



Archipelagic
& Island States
Forum

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AIS RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CENTER OVERVIEW

IN
COLLABORATION
WITH

wicked
acceleration
labs

Table of Contents

Introduction	03
Vision, Mission, Objectives	04
COINs Framework	05
The R&D Innovation Accelerator	06
Functions	08
Programs	09
Thematic Focus Areas	11
O.C.E.A.N. AI TOOL	15
Mission Model Canvas	16
Strategy Roadmap	17
Partnerships	18
Ocean Databases	19
Call to Action	20
References	21

Introduction

The AIS Forum aims to develop an AIS Research and Development (R&D) Center with a clear focus on innovation, collaboration and impact, following the AIS Forum's motto: "Fostering Collaboration, Enabling Innovation".

Scientific research on ocean-related issues has grown increasingly complex as oceans absorb 30% of CO₂ emissions and 8 million metric tons of plastic annually. With over 40% of the world's population living near coasts, issues like climate change and marine biodiversity loss directly impact livelihoods, especially in archipelagic and island states. However, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least-Developed Countries often face low investment in research and innovation infrastructure. Addressing these challenges requires global collaboration to leverage expertise and accelerate progress toward sustainable development goals.

As a result, a AIS R&D Center is necessary to be established to orchestrate pre-existing initiatives and connect the dots to achieve impactful results in communities worldwide. As the complexity and urgency of scientific research increase, specialized resources, skills, and knowledge are required to conduct high-quality research that is relevant for practitioners and policymakers. Consequently, the establishment of a specialized research and development (R&D) center should provide a platform for interdisciplinary global collaboration among scientists, citizens and policymakers and, thus, drive sustainable innovation. The AIS R&D Innovation Center will focus on four flagship research priorities, which are critical for the sustainable development and resilience of archipelagic and island states. These are [i] Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, [ii] Blue Economy Enhancement, [iii] Marine Plastic Debris Reduction, and [iv] Good Maritime Governance

The AIS Research & Development Center will also serve as a Hub for academic institutions, non-profit organizations, local/national governments and industry partners to collaborate on research initiatives, disseminate knowledge, share resources, train selected audiences and provide their problem-solving expertise. It may facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, improve research efficiency and impact, as well as encourage the development of cutting-edge technologies and innovative solutions to the pressing issues that AIS countries face.



Our Vision is to be a global hub for interdisciplinary research, problem-solving, innovation and collaboration on our oceans, empowering archipelagic and island states to realize their full potential so as to navigate their distinct challenges in achieving sustainable development.

Mission

- To drive sustainable development and resilience in archipelagic and island states through research, development, innovation, and impact.
- To nurture a culture of excellence and leverage collective intelligence in research, development, commercialisation and innovation amongst archipelagic and island states.
- To foster global partnerships among AIS Forum and beyond to drive impactful innovation, and support island/archipelagic states in addressing their ocean-related challenges.

Objectives

To facilitate and accelerate research, development, innovation and collaboration on:

- Climate change mitigation, adaptation, and disaster management,
- Sustainable blue economy,
- The protection of the marine environment from the challenges of ocean health, degradation, loss of biodiversity, acidification, plastic waste, and marine pollution;
- Good and better maritime governance.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG) 14, LIFE BELOW WATER

AIS Forum is swiftly being recognized as the platform for promoting action on the ocean and the R&D center aims to pioneer the progress of creating change in ocean and islands/archipelagic ecosystems.

The COINs Framework

The AIS R&D Center operates under a Collaborative Innovation Networks (COINs) Framework, creating a collaborative hub that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and innovation across diverse entities, including governments, academia, the private sector, NGOs, and local communities. It serves as a central platform for sharing ideas, co-developing solutions, and initiating joint research and development projects.

To apply the COINs framework for the AIS's R&D Center, the hub will:

Connect diverse stakeholders: The hub will link governments, local communities, academic institutions, industry players, NGOs, and international organizations in solving key challenges related to climate change, the blue economy, marine plastic debris, and maritime governance.

Facilitate problem-driven innovation: The AIS R&D Center will create an environment where co-curated problems will drive the talent matching and team building, and thus to drive the innovation process, focusing on common yet localized challenges and encouraging expert stakeholders to share knowledge and jointly develop solutions.

Perform localized technology transfer, solution deployment and knowledge dissemination in the oceanic regions (Pacific, Atlantic, Mediterranean and Indian Ocean).

COINs Framework to the AIS Collaborative Hub



The R&D Innovation Accelerator

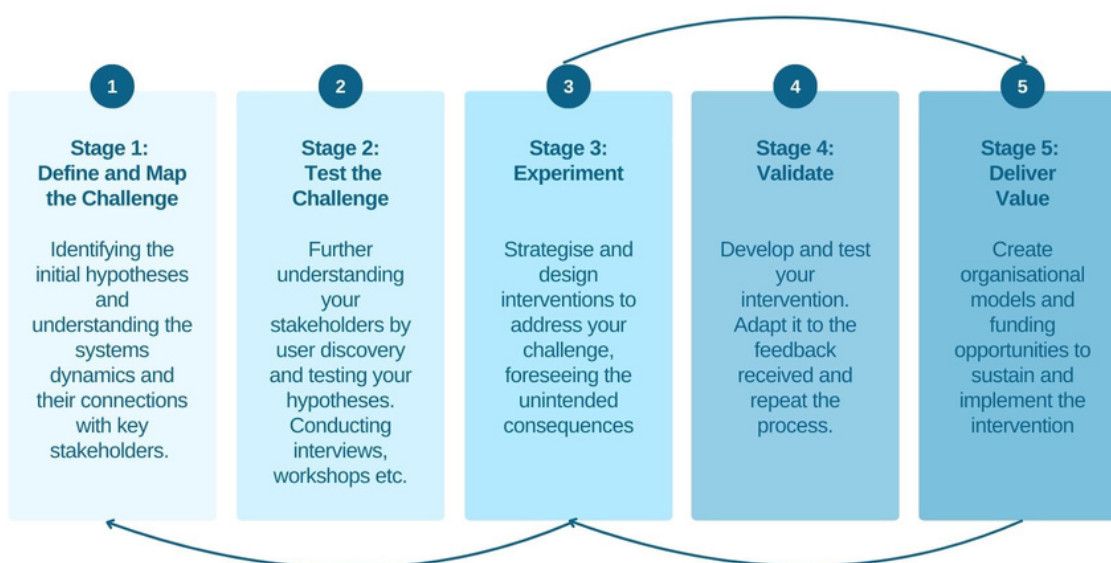
The AIS R&D Center also performs an innovation accelerator function, which aims to foster translation, commercialisation, technology/solution transfer and drive entrepreneurial ventures (spin-outs) as an outcome of the Center's research and development. By enabling and accelerating collaborative research initiatives, to be translated into innovations and, thus, promoting investment, the Center will create a fertile ecosystem for developing and scaling impactful solutions for the AIS Forum's member states and beyond.

The key functions of the R&D Innovation Accelerator are::

1. Accelerating Innovation and Technology Development

To support researchers, tech transfer officers and potential spinouts, the Centre will provide mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs, industry experts, and investors to help research-based ventures to navigate commercialization challenges and refine their business models; and offer guidance on customer/product development, market entry strategies, seed funding, talent sourcing, and scaling. The R&D Centre can also facilitate access to research facilities, laboratories, and specialized equipment as well as to provide access to a network of experts who can assist with specific technical and regulatory challenges.

The R&D Innovation Accelerator Process



The R&D Innovation Accelerator

2. Bridging Research and Commercialization

To bridge research and commercialization, the Centre will create a Technology Transfer Office (TTO), by [i] appointing experts in deep tech and tech transfer for the accelerator to facilitate validation and the commercialization of research and development outcomes from the Center's Academic Partners and to [ii] assist University researchers and emerging spinouts in protecting their innovations and securing intellectual property (IP) rights or/and putting their IP into the Creative Commons (CC) to ensure wide adoption and co-creation, depending on the context. This will also be done through customer/market validation and pilot projects to test the feasibility, viability and scalability of the innovations by providing small funding and resources.

3. Driving Impact in AIS Forum Domains

By functioning as an R&D Innovation Accelerator, the Centre will also drive impact in the four remit areas of the AIS Forum. To address climate change, the Centre will support the development of research-based ventures and spinouts focused on climate adaptation and mitigation technologies and promote innovations in renewable energy, carbon capture, and climate-resilient infrastructure. To enhance the blue economy, the Centre will help to foster the development of technologies that promote sustainable fishing, aquaculture, and marine resource management by supporting researchers working on marine biotechnology, ocean monitoring, and marine/coastal tourism. To reduce marine plastic pollution, the Centre will encourage both challenge-driven and applied research "Calls" aimed to develop innovative solutions for reducing marine plastic debris and other forms of marine pollution as well as to promote circular economy initiatives and sustainable waste management practices. In promoting Good Maritime Governance, the R&D Innovation Center will support the development of digital tools, standards and platforms for improving maritime governance, monitoring and policy enforcement.

4. Enhancing Capacity Building, Initial Research Grants and Knowledge Sharing

The capacity building and skills acquisition programs include entrepreneurial training and workshops on deep tech acceleration, lean entrepreneurship, innovation management, and scaling while equipping participants with the skills needed to start and grow successful research-based ventures. The Centre may also provide fellowship and internship opportunities for students, researchers, and young professionals to gain hands-on experience in academic and deep tech entrepreneurship. AIS Forum has already started work in this area with the Innovation Scholarships and Joint Research Grants, which will further develop under the new Centre.

5. Securing Funding and Investment

The Centre will help facilitate access to different sources of funding. First, it will provide seed funding, grants, and equity-free funding for proof-of-concepts, pilots, and R&D experiments. The Centre will then help these research-based ventures to secure funding from external sources, including government grants, angels, philanthropic donations and University grants. Later in the process, they might attract venture capital (VC) and corporate venture capital (CVC) funds to invest at the seed, Series A, and Series B stages as well as ensure these ventures have the financial support needed to scale their innovations and achieve impact.

Functions

The AIS R&D Center will have six (6) functions: two (2) core functions and four (4) supporting functions.

The core functions of Research and Development and the Collaborative Hub drive *scientific discovery* and *translation* as well as *knowledge exchange*, while supporting functions like Training, Acceleration, Outreach, and Partnering enhance their economic impact through capacity-building, market presence, policy influence and societal engagement.

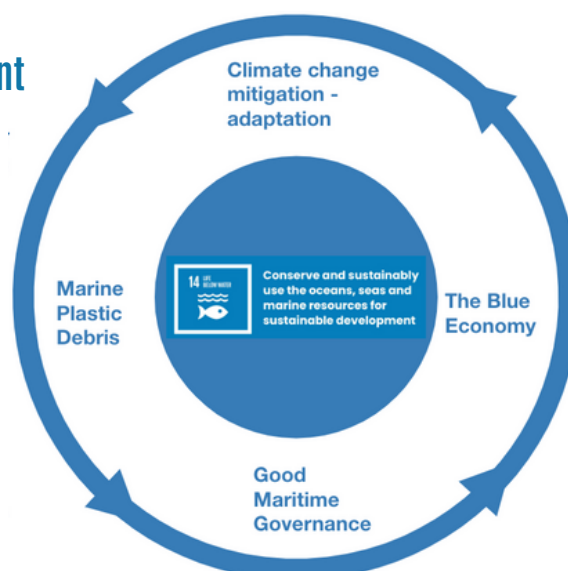
Core Functions

Research and Development

Support, scout, develop and transfer cross-cutting applied research in the focus fields.

Collaborative Hub

Fostering open and collaborative innovation that involves problem curation, constant feedback loops, knowledge-sharing, and the co-creation and validation of solutions to complex ocean-related problems



Supporting Functions

Education and Training

Support the design and delivery of educational and training programmes to develop key capabilities across AIS Forum members, sectors & geographies.

Innovation Accelerator

To foster impactful innovation, facilitate technology transfer and drive entrepreneurial ventures as an outcome of the Center's R&D

Outreach and Public Engagement

Expanding the AIS network, citizen awareness and policy influence through events, courses, webinars, meet-ups and engagement activities.

International Partnerships

Sharing best practices and scalable solutions by collaborating both regionally and globally with universities, governments, and organizations across the AIS Forum's members and beyond.

Programs

The AIS R&D Center's programs focus on scientific discovery, fostering global collaboration and driving innovation through research grants, scholarships, publications, tech/solutions transfer and capacity-building. By utilizing tools like the O.C.E.A.N. AI Tool, the Center will provide data-driven solutions to ocean-related sustainable development challenges and opportunities for the islands and archipelagic states.



Publications

The AIS Forum R&D Center will actively create and disseminate knowledge on its four key focus areas—climate change, blue economy, marine pollution, and good maritime governance—through various periodic publications. These will include the Annual AIS R&D Center Conference Proceedings, the Blue Economy Development Index Report, and will support joint scholarly articles. By prioritizing these outputs, the Center aims to foster awareness, encourage dialogue, and provide actionable insights to address these pressing systemic challenges effectively.



O.C.E.A.N. AI Tool

The Center has developed an AI-enabled web tool designed to streamline and accelerate the problem curation, talent/team building and solution co-creation. This novel web platform facilitates collaboration by connecting experts through an open professional database (LinkedIn), enabling them to join, network, share expertise, and find suitable collaborators for challenges and applied research.



Innovator Scholarship

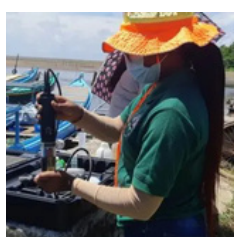
The Innovator Scholarship program serves as a platform uniting MSc students from diverse universities across AIS Forum's members. Through this collaborative endeavor, MSc students are offered the unique opportunity to engage with prominent entrepreneurs, academics, and policymakers from the AIS Forum's members, enabling them to learn skills as well as to nurture and refine their innovative concepts and solutions.

Programs



Joint Research Program

The AIS Joint Research program is dedicated to fostering collaborative research endeavors among a minimum of two AIS countries. The primary aim of this initiative is to support the AIS Forum Secretariat in identifying innovative and intelligent strategies that can enhance research cooperation and further development among archipelagic and island states.



Training and Capacity Building

The AIS R&D Center focuses on empowering local stakeholders and innovators through tailored training programs. These initiatives provide essential skills in marine systems management, complexity science, circular economy, and advancing marine sustainability, ocean science, and the blue economy. By fostering collaboration and equipping leaders across sectors, the Center enables learning, awareness, skills acquisition and innovation mind-sets at the *individual, team, organization and ecosystem* level to address the pressing climate, islands/archipelagos, and ocean challenges.

ECOSYSTEM					GLOBAL BOOTCAMP The centre will offer a global boot camp for selected participants across the globe to discuss and get training around specific initiatives of the network.
ORGANISATION					BESPOQUE PROGRAMMES FOR ORGANISATIONS The centre will offer Taylor-made programmes for partner organisations, based on their specific needs and projects.
TEAMS		THEMATIC MODULES BY THEME Online training modules, one per theme: Climate change, blue economy, marine debris and governance These modules will be run by experts in the field.	INTEGRAL PRACTICE MODULES BY REGION Hybrid training modules per region. This module will have components that are transversal, with local experiences of each region. This module will run in partnership with local organisations.		
INDIVIDUALS	OCEAN 101 Online introductory training module for individuals				

Thematic Focus Areas

The AIS R&D Innovation Center will focus on four flagship research priorities, which are critical for the sustainable development and resilience of archipelagic and island states. These are [i] Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation; [ii] Blue Economy Enhancement; [iii] Marine Plastic Debris Reduction and [iv] Good Maritime Governance

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Climate change presents a profound existential threat to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), with far-reaching impacts on every aspect of their societies, economies and natural ecosystems. To tackle these climate-related challenges, the AIS R&D Center has outlined key thematic activities and proposed initial programs designed to foster impactful applied research and scalable solutions.

Theme- related key activities	Proposed Initial Programs:
Basic Research: Conduct fundamental research to understand the mechanisms of climate change and its impacts on marine and coastal ecosystems.	• Climate Resilience Program: Focus on developing and implementing adaptation strategies and technologies to enhance the resilience of AIS communities. • Renewable Energy Initiative: This initiative aims to promote the adoption of renewable energy sources and technologies, such as solar, wind, and ocean energy, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase energy independence for AIS countries.
Applied Research: Develop and test innovative technologies and strategies for climate change mitigation, such as renewable energy solutions, carbon sequestration techniques, and nature-based solutions like mangrove restoration.	
Experimental Development: Implement pilot projects and experimental programs to test the effectiveness of these technologies and strategies in real-world settings. For example, deploying advanced climate monitoring systems and conducting resilience-building workshops for local communities.	

Thematic Focus Areas

Blue Economy Enhancement

The Blue Economy offers a vital opportunity for AIS Forum countries, driving sustainable growth through the conservation and use of marine resources. As highlighted by the World Bank and UN DESA report, “The Potential of the Blue Economy”, it supports low-carbon, resource-efficient development while safeguarding ecosystems critical to island nations' resilience and prosperity. Effective management and conservation are essential to unlock its long-term economic benefits.

Theme- related key activities	Proposed Initial Programs:
Basic Research: Study marine ecosystems and biodiversity to identify key areas for conservation and sustainable use.	• Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Program: Focus on developing and promoting sustainable practices in fisheries and aquaculture to ensure food security and livelihoods. • Blue Economy Development Index: A tracking tool to assess the development of blue economy in archipelagic and island states, with the potential to offer potential solutions, policy formation, and identify priorities for international development cooperation. • Marine Biotechnology Initiative: Explore the potential of marine biotechnology for innovation and economic development, including pharmaceuticals, biofuels, and biomaterials.
Applied Research: • Develop sustainable practices and technologies for sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and marine biotechnology. • Develop tracking tools for blue economy implementation in archipelagic and island states.	
Experimental Development: Launch pilot projects to test and refine blue economy initiatives, such as sustainable fishing practices, eco-friendly aquaculture systems, and marine spatial planning.	

Thematic Focus Areas

Marine Plastic Debris Reduction

According to the report "Marine Plastic Litter on Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Impacts and Measures by the Swedish Institute for the Marine Environment, Marine plastic debris is a major environmental pollutant that affects marine life, ecosystems, and human health. AIS member states are particularly vulnerable to plastic pollution due to their reliance on marine resources and geographical locations. Addressing marine pollution is key to ensuring the sustainability of our food systems, marine life and community wellbeing. We need efforts of international collaboration to foster innovative solutions mitigating the social, economic, and environmental impacts of marine plastic pollution

Theme- related key activities	Proposed Initial Programs:
Basic Research: Investigate the sources, distribution, and impacts of marine plastic debris on marine ecosystems and human health.	• Marine Debris Research Program: Conduct comprehensive research on marine plastic debris, its impacts, and potential solutions. • Waste Reduction and Recycling Initiative: Develop and promote innovative waste management practices and recycling technologies to reduce plastic waste.
Applied Research: Develop and test technologies and strategies for reducing plastic waste, such as biodegradable materials, recycling technologies, and waste management systems.	
Experimental Development: Implement pilot projects to test and demonstrate the effectiveness of these technologies and strategies in reducing plastic pollution. For example, community-based waste management programs and clean-up.	

Thematic Focus Areas

Good Maritime Governance

Maritime governance encompasses the strategic management, orchestration and regulation of maritime sectors, such as port and vessel operations. It involves developing and enforcing policies, managing resources, and overseeing maritime activities to ensure safety, security, efficiency, and environmental sustainability. This approach is vital for supporting global trade and regional economic development by protecting lives, assets, and marine ecosystems while promoting lawful maritime practices. According to the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), effective maritime governance harmonizes stakeholder interests, fostering sustainable development and global prosperity. AIS Forum's member countries can benefit from strengthened legal and policy frameworks that promote local, regional and international cooperation.

Theme- related key activities	Proposed Initial Programs:
Basic Research: Study international maritime laws, policies, and governance frameworks to identify best practices and gaps.	• Maritime Governance and Policy Program: Focus on research and development of policies and governance frameworks for sustainable maritime management. • Regional Cooperation Initiative: Promote regional cooperation and partnerships for effective maritime governance and security.
Applied Research: Develop and propose new policies, regulations, and management strategies for effective maritime governance.	
Experimental Development: Implement pilot projects to test new governance models and frameworks in collaboration with local, regional, and international stakeholders.	

O.C.E.A.N. AI TOOL

To realize the three components of the R&D Innovation Center-- Problem Identification and Curation; Talent Orchestration and Team Building; and Translatable Research and Solution Matching-- we have developed an AI-enabled web tool to accelerate this process.

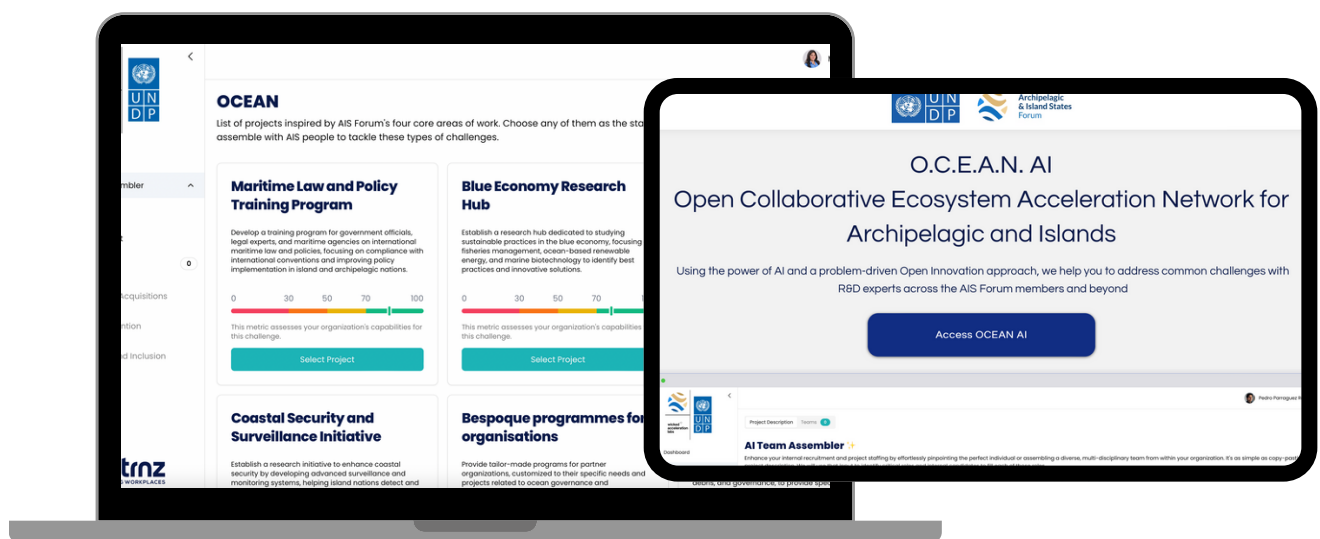
The O.C.E.A.N. AI (Open Collaborative Ecosystem Acceleration Network) tool leverages AI and open innovation to address common challenges among Archipelagic and Island States (AIS). It provides smart project prioritization, team planning, and advanced internal recruitment, enabling users to match roles with the best-suited capabilities within their network to drive impactful research and development projects.

1. Talent Orchestration and Team Building
To identify key roles for curated challenges and matches them with available expert talent across the AIS Forum network

2. Smart Project Prioritization
Ranks project opportunities based on talent availability and team capabilities, to ensure the best use of resources.

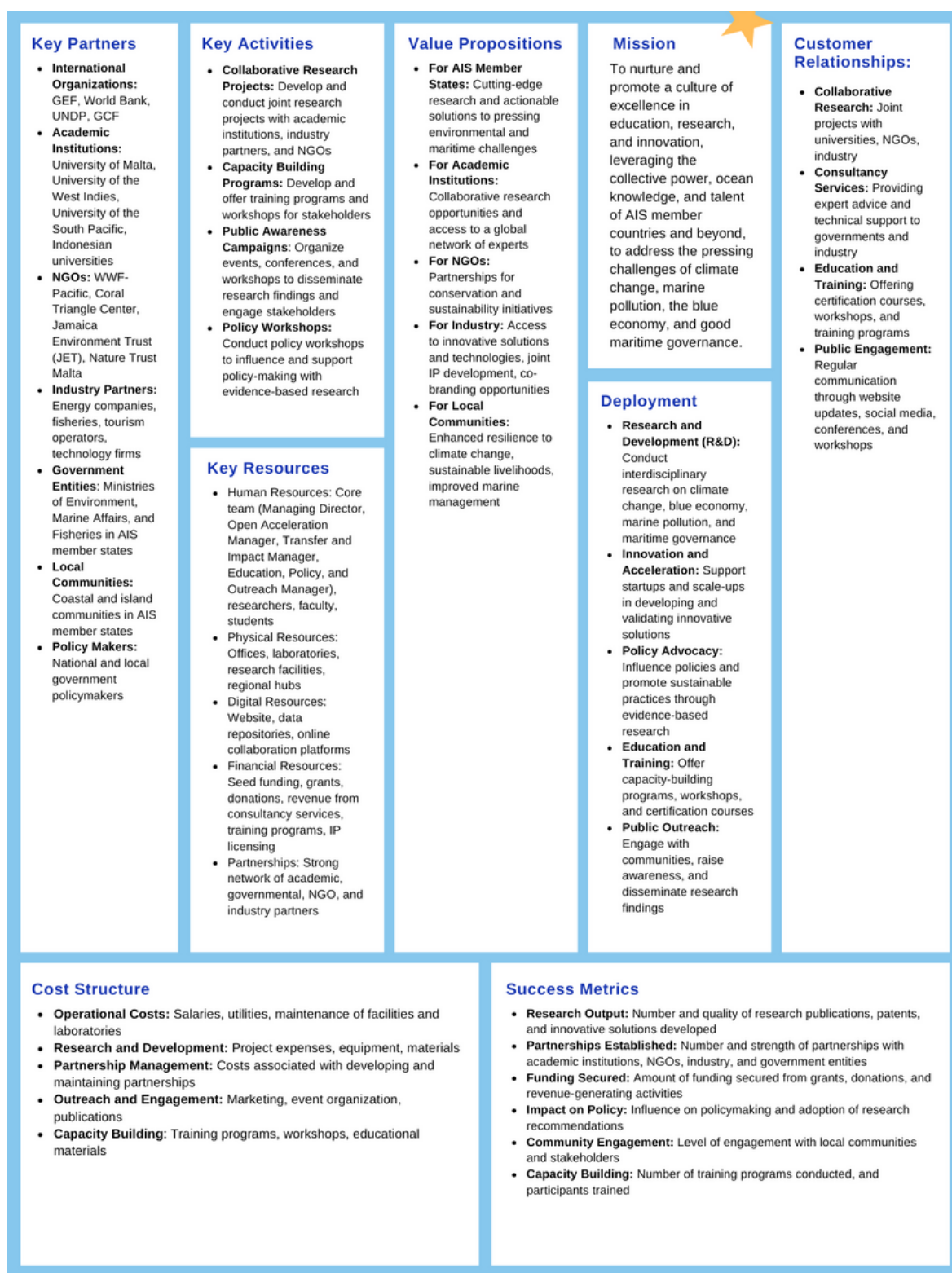
3. Advanced Internal Recruitment
Matches the right talent to the right roles using a capability mapping tool, suggesting the first steps in the R&D process.

[View the Tool](https://www.pattrnz.net/ocean) (<https://www.pattrnz.net/ocean>)



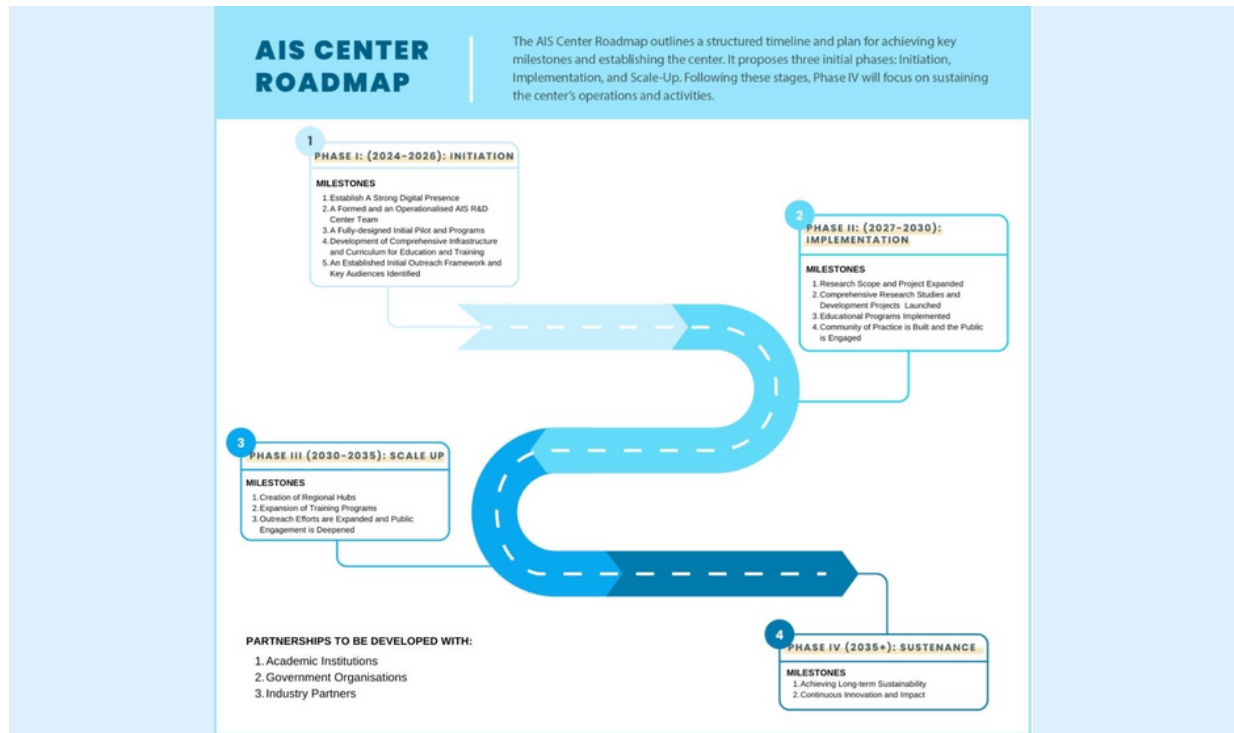
Mission Model Canvas

The Mission Model Canvas outlines how the AIS R&D Center intends to operate and fulfil its objectives. This Canvas has been adapted from the 'Business Model Canvas' and strategically made to help validate the mission of not-for-profit organizations and multilateral governmental organisations.

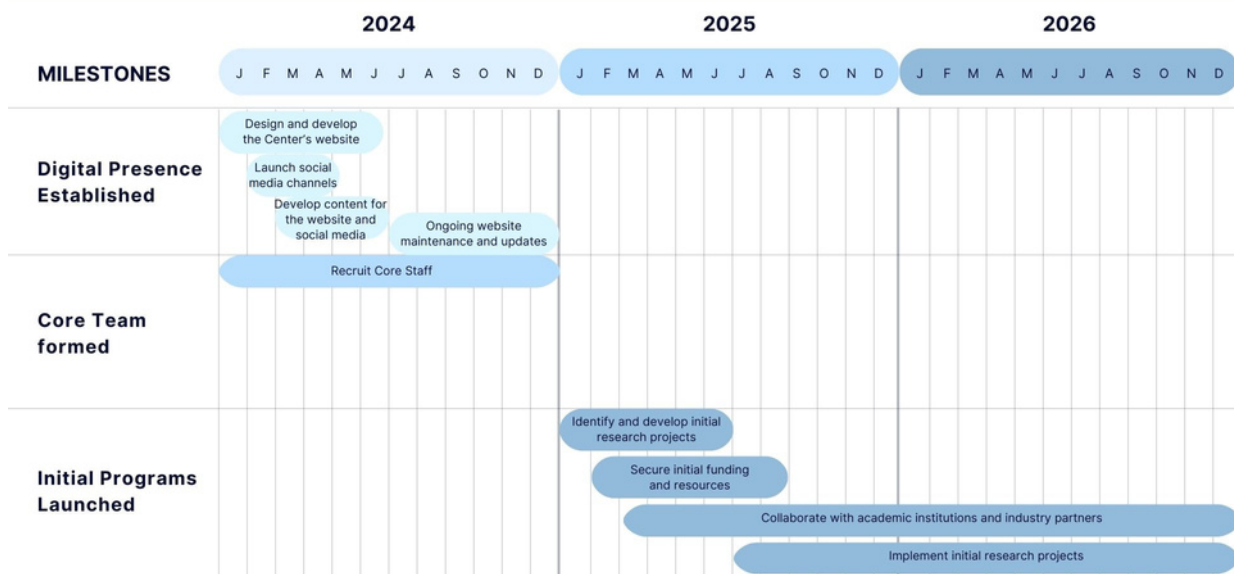


Strategy Roadmap

The AIS R&D Center will follow a 4-phase structured roadmap for full-filling its Mission and achieving its strategic objectives and key milestones.



Phase I Initiation (January 2024 – December 2026)



Partnerships

The R&D Center plans to establish partnerships with key institutions in the four Oceans, including the University of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea, the University of the West Indies in Jamaica in the Atlantic Ocean, the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and selected universities in Indonesia in the Indian Ocean. These regional hubs, highlighted in red on the map, will serve as strategic focal yet connected points for research, knowledge exchange and dissemination.



Extended Network: We aim to create an expanding network of experts, researchers, policymakers and funders, who are able to share their insights and expertise

>75 private sectors to work together with



>75 engagements with NGO and local communities

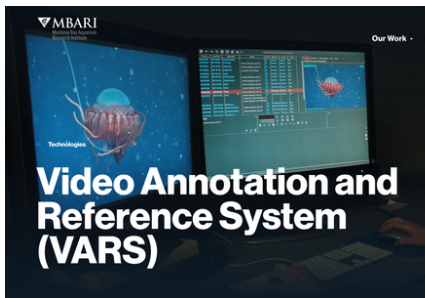


>100 groups of researchers, youth and academia collaboration



Selected Ocean Databases

Relevant ocean-related and island/archipelagic research databases that could support the AIS R&D Center initiatives are the following:



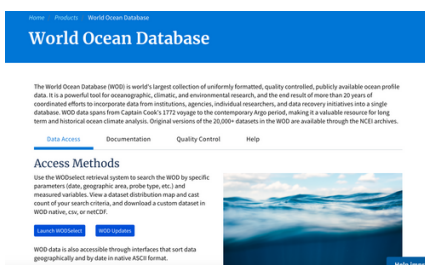
The Floating Observatory Systems (MBARI)

MBARI offers datasets and tools like the Deep-Sea Guide, a resource for exploring deep-sea observations. It also provides innovative technologies such as the Floating Observatory Systems, which allow for mapping and monitoring the Ocean health in real time.



Ocean Observatories Initiative (OOI)

The OOI provides real-time data from over 900 instruments deployed in diverse ocean environments. This system is ideal for addressing critical questions about ocean changes due to natural and human-induced factors



World Ocean Database (WOD)

WOD is the world's largest collection of quality-controlled ocean profile data. It supports research in oceanography, climate change, and environmental studies. Its extensive dataset is crucial for studying marine ecosystems and their changes over time.

JOIN US AT THE R&D INNOVATION CENTER!

If you're a researcher, policymaker, ocean advocate, committed citizen, founder, manager or simply interested in the present and future of Oceans as well as of Island & Archipelagic States, we would like to involve you in the AIS R&D Center! By contributing challenges, expertise and/or research interests, you can play a vital role in our mission. Please fill out this form to join our pool of experts:

[Read more about the Center](#)[Sign up here](#) →

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About this Report

This strategic report was conceived and written by Dr. Cristobal Garcia-Herrera with the valuable input of Ms. Mehek Khanna.

This report was designed and diagrammed in Canva by Ms. Mehek Khanna.

Dr. Nicolas Rebolledo contributed with components for the Training and Outreach Functions of the AIS R&D Center. Dr. Cristobal Garcia-Herrera and Dr. Nicolas Rebolledo are co-founders of Wicked Acceleration Labs. Mehek Khanna is a Design & Research Assistant at Wicked Acceleration Labs.

The AI-enabled Web Tool Open Collaborative Ecosystem Acceleration Network for Archipelagic and Islands (O.C.E.A.N. AI) was developed by DataVerz in collaboration with Wicked Labs.

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to the sustainable development of island and archipelagic states

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