



## Laura Cantral

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### Summary

A Partner at Meridian Institute with more than 18 years of experience designing and facilitating policy dialogues and strategy development processes. Meridian work and previous experience has focused primarily on ocean and coastal policy issues at the international, national, regional, and state levels. Among other duties, currently the Director of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, a collaborative, bipartisan, high-level group of thought leaders and experts on ocean issues. Possess additional expertise in the areas of fisheries, ecosystems, biodiversity, natural resources, and security. Hold a Juris Doctor and a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Mississippi.

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### Meridian Experience

#### Meridian Institute

2004–Present

Meridian Institute designs and facilitates collaborative processes that help diverse parties identify critical issues, build relationships and trust, construct innovative solutions, and implement durable decisions. These collaborative processes address challenges at the local, state, national, and international levels, and involve leaders from government agencies, industry, nongovernmental organizations, and international institutions. Meridian also assists organizations in conducting strategy development and planning.

#### Partner

Responsible for working with clients and team members to coordinate and assist in collaborative problem solving and strategic assessment and planning, including: convening and organizing meetings and activities as required to achieve project goals; advising on direction, strategy, and process design; drafting materials for meetings or other uses as needed; and providing coordinated facilitation, logistical, and research support for meetings and activities. Selected highlights are summarized below:

- Director of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, a collaborative, bipartisan effort of experienced thought leaders and ocean champions that offers high-level, credible, and bipartisan leadership on ocean and coastal policy issues, serving as a trusted advisor to key members of the Administration and Congress and bringing together all sectors of the ocean community to identify urgent priorities, communicate them effectively to decision makers, and cultivate and educate ocean leaders. Oversight includes project management, policy analysis and drafting, process design and facilitation, engaging with senior Congressional and Administration staff, and

coordination with Commissioners and diverse interests in the ocean community.

- Direct multiple projects aimed at achieving the effective implementation of the Obama Administration's National Ocean Policy established through Executive Order 13547. Activities include developing reports and white papers on specific technical and policy aspects of the National Ocean Policy, including the use of regional ocean planning approaches; convening meetings of academic, scientific, and policy experts to discuss particular dimensions of the policy's implementation in a nonpartisan environment; and assisting state-based regional ocean partnerships as they prepare to carry out various aspects of the policy.
- Co-lead for a project known as CALAMAR, Cooperation Across the Atlantic for Marine Governance Integration. This project, conducted in partnership with the Ecologic Institute and funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for External Relations, convened a diverse set of experts from government, industry, nongovernmental organizations, academia, and other key ocean stakeholders from the European Union and the United States to discuss shared challenges related to marine governance; strengthen networks by building alliances among key stakeholders; and contribute policy recommendations that incorporated stakeholder perspectives.
- Guide the activities and provide strategic direction for the National Ocean Protection Coalition, a group of more than 40 national nongovernmental organizations working together to encourage the Administration to protect special ocean places. Through building political and stakeholder support, and engaging effectively with officials at the White House and relevant federal agencies, the coalition was instrumental in President Obama designating three marine national monuments: expansion of the Remote Pacific Islands Marine National Monument, expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, and establishment of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, which is the first protection of its kind off the East Coast of the United States.
- Lead facilitator for the Northeast Regional Planning Body and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body, assisting regional planning bodies in developing innovative, large-scale regional ocean plans, a groundbreaking development in the field of ocean and coastal resource management.
- Please see <http://merid.org/staff/lcantral> for a full list of projects completed.

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## Previous Experience

### U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy

Washington, DC 2001–2004

*Associate Director for Governance*

Senior policy staff for this congressionally created national ocean commission.

Responsible for process design, work group facilitation, materials drafting, report writing and editing, and project coordination.

### Biscayne Bay Partnership Initiative

Miami, Florida 1999–2001

*Consultant/Facilitator*

Provided services to the Florida Atlantic University/Florida International University Joint Center for Environmental and Urban Problems, including process design and facilitation, materials drafting, and project coordination.

### Florida Governor's Ocean Committee

Tallahassee, Florida 1997–2001

*Senior Staff/Policy Analyst*

Provided policy analysis, research, and document drafting, as well as assistance with overall process design, project management, and meeting facilitation.

### Coastal Managers Training

Charleston, South Carolina  
and Lisbon, Portugal 1999–2002

*Consultant/Trainer*

Provided services to the Coastal Services Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Developed leadership and communications curriculum and trained coastal managers in the United States and Portugal.

### Coastal Management Leadership Training

Stennis Space Center, Mississippi 1998–2001

*Consultant/Trainer*

Provided services to the US Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program, including curriculum development and training of program staff.

### Florida State University College of Law

Tallahassee, Florida 1995–1997

*Professor*

Provided instruction on legal research and writing to law students.

### University of Mississippi School of Law

Oxford, Mississippi 1988–1995

*Research Counsel*

Served as legal research counsel for the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program.

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## Education

Juris Doctor, University of Mississippi

Bachelor of Arts in English, University of Mississippi