



Request for Proposals:

New Bedford Seafood Incubator Feasibility Study

Date of Issue: July 20, 2026

Responses Due: August 21, 2026

Submit Proposals to:

Jennifer Downing, Executive Director - jennifer.downing@nboc.org and

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About New Bedford Ocean Cluster

The New Bedford Ocean Cluster (NBOC) was launched to accelerate and sustain the growth of New Bedford's ocean economy by championing business development, technology innovation, and strategic partnerships. NBOC fosters collaboration across industry, academia, and the public sector to grow the region's ocean economy across four regionally significant industry pillars: **Aquaculture, Commercial Fishing & Seafood Processing, Offshore Renewable Energy, and Marine Innovation & Technology**. By leveraging New Bedford's coastal position, extensive maritime strengths, and rich historical and cultural ties to the sea, NBOC aims to attract investment, support the formation and growth of maritime businesses, and foster new initiatives that can create greater economic and coastal resilience for New Bedford and the surrounding region.

Background

New Bedford is the nation's leading commercial fishing port by landed value and a cornerstone of the regional and national seafood economy. The Port supports a diverse and interconnected seafood ecosystem that includes commercial fishing, seafood processing, distribution, cold storage, marine services, equipment suppliers, and a growing aquaculture sector. Together, these industries generate significant economic activity, provide thousands of jobs, and contribute to the long-term vitality of the working waterfront and the broader blue economy.

While New Bedford's commercial fishing and seafood industries remain among the most productive and resilient in the country, businesses across the seafood value chain face increasing pressures that can limit innovation and growth. Workforce shortages, aging infrastructure, regulatory complexity, capital constraints, changing consumer preferences, and market volatility require companies to focus much of their time and resources on maintaining existing operations and product lines. Similarly, emerging aquaculture enterprises often face barriers related to product development, processing capacity, market access, and the cost of scaling operations. As a result, opportunities to explore new products, technologies, and markets are often limited.

Members of the NBOC Fisheries & Aquaculture Advisory Committees have expressed interest in exploring the feasibility of creating a Seafood Incubator Facility in New Bedford to address some of these challenges. Inspired by the success of food incubator, [Hope & Main](#) in Warren, Rhode Island, Committee members see an opportunity to provide New Bedford's waterfront with similar shared access to certified processing space, technical expertise, regulatory guidance, specialized equipment, and business development support. Such a facility might serve as a critical platform for commercial fishermen, aquaculture producers, seafood processors, food entrepreneurs, researchers, and established companies seeking to develop and test new seafood products, evaluate processing methods, enter new markets, or commercialize innovations without the substantial upfront investment required to build dedicated facilities.

By lowering barriers to entry and encouraging experimentation, collaboration, and product development, a Seafood Incubator could strengthen the competitiveness of New Bedford's seafood sector, create pathways for new business formation, support workforce development, and increase the value derived from locally sourced seafood products. The facility could also help accelerate the growth of the region's emerging aquaculture industry by providing access to processing, packaging, value-added product development, and market-testing capabilities that are often difficult for early-stage aquaculture businesses to access independently.

Supporting both wild-harvested and farm-raised seafood, the Incubator has the potential to serve as a catalyst for innovation across the seafood supply chain. By fostering collaboration among industry, entrepreneurs, researchers, and other stakeholders, the facility could help diversify seafood products, expand market opportunities, strengthen regional food systems, and reinforce New Bedford's position as a global leader in the blue economy. Its development would also provide important insights into the operational, financial, and market considerations necessary to establish a sustainable seafood innovation hub that serves the evolving needs of both the commercial fishing and aquaculture industries.

Purpose of the Study

The prospective Seafood Incubator Feasibility Study should consider the model and inspiration of Hope & Main (H&M), a successful food incubator based in Warren, RI. H&M has launched over 500 food businesses since its opening in 2024. At its highest level, the seafood incubator feasibility study aims to:

- Determine Viability--- whether a seafood incubator in New Bedford is practical, needed and sustainable.
- Reduce risk before investment--- identifying technical, financial and market risks early
- Provide a roadmap--- outlining how the incubator could be structured, funded and operated

More specifically, it should assess whether launching a Seafood Incubator on New Bedford's waterfront can support entrepreneurs, strengthen the seafood economy and drive long-term growth

The purpose of this feasibility study is to rigorously evaluate the viability, design and long-term sustainability of a seafood incubator in New Bedford. The study will assess market demand, infrastructure and operational requirements, financial feasibility and organizational readiness, while incorporating stakeholder input to determine whether and how a seafood incubator could effectively support seafood entrepreneurs, strengthen regional supply chains and drive economic growth.

This feasibility study will assess the demand, operational requirements, business model options, market opportunities, and long-term sustainability of a Seafood Incubator Facility, with the goal of determining how such a resource could best support innovation, value-added production, and economic growth within New Bedford's seafood and aquaculture sectors.

Feasibility Study Elements

The Seafood Incubator Feasibility Study should include, but not be limited to the following items:

- A market analysis to understand and validate the anticipated demand for the facility and its programs and services.
- Benchmarking against other seafood incubators in the U.S.
- Identification of industry gaps and opportunities, addressing questions such as:
 - Are fishermen sending product to other states for processing?
 - Are aquaculture producers using facilities outside the region for freezing, packaging, or value-added products? What does “value-added seafood” mean for New Bedford and the region? What categories of seafood have the strongest market potential?
 - Are local entrepreneurs prototyping seafood products in incubators outside of New Bedford or the region?
 - Are researchers or startups leaving the region due to lack of certified space?
 - Do existing barriers like permitting, regulation, and access exist?
 - Is there an opportunity for value-added seafood products and new market channels that fit the desires of the growing American seafood consumer population.
- Stakeholder engagement and input.
- An organizational readiness assessment.
- An analysis of economic and community benefits, addressing questions such as:
 - Does the incubator present an opportunity to develop new infrastructure and programming to support the regional food system?
 - Would increasing local and regional market access to seafood contribute to food security and public health goals?
 - What would the economic output be like if we better connected small-scale producers to regional markets?
 - Does the incubator present an opportunity to revitalize existing and underutilized commercial and retail infrastructure?
 - What job creation and business opportunities could a seafood-focused food incubator generate
- A proposed program and operating model, including a financial scenario that includes funding sources beyond grants; utilization assumptions; seasonal variability; staffing;

adjacent services such as in-house small-batch co-packing, a retail counter, test market, café, etc. to diversity revenue; type of incubator (e.g., focus on production and innovation/technology and/or a hybrid approach that would include processing infrastructure, regulatory support, business mentoring, commercial test kitchen).

- Provide a go- or no-go decision and action plan

Deliverables

- Kickoff meeting and project work plan
- Draft feasibility study and presentation of draft findings
- Final feasibility study and presentation of final findings
- All underlying data, interview summaries, and editable working files

Eligibility

NBOC is seeking a qualified research organization or consulting firm with strong analytical competence and experience with conducting feasibility studies, food/seafood sector knowledge, and incubator development to conduct a New Bedford Seafood Incubator Feasibility Study. The reviewers also see value in firms that have experience in market demand analysis, industry benchmarking, financial modeling, economic impact analysis, business planning, and organizational readiness assessments to support the study. Multidisciplinary teams are encouraged. Teams with multiple entities should have one (1) entity that takes responsibility for organizing the team and submitting a joint proposal (the ‘Lead Applicant’). The NBOC will contract with the Lead Applicant.

Estimated Timeline

RFP Issued	July 20, 2026
Deadline for written questions from proposers	July 27, 2026
Release responses to questions	July 31, 2026
Proposals due	August 21, 2026
Interviews with shortlisted firms (2–4 firms)	August 31-September 4, 2026
Selection	September 7, 2026

How to Apply

Proposals must be in electronic form, submitted by email to both Jennifer Downing (jennifer.downing@nboc.org) and Eric Reid (ericreidri@gmail.com). Please include “New Bedford Seafood Incubator Feasibility Study” in the email subject line. Proposals should be in a

single PDF document. Applicants may propose edits to the scope of work, including additions or reductions, as they see fit. Please include in your proposal:

- Proposal
- Budget
- Resumes of individuals that will be part of the Project Management Team

Budget

Project funding will be provided by the City of New Bedford. The fee for the New Bedford Seafood Incubator Feasibility is not to exceed \$40,000. Any proposal that exceeds \$40,000 will be considered non-responsive.

Disclaimer

NBOC may modify or cancel this RFP at any time for any reason with or without notice. NBOC reserves the right to request supplemental information after RFPs have been submitted. NBOC reserves the right to issue awards and reject proposals at their sole discretion.