



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER



STRATEGIC
PLAN
2026



New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center (FHC) is the only organization actively recording, preserving, and sharing the story of New Bedford's fishing industry and community.

HISTORY OF NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

New Bedford is America's preeminent commercial fishing port. As such, it is perhaps the only place in New England where this industry, which was once so dominant in the region, is still a robust source of income and employment, and not simply a fact of history. It is a significant part of the region's economy and cultural identity, employing nearly 7,000 people in a combination of work at sea and on shore. Yet because so much of the work takes place out of sight, this culture is largely unknown and often misunderstood by those outside the industry. Unlike many waterfront communities that have lost their working waterfront to development, New Bedford remains a working harbor.

Located in the heart of the downtown Seaport Cultural District, FHC opened its doors in June of 2016, building on more than a decade of programming associated with the Working Waterfront Festival, an award winning, educational celebration of the occupational culture of commercial fishing that drew thousands to New Bedford's waterfront annually (2004-2017). Documenting, preserving, and sharing this occupational history began with the festival, and continues via ongoing community documentation, an archive, exhibits, film screenings, talks, tours, classes, school and out of school programs and festivals.

OUR MISSION

Sharing the story of New Bedford's fishing community with the world

OUR VISION

Because of New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center, residents and visitors understand and appreciate New Bedford's commercial fishing industry and its role in the economy, history, and culture of the region. The Center provides a gathering place for the fishing community, honoring its past, celebrating its present, and supporting its future. The Center is a gateway to the working waterfront and a must-see destination for visitors to the region. It is a well-used resource for students and teachers, writers and researchers, fishing community members, and the general public and is recognized regionally as a leading cultural institution.

CORE VALUES

Authenticity

FHC creates opportunities for the fishing community to share its story with the public offering many programs co-created and presented by fishing community members with lived experience.

Inclusion

FHC tells a story across time that includes everyone involved at sea and on shore, from boat and business owners to deckhands and shoreside workers, fishing families, and lesser-known perspectives, and offers programs for all income levels.

Trust/Respect

FHC is a trusted steward of the fishing community story, honoring the fishing community, fostering dialogue, and building respect for the hard work, generational knowledge, and cultural traditions of the fishing community.

Connection

FHC presents a wide range of programs, enabling everyone to connect with the story of commercial fishing. Whether they are interested in maritime history, seafood, or the inner workings of the port, everyone leaves with a better understanding of and respect for the fishing community.

Preservation

FHC is dedicated to documenting, preserving, and providing access to the history of the fishing community.



GOAL

1

Reconfigure FHC portfolio of programs to fulfill mission and address market opportunities

Goal 1

→ STRATEGY 1

Assess and re-prioritize programming and partnerships

→ STRATEGY 2

Offer a revised portfolio of programs at the Center, in the community, and online

→ STRATEGY 3

Generate data to measure effectiveness of programs



When I walked into the Fishing Heritage Center, I felt like I had come home. I belong here and it helped me understand Bill better.

RUTH BLOUNT, WIFE OF CAPTAIN BILL BLOUNT



GOAL

2

Reconfigure staff to align with new portfolio of programs and operations



My son just finished camp. Every day when I picked him up, he was so engrossed with the other campers he did not even realize camp had ended . . . he did not want camp to end. This is what a parent wants to hear when they decide to send their children to camp.

CARLOTA CARVALHO, PARENT

Goal 2

→ STRATEGY 1

Clarify, align, and document functions, responsibilities, procedures, and reporting relationships of staff and volunteers

→ STRATEGY 2

Develop 3-year organizational budgets that align staffing with scale of programming and industry standards and a corresponding business plan



I have been a commercial fisherman since 1957. I am the 4th generation of a family of 6 generations of commercial fishermen from New Bedford. It is very important for my family and the families of other fishermen that New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center is preserving this history for future generations.

RODNEY AVILA, RETIRED FISHERMAN



GOAL

3

Increase revenues to adequately support programming and operations



New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center's collection of materials is expansive, well catalogued and easily searchable. Their staff are knowledgeable and communicative . . . I especially appreciate their commitment to making sure these treasures in their archive are not only preserved, but made as accessible as possible to the broader community.

IAN COSS, PODCAST PRODUCER, GBH NEWS

Goal 3

→ STRATEGY 1

Develop cases for increased support

→ STRATEGY 2

Increase revenues from individual donors and corporate sponsorships

→ STRATEGY 3

Increase and prioritize grants of >\$25,000

→ STRATEGY 4

Adjust fees for services to align with market pricing

→ STRATEGY 5

Maximize net income from fundraising events

→ STRATEGY 6

Investigate and pursue as appropriate, passive revenue streams based on use of FHC Archives, online store, program and educational materials, and digital exhibits



GOAL

4

Strengthen and streamline operations and assess facilities needs



I was on a cruise that included a stop at New Bedford harbor where a fishing boat captain and a young woman whose father was lost at sea gave a talk on board our ship about the local fishing industry. It was the most memorable discussion of my trip. I would like to personally thank the Fishing Heritage Center.

PETER D

Goal 4

→ STRATEGY 1

Upgrade and integrate core systems to more effectively manage donations, financial processes, and program data, enhancing overall efficiency and decision-making

→ STRATEGY 2

Equip staff with training on new tools and systems, including cross-functional training to build flexibility and resilience, supported by ongoing IT assistance and clear, documented processes to ensure consistency and continuity

→ STRATEGY 3

Develop and implement a comprehensive Risk Management and Disaster Recovery Plan, with defined protocols and staff training to ensure preparedness and continuity in the face of unexpected challenges

→ STRATEGY 4

Analyze facilities relative to revised programming and operations needs for lease renewal decision or alternatives



GOAL

5

Revitalize brand, marketing and visibility for launch as part of 10th anniversary celebrations



The 'Walk the Working Waterfront' tour is an unbelievable experience!! You get a rare, behind-the-scenes look at America's top fishing port from the FHC -- with firsthand stories told in the shadow of the fishing fleet, you get a true feel for New Bedford's maritime life. It should be on everyone's list!!

MARLISSA B

Goal 5

→ STRATEGY 1

Revitalize FHC Brand to reflect its significance as an institution

→ STRATEGY 2

Update marketing materials and website

→ STRATEGY 3

Capitalize on the Center's location to attract Whaling Museum visitors and connect their interest in maritime history to the current fishing industry

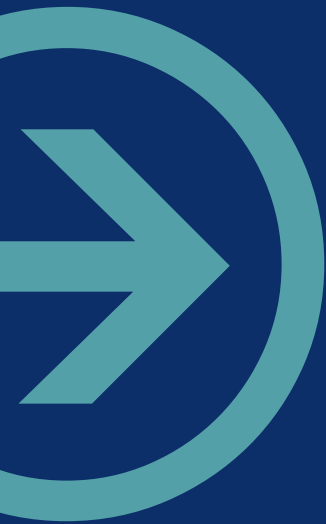
→ STRATEGY 4

Celebrate 10th anniversary year and launch FHC's second decade



Most history is created everyday by ordinary men and women. It is this daily contribution by those of us who are typically left out of the history books that arguably has the largest impact on how history has progressed. This is precisely why the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center is so special and worth supporting.

RYAN SYLVIA, HISTORY TEACHER, GREATER NEW BEDFORD VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL



GOAL

6

Build the capacity of the Board of Directors and staff to lead an institution prepared for its second decade



Humanities are the values we place in each other's lives and the way we express to one another that we matter . . . Every resident should see themselves in their local museum . . . that's why the Fishing Heritage Center is a leader.

BRIAN BOYLES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MASS HUMANITIES

Goal 6

→ STRATEGY 1

Grow membership and capacity of the Board of Directors to include the skills, experience and reach needed for a stable second decade of this community institution

→ STRATEGY 2

Provide professional development for staff, volunteers, and Board of Directors

→ STRATEGY 3

Consider adding Advisory Board(s)



So much of commercial fishing...takes place offshore, out of sight and mind for most people, and the Center's exhibitions and programs allow them to see, hear, feel and know that unique and difficult world. I see the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center as . . . THE fundamental resource for anyone trying to understand it or know it.

CARL HOFFMAN, NY TIMES BEST SELLING AUTHOR



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