REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS / REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Accelerating Ocean Technology Innovation in Southeastern New England

Responses are due by October 10, 2025

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation ("Corporation"), as the administrative and fiscal agent for the Ocean Tech Hub ("OTH"), seeks information and qualification details from entities to support and accelerate commercialization of ocean technologies, with a focus on innovations at Technology Readiness Levels ("TRL") 6 to 9. Information submitted should focus on projects, infrastructure, and programs that would support the commercialization of unmanned and autonomous marine systems, artificial intelligence / machine learning (AI/ML) for use with undersea technology, and/or advanced materials manufacturing that can withstand the ocean environment.

Background

The Ocean Tech Hub is a consortium-based initiative designed to accelerate the commercialization of ocean technology in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. The Corporation is the lead convener of the OTH Consortium. In October 2023, the OTH was one of 31 Tech Hubs designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration ("EDA"). In February 2024, the OTH submitted a full proposal with several component projects to the 2024 Phase 2 Implementation Award opportunity. This proposal was not funded. Despite this, the OTH has made progress on several components of the Phase 2 application.

In May 2025, the EDA announced that all designated Tech Hubs that have not been funded are eligible for a new round of Implementation Grants, totaling approximately $220 million. The OTH is eligible to apply to this upcoming opportunity to further its efforts. The Notice of Funding ("NOFO") for this opportunity is expected in September 2025 with a potential due date in October 2025.

Additionally, in June 2025, the EDA made available $1.447B in funding through the FY25 Disaster Supplemental to support economic recovery projects, including an Industry Transformation Path to support coalition-led, multi-project portfolios that transform regional economies through targeted industry development. Finally, in July 2025, the Small Business Administration released a grant opportunity for Regional Innovation Clusters to support technology-focused small businesses in regions across the country.

As the Corporation and OTH Consortium prepare to apply to each of these opportunities, we are seeking new project ideas as well as updates to components previously identified to ensure the strongest approach is taken and represented in any future grant applications. This RFQ will inform potential grant project selection as well as content of the OTH's grant applications. Specifically, this RFQ seeks information and qualifications from relevant firms, nonprofits, and other collaborators who may serve as named subrecipients in a federal funding request led by the Corporation in service of the OTH and ocean

technology innovation in the region, or who may serve as component project lead(s) for this federal funding request.

The EDA highly prioritizes funding projects that include private capital match in the budgets as well.

OTH Overview
OTH is focused on advancing regional collaboration to enhance economic prosperity and catalyze a vibrant ocean technology ecosystem, in support of the defense industry, national security, advanced manufacturing, energy independence, and good-paying jobs in the region. OTH harnesses the region's assets and burgeoning technology to create global market-rich opportunities. Through this, we accelerate the commercialization of tech-ready innovation, scale workforce programs to create new good-paying jobs, and ensure policy and other barriers to technology development are removed.

A Tech Hubs designation from the U.S. Economic Development Administration recognizes a region as having the assets, expertise, and potential to become a globally competitive leader in one or more Key Technology Focus Areas (KTFA). The designation makes the consortium eligible to apply for large federal implementation grants and signals to private investors and partners that the region is a national priority for innovation, workforce, and supply chain growth. KTFAs are the specific technology domains that the federal government has identified as critical for U.S. national security, economic competitiveness, and supply chain resilience. KFTA designations for OTH include:

- **KTFA 4, 1 → Robotics and sensors with embedded artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML)**, including advanced surface and subsurface unmanned and autonomous vehicles

KTFA 10 → Advanced material science innovations, particularly composites and materials designed to enhance performance, durability, and strength in demanding marine environmentsOTH will lead in the development and deployment of the following technologies (inclusive of the Key Technology Focus Areas identified in the OTH Designation above):

a. Unmanned and autonomous marine systems
b. Artificial intelligence / machine learning (AI/ML) for use with undersea technology
c. Advanced materials manufacturing that can withstand the ocean environment

More information can be found at oceantechnologyhub.com. Additionally, further information on the work of the OTH over the past eighteen months can be found in Appendix A.

Goals for the Ocean Tech Hub:

- **Acceleration of Technology Commercialization** – support the rapid development and scaling of companies and their technologies at TRLs 6 through 9
- **Global Market Development** – meet global market demand through ocean technology produced and manufactured in Southeastern New England

- **Workforce of the Future** – invest in the people through good jobs that will drive economic growth regionally
- **Infrastructure Development** – expand the facilities, systems and physical potential to gain competitive advantage
- **Regional Collaboration and Innovation** – harness regional strengths through partnerships to accelerate innovation, businesses and jobs
- **Economic and National Security** – strengthen communities' economic resilience and maintain our technological edge

Gaps Identified in the Current Landscape:
As we seek to support these goals, the OTH has identified a number of current gaps that we are seeking innovation solutions through this RFQ/RFI from collaborators to fill. These gaps include but are not limited to:

- **In-water testing access** such as in-water test range and platform access, as well as access to far-shore testing and vessel access.
- **Quayside access and relevant in-water testing equipment and space** including but not limited to boats/barges, slips/moorings, cranes, boat ramps, and piers, as well as near-shore shovel ready property. (This need includes relevant site-readiness work including, often, brownfield remediation.)
- **Advanced information technology capabilities** and support services compatible with Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) to foster the rapid commercialization of dual use technologies that address national security priorities.
- **Research, development and training space,** inclusive of multiuse space capabilities like high bay garage access, clean workspace, and prototyping, testing, and demonstration equipment.
- **Tech transfer support** to transition innovation resource to real world commercial applications.
- **Lab-to-Market support offerings** for high-growth potential startups with innovations specifically at TRLs 6-9 including mentoring, access to capital, incubator space, business-building tools, event conference room spaces, and networking programs.
- **Workforce development training and educational experiences** designed for elementary students through adulthood. Focused on career exploration, work-based learning experiences, and direct job-based skill-building, these trainings should equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for successful careers in the areas of unmanned and autonomous marine systems and related fields.
- **Other** related infrastructure, technologies, equipment, and services that advance the commercialization and scaling of unmanned and autonomous marine systems.

Guidelines for Respondents
In order to fill the above identified gaps in service of the above listed goals, the Corporation is seeking information in the below format:

Respondents should consider and address the following in their responses:

- Advancement of undersea and related technology that could potentially address the intersection of national security, energy infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing.
- Advancement of dual-use maritime technology that addresses multiple applications.
- The potential to further link the current OTH region physical assets including facilities, testbeds, water access and ports.
- Sustainability of the project idea over a ten-year time horizon.
- Alignment to the EDA's requirements (see Appendix B for more).

Responses to this RFQ/RFI can consider solutions that support all or any component of the OTH region (Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts). Respondents do not need to be headquartered in this region, though the OTH expects any winning subrecipient to have a physical presence in the region prior to award.

Private companies are highly encouraged to respond to this RFQ/RFI. Matching funds (cash or in-kind) are encouraged as well.

Request for Qualifications Response Structure
In no more than six pages, single-spaced with one-inch margins in 12-point font, please explain how your firm, products, and proposed project(s) will address the above detailed gaps in the ocean technology commercialization ecosystem and make Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts globally competitive in ocean technology by 2035. Include the following in your response:

Opportunity statement: What problem can you/do you solve? Specifically, what of the above-named gaps does your entity solve for? What will tangibly be different in the world in ten years due to your company's efforts or your idea's efforts and how will you measure success? What evidence exists that your solution will solve this problem, specifically in our region? How is your concept uniquely necessary for the region to reach global competitiveness and ensure national and economic security? How does the idea or project align to the Ocean Tech Hub goals and the Key Technology Focus Areas?

Partners and Qualifications: What differentiates your firm/entity? If partners are being leveraged, explain why these partners are important to your firm's capacities and/or the proposed solution, including what specifically those partners will do. Include overall capabilities in delivering success for this type of project.

Assets: What resources (time, talent, treasure) would you bring to support the execution of any project or gap-filling solution? Please detail this for each of the core partners listed, as applicable. Identify specific sources of innovation, capital, workforce or infrastructure that will be leveraged by the project. Note: EDA requires a 10 percent match for the Tech Hubs program and a 20% match for the Disaster Supplemental, so matching capital is important for all potential grant responses.

*Capacity of respondents to provide dedicated match will be factored into the review of this RRQ/RFI.

Evidence base: What evidence exists that suggests this project will solve the identified problem and will help the OTH reach the goal of being globally competitive in 10 years? Include past successes of entity as available. This could include feasibility testing that has been completed, commercial interest for the technology that has been identified, market analyses conducted, or other evidence as applicable.

Scope of Work and Budget: Briefly describe the high-level activities that your entity undertakes or can undertake in service of the OTH and a cost estimate for any purchases and/or services as required.

Risk factors: Describe any risks that must be mitigated in order to succeed at filling the identified gap toward project commercialization.

The requirements for Tech Hubs proposals from a previous Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) are included as Appendix B for reference. These are subject to change with any new NOFO.

Qualifications
In order to ensure a wide range of expertise and perspective towards building the OTH, this RFQ/RFI is open to all, with private companies highly encouraged to respond.

Responded to this RFQ/RFI should provide information showing their expertise and experience in the ocean economy, the local economic ecosystem, and the ability to engage in the efforts detailed in the response.

Project Timeline
The OTH anticipates submitting one or more applications to the EDA before the end of 2025, potentially as early as October 2025

Budget
The FY25 Disaster Supplemental Industry Transformation grants may apply for 3-5 component projects with an aggregate award request of $20M-$50M; this application requires a 20 percent matching share of total cost by the applicants.

The Tech Hubs grant NOFO has not yet been released, but the program is anticipated to make approximately $220M available.

Additional Information
This RFQ/RFI is designed to gather input and generate ideas that will inform grant applications to the EDA and, as applicable, other federal agencies during the next year. It is our hope that this process will ensure a wide range of input, expertise and experiences. The Corporation will review responses to

identify ideas that will strengthen the overall grant applications. Possible matchmaking may occur to combine ideas and concepts, including potential requested partnerships amongst respondents.

From this RFQ/RFI, final grant applications will be developed, including identification of potential component project lead(s) and potential grant subrecipients. Note: If an entity is selected as a component project lead, that entity may be responsible for submitting an application through a federal portal (e.g., EDA's EDGE Portal) and would be responsible for any direct EDA reporting or other requirements of a grantee/subrecipient, as applicable.

Note: Further discussion may be required with respondents to this RFQ/RFI to hone ideas and/or to further understand qualifications of responsive entities. Additionally, all grant applications must show integration between component projects. Thus, the Corporation, with the OTH Consortium, will continue to work with respondents to create comprehensive and thoughtful grant applications.

RFQ/RFI Submissions

Responses to this RFQ/RFI should be include one (1) electronic (PDF) attachment sent to RFP@commerceri.com by **11:59 pm on October 10, 2025**. The Corporation will review responses on a rolling basis—potential respondents are encouraged to submit qualifications and information prior to the deadline as they are able.

Questions, interpretations, or clarifications concerning this RFQ/RFI should be directed by e-mail to RFP@commerceri.com no later than 2:00 pm on September 25, 2025. Responses to questions, interpretations, or clarifications concerning this RFP will be posted online via addendum at www.commerceri.com and www.ridop.ri.gov on a rolling basis but no later than September 28, 2025, to ensure equal awareness of important facts and details.

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation reserves the right to terminate this Request for Qualifications / Request for Information at any time, and by responding hereto, no firms are vested with any rights in any way whatsoever.

Further instructions to respondents can be found in Appendix D.

Appendix A: Ocean Tech Hub Component Project Progress since October 2023 (as of July 2025)

1. **Ocean Tech Central Hub:** The governance and leadership that integrates all components with the larger ecosystem to accelerate ocean technology.
    - $1M in EDA funding through two separate grants
    - Hired Ocean Tech Hub Director for full-time role

2. **University Consortium:** This initiative catalyzes regional academic institutions to streamline research in marine science and technology. It offers state-of-the-art test tanks, promotes technology transfer, and provides lab-based internship opportunities.
    - $5.7M RI Commerce Innovation Campus funding with equal match to support the development of the URI Ocean Tech Center with equal match from federal and private sources.
    - $8M of MA state funding to support UMass Dartmouth's core ocean economy research facilities, education and workforce development, and technology and commercialization efforts.

3. **Blue Robotics Lab:** R&D space supporting entrepreneurs and startups in designing, building, prototyping, testing, and commercializing undersea robotics and advanced materials.
    - $4M RI Commerce Innovation Campus funding with equal match from private and other sources.

4. **Test Beds:** Testing sites for ocean technology businesses, offering dockside, near-shore, and permanent deep offshore testing capabilities.
    - MassCEC ran a Request for Proposals (RFP) process with up to $7.5M in funding for the development and implementation of test sites (selection(s) forthcoming)
    - $60k RI Commerce Network Matching Grant funding with matching support from Herreshoff Marine Museum for deployment of a jib crane for moving equipment in and out of water.

5. **Smart Bay:** This project involves the creation of a "digital twin" of the region's marine conditions and geography, serving as a virtual testing environment for ocean technology.
    - BlueTide 2024 collected data to begin data gathering for a Smart Bay.
        1. Rebranded as OceanTide, this event is scheduled for August 28, 2025.

6. **Business Acceleration:** Adding capacity to the business support ecosystem to foster ocean technology startups by providing specialized resources, services and capital.
    - MassCEC awarded SeaAhead $300,000 to develop and implement a testing- and evaluation-focused accelerator program to supplement their Blue Swell program
    - RIHub received $128,000 Matching Grant to launch an ocean tech VMS (Venture Mentoring Service) program.

- VentureWell launched an Ocean Enterprise Accelerator through funding from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
- 401 Tech Bridge continuing BlueTide (rebranded OceanTide) in 2025 with a full day of in-water demonstrations in undersea and multidomain communications, digital twin and virtual worlds modeling and simulation, persistent monitoring and sensing, and autonomous and uncrewed systems.

7. **Workforce of the Future:** This initiative focuses on employer-driven training, comprehensive support for trainees, and K-12 learning and exposure opportunities.
    - $4M awarded by the EDA for workforce training in composites, robotics, and underwater welding through the Good Job Challenge
    - RI Commerce awarded Courage Builder $97,000 for internships/externships, career awareness, and high-school coursework in ocean technologies in direct collaboration with Times2 STEM Academy

Accelerating Ocean Tech in Southeastern New England - Ocean Tech Hub's Consortium Member Impacts

- MassTech opened an RFP for a Massachusetts Tech Hub program.
- VentureWell launched an Ocean Enterprise Accelerator through funding from NOAA and hosted the first cohort right here in Southeastern New England. 15 startups from across the U.S. spent a week learning about the ocean innovation ecosystem in RI and MA.
- 2025 Marked the 10th anniversary of the Blue Innovation Summit and launched a new Summer Summit.
- Consortium Member 401 Tech Bridge hosted four virtual and one in-water demonstration days through its BlueTide program in 2024, with over 30 businesses demonstrating and (rebranded OceanTide) in 2025 with a full day of in-water demonstrations in undersea and multidomain communications, digital twin and virtual worlds modeling and simulation, persistent monitoring and sensing, and autonomous and uncrewed systems.
- The first-of-its-kind Possibility Ocean International Virtual Summit was hosted in Newport, RI by Consortium Member Giant Shoulders in March 2025 with over 200 attendees from 15 countries and 25 states.
- The Ocean Innovation Cluster at Unity Park expanded with the addition of Saab, Vatn, and Deep Blue Composites (joining other resident businesses Flux Marine, SeaLegs, and others already based there)
- In March 2025, Consortium Member 401 Tech Bridge opened an application for a Prize Challenge in partnership with the Northeast Tech Bridge, Office of Naval Research, and NavalX and received 80 applications from Ocean Tech startups from around the world.

Appendix B: Requirements for component projects from the 2023 EDA Tech Hubs Funding Round

The 2023 Implementation Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity can be found here.

COMPONENT PROJECT – EVALUATION CRITERIA

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) identified key evaluation criteria to base reviews against. These included:

1. Project quality, ability to execute, and private sector integration
2. Impact on national security
3. Investment and policy commitments
4. Developing, recruiting and retaining talent and workforce
5. Capital formation, deployment and access
6. Governance, leadership and evaluation

COMPONENT PROJECT – ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

The EDA also described specific activities that were eligible for component projects, including:

- Workforce Development
    - Training and placement (including but not limited to Registered Apprenticeships and other quality work-and-learn models) as well as other educational programs.
- Business and Entrepreneur Development
    - Entrepreneur training that enables technology commercialization, increase the formation and deployment of and access to capital for new or growing businesses, and build mentorship networks.
    - Business and entrepreneur activities should consider the needs of companies --.at tech readiness levels of 6-9.
- Technology Development and Maturation
    - Technology deployment, facilitation of technology and knowledge transfer, provision of facilities to test and mature technologies, and creation of new sources of capital for businesses to start and grow through technology development, adoption, or deployment.
    - Activities should involve actual and potential customers where relevant and should seek to develop and strengthen customer-supplier relationships to develop the markets for relevant technology products and services (and within their supply chains) and to facilitate customer input into supplier technology development and maturation goals.
- Related Infrastructure Activities
    - Construction of buildings, such as a testbed or demonstration facility, and infrastructure necessary for projects in the three categories described above (e.g., connectivity or supporting infrastructure).

Appendix D: Instructions and Notifications to Respondents

1. Potential respondents are advised to review all sections of this RFQ/RFI carefully and to follow instructions completely.

2. All costs associated with developing or submitting a response to this RFQ/RFI, or to provide oral or written clarification of its content, shall be borne by the respondent. The Corporation/the OTH assume no responsibility for such costs.

3. Responses that are submitted late, misdirected or sent to the wrong email address will not be accepted.

4. Interested parties are instructed to peruse the Ocean Tech Hub's website (www.oceantechnologyhub.com) as well as the Corporation's website (www.commerceri.com) on a regular basis, as additional information relating to this RFQ/RFI may be released in the form of an addenda. Addenda will also be posted to the Rhode Island State Division of Purchases' website at www.ridop.ri.gov.

5. Equal Employment Opportunity (R.I. Gen. Laws § 28-5.1-1, et seq.) – § 28-5.1-1 Declaration of policy – (a) Equal opportunity and affirmative action toward its achievement is the policy of all units of Rhode Island state government, including all public and quasi-public agencies, commissions, boards and authorities, and in the classified, unclassified, and non-classified services of state employment. This policy applies to all areas where State dollars are spent, in employment, public services, grants and financial assistance, and in state licensing and regulation.

6. In accordance with Title 7, Chapter 1.2 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, no corporation organized under the laws of another state or country shall have the right to transact business in Rhode Island until it shall have procured a Certificate of Authority to do so from the Rhode Island Secretary of State (401-222-3040).

7. The respondent should be aware of the State's Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) requirements, which address the State's goal of fifteen percent (15%) participation by MBEs in all procurements, including a minimum of 7.5% participation by minority business enterprises owned and controlled by a minority owner, as defined in § 37-14.1-3, and a minimum of 7.5% participation by minority business enterprises owned and controlled by a woman. For further information, visit the website www.mbe.ri.gov.