Innovation Subcommittee – Ideas for prioritization consideration for Quick Start and Short-Term recommendations

Emerging Themes:
- Bully Pulpit Communications and follow on programming around Welcome Home to Innovationland/Maine as a digital home
- State as customer and marketer of Maine-made goods
- Improved and equitable access to capital and debt relief
- COVID-19 Innovations, Pivots and Opportunities

Shared Themes (co-sign/collaborate with Subcommittees on recommendations):
- Resources and messaging to allow resumption of safe operations for education, childcare, and businesses
- General Aid (gaps and crack filling)
- Improve digital infrastructure and connections (broadband infrastructure)

Quick Start finalists:

1. Aggressively promote Maine through Office of Governor and Office of Tourism as: safest state to visit and live, best place to work remotely**; state agencies and stakeholder organizations should market Maine as a safe place to work, live, attend school, start innovative business, and visit based on implementation of safety measures and infrastructure investments

2. Identify and enlist current frontline entrepreneurs and experts in life sciences, energy, and tech from existing innovation networks to revitalize the Maine Innovation Economic Advisory Board with a more public face

3. Expand free and easily-accessible and available COVID-19 testing to improve safe movement into and around the State

4. Create an Ambassador Program for entrepreneurial community

5. Update statewide inventory of assets connecting to start-ups and entrepreneurs

6. Solicit recommendations from Maine Center for Entrepreneurs 2020 Life Sciences Summit

7. Develop policy to subsidize installation of high speed, reliable, affordable fiber to collaborative workspaces – especially in rural regions

8. Promote a buy local program: Establish a state-wide website with rotating “specials”, discounts funded by CARES Funds to attract online buyers to Maine businesses (could build on current Maine Made program; Require State/local purchasing to prioritize purchasing PPE from Maine manufacturers (could build on existing efforts)

9. Extend deadline for New Market Capital Tax Credits by executive order
10. Expand and make key changes to Maine Seed Capital Tax Credit – while it needs specifics language, the general consensus is to change it

11. Allow workers to use Unemployment Insurance benefit period for business startup with wraparound assistance from SBDC, etc. Also emphasize business succession opportunities for matching retiring owners with those who want to start businesses and/or employee-ownership options

12. Work with MTI and FAME to support ability to provide loan forgiveness along lines of PPP for appropriate existing loans

13. Balance supporting the innovative businesses that were underway before the pandemic with supporting those that have flexed their innovative muscles as a result of the pandemic by engaging with the pipeline of Maine companies (particularly those in life sciences) who have rapidly shifted gears to produce solutions for the impacts of COVID-19. For example, those that increased their output or for the first time are making human COVID-19 viral tests (Abbott, JAX, IDEXX). Using MTI’s MTAF pipeline may not reflect the new opportunities in the State in the testing arena or other solutions areas. Find out what these companies who may have transitioned rapidly into a healthcare-related manufacturing business during COVID need and then try to be responsive through existing resources. These could be quick starts that match existing opportunity.

Short Term finalists:

1. Cross Cutting Initiative - “Make Maine The Digital State” – addressing common themes of internet connectivity, cell service, remote work, digital tech assistance and others. This could include: incentives for remote work and relocation; some high-profile projects in select towns, and make them 'gigabit cities/towns'...then advertise the quality of place in a remote worker campaign in the entire east coast megalopolis...get the Boston and NY refugees especially; Consider incentives to businesses that could assist remote work across the country, including by setting up training programs at community colleges; Education could add a focus on remote work management.

2. Provide additional funds for MTI’s current open round of MTAF 2.5 applications. Given MTI has done so much work already and it seems that the +/-$5 million is a relatively low-cost.

3. An expanded MTAF3.0 (minus limiting requirements for use of capital) for companies adversely impacted or companies with COVID-solutions. Related potential longer term, clarify or change capital limitations on bond funds like MTAF so funds can be used as bridge or working capital

Deploy CARES Act funds or other funds for:

1. PPE and PPP gaps: Fund grant program to allow businesses to install PPE and to fill PPP gaps, including unforgiven portions of PPP loans and grants for businesses that were unable to access PPP loans or that avoided the program out of a concern that they would not be able to get forgiveness and couldn’t pay back a loan due to revenue drops.
2. Bridge capital: Fund grant program to match bridge funding raised by tech and startup economy companies which have had to postpone equity raises due to the impact of Covid.

3. Bankruptcy assistance: Provide grants to match funding for companies forced to reorganize under Chapter 11 bankruptcy due to Covid.

4. Central PPE purchasing and distribution program to minimize cost of PPE for businesses

**Collaborative Co-sponsored Quick Start finalists**

1. Direct state agencies to develop and communicate guidance to businesses and schools on how to return to work safely

2. Plan and deploy greater testing capacity for critical front-line workers and teachers

3. Direct state agencies and stakeholder organizations to collaborate to identify and implement innovative practices and other direct supports for the most disrupted sectors of lodging and restaurants

4. Direct state agencies and stakeholder organizations to collaborate to connect citizens, businesses, and institutions directly to additional federal resources, particularly related to acute needs of food, housing, child care, medical care, and behavioral health and to disruptions in hospitality businesses.

5. Direct ConnectME authority to fast-track existing funding stream for grants to expand broadband

**Collaborative Co-sponsored Short Term finalists**

1. Provide necessary means with current federal funds for safety modifications to resume safe and reliable operations at schools and child care facilities.

2. Use current federal funds to expand testing for critical front line workers, teachers, and childcare employees

3. Strengthen and fund safety net for food, health care, and behavioral health needs for self-employed and employees with particular attention to hospitality sector

4. Direct DECD to implement $15M July 14 bond to expand broadband

5. Develop policies related to alternative fuels, in support of off-shore wind development, in support of distributed solar generation and storage

**https://wallethub.com/edu/safest-states-to-live-in/4566/; Subcommittee should consider this message carefully in terms of both safety (what does this mean for multiple communities) and also consider carefully the multiple potential market segments and/or populations we want to attract as remote workers (need to check our assumptions as a Subcommittee – if we want to attract diversity of remote workers, how do we do so if we are not inclusive?)**