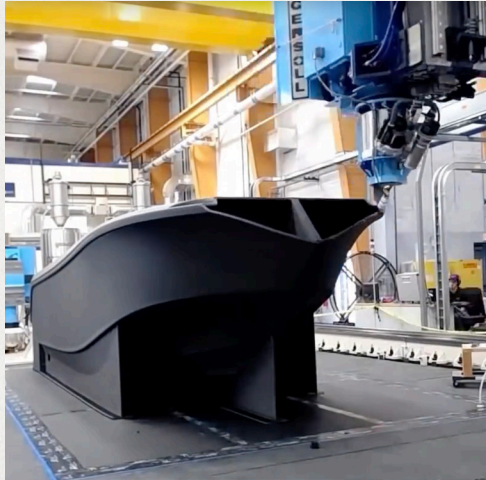
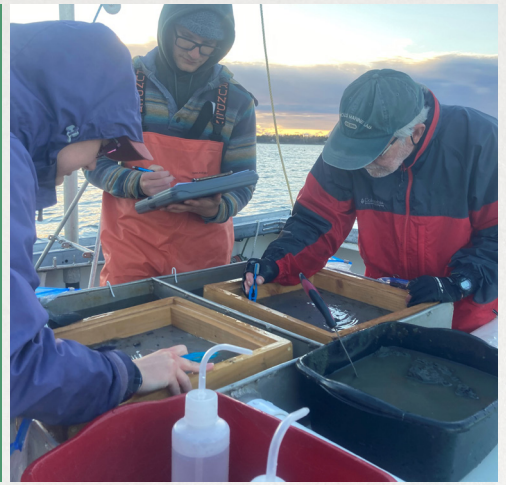


The Maine 2020-2029

Economic Development Strategy: THE 2024 RESET



March 8, 2024
(Revised March 17, 2025)

March 8, 2024

Dear Friends,

When I became Governor in 2019, Maine was at an economic crossroads. We were one of the last states to fully recover from the Great Recession. Our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) — a key measure of economic growth — had increased at only a third of the rate of the rest of the nation during the prior decade. Average annual wages sat at 78 percent of the national average, and our state, home to the oldest median age in the country, was expected to see far more workers leave the workforce in the decade ahead than enter it.

My Administration recognized that these major economic challenges, if left unaddressed, would inhibit future growth — so we got to work on a plan to get our state's economy moving.

Following an extensive stakeholder engagement process, in November 2019, I released the state's first comprehensive economic development strategy in more than two decades. None of us could have imagined that just a few months later, Maine would face its biggest economic challenge in generations: the COVID-19 pandemic.

When President Biden and Congress delivered nearly \$1 billion in federal American Rescue Plan funds to Maine, we had a roadmap in the form of our strategic plan to put those to work building an economy poised for future prosperity. We invested \$400 million in the workforce, innovation, green energy, broadband, and infrastructure recommendations contained in the strategy.

Those investments helped Maine achieve and surpass the ten-year goals contained in the 2020 strategy. Today, our GDP has grown faster than any other New England state — and outpaced the growth of larger states like California, New York, and Virginia. Real wages (income after inflation is accounted for) are up 10 percent, and workers are earning more than they were before the pandemic. Our state has seen record rates of in-migration that have outpaced much of the nation. Productivity is up 13 percent.

I am excited about the direction we are heading. Small businesses are expanding their operations; people are moving here to work and raise their families; graduates are staying in Maine to pursue rewarding, life-long careers here at home — our economy, and our state, are getting stronger every day.

At the same time, we still have work to do — from ensuring people of all backgrounds in all parts of the state can enjoy the benefits of economic growth, to meeting ambitious green economic development goals, to ensuring everyone can have a comfortable and affordable place to live, to growing the size and skills of our labor force.

It is time to take stock of how far we have come, where work remains, and where new approaches are needed. The vision and the long-term strategies remain the same, even as strategies evolve to meet the changing needs of Maine's economy.

I thank Commissioner Heather Johnson of the Department of Economic and Community Development for leading this update, and I thank the hundreds of Maine people who have helped to create this new suite of recommendations.

We will continue to work hard to address the challenges we face to ensure that Maine remains the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet T. Mills".

Janet T. Mills
Governor



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vision

By 2030, Maine will be an international leader with a vibrant, sustainable, environmentally responsible economy. All across the state, the people of Maine will have access to an unmatched quality of life and good paying jobs.



Our 10 Year Strategic Goals

To achieve our vision, we have established three goals.

grow the average
annual wage by

+10%¹

to the benefit of workers at
all income levels

increase the value
of what we sell
per worker by

+10%²



Attract

75,000

people to Maine's talent pool

both by increasing participation among Maine's existing
population, and attracting new people from out of state —
thus turning a potential labor force shrinkage into a gain.

¹ From \$45,370 to \$49,900, in inflation-adjusted dollars

² From \$87,160 to \$95,876, in inflation adjusted dollars



executive summary

Three months after the Maine 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy was released, the first Covid case was detected in Maine, causing major changes to the economy at the state, national, and global levels. The Strategy gave Maine a roadmap to address the immediate economic crisis through needed investments in Maine's workforce and employers. The Governor, working with the Legislature, invested \$400 million of federal relief funds into these initiatives, jumpstarting the fastest growth Maine had seen in many years. Given all that has changed since the Strategy was first published, it is time to look at the next set of actions Maine needs to take to continue progress toward our strategic goals.

Maine has already nearly met or exceeded two of the three ten-year goals in the 2020-2029 Strategy. Growth in real wages and growth in productivity have both reached 10% in the last 4 years. But that is not a sign that our work is finished—far from it. The continuation of these positive trends is not guaranteed; headwinds of affordability and market uncertainty remain serious challenges. On the third goal of labor force growth, we have made significant progress but still have an uphill journey to reach our target. And Maine needs to do more to ensure that the benefits of growth are shared by everyone.

This update reaffirms the vision and seven strategies of the original plan while revising and adding new actions for implementation. The actions are based on the latest data, as well as discussions with and input from hundreds of Maine people during 2023. Working together across industries, organizations, and the public and private sectors, we will sustain and build upon Maine's growing economy to achieve our 2030 goals.

The strategies from the Maine 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy continue today, while the specific action items have been updated. The strategies are:

STRATEGY A

Grow Local Talent

The first step to growing our workforce is ensuring every person in Maine is reaching their full potential. Through investments like free community college, Maine has increased the percentage of its workforce with a credential of value, such as a college degree or trade certification. Continuing to solidify and grow attainment of higher education is critical to meeting our workforce needs and guaranteeing Maine people can find their best match in the economy. These credentials of value directly correlate to increased wage growth for individuals and increased productivity in Maine's economy.

We also need to ensure Maine's young people have a chance to learn about career opportunities, get connected to work, and gain skills that are vital to their long-term participation and leadership in Maine's economy. Building on investments in career exploration programming for young people and high school technical education will lead to a more capable and growing workforce in our state. Through action items across our labor, licensing, and education systems, this strategy will strengthen Maine's talent base.

STRATEGY B

Attract New Talent

To maintain our workforce as tens of thousands of Maine people reach retirement age in the coming years, we must attract new talent into the state. We have seen rapid growth in the number of people moving into the state in recent years. In 2021, Maine experienced the highest rate of in-migration since 1950 and had the 7th highest rate among all states. These new residents primarily came from elsewhere in the U.S.—moves spurred by the growing Maine brand and made possible by the opportunity for remote work. New immigrants also contributed to this growth, choosing Maine for similar reasons of quality of life and opportunity for work. The action items under this strategy will support our employers and education institutions as they attract workers and students and ensure new arrivals are able to swiftly connect to good, unfilled jobs.

STRATEGY C

Promote Innovation

At the core of improving Maine's economy is innovation: finding new ways of doing and making things that provide greater value to society. Every time someone in

Maine successfully brings a good idea from their mind to the market, we all get some of the benefit—whether it is a large scale innovation that grows jobs and wages, or a more humble improvement to daily life.

Innovation has been expanding in Maine in recent years, starting with its foundations in higher education. The University of Maine achieved R1 status, the highest performance level of research universities, and the Roux Institute at Northeastern University opened in Portland with 3,000 business partners across the Northeastern network. Meanwhile, new business formation has increased, representing everything from mom-and-pop establishments to new large investments. One indicator of the strength of innovation in Maine is the growth in the life sciences sector, which saw a 42% increase in employment in five years.

But we are starting from a challenging position as a rural state whose core industries were battered in prior decades. We have much to do to secure a place as a destination for innovation and investment and the economic benefits that come with it. We must grow investment in research and development, leverage our natural resources, better coordinate our business supports, and ensure entrepreneurs of all kinds are able to grow here.





STRATEGY D

Build Connections

Broadband is foundational infrastructure in today's economy and society. Maine has deployed hundreds of millions of dollars for broadband expansion in recent years, and the results are dramatic. In just the past year, the number of underserved homes has been cut by two thirds, and the number served with the highest speeds of broadband (100/100) has been doubled. To continue this success, we must extend broadband further into rural areas, help underserved populations get access to equipment and training, and improve understanding of broadband's importance. With connections available to everyone, we must enable Maine people to build economic value using this modern infrastructure.

STRATEGY E

Provide Supporting Infrastructure

Community infrastructure, such as affordable transportation, childcare, and housing, are key to Maine's economy. That infrastructure supports workers, attracts talent, and forms communities with a high quality of life. Maine has invested heavily in all of these areas in the last four years. But these widespread needs will require steady investment for many years in order to achieve our goals. The action items for this strategy identify the need for a more comprehensive roadmap on housing production, funding for transportation and child care, and the workforce needed to implement all of the above.

STRATEGY F

Maintain a Stable Business Environment

Improving the predictability and affordability of Maine's business environment is crucial to achieving economic success. It is a persistent challenge to strike the right balance of protecting natural resources, guiding development, making energy and healthcare affordable in a rural state, and the many other factors impacting business costs and quality of life. We can improve this balance by streamlining permitting, swiftly moving to clean, reliable energy generated in Maine, and improving access to State resources.

STRATEGY G

Promote Hubs of Excellence

Places where research and education institutions, talented workers, forward-thinking businesses, natural assets, and local investments converge have an economic impact greater than the sum of their parts. These hubs of excellence can become the engines of growth and high quality of life. Maine has seen exciting examples emerge across the state in recent years: Waterville has taken big steps to establish itself as an art and film destination for northern New England; Skowhegan is a growing center for local foods and manufacturing; and Rangeley is a leading destination for four-season outdoor recreation. Many other communities are in the process of creating their own brands and local alliances. We must take steps to help communities—including partners ranging from industry to nonprofits to academia—identify their strengths, build on existing successes, and map their pathways for future growth



Within individual strategies, there has been important progress.

HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS:

Strategy A

GROW LOCAL TALENT

55%

OF MAINE ADULTS

with a postsecondary
credential of value

UP FROM

44% IN 2018

Strategy B

ATTRACT NEW TALENT

NET MIGRATION OF

**21,200
PEOPLE**

in 2021

THE HIGHEST

RATE SINCE 1950

Strategy C

PROMOTE INNOVATION

7,900

**NEW BUSINESS
STARTUPS** in 2021

70% MORE
than closures

42%

GROWTH

in life science
jobs in Maine
in most recent
five years

**UNIVERSITY OF
MAINE** IS UPGRADED
TO AN R1 INSTITUTION

**THE TOP
RESEARCH**
CATEGORIZATION

**THE ROUX INSTITUTE
AT NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY**
OPENS IN PORTLAND IN 2020

Strategy D

BUILD CONNECTIONS

Number of households without broadband

CUT BY TWO-THIRDS

To less than 5% of locations remaining
as of 2023

Strategy E

PROVIDE SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

OVER \$222 MILLION

IN NEWLY FUNDED INITIATIVES

for affordable transportation, housing,
childcare, and other infrastructure

Strategy F

MAINTAIN A STABLE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

2.5 PERCENTAGE POINT REDUCTION

IN PERSONAL HEALTH CARE EXPENDITURES

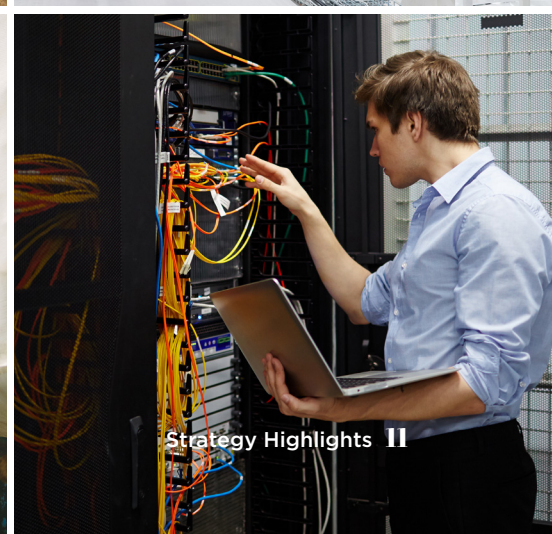
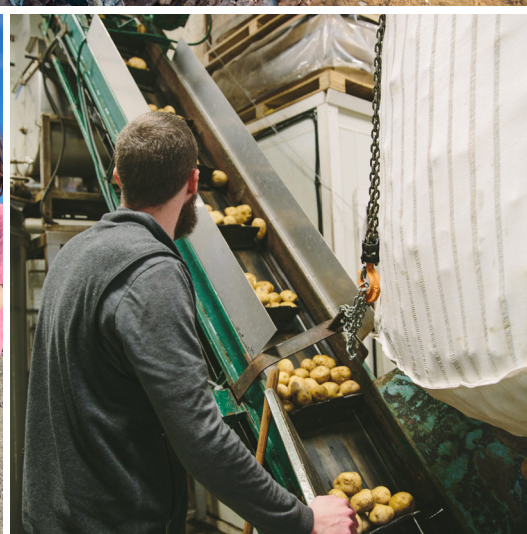
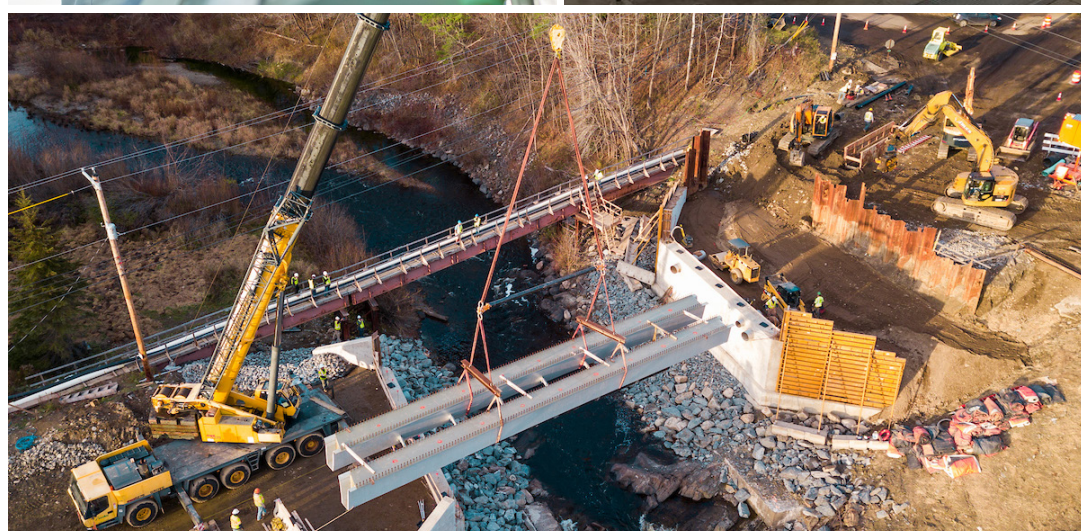
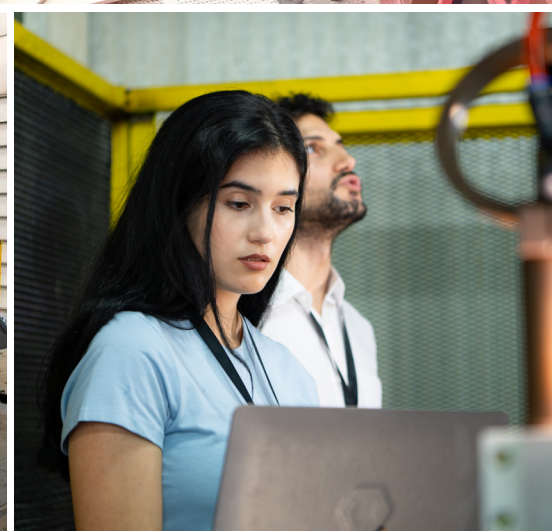
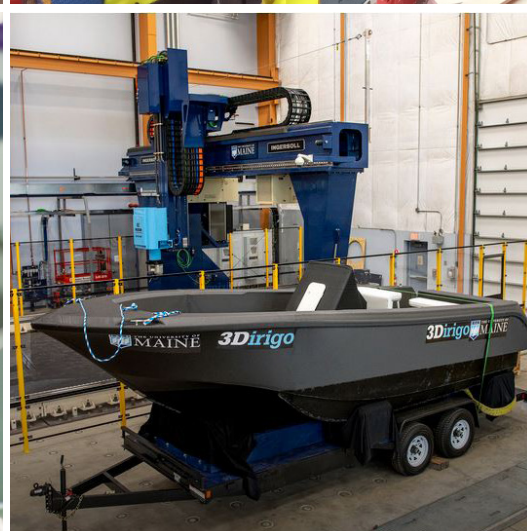
Strategy G

PROMOTE HUBS OF EXCELLENCE

WATERVILLE, SKOWHEGAN & RANGELEY

creating critical mass for
COMMUNITY IDENTITY





four tumultuous years

Much has happened since the release of the original Maine Economic Development Strategy in November 2019. Covid struck the next spring, leading to the sudden loss of nearly 100,000 jobs. One in six Maine workers found themselves unexpectedly on the unemployment rolls.

In response to the pandemic, Maine invested over \$400 million of federal recovery funds into workforce training, the green economy, broadband, and infrastructure (see Appendix A for a partial list). The unprecedented federal funding since 2020 allowed us to invest in many of the actions laid out in the original Strategy, spurring collaboration among public and private organizations to imple-

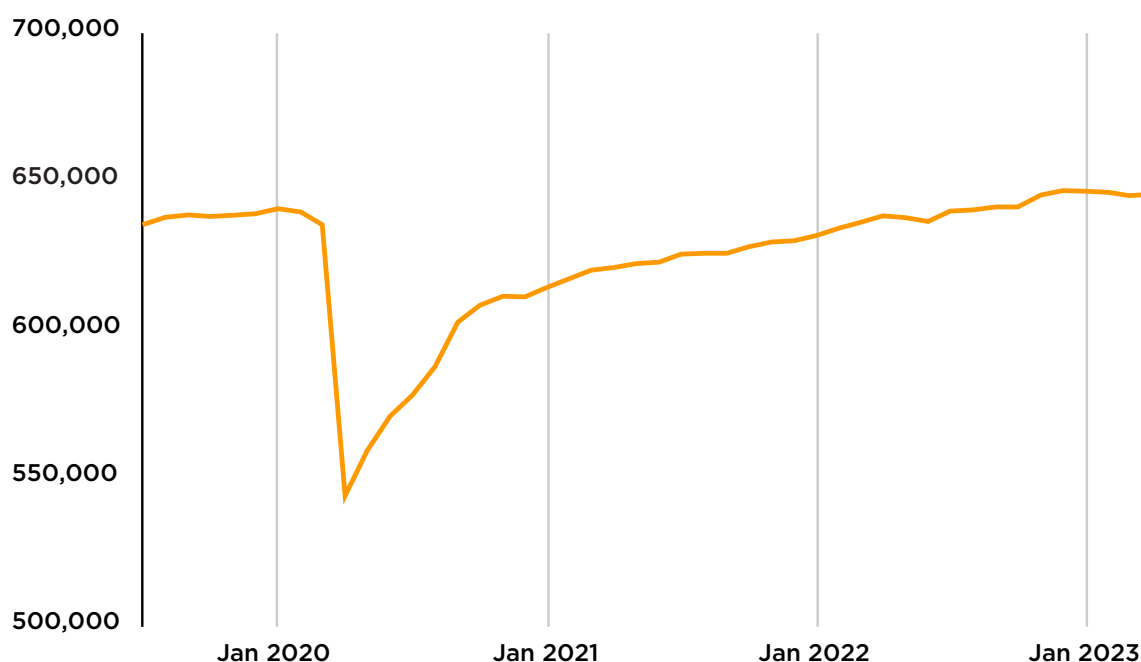
ment new ideas. Maine's GDP has grown faster than any other New England state and even faster than New York or California. Incomes are up more than inflation. Tourism revenue is up. Traffic is back on the highways. Public places are open again.

The economy has resumed, but the economy of 2024 is not the same as in 2019. Some of the patterns of living, learning, working and shopping, either begun or intensified during the pandemic, have created permanent changes in the economy.

In-migration to Maine continues to grow. Telecommuting is now a regular feature of employment. Maine's

Nonfarm Wage & Salary Jobs

(Seasonally Adjusted)



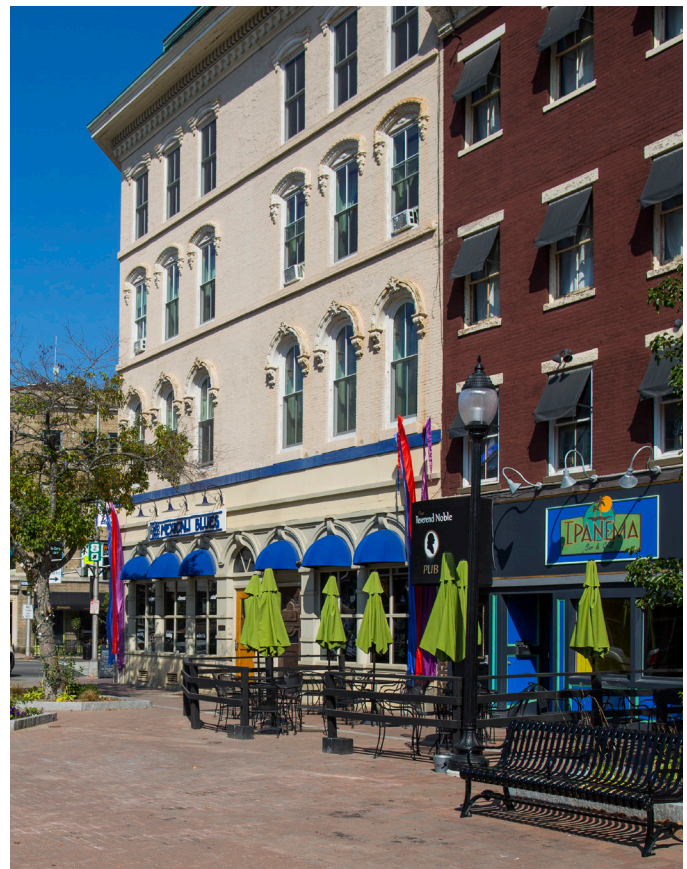
Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information, Current Employment Statistics

retail industry continues to evolve to meet customers' expectations to shop online and in-store interchangeably. This evolution was accelerated by the pandemic as even the smallest stores quickly needed to accommodate the shift to online shopping. Although 442 brick and mortar locations closed between 2011 and 2021, retail employment has rebounded close to pre-pandemic levels with more than 80,000 Mainers working in retail.

Manufacturing employment is above its pre-pandemic level, and businesses have more openings than there are qualified applicants to fill. Students are back in school, but the pandemic set back their educational progress even while bringing new creative efforts by our state's educators to meet students where they are. Baby boomers will continue to retire at high rates in the coming years, maintaining the pressure to grow our workforce.

It is time to update the Maine Economic Development Strategy to acknowledge the progress that has been made, the challenges that persist, and what we can do to advance the economy of tomorrow.

It is time to redouble our commitments to build greater prosperity across Maine.



Timeline



SINCE 2020

progress on goals

The original Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029 had one vision, three major goals, and seven strategies. The vision, goals, and large strategies all remain in place in this update.

The initial plan focused on three economy-shifting goals to be attained by the end of 2029. These were intended to be ambitious but achievable at the time, based on the relatively moderate pace of economic change in prior decades. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and everything that followed changed Maine's trajectory on each measure. Already, just four years into the plan, we have nearly met or exceeded two of the three goals.

GOAL 1

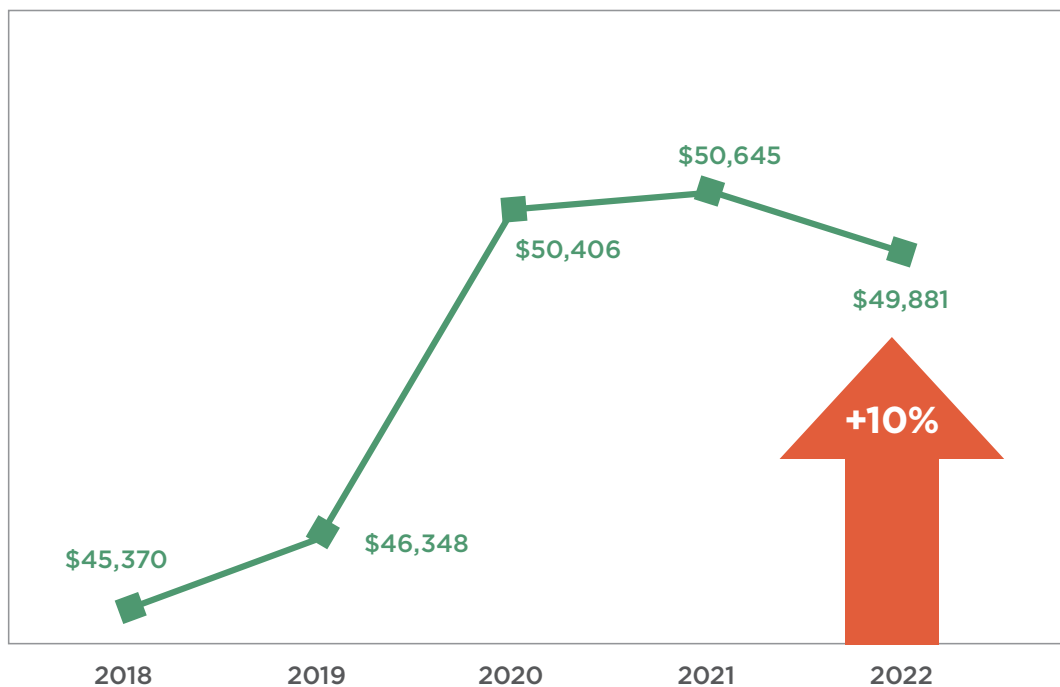
**10%
GROWTH**
in real wages
in ten years

PERFORMANCE

**10%
GROWTH**
in four years

Real wages (income adjusted for inflation) have increased by 10% from the 2020 plan baseline of 2018 to 2022. Wage growth in Maine was the fastest in the country during this period. In the year prior to the Plan, wages for Maine workers ranked 45th in the country. The most recent national data shows average wages in Maine have jumped 11 spots to the 34th highest in the country. These higher real wages mean that, on average, working Mainers' paychecks today go thousands of dollars further than at any time in the past two decades. In Maine, wage growth has been strongest among lower-middle income levels, workers with lower levels of educational attainment, and youth.

Real Wages Have Grown 10% Since 2018



Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages;
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index

GOAL 2

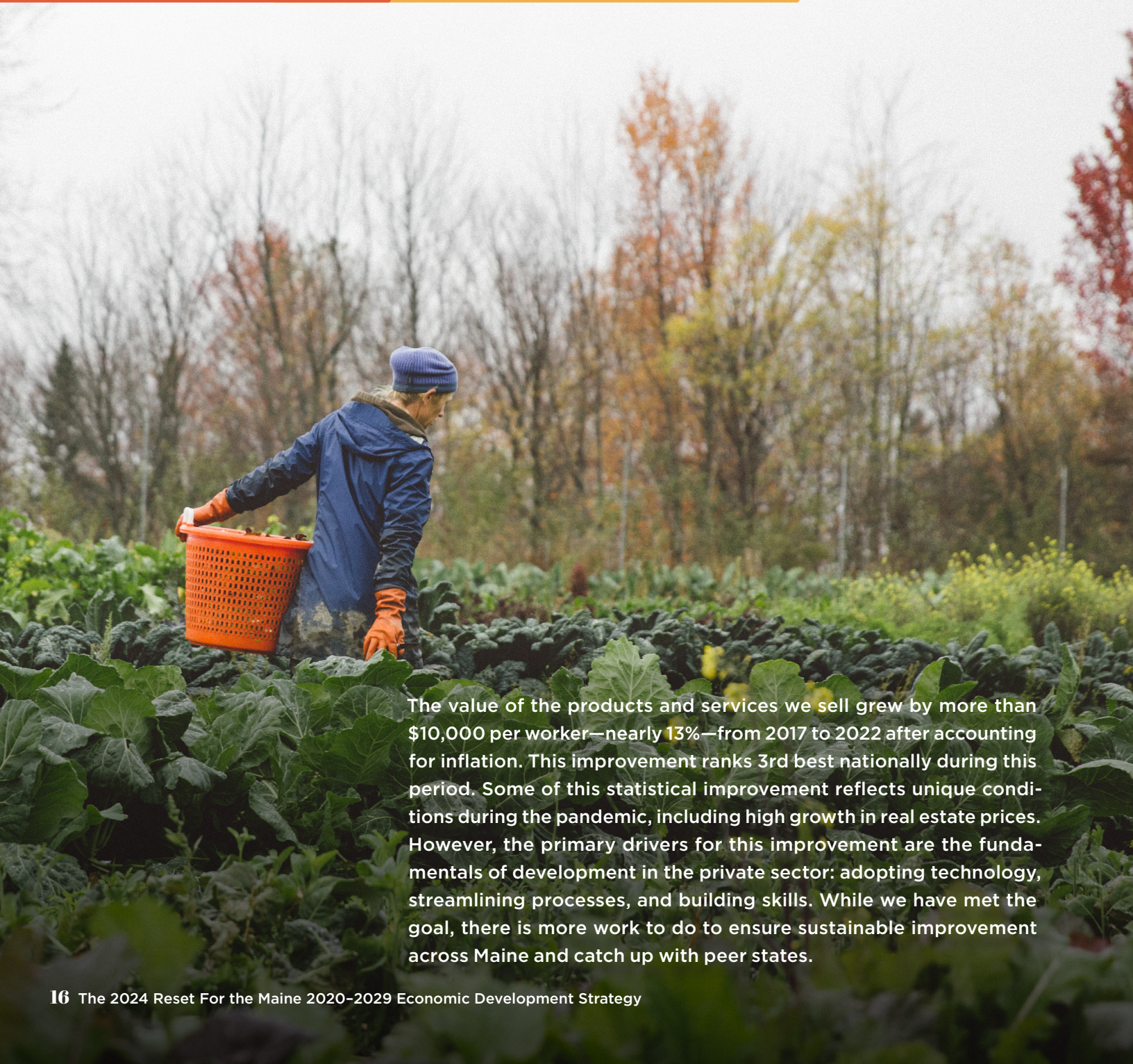
**10%
INCREASE**

in the value of what
we sell per worker
in ten years

PERFORMANCE

**13%
GROWTH**

in four years



The value of the products and services we sell grew by more than \$10,000 per worker—nearly 13%—from 2017 to 2022 after accounting for inflation. This improvement ranks 3rd best nationally during this period. Some of this statistical improvement reflects unique conditions during the pandemic, including high growth in real estate prices. However, the primary drivers for this improvement are the fundamentals of development in the private sector: adopting technology, streamlining processes, and building skills. While we have met the goal, there is more work to do to ensure sustainable improvement across Maine and catch up with peer states.

GOAL 3

75,000

PEOPLE

added to Maine's talent pool in 10 years

PERFORMANCE

Approximately

13,400

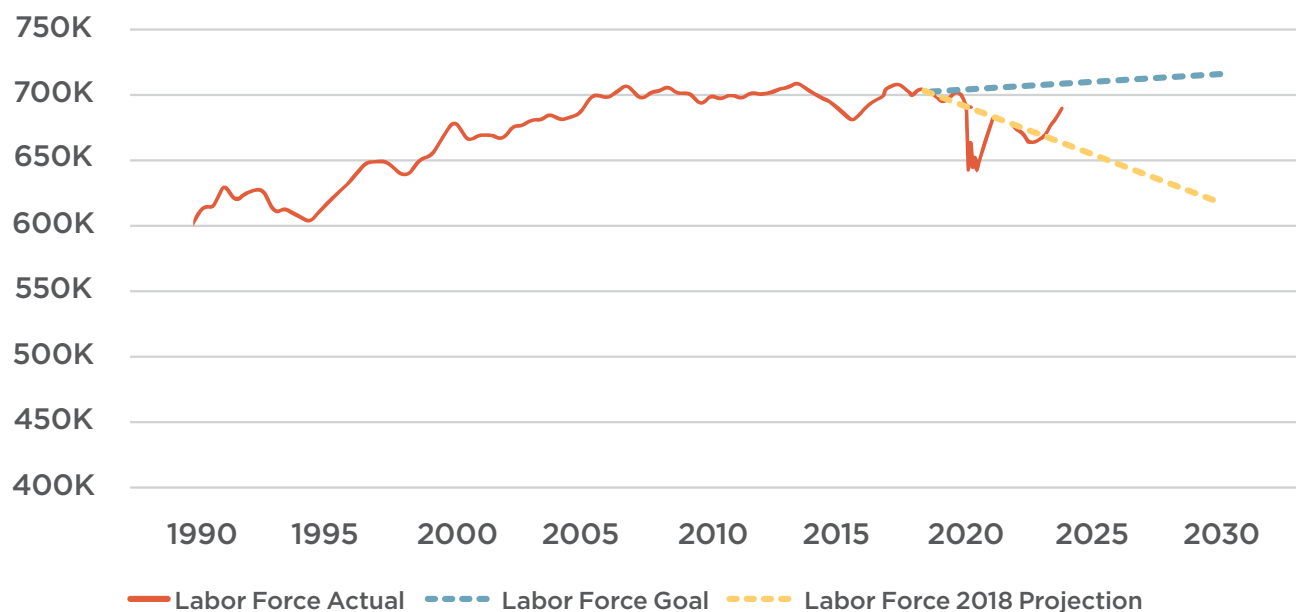
PEOPLE

added to Maine's talent pool in three years

The goal of increasing the talent pool by 75,000 encompasses both increasing the population through migration and increasing the labor force participation rate of the population already residing in Maine. The pandemic affected both factors. Migration into the state, particularly of people under the age of 45, increased, adding to the 18+ working-age population. At the same time, more baby boom generation workers are retiring in Maine than young people are joining the workforce.

We are doing better than expected, but not as well as we need to do. The chart below shows the projected decline of Maine's labor force from 2018 to 2030 at the time the Strategic Plan was written if more people did not join the workforce. It also shows the 2020-2029 Plan goal—to reverse that decline and instead achieve a modest gain. The actual performance thus far has been in between those trajectories; better than business as usual, but not yet as good as we need.

Maine Needs to Reverse a Projected Labor Force Decline



Data source: Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information, Local Area Unemployment Statistics;
Projection source: Maine State Economist

Prosperity for All

In looking at statewide data, it is important to keep in mind that the economic progress achieved has not been evenly distributed among people or regions within the state.

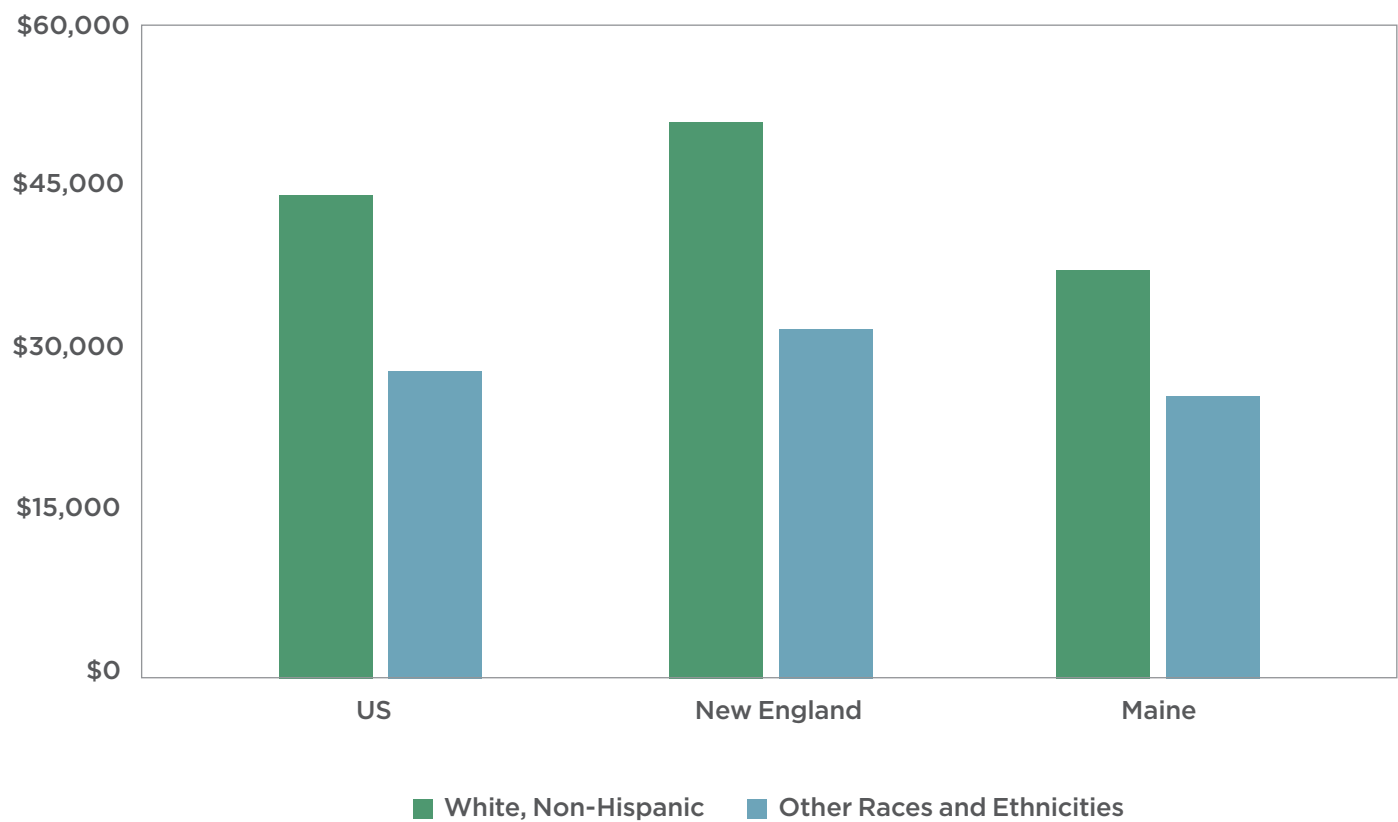
The per capita income of people of color in Maine is 70% of the level of those of white earners. Women make 80% of the earnings of men. The average annual wage in Piscataquis County is only two thirds of that of Cumberland County.

Populations who have historically not had the chance to fully participate in Maine’s economy—or face obstacles to rejoining it—must be included

for the state to reach our goals. There are unique historical circumstances behind every income gap, and consequently there must be multiple approaches to shrinking those gaps. Ensuring the future full and meaningful participation of these populations in the high-skill and high-wage labor force will be needed for Maine to reach its goals.

Embedded throughout the seven strategies on the following pages, there are specific actions listed to make sure that all populations in Maine engage in and benefit from our growing economy.

Average Per Capita Income, 2017–2021



Source: US Census Bureau

STRATEGY A

grow local talent

FROM THE 2020 PLAN

In the 21st century, economic development is about investing in people and their communities. Talent is the new currency.

For the long run, we will invest in our early care and pre-K system. We will prepare our children entering kindergarten to succeed. We will prepare all students to achieve the competencies needed to find a place in the future economy.

In the short run, we will help adult workers, who are now (or could be) in the workforce, to upgrade their skills so that they can qualify for better paying jobs—and to simply keep their own jobs, which will require new skills as technology changes.

In 2018, 44% of Maine’s workforce has a work credential that goes beyond a high school diploma. A “credential” is a two or four-year college degree, or a license in the trades, or a professional certificate. The goal set in Maine law is to increase this proportion to 60% by 2025.

STRATEGY A: GROW LOCAL TALENT

CURRENT STATUS

Success in growing local talent will ensure that Maine has the people it needs to support its economic goals and that Maine people can share in the rewards of greater growth.

There are many challenges to be addressed. Labor force participation among working age Maine people has recovered from the pandemic but still remains below its high during the early 2000s. There are populations in Maine that historically have not fully enjoyed the benefits of good quality jobs whose further inclusion would help raise participation. Additionally, participation can increase in those areas where the people, skills, jobs, and supporting infrastructure like childcare and housing don't line up.

The pandemic also disrupted learning for Maine students, with significant impacts on wellbeing, attendance, engagement, and academics. In response, Maine has leaned into hands on, engaging, interdisciplinary educational opportunities such as universal computer science education. Much work remains to reconnect students with school and prepare them for success in life, career, and as citizens.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) has seen an 18% increase in enrollment since 2018, with 10,012 students enrolled in 2023. The greatest increase has been in the CTE Exploratory programs that primarily serve 9th and 10th graders. These programs are designed to introduce students to CTE programs with the goal of them gaining interest and enrolling in programs during their junior and senior years. There are 1,019 students enrolled in the 2023-2024 school year.

In 2022, Maine took the transformational step of making community college free for recent Maine high school graduates. Over 11,500 students have enrolled already, almost 50% more than projected. The University of Maine System continues to produce thousands of high-quality graduates each year, strengthening connections with Maine’s K-12 schools, the Community College System, and Maine employers as a central conduit of the state’s talent pipeline.

In 2022 Maine also established the Maine Career Exploration Program, which provides paid work experiences for Mainers ages 16 to 24; thousands of young people have already completed the program and even more are in the pipeline. An additional \$12 million from the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan will allow for the expansion of registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs—creating pathways to careers for 1,400 participants and supporting recruitment and retention efforts of 400+ businesses.

Results are already beginning to show. As of 2021, already 55% of Maine adults had a credential of value—up from 44% in 2018, and well on the way to the plan goal of 60% by 2025.

By continuing to connect Maine people to the best education and training available and ensuring they have access to great careers, we will grow our talent base to new levels.

“I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do when it came to college. Spending thousands of dollars to figure it out really made me nervous, especially with all the talk around the country about student loan debt.

The Free College Scholarship really gave me the peace of mind and the extra bump in the right direction to start college.”

—MIKENZIE MELENDEZ
Central Maine Community College



ACTION A1

CONTINUE FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Access to education is essential to creating a gateway for local talent. To build Maine’s workforce, we need to support seamless, low-barrier pathways to high-quality workforce training, particularly for young people just graduating from high school. The free community college initiative for recent high school graduates created that pathway by automatically eliminating tuition costs for those graduates, fueling a 30 percent increase in community college enrollment in its first two years and attracting thousands of students who might not otherwise have gone to college. To provide support and clear opportunities to our young people, we must maintain and expand the free community college initiative beyond the 2024-25 academic year.

ACTION A2

DEVELOP A STATEWIDE CAREER PORTAL

Maine’s future workforce needs to know what careers are available and how to reach them from any starting point. We will develop and implement a training, education and career planning web portal that job seekers, community partners, and employers will use as a critical first step in connecting talent with resources that lead to good careers. We plan to incorporate student and worker voices to ensure that this site speaks to their needs. The Department of Labor will lead this effort, collaborating with businesses and nonprofits to ensure that the content is robust and workers to ensure they can get the tools they need.

ACTION A3

EXPAND AND PROMOTE REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships work to boost wages and retention. According to national data, apprenticeship graduates earn an average of \$300,000 more in wages and benefits than their peers throughout their careers, and 91% of apprentices continue working with their employer after their training because they feel more invested and supported. We will expand financial support and technical assistance to businesses and organizations that want to host pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship programs—and we will continue to increase awareness of apprenticeships as a valued pathway to credential attainment.

ACTION A4

STRENGTHEN CAREER PATHWAYS

Ensuring Maine’s workers are achieving their full potential requires getting them connected to the right career. We plan to create career academies that connect both students and working adults to work-based learning and dual-enrollment opportunities that lead to good careers. This will require coordination between PK-12 schools, Career and Technical centers, labor unions, adult education programs, higher education systems, and employers to ensure the pathways are industry-aligned and relevant to workers and learners. Other states have seen success with this approach, and we can do the same by bringing the right partners together to create straightforward career pathways for Maine workers.

A student from Nokomis High School, an avid hunter, used his interest in hunting and wild game processing to do an extended learning opportunity (ELO). He used a full semester to learn all the aspects of processing and the business behind one of Maine’s most popular tourism-based activities: hunting. Science standards were attached to the assignments through biology, resulting in the student receiving a science credit.

ACTION A5

INCREASE EQUITABLE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

We need to actively remove barriers to great jobs for all Maine people. We need to increase equitable workforce participation and provide upskilling opportunities for existing residents, with a focus on historically marginalized communities. While a key consideration across all the programs discussed in this Strategy, we also must apply targeted supports where specific barriers to fully participating in the workforce persist. This encompasses a wide body of work, from strengthening professional networks with and among people of color to improving occupational language course offerings for English language learners to supporting accessible workplace improvements for individuals with disabilities.

ACTION A6

EXPAND THE MAINE CAREER EXPLORATION PROGRAM

In order to grow local Maine talent, we must encourage students to explore their interests through experiential learning opportunities in Maine's key industries.

The \$25 million investment in the Maine Career Exploration Program beginning in 2022 built the foundation for the program's three major partnerships with the Maine Department of Education, Jobs for Maine's Graduates, and the Children's Cabinet. Since then, more than 3,500 young people have participated in the program, with another 2,500 slated for next year. Students are getting experience in Maine organizations and are being paid for their work. This program improves the workforce participation rates in Maine's younger age bands and retains talent by showing youth the great opportunities that are available in our state.

There is even more that can be done with Maine Career Exploration by further extending the program to earlier grades and higher education, as well as covering more types of jobs. But crucial for sustained programming will be identifying the right organizational and funding structure. For all the success it has already displayed, Maine Career exploration relies on federal pandemic relief funding—a temporary source of support. The benefits to our K-12, higher ed, and employer communities



are substantial due to the opportunities it grants young people to find what they are good at and want to do before they invest in a career path. Finding a balance of investment from the public and private sectors to continue this successful model will be critical.

Our Goals for the Next Year of the Maine Career Exploration Program

1. Provide 3,000 young people with paid career exploration opportunities
2. Attract new businesses and nonprofits to host students
3. Research and implement national best practices for work-based learning and supporting the career exploration continuum
4. Create the foundation for middle school programming so that all middle school students have access to Career Exploration



Shamica Williams, a senior at Morse High School in Bath, was offered a flight lesson by the New England Aviation Academy through the JMG Maine Career Exploration Badge (MCEB) experience.



JMG is Forging a Future Workforce The Maine Career Exploration Badge (MCEB)



Jesse Taggett was a freshman at Caribou High School when the pandemic struck in 2020. That spring, and for the next two academic years, students had to adjust to remote and hybrid learning and in-person masking requirements. As Jesse began his senior year, a member of the Class of 2023, he was excited to do all the ordinary things students do: prom, extracurricular activities, sports, and the opportunity to gain real work experience. Fortunately, the Maine Career Exploration Badge

program was created to connect Jesse, and thousands of high school students across the state, to employer-based opportunities to build skills and explore careers. The goal of the MCEB initiative is to provide 6,000 students like Jesse, Christian (right), and Shamica (opposite page), across all 16 counties, with a minimum of 40 hours of meaningful work experience through the help and dedication of Maine's educators and employers. Through this innovative initiative, JMG offers high school juniors and seniors a structured pathway to gain meaningful work experience. MCEB helps students discover their career aspirations, or, for students like Jesse, helps them gain experience in their specific field of interest. Jesse knew he wanted to pursue a professional career in welding. MCEB allowed Jesse to expand his skills, including fabricating, at the Louisiana Pacific Houlton Mill in New Limerick. Jesse graduated in May 2023. He now attends Northern Maine Community College and is employed by Hack & Gouge Welding in Woodland. The goal of the MCEB initiative is to provide 6,000 students, across all 16 counties, with a minimum of 40 hours of meaningful work experience, with the help and dedication of Maine's educators and employers.

Jesse Taggett was one of the first students to complete JMG's Maine Career Exploration Badge (MCEB), pursuing his passion for welding, while he was a senior at Caribou High School.



Gorham High School student Christian Butler gained meaningful work experience through JMG's Maine Career Exploration Badge (MCEB) initiative with the support of the nursing team at MaineHealth's outpatient facilities in South Portland and Scarborough.



ACTION A7

SUSTAIN ADULT EDUCATION WORKFORCE PROGRAMMING

Adult Education programming throughout the state has grown over the past four years. During the 2022-2023 school year, more than 11,000 adult learners participated in Maine adult education programming, resulting in 2,872 credentials of value being issued. Across the state, Adult Education programs play a vital role in connecting people to good jobs. Sustaining and furthering this growth is an opportunity to ensure good career pathways are available to people starting from all points. The more we do to match Adult Education offerings to the skills and credentials employers require, the more adult learners will benefit.

ACTION A8

SUPPORT INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

Maine has an abundance of skilled and talented workers from other countries, yet many face barriers to working at their highest level of education or training. We need their skills and talent in all of our industries, and we need to maximize the utilization of their existing skills and knowledge. That will require continued improvements to our professional licensing processes, as well as direct supports to address the specific steps these workers must follow to practice their occupation once again, the specialty of organizations like the New Mainers Resource Center. We will also support the coordination of adult education, the Maine Community College System and University of Maine System to improve prior learning and skills assessments so that internationally educated and trained professionals can reach their occupational and professional goals in an efficient and timely manner in Maine.

2022-2023
ADULT EDUCATION

11,000+
PARTICIPANTS

Workforce Certifications
and Credentials Issued:

2,872
68% INCREASE

Medical
Certifications Issued:

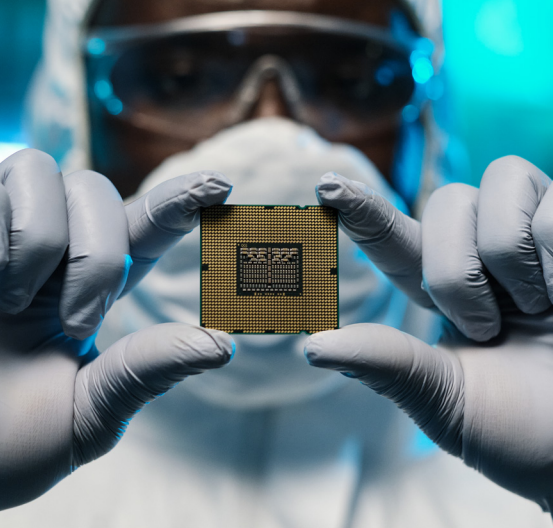
1,252
57% INCREASE

Manufacturing and Trucking
Licenses and Credentials Issued:

266
63% INCREASE

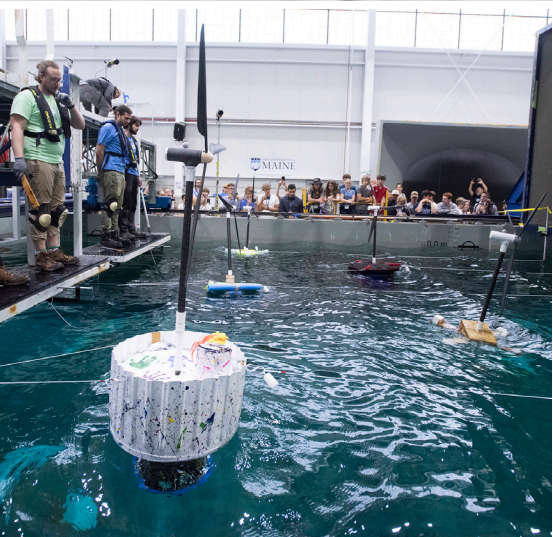
Business and Technology
Certifications Issued:

266
63% INCREASE



I feel that the exposure to “hands on” trades/professions, and other “outside of the classroom” experiences should be long before Junior/Senior year. Children should be exposed to this kind of schooling/experience starting at 10 years old to give them a longer opportunity to explore.

—SURVEY RESPONDENT



Unique Partnership Between Somerset Career and Technical Center and Cianbro Gives Students a Solid Career Track into Welding

For the last 14 years the Somerset Career and Technical Center (SCTC) in Skowhegan has had a partnership with Cianbro to provide an innovative Career and Technical Education (CTE) welding program. The program has grown over the years, both in participants and partners giving students a hands-on track into welding careers within their community and beyond.

This collaboration began when both organizations were facing challenges; SCTC didn't have the space to start a new program and Cianbro had a growing need for welders. After some discussion the question was posed: what if Cianbro provided the space and the instructor? This was an approach that hadn't been done before, but everyone involved could see the value in a true public-private collaboration. It originally started with a welding training trailer with six booths. As the program grew it became clear that it would be better for students to be bussed directly to Cianbro's welding facility in Pittsfield.

"It is a great model when you can transition students into an environment where they are learning their skills next to adults who are also going into the trades" said SCTC Director David Dorr. "It's a model I would welcome to duplicate."

While at Cianbro, students are being taught the welding standards through the NCCER Welding curriculum, which allows them to work towards their American Welding Society (AWS) certifications. Historically, all students in the program receive at least one AWS certification, with many passing multiple. Once a student passes and receives their certification, they also become eligible to participate in SCTC's apprenticeship program. SCTC contracts with Cianbro for the instructor as well as materials. The instructor is a Maine Department of Education (DOE) certified teacher, holds an NCCER instructor certification, and brings a wealth of knowledge from the industry as an experienced Cianbro employee. Troy Twitchell, who was the original instructor from Cianbro, said, "I have been involved with the SCTC welding program since it began. Students get a chance to work outside of their comfort zone and see what it is like working in the real world." He continued by emphasizing the overall impact on the community: "The community is excited to see a partnership between schools and a construction company. Participation in the program could lead to potential job opportunities in the future."

As the program began to grow in interest from students, there was a limit on how many could safely be instructed, which led to a waitlist for the program. By 2021, there were 15 students on the waiting list, which was equivalent to the entire size of the program when it first started in 2011. This led to more conversation on how to address the challenge.



SCTC and Cianbro brought their can-do attitude and experience of collaboration to the community. This led to discussions with Madison High School and other business in the greater Somerset County area who all recognized the value of the program and appreciated the collaboration. This new collaboration resulted in over \$200,000 raised to build a state-of-the-art welding facility at Madison High School to allow for additional students to be served. Today, with the additional space, enrollment has grown with 28 total students enrolled at the two locations and ultimately eliminated any waitlist.

There is no doubt the value that this partnership brings to both organizations as well as the students involved. The opportunity for the students to be a part of a program that is connected to an industry and company that values growth is a benefit for all. Mark Brooks, the Director of the Cianbro Institute has seen this first hand: "I've really enjoyed watching the energy between [primary welding instructor] Sam Baker and the students as they begin their education with limited welding experience and watching them develop over time into skilled welders."

This collaboration is a sign of the value a true public-private partnership can bring to communities across the state. It raises aspirations for students while also preparing our next generation workforce. Mark said, "Cianbro remains excited for the collaboration with the SCTC program in order to create an awareness of a trade that will assist them in the future. The welding education program is a great opportunity for students to begin to explore their pathway to the future."



This is a great example of what can happen when we all are focused on the same goal.

STRATEGY B

attract new talent

FROM THE 2020 PLAN

The goal is 75,000 additional people in the workforce. Maine has strong, talented, hard-working people. We don't have enough of them. This strategy forecasts a 65,000-person contraction in the workforce over the next ten years unless robust countermeasures are undertaken.

CURRENT STATUS

Maine is making progress in attracting people to our state. After years of experiencing net out-migration, Maine is now consistently attracting more people than it is losing. In 2022, Maine's rate of net in-migration was 11th in the US, creating a net gain of 8,000 people (see chart). We are still conducting research to learn more about who has come and why, and if this trend can be expected to continue.

Regardless, we are working against the tide. Every year, roughly ten people reach retirement age in Maine while only seven enter prime workforce age. Part of the equation for sustaining our incomes, businesses, services, and overall economy necessarily includes attracting new talent to the state.

ACTION B1

BUILD MAINE'S TALENT ATTRACTION CAMPAIGNS

Maine is a great place to live, learn, and work—but not enough people know that yet. We need to promote Maine's quality of life benefits. We also need to highlight programs such as free community college, affordable and high-quality public four-year universities, the Student Loan Repayment Tax Credit, professional and occupational licensure recognition, remote work opportunities, and others. To increase impact, we can support direct recruitment efforts, including of veterans transitioning out of military service, as well as marketing and attraction campaigns that promote our state's strengths while connecting workers to specific Maine employers.

ACTION B2

HIGHLIGHT CAREER PATHWAYS FOR NEW MAINERS

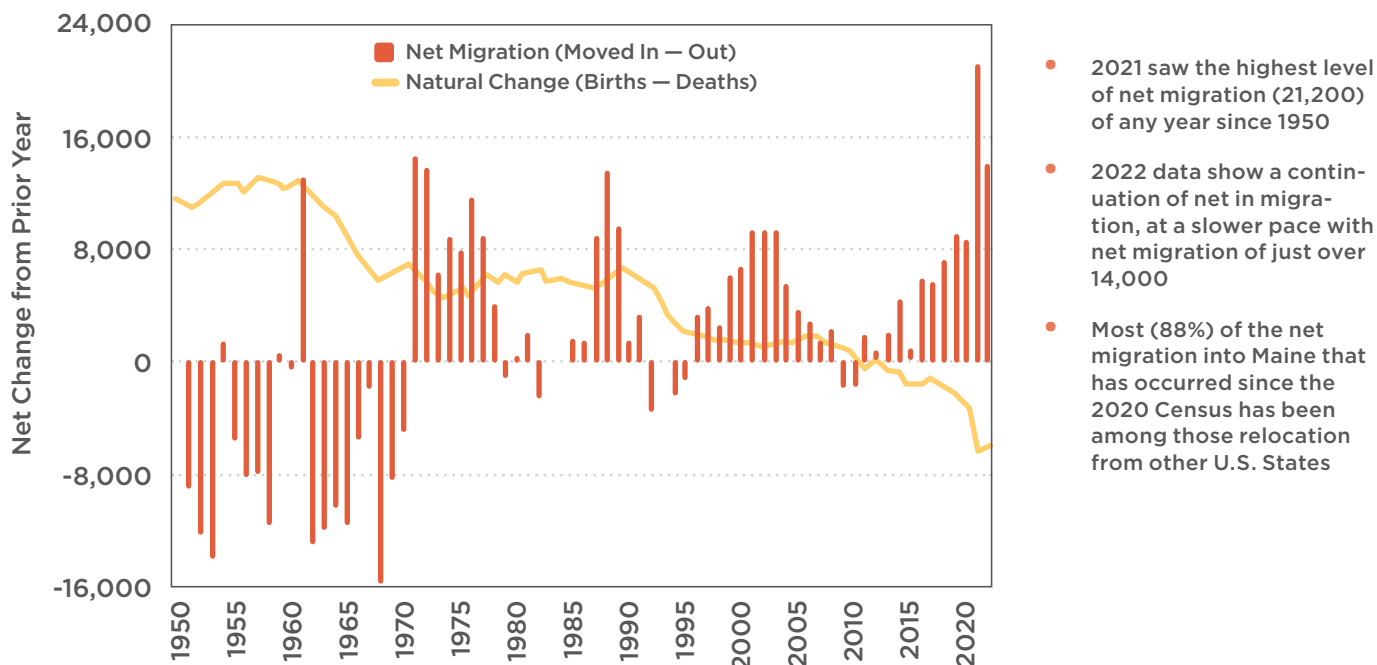
Attracting talent requires a well-defined path to success. We will establish an Office of New Americans that identifies roadblocks in skill development and credentialing in order to create access to high-quality work opportunities.

ACTION B3

MATCH NEW ENGLAND STUDENTS WITH MAINE EMPLOYERS

Students in neighboring states should be able to find work here. We plan to launch a unique initiative that matches New England higher education graduates with smaller employers in Maine. Maine employers

Source of Population Change



Through the JMG Summer Academy, five students from JMG's South Portland Multilingual program earned their CNA certification from SMCC and performed their clinicals at The Cedars Retirement Community in Portland. During their pinning ceremony, it was announced that all five students had been permanently hired by The Cedars.



have roles that students from all over the country would be interested in. Creating direct one-to-one interactions between employer and student will improve the number of recent graduates joining Maine's workforce.

ACTION B4

RECOGNIZE OUT-OF-STATE OCCUPATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

We need to make it easier to bring expertise to our state. We need to continue finding opportunities to accept professional and occupational licenses from other states and countries. Other pathways to working in Maine, such as provisional licensure, will also need to be identified to address the scale of qualified individuals our state economy requires.

ACTION B5

STRENGTHEN MAINE'S HIGHER EDUCATION BRAND AWARENESS

Maine has great schools and a strong higher education system—and we should shout it from the rooftops. We need to market Maine's schools in a way that showcases their unique value and attracts students. Over 6,000 students graduated from the University of Maine System alone in 2022-23. We need to improve our data on what those students do following graduation and what influences their likelihood of remaining in Maine. If we increase Maine higher education enrollments, provide local work experience while they are enrolled, and graduate higher numbers into the workforce, we will create a pool of talented and skilled people with local professional and institutional connections who are likely to contribute to the Maine economy after graduation.

STRATEGY C

promote innovation

FROM THE 2020 PLAN

Maine has some distinctive strengths that support the four themes for high-wage growth described earlier. The University of Maine, with world-class research and development in wood composites, climate change, food, and aquaculture/marine sciences, is based in the Greater Bangor region, and is a statewide resource for innovation as a land, sea, and space grant institution. The Jackson Laboratory, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, MDI biological laboratory, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and a cluster of companies focused on biomedical work are leading assets for Maine. Greater Portland has an array of biomedical and veterinary research and startup activity. Throughout the state, advancements in renewable generation, storage and access will facilitate growth across regions. This plan has a focus in four thematic areas: Food/Marine, Forest Products, Making/Manufacturing, and Technical Services. The intersection of these areas with significant global trends is where the largest opportunities exist for growth through innovation in Maine. These four themes will provide a focus for Maine's public research and development (R&D) programs. Public R&D infrastructure, in turn, will offer cutting-edge partnership capacity to private sector business and profitable opportunities to feed into Maine's entrepreneurship and small business programs.

STRATEGY C: PROMOTE INNOVATION

CURRENT STATUS

The innovation economy is taking hold in Maine. Maine is well positioned to be a leader in leveraging our heritage industries of forestry, farming, and fishing to generate global products and practices based in new technologies—products that are functional, affordable, and meet climate goals. Such new products will help grow and diversify our economy, strengthen our supply chains, achieve our climate goals, and increase the value-add of Maine jobs.

Effective research and development requires partnerships between strong academic institutions and the private sector. Maine’s ability to not just conduct the research but also strengthen the ecosystem for commercialization will be key to sustaining ongoing investment.

In addition to our heritage industries, we are seeing strength in growing sectors like life sciences and human health. Maine companies like the Jackson Laboratory, IDEXX, and Puritan Medical Products developed critical solutions to address the global pandemic. Now they continue to grow as their research develops effective treatment and delivery options for both human and animal disease. Advances in biomedical engineering and approaches to healthy aging also are potential growth areas where research is underway in Maine.

In October of 2023, the federal government designated a Maine consortium of businesses and agencies as a Forest Bioproducts Advanced Manufacturing Tech Hub. The Hub will accelerate the commercialization of a new stage of plastic and PFAS alternatives derived from wood, with uses across the building products, packaging, healthcare, agriculture, and energy sectors. The designation puts Maine on a select map of regions that are leading new technological innovations across the country.

There are a host of other potential high growth sectors for Maine, ranging from aerospace to renewable energy and AI to algae-derived products.

At the center of it all are Maine's research universities. In 2022, the University of Maine invested a record \$225 million in research and development and was upgraded to an R1 designation in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, putting it among the top 146 research universities in the nation. In 2020, Northeastern University launched its Roux Institute in Portland. The institute offers graduate education and research capabilities in AI, computer and data sciences, digital engineering, and advanced life sciences and medicine. Already, the Roux employs more than 165 Mainers and partners with more than 200 Maine organizations.

There is still a long way to go. Maine's total R&D investment, as a proportion of its total economy, is still only a third of the national average. But we are making progress, and as this progress continues, Maine people will see more of the benefits. With a focus on advancing our strategic goals across all populations in Maine, promoting the next phase of innovation will enable our state to reach greater levels of prosperity.

ACTION C1

DEVELOP AN INNOVATION TALENT PIPELINE

Innovation starts with education and collaboration. We must focus our talent pipeline on fueling innovation. We will increase the emphasis on and support for STEM education, innovation, and entrepreneurship in all settings—PK-12, postsecondary, and workforce development—and using all available tools, ranging from Maine Career Exploration to apprenticeships to badge programs.

A key component will be connecting students to real-world research opportunities. The University of Maine runs a Research Learning experience designed to prepare innovators and problem solvers for Maine's workforce, supported by the Harold Alfond Foundation. The program engages students in research projects connected to internships, co-ops and experiences with Maine companies. It shows how institutions can form direct links between students and Maine businesses to solve problems in the short-term while building our capacity for innovation over the long term. It is a model we should replicate and grow.

ACTION C2

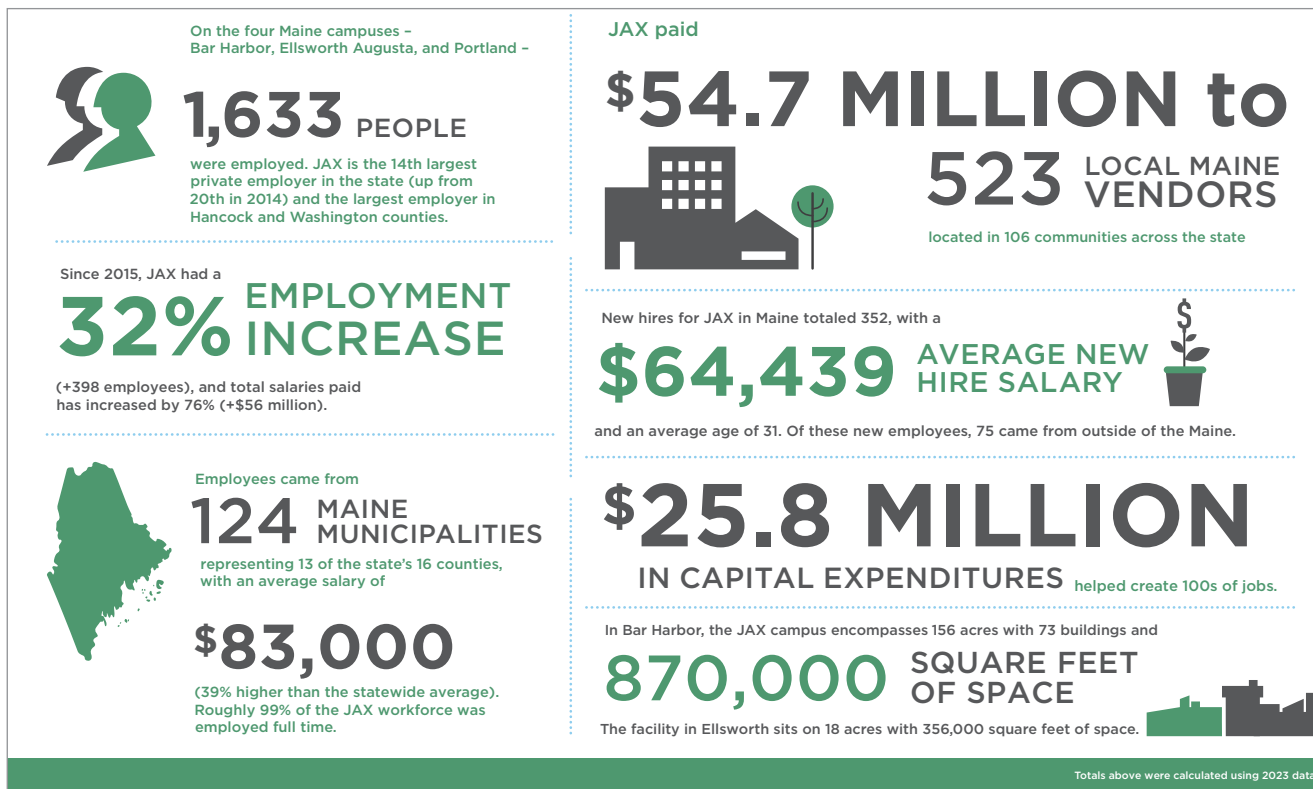
INVEST IN RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

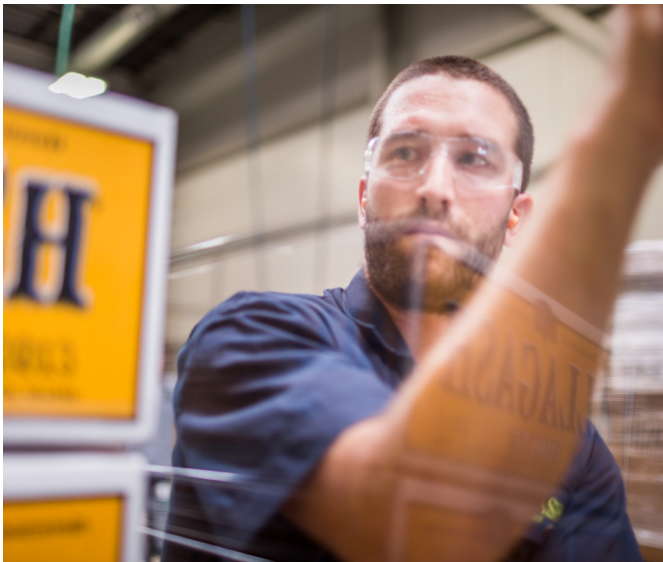
The technological advancement seeded by research and development is a core pillar of economic growth.

The success of the University of Maine's research growth, leading to the R1 designation, is compounding, attracting more funding and talented researchers to the system. That research can then be utilized by nonprofits and private companies for commercial growth. Further commercialization through initiatives such as the Forest Biomanufacturing Tech Hub and the Maine Technology Institute's funding streams can leverage research for even greater economic impact.

Other institutions are also putting Maine on the map as an R&D center. For example, Maine's long-term commitment to the success of The Jackson Laboratory has resulted in major positive impacts on the state economy (see graphic below).

As part of the first round of priority actions, Maine reinstated the Maine Innovation Economy Advisory Board. They are continuing to develop priority actions





that work in concert with Strategy C, including further plans to boost R&D. We must identify new tools and refine existing ones to invest in R&D across public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors in Maine.

ACTION C3

CAPITALIZE ON THE “MADE IN MAINE” BRAND

We want consumers to know that products made in Maine are made well. We will strengthen and expand domestic trade efforts so makers and businesses (both existing and new to Maine) can leverage high-quality market information and seize opportunities to export their goods and services to other states and nations.

ACTION C4

LEVERAGE MAINE’S NATURAL RESOURCES

Our forest and marine environments are competitive economic advantages for Maine. Maine is in a unique position to bring together climate change mitigation and economic development. We must focus on developing and expanding businesses that leverage Maine’s competitive advantages in emerging market opportunities like sustainable bioproducts and building materials, aquaculture, wind and solar energy, life sciences, and many more. To do so, we can support further sector planning and ecosystem efforts like FOR/Maine, SeaMaine, and the Maine Life Sciences Network, as well as funding tools such as the Maine Technology Institute.

ACTION C5

SUPPORT NEW COMPANIES

The next great business might need a little help getting off the ground. We need to better support innovative new companies that face high up-front costs or long timelines to commercialization. This requires ensuring the right funding and incentive opportunities are available—ranging from loan programs to investment incentives to marketing support—as well as ensuring entrepreneurs know how to access those opportunities. We also need to foster the engagement of existing Maine companies and organizations to be suppliers, distributors, and first customers of new businesses to accelerate their commercialization.

ACTION C6

ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

We can’t let barriers to success hold down innovation. Many Maine organizations are focused on equitable access to capital for all entrepreneurs, start-ups, and business owners—especially those with persistent and disproportionate barriers to success, like Maine’s racial, ethnic, and linguistically diverse business owners. The Maine Technology Institute, for example, adopted commitments to equity and quality jobs in its programming. Our entrepreneurship-boosting institutions must grow their networks and offerings to ensure no good business idea gets missed in Maine for lack of access to capital and technical assistance.

ACTION C7

COORDINATE STATEWIDE BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

We must continue efforts to simplify, coordinate, and market the wide range of assistance available for Maine businesses to guarantee they can reach the right resource at the right time. Funding providers will aggregate their offerings so entrepreneurs can shorten their time to access capital and remove multiple, often complex, steps. Technical assistance providers can lean into a regional approach to create an environment where local business owners know exactly who they need to call when they have a question.

STRATEGY D

ubiquitous connectivity

FROM THE 2020 PLAN

Digital connectivity serves as a lifeline of the modern Maine economy. Connectivity through high-speed internet (broadband) or cellular service is essential for communities to thrive, businesses to prosper, and public services to modernize. Connectivity in rural areas allows talent attraction, innovation, skills upgrading, and access to a global economy. Connectivity will cross all sectors –not just of the economy but of people’s lives. The ability to access information, create and share content, improve health outcomes, access learning, and work from anywhere in our state, all hinge on high-speed access.

CURRENT STATUS

A fast, reliable internet connection is essential to modern life, linking users to vital information and exciting opportunities. It allows businesses to market their services and products anywhere in the world; professionals to telecommute from a rural farm as easily as from an office in downtown Skowhegan; students to attend classes virtually; patients to connect to a healthcare professional via telehealth; and residents to stream content, videoconference, and use smart devices to stay in their homes as they age. It is simply not an option for anyone in the state to be left in the digital dark.

The first step to connecting everyone is expanding modern digital infrastructure (utility poles, fiber optic cable, and towers) in the places needing it the most. Significant progress toward this goal has already been made. Maine has facilitated more than \$230 million to connect everyone in the state and created the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) to proactively invest in our infrastructure and ensure digital inclusion.

The number of homes and businesses with no connection has been cut by two-thirds to less than 5% of all locations remaining as of 2023, while the number of locations with excellent service (speeds of more than 100 Mbps / 100 Mbps) has almost tripled to 33% from 2022 to 2023 and continues to grow. Starting in 2024, Maine will begin to deploy an additional \$300 million in transformational federal funding, leveraging an additional \$100 million of private capital.

Enabling access to infrastructure alone is not enough. To maximize the generational investment, Maine must also ensure that all Maine people and communities—especially those facing the most barriers—can take full advantage of expanded connectivity. High-speed internet available in every household won't matter if people can't afford it, don't have the devices to access it or have the knowledge to thrive online. The Maine Connectivity Authority has adopted the state's first Digital Equity Plan to focus on reaching those traditionally left behind in the digital dark, specifically people in rural areas, veterans, older Mainers and other historically disadvantaged groups. These activities will focus on improving the affordability of service, building digital skills, helping Mainers find the tools to stay safe online, increasing access to low-cost devices and technical support, and ensuring online resources are accessible to all. This focus will create greater opportunities for economic growth and return on investment by increasing workforce engagement and skills and ensuring that communities and businesses can take full advantage of being connected.

ACTION D1

FOSTER COLLABORATION AT ALL LEVELS TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT

In a three-year period, Maine will receive and deploy over \$400 million in federal funds to build out connectivity where it doesn't exist. Combining these funds to leverage private investment, community and regional capacity, and public partnerships will enable data-driven investments to address urgent connectivity needs and ensure a future of affordable connectivity for all Mainers.

ACTION D2

DEPLOY DIVERSE TECHNOLOGIES TO REACH ALL CORNERS OF THE STATE

Maine is a big state, and our rural communities need the same access as our urban centers. To ensure all of Maine has access to online training, remote work, telehealth, and so much more, we must pilot and evaluate new technologies that could connect remote and difficult-to-reach areas cost-effectively and quickly. These alternative technologies can also increase the resiliency and redundancy of the state's internet infrastructure, accelerating affordability and adoption.

ACTION D3

SUPPORT DIGITAL INCLUSION

We have big connectivity goals to ensure digital equity. To achieve the implementation goals set forth by the Broadband Action Plan and Digital Equity Strategy, we will support diverse technologies to address diverse connectivity needs, maximize coordination with other agencies and organizations, and support programs that help everyone get online and prosper.

ACTION D4

CREATE PATHWAYS FOR DIGITAL EDUCATION

Awareness and access are crucial to Maine's digital revolution. We will continue to fund and provide digital skill-building and internet safety education so all Mainers can take full advantage of their internet connections and keep themselves safe online. We can do this by leveraging partnerships with Maine's educational and training institutions and the state's robust network of digital inclusion partners.

ACTION D5

INCREASE DEVICE ACCESSIBILITY

To put the modern world in the hands of Mainers, we must ensure they have access to internet-connected devices. Key to success will be providing access to technical support when needed and supporting programming and upgrades at community anchor institutions. Businesses and institutions will play a critical role in making high-quality devices available.

ACTION D6

HIGHLIGHT STORIES OF BROADBAND IMPACT AND SUCCESS

Expanded internet access has countless benefits. We will highlight how broadband expansion enables not only the success of our high-growth and emerging industries, but also allows Maine's legacy industries to evolve and thrive with access to new markets and economies. Focusing on the people, places, and projects, we will tell the story of Mainers from across the state who are transforming their lives through the power of the internet.

A large chunk of people I work with don't know how to use a computer. There needs to be many more in-person classes to help the workforce become more comfortable with a computer, and internet needs to be more affordable.

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

ACTION D7

STRENGTHEN OUR INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE

A more robust Maine internet benefits everyone. We will maximize the impact of federal grants by strategically deploying funds and creating a marketplace that drives private investment by Maine’s internet service providers. Developing the state’s middle-mile “backbone” will create a strong platform for future expansion and ensure Maine has the 21st-century infrastructure that businesses, institutions, and public agencies need to thrive and grow.

ACTION D8

REDUCE BARRIERS TO DEPLOYMENT

With a generational investment in broadband connectivity flowing into the state, we must reduce or eliminate barriers that will slow the deployment and minimize the impact of those funds. Creating connections to train a ready and qualified workforce, streamlining utility pole access, and identifying robust financing options are all critical to accelerating the deployment of digital infrastructure.



STRATEGY E

provide supporting infrastructure

FROM THE 2020 PLAN

To attract talent to move into the state—and to retain the talent we have—Maine needs a supporting infrastructure that ensures a quality of life. Broadband and schools, mentioned earlier, are pieces of the puzzle. Childcare, housing and transportation are also part of the picture. Because these functions are largely independent of the economic development system, other entities must be responsible for achieving goals in these areas.

CURRENT STATUS

There have been major investments in infrastructure in the past 4 years. The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) put to use over \$450 million in state capital construction funds in fiscal year 2023. Maine invested \$25 million in federal pandemic aid funds into growing early childhood programs and provided monthly stipends to more than 7,000 childcare workers. The Legislature approved record level funding for housing in 2023—over \$90 million for production and homelessness programs.

But transportation, housing, and childcare are long-term problems. They took many years to develop and will take many years to fix. The American Society of Civil Engineers gave Maine a C- grade in 2020 for its maintenance of roads, bridges, transit, and utilities. A statewide study in 2023 found that Maine needs another 80,000 housing units across all geographies and income levels by 2030 to address historic underproduction and the demand from new residents. Maine's childcare market is still constrained by a mismatch between what families can afford and what childcare providers need to pay to attract and retain workers.

As Maine strives to attract new talent, pressure will continue to rise for improving our housing, transportation, and childcare infrastructure. We need to match investments in these areas to the level of quality and affordable service all Maine people deserve.

“Attack the rising cost of living (mainly HOUSING, transportation, and child care). If people work hard and still can't afford to live somewhat comfortably, their desire to work will disintegrate. They will become mentally unwell, leave, and/or underperform at the workplace.

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

ACTION E1

INVEST IN QUALITY CHILDCARE

Public investment in childhood education repays itself five times over during the lifetime of the child. We must use the full array of tools to improve quality childcare access across the state: increasing awareness of available public Pre-K programs; activating universal Pre-K for 3 and 4 year olds; incentivizing employer-based solutions similar to other states (like Michigan, where cost is evenly split between the State, employer, and employee); providing incentives to workers to enter and grow early education careers; promoting individual tax credits; expanding awareness of and access to after-school and summer programs; and supporting public-private partnerships—especially in areas where solely public programs are not easily accessible.

ACTION E2

BOOST MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The mental health trends for youth nationally and in Maine are concerning. We must support the enhancement of behavioral and mental health services for students in PK-12 across all parts of our state. We also recognize the importance of mental health and well-being

resources in our institutions of higher education. The Department of Education received a 5-year \$9 million grant, funded through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, to increase the number of school-based mental health staff and services in Maine by recruiting, retaining, and training providers to work with young people in schools. This type of service enhancement is a step towards getting all young people the supports they need.

ACTION E3

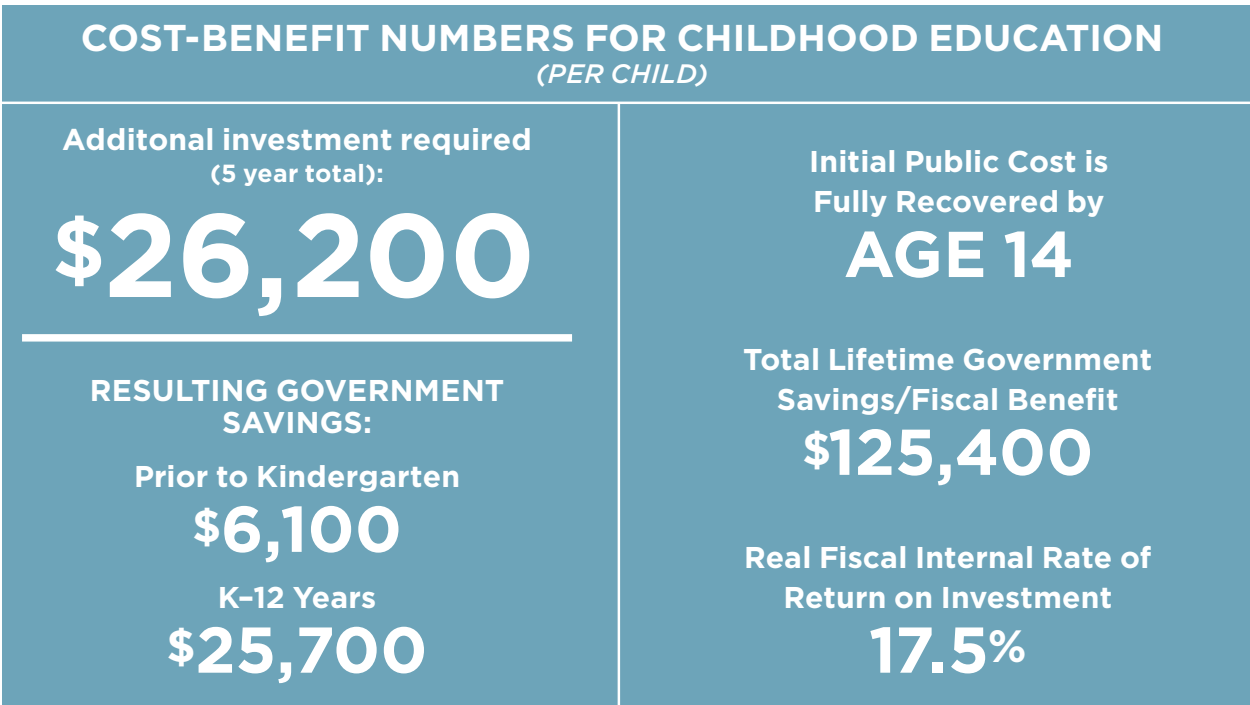
EXPAND THE WORKFORCE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

Getting to work needs to be easier. The Department of Transportation Pilot Transportation Program has helped Maine employers to create innovative worker commuting approaches that address each business’s unique transportation needs. In order to attract and retain a desirable workforce, this program and others like it need to be sustained and expanded.

ACTION E4

MEET TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

We can help Maine people commute while cutting costs and emissions. In our state, the distance between home and work, home and school,



Source: Path to a Better Future: The Fiscal Payoff of Investment in Early Childhood in Maine

or a business and its customer can be prohibitive. We will continue to maintain and improve our existing infrastructure and the essential mobility it provides while identifying supplemental funding opportunities for public-public and public-private partnerships to fill gaps in transportation needs, especially in remote rural areas. These efforts must consider all modes of transportation and be tailored to the specific needs of communities across the state. For example, MaineDOT and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services will continue to work on better coordinating subsidized medical trips (such as provided through MaineCare) and public transit options to improve access to health care and other essential services.



Think of transportation strategies that are outside of the typical “public” options. We will never develop a bus system that will meet the needs of rural Maine. Could we incentive an Uber-like strategy that is cost effective?

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

ACTION E5

ACTIVATE A HOUSING STRATEGY

We’ve assessed our housing needs; now we need to meet them. Since 2019, we’ve focused on building more housing, including workforce housing, affordable housing, and rehabbing and restoring existing housing units. The State has invested \$285 million to incentivize building of more affordable housing, resulting in 618 new homes, with 1,126 under construction and 2,187 in the pipeline.

In 2023, we commissioned a comprehensive housing study examining Maine’s housing needs to meet present demands reflecting historical underproduction and recent population growth. The study also forecasted housing needs through 2030 based on longer-term state demographic trends and economic and workforce projections. The study found that Maine needs 38,500 housing units to meet current needs, and at least 38,000 additional units to meet future projected demand. The study emphasized the need for housing attainable for those with low-and moderate-incomes because they are currently more constrained in their housing choices and are more likely to pay more than they can afford for a home.

PL 2021, ch. 672 (LD 2003), a landmark housing bill passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Mills in 2022, reduces local land use and zoning barriers to the production of workforce and affordable housing. This legislation requires municipalities to update land use and zoning ordinances to allow (1) additional density for affordable housing developments, (2) multiple dwelling units on lots designated for residential use, and (3) one accessory dwelling unit on the same lot as an existing single-family home. As part of LD 2003, we must create statewide and regional housing goals, ensuring that we are tracking housing development progress at the state, regional, and local levels.

Additional efforts to produce housing include the creation of the Affordable Homeownership Program and Rural Affordable Rental Program which provide financing programs to developers to expand housing options that are affordable to workers and their families to own or rent. Both programs are expected to create more than 450 homes, especially in rural areas.



Finally, we invested \$80 million, the single largest investment in housing in Maine’s history, to create the State Affordable Housing Tax Credit to allow individuals or corporations to invest in affordable development or preservation of affordable housing in return for State income tax credits. This program will create 1,000 new affordable homes by the end of 2028.

Additional policies to prioritize include supporting homeowners interested in adding additional housing units on their property, as well as support for local governments focused on housing development. Employers will also play an increasingly vital role in subsidizing new housing development for employees near their workplaces.

There is still a long road to reach a stable, quality, affordable housing supply in Maine. The challenge is of such a size that we must create and implement a standalone housing strategy that guides public and private action at the scale required.

ACTION E6

PROVIDE REGULATORY ASSISTANCE

Housing solutions only work if they can be implemented. As we create regulatory and zoning changes to address Maine’s housing challenge, we need to provide robust technical assistance to municipalities that have limited capacity to implement those changes.

ACTION E7

STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION WITH THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

1 in 6 Maine workers are employed by a nonprofit. The nonprofit sector is vital to the well-being of all Mainers and to Maine’s economy. There are opportunities for communities and nonprofits to work more closely together to meet their shared missions. We will better connect nonprofits with community and business leaders to make it easier for them to collaborate to address regional challenges.

maintain a stable business environment

FROM THE 2020 PLAN

Maine has a set of high regulatory standards—and for good reason. Our natural resources are one of our state’s greatest assets and safeguarding them for future generations is critical. The implementation of these standards should be done with predictability, transparency, and timeliness. The policy goals of high environmental standards and efficient regulatory processes are not in conflict with one another. Both are essential. The following recommendations focus on strategies to streamline processes, advance efficiencies, and create stability without sacrificing integral standards.

CURRENT STATUS

Achieving a stable and predictable business environment in Maine is a goal that remains in progress, but there is movement. The original Economic Development Strategy identified controlling healthcare costs as an action item. Since then, the percentage of the state’s personal expenditures going to health care declined from 19% to 16.5% from 2019 to 2022. In part, this is due to a continuing decline in the number of people without health insurance in Maine, from 8.1% in 2019 to 6.5% in 2022.

Permitting process improvements continue, with a modern online system on the way. On energy, there are now over 15,000 Maine people employed in jobs in promoting energy efficiency, clean electricity, and clean transport.

Nevertheless, the level and stability of costs for businesses remain a barrier to achieving our strategic goals. Addressing them will be a long-term effort, and our task is to continue making progress for the duration of this plan.

ACTION F1

SIMPLIFY AND STREAMLINE PERMITTING

It is critical to protect Maine’s natural resources. Our high environmental standards are fundamental to many parts of Maine’s economy, including attracting workers. However, we can do better at maintaining these protections while giving businesses and developers a clear, swift process to learn whether a proposed project is compatible with our rules. Governor Mills and the Legislature have recently invested in creation of an online licensing system and an organizational change management consultant for the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, which will bring about that swifter process. Applicants and citizens will be able to submit and obtain information through the online system for all environmental licenses and compliance reports managed by the Department. Adopting this modern system will go a long way to balancing economic advancement with Maine’s environment, and we must continue to identify permitting process improvements to further these aims.

ACTION F2

INCREASE RENEWABLE ENERGY PRODUCTION

Maine is growing its renewable energy portfolio. Maine is on track for 51% of our electricity coming from renewable energy in 2023, on a pathway to 80% by 2030. Given this progress and recent energy price volatility, the Governor set a new target of 100% clean electricity by 2040. The transition will require building new generation and the necessary grid infrastructure to deliver this power, as well as continued investments in energy efficiency and demand management.

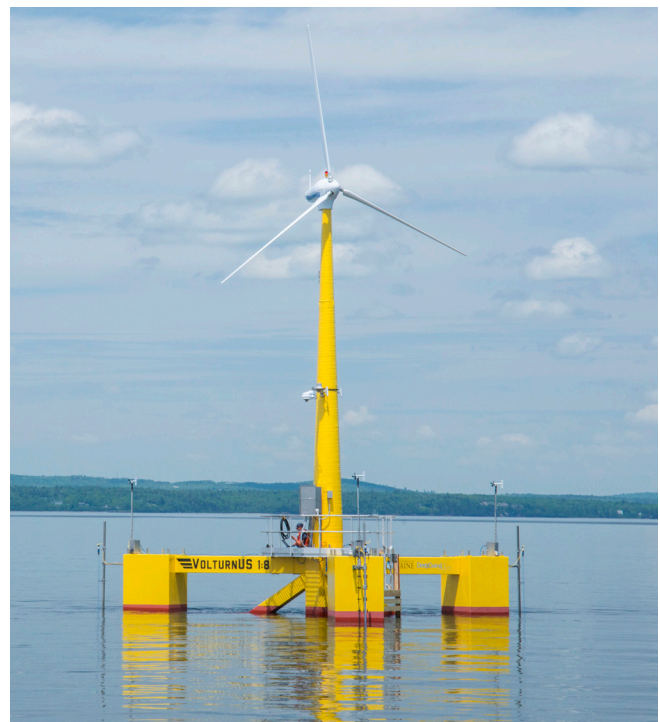
Maine has also made unprecedented progress reducing its over-reliance on oil for heating. From 2018-2022, Maine saw a 10% decrease in heating oil as a primary fuel for home heating (down to 56%, compared to just 4% nationally), with an increase in households utilizing electricity during that time. The period coincides with record adoption of high efficiency air source heat pumps in Maine, which surpassed the State’s goal of 100,000 new installations in July 2023, two years ahead of schedule.

The cost of energy is an important factor for any business environment, and we will be better off the less we are tied to price swings in global fuel markets far outside Maine’s control. The faster we can make this transition, the sooner we can reach an equilibrium of more stable, lower energy costs, and the faster we will reach our climate goals. We will focus efforts through the Maine Energy Plan, which takes the strategic approach necessary to address such a large body of work.

ACTION F3

ENHANCE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND IMPROVE RESOURCE AWARENESS

To meet our state goals, we need to continue to provide local technical support. In order to achieve overarching housing, broadband, and other objectives, we must continue to enhance technical assistance for towns, municipalities, and other regional entities so that they can regulate with efficiency, transparency, and predictability. We need to ensure that communities, businesses, and nonprofits are aware of resources that already exist by improved marketing and distribution, as well as direct training and support from the State where feasible.



STRATEGY G

promote hubs of excellence

FROM THE 2020 PLAN

A Hub of Excellence is a geographical area with conditions present for strong economic growth. Hubs of Excellence are driven by talent and a convergence of research, higher learning, skilled workforce and business, and a livable, healthy space. Focusing on hubs allows communities to leverage their strengths and develop areas that are gaps. This concept supports communities working together to deliver comprehensive assets to their residents.

CURRENT STATUS

The idea of “Hubs of Excellence” is where many of the themes of this strategy come together. In order to grow our workforce, we need areas that will attract and retain people.

The goal of a Hub of Excellence approach is clear: create prosperous communities. Places where we have assets supporting a strong quality of life like cultural fixtures, outdoor recreation, walkable downtowns, strong education options, and modern infrastructure. Places where people want to live, work, and be a part of their community. In short, to strengthen the assets that Maine communities traditionally have.

There are a number of regions working on identifying their assets and finding creative ways to bring them together. In Waterville, a series of key investments by Colby College, the Alford Foundation, Waterville Creates, the City of Waterville, and the private sector are turning the city into a year-round destination for the creative arts and film in northern New England. Skowhegan is developing into a food hub for innovative processing businesses. Madison is the site of a new wood-fiber insulation plant—linking the forest products industry with energy conservation goals. Rangeley is leveraging a reopened ski resort to establish a strong four-season tourism identity.

The potential in Maine for combining schools, businesses, nonprofits, and local governments to create and sustain a local identity as a Hub of Excellence is just starting to be realized.



ACTION G1

HELP COMMUNITIES IDENTIFY HUBS OF EXCELLENCE

When residents and institutions in a region begin to coalesce around a shared strength, we must help them build partnerships and reach resources to organize. We can point to great examples in Maine and globally as model hubs of excellence to learn from. While the State cannot pick a community's strength for them, we can ensure actors across the public, nonprofit, and private spheres in a region are able to see their unique assets and build upon them.

ACTION G2

INCREASE CONNECTIONS TO NONPROFIT AND ACADEMIC EXPERTISE

There are strong nonprofit organizations and universities across Maine that have the expertise to support community partnerships. We need to strengthen the ties between these institutions and local communities to ensure their expertise is fully utilized.

ACTION G3

INVEST IN PLACEMAKING

Maine's iconic village centers are an important asset for the state, and the world-class quality of life they provide can help the state to attract and retain talent. We will continue to reinvest in Maine's villages through programs like Maine DOT's Village Partnership Initiative, which will help develop these areas into more walkable, bikeable, and business-friendly locations, making Maine communities more attractive places to live, work, invest, and raise a family.

ACTION G4

BUILD UPON PILOT HUB MODELS

There are existing approaches to creating community hubs that we can learn from. The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston leads a program called the Working Community Challenge that has six participating regions in Maine. Each region formed a partnership to identify and address a systemic challenge in their communities to create more opportunity for residents. This model focuses on local partnership development between the private sector, education, town management and community leaders. This approach has shown results in many other areas of the country and is something Maine can adapt and pursue further to address complex local challenges.



WATERVILLE INNOVATION HUB

Catalyst for Economic Renaissance and Urban Revitalization

Situated mid-Maine along the Kennebec River, Waterville is rapidly emerging as an innovation hub, seamlessly blending historic charm with forward-thinking dynamics. This economic symphony drives collaboration, impacting livability and residential density downtown.

HUB HIGHLIGHTS:

BUSINESS COMMUNITY:

Guided by the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce and Central Maine Growth Council, established firms support business needs, mentor startups, and foster a supportive network.

ACADEMIC POWERHOUSES:

Colby College, Thomas College, and Kennebec Community College form a regional academic triangle, contributing to intellectual capital and research synergy. Special projects, including startup and ecosystem building for students and AI specialization through Davis Institute for AI at Colby College, add depth to the city's economic fabric.

ARTS, CULTURE, & LIVABILITY:

The Waterville Opera House and recent cultural additions enhance livability. Projects like the new \$18M Paul J. Schupf Art Center, \$26M Lockwood Hotel, \$6.7M Green Block Community Arts Center, and ongoing redevelopment of the Lockwood Mill Complex contribute to the vibrant cultural scene alongside new riverfront mixed use housing projects and develops.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS + CITY CHAMPIONS:

The City of Waterville, in partnership with business, civic, academic, and philanthropic insti-

tutions, demonstrates leadership through a pro-growth mindset, yielding multiple flagship public-private partnerships, grants, programs, incentives, and initiatives.

DIRIGO LABS ACCELERATION:

As the conductor of the innovation ecosystem, Dirigo Labs propels startups with funding and networks, contributing to sustainable growth. Support extends to businesses, startups, and entrepreneurs in the downtown area and throughout Maine.

RIPPLE EFFECT:

Beyond Bricks Coworking & Innovation and Dirigo Labs, the ripple effect of startup success generates jobs, attracts investment, and enriches the city. New downtown contributors include biotech company Genotype Center of America and newcomers like Main Street Provisions and Gorham Bike & Ski.

WATERVILLE INNOVATION HUB MINDSET:

Beyond physical space, Waterville's Innovation Hub embodies a collective mindset—a commitment to collaboration, creativity, and relentless pursuit of ideas. It positions Waterville as a global beacon of innovation, revitalizing the urban core.



CMGC and Dirigo Labs celebrate a pitch competition for its second cohort of startups at the new Paul J. Schupf Art Center in downtown Waterville. The Waterville-based startup accelerator program helps Maine founders launch and thrive.

March 8, 2024

Dear Reader,

I want to thank the hundreds of Maine business people, educators, municipal and regional officials, nonprofit leaders, and citizens who have contributed to the ideas in this update. I want to particularly acknowledge the help and guidance of the 10-Year Plan Executive Steering Committee and the State Workforce Board in this effort.

It has been an exciting ride for the past four years for those of us in the development community. We worked hard in 2019 to create a strategy that was forward-looking, ambitious, and achievable. In 2021 our work was rewarded, as the Governor and Legislature invested over \$400 million in furthering the strategies contained in that plan. We are gratified with the results, including a 10% growth in real income and in business productivity. Thanks for all that you have done to contribute to this achievement.

Now it's time for a reset. The long-term strategic goals we identified in 2019 remain our pole star today. But the world has changed, and we must adapt our actions to that new world.

The last four years demonstrate that we can work together to achieve bold goals. This report resets the actions that are needed to continue the work. We must continue to upskill and grow our workforce, promote innovation, spread broadband, establish infrastructure, maintain a stable business climate, and create Hubs of Excellence. And we must do all of this with an increased attention to ensuring that every population in Maine participates in and shares the benefits of our development efforts.

That is the commitment of Governor Mills, and it is my commitment. Maine people have made a lot of progress already. Now let's get back to work.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heather Johnson", with a stylized, flowing script.

Heather Johnson
Commissioner of the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development

APPENDIX A:

Funding for Select 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy Initiatives in the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan

Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan Initiative	Amount	Related 2019 Strategic Plan Action Item
Maine Career Exploration Program	\$25,000,000	A1: Establish Career Exploration Program
Career Portal and Emergency Support for Jobseekers	\$3,700,000	A2: Create a Career Portal
Maine Community College System Workforce Training Programs	\$35,000,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Career and Technical Education Center Infrastructure and Equipment	\$20,000,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Maine Apprenticeship Program Expansion	\$11,200,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Health Care Training for ME: Training for Current Health Care Workers	\$8,500,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Clean Energy Partnership — Workforce Initiative	\$4,000,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Tuition Support for Health Care Professions	\$4,000,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Maine Industry Partnerships for Workforce Development	\$3,700,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Competitive Skills Scholarship Program	\$1,500,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Peer Workforce Navigator Program	\$1,000,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
Health Care Career Navigators	\$600,000	A4: Strengthen Workforce Education
University of Maine System Workforce, Research, and Innovation Programs	\$35,000,000	A5+C1: Boost STEM Education and R&D
Workforce Diversity for Impacted Industries	\$5,000,000	B1: Increase Labor Force Participation
Career Counseling for Mainers Seeking Work	\$3,652,346	B1: Increase Labor Force Participation
Progressive Employment	\$1,000,000	B1: Increase Labor Force Participation
Job and Career Programs Learning & Evaluation	\$900,000	B1: Increase Labor Force Participation
Career Advancement and Navigation Pilot Program	\$780,691	B1: Increase Labor Force Participation
Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program	\$400,000	B1: Increase Labor Force Participation
Military Veteran Career Transition Pilot Program	\$200,000	B1: Increase Labor Force Participation
Remote Worker Welcome Program	\$5,000,000	B2: Create Welcome Home Program
Welcome Home Talent Attraction Program	\$5,000,000	B2: Create Welcome Home Program
Health Care Recruitment Campaigns	\$3,000,000	B2: Create Welcome Home Program
Grant Programs for English Language Acquisition and Higher Education	\$15,000,000	B4: Work Qualifications for Newcomers
Increase Licensing Efficiency	\$13,000,000	B4: Work Qualifications for Newcomers
Domestic Trade Program	\$15,000,000	C4: Promote Domestic Trade
Expand High-Speed Broadband	\$21,000,000	D3: Expand Broadband Infrastructure
Child Care Infrastructure Grant Program	\$15,236,475	E1: Create World-class Childcare System
Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Grants	\$10,000,000	E1: Create World-class Childcare System
Workforce Transportation Program	\$5,000,000	E2: Sustainably Fund Transportation
Affordable Homeownership & Rental Development Programs	\$50,000,000	E3: Expand Housing Production
Housing Navigators Pilot Program	\$1,500,000	E3: Expand Housing Production
Energy Efficiency and Weatherization	\$50,000,000	F3: Control Energy Costs
Electricity Grid Upgrades for Economic Development	\$8,000,000	F3: Control Energy Costs
Clean Energy Partnership — Innovation Initiative	\$2,500,000	F3: Control Energy Costs
Total	\$384,369,512	

APPENDIX B: PLAN ADVISORS

Maine's 10-Year Statewide Strategic Plan

Executive Steering Committee Membership

Jeannette Andre, MPC
Yellow Light Breen, Maine Development Foundation
Linda Caprara, Maine State Chamber of Commerce
David Daigler, MCCC
Dr. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, University of Maine
Laura Fortman, Commissioner, DOL
David Greenham, Maine Arts Commission
Adam Lachman, Senator King's Office
Amy Landry, AVCOG
Sarah Lawrence, Congresswoman Pingree's Office
Melanie Loyzim, DEP
Andrea Cianchette Maker, FocusMaine
Ryan Neale, DOT
John Ochira, Maine Community Foundation
Charlene Virgilio, Four Directions Development Corporation
William Whitmore, MaineHealth
Carol Woodcock, Senator Collins' Office

Maine Economic Growth Council Members 2021

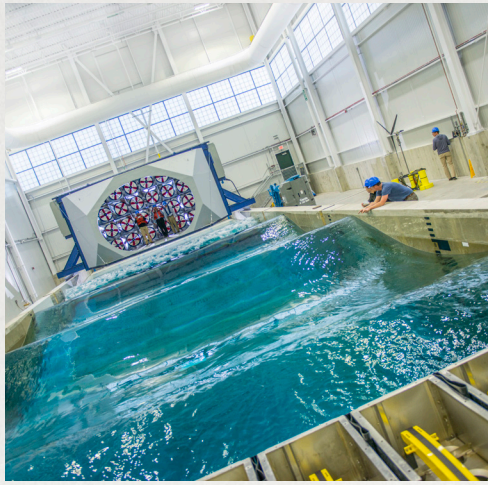
Stephen Von Vogt, Co-Chair, Maine Marine Composites
LuAnn Ballesteros, The Jackson Laboratory
Keith Bisson, Coastal Enterprises Inc.
Sheena Bunnell, University of Maine at Farmington
Donna Cassese, Sappi North America
Hon. James Dill, Senate District 5
James Erwin, Pierce Atwood LLP
Steve Hewins, Former CEO, HospitalityMaine
Thomas Kittredge, City of Belfast
John Napolitano, Plumbers and Pipefitters Union 716
Hon. Harold Stewart, Senate District 2
Tim Walton, Walton External Affairs
Julia Trujillo Luengo, Maine Dept. Economic and Community Development (Commissioner's designee)

Maine State Workforce Board

Governor Janet T. Mills
Vaughan Woodruff; Chair; ReVision Energy
Peter Baldacci; Penobscot County Commissioner
LuAnn Ballesteros; The Jackson Laboratory
Allyson Coombs; Bath Iron Works
Megan Dichter; DOE Adult Education
Brenda Drummond; MDOL Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, WIOA Title IV
Dave Dunning; S.W. Cole Engineering, Inc.
Meryl Fogg; Grand Rounds
Laura Fortman; MDOL Commissioner, Governor's designee
Jen Fullmer; Boots2Roots
Al Harris; Sappi Paper
Colleen Hilton; Northern Light Health
Adria Horn; Tilson Technology
Aileen Huang-Saad; Roux Institute
Melissa Hue; City of Portland
Betty Johnson; Waldo County Commissioner
Guy Langevin; Dead River
John Leavitt; Carpenters Local 1996
Gordon McAleer; Bixby Chocolate
Kimberly Moore; MDOL Bureau of Employment Services, WIOA Title I & III
Christopher Morley; Mason's Brewing
Bruce Noddin; Maine Prisoner Re-Entry Network
John Patrick; AFL-CIO
Joseph Pietroski; Kennebec County Commissioner
Grant Provost; Iron Workers Local 7
Amy Roeder; State Representative
Alec Rogers; Maine Evergreen Hotel
Jason Shedlock; Maine Building and Construction Trades Council
Mike Tipping; State Senator
Julia Trujillo Luengo; DECD Commissioner's Designee
Michael Tyler; Sandy River Company
Briana Warner; Atlantic Sea Farms
Corinne Watson; Tiny Homes of Maine
Robin Wood; Reed and Reed
Tuesdi Woodworth; Front Street Shipyard

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“Maine people have made a lot of progress already. Now let’s get back to work.”

—HEATHER JOHNSON