



Preparing a Workforce for a New Industry

A Q&A with New Bedford Ocean Cluster's executive director

The offshore wind industry is about to take off. The South Coast region stands to benefit in ways that previously were not available to underserved communities and gateway cities such as New Bedford and Fall River, where economic opportunities have been lacking for



generations. As a result, there is a lot of grassroots focus and work required to prepare for what some people consider an opportunity representing a generational economic sea change for these families and communities. The vision is to make the Port of New Bedford the first port of call

for the offshore wind industry in the United States. Ultimately, the goal is to become a model for other ports to facilitate commercial collaboration between port industries and companies while developing strategies to create more value for local communities from natural ocean resources,

including fish, wind, and aquaculture.

The New Bedford Ocean Cluster (NBOC) is a nonprofit organization formed to align the maritime interests of the city and region under one umbrella organization. Jennifer Downing was appointed the NBOC's first executive director in January 2022. We sat down with Downing and the Academy's Director of the Office of Intercultural Engagement

Patrick Nobrega, a New Bedford native who serves on the NBOC's Diversity Committee, to get a sense of what's been happening and where things are headed for offshore wind and the communities that could benefit.

New Bedford has historically been a fishing port. With the wind industry poised to move in, how does this process unfold?

Jennifer Downing: We believe strongly at the NBOC that if offshore wind is developed responsibly, both the commercial fishing and offshore wind industries can be successful in the Port of New Bedford. Responsible development will require communication, transparency, and a lot of coordination. The NBOC was created in part to support this coordination and to serve as a convener and liaison between the two industries. There are job opportunities for commercial fishing in offshore wind and we want to help fisheries capture these opportunities if they wish to.

The parent wind companies are all from Europe, where the industry is well established. Are port space and who gets access a consideration, and does this present any obstacles?

JD: Every port has different advantages, so a key will be coordination and collaboration across Massachusetts, as well as across state lines.

I was at a conference in Virginia recently where port infrastructure and marshaling

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—Jennifer Downing

Opposite: port of New Bedford; below: Jennifer Downing



was a major focus. The ports in Europe are massive, many purpose-built for offshore wind. We don't have that space here in the U.S., so our methods for assembly and installation will be different than in Europe.

Ports will need to leverage their strengths and understand where they can best service the industry. In New Bedford, with the New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal and Foss Marine Terminals under construction, we know that we will be a key base for marshaling, particularly for the first projects in the pipeline. In the long-term, the Port of New Bedford will be ideal for operations & maintenance activities, given our close proximity and ease of access to lease areas and our extensive marine vendor base and seafaring workforce.

You're both very familiar with New Bedford and the surrounding area. Jen, you've been on the job at the NBOC since January. With everything going on, will one of your biggest challenges be figuring out how this all rolls out logistically?

JD: Our biggest challenge will be to ensure that local people and businesses get the opportunity to be a part of the industry. Construction for Vineyard Wind 1 has begun and will continue for the next couple of years. There will be a lot of opportunities for people to get trained and capture good paying jobs. Local businesses in greater New Bedford can provide products and services to the industry. But for many, the industry isn't quite real yet. We need to inform the community about the possibilities



and make sure they are ready to participate.

Our Act Local program, which was launched in partnership with Vineyard Wind, is trying to do just that — understand the needs of the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and Tier 1 suppliers on these projects and their subcontracting needs, and connect them with local businesses that align. Ultimately, we want the economic benefits of these projects to stay in our community.

Prysmian Group, a major cable manufacturer, is constructing a plant in Somerset, which will

New Bedford Ocean Cluster's four pillars are represented clockwise from top left: offshore renewables initiative, commercial fishing and processing, technology and innovation, and aquaculture.

provide more than 200 local jobs. There will be other opportunities in the future and we need to stay on top of them. We have an opportunity with offshore wind to make sure the industry develops right from the start — engaging a local, diverse, and equitable workforce and supply chain. The industry is moving very fast though, so this will be a challenge.

Patrick Nobrega: What's exciting for me are the conversations that are happening around access and inclusion in the coming

industry. [People] are taking into consideration all sorts of issues from awareness and education about what this all means, that this industry is coming, but are we ready for it? Right now, the average New Bedford citizen is hearing about wind, but maybe not sure how they'll fit in terms of what these opportunities mean. We cannot allow the opportunity to ensure that the growing industry reflects the diversity of Greater New Bedford to pass us by. Vineyard Wind had a job fair in September with about 20 companies there and it was

great to see that it looked like New Bedford in all its diversity. The job fair needed to be successful in that it was important for these companies who want to invest in this process to see that there was a lot of interest in these jobs — that hiring here is going to pay off in many ways.

Right, this is not a “build it and they will come” scenario. Beyond training the crews for work at sea, which has been happening at the Academy since 2019, the biggest piece involves the local communities. They need to be prepped and ready when the time comes.

JD: There are a lot of moving parts to getting this industry off the ground. And, there is a lot of money going into it. Time is money and efficiency is key. The developers need to do whatever it takes to get the projects completed on time and budget. While there is certainly an intent to hire local, we worry that if the workforce and businesses are not ready, the developers and their main contracts will need to source elsewhere. We can't let that happen, so there will need to be a very coordinated effort here in the region among our workforce training institutions, colleges, community organizations, trade unions, and economic development agencies to ensure people are informed, trained, and ready.

PN: This is not just with people who are of working age. We need to reach out to those who will be ready in a few years to get them prepped for this. At the Academy, we're working on some initiatives and funding that will create



Patrick Nobrega, right, with Laura Kleber '22 at the September Vineyard Winds Job Fair; Kleber is a project associate at Vineyard Winds



some programs that focus on younger students in the area by introducing a STEM-focused curriculum and programs around renewable energy. My role on the DEI Committee of NBOC is aligned well with our efforts for inclusion at the Academy, of which community engagement is a core pillar. We cannot say we are truly embracing inclusive excellence unless we are increasing access to underrepresented groups in the local community. I have also been working with the Marine Center for Responsible Energy at the Academy to increase awareness of the GWO training opportunities at MMA in the New Bedford community. We

are building awareness, curiosity, and interest now in order to lay a foundation for the future.

JD: There is no doubt that the efforts in the communities are going to be critical to longer-term success. So building relationships with community activists and liaisons who will facilitate much of the communications will have to be a major piece of this. The coordination will be focused on making sure those we need to engage are informed so we connect the community with these opportunities. It's going to be so important to leverage the resources in our communities. That's our vision. 