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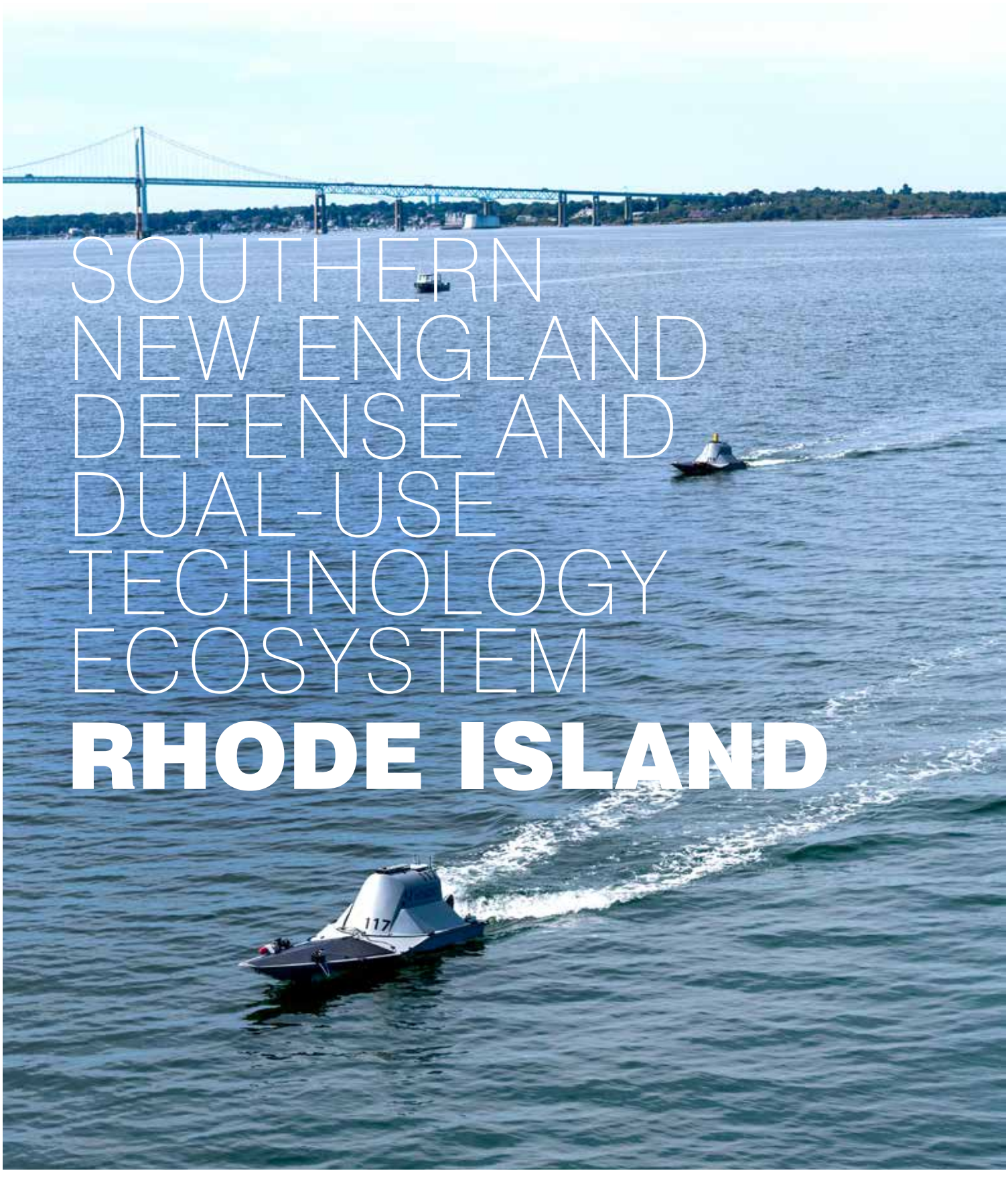

SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND DEFENSE AND DUAL-USE TECHNOLOGY ECOSYSTEM

RHODE ISLAND

The 2025 State of Southern New England Defense and Dual-Use Technology Ecosystem in Rhode Island

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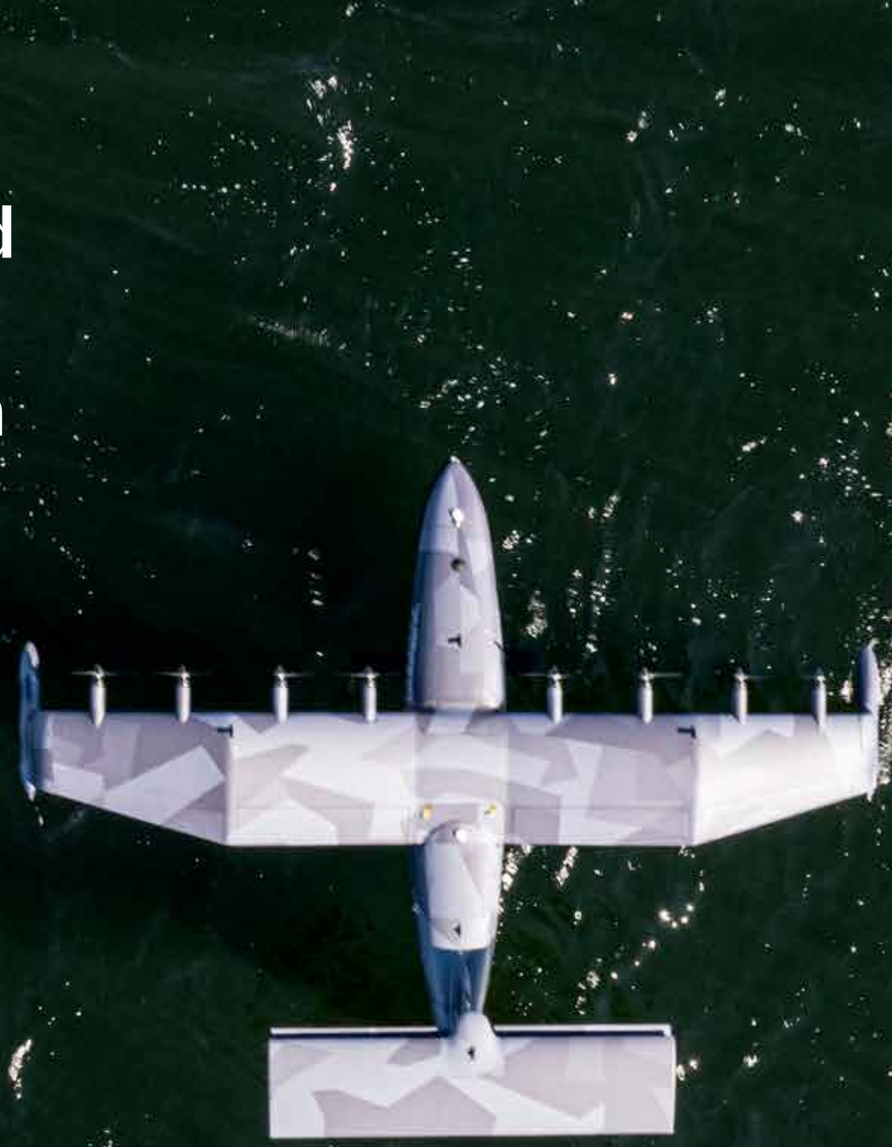

At this critical moment in history, Rhode Island finds itself at the crossroads of national security and its own economic future. This data driven report is intended to share economic data from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, recognize RI's role in national security, highlight recent successes, and provide a vision for Rhode Island to realize its potential by investing in a Blue Economy anchored by defense and dual-use technologies.

WHAT'S INSIDE

PARTNERS:

Commerce Rhode Island
Quonset Development Corporation
The University of Rhode Island
The MITRE Corporation
MIT Lincoln Laboratory
Regent Craft
Havoc
Juice Data Systems
Jaia Robotics
Vatn Systems
RIHub
Rogue Venture Capital

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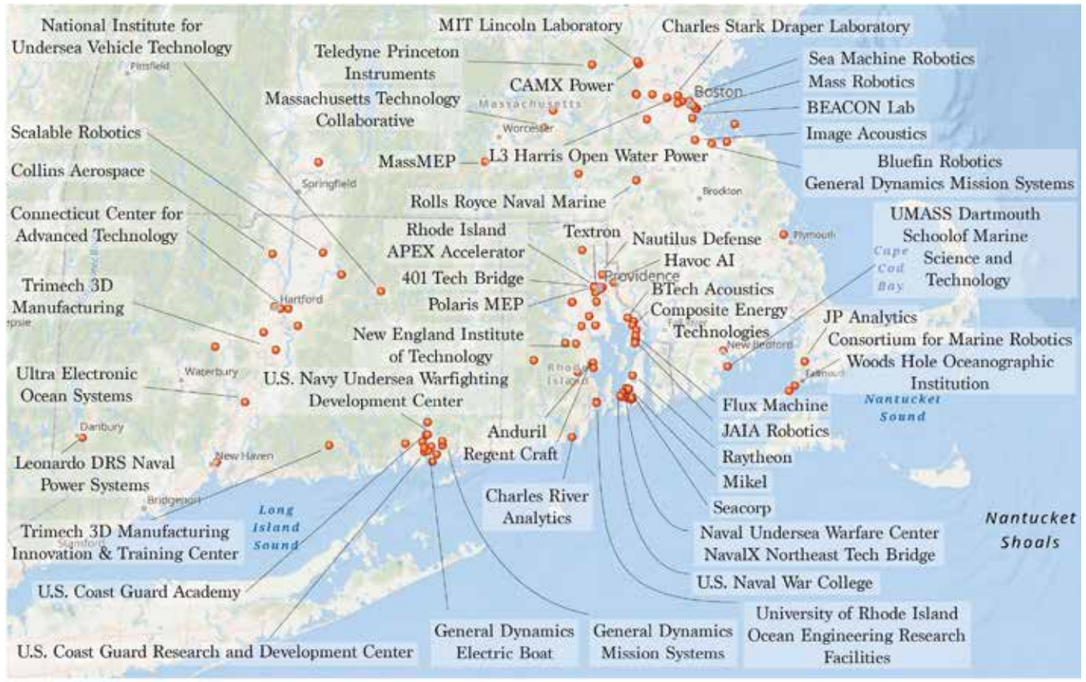
SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND DEFENSE AND DUAL-USE TECHNOLOGY ECOSYSTEM RI'S ROLE, POTENTIAL, OPPORTUNITIES & VISION FOR MARITIME INNOVATION

OVERVIEW

Southern New England has long stood at the center of the nation's maritime defense enterprise. Since the early 20th century, the region's proximity to the Atlantic sea lanes, coupled with the U.S. Navy's concentration of facilities in Newport and Groton, laid the groundwork for a powerful naval industrial base. The Naval War College and the Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC) have been the intellectual and technical engines behind the Navy's undersea dominance for over a century, shaping doctrine, technology, and workforce development.



Southern New England Innovation Ecosystem
for entities focused on Defense-related Manufacturing, Research and Development, and Workforce Development in the areas of Nuclear Submarines, Shipbuilding, Autonomous Underwater Vehicles, Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems, Aerospace, and Specialized Supplier and Facilitator Businesses, and the Maritime Doctrine-to-Tactics Expertise Community

SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND NOW SUPPORTS ONE OF THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE DEFENSE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES.

The industrial legacy of shipbuilding, composites, and ocean engineering further strengthened this foundation. Electric Boat, headquartered in Groton with major production facilities in Quonset Business Park, Rhode Island, became synonymous with American submarine construction. This heritage created a deep supply chain—thousands of small and mid-sized manufacturers across Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts—that evolved from traditional maritime production to advanced technology manufacturing. The collaboration between universities, government laboratories, and private industry cultivated a dense, innovation-driven ecosystem capable of adapting to new defense imperatives.

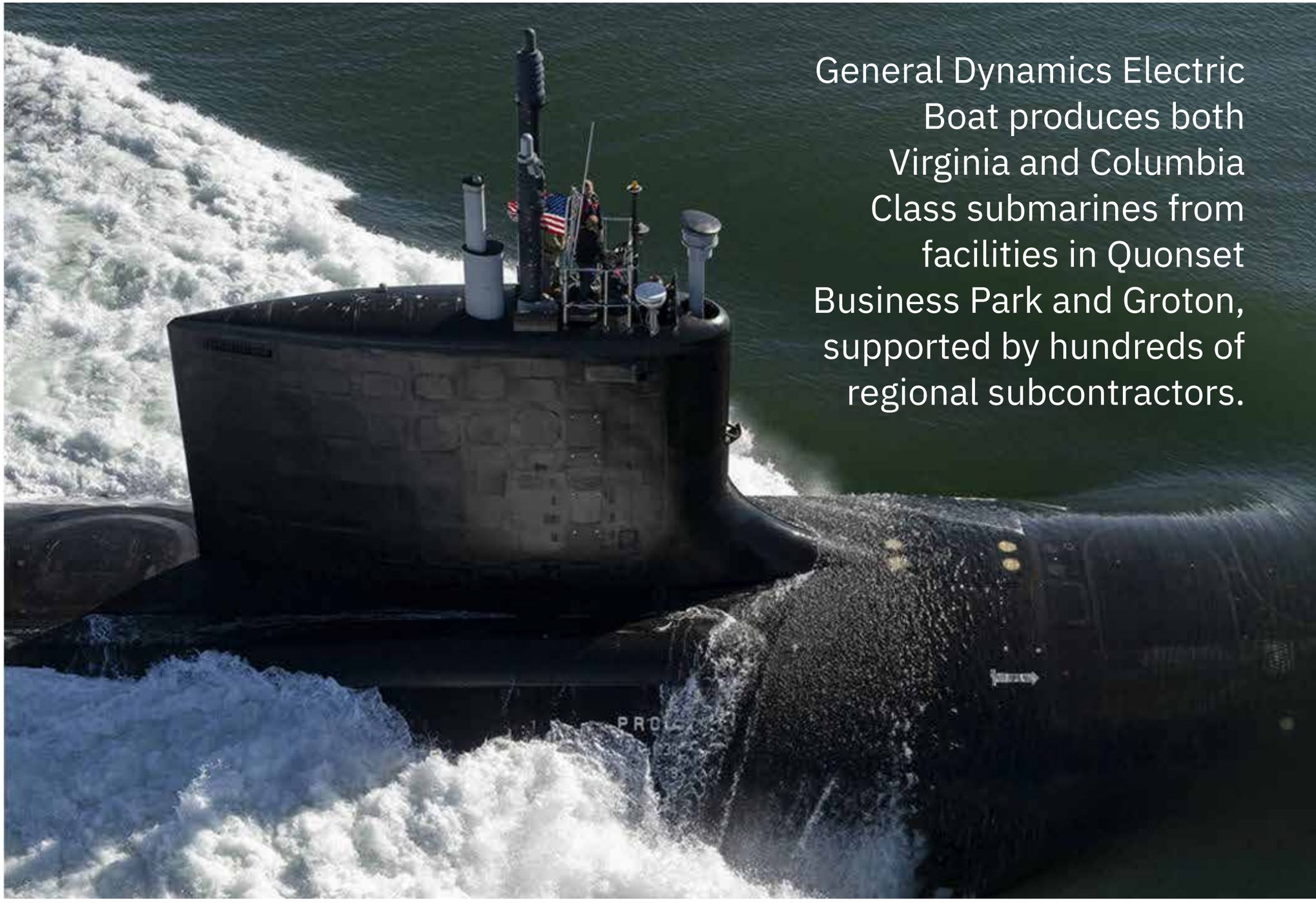
Southern New England now supports one of the most comprehensive defense innovation ecosystems in the United States. Over 8,000 ocean-tech and defense-related companies operate in the region, anchored by General Dynamics Electric Boat, Anduril, Saab, and Raytheon. These major primes are complemented by agile small businesses specializing in autonomous systems, counter-UAS, advanced materials, and dual-use technologies.

Key innovation accelerators and support organizations like 401 Tech Bridge, Polaris Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Polaris MEP), RIHub, SENEDIA, The University of Rhode Island and their partners in the National Institute for Undersea Vehicle Technology (NIUVT) partners, the University of Connecticut and NUWC, and the Ocean Tech Hub help to coordinate the ecosystem.

The region remains the core of America's nuclear submarine industrial base. General Dynamics Electric Boat produces both Virginia and Columbia Class submarines from facilities in Quonset Business Park and Groton, supported by hundreds of regional subcontractors. Meeting DoD's production goals demands workforce expansion, supply chain agility, and integration of automation and robotics.

Southern New England is equally distinguished for its innovation in Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUVs) and counter-UAS technologies. Firms such as Anduril, Saab, Greensea IQ, Jaia Robotics, Havoc AI, Regent, and VATN Systems are advancing technologies including swarm-capable underwater systems, modular payloads, and low-cost surveillance platforms across domains. The BlueTIDE (technology in-water demonstration event) demonstration series, hosted by 401 Tech Bridge, has established an event in the region referred to as the "Paris Airshow of undersea technology", according to Senator Sheldon Whitehouse. Southern New England is on the rise thanks to a swell of advancements and investment in blue and dual-use technology.

THE REGION REMAINS THE CORE OF AMERICA'S NUCLEAR SUBMARINE INDUSTRIAL BASE.



CURRENT INTERNATIONAL SECURITY LANDSCAPE AND CHALLENGES

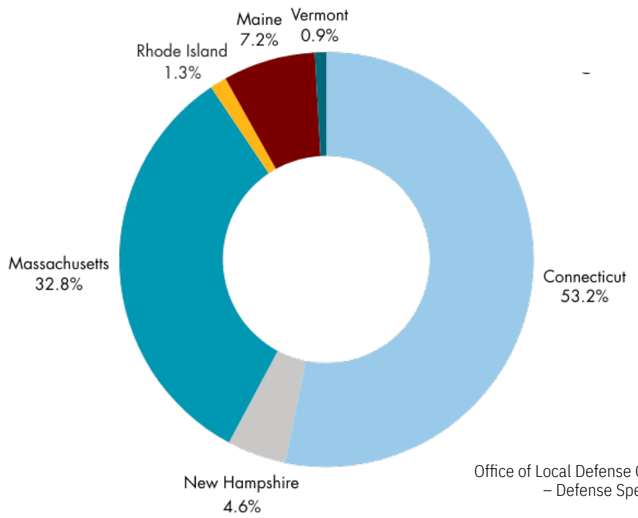
The contemporary security environment is defined by rapid technological change, strategic competition, and evolving modes of warfare. Major state actors such as China and Russia are reshaping the global order through military modernization, gray-zone operations, and hybrid tactics that exploit emerging technologies. Hot spots are flaring in South America and the Middle East resulting in limited military engagements in Iran and Venezuela, both of which have the potential to intensify at a moment's notice or spread further in the region. These developments challenge U.S. dominance across all domains, in many regions but particularly in the undersea and littoral environments where access, survivability, and persistence are critical.

From the strategic perspective, geopolitical realities demand new force projection capabilities and distributed, low-cost, low-signature operations and simultaneous investment in defense against these same capabilities. The AUKUS agreement exemplifies this strategic response—linking U.S., U.K., and Australian capabilities in nuclear-powered submarine production and integrated operations. At the tactical level the proliferation of unmanned systems—particularly low-cost aerial and maritime drones—has transformed warfare at the tactical level. Bridging the gap between doctrine and technology requires the ability to rapidly prototype, test, and integrate novel systems, which regional organizations like the burgeoning Rapid Innovation Accelerator (RIA–RI) and the future RADE (Research Acceleration Demonstration and Experimentation) Center will directly support.

THE CONTEMPORARY SECURITY ENVIRONMENT IS DEFINED BY RAPID TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, STRATEGIC COMPETITION, AND EVOLVING MODES OF WARFARE.

RHODE ISLAND'S ROLE

Rhode Island, sitting squarely in the middle of southern New England, is dwarfed by its two larger neighbors in total defense spending according to DoD's annual report on spending by state. As of 2023, Connecticut leads the way with $25.3 billion of personnel and contract defense spending, Massachusetts trails with $16.8 billion. DOD data used for these spending reports is under reported for Rhode Island, as noted in the SENEDIA *Economic Impact of the Defense Cluster in New England*, May 2023 and lists Rhode Island at a distant third at $1.8 billion. Though Rhode Island trails in defense spending, it still maintains strategic advantages due to its geographic location, 400 miles of coastline, deep water access, historical investment, organization and infrastructure.



2023 DoD Contract Spending by New England State ($B)

Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation – Defense Spending by State FY 2023

From a geographic perspective, Rhode Island sits between New York and Boston, major hubs of investment and innovation, and is accessible to both easily by car or train. It hosts a nationally recognized regional airport which enables a short flight to Washington DC. Any part of Rhode Island is accessible within an hour and yes, everyone knows everyone, which accelerates partnerships and innovation activities. Rhode Island's unique shape boasts over 400 miles of coastline - incredible access to the ocean and a tremendous advantage compared to its neighbors. Additionally, the cost of living is lower, and quality of life is regularly considered higher in Rhode Island.

For generations, key investments in organizations and institutions have made Rhode Island the center of undersea technology. Rhode Island can utilize the assets in both Massachusetts and Connecticut while maintaining excellent ocean access to create tremendous opportunity.

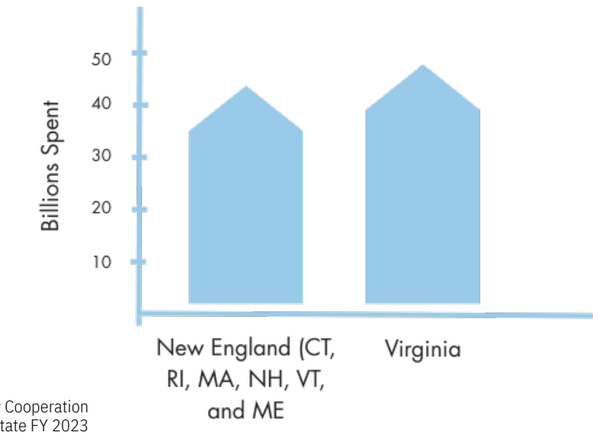
Southern New England's dominance in maritime space is unrivaled. The Naval War College in Newport, RI is the nation's center of strategy and policy and the Undersea Warfighting Development Center in Groton, CT is the home of undersea tactics and training. The density of research and development between the government entities (the Naval Undersea Warfare Center in Newport, Coast Guard Research and Development

Center in Groton, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, MIT Lincoln Labs, MITRE, and Draper Lab) and the offices of every major defense prime and dozens of academic institutions creates the most fertile breeding ground for maritime technology in the world. Rhode Island simply requires an adequate investment strategy to capitalize on the opportunities created by this proximity.

The only other state with submarine building receives more federal funding than all of New England combined!

For generations, key investments in organizations and institutions have made Rhode Island the center of undersea technology.

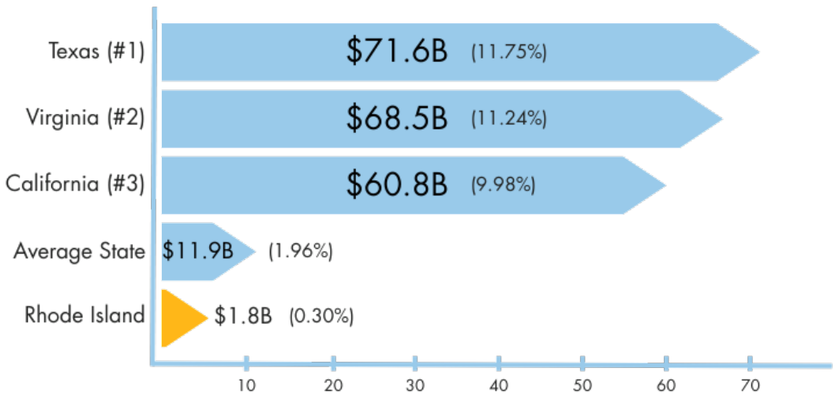
FY23 DoD Contract Spending: New England vs. Virginia ($B)



Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation – Defense Spending by State FY 2023

"Southern New England's dominance in maritime space is unrivaled."

Defense Spending in Rhode Island vs Other States ($B)



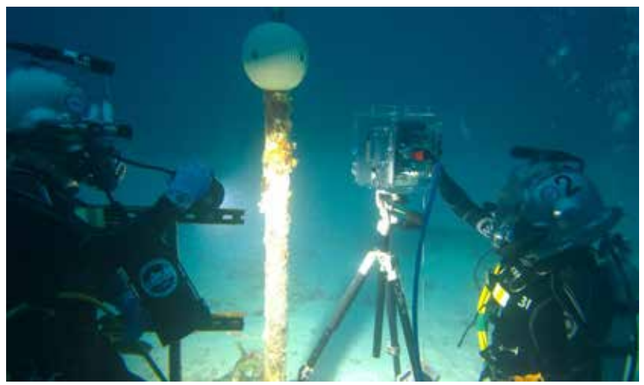
Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation – Defense Spending by State FY 2023

STRATEGIC RHODE ISLAND ASSETS

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

The U.S. Naval War College (NWC) in Newport, RI, anchors the Doctrine-to-Tactics enterprise in Southern New England. Its wargaming center bridges emerging technologies and operational concepts. Integrating Smart Bay's digital twin into the wargaming environment will allow real-time data to inform strategic modeling, while RADE's live testing validates those technologies in practice. Together, these institutions create a feedback loop linking concept, simulation, and experimentation.

The U.S. Naval War College (NWC), founded in 1884 in Newport, Rhode Island, is the oldest institution of its kind devoted to the advanced study of naval warfare. Its establishment was driven by Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, who envisioned a school where naval officers could systematically study the art and science of maritime strategy, operations, and tactics. Over its history, the NWC has been a hub for developing naval doctrine and professional military education, shaping generations of naval leaders. Figures such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, one of its earliest faculty members, produced foundational works on sea power that influenced naval strategy worldwide. The College's mission has consistently been to enhance the intellectual readiness of Navy officers through rigorous academic study and strategic analysis, preparing them for high command and complex joint operations.



A defining feature of the Naval War College's contribution to the Navy and the Department of Defense has been its pioneering role in wargaming. Beginning in the late 19th century, the College developed structured gaming methodologies to simulate naval engagements and explore potential strategies and technologies. These wargames have played a crucial role in shaping U.S. naval planning—from pre-World War II carrier operations to Cold War deterrence and modern multi-domain warfare. Today, the NWC remains the central hub for operational-level and strategic wargaming in the Department of Defense, supporting the development of concepts, capabilities, and force design for the future fleet. Its Wargaming Department collaborates with the Navy, Marine Corps, and other services—as well as allies and partners—to test assumptions, refine doctrines, and anticipate emerging challenges in an increasingly contested global security environment.

"These wargames have played a crucial role in shaping U.S. naval planning..."

NAVAL UNDERSEA WARFARE CENTER, NEWPORT

The Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC) in Newport, Rhode Island traces its origins to the establishment of the Naval Torpedo Station on Goat Island in 1869, the U.S. Navy's first permanent torpedo research and development facility. Initially focused on the design and production of torpedoes, the station evolved through two world wars into a leading center for undersea weapons innovation and testing. In 1970, it became part of the newly created Naval Underwater Systems Center (NUSC), reflecting an expanded mission that included sonar, guidance, communications, and undersea vehicle technologies. Following further reorganizations, the modern NUWC Division Newport was formally established in 1992 as part of the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA), and continued growing capabilities thanks to Senator Reed's support and advocacy for the important role NUWC plays in national defense. Today, NUWC Newport stands as one of the Navy's premier research, development, test, and evaluation (RDT&E) centers, continuing a legacy of more than 150 years of advancing undersea warfare capabilities.

NUWC Newport plays a critical role in developing, testing, and integrating the Navy's most advanced maritime technologies, supporting both manned and unmanned undersea systems. Central to its work is the use of high-fidelity modeling and simulation, which allows engineers and scientists to analyze complex interactions within the undersea environment without

NUWC NEWPORT PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN DEVELOPING, TESTING, AND INTEGRATING THE NAVY'S MOST ADVANCED MARITIME TECHNOLOGIES, SUPPORTING BOTH MANNED AND UNMANNED UNDERSEA SYSTEMS.

relying solely on costly and time-consuming sea trials. Through advanced digital twins, acoustic modeling, and system performance simulations, NUWC can evaluate new sensors, weapons, and platforms in realistic virtual environments. These capabilities not only accelerate innovation but also help inform fleet tactics, system acquisition, and future force design. By combining physical experimentation with digital modeling, NUWC Newport remains a cornerstone of the Navy's undersea dominance and a key contributor to the Department of Defense's broader

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION (NOAA) MARINE OPERATIONS CENTER – ATLANTIC (MOC-A), NEWPORT

Thanks to Senator Reed's support, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is building a new Marine Operations Center–Atlantic (MOC-A) at Naval Station Newport in Rhode Island, marking a major investment in the nation's ocean research and fleet support infrastructure. Groundbreaking for the facility took place on May 6, 2024, with construction expected to be completed in 2027. The $147 million project, awarded to Skanska USA through the U.S. Navy, will feature a state-of-the-art pier capable of berthing four large NOAA vessels, a floating dock for smaller craft, and extensive shoreside facilities for administration, maintenance, logistics, and storage. Funded in part by the Inflation Reduction Act, the new MOC-A is designed to meet modern standards for sustainability, climate resilience, and operational efficiency.

Once completed, the Newport center will serve as the home port for NOAA's Atlantic fleet, supporting vital oceanographic, climate, and hydrographic research missions. Its location within Naval Station Newport places it within a broader ecosystem of defense and maritime innovation institutions, including the Naval Undersea Warfare Center and the Naval War College. The new facility will strengthen NOAA's ability to conduct research, maintain vessels, and coordinate field operations throughout the Atlantic region, reinforcing the United States' leadership in ocean science, climate observation, and maritime safety.

OFFSHORE WIND, BLOCK ISLAND

Rhode Island is a pioneer in the U.S. offshore wind industry, beginning with the Block Island Wind Farm project that became operational in 2016 and is recognized as the nation's first commercial offshore wind farm. The follow-on Revolution Wind project, a utility-scale wind farm providing power to Rhode Island and Connecticut, is expected to be fully operational in 2026 and has been key in helping both states meet clean energy goals while creating regional offshore wind hubs and transforming port infrastructure in places like Quonset Business Park and ProvPort. Aside from the obvious benefits of additional power to the grid, the creation of this wind farm provides a tremendous research and development opportunity. The infrastructure creates a new undersea environment and serves as a distributed network of platforms for a wide variety of sensors.

Rhode Island's foundational strength also stems from a congressional delegation which includes U.S. Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and U.S. Representatives Gabe Amo (1st District) and Seth Magaziner (2nd District). Senator Reed, a senior member of the Senate, serves on key panels including the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee, where he influences defense and funding priorities. Senator Whitehouse sits on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and previously chaired the Budget Committee, among others. Representative Amo serves in the House representing the 1st District serving as Vice Ranking Member on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and member on both the House Committee on the Budget and House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. Representative Magaziner serves the 2nd District, with Magaziner's committee work including Homeland Security and Natural Resources.

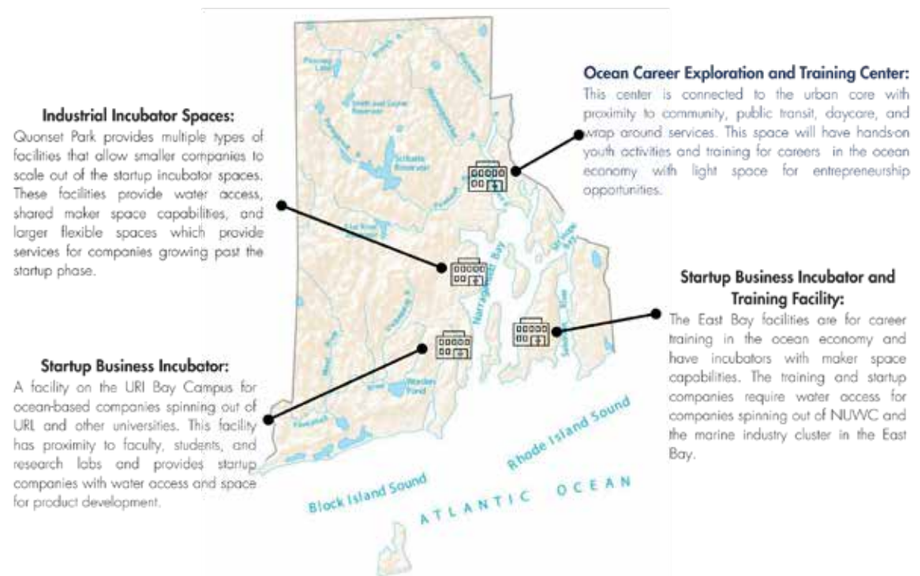
OPPORTUNITIES

There are ample opportunities to connect these great organizations institutions, spur collaboration and accelerate technology development and the Rhode Island economy along with it. To do so will take leadership, communication, and investment to help RI meet it's potential.

EMBRACE AND ENHANCE GEOGRAPHIC ADVANTAGES

The state of Rhode Island is essentially a horseshoe shaped land mass surrounding the Narragansett Bay with islands scattered both within the horseshoe and offshore. There is tremendous access to the water around the state and a variety of uncoordinated, discrete efforts that relate to the blue economy and dual use technology ecosystem. There are four strategically key geographic areas for investment:

- **PROVIDENCE:** The state's densest population and greatest opportunity to develop future workforce. Investment in this area will seed economic opportunities within the urban core.
- **QUONSET BUSINESS PARK:** The state's largest industrial park and economic development engine. Defense and dual-use companies require additional capabilities enhanced by the geographic features and economic advantages of this park.
- **AQUIDNECK ISLAND/BRISTOL:** Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth, are home to the majority of defense organizations and investment in Rhode Island. Bristol is home to many boat building and composite companies and a burgeoning innovation ecosystem. Investment in tools to accelerate opportunities in this area will be impacted by the legacy companies and innovative organizations.
- **SOUTH COUNTY/URI:** Home to the URI Bay Campus and multiple federal government partners. Investment in this area will create better opportunities for companies spinning out of the university into an environment primed for defense and dual-use applications.



> “State funding can help connect these entities by creating cooperative efforts and they can connect the people between these locations as well”

In addition to these four key regional sectors, Block Island is home to the first offshore wind farm, an asset not only for energy generation but also research and development as well as economic development. Each of these areas require investment and support in a coordinated fashion.

In Providence, Polaris is building a workforce exploration and training center in partnership with the city and the Economic Development Administration (EDA) at 50 Sims. At Quonset Business Park, QDCis planning the RADE Centercreating a commercial, purpose-built, multidomain, technology test-and-demonstration center adjacent to the Air National Guard Headquarters and the two largest defense industry partners in the state. In Newport, 401 tech bridge has established an annual maritime technology demonstration event, Blue TIDE, RI Hub hosts an annual Newport Investor Summit, SENEDIA hosts Defense Innovation Days, and innovate Newport has created a space to host startup companies and events. In Bristol, Unity Park has created an accessible location for maritime technologies and start-ups. In Narragansett, URI Is building their new ocean robotics facility, has a research nuclear reactor, and the Ocean Technology Center aimed at developing startups out of the University’s innovation ecosystem. These specific facilities and organizations need more reliable resourcing from the state and greater coordination with each other to meet growing national security requirements as well as state economic goals.

This horseshoe geography is typically seen as a challenge as commuters rely on a network of bridges, often under some form of construction or maintenance, to move between key economic centers across the state. Viewed from the water though, these centers are quite close to one another. State funding can help connect these entities by creating cooperative efforts and they can connect the people between these locations as well with the development of a subsidized ferry system that would not only ease traffic congestion on bridges and roads and create shorter and more pleasurable commutes, it would also create multiple opportunities for technology development and ocean data collection across the Narragansett Bay.

ORGANIZE AND REINFORCE SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Rhode Island is home to many nonprofit organizations that support a variety of economic interests around the state, including many that touch the blue economy or defense industry. But who is leading these efforts? In order to move forward in a coordinated fashion, the state must appoint a coordinating body to support blue economy and dual use technology related efforts. Rhode Island is also lacking an economic development district that facilitates advancements of state economic priorities. Organizations like 401 Tech Bridge, Polaris MEP, RI HUB, APEX Accelerators, Chambers of Commerce, Grow Blue, Ocean Tech Hub, SENEDIA, RIMA and others all have roles to play and there is plenty of work to go around but there needs to be an appointed leader in this space to coordinate and avoid duplication of effort.

RI SMARTBAY – MARITIME AND MULTIDOMAIN TEST RANGE

The RI SmartBay initiative, a component of the Ocean Technology Hub (OTH) led by 401 Tech Bridge, is a proposal for a comprehensive maritime testbed and coastal observatory designed to transform Narragansett Bay into a global hub for ocean technology innovation and commercialization. The initiative’s core mission is to address the current problem of siloed data and uncoordinated efforts by connecting legacy maritime facilities, installing new sensors, and leveraging mobile sensing equipment to build a realtime digital twin modeling and simulation environment. This sophisticated platform would integrate data from buoys, moored instruments, and various autonomous unmanned systems to create a robust, cloud-based network for technology prototyping, rapid development, testing, demonstration, and workforce development in sectors like defense, energy, maritime logistics, and aquaculture. The platform and its associated Digital Experience Center (DEC) would democratize access to ocean data and simulation for everyone from K-12 students to startup businesses, to large prime contractors and government organizations ultimately building a next-generation, self-sustaining ecosystem that drives economic growth in Rhode Island’s blue economy.

RADE CENTER (RESEARCH ACCELERATION DEMONSTRATION, AND EXPERIMENTATION)

The Research, Acceleration, Demonstration, and Experimentation (RADE) Center proposal represents the physical cornerstone of the region’s innovation ecosystem. Situated at the Quonset Business Park, this 160,000-square-foot facility would provide direct access to air, sea, and land domains. High-bay demonstration areas, wet and dry labs, and digital collaboration spaces will support testing of unmanned systems, materials, sensors, and integrated maritime and aerial technologies.

Working in tandem with the Rhode Island Smart Bay, the persistent network of oceanographic sensors and real-time data analytics discussed above, the RADE Center would establish a full life-cycle pathway from prototype to production. This shared resource would enable collaboration among NUWC, the Naval War College, and the Air National Guard while maintaining secure, off-base experimentation and technology demonstration facilities. It is planned to include SCIF (sensitive compartmented information facility) space, which is lacking in the region, and can serve as a landing space for technology companies interested in moving to the region from across the country as well as those from partner nations, supporting national priorities like the AUKUS partnership.

BLUE TIDE

Blue Technology In-water Demonstration Event (BlueTIDE) series in Newport, RI, where 401 Tech Bridge has conducted advanced technology demonstrations and competitions for the last two years. Blue TIDE 2026 had 53 industry participants and over 550 attendees. This event creates a robust, real-world demonstration series for emerging technologies across the maritime, multi-domain and dual-use technology sectors to address clearly defined warfighter requirements.

AUKUS (AUSTRALIA UNITED KINGDOM UNITED STATES) STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

AUKUS represents not only a defense alliance but a long-term industrial partnership. To meet its commitments, the U.S. must scale submarine production and foster interoperable industrial bases among its allies. Nuclear submarines are only built in two locations in the United States, by two companies: Huntington Ingalls Industries in Virginia and General Dynamics Electric Boat in Rhode Island and Connecticut. While Southern New England is producing half of the U.S. nuclear submarine fleet, it is not seeing anywhere close to half of the investment from AUKUS-related funding, in part because the states are not investing in the partnership themselves. An FY24 National Security Supplemental Funding Appropriation approved nearly $3.3 billion in additional funding for submarine industrial base and AUKUS activities while Australia has also committed an additional $3 billion to the program. New England's suppliers form a critical portion of the Submarine Industrial Base, and collaborations by University of Rhode Island with Flinders University (Australia) and NERDIC are advancing

AUKUS FUNDING OVERVIEW

FUNDING CATEGORY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT	INVESTMENT DETAILS
Submarine Industrial Base	~$3.3 Billion+	Dedicated supplemental funding to boost US capacity.
Advanced Capabilities (Pillar II)	~$25M / year	Dedicated to joint tech development (AI, Quantum, unmanned systems, cUAS, etc.).
Broader Navy Infrastructure	$30B+ annually	Not AUKUS-specific, but essential for its execution.
Inbound from Australia	+$3 Billion	Credit to the US: Australia is paying this TO the US.

The partnership is best known for Pillar I, which focuses entirely on nuclear submarines, but AUKUS Pillar II emphasizes advanced capabilities such as AI-enabled undersea autonomy, resilient communications, advanced materials, and maritime cyber defense—all fields actively developed through URI, 401 Tech Bridge, and the Ocean Tech Hub. The integration of Smart Bay's digital twin environment and RADE Center's physical testing enables simulation, modeling, and real-world validation of these technologies under controlled, data-rich conditions. While the government investment in Pillar II is small in comparison to the billions of dollars invested in Pillar I, there still has been at least $25 million in annual defense budgets with number expected to rise.

COORDINATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION EFFORTS BASED ON INDUSTRY REQUIREMENTS

Rhode Island needs a high-level organization built to unite business leaders, educators, workforce agencies, and public partners around shared strategies for innovation, workforce, and infrastructure investment within the state and region. A nonpartisan, apolitical convener should be established or appointed to coordinate and lead this effort. The Office of the Post Secondary Commissioner (OPC), separate from RI Department of Education (RIDE), has some authority over state colleges and universities (University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and Community College of Rhode Island) but lacks authority over private universities (Brown, Providence College, Roger Williams, Bryant, Salve Regina University, the Rhode Island School of Design, Johnson and Wales University, and New England Tech) and lacks connectivity to industry. The RI Department of Labor and Training (DLT) and its successful Real Jobs RI program has convened effective organizations to facilitate workforce development but lacks influence or authority over colleges and universities. RIDE has done a great job supporting real world learning programs like The Met school and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs across the state, but those programs could be improved by greater coordination with industry at strategic levels and strong pipelines into post-secondary programs and schools. All of these state entities run critical programs that would benefit from a closer relationship with industry and an opportunity to build relationships and execute coordinated programs with additional public and private partners.

To effectively convene and coordinate, the organization selected or created must have both the authority and the resources to do so. This means the organization must be appointed or designated by the state, recognized by the federal delegation and federal government to represent the state in seeking federal resources, and resourced by the state to both execute its convening mission and to allocate funding to meet state level priorities determined by the convened group of industry, academic, nonprofit and government leaders. Without the ability to provide funding to programs needed, this and any organization will struggle to gain the necessary influence outside of government organizations. Funding for programs or infrastructure through this entity should be restricted to participating members.

> “RIDE has done a great job supporting real world learning programs...”

> “All of these state entities run critical programs that would benefit from a closer relationship with industry and an opportunity to build relationships...”

SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND COMMISSION

Rhode Island's congressional delegation has worked for years to create opportunities for the state within the blue economy. Congressman Cicilline had led the effort and Congressman Amo picked up the torch in partnership with his RI colleagues in the Senate on the Southern New England Commission. This is a tremendous opportunity for Rhode Island to seek federal investment in areas of strategic interest to the federal government. On 4 January 2025, legislation authorized the creation of the Southern New England Regional Commission via amending 40 U.S.C. §15301(a). Federally established regional commissions like this one promote targeted economic development vital to national interests and the Southern New England Regional Commission targets economic and workforce development in the blue economy, specifically to expand defense manufacturing and the maritime economy. This Commission is the tenth commission established by Congress since 1965, and these commissions have been highly successful, once they are operational and funded. To begin operations, the commissions require the Executive Branch to nominate, and the Senate to confirm, a federal co-chair, who serves alongside the other members of the commission, which in the case of the Southern New England Regional Commission will be the Governors of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, one of whom will be elected to serve as the regional co-chair. Once Congress appropriates funding for Commission operations, the Commission may hire staff and begin issuing grants to promote blue economy development and defense manufacturing in Southern New England.

THIS IS A TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITY FOR RHODE ISLAND TO SEEK FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN AREAS OF STRATEGIC INTEREST TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

CONCLUSION

Southern New England stands at an inflection point. The region's century-long legacy of undersea dominance, anchored by the Naval War College, NUWC, UWDC, Electric Boat, and a dense constellation of research institutions and maritime innovators has positioned Rhode Island and its neighbors as the nation's most concentrated and capable hub for naval and dual-use technology. The challenges of the current global security environment, from strategic competition with near-peer adversaries to the rapid proliferation of unmanned and autonomous systems, only underscore the urgent national need for an ecosystem that can connect strategic thought, cutting-edge research, rapid prototyping, and full-scale production. Few places in the world offer the proximity, access, and depth of maritime expertise that Southern New England already possesses.

Unlocking the region's full potential requires intentional organization and coordinated investment. Rhode Island's geographic assets, world-class institutions, and unique ocean access are powerful advantages, but only if they are woven together into a coherent, state-and-regionwide strategy. The emergence of SmartBay, the RADE Center, BlueTIDE, and the Ocean Tech Hub demonstrates the momentum already building in this direction. However, the next phase of growth will depend on establishing a unifying structure that aligns state agencies, higher education, industry, and nonprofit partners around shared priorities in innovation, workforce development, infrastructure modernization, and data sharing and integration. Without a central convener with the authority, resources, and federal alignment to drive strategy, the ecosystem risks fragmentation at a moment when national security demands speed and cohesion.

The creation of the Southern New England Regional Commission represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure sustained federal investment in blue economy infrastructure, defense manufacturing, and maritime innovation. Rhode Island is poised to lead this effort, not by competing with Connecticut or Massachusetts, but by serving as the connective tissue that unites the region's premier assets. By coordinating demonstration environments like SmartBay, accelerating technology transition through the RADE Center, expanding events like BlueTIDE, and aligning educational and workforce pathways with industry needs, Rhode Island can become the national epicenter for the development, testing, and deployment of advanced maritime capabilities.

In a rapidly changing world, the United States must out-innovate and out-produce its competitors across every maritime domain. Southern New England is uniquely equipped to meet that challenge. With deliberate strategy, aligned leadership, and sustained investment, the region can not only maintain its historic role in undersea warfare, it can shape the future of global maritime security, drive economic growth, and demonstrate a model of regional collaboration unmatched anywhere in the country.

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