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In Portugal, Stone Soup Leadership Institute is Building Blue Economy Education Pathways That Start Early

By Susan Lahey May 15, 2026



The Blue Economy needs a workforce trained a different way—not just for economic sustainability but for ecological sustainability and interconnection among industries and organizations. Because the economy is being built in real time, there’s very little structure to prepare young people to step into these careers. Stone Soup Leadership Institute is building Blue Economy education pathways; and students are helping.

The nonprofit has spent the last eight years co-developing its Blue Economy Career Pathways Platform with youth, business, education and government leaders. Founding Director Marianne Larned said she’s seen over and over again a disconnect between what businesses need and what schools teach, leaving businesses struggling for workers with the right skills and graduates unable to get jobs.

“The challenge is that in order to prepare our young people for these jobs, the academic offerings from colleges and universities and high schools needs to be expanded adjusted – especially since we’re in a crisis with the planet,” she said.

The Institute has worked with island communities as well as communities on both U.S. coasts where young people were eager to find jobs that helped the planet—especially the oceans—and their own communities rather than having to relocate.

In Fall River Massachusetts, for example, it helped a community that was losing its water management employees to retirement with no replacements. Local young people desperately needed greater career opportunities but none of them seemed to be thinking of water management. The local community college had a clean water management certificate program, but nobody was signing up for it.

Stone Soup worked with the local high school Environmental Science teacher and CTE (technical training department) to show students options they hadn't seen before. They introduced them to the 50 sustainability certificates the college offered and they created a dual-enrollment certificate program for the college's water management track, developing a pipeline for future employees.

The organization's Blue Economy platform shows what jobs the Blue Economy needs and the requirements and resources—from certificates to degree programs—to pursue those jobs. It's customized with local/national job projections and salary range forming a comprehensive ecosystem.

And, of course, to ensure that sustainability is built in.

"Everything we do is about sustainability," Larned said. "So the young people bring that with them wherever they go...and they use that criteria for choosing what companies they want to work with."

In recent years, Stone Soup has focused on Portugal which aims to be Europe's Blue Economy Hub—since the country's entire west flank is ocean. Emigration is common in Portugal, though many young people would rather find jobs close to home. But, Larned said, the European system channels kids into career decisions very early in their education so it's harder for young people to think of switching to emerging career paths in this Blue Economy.

From April to June in Portugal Stone Soup is hosting a Blue Economy Youth Ambassadors internship program. Students are interviewing leaders in business, education and organizations to design specifically Portuguese Blue Economy Career Pathways and create a Blue Economy Education Exhibit that includes a video library of their interviews. This will be a living document available to schools for free. June 2 in Cascais they'll present their findings at an event that includes Portugal's Secretary of the Sea Salvador Malheiro.

"These young people are interviewing leaders and business education and organizations. And it's incredible.. .they are learning about where the gaps are – and the challenge is that these sectors don't talk with each other. And so there's no infrastructure yet to address the gaps. So what we're hoping with this initiative we're developing in Portugal right now is to offer a roadmap for leaders in business, education and government to have a clearer understanding of what the issues are, the challenges, the opportunities, the emerging trends that will enable Portugal to realize a leader in the blue economy."