

State of Maine Blue Economy Task Force
Friday, November 7, 2025, 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM EST
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. Learn from the Workforce Subcommittee and discuss recommendations regarding the Center's role in supporting Maine's blue economy workforce.
2. Review draft recommendations to define the Center's purpose, activities, and structure.
3. Discuss initial thinking on a host model for the Center and provide feedback on the draft report outline.

In Attendance

Task Force Members: Tim Agnew (Bold Ocean Ventures), Patrick Arnold (New England Ocean Cluster), Jeff Auger (Atlantic Aqua Farms), Nick Battista (Island Institute), Dan Berger (MITC), Sebastian Belle (MAA), Keith Bisson (CEI), John Caron (The Landing School), Chip Terry (Blue Trace), Kristen Danaher (Washburn & Doughty), Jake Danniele (DECD), Hon. Jill Duson (Maine Senate), Rhiannon Hampson (GMRI), Steve Hedlund (Cooke Aquaculture), Mitch Lench (Oceans Balance), Ben Martens (Maine Coast Fishermen's Association), Beth Orcutt (Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences), Brendyn Sarnacki (Maine Maritime Academy), Jonny Sonnenfeld (Greenhead Lobster), Cameron Wake (UNE), Eric Weidman (DECD).

Others: Mike Conathan, Charlie Colgan, Blaine Grimes, Dana O'Brien, Laura Singer (Project Consultants), Katrina Armstrong (University of Maine), Annina Breen, Yellow Breen, Erica Watson (MDF), Elle Snyder (Maine Legislature Staff)

Meeting slides are available [here](#).

Agenda, Summary, and Discussion

- **Welcome:** The meeting opened with a review of the objectives and a reminder that this was the second-to-last meeting before the final report is delivered. The group was encouraged to focus discussion on recommendations for workforce development and on refining the structure and organizational characteristics of a proposed Blue Economy Center.
- **Workforce Education and Training:** The Workforce Subcommittee provided an overview of its recent work, which examined opportunities and gaps across the five special blue economy opportunity sectors and organized workforce needs into four categories: basic skills, specialization, connections between programs, and innovation.

Discussion highlighted opportunities for growth in shipbuilding, marine propulsion, and marine biotechnology, as well as the importance of early exposure to maritime and marine-related careers through K-12 and Career and Technical Education programs. Members emphasized the significance of transferable skills across sectors, the value of adult education and ESL programs, and the need to better connect existing educational pathways.

It was noted that challenges related to housing and quality of life remain barriers to attracting and retaining young workers, and that future workforce development strategies must account for evolving expectations regarding work and compensation. The proposed Center's role was framed as coordinating and tracking workforce efforts rather than filling workforce gaps directly.

A poll indicated general support for the subcommittee's recommendations.

- **Guiding Principles and Draft Recommendations for the Center:** The consulting team reviewed draft guiding principles and functions for the Center. Discussion focused on ensuring that the principles reflect the need for coordinated, measurable, and transparent efforts to strengthen Maine’s blue economy. Members noted the importance of presenting the Center’s functions before its guiding principles in the report for clarity and emphasized simplifying language for accessibility.

There was broad agreement that the Center should remain neutral, outcome-oriented, and structured to facilitate collaboration across organizations and sectors. Discussion also reinforced the need to balance support for traditional industries with emerging opportunities.

Members expressed interest in clearer definitions for functions such as ecosystem mapping and metrics tracking. Polling indicated general agreement with the guiding principles and desired functions.

- **Year One Priorities and Structural Considerations:** The group discussed draft year-one activities for the Center, including ecosystem mapping, tracking metrics, identifying opportunity areas, and supporting coordination across sectors. Members emphasized the importance of distinguishing between a minimum viable product in the Center’s early stages and a longer-term vision that would require additional staffing, resources, and organizational sophistication.

In considering the Center’s potential structural home, discussion focused on identifying a host with demonstrated experience supporting innovation sectors, a stable governance model, statewide reach, and strong bipartisan credibility. It was noted that recent state decisions, particularly the Governor’s establishment of the Maine Life Sciences Innovation Center within the Maine Technology Institute (MTI), provide a practical reference point for how a new Center could be launched quickly using existing infrastructure.

The concept of a phased approach, beginning with an existing organization capable of providing immediate operational support, followed by a potential transition to a more independent structure over time, was viewed as an effective and pragmatic pathway aligned with how similar efforts have been implemented in Maine.

Overall, discussion reinforced that the Center should build on Maine’s existing strengths, remain lean and adaptable in its early years, attract new resources to the state rather than redistribute existing ones, and evolve as it demonstrates value and secures broader support.

Next Steps

- Incorporate comments from today's meeting and prepare updates to the draft report.
- Make documents available in Google Doc format for member review and comment.
- Revise workforce recommendations to emphasize early exposure, transferable skills, adult education, and factors affecting worker retention.
- Clarify draft recommendations regarding functions, metrics, and year-one priorities for the Center.
- Develop language that distinguishes between short-term and long-term resource needs.

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.

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