



**The Stone Soup Leadership Institute's Design-A-Thon
A User Design Experience for the Sustainable Workforce Development Network
June 21, 2019 at Innovate Newport**

On June 21, the Stone Soup Leadership Institute brought together leaders of the Blue Economy - from CEOs, to Newport's Mayor and New England academic institutions. These leaders were invited to engage in a deep exploration to shape the design of the Institute's **Sustainable Workforce Development Network (SWDN)**.

To guide their interviews, the Institute's Sustainability and Tech Emerging Leaders from Olin College of Engineering crafted thought-provoking questions for the SWDN Survey. They received valuable first-hand testimonials and gained insight into how the SWDN can serve as an important bridge between students and blue companies. The Design-A-Thon's process directed the Institute's Tech Team how to strategically steer the SWD Network prototype. Their discussions ranged from the need to raise awareness about blue-green jobs, especially among educators and high school students, and the importance of connecting them to resources like workforce development programs. It was a strong reminder that students not only need to be aware of blue opportunities, but they also need to be guided towards these career pathways.

*"Newport is positioned to be a strong force in the Blue Economy... we have all these connections that can really make for a blue economy region," said **Newport Mayor Jamie Bova**. "There's work that we need to do in order to make that happen. One of the most important things we need to do is help prepare our students and residents to be ready to take those jobs. We have students that want to go into these fields, that want to go into Blue Economy."*

One of the key takeaways was the lack of information available to students about Blue Economy which prohibits them from becoming actively involved. This can be overcome by providing students with resources as well as motivating them. Institutions can play an important role in this.

*"It was enlightening for me to learn how disconnected our student youth in our region are from our local industry and government incentive programs," said **Anthony Baro, PowerDocks LLC**. "We have an absolute opportunity for Chambers of Commerce, working with local professional associations and organizations (i.e. from Blue Tech) and local government business development agencies, to engage united in an educational career and workforce development outreach program with our High Schools and Higher Ed Institutions. Students have high aspirations, helping them recognize and identify paths knowing what local industry and government incentive programs are, can offer them the opportunity to help them develop their dreams and ultimately ignite local communities with much needed solutions to local challenges. Blue Tech represents roughly 75% of the Earth footprint. Imagine what we can accomplish if we could develop the missing 50% capacity to address our Blue Tech promise and challenges." He added, "I look forward to staying engaged and helping this great workforce development initiative."*

The Design-A-Thon was a powerful reminder of the importance of building bridges between education and employers. The missing link re-affirmed the need to build the SWD network and also helped leaders from businesses and institutions to come forward and support the Institute in its endeavors. Blue Economy leaders who participated in the Design-A-Thon underlined the importance of engaging community stakeholders and youth to work together toward a common goal. *"What emerged was an eye-opening and valuable discussion that confirmed for me the importance of engaging stakeholders around the Blue Economy in our communities," said **Bridget Burger of Cape Cod Regional STEM Network.** "The excitement of the next generation in being involved in building a better future, with the promise of innovative solutions to protect of our vital water resources is possible— if we all work together."*

• **Robert Rak, Bristol Community College:** *We need to equip high schoolers and career centers with resources like workforce development programs.*

• **Hugh Dunn: SouthCoast Development Partnership:** *"Massachusetts funds student internships with blue tech companies."*

• **Anthony Baro, Powerdocks LLC: Issue: Self-Motivation:** *"Will students take the extra step to go online and find this information for themselves? Chris responded with a great question: "Is there a link/step that should be taken by companies to help students pass this motivational threshold?"*

• **Bridget Burger, Cape Cod STEM Network:** The Institute's SWD Youth Survey about their interests offers a very interesting perspective. Matched with the Institute's TouchStone Leaders Platform it helps students identify, discover, research the educational tools with career testing modules.

*"It is encouraging to see this group of students and stakeholders from across the blue economy corridor (Cape Cod, SouthCoast to Rhode Island) attending the Stone Soup Leadership Institute's 15th Youth Leadership Summit for the Blue Economy," said **Hugh Dunn, SouthCoast Partnership Development and UMass Dartmouth's Blue Economy Corridor Initiative.** "This Summit was very timely, as it will help prepare our youth to begin pursuing education and career pathways in these blue tech industries, and help these industries accelerate within the region. It is another example of this region leveraging its two greatest assets, its people and its coastline."* **Michael Cullen of Rhode Island STEAM Academy** expressed the urgency of now and the need for involving the youth in finding a solution, *"...the Blue Tech future is now. It's here. Our current generation of students deserve to be given the keys to unlock the abundant advantages sitting on our doorstep."* **Keith Stokes, WindWInRI** said, *"...there is no better way to build a worker talent pipeline for this fast emerging sector (offshore wind) than to prepare youth through dedicated career pathway education."*

While the Institute's **Design-A-Thon** was eye-opening for the leaders and awakened them to the realities of young job seekers, for the Emerging Leaders building the SWDN prototype, the experience was motivational. **Chris Aring** said, *"I was inspired by these people with key roles in the sustainability and blue job/economy. After learning about what blue jobs and sustainability meant to each of them I couldn't wait to get back to the drawing board and iterate on powerful designs to help businesses and students connect to create a strong sustainability workforce development network. Their frustrations and hopes for the future have made me realize how important this problem is and how lucky I am to be able to work on a possible solution."* **Ilya Besancon,** added, *"The Design-A-Thon was a great experience. We engaged in fruitful discussions about sustainability, and the future of workforce development in Newport, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. I'm very motivated to work through our insights to help generate a more successful product for the Sustainable Workforce Development Network."* Trevor Tanaka said *"I feel hopeful that we can assist Rhode Island and Massachusetts to build bridges and connect youth with resources to support sustainable workforce development."*

These Emerging Leaders used this Design-A-Thon as the foundation for building the prototype during the Institute's 15th Youth Leadership Summit. They presented the **Sustainable Workforce Development Kiosk** at the Summit Graduation on June 28. Learn more watch video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpwazxo1AmM>