RHODE ISLAND'S 2030 BLUE ECONOMY ACTION PLAN

Presented by

Grow Blue

THE BLUE ECONOMY PARTNERSHIP FOR RHODE ISLAND

2025 Update

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The Blue Economy can bring both economic prosperity and environmental protection for coastal areas.

Cover photo by Beau Jones: Waterfront business and seaport, Warren Rhode Island,

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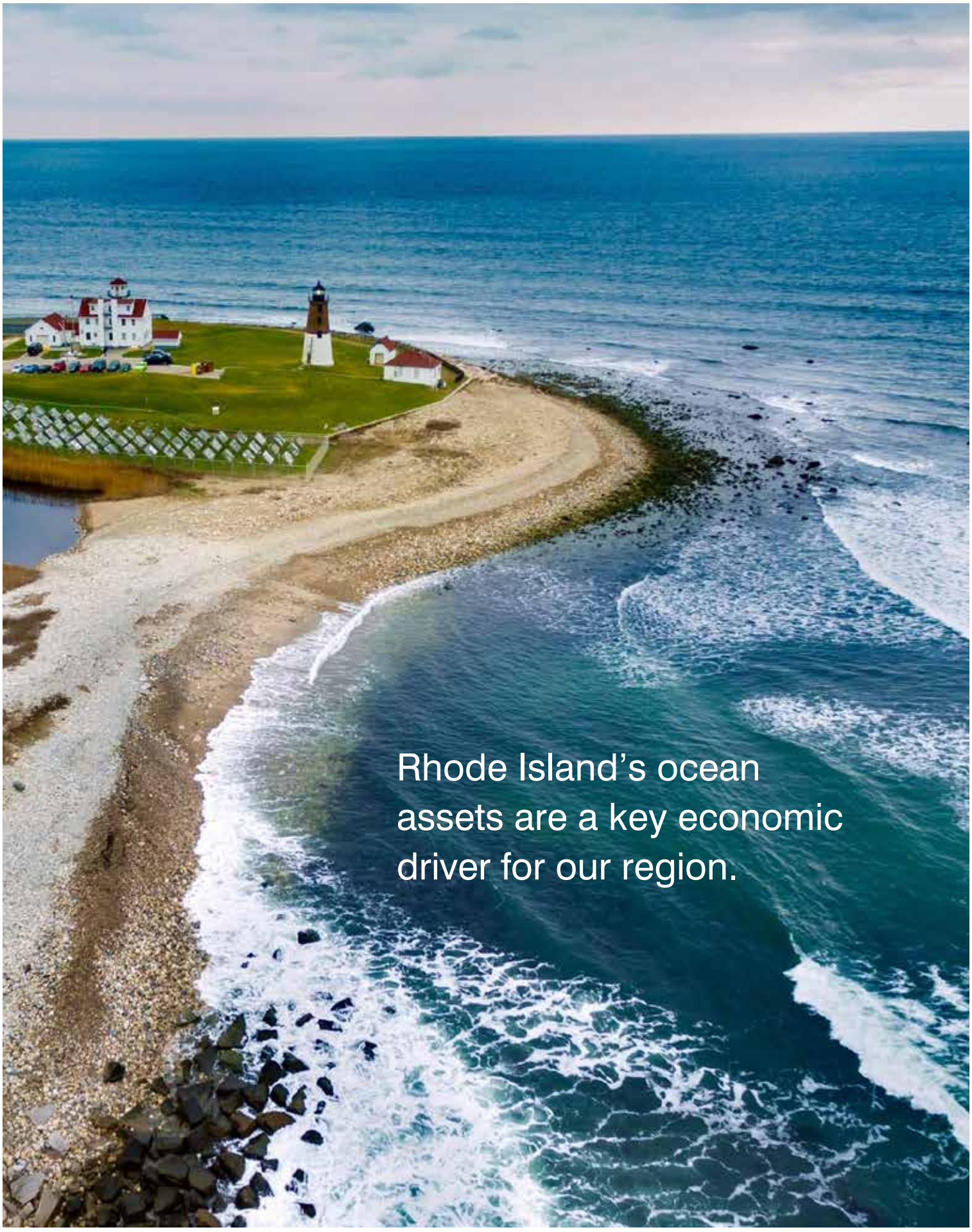
Photo of Coastal Erosion study by Beau Jones for URI's *Momentum: Research and Innovation* magazine

THE BLUE ECONOMY IS AT ONCE BOTH A LEGACY ECONOMIC DRIVER, EMPLOYING MORE THAN 36,500, AND AN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY OF THE FUTURE.



Point Judith Lighthouse, Narragansett, RI

FORWARD

GROW BLUE UPDATE

2023-2025

Rhode Island's ocean assets are a key economic driver for our region. In 2023, the Grow Blue Action Plan called for a coordinated effort across industry, labor, government, higher education, non-profit institutions and community advocates to support growth in this sector through strengthened advocacy, advancements in workforce development, accelerated commercial growth and improvements to our infrastructure. **Our goal was to double the Blue Economy within 10 years by significantly adding jobs and increasing the annual GDP. The Plan includes sixteen strategic steps across three areas to reach this goal.** While there is still much to accomplish, great strides have been made over the past two years to reach this ambitious achievement through accomplishments in **Workforce Development, Business Growth & Investment and Infrastructure.** Following is a sampling of the stories illustrating the powerful momentum that is building on historical assets and emerging sectors to drive growth and change to make Rhode Island a powerhouse of the Blue Economy.

THE BLUE ECONOMY IS THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE OCEAN AND OUR WATER ASSETS TO CREATE A RESILIENT ECONOMY AND GOOD PAYING JOBS

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholders convened by the "2030 Grow Blue Action Plan" believed that building the talent pipeline needed for the blue economy includes both upskilling existing workers and preparing new entrants by creating pathways to high-paying, high demand jobs in areas such as ocean robotics, sensors, advanced materials, composites, and advanced manufacturing industries.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Through efforts that bring together critical stakeholders from industry, higher education, labor organizations, non profits and government, following are examples of significant progress that has been made to this end.

In January 2025, a $3.8 million federal grant via the Good Jobs Challenge to the University of Rhode Island Research Foundation's "Ocean Tech Works" project will help meet the demands of ocean-based technology companies and their extensive supply chains.

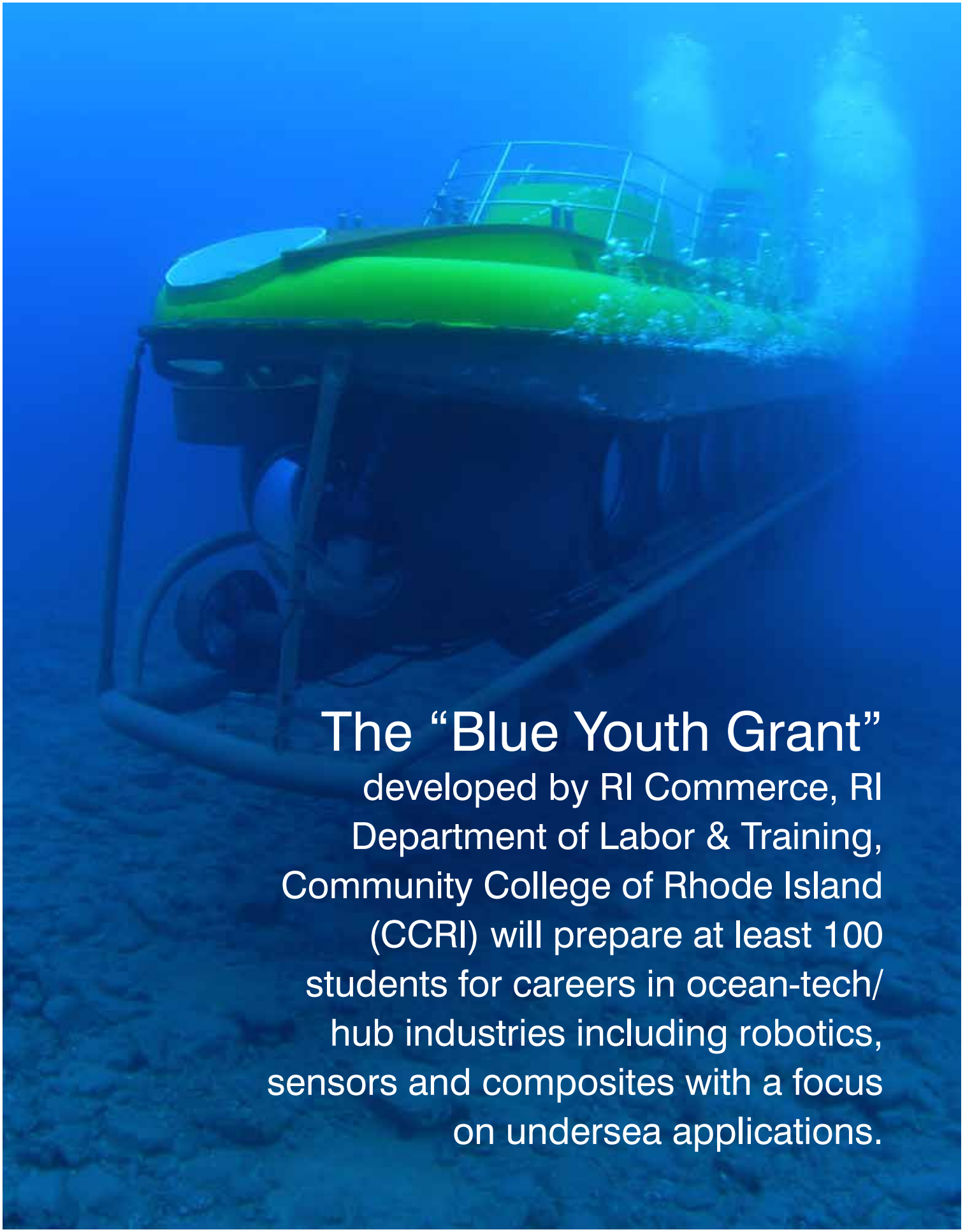
IN JANUARY 2025, A $3.8 MILLION FEDERAL GRANT VIA THE GOOD JOBS CHALLENGE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND RESEARCH FOUNDATION'S "OCEAN TECH WORKS" PROJECT WILL HELP MEET THE DEMANDS OF OCEAN-BASED TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES AND THEIR EXTENSIVE SUPPLY CHAINS.

The "Blue Youth Grant" developed by RI Commerce, RI Department of Labor & Training, Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) will prepare at least 100 students for careers in ocean-tech/hub industries including robotics, sensors and composites with a focus on undersea applications. This funding will establish partnerships and develop coursework that will increase student interest and skills in careers that support industries that are critical to the success of the Ocean Tech Hub.

On the URI Narragansett Bay Campus, a professional aquaculture training course is helping participants who already have a foundational understanding of aquaculture expand their knowledge of industry best practices, business strategy, and sustainable operations. Also at URI, the Bridge to Ocean Exploration Program developed and managed by URI's Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute, provides students at the Community College of Rhode Island with valuable experience working alongside URI graduate students, professors, and industry professionals.

At Roger Williams University an interdisciplinary marine science and business course has been introduced where students can explore issues like climate change, water scarcity, marine pollution, and food insecurity and design market-ready products or services to meet these challenges.

Labor unions are also introducing new training for blue jobs. Workers seeking a Global Wind Organization (GWO) training certificate which provides the specialized safety credentials required for working offshore can complete a Basic Safety Training at the state's only certified offshore wind safety training center located at the Community College of Rhode Island's Lincoln Campus. And the Rhode Island Building and Construction Trades Council has partnered with Ørsted as they construct the Revolution Wind project under an all-union project labor agreement.



The “Blue Youth Grant”

developed by RI Commerce, RI Department of Labor & Training, Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) will prepare at least 100 students for careers in ocean-tech/ hub industries including robotics, sensors and composites with a focus on undersea applications.

BUSINESS GROWTH AND INVESTMENT

Stakeholders agreed that a supportive network of organizations focused on the needs of blue economy companies which could quickly connect these companies to each other and to vital resources was imperative for the future growth and success of this sector.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

The designation by the US Department of Commerce as an Ocean Tech Hub (OTH) has created a pathway to cultivate, attract and support the next generation of entrepreneurs that can grow right here in the region. The OTH is bringing together top academics, industry leaders, government officials, and hundreds of other stakeholders across Southeastern New England with a unified goal of further growing its reputation as a global powerhouse for undersea innovation and the development, advancement, and commercialization of ocean technologies. This designation and the accompanying funding are enabling the OTH to build momentum, strengthen the consortium, and continue the development of a globally competitive regional industry rooted in the next generation of ocean technology - from undersea autonomous vehicles, to state-of-the-art robotics, and advanced materials and composites.

Additional private investments and state support through the RI Commerce Corporation have also bolstered this sector. Over the past few years, the ecosystem has enabled the expansion of a number of companies with new ventures joining legacy ones in selecting Rhode Island as a base for the development and production of innovative ocean technologies. Following are some examples of achievements in this category.

Anduril launched a new 150,000 square-foot manufacturing facility in Quonset. The new site will support the production of cutting-edge unmanned underwater vehicles, bringing 100 new jobs to our state over the next four years. Spanning up to 150,000 square feet, the $8.3 million new production facility will focus on developing autonomous maritime systems and technologies, including Anduril's large-scale production of autonomous Large Diameter Unmanned Underwater Vehicles and Extra Large Unmanned Underwater Vehicles.

Blount Boats delivered the first offshore crew vehicle built in Rhode Island. The 100-foot ship Gripper took two years to build and will be used by American Offshore Services to carry about 20 technicians to the 65-turbine wind farm being constructed off the coast of Rhode Island by Orsted and Eversource. Local companies provided vessel components including electronics, engines, cranes, aluminum, safety equipment and more.

Regent Craft celebrated the groundbreaking of the world's first Seaglider Manufacturing Facility, marking a pivotal moment in REGENT's history and a critical step toward transforming transportation for coastal communities around the globe. Coming online in 2026, the 255,000 square-foot facility located in the Quonset Business Park will house seaglider component

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, THIS ECOSYSTEM HAS ENABLED THE EXPANSION OF A NUMBER OF COMPANIES WITH NEW VENTURES JOINING LEGACY ONES IN SELECTING RHODE ISLAND AS A BASE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF INNOVATIVE OCEAN TECHNOLOGIES.

Blount Boats, Eddie Somers Vessle

manufacturing, vehicle final assembly, and pre-delivery testing for Regent's 12-passenger Viceroy seaglider.

VATN Systems, a leading defense technology company that builds self-driving underwater vehicles for the U.S. Military and allies, has opened a new manufacturing facility in Bristol, Rhode Island at Unity Park to produce the innovative AUV-torpedo product line the Skelmir S12. The new facility leverages patent-pending modular design and vertical integration techniques, enabling rapid production at a scale previously unseen in the underwater vehicle market. The production of 2,000 vehicles annually will be the highest capacity production site for autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) in the country and reinforces Rhode Island's position as a leader in the Blue Economy.

Saab which currently has R&D offices in Cranston will join VATN at Unity Park in a new state-of-the-art manufacturing facility to produce advanced, unmanned underwater vehicles and anti-submarine warfare training targets for the US Navy.

Three ocean focused businesses received Innovation Vouchers from the RI Commerce Corporation to fund research and development. The recipients include Crewless Marine Acoustics, LLC which will develop and manufacture an affordable hydrophone sensor with acoustic data fusion software, Electro Standards Laboratory, Inc. which will prototype the EtherCap, a broadband network switch with integrated supercapacitor power backup and VATN Systems, Inc. which will advance wireless charging systems for autonomous underwater vehicles.

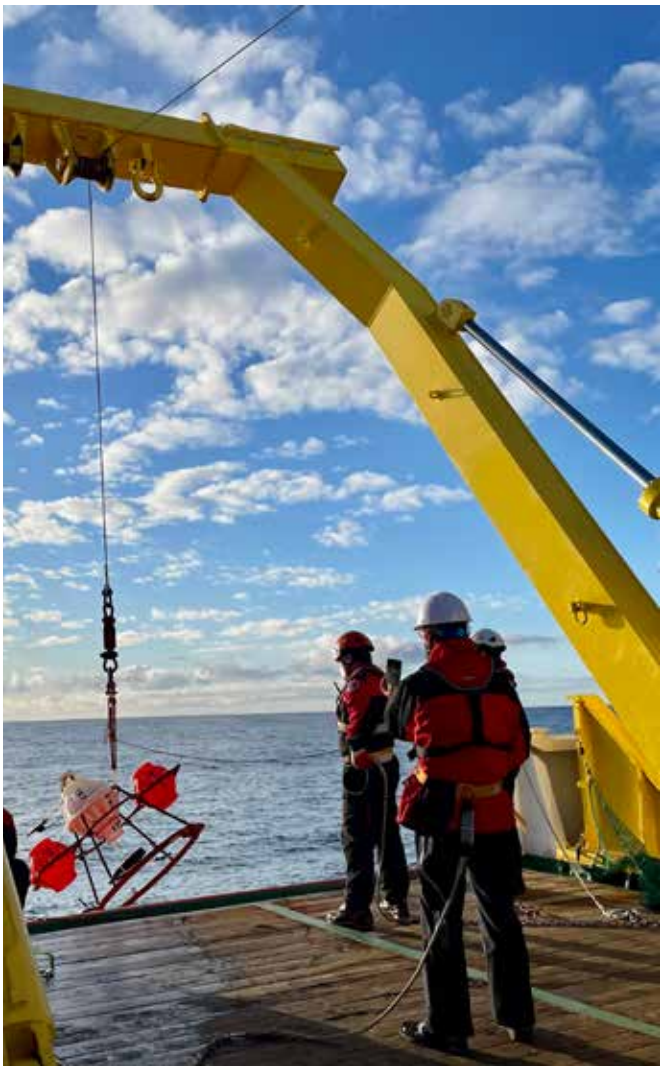
Blue Tide, an initiative of 401 Tech Bridge, held events in August of 2024 and 2025 at Newport's Fort Adams to showcase the latest groundbreaking advancements and a wide range of dual use technologies across the undersea, defense and national security space. The demonstrations highlighted not only innovative in-water solutions but also the real potential for impact as these solutions move forward. Simultaneously, companies competed in a Navy designed in-water prize challenge mission focused on technology for monitoring and protecting critical undersea infrastructure.

As part of RI Start Up Week, the Newport Investor Summit hosted guests from around the world celebrating the powerful tradition of American innovation built on the fusion of creativity and capital. A Blue Innovation track was included in the pitches.

Future funding is also being pursued. NSPIRE, The New England Seafood Partnership for Innovations, Research and Engagement, led by Marta Gomez Chiarri at the University of Rhode Island, is a consortium of more than 50 partner organizations from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maine and New Hampshire selected by the National Science Foundation as a candidate for up to $160 million to support technological innovation, workforce development, and sustainability in the seafood industry.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESS

A variety of critical infrastructures and assets support Rhode Island's blue economy, none more so than working waterfronts. Blue Economy stakeholders believed a critical step towards a stronger sector is seeking opportunities for growth, optimization and an equitable distribution across different industries and users. Community members also called for enhanced collaboration for bringing new products to market through the creation of a physical hub for blue economy Research & Development in partnership with industry officials and higher education institutions.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

In 2024, the URI Research Foundation revitalized the Ocean Technology Center (OTC), a 10K square foot mixed-use facility on the URI Narragansett Bay Campus. The OTC was originally built in 1998 as a Slater Technology Center but over the years repurposed to house various programs. The Center has returned to its original purpose as a hub for the development of new technologies and for innovation and entrepreneurship. The OTC offers collaboration, prototyping, fabrication and meeting space where students, faculty and entrepreneurs can develop new products and gain access to cutting edge equipment and space on flexible terms. A Maker Space at the OTC provides a wide range of prototyping tools and flexible manufacturing space.

Revitalization of this space has led to the award of an Innovation Campus bond grant to support construction of a permanent Blue Technology Innovation Center (BTIC) adjacent to URI's Ocean Engineering Complex. This Center will expand on the success of the current prototype to leverage URI's deep research strengths and robust industry collaboration. The new space will accelerate the commercialization of technology developed at URI as well as foster deeper industry relationships with the university and access to URI's best-in-class testing facilities on its Bay Campus.

In the East Bay, the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the Bristol Industrial Park has created Unity Park, a hub for the ocean technology sector. Tenants such as Flux Marine (electric propulsion systems), VATN (autonomous underwater vehicles), Deep Blue Composites (advanced material technology), Sea Legs North America (amphibious boats), Saab International (developer of autonomous and undersea systems) and KVH Industries, Inc. (integrated communications for sea and shore) provide high-tech, cutting-edge professional jobs.

QDC Quonset Business Park is a critical economic engine for the region's blue economy with 2024 seeing continued growth at this key facility. The Park is home to more than 14,000 jobs at 239 companies across nearly every sector of the economy, including nearly one of every five manufacturing jobs in Rhode Island. Recently QDC opened a flex industrial campus serving Rhode Island startups and small businesses, began construction on the first new pier to be built at Quonset in nearly 70 years, renovated and reopened Pier 1to marine traffic adding another 50 years to the pier's service life and completed three major railroad infrastructure upgrades throughout the Business Park.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) has selected Newport RI for its newest hub, a Marine Operations Center – Atlantic (MOC-A). The new shoreside facility will support 200 jobs, be used to coordinate ships in the Atlantic Ocean and Great Lakes and will be the homeport of NOAA's flagship research vessels. It will also feature a pier, floating dock, warehouse and space for ship repairs. Locating the Center in Newport will provide increased opportunities for collaboration of players in the blue economy including industry, government and academic institutions.

The facility is set to open in 2027.

The Ocean Technology Center has returned to its original purpose as a hub for the development of new technologies and for innovation and entrepreneurship.

"Various Blue Economy industry sectors are creating good jobs for a range of skill levels and can be Rhode Island's path to equitable economic opportunity."

Flux Marine demonstrates one of the company's batter-powered outboard motors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rhode Island's Leadership Moment in the Blue Economy

Rhode Islanders have long benefited from their proximity to the ocean and numerous waterways. The next two to three years can be a time of critical inflection when the community moves from an opportunistic use of these assets to a strategic leadership approach, from a disconnected distribution of economic impact to securing equitable prosperity for individuals across the state with an emphasis on historically marginalized populations.

Known as the Ocean State, Rhode Island, and its leaders, should focus on their strengths in the Blue Economy sector rather than being caught in the endless introduction of "the next big economic development opportunity." **The Blue Economy is the big economic development opportunity**. The Blue Economy is at once both a legacy economic driver, employing more than 36,500, and an economic opportunity of the future. This opportunity takes advantage of the state's longstanding assets and infrastructure, while focusing on inclusive stakeholder-led strategies and on actions that welcome all.

To date, much activity occurs in this sector, but it is under-resourced, disjointed, and at times conflicting due to a lack of coordination. This weakens Rhode Island's position in the regional, national, and global market. With sustained and properly resourced leadership, Rhode Island can scale its existing activities and provide immediate impact for thousands of the state's residents.

Worldwide, economic and political leaders recognize that the Blue Economy is poised for growth. From renewable energy to increased food opportunities, from systems innovation to adaptation and resilience in the face of climate change, the Blue Economy can bring both economic prosperity and environmental protection for coastal areas. Various Blue Economy industry sectors are creating good jobs for a range of skill levels and can be Rhode Island's path to equitable economic opportunity.

This Blue Economy Action Plan identifies sixteen specific actions, drawn from thoughts shared by a broad range of community partners, that Rhode Island can take to claim its leadership position in this emerging sector. It also identifies the need for a coordinated effort going forward and advocates for the creation of a Blue Economy Partnership.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Blue Economy Partnership Project Core Team

The Core Team, which included 32 industry stakeholders, served as the advisory body over this strategic planning effort. The team convened 4 times throughout the project to establish goals, drive forward recommendations, and refine the plan's final recommendations. The team was funded in part by the RI Blue Economy Tech Cluster's (RI BETC's) Build Back Better Phase 1 award, and formed as an expansion of the initial working group body of the 2022 Build Back Better Regional Challenge Phase 2 Grant application.

CORE **TEAM MEMBERS**

Paula Bontempi – *University of Rhode Island*
Eric Brine – *401 Tech Bridge*
Drew Carey – *Inspire Environmental*
Christian Cowan – *URI Research Foundation dba Polaris*
Patrick Crowley – *AFL-CIO*
Susan Daly – *401 Tech Bridge*
Erin Donovan-Boyle – *Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce*
Brian Dursi – *Rhode Island Marine Trades Association*
Katharine Flynn, *University of Rhode Island*
Julietta Georgakis – *Commerce Rhode Island*
Tom Giordano – *Partnership for Rhode Island*
Bobby Gondola – *Community College of Rhode Island*
Terry Gray – *Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management*
Neil Hamel – *Ørsted*
Steve Heath – *FabNewport*
Adam Isaacs-Falbel – *Commerce Rhode Island*
Jason Kelly – *Moran Shipping*
Elizabeth Lynn – *VanBueren Charitable Foundation*
Wendy Mackie – *Two Bridges LLC*
Molly Donohue Magee – *SENEDIA*
Anthony Marchese – *University of Rhode Island*
Joe Masino – *Rhode Island Senate*
Jen McCann – *University of Rhode Island*
Oscar Mejias – *Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce*
Jim Miller – *University of Rhode Island*
Jim Owens – *Nautilus Defense*
Nina Pande – *Skills for Rhode Island's Future*
Alissa Peterson – *SeaAhead*
Tom Pearce –*Rhode Island Office of Postsecondary Commissioner*
Stephen Piper – *IBM*
Lisa Ranglin – *Rhode Island Black Business Association*
Pete Rumsey – *URI Research Foundation*
Chelsea Siefert – *Quonset Development Corporation*
Christine M.B. Smith – *URI Research Foundation*
Toby Stapleton – *Blue Venture Forum*
Jonathan Stone – *Save the Bay*
Brian Williams – *Roger Williams University*

Layout & Design by Krisanne Murray, Designroom.co

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BLUE ECONOMY **SPRINT TEAMS**

Sprint Teams served as community-focused ideation groups to create innovative solutions and action-items for the planning team to push forward into this Action Plan. Eight different Sprint Teams convened throughout the planning process, bringing forward opportunities, issues, ideas, and expertise. More than 250 people participated across these Sprint Team engagements in December 2022 and February 2023.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

During this project, the Grow Blue team also met individually with additional stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and organizations, who all had different levels of awareness of the blue economy. These discussions were listening sessions and opportunities to strategize ways to raise awareness of the economic development benefits for all Rhode Islanders. These discussions will help inform Grow Blue as we work with partners to develop inclusive community engagement strategies. This feedback will shape future outreach efforts, and we are grateful to each stakeholder for sharing their input and guidance and the time spent talking to our team members.

This report was funded by the US Economic Development Administration through a Phase 1 Build Back Better Regional Challenge planning grant.

The University of Rhode Island Research Foundation as recipient of this grant has been leading the State's Blue Economy-related efforts including commissioning this Blue Economy Action Plan. The URI Research Foundation promotes industry/academic collaboration and the development of new technology ventures to support economic growth and job creation in Rhode Island, the U.S., and the world. Peter Rumsey, Project Lead, RI Blue Economy Tech Cluster; Christian Cowan, Executive Director of URI Research Foundation dba Polaris; and Christine Smith, Editor of the 2030 Grow Blue Plan led this project.

Newport Waterfront, Rhode Island

Sailing Team, Newport Harbor, Rhode Island

We are grateful for additional support for this project from the following key partners:

PARTNERSHIP FOR RHODE ISLAND

The Partnership for Rhode Island is a nonprofit CEO roundtable made up of the state's largest employers and focused on initiatives in K-12 Education, Infrastructure, Workforce Development and Business & Investment Attraction.

THE RHODE ISLAND COMMERCE CORPORATION

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation works with public, private and nonprofit partners to create the conditions for businesses in all sectors to thrive and to improve the quality of life for our citizens by promoting the state's long-term economic health and prosperity. We offer business assistance, access to funding and red tape reduction for companies of all sizes.

Consulting support for the project was provided by the following:

RICH OVERMOYER, FOURTH ECONOMY CONSULTING

Fourth Economy is a national community and economic development consulting firm. Powered by a vision for an economy that serves the people, our approach is centered on principles of competitiveness, equity and resilience. We partner with communities and organizations, public and private, who are ready for change to equip them with the tools and innovative solutions to create strategic, resilient, and equitable communities and organizations.

RELE ABIADE, ONE RHODE CONSULTING

One Rhode Consulting provides strategic consulting services to businesses, non-profits, and government entities as they develop or expand projects, programs, and special initiatives. We specialize in deploying mission-driven strategies, encouraging collaboration, and convening diverse voices to achieve the best possible outcomes.

RALPH TAVARES, HUCKLE INCLUSIVE

Huckel Inclusive provides clients with strategic diversity and inclusion consulting services representing best practices and innovation from a highly-skilled team of change-makers harnessing practical experience and passion, with a specialty in LGBTQ+ topics. In addition to strategic consulting services, Huckel Inclusive is experienced in providing curriculum development for organizational change, workshop facilitation, executive coaching, and more.

GOALS

The URI Research Foundation (URIRF) convened and catalyzed this strategic planning effort in collaboration with coalition partners to complete the Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) Phase 1 planning efforts, leveraging the remarkable momentum developed during development of a BBBRC Phase 2 Grant BBBRC application. This strategic planning effort had two primary goals:

1. Define a growth strategy for RI's Blue Economy through a set of specific actions that RI stakeholders can take to advance Blue Economy opportunities and bridge gaps. Actions can take the form of program development, infrastructure building, wider community engagement, and policy/ regulatory asks - to name a few examples.

2. Explore the formation of a Blue Economy Partnership that leverages all of the energy and most importantly co-operation during the BBBRC process to create long-lasting organizational capacity to advance Blue Economy opportunities, be an advocate for the various component sectors, continue to convene community partners and advise Rhode Island's elected officials and stakeholders on the opportunities and needs for growth in this cluster.

Throughout this strategic planning effort, an overarching new goal for Rhode Island's Blue Economy emerged around forming a real economic opportunity for all that leverages existing funding streams, programs, and assets to:

- Drive a scalable economy backed with both internal and external momentum;
- Build a diverse industry base that creates commercial resilience and growth;
- Create a job market that represents opportunity for a diverse array of residents with job and career opportunities for all;
- Convene community members to ensure a comprehensive, strategic use of existing assets and partnerships;
- Develop a shared message of what the Blue Economy is and how it can achieve prosperity.

ACTIONS CAN TAKE THE FORM OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING, WIDER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND POLICY/ REGULATORY ASKS

Providence, Rhode Island Waterfront

Young oysters at *Salt Pond Oysters* in South Kingstown.

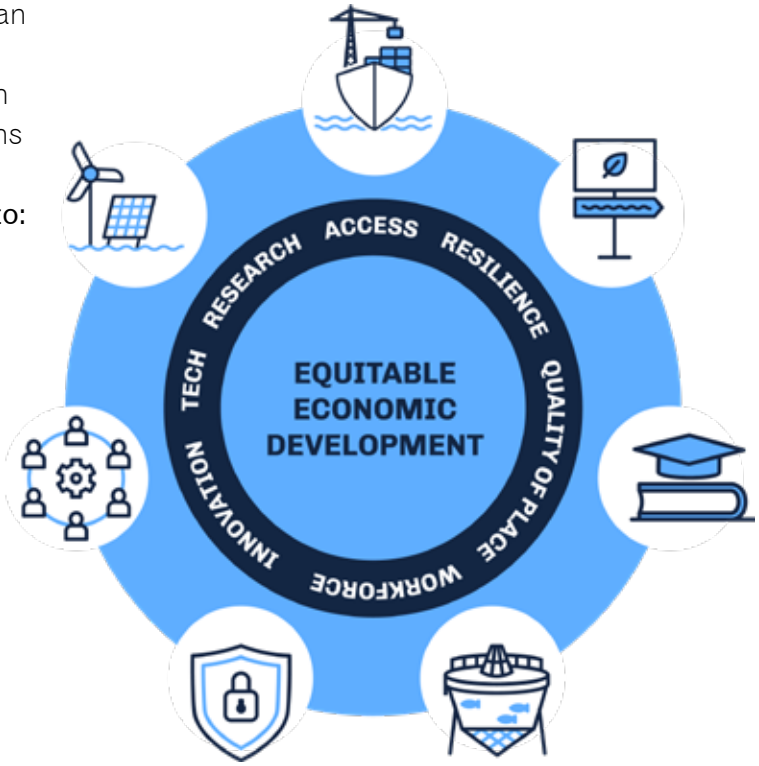
WHAT IS THE BLUE ECONOMY?

INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

With the ocean covering 71% of the Earth's surface, human life and commercial activity are inextricably linked to the water. The global ocean economy is worth over $2.5 trillion annually and growing according to a recent United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2021) Industries contributing to this impact include, but are not limited to:

- **PORTS AND SHIPPING**
- **TOURISM AND RECREATION**
- **OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY**
- **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**
- **AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES**
- **MARINE TRADES**
- **DEFENSE**

(Source: URI Coastal Resource Center, JMcCann)



United Nations Center on Trade and Development

With the ocean covering 71% of the Earth's surface, human life and commercial activity are inextricably linked to the water.

Newport Harbor, photo by Beau Jones

This large economic impact is often driven by industry clusters, or "geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field." In coastal areas across the US, Blue Economy industry clusters are driven by population and activity centers, robust natural assets, and critical infrastructure for commerce, R&D, and collaboration. Often supported by public-private partnerships and other authorities, industry clusters support local and state economies, drive innovative thinking, and position the US as a leader in Blue Economy activity alongside the likes of China, the European Union, and Mexico.

The US's Blue Economy continues to grow at a rate 2x faster than the national economy as a whole, presenting an opportunity for American coastal communities to continue capturing the growing market share of jobs, business, and general productivity. These businesses range from fishermen and conservation labs to innovative aquaculture researchers and offshore wind turbine producers. As America's Blue Economy clusters continue to compete and grow in tandem, geographic areas become increasingly impactful due to overall productivity and specializations in specific forms of research, production, and technology.

In Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, we define the Blue Economy as "the sustainable use of the ocean and our water assets to create a resilient economy and good paying jobs".

THIS BLUE ECONOMY INCLUDES, BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO:

- **The people working to build and maintain offshore wind turbines.**
- **The people sustainably fishing and harvesting food from the ocean.**
- **The people working to protect coastal communities from climate change.**
- **The people serving others as they experience our water-based recreational assets and communities.**
- **The people working in our defense sector to protect our citizens, coastlines and critical assets.**
- **The people working at our ports and those that support them.**
- **The people building boats as well as advanced manned and unmanned underwater vehicles.**

While Rhode Island has historically benefited from the ocean, we see an opportunity to act more strategically in this next chapter. The Blue Economy opportunity can be both economically impactful and inclusive if we execute a series of actions defined in the Action Plan.

Number of jobs in the Blue Economy across the US's Coastal Communities (2018).

BY THE NUMBERS

The total impact of the Rhode Island Blue Economy is estimated to be $5.2 billion and more than 36,500 jobs.

The table below defines the direct value and employment across aquaculture, defense, fisheries, marine trades and hotel and lodging. This definition includes federal data from the Economics: National Ocean Watch (ENOW) program gathered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), as well as data defined and gathered by Rhode Islanders in sectors with no significant overlap with federal data.

SECTOR	VALUE	JOBS	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Aquaculture	$6.95 million (farm gate)	222	Farm gate for shellfish aquaculture	CRMC 2021
Defense	$3.16 billion (direct effect)	16,011	Federally funded defense activities and industries.	SENEDIA 2017
Fisheries and Related (net of charter)	$151.5 million (direct effect)	2,965	Harvesting and processing capacity of the fishing industry, in addition to support businesses and organizations. No charter.	Sproul, T., personal communication, Nov. 5, 2019
Marine Trades	$1.45 billion (direct effect)	13,337	Boat building, repair, and retail industries, diving and marine construction industries, and select tourism and recreation industries, including charter.	Sproul 2018a, 2018b, 2018c
Hotels and Lodging (coastal communities)	$428 million (direct effect)	3,999	Hotel and lodging establishments located in Rhode Island zip codes adjacent to the coast.	
TOTAL	**$5.2 billion**	**36,534**		

McCann, J., Poli, S., Kennedy, S., O'Neill, E., Robadue, D., and Kotowicz, D. (2020). The Value of Rhode Island's Blue Economy. Coastal Resources Center and Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island.

THE BLUE ECONOMY IS AN IMPORTANT ECONOMIC DRIVER TO THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING JOB AND PRODUCTIVITY IMPACTS:

JOBS: Employment within the Blue Economy represents 5.7% of Rhode Island's overall employment – nearly twice the concentration of Blue Economy workers of Massachusetts, Connecticut, California, and Texas.

GDP: The Blue Economy is responsible for 8.8% of Rhode Island's overall gross domestic product (GDP).

PRODUCTIVITY: Because the Blue Economy contributes a higher share of state GDP (8.8%) than the employment share of Blue Economy workers (5.7%), Blue Economy jobs generate more economic impact than those of an average worker, "produc[ing] a higher value-add per employee than the economy as a whole."

McCann, J., Poli, S., Kennedy, S., O'Neill, E., Robadue, D., and Kotowicz, D. (2020). The Value of Rhode Island's Blue Economy. Coastal Resources Center and Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island.

GROW BLUE
THE BLUE ECONOMY PARTNERSHIP

The Grow Blue Partnership will serve in response to the feedback from more than 250 Rhode Islanders who have participated in the development of the Blue Economy Action Plan 2030 and advocated for a coordinated effort going forward. These blue economy actors shared their interest in having some entity support a variety of needed roles including:

- **COALITION BUILDING TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED COLLABORATION.**
- **CENTRALIZING RESOURCES AND PROVIDING PUBLIC ACCESS TO ALL.**
- **MARKETING RI'S BLUE ECONOMY ASSETS TO DIVERSE AUDIENCES.**
- **COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT THROUGH THE STATE AND ACROSS STATE LINES.**
- **PROVIDING A RESOURCE FOR GUIDING COMPETING PRIORITIES OR GAPS BETWEEN SECTORS.**

WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE?

Core partners deliberated and determined that a two-phase approach to launching the Grow Blue Partnership was the most optimal.

PHASE 1:

Grow Blue Partnership will launch with an independent Advisory Board and staffed as an initiative of the URI Research Foundation. The Advisory Board will include a diverse group of industry and community leaders representing the interests of all Rhode Islanders.

Launching an Advisory Board supported by the URI Research Foundation will require the Foundation to secure new funding in order to support a two-year effort to transition the initial Board into a new independent nonprofit organization for the future. These funds should support an estimated 2.5 FTE staffing level that will include a Project Lead, Coordinator and Communications/logistics support. They will also support the continued industry liaison role being led by the URI Coastal Resource Center.

PHASE 2:

The current plan envisions that the Grow Blue Partnership will evolve into a separate nonprofit organization. The establishment of a separate nonprofit organization will allow for an increased level of service and an increase in impact potential. Centralizing this work in a dedicated organization will allow for the eventual execution of some of the recommended actions that currently lack an existing lead organization and will take time to develop.

WHAT ARE THE VALUES?

- **DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE:** Ensure the opportunity to access Blue Economy benefits is available to all, with a recognition of the need to eliminate barriers, build trust, and listen to the input of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.
- **INTERDISCIPLINARY:** While taking pride in our "small state" status, our size requires us to foster collaboration and leverage resources in order to realize an oversized impact.
- **INTENTIONAL:** As we focus on connecting our communities with our Blue Economy assets and defined actions, we must work collaboratively to identify and pursue key resources from outside and within the state.
- **ADVOCACY:** The partnership will advocate for those individuals and organizations in the Blue Economy that do not have a centralized body to advocate for themselves.
- **BALANCE:** The Blue Economy provides many opportunities to balance economic prosperity with environmental protections and social justice.

WHAT DOES THE PARTNERSHIP DO?

In addition to the actions recommended in the Blue Economy Action Plan 2030, the Grow Blue Partnership will advance five key actions identified as opportunities and needs by community stakeholders.

1. Act in partnership with RI Commerce and Compete RI as a facilitator of information on upcoming and current funding opportunities from Federal, State and other entities.

2. Embed equity into Grow Blue communications, stakeholder and community involvement, and access with the goal of eliminating economic and social disparities.

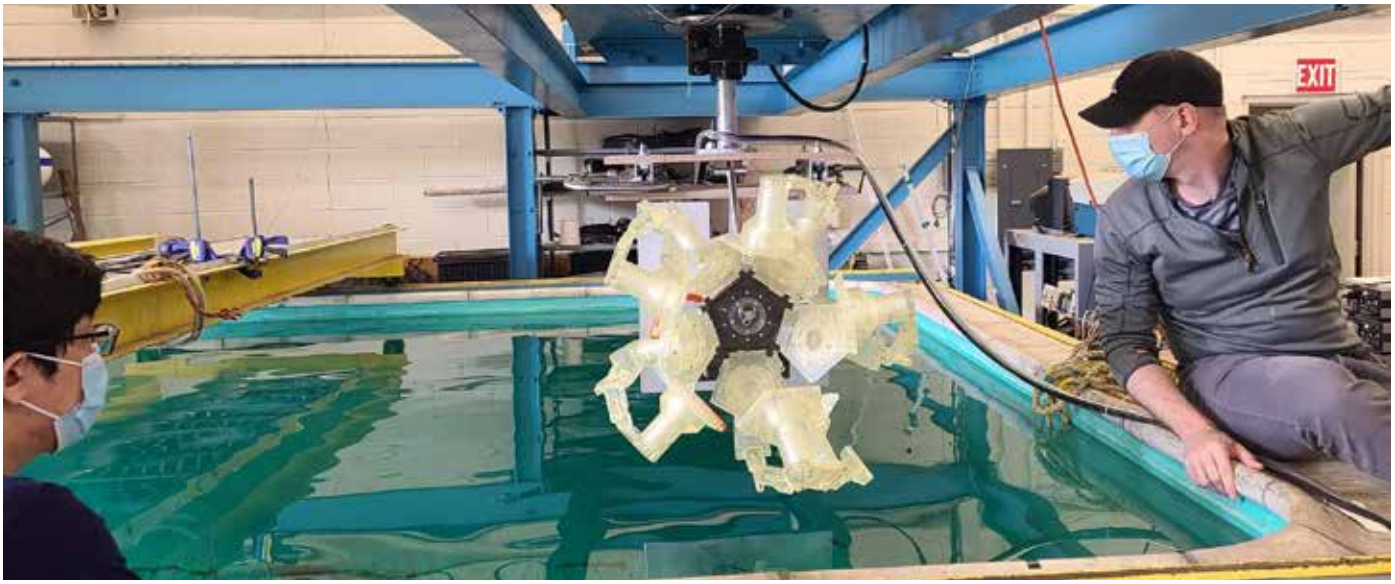
3. Serve as a network to centralize marketing and engagement efforts of the Blue Economy to expand our message from a local one to a national brand. Utilize this neutral organization to build trust and support throughout the state.

4. Identify and map all Blue Economy assets across the state and region. Provide them to the public as a resource to support collaboration. Identify the gaps to inform strategic planning efforts for the future.

5. Serve to identify and advise on cross-sector opportunities and intersections between efforts that can lead to greater economic and community impact.

GROW BLUE 2030

THE BLUE ECONOMY ACTION PLAN



WORKFORCE AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The industry sectors that comprise the Blue Economy employ 36k+ today and are poised for significant growth. The job opportunities in the Blue Economy will require a range of skill and education levels. Entry level jobs can support people early in their careers and people that are transitioning between sectors. In addition to new jobs being created, the sector needs replacement workers as many people are nearing retirement age. A focus on preparing individuals for these existing jobs along with future opportunities can build on the growing number of training and education programs, laying the groundwork for future expansion and collaboration.

GROWTH FOR TODAY

1. Create a statewide Blue Economy Workforce Development Coalition.
2. Create a Blue Economy Jobs Training to Career Unified Service Offering.
3. Recognize and Celebrate the Legacy of the Blue Economy.

GROWTH FOR TOMORROW

1. Invest in early-learning education efforts (K-8) and high school that provide all RI youth with tangible, impactful experiences on the water.
2. Develop a Blue Economy Jobs Now curriculum set that prioritizes delivery in disadvantaged school districts.
3. Create a Blue Economy Jobs Hub and Campaign with jobs, training, profiles etc.

Jaia Robotics photo by Rupert Whitely

Photo courtesy of URI's Coastal Resources Center and Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program. IYRS School of Technology and Trades.

EMPLOYERS IN THE BLUE ECONOMY IN RHODE ISLAND ARE ALREADY PROVIDING A SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF EMPLOYMENT ACROSS A RANGE OF SECTORS.

BUSINESS GROWTH AND INVESTMENT

As noted in the industry overview section, employers in the Blue Economy in Rhode Island are already providing a significant source of employment across a range of sectors. As these companies grow and adapt to changing market opportunities, they can benefit from a supportive network of organizations aligned to focus on their needs. In addition, as Rhode Island's reputation as a home to successful Blue Economy endeavors grows, we will see new companies set up operations in the state. Helping their leadership teams and employees quickly connect to the Blue Economy community will be imperative to their success.

Captain Dave Monti, left, owner of a Rhode Island fishing charter boat

Grading the baby oysters, *Salt Pond Oysters*

ALIGNING ON BUSINESS GROWTH

1. Establish a committee within the Grow Blue Partnership to lead coordinated business growth and expansion efforts for Rhode Island's Blue Economy.
2. Remove business start and growth barriers in the Blue Economy.

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING BLUE ECONOMY BUSINESSES

1. Develop a Concierge Service for Blue Economy business retention, expansion, and attraction in Rhode Island.

CAPTURE CAPITAL INVESTMENT

1. Advocate for resources and funding on a state and national level.
2. Invest in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies to protect Rhode Island's coast and physical assets.

Galilee, Photo by Krisanne Murray

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESS

A variety of critical infrastructures and assets support Rhode Island's Blue Economy, none more so than working waterfronts. Waterfronts are critical pieces of recreation and industry for residents, fishermen, entrepreneurs, and corporations alike to share. Blue Economy stakeholders believe a critical step towards a stronger sector is to capture and understand the current state of these waterfronts: how are Rhode Island's coastlines used? Who is using them? Are there opportunities for growth, optimization, or a more equitable distribution across different industries and uses? As the purposes of physical assets across the state are better understood, the state and its numerous Blue Economy partners can begin to take concrete actions towards enhanced collaboration in Research and Development (R&D). Actions for successful R&D that grows Rhode Island's Blue Economy and establishes the state as an international sector leader include unlocking collaborative incentives, building co-use workspace and assets, and innovating on open-source data. Efforts will also include education of public officials and community leaders and advocacy for the needs of water-based businesses.

Downtown Providence waterfront

MAKING WATERFRONTS WORK

1. Develop a working waterfront plan that ensures a diverse mix of businesses and sectors have affordable access to needed commercial waterfront and dock space.
2. Perform a fit-gap analysis to better understand what businesses and assets are currently utilizing waterfront space, what commercial entities are missing, and where waterfront access may be expanded for businesses.

CATALYZING COLLABORATIVE R&D

1. Develop a physical hub for Blue Economy R&D, in partnership with industry officials and higher-education institutions.
2. Create digital, open-source assets that allow for increased efficiency in multiple Blue Economy partners moving towards 'smart' assets.
3. Motivate industry leaders to collaborate on activities and initiatives that grow the Blue Economy through clearer value propositions, knowledge-sharing opportunities, and alignment on broader statewide economic goals.

IMPLEMENTATION FOR **IMPACT**

THIS ACTION PLAN OFFERS TWO PRIMARY IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES:

1. Launch the Grow Blue Partnership and define the first-year actions that it can lead.

2. Prioritize the Blue Economy Action Plan opportunities and needs through broad-based community engagement.

The Grow Blue Partnership and Action Plan opportunities can solidify Rhode island's leadership position in the Blue Economy sector and most importantly make an impact in the following ways:

ACTION	IMPACT
Educate Rhode Island residents to the career opportunities in the sector	• **Increase in employment in the Blue Economy** • **Increase in jobs held by historically disadvantaged populations**
Promote Rhode Island Blue Economy assets to a regional and global audience	• **Increase in inbound inquiries from business and individuals looking to locate or collaborate with RI assets**
Prepare RI projects and initiatives for federal, state and private investment	• **Increase in the number of projects advancing** • **Increase in federal funding being allocated to projects/ initiatives in the state**
Foster adaptation and mitigation strategies to protect our assets	• **Increase in local, state, federal and private funding to support adaptation and mitigation efforts**

CALL TO ACTION

Here in Rhode Island, the Ocean State, legacy industries including fishing, boatbuilding and marine trades are combining with the emerging offshore renewable energy industry and exciting new advanced ocean technologies to create powerful intersections that will guide our economy into the future. The Grow Blue Action Plan 2030 proposes 16 Action Steps that when taken will improve our physical infrastructure, invest in our workforce and strengthen our business development initiatives to ensure we are ready for this economic growth. Over 250 Rhode Islanders representing business, nonprofits and government agencies guided the development of these Action Steps and will now work as a Blue Economy Partnership to see them adopted. Ready to join us? To learn more on how you can be part of this effort and add your voice to our story, visit www.growblue.org.

Photo courtesy of URI's Coastal Resources Center and Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program

Viceroy is REGENT's flagship Seaglider vessel, a wing-in-ground-effect craft that flies just above the water's surface

CONTACT US

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Salt Pond Oysters