

State of Maine Blue Economy Task Force
Wednesday, October 1, 2025, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM EDT
Virtual via Zoom

Meeting Summary

Legislative Duties ([LD 1023](#))

1. The task force shall develop recommendations for the establishment of the Center for the Blue Economy, referred to in this section as "the center," which must include, but is not limited to:
 - A. An organizational structure and budget for the ongoing funding of the center;
 - B. A requirement that the center be either housed within an existing institution, such as the University of Maine System, or as a stand-alone, independent entity; and
 - C. The scope of the authorities and responsibilities of the center, which may include, but are not limited to:
 - (1) Supporting businesses and other institutions in the State to build on the blue economy advantages of and reduce the obstacles to further development of the blue economy in the State identified by the prior task force in its report submitted pursuant to Resolve 2023, chapter 119, section 6;
 - (2) Advancing research and development and supporting innovation in the blue economy, including the financing of innovations and growth in blue economy output and employment;
 - (3) Promoting communication and collaboration among blue economy institutions and businesses;
 - (4) Providing common services to blue economy businesses and institutions, including research support and access to journals and technologies such as laboratories, 3-D printing and data management; and
 - (5) Supporting the development of blue economy sectors as outlined in current or future sector-specific development plans and roadmaps.
2. The task force shall recommend improvements and expansions of blue economy workforce education and training to encompass the elementary and secondary school system and public and private institutions of higher education.

Meeting Objectives

1. Better understand Maine's strengths and challenges in the blue economy.
2. Review outcomes from discussion to define the Center's purpose and activities.
3. Review and discuss options for a Center's organizational structure.

In Attendance

Task Force Members: Tim Agnew (Bold Ocean Ventures), Patrick Arnold (New England Ocean Cluster), Nick Battista (The Island Institute), Brian Beal (Downeast Institute), Sebastian Belle (MAA), John Caron (The Landing School), Keith Bisson (CEI), Deborah Bouchard (Aquaculture

Research Institute), Ben Conniff (Luke's Lobster), Hon. Jill Duson (Maine Senate), Rhiannon Hampson (Gulf of Maine Research Institute), Steven Hedlund (Cooke Aquaculture), Sean Ireland (Windward Development Group), Nathan Johnson (OPRC), Anne Langston Noll (MAIC), Mitch Lench (Oceans Balance), Charlotte Mace (Department of Economic and Community Development), Ben Martens (Maine Coast Fishermen's Association), Jason Mitchell (Norfolk Green Ventures), Beth Orcutt (Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences), Nick Planson (Shred Electric), Hon. Morgan Rielly (Maine House of Representatives), Brendyn Sarnacki (Maine Maritime Academy), Cameron Wake (University of New England), Brian Whitney (MTI)

Others: Mike Conathan, Charlie Colgan, Blaine Grimes, Dana O'Brien, Laura Singer (Project Consultants), Katrina Armstrong (University of Maine), Erin Quetell (The Island Institute), Rosie Vanadestine (MDF), Annina Breen, Yellow Breen (MDF), and Sylvie Piquet (MDF)

Meeting slides are available [here](#).

Agenda, Summary, and Discussion

- **Welcome:** Charlotte Mace welcomed the group and opened the meeting.
- **Initial Framework for a Center's High-Level Purpose:** Mike Conathan framed this discussion around clarifying a Blue Economy Center's proposed purpose and exploring how it could be structured to operate effectively within Maine's existing innovation and economic development landscape. The dialogue built on previous Task Force work identifying three core functions for the Center and examined the advantages and disadvantages of several possible governance models. The Task Force reaffirmed three primary categories of work for the Center:
 - **Coordinating and Convening:** aligning initiatives and connecting partners to reduce duplication and strengthen statewide collaboration and impact.
 - **Data Synthesis, Information Sharing, and Raising Awareness:** providing reliable data and communication tools to inform decision-making and promote Maine's blue economy.
 - **Advocacy, Policy, and Attracting Funding:** advancing supportive policies, attracting investment, and promoting Maine's leadership at state, regional, and national levels.

Discussion emphasized:

- **Begin with a clear understanding of the landscape:** Members reinforced the value of mapping existing organizations, programs, and physical assets involved in Maine's blue economy. This work would help the Center focus on filling gaps rather than replicating the efforts of others, ensuring that coordination adds value across sectors and can be approached in achievable, bite-size steps.
- **Strengthen connections rather than control them:** It was noted that the Center should foster organic growth and collaboration rather than position itself as a single control point. Its value lies in connecting partners, encouraging

partnerships, and helping clusters function as part of an integrated statewide network.

- **Expand access to Maine’s shared assets and facilities:** Participants noted limited coordination currently around physical assets and facilities. The Center could help catalog and expand access to on-water testing sites, research infrastructure, and training facilities across universities, technical schools, and industry partners.
 - **Keep traditional fisheries in the conversation:** Several members emphasized that innovation in Maine’s traditional and wild fisheries should not be overlooked. The Center should define how these heritage sectors fit into the broader blue economy framework to prevent confusion and ensure inclusivity.
 - **Help Maine communities navigate what’s next:** The group discussed the Center’s role in helping communities prepare for transition, noting that growth in the blue economy will require economic and cultural change. The Center could serve as a facilitator of “change management,” helping ensure that the evolving blue economy truly fits into Maine’s culture, workforce, and communities. Rather than taking on direct community engagement, it was suggested the Center should coordinate and fund such work through partners like regional nonprofits.
 - **Pursue new investment that adds value and attracts business partners:** It was noted that the Center’s funding strategy should prioritize attracting new federal, private, and philanthropic capital to Maine, rather than redistributing existing state resources. If done well, this approach would add significant value to Maine’s economy and make the sector attractive to investors. Policy and advocacy work should focus on investment, streamlined permitting, and incentives.
 - **Deliver results people can see:** Members noted that Center activities must tie back to tangible metrics such as business formation, investment attraction, job growth, and return on investment. The Center’s success should be judged by its ability to translate coordination into measurable economic gains for Maine.
- **Review Basic Organizational Structures:** Charles Colgan discussed four potential structures:
 1. **Office/Bureau** - Embedded within a state department.
 2. **Independent State Entity** - Created by statute with a Governor-appointed board.
 3. **State-Authorized Host** - Created by statute but housed within a nonprofit or university.
 4. **Community Nonprofit** - Fully independent and citizen-led.
 - **Breakouts and Readouts:** Task Force members divided into three breakout groups to consider how the Center should be structured and governed. Each group was asked to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the four potential organizational models referenced above. Participants also explored whether one model showed immediate promise, and whether there might be alternative approaches better suited to Maine’s context. A summary of each group breakout session is set forth below.

- **Group 1:** This group discussed how to make use of existing infrastructure rather than creating a new organization from the ground up. Participants emphasized the importance of neutrality and trust, noting that locating the Center in a nonpartisan space would help it operate across sectors and political transitions. There was interest in a **state-authorized host** model that could combine independence and flexibility with alignment to state priorities, while avoiding the creation of new bureaucracy. Participants also discussed how the Center could help coordinate investment and policy work to support business growth and innovation, while maintaining a lean, fast-moving structure focused on results.
- **Group 2:** This group focused on how to balance independence, flexibility, and credibility so the Center can coordinate activity and attract investment without adding bureaucracy. Participants felt that placing it directly within state government could slow progress, while a nonprofit model might face fundraising and mission challenges. The discussion leaned toward an **independent state entity** as a long-term structure, with the possibility of a **temporary host arrangement** to get the effort started. Funding and sustainability were recurring themes, including the need to diversify revenue, pursue federal opportunities, and avoid reliance on short-term grants. The newly formed Maine Life Sciences Innovation Center was mentioned as a helpful reference point, though participants noted that the Blue Economy Center would need to focus on its own unique mission while also coordinating where appropriate with other partially overlapping entities.
- **Group 3:** This group explored how the Center could be structured to remain neutral, flexible, and financially sustainable. Participants discussed the possibility of starting within a **quasi-public organization** to take advantage of existing infrastructure and credibility, then **transitioning to an independent entity** once established. This approach was seen as practical if there were clear parameters to maintain independence and avoid any appearance of conflict if the host also managed funding. The group also considered whether a university or research organization could serve as a temporary home, noting that higher overhead costs and administrative requirements might limit agility in that scenario. Throughout the discussion, participants emphasized the importance of neutrality, transparency, and broad representation, ensuring the Center brings together a range of partners rather than being seen as owned by any one group.

Overall Themes: Across all three breakout discussions, participants circled around a similar set of ideas. There was a shared interest in creating a Center that is credible, neutral, and enduring, serving as a coordinating hub that strengthens Maine’s blue economy without adding unnecessary layers of bureaucracy. Participants emphasized building on what already exists to move quickly and demonstrate early value, with the flexibility to evolve into a more independent model over time.

Key points that came through across groups included:

- The Center should remain nonpartisan and stable across administrations.
- A lean, agile structure is preferred over a large, slow-moving one; bureaucracy was seen as a key risk.
- Funding should attract new resources to Maine rather than reshuffling what's already in play.
- Structure should follow purpose (form should support function), not drive it.
- Governance should be inclusive, ensuring representation from across the state and sectors.
- A phased approach, such as starting within an existing organization and growing into a more independent entity, was seen as a practical path forward for Maine at this stage.

Next Steps

- Develop a recommendation for an organizational structure, drawing on today's input
- Prepare for Next Meeting (originally scheduled for Monday Oct 20, 11:00AM to 1:00PM, but postponed to Friday Nov. 7 from 9:00AM to 11:00AM): focus will be on workforce and a review of initial draft thoughts to inform recommendations)
- Workforce Subcommittee will add a meeting on Oct 27.
- Engage Key Stakeholders – attend various blue economy events across the state and continue holding conversations with key stakeholders, including Washington County leaders, state officials, and others.

Upcoming Meetings

It is anticipated that all meetings will be conducted via Zoom. Note the final report is due to the State of Maine on Wednesday, December 3, 2025.

Friday November 7

9:00AM to 11:00AM EDT

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84227741053>

Topic: Review an initial analysis and synthesis of all of our work to date and initial draft thoughts to inform key recommendations about the Center and workforce development

Tuesday, November 18

9:00AM to 11:00PM EDT

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82737708411?pwd=QM9ndzxBTMhMqmuJE5bb7t20DbakE9.1>

Topic: Review draft report and take final input from the Task Force