# Economic Development

## Introduction

The overarching goal of economic development in the Town of Bristol is to sustain a vibrant, resilient, and welcoming community for residents, businesses, and visitors. Bristol's strategy builds on its core strengths—its nationally recognized waterfront, rich historic and cultural resources, active downtown, respected academic institutions, high-quality public spaces, and strong maritime and manufacturing roots.

Bristol's commercial districts, small businesses, marine trades, educational partnerships, and emerging innovation sectors provide a strong foundation for long-term growth. At the same time, the Town's coastal setting and historic character require that economic activity support environmental stewardship, resilience, and compatible land use.

This Element outlines the policies that guide economic development in Bristol and identifies strategies to strengthen the local economy, support small businesses, expand workforce opportunities, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, and enhance the Town's role as a regional destination. The implementation actions that follow provide a roadmap for achieving these goals.

**Goal 1. Strengthen Bristol's overall economic climate by promoting a stable, resilient, and business-friendly environment that supports the community's quality of life and long-term prosperity.**

**Policies**

1. Make economic development a priority by fostering a predictable, business-friendly environment across Town departments and providing permitting processes that are efficient while still meeting design, safety, and environmental standards.
2. Collaborate with local, regional, and institutional partners to align economic initiatives and leverage shared resources.
3. Promote coordinated destination branding and marketing efforts that highlight Bristol's cultural, historic, and waterfront assets. ~~Promote "Destination Bristol" branding and marketing efforts that highlight the community's cultural, historic, and waterfront assets.~~
4. Encourage reinvestment in existing commercial and industrial sites to strengthen the local tax base.

**Goal 2. Support and grow Bristol's business base by prioritizing small businesses, key industries, the blue economy, entrepreneurship, and reinvestment in commercial and industrial properties.**

**Policies**

1. Support the retention and growth of Bristol's key industries, including marine trades, advanced manufacturing, higher education, tourism, and creative economy.
2. Foster entrepreneurship and small business growth through partnerships and support, business incubators, and shared workspaces.

3. ~~Inventory and E~~encourage the use of vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial properties suitable for redevelopment or adaptive reuse.
4. Encourage property and facility upgrades that improve accessibility, energy efficiency, and site appearance.
5. Prepare for climate impacts by ~~helping local businesses develop continuity and~~ implementing resilience strategies to protect businesses ~~jobs and assets~~.

**Goal 3. Invest in infrastructure, regulatory updates, and place-based improvements that enable business growth while preserving Bristol's distinctive character and environmental quality.**

**Policies**

1. Align infrastructure and capital improvement investments with economic development priorities and areas suitable for reinvestment or redevelopment.
2. Incorporate flood resilience, sustainability, and green infrastructure features into public and private redevelopment projects.
3. Coordinate with regional and state agencies to fund and implement infrastructure projects that support economic growth and climate adaptation.
4. Balance commercial visibility, signage, and access needs with the Town's scenic, historic, and neighborhood character.

**Goal 4. Promote a thriving downtown and active commercial areas that serve as vibrant centers of commerce, culture, and community life.**

**Policies**

1. Preserve and enhance the historic fabric and human scale of Downtown Bristol while encouraging compatible adaptive reuse and upper-story occupancy.
2. Maintain Bristol's Formula Business Ordinance to preserve the unique character, scale, and local business environment of the Downtown Historic District.
3. Maintain and strengthen civic uses downtown to support year-round activity, reinforce the area's role as Bristol's civic and cultural hub, and complement surrounding businesses and historic character.
4. Improve walkability and accessibility through coordinated streetscape design, parking management, and wayfinding.
5. Coordinate visitor information, marketing, and signage to connect downtown, the waterfront, and other destinations.
6. Encourage year-round downtown activity through cultural events, heritage tourism, and partnerships that support local businesses.
7. Promote public art, cultural programming, and the creative economy as integral components of Bristol's economic vitality.

**Goal 5. Support education, workforce development, and partnerships with local academic institutions and industries to build a strong and adaptable local workforce.**

**Policies**

1. Partner with Roger Williams University, the Bristol-Warren Regional School District, and workforce organizations to support ~~develop~~ training and career pathway programs.
2. Facilitate connections between students, residents, and local employers in the trades, blue economy, manufacturing, and tourism sectors.
3. Encourage local hiring, internships, and apprenticeships through municipal, institutional, and private partnerships.
4. Promote lifelong learning and career readiness as community values that strengthen workforce adaptability.

**Goal 6. Maintain and expand Bristol's agricultural economy by preserving farmland, supporting farm operations, and encouraging value-added and aquaculture enterprises.**

**Policies**

1. Preserve remaining farmland and high-quality agricultural soils through voluntary conservation tools and purchase of development rights, while ensuring ~~existing~~ zoning and land use policies ~~continues to~~ support agricultural uses.
2. Encourage the active use of idle or underutilized agricultural land for farming, horticulture, or community agriculture.
3. Support aquaculture and shellfish enterprises in coordination with state agencies and local maritime stakeholders.
4. Promote awareness of Bristol's farming heritage and encourage residents and institutions to purchase locally grown or locally produced foods.

**2016 Comprehensive Plan Implementation Progress**

Since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Bristol has advanced key economic development initiatives across zoning, infrastructure, tourism, workforce development, and interdepartmental coordination. This section highlights the actions from the 2016 Plan that have been implemented and demonstrates how the Town has made measurable progress toward its economic development goals.

**1. Modernizing Regulations and Improving Town Processes**

Bristol has completed several zoning updates to support business growth, adaptive reuse, and flexible industrial spaces. Recent State reforms have further streamlined administrative and development

review procedures. The Town has strengthened coordination among departments, improved communication with applicants and created a more efficient permitting process.

Unity Park Redevelopment

The transformation of the former manufacturing area into Unity Park represents one of Bristol's most significant economic development accomplishments since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan. The Town proactively supported this redevelopment by ensuring that existing manufacturing uses could continue while also creating the Rehab Land Development Project (LDP) zoning district to enable adaptive reuse and broaden the range of allowable uses with minimal restrictions. This zoning framework provided the flexibility necessary to attract reinvestment, modernize aging industrial buildings, and support a mix of commercial, ~~recreational, and civic uses~~industrial and space for civic events.

**2. Strengthening Tourism, Merchants, and Destination Branding**

Tourism, marketing, and downtown vitality have been major areas of progress since 2016. Bristol has supported numerous initiatives through partnerships with: Explore Bristol, Bristol Merchants Association (BMA), Discover Newport, and Bristol Historical & Preservation Society

Key accomplishments include:

- Installation of tourism kiosks with maps and brochures.
- Ongoing digital and print campaigns including the "Small Town, Big Charm" brand.
- Explore Bristol's expanded role in event coordination, marketing, newsletters, and merchant support.
- Continued progress on Discover Newport's regional strategic planning, including Bristol representation on working groups.
- Continued support for downtown redevelopment.
- Sustained maintenance of a vibrant downtown with active storefronts, community events, and cultural programming.

Although the Town no longer operates a formal welcome center, the Maritime Center serves as a visitor gateway for the boating community. The Bristol Maritime Center is an important addition to Bristol Harbor and a major asset for the boating community. The facility provides upgraded restrooms, boater services, storage, and improved access to the harbor. Its completion has enhanced Bristol's appeal as a recreational boating destination and strengthened the connection between the waterfront and downtown businesses.

**3. Advancing Education, Workforce Development, and RWU Partnerships**

Workforce readiness remains an ongoing priority. Bristol has made noticeable progress in expanding partnerships with Roger Williams University (RWU), the School District, and local businesses. Recent initiatives include:

- Active partnerships between RWU, local businesses, and educational institutions to support internships, mentorship, project collaboration, and workforce skill development.
- Grant funded u~~U~~pgrades at the Rogers Free Library, including improved work/study rooms and the new public maker space ~~supported through the Community Learning Center Grant, ARPA funding, and other grants~~, along with expanded programming focused on work readiness, education, and health.

**4. Expanded Civic and Physical Infrastructure to Support Economic Development**

Bristol has completed numerous infrastructure actions identified in the 2016 Plan. Highlights include:

- Major progress on Unity Park, including amenities, signage, benches, and civic improvements.
- Completion of the boat ramp at Independence Park, a state-owned facility leased by the Town, was funded through the Town's Capital Budget. Associated parking lot improvements and water quality enhancements were supported through a grant from the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank.~~Completion of upgrades to the Town boat ramp.~~
- ARPA-funded expansion of the OSHEAN broadband network, advancing connectivity for municipal facilities.
- Ongoing coordination with RIDOT on the sidewalk and path extension from Constitution Street to RWU, with continued advocacy to extend sidewalks up to traffic light at Old Ferry Road.
- Harbor management improvements by the Harbormaster, including updated harbor infrastructure and continued implementation of the Marine Trades Route Plan.
- Completion of several actions relating to signage and wayfinding.

**5. Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Local Food Systems**

The Town established an agricultural zoning district and partnered with NRCS and local organizations to preserve several farm properties through conservation easements, helping protect Bristol's remaining farmland. The Town also adopted agritourism zoning to support farm viability by allowing appropriate accessory commercial uses on agricultural properties. Ongoing efforts continue to support agricultural and aquaculture enterprises through zoning and tax strategies, such as the Farm, Forest and Open Space program, collaboration with partners, and promotion of local food initiatives such as farmers' markets and "farm-to-table" and "boat-to-table" programming.

**5. Downtown Residential Development and Revitalization**

Supporting residential development in and near downtown was a key recommendation of the 2016 Plan, and the Town has made significant progress. Along with 6,400 square feet of commercial use, ~~The~~ the redevelopment of the former Robin Rug mill will ~~deliver~~ add127 new residential units, bringing new residents to the downtown area, supporting local shops and restaurants, and strengthening walkability and year-round activity. ~~Additional phases of downtown revitalization and adaptive reuse remain future priorities.~~Opportunities for revitalization and adaptive reuse of additional key properties downtown remain a priority.

## BRISTOL ECONOMIC STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

**Strategic Regional Location**
Bristol is situated within southern New England's broader travel and economic corridors, providing access to multiple labor markets, higher education institutions, and industry clusters. While travel times can vary due to limited access routes, Bristol remains within a reasonable commuting distance of Providence, Newport County, and southeastern Massachusetts. Its proximity to these markets combined with strong quality of life amenities, a competitive commercial tax rate, and a federally designated Opportunity Zone helps position Bristol as an attractive location for small businesses, marine trades, research partnerships, and innovation-oriented enterprises.

**Distinctive Community Character**
Bristol's walkable historic downtown, nationally recognized waterfront, preserved architecture, scenic neighborhoods, and parks and public spaces contribute to a strong sense of place. This character supports tourism, small-scale retail, and local entrepreneurship, and ~~-~~plays a central role in attracting new residents, businesses, and investment.

**Presence of Roger Williams University**
The town's largest employer, Roger Williams University is a significant driver of Bristol's economy. The university brings students, employees, and visitors into town and provides opportunities for research partnerships, entrepreneurship, workforce development, cultural programming, and marine and engineering innovation.

**Redevelopment and Reuse Opportunities**
Bristol includes several properties well suited for reinvestment, adaptive reuse, and mixed-use development. Its federally designated Opportunity Zone provides additional financial tools to support redevelopment of key sites, including historic buildings, mill complexes, and waterfront properties.

**Infrastructure and Mobility Assets**
Bristol's public water and sewer systems, along with ongoing infrastructure upgrades, create a reliable foundation for business operations and future investment. Mobility assets, including RIPTA transit, the East Bay Bike Path, and a walkable downtown, strengthen access to commercial areas, support local businesses, and enhance the town's economic competitiveness.

**Creative, Cultural, and Civic Assets**
Bristol's arts community, cultural institutions, historic venues, and year-round community events contribute to a vibrant local economy. These assets and events generate visitor activity, support downtown businesses, and help sustain economic activity beyond the peak summer season, reinforcing~~attract visitors, support small businesses, and reinforce~~ Bristol's identity as a lively and creative coastal community.

**Natural Resources and Maritime Economy**
Bristol's extensive shoreline and harbor shape a strong maritime economy supported by marine trades, boating, recreation, and emerging blue economy sectors. These resources offer ongoing opportunities for sustainable growth while reinforcing the community's coastal heritage.

## Economic Development Challenges

### Coastal Resilience Risks

Businesses and infrastructure in flood-prone areas of Bristol including Downtown face increasing risks from flooding and sea-level rise, creating short and long-term challenges ~~for business continuity~~. The Town was selected for the Ready, Set, Rhody initiative, a statewide program supporting climate and infrastructure resilience in vulnerable commercial districts. Through this effort, Bristol's Thames Street district received a state-funded vulnerability assessment to identify flooding, storm surge, and infrastructure risks that could affect businesses. Participation in this program positions the Town to pursue targeted improvements that protect local businesses from climate-related disruptions and improve resiliency of the local economy.

### High Cost of Real Estate

High housing and real estate costs limit Bristol's ability to attract and retain a stable workforce and constrain small business growth. Rising housing prices and a lack of rental, workforce, and employee-oriented housing force many workers to commute from outside the community, increasing costs for employees and employers alike. At the same time, high commercial rents and limited space availability make it difficult for small businesses and start-ups to secure affordable locations. Addressing housing affordability and workforce housing options is closely tied to Bristol's long-term economic vitality and business retention.

### State Land-Use Mandates

Recent state land-use reforms have reduced local control, including new "by-right" adaptive reuse provisions that allow commercial buildings to be converted to residential use even within commercial zoning districts. This creates concern about the long-term loss of commercial space, potential land-use conflicts, and impacts on economic vitality. The Town ~~may need to~~ should regularly engage State delegation and advocate for state-level adjustments to ensure adaptive reuse or other policies do~~es~~ not unintentionally erode Bristol's commercial tax base or business districts.

### Parking and Downtown Access

Parking in Downtown Bristol during peak periods, in particular special events is a challenge~~, . but any parking management strategies must maintain Bristol's walkable, historic downtown and not involve adding supply that detracts from character.~~ Any parking or access management strategies must balance the need to support businesses and visitors while preserving the walkable scale and historic character that define Downtown Bristol.

### Transportation Constraints

Bristol's peninsular geography and limited access routes can create congestion and longer travel times for workers, visitors, and deliveries. For some businesses, particularly those serving a regional customer base, the geography limits their market radius and can influence business location decisions.

Distance from interstate highways also affects customer reach and employee commuting patterns, with travel to Providence and other hubs often taking longer than comparable distances elsewhere in the state. These geographic factors underscore the importance of strengthening transit, enhancing

digital infrastructure, and supporting industries that are less dependent on regional physical catchment areas.

**Seasonal Demand Fluctuations**
Tourism-dependent businesses experience seasonal peaks and slower winter months, affecting staffing and year-round financial stability, particularly for small retailers and restaurants.

**Skilled Workforce Gaps**
Marine trades, manufacturing, and blue-economy firms face challenges recruiting workers with specialized skills~~, despite nearby training resources~~. Strengthening connections between local employers, universities, and regional workforce programs remains an ongoing opportunity.

## ECONOMIC DATA & INDICATORS

### Data Sources and Methodology

Economic indicators presented in this section are drawn primarily from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates for 2013 and 2023, supplemented by additional sources where appropriate. The ACS provides statistically reliable data for small geographies such as Bristol by aggregating multiple years of survey responses. Employment trends are also informed by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (RIDLT) Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) series, which provides the standard annual average unemployment estimates for Bristol residents. Housing market indicators, including recent changes in home values, rents, and income needed to afford housing, are drawn from the 2025 HousingWorks RI Factbook. Together, these sources provide baseline context for understanding local economic conditions, including labor force participation, household assistance needs, income levels, and housing affordability. All values are estimates and should be interpreted with consideration of margins of error and methodological differences between sources.

### Population and Household Context

According to ACS 5-Year estimates, Bristol had approximately 8,300 households in 2013 and 8,480 households in 2023, indicating relatively stable household counts over the past decade. Average household size remained consistent, suggesting that changes in economic indicators are not solely attributable to population growth, but may reflect shifts in income, employment conditions, housing costs, or household composition.

### Household Assistance and Poverty

Between 2013 and 2023, the share of Bristol households receiving SNAP benefits declined from 9.1 percent (approximately 755 households) to 5.6 percent (approximately 475 households). Over the same period, the share of residents living below the federal poverty level declined from 7.7 percent (approximately 1,720 residents) to 6.4 percent (approximately 1,410 residents). These trends suggest modest improvement in several household economic indicators, though a meaningful number of households and residents continue to experience economic vulnerability.

### Employment and Labor Force Participation

**RIDLT's LAUS data show that Bristol's annual average unemployment rate generally declined through the late 2010s (5.6% in 2015 to 3.3% in 2019), spiked during the pandemic (8.0% in 2020), then improved again (2.7% in 2023) before rising to 3.8% in 2024. These figures reflect Bristol residents' labor force status (not where jobs are located) and are the standard "official" unemployment series used by RIDLT/BLS for sub-state areas.**

**Educational Attainment**

The labor force in Bristol is comparatively well educated. Over **90%** of residents age 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, and nearly **46%** hold a bachelor's degree or higher. High educational attainment supports the town's professional services, research, and technical sectors.

| Educational Attainment (Age 25+) | Percent | Estimated Count |
|---|---|---|
| High school graduate or higher | 91.9% | ~14,110 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | 45.9% | ~7,053 |

**Commuting Patterns**

Bristol residents have an average commute of about **26 minutes**, demonstrating strong connectivity to employment centers throughout the region. This aligns with Bristol's strategic location relative to Providence, southeastern Massachusetts, and Newport County.

**Residential Mobility**

With approximately **12.8%** of the population moving in the past year, Bristol exhibits a moderate level of residential turnover. Mobility patterns can reflect both housing market conditions and broader demographic trends.

**Household Income Distribution**

Detailed ACS 5-Year Estimates for Bristol reveal a diverse income distribution across households. Nearly half of households earn above $75,000 annually, and the median household income is approximately **$96,005**, which is higher than statewide and national medians, reflecting relative economic affluence. Income distribution shows variation across income brackets, which has implications for housing affordability and economic inclusion.

| Household Income Bracket | Estimated Households | % of Total Households |
|---|---|---|
| Less than $25,000 | ~1,035 | ~12% |
| $25,000–$49,999 | ~1,270 | ~15% |
| $50,000–$74,999 | ~1,700 | ~20% |
| $75,000–$99,999 | ~1,360 | ~16% |
| $100,000–$149,999 | ~1,530 | ~18% |
| $150,000 and over | ~1,585 | ~19% |
| **Total Households** | **8,480** | **100%** |

**Income and Housing Cost Pressures**

**Bristol's median household income has increased over the past decade and, based on the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, is higher than the statewide median. At the same time, housing costs have risen rapidly and continue to outpace income growth. According to**

the 2025 HousingWorks RI Factbook, the median single-family home price in Bristol reached approximately $575,000, representing a 69 percent increase between 2019 and 2024. Average rents have also increased, with a typical two-bedroom apartment renting for about $2,002 per month, a 21 percent increase over the same period, requiring an annual income of roughly $80,000 to avoid being cost-burdened. As a result, approximately 39 percent of renter households in Bristol spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, compared to 27 percent of owner households. The income needed to purchase a median-priced home is estimated at over $191,000, which significantly exceeds Bristol's current median household income of $96,005. Together, these trends indicate growing housing affordability pressures that may influence household stability, workforce retention, and who is able to remain in or move to Bristol.

Improvements in economic indicators, such as increased household income and reduced reliance on public assistance, may reflect increased earnings among existing residents, broader labor market recovery, or a combination of factors. These trends can also coincide with demographic change, including the in-migration of higher-income households and affordability pressures that may contribute to displacement of lower-income residents.

From an economic development perspective, these indicators underscore the importance of supporting stable, year-round employment, workforce retention, and housing options affordable to a range of income levels.

~~Economic Data and Local Economic Conditions~~

~~Economic indicators are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (2013 and 2023). Employment and unemployment data reflect ACS measures for residents age 16 and over. These indicators provide a snapshot of household assistance levels, poverty, and basic labor-force participation in Bristol. The information offers baseline context for understanding local economic conditions and helps inform future economic development strategies.~~

~~Key Economic Indicators (ACS 5-Year Estimates)~~

~~Household Assistance~~

- ~~Households receiving SNAP benefits (2013): 9.1%~~
- ~~Households receiving SNAP benefits (2023): 5.6%~~

~~Poverty~~

- ~~Individuals below poverty level (2013): 7.7%~~
- ~~Individuals below poverty level (2023): 6.4%~~

~~Employment & Labor Force~~

- ~~Residents age 16+ employed (2013): 86.5%~~
- ~~Residents age 16+ employed (2023): 88.1%~~
- ~~Residents age 16+ unemployed (2013): 8.5%~~

- ~~Residents age 16+ unemployed (2023): 2.7%~~

## Local Employment Structure

Major employers in Bristol include Roger Williams University, the Bristol-Warren Regional School District, State Veteran's home, and a range of marine trades and manufacturing firms in the Business Park and Unity Park, and the Bristol Medical Center and other medical/nursing home facilities.

**Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data from the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training provides a snapshot of jobs physically located in Bristol, regardless of where employees live. The dataset captures employment associated with worksites in town and does not reflect remote work performed from home or the residential employment patterns of Bristol residents. It includes both private-sector employers and government entities, including public schools and municipal operations. QCEW does not publish establishment-level breakouts for individual employers, and employment counts are aggregated by industry and ownership category.**

**Based on the most recent complete data available, the industries with the largest numbers of jobs located in Bristol include:**
**• Educational Services (1,356 jobs) – the largest employment sector in town, reflecting Roger Williams University, private educational institutions, and related employers.**
**• Government (1,141 jobs) – including local and state government worksites located in Bristol, such as municipal operations, public schools, police and fire services, and state facilities.**
**• Accommodation and Food Services (952 jobs) – representing restaurants, hospitality, and tourism-related businesses serving residents, students, and visitors.**
**• Manufacturing (912 jobs) – including marine trades, precision manufacturing, and specialty production, which provide relatively higher-wage employment opportunities.**
**• Health Care and Social Assistance (728 jobs) – including medical offices, clinics, and care providers serving the local and regional population.**
**• Retail Trade (609 jobs) – including downtown shops, grocery stores, and other consumer-oriented businesses.**

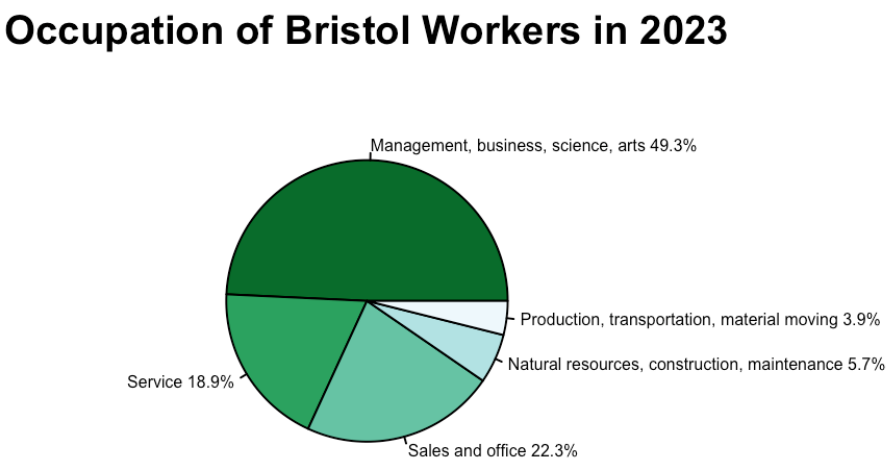
**Several of these sectors also make substantial contributions to total wages generated within Bristol. The highest overall wage-paying sectors include Educational Services ($78.7 million), Government ($69.6 million), Manufacturing ($59.9 million), Health Care and Social Assistance ($38.5 million), Accommodation and Food Services ($27.2 million), and Professional and Technical Services ($27.6 million).**

## Occupation Profile of Bristol Residents

**Occupation data are drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) and reflect standard U.S. Census occupational categories. These data describe the occupations of Bristol residents rather than the location of employment. ACS estimates indicate that nearly half of Bristol's employed residents work in management, business, science, and arts occupations, with an additional 22 percent employed in sales and office roles. This occupational profile reflects a highly skilled,**

largely white-collar workforce that is closely tied to regional employment centers and professional industries.

While the accompanying chart presents a snapshot of occupational distribution in 2023, comparative ACS data show that between 2013 and 2023 Bristol experienced a gradual shift toward higher-skill professional and managerial occupations among residents, consistent with broader regional and national labor market trends.




| - | Bristol | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of Units | Average Employment | Total Wages |
| Total Private & Government | 870 | 7,600 | 425,429,708 |
| Total Private Only | 854 | 6,459 | 355,790,567 |
| - | - | - | - |
| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting | 1 | * | * |
| Mining | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Utilities | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Construction | 96 | 404 | 27,494,150 |
| Manufacturing | 49 | 912 | 59,911,312 |
| Wholesale Trade | 82 | 188 | 19,941,409 |
| Retail Trade | 55 | 609 | 24,535,556 |
| Transportation & Warehousing | 5 | 7 | 448,533 |
| Information | 36 | 50 | 4,130,393 |
| Finance & Insurance | 31 | 141 | 12,092,950 |
| Real Estate & Rental & Leasing | 25 | 68 | 3,641,895 |
| Professional & Technical Services | 159 | 285 | 27,611,563 |
| Management of Companies & Enterprises | 2 | * | * |
| Administrative Support & Waste Mngmnt. | 50 | 225 | 12,622,043 |
| Educational Services | 25 | 1,356 | 78,734,589 |
| Health Care & Social Assistance | 72 | 728 | 38,466,041 |
| Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation | 19 | 206 | 5,660,234 |
| Accommodation & Food Services | 64 | 952 | 27,209,454 |
| Other services (except Public Administration) | 84 | 308 | 12,248,507 |
| Unclassified Establishments | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| - | - | - | - |
| Government | 16 | 1,141 | 69,639,141 |

Source: RIDLT, Quarterly Census of U.I.- Covered Employment and Wages, City and Town Report, 2022 AnnualData compiled May 2023, subject to revision.
* Some data are not shown due to the possibility of identifying data of a specific employer.

** Statewide - employment in multiple towns, at unknown locations, or outside RI.
Data compiled May 2025, subject to revision.

INSERT ADDITIONAL BRISTOL ECONOMIC DATA

## Industry Profiles

Bristol's economy includes a mix of long-standing industries and emerging sectors shaped by the Town's coastal location, institutional presence, and quality of life. Employment is distributed across multiple sectors, each contributing to year-round economic activity and community stability.

Marine trades and advanced manufacturing are a foundational part of Bristol's economic base. Local firms produce composites, specialty equipment, and provide naval architecture and marine engineering services. These businesses benefit from access to Bristol Harbor, proximity to a working waterfront, and connections to Roger Williams University's marine science and engineering

programs. Together, these assets support skilled employment and link Bristol to Rhode Island's growing blue-economy sector.

Tourism, hospitality, and cultural industries play a significant role in Bristol's local economy. The historic downtown, waterfront amenities, museums, and cultural venues attract visitors throughout the year. Festivals, concerts, and heritage events help extend the tourism season and support local shops, restaurants, and service businesses.

Higher education, health care, and social assistance represent major employment sectors in Bristol. Roger Williams University is the Town's largest employer, providing a substantial number of jobs directly through academic, research, administrative, and facilities positions. Health care and institutional employers, including Bristol Medical Center and the State Veterans Home, also provide stable, year-round employment and serve local and regional populations.

Professional and technical services continue to grow in Bristol. Small firms in engineering, architecture, information technology, consulting, and design are supported by the Town's quality of life and accessibility to regional markets.

The Blue Economy

The blue economy, defined by the State as the sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources to support economic activity and employment, is an established and growing sector in Bristol. As a coastal community with an active working waterfront, marine trades, research capacity, and advanced manufacturing space, Bristol is well positioned to support this sector as part of Rhode Island's broader blue-economy strategy.

Bristol's blue economy includes both traditional maritime industries and emerging ocean-technology activities. Marine trades and boatyards at Bristol Harbor support year-round economic activity and maintain essential working-waterfront functions. Roger Williams University contributes to the sector through marine science and engineering programs, applied research, and partnerships related to aquaculture, coastal resilience, and marine technology, while also serving as a major employer in these fields.

Recent state investment has reinforced Bristol's role in the blue economy, particularly at Unity Park, which has emerged as a center for ocean-technology manufacturing and research. State incentives totaling approximately $2.68 million have supported redevelopment at Unity Park, and a $4 million Innovation Campus grant has been awarded for the Blue Robotics Lab. The Herreshoff Marine Museum has also received state funding to expand facilities supporting marine-industry testing, education, and innovation.

Bristol's blue economy is characterized by a diverse mix of marine trades, naval architecture and engineering, marine fabrication, clean-energy and climate-resilience firms, and ocean-technology manufacturers. The concentration of these activities supports collaboration across research, testing, manufacturing, and commercialization and reinforces Bristol's role as a regional hub within the State's blue-economy network.

~~INDUSTRY PROFILES~~

~~Bristol's diverse economy includes both long-standing industries and emerging sectors:~~

~~**Marine Trades & Advanced Manufacturing**~~

~~Bristol is home to skilled manufacturers producing composites, specialty equipment, and naval architecture services. These industries benefit from access to Bristol Harbor, RWU's marine and engineering programs, and the growing blue-economy cluster in Bristol (described in more detail in the section below).~~

~~**Tourism, Hospitality & Cultural Industries**~~

~~Historic downtown, waterfront amenities, and cultural venues contribute to a robust visitor economy. Year-round programming—festivals, regattas, concerts, and heritage events—extends the tourism season and supports local businesses.~~

~~**Higher Education & Research**~~

~~Roger Williams University is a major employer and innovation driver. Collaborations with the Town and private sector support internships, applied research, planning and design services, and emerging blue-tech initiatives.~~

~~**Professional & Technical Services**~~

~~Small professional firmsincluding engineering, architecture, IT, consulting, and designrepresent an expanding sector driven by remote/hybrid work and Bristol's high quality of life.~~

~~**Health Care & Social Assistance**~~

~~Local medical practices, outpatient facilities, and senior-care providers meet regional needs and support a steady employment base.~~

~~**The Blue Economy**~~

~~The blue economy, defined by the State as the sustainable use of the ocean and Rhode Island's water assets to create a resilient economy with good-paying jobs, is an area where the state has long been a national leader. Industries contributing to the blue economy include ports and shipping, tourism and recreation, offshore renewable energy, marine trades, aquaculture and fisheries, seafood processing, and defense. Statewide studies estimate that blue-economy sectors account for a significant share of Rhode Island jobs and economic output, reflecting the importance of ocean-related activity to the state's overall prosperity.~~

~~As a coastal community with a deep maritime heritage, Bristol plays a meaningful role in this statewide blue economy. Bristol Harbor has historically supported shipbuilding, repair, and commercial maritime activity and continues to host full-service marine trades and boatyards, such as Bristol Marine, that provide skilled jobs and year-round economic activity. Roger Williams University further anchors Bristol in the blue economy through its waterfront campus, marine science facilities, and programs such as the Center for Economic and Environmental Development and the emerging Blue Solutions Institute, which support marine research, aquaculture, coastal resilience, and blue-tech entrepreneurship.~~

~~The Herreshoff Marine Museum in Bristol recently received a $59,000 innovation grant from the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation to expand its capacity for marine-industry testing and commercialization of ocean technologies.~~

~~Meanwhile, the redevelopment of Unity Park has become a major hub for the state's blue economy initiative; the state awarded it approximately $2.68 million in tax credits and sales-tax rebates to support adaptive reuse and manufacturing space for ocean-technology firms.~~

~~In June 2025 the state announced a $9.7 million award under the Innovation Campus Initiative for two campuses, including a $4 million grant for the "Blue Robotics Lab" at Unity Park to accelerate undersea robotics commercialization.~~

~~Expanding and attracting additional businesses to Bristol that support the growing blue economy—such as marine trades, aquaculture and shellfish enterprises, marine technology and engineering firms, environmental and coastal consulting, and water-based tourism and recreation—is highly desirable and offers significant potential to add jobs to the local economy. Aligning local land use, workforce partnerships, and waterfront planning with the State's blue-economy strategies positions Bristol to capture a larger share of this growth in the coming decade.~~

~~**Table EC1. Representative Blue-Economy Firms in Bristol (2025)**~~

| ~~Firm / Institution~~ | ~~Location~~ | ~~Blue-Economy Segment~~ | ~~Notes~~ |
|---|---|---|---|
| ~~Flux Marine~~ | ~~Unity Park~~ | ~~Electric propulsion; marine technology; advanced manufacturing~~ | ~~Designs and manufactures high-performance electric outboard motors; recognized statewide as a leading blue-economy innovator.~~ |
| ~~Saab, Inc. – Autonomous & Undersea Systems~~ | ~~Unity Park~~ | ~~Autonomous underwater vehicles; defense; ocean technology~~ | ~~Establishing major AUV manufacturing and testing facility; supported by state incentives; cornerstone tenant of Bristol's blue-economy hub.~~ |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sea Legs | Unity Park | Amphibious marine mobility | Provides amphibious craft technology; part of growing ocean-tech cluster at Unity Park. |
| Endurance Clean Energy | Unity Park | Clean energy; climate resilience; blue/green tech | Develops clean-energy and storage projects; complements marine and blue-economy innovation at Unity Park. |
| Herreshoff Marine Museum & America's Cup Hall of Fame | Burnside St. /Bristol Harbor | Maritime heritage; sailing; workforce development; ocean-tech partnerships | Hosts sailing, composites, and marine programs; securing grants for marine innovation space and water-access testing facilities. |
| Bristol Marine (Wardwell Boatyard) | Bristol Harbor | Marine trades; boatbuilding and repair; working waterfront | Full-service boatyard providing repair, refit, and haul-out services; anchors Bristol's working waterfront economy. |
| Bristol Harbor Group, Inc. | Bristol Harbor / 99 Poppasquash Road | Naval architecture; marine engineering | Designs and engineers commercial vessels and advanced hull types; regional leader in marine design services. |
| Zim Sailing | Ballou Blvd. | Sailing equipment; marine manufacturing | Designs and distributes performance dinghies; supports competitive and |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ~~recreational sailing markets.~~ |
| ~~Kinder Industries~~ | ~~Wood Street~~ | ~~Marine fabrication; canvas and enclosures~~ | ~~Provides custom marine covers, enclosures, and fabric products for recreational and competitive boats.~~ |
| ~~Quantum Sails – Bristol Loft~~ | ~~Tupelo Street~~ | ~~Sailmaking; performance sailing services~~ | ~~Designs and repairs sails for cruisers and racing vessels; reinforces Bristol's role in the sailing and marine-services sector.~~ |

## Public Input on Economic Development

Public input from workshops emphasized the importance of supporting economic growth while preserving Bristol's historic character and coastal identity. Participants expressed strong support for reinvestment in local businesses and underutilized properties, paired with a desire to maintain the Town's walkable downtown, working waterfront, and cultural assets.

Residents highlighted the need to diversify the business base and continue supporting small, locally owned establishments, noting that Bristol's waterfront and historic resources provide opportunities to strengthen the economy if growth remains compatible with neighborhood character. Overall, community feedback reflected optimism about Bristol's economic future and a shared interest in balanced growth that expands opportunities while reinforcing the Town's sense of place.

### Economic Development Programs and Partners

*Bristol's economic development efforts are supported through a combination of local incentive programs, partnerships with business and tourism organizations, regional collaboration, and state and federal resources. Together, these programs and partners help support business investment, strengthen the visitor economy, and enhance the Town's long-term economic resilience.*

*Tax Stabilization*

The Town offers a Commercial Tax Stabilization Program to support new construction and rehabilitation investment by allowing a phased property tax arrangement for qualifying projects. This incentive is intended to improve Bristol's competitiveness for business location and reinvestment, particularly for projects exceeding capital investment thresholds. This program is established under Town Ordinance Chapter 27, Section 27.5

Community Facilities Grant / Rogers Free Library

Rogers Free Library is undergoing a series of capital improvements supported by a $1.75 million Community Facilities Grant awarded to the Town of Bristol through the United States Treasury and administered by the Rhode Island Pandemic Recovery Office. The grant program is intended to support community facilities that enable work, education, and health monitoring. Bristol's project includes both building system upgrades and new public-facing amenities, such as updated equipment, flexible work and study areas, private rooms with technology access, and a publicly accessible maker space. These improvements expand the Library's capacity to provide technology access, space for remote work and learning, skills development resources, and community programs, serving residents town-wide and supporting a range of educational and workforce-related activities.

Learn365RI

Bristol participates in Learn365RI, a statewide initiative administered by the Rhode Island Department of Education that supports expanded out-of-school learning opportunities. The Town signed the Learn365RI Municipal Compact in 2023 and partners with local organizations to provide programming that builds academic skills, digital literacy, and readiness for future employment. In Bristol, Learn365-supported activities have included tutoring and enrichment programs

~~*Ready, Set, Rhody*~~

~~The Town was selected for the Ready, Set, Rhody initiative, a statewide program supporting climate and infrastructure resilience in vulnerable commercial districts. Through this effort, Bristol's Thames Street district will receive a state-funded vulnerability assessment to identify flooding, storm surge, and infrastructure risks that could affect businesses. Participation in this program positions the Town to pursue targeted improvements that strengthen downtown's long-term economic health and protect local businesses from climate-related disruptions.~~

*Explore Bristol*

Explore Bristol serves as the Town's primary partner for tourism promotion and visitor information. The organization markets local businesses, cultural assets, and community events through coordinated outreach and branding. Its work supports Bristol's small-business community by helping direct visitors to downtown shops, restaurants, and attractions. Continued collaboration with Explore Bristol can assist the Town in maintaining a steady visitor economy and reinforcing the visibility of local destinations.

*Bristol Merchants Association*

The Bristol Merchants Association (BMA) is a volunteer organization that supports local businesses through communication, networking, and coordinated promotional efforts. The group helps share information among merchants, collaborates on seasonal activities and special events, and provides a forum for discussing issues affecting the downtown and broader business community. The BMA's efforts complement the Town's economic development goals by fostering connections among local businesses and contributing to a cohesive commercial environment.

*East Bay Chamber of Commerce*

The East Bay Chamber of Commerce serves as a regional resource for businesses in Bristol, Warren, and Barrington. The Chamber provides networking opportunities, business education, advocacy, and promotional support for local enterprises. It also assists with small-business development, workforce connections, and regional marketing initiatives. The Chamber's programs complement the Town's economic development efforts by offering services that help strengthen local businesses and support a coordinated economic identity for the East Bay region.

*Bristol Fourth of July Committee*

Bristol's Fourth of July Committee, a local Town committee, plays a significant role in the local economy by organizing the month-long celebration that draws tens of thousands of visitors each year. The Committee's activities—including parades, concerts, fireworks, and community events—generate the busiest economic period of the year for many local businesses. Coordination among the Town, the Committee, and economic development partners is essential to ensure that public safety, parking, transportation, signage, and visitor services effectively support both residents and businesses during peak periods. Strategic planning with the Committee can help maximize the economic benefits of this signature event while maintaining the traditions and character that define Bristol's identity.

*East Bay Chamber of Commerce*

The East Bay Chamber of Commerce serves as a regional resource for businesses in Bristol, Warren, and Barrington. The Chamber provides networking opportunities, business education, advocacy, and promotional support, and assists with small-business development, workforce connections, and regional marketing initiatives. Its programs complement Bristol's economic development efforts by supporting local businesses and reinforcing a coordinated economic identity across the East Bay region.

*State and Federal Resources*

Bristol businesses also have access to a range of state and federal programs that support business development, financing, technical assistance, and workforce growth. Key resources include Commerce Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Small Business Development Center, and the U.S. Small Business Administration, which offer loan programs, counseling services, and technical assistance to support start-up, expansion, and resilience planning for local businesses.