excellence and expertise of its staff. Over the last five decades, that staff has honed the organization's approach and advanced environmental protections across the planet. In that same span of time, the context in which our organization operates has shifted (and continues to shift) dramatically while ELI's project-oriented focus has made it difficult to communicate an organization-wide value-add. In addition, like many organizations, ELI acquired inefficient systems and processes along the way.

Addressing these challenges is necessary to fulfill the Institute's full potential. To do this, we will act on three strategic imperatives over the next five years: maximize our impact, amplify our message, and enable our work. Fulfilling on our potential means unleashing ELI's world-class staff to do the work that inspires and motivates them. Beyond our own interests, our work has the potential to make significant, at-scale impact on the existential environmental crises we face in the world.

2024

ELI's new strategic plan expands our ability to advance durable and equitable law, policy, and governance, working across the public and private sectors to solve today's most pressing environmental issues.

