

Supporting the U.S. Ocean Workforce

Submitting Organization: RECOS – The Ocean Coalition
Affected Government Agencies: NOAA, EDA, Navy
Corresponding Appropriations: CJS, Defense

Background: The Blue Economy, also known as the ocean economy, brings people together in the use of ocean resources to support economic growth. This growth is tied to jobs, livelihoods, and the preservation of the health of oceans and coasts, where people live, earn, and learn. For this growth to occur over the long term, both in terms of economics and resource preservation, a knowledgeable, prepared and innovative Blue Economy workforce will need to be inspired and trained. Current education programs at all levels must adjust to be relevant to the needs of the Blue Economy, and new programs of study will be required to address emerging occupations.

The U.S. faces a spectrum of challenges related to weather cycles, food security, national security, energy independence, natural resource supply, and pollution that connect with the Blue Economy and impact coastal communities. These same challenges have great potential to create high paying jobs while contributing innovation, technology and approaches that support resilient communities, coastlines, the equitable sharing of natural resources. There is an increasing need for members of the workforce that have both technical acumen and the ability to work across disciplines and sectors to find solutions and opportunities. Dedicated programs to train this needed ocean workforce are required for the U.S. to fully realize the economic and environmental benefits of a sustainable Blue Economy. This is also an opportunity to train a ocean workforce in careers that allow them to prioritize healthy work/life balance while contributing to a greater social good.

The Blue Economy is currently valued at approximately \$2.5T USD globally each year, with the potential to double in the next ten years. Economic growth in this sector is poised to occur in fields including ocean engineering, robotics, observing, energy, biotechnology, aquaculture and fisheries. Supporting academic training programs will allow the U.S. to lead in this sector and meet the needs of coastal communities, foster industry growth, and provide information and data to government agencies to support their work. Establishing leadership in training the future ocean workforce is necessary for human, environmental and economic health and national security.

To ensure U.S. leadership in ocean science and innovation, competitiveness, and successful U.S. growth in the Blue Economy, fundamental ocean science research must continue to be funded. In addition, investments in ocean education programs that enable translation of science into products and services that directly benefit people, agencies and industry are needed. For the U.S. to lead in the Blue Economy, students from many backgrounds and experiences must enter the workforce with technical and vocational skills to use emerging technologies and understand the connection between research and societal benefit to continue to grow innovation and opportunity for a broad range of interest-holders.

Recommendation in Legislation: RECOS supports the continuation of robust funding in Blue Economy workforce training programs with the Department of Commerce, including programs through NOAA and the Economic Development Administration.