

**Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products
Infrastructure Investment Fund
Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, May 28, 2025; 12:30 – 3:00 pm
Marquardt Building, Room 118, 32 Blossom Lane, Augusta**

[AFFPIF Webpage](#)

Members of the public, please register for the Zoom meeting [HERE](#)

Desired Outcomes - By the end of this meeting, we will have:

- Discussed takeaways from certain prior reports and presentations
- Discussed examples of embedding equity considerations into grantmaking decisions
- Provided an opportunity for public input

Agenda

What	When
Member Introductions, Agenda Review, Working Agreements	12:30 – 12:45
Discussion of Funding Landscape Report, AIIP Presentation, RFSI Survey, and Forestry Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your key takeaways from this report or presentation, and what, if any, conclusions do you draw that could inform initial fund design?• Are there any critical gaps in this information that, if filled, would help you in thinking about initial fund design?• Taking this information into account, how could the Fund best ensure equitable outcomes in fund distribution?	12:45 – 2:00
Break	2:00 – 2:10
Embedding Equity Considerations into Grantmaking Decisions – presentation on various state examples and discussion	2:10 -2:50
Public Input	2:50 – 2:55
Next Meeting: June 25, 12:30-2:30 pm, virtual	2:55- 3:00

Note: Agenda item times are subject to change based on the progress of the group

Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund Advisory Board Members

Board Member	Affiliation	Seat Description
Craig Hickman (Co-Chair)	Annabessacook Farm	Historically underserved racial populations in nondairy farming
Tricia Rouleau (Co-Chair)	Maine Farmland Trust	Statewide industry group representing conventional nondairy farming
Amanda Beal	Commissioner, DACF	Commissioner DACF or designee
Jay Beck	FAME	Financial institutions with experience in the agricultural and forest products industry
Matt Chin		Supply chain in processing, mfg or distribution
Marada Cook	Crown O'Maine	Supply chain in processing, mfg or distribution
Dana Doran	Professional Logging Contractors	Statewide group representing logging and trucking industry
Shannon Hill	Mi'kmaq Farms	Member of a federally recognized Indian nation, tribe, or band
Michael Duguay	Commissioner, DECD	Commissioner DECD or designee
		Mfg of forest products
Muhidin Libah	Liberation Farms	Historically underserved racial populations in nondairy farming
Nicolas Lindholm	MOFGA	Statewide industry group representing organic nondairy farming
Jameson Little	Farm Credit East	Financial institutions with experience in the agricultural and forest products industry
Sarah Littlefield	Maine Dairy Promotion Board	Statewide industry group representing dairy producers
Krysta West	Maine Forest Products Council	Statewide industry group representing forest products industry
Amy Winston	CEI	Provider of mktg assistance, mkt development, or business and financial planning
Jeffrey Wolovitz	Heiwa Tofu	Mfg of value-added products or representative of the value-added agricultural products industry

Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Advisory Fund Advisory Board Working Agreements

- Meetings will start and end on time.
- When meetings are held in person, Advisory Board members will make every effort to attend in person to maximize learning, communication, and collaboration.
- Cameras will remain on during virtual meetings to facilitate communication and understanding.
- Meeting materials will be shared in advance of meetings with sufficient time for review.
- Come prepared, having read meeting materials and completed assignments.
- Be present and engaged.
- Strive for equal airtime, enabling all to participate fully.
- Listen with curiosity and an openness to learning and understanding.
- Adopt a creative problem-solving orientation.
- Name the tension, kindly.
- Humor is welcome!

The Advisory Board will strive for consensus in its deliberations through a facilitated, discussion-based process. It will not hold votes on program design decisions. The Advisory Board will shift to a voting system as the Fund begins grantmaking.

Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund Advisory Board

Meeting Schedule and Draft Meeting Content

Date	Time	Location	Draft Meeting Content
March 5, 2025	1:00-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	PFAS Fund Presentation
March 26, 2025	1:00-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	AIIP and RFSI Presentation Funding Landscape Presentation
April 30, 2025	12:30-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	Forestry Presentation Benchmark Report Presentation VT guest speaker
May 28, 2025	12:30-3:00 PM	In-Person, Augusta, Marquardt 118	Facilitated discussion focused on Funding Landscape Report, AIIP presentation, RFSI data, and Forestry presentation; Embedding equity considerations into grant decisions
June 25, 2025	12:30-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	Survey Analysis presentation; Facilitated discussion focused on Benchmarking Report, Survey Analysis, equity
July 30, 2025	12:30-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	Interviews Analysis Presentation; Facilitated discussion focused on Interviews, equity; Consideration of outline of initial Fund structure
August 27, 2025	12:30-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	Metrics Framework presentation; Facilitated discussion focused on Metrics, equity; Consideration of revised outline of initial Fund structure; public comment period?
September 24, 2025	12:30-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	Consideration of public comment; final revisions to initial Fund structure
October 29, 2025	12:30 – 3:00 PM	In-Person, Brewer	Approve plan for initial round of funding
November 19, 2025	12:30-2:30 PM	Remote Only - Zoom	Presentation of draft rules? Public Hearing

**Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products
Infrastructure Investment Fund Advisory Board Assignment**

May 28, 2025

1. What are your key takeaways from this report or presentation, and what, if any, conclusions do you draw that could inform initial fund design?

Funding Landscape Report

- There is a wide array of capital and technical assistance programs already in existence across Maine. Need to focus on weak areas of existing programs. There are fewer funding opportunities for pre-venture and start-ups than for businesses further along in their business stage of development. If supporting / increasing new entrants is viewed as a key priority, this may be an area for opportunity. There are ample short-term technical assistance opportunities available, but longer-term, in-depth one-on-one TA is less common.
- There seem to be several funds available. How can we replicate successful models of funding in these sectors to not start from scratch for our fund? And contrast, what should we avoid in building our model?
- It was great to get the perspective from Vermont where they have been doing this for many years. Is that the idea here, that this isn't a one-off funding opportunity, but hopefully is something that will iterate over the years as needs and impacts are evaluated?
- This document is a great resource for anyone looking to invest in their business. There are so many resources, it is great to see them summarized here. It defines a lot. The key findings are great, but challenging for me to see how to incorporate directly into a draft fund strategy.
- The Fund could consider upstream/downstream barriers to being eligible or a good match for the existing funds, and seek to invest where such investments reduce risks of follow on investment or loans. For example, if sales growth is an uncertainty limiting infrastructure investment, the fund could offer tools like grants for seasoned sales professionals for a two to three year period that might position a farm or food business to be eligible for a future loan or investment from an existing source. The fund might also offer grants directly for infrastructure that enables growth (with wider tolerance for uncertainty than a lender would allow). Another example of a barrier - farms may be reluctant to take on debt for infrastructure even though it might strengthen farm activities and Maine's sector as a whole. The fund could look at projects that are strictly grant-funded as a way to mitigate the barrier to investment which is reluctance to assume debt in a low return industry. Finally, the fund could consider efforts that focus on the central issue in accessing funds - that farming and food producing businesses are often low profit. The fund could consider novel initiatives in both for profit and non profit agricultural endeavors - curating investments that foster social, cultural, environmental and community wellbeing above profits, while concurrently funding projects that improve profits through capacity building or market development or

efficiency- with the aim that this funding improves eligibility for the many other funding channels. The Fund should carefully consider whether additional funding mechanisms are even needed, or if the fund might be well served to distribute funds to partners to administer according to the priorities set for the fund.

- There is a significant source of external funding with diversification across different factors; type – loans, debt, equity, tax credits, grants; federal, state, private; target sectors; business development; TA... Hopefully, there is a path to increase the fund to about \$30M. If the fund remains at \$500k, our work is purely academic, as it is inadequate to achieve any sustainable state-wide change.
- There are many opportunities for funding for ag and food businesses. There seems to be a shortfall for forest products industries. Technical assistance is available, but not for all stages of development.
- Many forms of funding and funding organizations already exist for farmers and food producers.
- Forestry partners and funding is less well represented.
- Takeaways include apparent gaps in capital and TA for early-stage companies, especially; confirming previous research (including DACF assessment). Web-based scans are helpful to reflect back the available inventory of ecosystem and economic/ag development tools, especially when trying to align and congeal a group that is newly established. While many advisory board members are likely aware of these programs, perhaps they are not too familiar with them, not sure how up-to-date or effective they are -- maybe they haven't personally worked with them. It feels like a step needed/helpful to get all of us on the same page; yet it feels somewhat superficial, like a catalog of what we already know, without any real analysis or original insights for us to consider.

AIIP Slide Deck

- Grants/dispersed funds are more easily available to nonprofits and larger organizations who have staff that prioritize grant writing and pulling together application packets. Small farms and businesses typically do not have this capacity. TA is most important for these smaller businesses. It is also important for the Advisory Board not to set the bar too high, which could be detrimental to grantees/borrowers. Small business owners have limited time and resources to complete burdensome applications. It is also important for organizations to work with each other to help fill gaps in funding for the total project of the businesses. The Advisory Board should look at funding smaller projects within the larger projects, so there is an end point/completion of the project. It is detrimental to a business owner to run out of funds or access to funds leaving the project incomplete.
- Processor requests are larger than producer requests. Capex percentage was high (p35), but didn't AIIP select for infrastructure projects - that metric might be inflated compared to broader base of funding needs. I know that gap funding can be critical to infrastructure projects – businesses can be profitable and have healthy cash flow to support increase debt

funding for infrastructure, but still not be able to borrow because there is not enough equity. Specific examples are both Heiwa Tofu and Maine Grains – we may not have been able to leverage mortgages for our expansion without AIIP funds.

- How long is our Advisory Board overseeing the fund? Do we need to build out parameters for a longer term board? As funds are awarded, how is project completion tracked and are there consequences for not completing projects?
- \$20M was inadequate to meet the applicant demand. Delays in approving the applications led to changes in the use of the funds. I agree with their Considerations for Future Investment Programs.
- Demand for grant funding of infrastructure exceeded supply 8:1.
- Shared infrastructure adds a lot of complexity to any project. It personally makes me very cautious when I see it. I would like to see some funds allocated specifically to those types of projects. They strike me as riskier and harder to build. I'm concerned that these types of projects require someone who can oversee the grant and project, and that may leave out businesses (or groups of businesses) that don't have the resources to commit.
- This presentation has also got me thinking about businesses that are chronically dependent on outside funding to stay solvent. I'm not sure this fund should be investing there. I'd like to see current business profitability a key component of business plans as applications are judged for likelihood of success.
- I don't see much in the presentation about gleaning and upcycling of food wastes for consumer markets. Are there opportunities for food processing of waste streams from farms and other processors? Harvest Maine and Maine Marinara. Not sure if either is profitable.
- Improvements to enable year-round production are necessary to meet demand. Shared facilities (e.g., commercial kitchens*) can support diversification, value-added production, and food safety certifications. Only 42% of projects approved in 2022 were completed as of 2024 YE. May indicate increased monitoring is needed to ensure more projects reach the finish line.
- Takeaway that deep stakeholder engagement is key – so important; the concise statement of purpose that matches the Fund's purpose in the AARPA slide; geographic distribution, avg grant size of awards, processing/manufacturing more expensive, fewer projects; and the \$160M in unmet investment (!) Need to be strategic in coordinating/integrating tools, building this Fund out as the state's financing infrastructure, optimizing the expertise of those who specialize in various types of finance, tax credits and economic development tools mentioned above, to close the value gap for strategic businesses, businesses in certain regions and segments of the supply chain, serving markets (maine and beyond). The indirect effects, increased profitability, supply chain resilience outcomes.
- I question the need for job creation as a metric for achieving goals (p37). Labor market is challenging. I focus my business more on profitability, which leads to creating higher quality jobs vs. adding more jobs. CEI may be a good place to go for insights and experience with quality vs. quantity.

RFSI

- Structures, storage (cold & dry), and processing equipment rank as the most important areas of investment for businesses. Request for the above needs should be prioritized ahead of others in the application process.
- Direct to consumer is the most important marketing channel, and the one that businesses said they need the most support with. If the fund has a technical support aspect, there should be a focus on DTC marketing.
- The largest barriers to applying/receiving government grants for businesses is that they take too long and require matching funds. Application process should be as simple and timely as possible. Maybe consider a short form application for applications less than \$250K which is the most common grant size requested.
- Stakeholders need funds for infrastructure improvements or funds for new equipment that would simplify processes. Applications are too cumbersome and time consuming for stakeholders. Matching funds are not always available, which makes the stakeholders ineligible for most programs.
- Key takeaways - producers clearly showed interest in infrastructure grants, concerned about application time required and matching funds, although the matching funds may be attainable.
- Responses to this presentation are mixed in with AIIP responses as they cover similar information. I'm not able to dig in deep enough to look at the shift in any trends between AIIP and RFSI programs.
- Most of the funding priorities were for on-farm improvements. It raises the question if funding is best used for individual businesses or for infrastructure that can be share by several businesses or split. This balance should be determined by the Advisory Board.
- What does success look like and how is it evaluated?
- Most of the funding priorities were for on-farm improvements. It raises the question if funding is best used for individual businesses or for infrastructure that can be share by several businesses or split. This balance should be determined by the Advisory Board.

Forestry Slide Deck

- Similar to the RFSI slide deck, stakeholders need funds for upgrades to aging infrastructure and equipment. Grants are ideal, but not always available. Low interest loans are next in line, but a simplified process would be beneficial for smaller businesses. Large businesses have more resources to apply for grants and loans.
- Forestry FR1 fund had a MUCH higher rate of funded applications than agriculture - is this embedded in design? Grants were smaller, but almost all applicants received funding. Not all applications were funded in full? Ratio of available funds to total dollars requested was 1:3

(compare to 1:8 in ag). Awards had a huge 85% local purchasing impact, doubling the impact of the funds. FR2 funded at 50% of applications and a consistent 1:3 request to available funds ratio.

- I like the sounds of “boosts to productivity to increase competitiveness” Can we apply this to food as well? Concern over interest rates continues to be high. Low interest rates for gap funding could be useful. Also low interest loans for productivity/efficiency upgrades to help reduce the payback on investments. As an example, CEI 3.5% solar loan program reduces the payback significantly on a solar investment compared to a 7% commercial mortgage. Low risk revolving loan fund for existing businesses that increases profitability without relying upon growing markets.
- Simple, promoted by industry, emerging tech and production for competitive adv as deliberate areas of focus, also to damage repair/pandemic.
- The FRI-1 grant was a lifeline to many operations during the pandemic. Applications exceeded awards by about 3 to 1 in both FRI-1 and FRI-2. Simplified application process is important for smaller companies (i.e. owner-operators) with limited administrative support. Applications for projects including a technological innovation were prioritized over others. I think the fund may want to consider doing the same. Investments for an antiquated technology might not be as beneficial or lasting as a new or developing technology.

2. Are there any critical gaps in this information that, if filled, would help you in thinking about initial fund design?

Funding Landscape Report

- More statistics are needed in technical assistance to determine where the gaps are and how to aid with all stages of development.
- The bill, as it's written, is very general in its goals of supporting food and forestry systems. What are the goals, and what are the metrics by which we will measure successful implementation? I'm not sure I understand where the real need is and what sort of funding types from this presentation are most needed. Not really getting a clear understanding of either sector's funding needs from such a narrow data set, as well as not being clear on specific desired outcomes/impact of the fund. I want to hear from banks, TA providers, and sector associations to get a more diverse set of funding needs.
- What is the need for sub-debt/gap funding to support private debt? Similarly, are loan guarantees by FAME and others enough to support need? Are there sufficient quantities of reasonable microloans available to meet current needs?
- I am assuming that this is informational, as the Advisory Board is not responsible for finding additional funding. It would be helpful to get a prioritized list of the funding sources where our work fits best with their funding priorities along with funding potential (\$) from each source. From this, an initial target list of funders can be established with a funding potential.
- To get to, or make it applicable to, an initial fund design, I would look for further analysis and original insights. Blending the Maine products with the benchmarked Funds from VT, MA, MI – some specific contrasts and comparisons, pointing up analogues, and so forth. A deeper dive is needed - with empirical research, case studies based on interviews and observations, to verify tools are active (and funded), actively used, accessible, understood, paired with TA, if/how they work or have worked together, or even a practical use of time and resources (return on invested time and money to apply/pursue) if on the radar of businesses across the value chain. Sector-specific and/or supply chain segment case studies, interviews across industry -- with a representative sample stratified by size and type of business, sector, segment, as well as demographic and geographic distribution. This would confirm and explore the perceived gaps and overlaps and service of these programs to our food and forest products systems. And really shine light on barriers that companies face, diverse companies in particular, in servicing the supply chain, becoming a viable and not vulnerable participant in building a sustainable and resilient food system, from the standpoint of food security and healthy food access, and from the standpoint of supporting growth oriented businesses that can transform our food system and economy – getting more Maine food to more people in Maine and beyond – market access/expansion.

AIIP Slide Deck

- Since the application data contains current projects and needs, how can it be used to extrapolate to Maine's future needs? I feel that the responsibility of the Advisory Board is to look out 5 to 10 years and identify potential infrastructure priorities. I am interested in an assessment of the long-term sustainability of the investments in the business supported by AIIP.
- What would the aggregate beneficial impact to the state have been in five to ten years if all projects were funded, as reported by applicants? How does this align with AFFIP goals of viability, resilience and equity? High alignment? What matches and what is left out?
- Understanding the net impacts of investments in fewer larger projects vs many smaller ones.
- Can funds help businesses scale to keep the affordability of their products reasonable to the people of Maine?
- Are we trying to create benefits just for businesses? Or is creating direct benefits to the food and forestry product consumers in Maine attainable?
- Are the applicants proportionate to the prominence of the food economy in that region? How are we distinguishing processing and manufacturing? (How) does producer need/demand match up with supply chain gaps and bottlenecks – as far as lining up critical investments with business viability (more refined analysis of increased ability to source and process maine-grown to know that businesses are seeing how and being steered to be a strategic part of the supply chain). Relates to sector specific and shared infrastructure investments– case studies could help illuminate how that benefits particular pinch points.
- What are the “New Markets” that are being accessed? I'd like to know about the range of markets that the applicants were looking to expand into, as well as their current markets. It seemed like a lot of the producers were direct-to-consumer, but who are the consumers, particularly in terms of socio-economics? Can we ensure that a diversity of new markets is being accessed so that funds aren't just going to ultra-high-end markets (cheese for \$40/pound, carrots for \$5/lb, and ground beef for \$15/pound)? Could funds also provide consumer goods for communities facing food insecurity, as well as middle-income earners who aren't necessarily food insecure but can't afford a stiff premium that is often attached to locally grown foods?

RFSI

- Cold storage seems like a very highly ranked priority, along with that cold storage being on farm. A tension was mentioned between farm resilience and an appetite for using shared facilities - what do we know about the ratio of distance from farm to the size of storage needed on farm vs. accessible to farm, and what do we know about the geographic distribution of cold storage needs and the appropriate technology transfers we could support/invest in. If cold storage funding was available and funded, how would that shift the

next set of perceived needs? Drilling down into cold storage seems like a useful place to study further.

- Potential borrowers need programs to be simplified to make it easier to access funds. TA would be beneficial for stakeholders who are new to the funding landscape.
- Not being knowledgeable about forestry, I ask if the top five types of investment priorities that identify outlet/markets for forestry products is about increased access to existing markets or aid in increasing the total available market. I believe the solutions are quite different.
- Are there any trends by industry / food supply chain role for responses to priority setting questions 1-3?

Forestry Slide Deck

- It seems that awarding funding based on damages caused by the pandemic is rearward looking and far different from the task of AFFPIF which is to look at future priorities. I would be interested in learning the impact of these investments after 5 and 10 years (future work). Long-term sustainable improvements are the goal, and a lagging indicator of whether the process worked.
- Despite focus on job retention, funds only allowed 38% retention. What could have helped with higher job retention if that was a key goal?
- Overall, I'd like to hear/learn more about Forestry sector funding history and needs. What is the likelihood of success for growing companies compared to food businesses?
- How much of the emerging tech is coming out of the UMaine Innovation Center (ag and tech) then supported with help of MERC (in case of ag) and MTI (in both ag/forest prod)?

3. Taking this information into account, how could the Fund best ensure equitable outcomes in fund distribution?

Funding Landscape Report

- Given my first thought of replicating parts of successful funding models, we may need to build different models for the different sectors. For example, ag may be more successful with grants whereas forestry may be more successful with low-interest loans.
- I don't have much to offer here. Have a TA provider that can support fundees to navigate the vast network of resources available – aka funding landscape switchboard operator or tour guide.
- To ensure equitable outcomes in fund distribution, we should be looking at the gaps in funding and technical assistance. If those gaps fall within the forest products industry, then we should look to fill those first. It seems counterintuitive to distribute funds to industries that already have access to funding and TA programs.
- This funding priority list will include funders that have funding priorities targeted to underrepresented geographies, populations, markets, products...
- Minimize the overlap with other existing programs and try to fill a void where it is shown there is a need.
- Include interviews with diverse businesses and cohort-based technical assistance providers – to hear how demand/use of programs has dropped/drops without specific/explicit outreach and targeting of the curriculum to diverse entrepreneurs and their peers. Do they continue to use services that aren't specially marketed and designed for diverse businesses? Why/not? Why are BIPOC business cohorts effective? Also, talk with businesses that have failed and succeeded to understand how catalytic capital and tech services would have helped them grow sooner. How could this fund have helped those who have struggled?
- Separately, what can existing funders tell us about gaps in equity?

AIIP Slide Deck

- Smaller businesses do not have the same resources as larger businesses when it comes to knowledge and experience for grant writing or applying for different types of capital. TA needs to be available for smaller businesses so they have the same opportunities as businesses who have dedicated staff to do it for them.
- Given that AIIP applicants are a self-selected pool of businesses able to complete a grant application and willing to make investments in their businesses, should the fund consider the merits or disadvantages of opening a funding opportunity without sufficient resources to meet demand? Arguably these businesses experienced a waiting time in which they did not pursue the other funding mechanisms while waiting for an answer. Additionally, perhaps applications come from a pool of producers who are (or are not) eligible for other funding channels - is it more equitable to applicants to increase the available funds? Or narrow the

qualifying pool to specific investment types in order to broaden access itself, coupled with more support for submitting the applications and doing outreach to eligible businesses.

- It's important to consider: a) a range of markets for end goods and consumer impact, b) a range of complexity for project scopes (shared use projects, limited scope/quick ROI, and larger infrastructure), and c) focus on helping profitable businesses grow. Avoid businesses that have had previous rounds of funding and are still struggling with profitability, particularly in regards to larger investments. I might view this differently in regards to underserved/underrepresented communities. Then we want to add robust TA support along with funding, particularly if it is a new/starting business.
- I believe that the awardees were companies that had the capacity and time to submit an AIIP application. Companies that have an existing business that requires growth or capital investments. Companies that have a higher return on the AIIP's investment. This application process might have put certain companies at a disadvantage: those that are new to grants, where English is not their first language, and start-ups. Those are the companies the AFFPIF fund should be targeting.
- Take into account indirect impacts of the project, including new jobs created, for example.
- Digging deeper into making sure that investments are fully utilized and accessible to all who may be benefit. Interviews should be strategic across the value chain, with diverse and innovative businesses and accelerator TA and capital providers, including VC (using SCTC) and OZ funds, and NMTC users/capital providers. Focus on small producers, outreach to communities through ECBOs and CBOs, industry associations, by working closely with local and regional TA providers serving businesses.

RFSI

- Remove barriers to accessing funds. Simplify the application process. Micro loan programs with favorable interest rates and terms would be beneficial. Time is of the essence with small businesses. By simplifying the process, it could speed up disbursement of funds for small businesses in need.
- Need to ensure approved applications demonstrate diverse industry / food supply chain representation from different geographical areas of Maine.
- Need to ensure application process is straightforward and doesn't take a big time investment so as not to favor larger businesses with admin staff capacity.
- The responses to Priority Setting 4 suggest that the application process to get funding from the Investment Fund must be easy, take little time, not require a match, and have a paper submission path.
- The Fund should clarify whether equitable funding means equitable to all applicants, all producers (regardless of whether they are also applicants), all regions of Maine, all scales of activity, all stages of business (or all of the above).

Forestry Slide Deck

- Focus on small producers.
- As always, TA would be a benefit to smaller businesses who don't have the capacity to apply for grants/loans.
- I was impressed that the average company size was 6.7 FTEs (FR1). This work funded small business, which is an underserved population pool.
- Consistent office hours, multiple languages available
- Embedding impact goals in the process creates actionable outcomes to improve over time. What goals could we embed in the fund while also being responsive to the applicants in both sectors? These applications should be simpler and less time-consuming!
- I had not previously considered equity tracking in a breakdown of counties. How should we consider this, given that some sectors will be more concentrated in certain counties/regions of Maine?
- Having the application in several languages invites new Mainers to the bid process – very exciting.
- The Fund may want to consider a technological innovation component to evaluation criteria.

§320-A. Agriculture, food system and forest products infrastructure investment

1. Definitions. As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "Food system" means all processes, infrastructure and persons involved in feeding a population, including growing, harvesting, collecting, processing, manufacturing, packaging, transporting, marketing, selling, consuming and disposing of food and food-related items in the State. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

B. "Infrastructure" means property, equipment, networks and supporting services associated with the production, harvesting, processing, manufacturing, storage, packaging, transporting, marketing, sales and disposal of food. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

C. "Producer" means a person in the State that grows, manufactures, harvests or otherwise creates agricultural, food or forest products and value-added products, including a person engaged in farming, harvesting or other agricultural and forestry manufacturing activities. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

D. "Supply chain" means the chain of distribution by which agricultural, food and forest products are moved from the producer to the consumer and may include intermediate entities, including aggregators of various products, manufacturers, value-added producers, processors, packagers, warehouse operators and other storage entities, distributors, wholesalers and retailers. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

E. "Value-added" means changing the physical state or form of a product through processing or manufacturing to enhance or increase the product's value, including making the product suitable to generate renewable energy. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

2. Goals; investment; inclusiveness. The commissioner, in coordination with the Department of Economic and Community Development, industry stakeholders, representatives of Indian tribes, communities of color and other underserved communities and populations and other relevant agencies, shall:

A. Strengthen the State's agricultural, food and forest products economy with a priority of making resulting efforts more inclusive of and increasing investments in historically marginalized, underrepresented and underserved communities, including communities of color, low-income communities and rural communities that typically lack access to capital to start, sustain, scale and innovate businesses; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

B. Expand infrastructure investments in the agricultural, food and forest products economy to increase access to new markets and opportunities for producers, processors, small businesses and consumers in the State in the producing, processing, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, marketing, sale and consumption of products; and [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

C. Collaborate with other state agencies, economic development organizations and other key institutional partners to establish technical assistance programs to support the objectives of this chapter. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

3. Powers. In carrying out the purposes of this chapter, the commissioner may:

A. Hire or assign staff or contractors, including community development financial institutions, economic development organizations, quasi-governmental entities or other capital or technical assistance providers; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

B. Seek and accept funds from public and private sources; and [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

C. Administer funds, grants and programs. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).

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§320-B. Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund

1. Fund established. The Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund, referred to in this chapter as "the fund," is established and administered by the department to support public-private partnerships to carry out the purposes of this chapter. The fund consists of money appropriated to the fund or received from any other private or public source. Interest in investment of money of the fund is credited to the fund. Unexpended balances at the end of the fiscal year do not lapse but carry over into the next fiscal year. The Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Advisory Board established in section 320-C shall oversee and determine expenditures from the fund.

[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).

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§320-C. Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Advisory Board

1. The Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Advisory Board. The Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Advisory Board established in Title 5, section 12004-J, subsection 1-A, referred to in this section as "the board," is created to oversee and determine expenditures from the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund in section 320-B.
[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

2. Membership. The board consists of the commissioner or the commissioner's designee, the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development or the commissioner's designee and 15 members appointed jointly by the commissioner and the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development as follows:

- A. One member of a statewide industry group representing conventional nondairy farming; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- B. One member of a statewide industry group representing organic nondairy farming; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- C. One member of a statewide industry group representing dairy producers; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- D. One member of a statewide industry group representing the forest products industry; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- E. Two members from relevant financial institutions with experience in the agricultural and forest products industries; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- F. One manufacturer of forest products; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- G. One manufacturer of value-added agricultural products or representative of the value-added agricultural products industry; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- H. Two members representing the supply chain in processing, manufacturing or distribution; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- I. One member actively engaged in providing marketing assistance, market development or business and financial planning; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- J. One member from a statewide group representing the logging and trucking industry; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- K. One member who is a member of a federally recognized Indian nation, tribe or band in this State; and [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]
- L. Two members who represent historically underserved racial populations in nondairy farming. [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

Board membership must reflect a diversity of skills and experience relevant to investment in agricultural, food and forest products processing and manufacturing industries and represent the racial diversity of the food system in the State with specific representation by Indian tribes, communities of color and other underserved communities and populations.
[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

3. Terms; officers; committees; rules. Board members serve for 3-year terms and may serve no more than 2 consecutive terms. The members shall elect a chair and may elect officers, establish one or more committees or subcommittees and adopt such procedural rules as the members determine necessary and appropriate to perform the board's work.

[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

4. Quorum; meeting; voting. A majority of the sitting members constitute a quorum, and action taken by the board may be authorized by a majority of the members present and voting at any regular or special meeting at which a quorum is present. The board may permit any or all members to participate in a regular or special meeting by or conduct the meeting through the use of any means of communication, including electronic telecommunications or a telephone conference call, by which all members participating may communicate with each other during the meeting. A member participating in a meeting by means approved by the board under this subsection is deemed to be present in person at the meeting.

[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

5. Reimbursement. A member of the board is entitled to reimbursement of mileage and other incidental expenses, if funds are available for such purposes, pursuant to Title 5, chapter 379.

[PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

6. Powers and duties of board. The board, in determining disbursements of the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund, shall:

A. Facilitate strategic investments in the State's agricultural, food and forest products processing and manufacturing industries, including value-added products; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

B. Foster an environment that encourages innovation, sustainable growth, equity and inclusion; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

C. Implement and maintain business technical assistance programs in support of the fund and other funds as needed; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

D. Determine and devise a process for requests for proposals to perform 3rd-party services in support of and for the management and administration of the fund and other potential natural resource-related funds as needed and for technical assistance programs that ensure that economic development organizations, capital providers and community development financial institutions in any region of the State are able to fairly compete for disbursements from the fund to meet identified infrastructure investment needs and fulfill the objectives of the funding and technical assistance programs; [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

E. Enter into performance contracts with one or more persons in order to provide investment and services to agricultural, food and forest products industries, including:

- (1) Technical assistance and product research services;
- (2) Marketing assistance, market development and business and financial planning;
- (3) Organizational, regulatory and development assistance, including feasibility studies of facilities or capital investments to optimize construction and other cost efficiencies; and
- (4) Identification of workforce needs and programs in order to develop training and incentive opportunities for the agricultural, food and forest products industries after consulting with the Department of Labor; and [PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW).]

F. Oversee, analyze and evaluate programs, contractors and other recipients of funds disbursed by the board annually, including:

- (1) Analyzing fund and technical assistance program use;
- (2) Recommending program changes and improvements;
- (3) Preparing a comprehensive report, in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Community Development and other appropriate agencies and organizational partners, on the

performance, use and sustainability of funds and supporting programs of the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund to submit to the commissioner; and

(4) Collaborating with the Department of Economic and Community Development and other appropriate agencies and organizational partners to ensure that investment objectives are appropriately targeted and not duplicative and to establish various grant and loan instruments as part of the fund. [PL 2023, c. 470, §§1-3 (AMD).]

[PL 2023, c. 470, §§1-3 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2021, c. 483, Pt. KK, §2 (NEW). PL 2023, c. 470, §§1-3 (AMD).

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Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund Advisory Board Meeting Summary (04/30/25)

The meeting began by welcoming new board members Melissa Lacasse of Tanbark, a molded fiber producer in Maine, and Michael Duguay, new Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development. Co-chair Tricia Rouleau outlined the agenda, to include presentations on Maine forestry sector needs and trends, a benchmarking report discussion, and information about the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Fund.

Maine Forestry Industry ARPA Funding

Matt Hoffner from Maine Technology Institute (MTI) presented on MTI's role in distributing ARPA funds to the forestry industry during the pandemic. He detailed the Forest Recovery Initiative Phase One (FRI-1), which provided immediate assistance to small businesses, and FRI-2, which funded larger projects for technology development and efficiency upgrades, and described their economic impact. Matt also discussed MTI's core funding for forestry and agriculture projects, emphasizing their focus on innovation.

Benchmarking Report

Erica Campbell of InCommon Group summarized the suite of research efforts being undertaken to inform the Advisory Board, including a funding landscape report, benchmarking report, surveys, interviews, and evaluation metrics framework. Eric DeLuca of Leverage Point Consulting then discussed approaches that three other states - Massachusetts, Michigan, and Vermont – took in developing comparable agriculture or agriculture/forestry investment funds. Eric discussed various strategies and lessons learned from these funding programs. He highlighted Vermont's use of a letter of intent phase to calibrate demand and improve application quality. Eric emphasized the value of utilizing grants to mitigate risks and attract additional funding. He also mentioned the benefits of milestone-based payments and public-private partnerships in program implementation. Eric stressed the importance of framing food system and working lands development as economic development, and highlighted the role of technical assistance and integrated capital approaches in supporting business viability and sustainability.

Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Overview

Ellen Kaylor, Executive Director of the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, presented an overview of the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative. She underscored Eric's point that working land sector development is economic development. She explained that the Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan and the Forest Future Roadmap serve as foundational documents for the board's decision-making. The Initiative's goals, grant programs, and performance measures all reflect a focus on investment and economic development in the working lands sector.

Vermont's Working Lands Enterprise Initiative has contributed \$8.8 million in state funds over 12 years, leveraging an additional \$30.9 million in matching funds. The board focuses on strengthening business viability, increasing knowledge and skills, supporting underserved communities, and improving the operating environment for agriculture and forest businesses. Grant types range from \$15,000 to \$250,000, with funding allocated to individual businesses, supply chain impacts, and service providers. The board carefully considers geographic distribution and balances funding between agriculture (on average 70%) and forestry (on average 30%). Ellen emphasized the value of consistent annual funding from the legislature to allow for better planning by businesses and the board.

Future Meeting Plans and Structure

The board discussed plans for future meetings and changes to the meeting structure. It agreed to hold an in-person meeting in May instead of June, with a remote option available. The board agreed to add an October meeting to allow more time to finalize initial fund design. This meeting will be held in person in the Bangor area. Future meetings will focus on facilitated discussions rather than presentations, giving board members more opportunity to share perspectives. The staff will provide synthesized information from previous meetings to guide these discussions. The board also agreed to extend in-person meetings by 30 minutes. There was limited interest in site visits to AIIP-funded projects before meetings.

Next Steps

- Jo D. Saffair will send out certain previous reports and presentations for review before the May meeting.
- Board members will review these materials and provide feedback on key takeaways before May meeting.
- Board members will send any follow-up questions for the meeting presenters to the co-Chairs and Jo D.
- Jo D. will share presentation slides in a subsequent meeting package.