New Bedford Ocean Cluster wins first competitive grant

The New Bedford Ocean Cluster (NBOC), a partnership between the New Bedford Port Authority and Spherical Analytics (formerly ImpactLABS), was awarded a grant through the Grand Challenge, a grant competition offered through the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative and the Seaport Economic Council.

With the $250,000 award, the NBOC will establish the infrastructure to create a Marine Data Bank, a cloud-based platform that allows a number of subscribers to share, sell, and trade their data. Subscribers' data is first ingested through Spherical Analytics' Immutably™ for the Environment blockchain technology, where it is proofed for accuracy and veracity; it is then held in the Marine Data Bank where stakeholders can share their data, running models and analytics that ultimately increase productivity and efficiency, and create commercial potential and growth within the sector.

The NBOC will test the Marine Data Bank through a pilot program in partnership with UMass Dartmouth's School for Marine Science & Technology's (SMAST) Dr. Kevin Stokesbury, ingesting data collected through his finfish counting program.

"The Port of New Bedford continues to evolve as a leading center of marine science innovation, and today's announcement is further evidence of that," said Mayor Jon Mitchell, who chairs the New Bedford Port Authority.

He added, "Dozens of businesses located in and around New Bedford have been tracking, and continue to track, hundreds of individual data points for a variety of purposes. These data points are sitting in a number of physical and digital spaces,

creating a highly underutilized data environment. At the same time, there are hundreds of public data sets that are also sitting in a variety of physical and digital spaces. Our goal is to find ways to capture the latent value of all this data, and put it toward productive economic use for our industries and residents."

The Marine Data Bank will serve as the 'digital data exchange' for the maritime industry stakeholders in Greater New Bedford and beyond, creating a central repository for this data, where it can be looked at through a wider, more comprehensive lens and applied to a number of business and environmental challenges.

"We are excited to be given the opportunity to work on such an exciting project with Spherical Analytics and SMAST," says Ed Anthes-Washburn, Port Director. "Through this project, we can basically turn our fishing fleet into a fleet of research vessels that are on the water 365 days a year collecting data that could provide additional streams of revenue for fishermen."

Greater New Bedford, and the seacoast communities of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, have the opportunity to lead the world in demonstrating how new approaches to integrating traditional maritime operations with existing and emerging digital data sources and new sensor and instrumentation technologies can lead to more productive and sustainable fisheries, business and job creation, and environmental and coastal resilience.

The New Bedford Ocean Cluster was formally established in the fall of 2017, with founding partners the New Bedford Port Authority and Spherical Analytics. Thereafter, the NBOC formally became a member of the Iceland Ocean Cluster Network, which includes clusters in Norway, Maine, and Iceland.

The NBOC aims to create opportunities for startups and

entrepreneurs to network directly with industry to ultimately increase efficiency, increase value, and/or enter new markets. At the same time, the NBOC aims to provide startups and entrepreneurs with customized marine-based technical assistance and guidance.