Background for Innovation Subcommittee*

Maine Innovation Economy Advisory Board (MIEAB) – history and context

The Maine Innovation Economy Advisory Board (MIEAB) was created in 2007 and is governed by statute (MRSA Title 10, §949). The Board has 32 members and most, if not all, are serving in expired terms. Former Governor LePage declined to appoint members to the Board and Governor Mills has also not reappointed or appointed members since taking office.

**MIEAB statutory responsibilities.** MIEAB has several core responsibilities outlined in founding statute:

1. Develop the State of Maine’s five-year Innovation Economy Action Plan to improve the state's position in the global economy. “The plan must identify specific steps that public and private research institutions must implement to improve the state's science and technology infrastructure, goals for encouraging collaborative initiatives among public and private research institutions, steps that can be implemented immediately without new state funding and resources and steps that will require new state appropriations or major reallocation of state appropriations and resources. The plan must also include numerical objectives, costs and an evaluation protocol, as well as a provision for assigning and ensuring accountability for those who receive state research and development funds.”

**Most Recent Actions in this area of responsibility** – MIEAB, with extensive MTI staff support, last released an [Innovation Economy Action Plan](#) in January 2017. The previous plan was published in 2010.

2. The advisory board shall assist state and federal policy makers in advancing research and development capacity initiatives in the state and in developing corresponding funding strategies; provide input on economic planning and the commercial application of the state’s research and development efforts; facilitate research opportunities that create sustained, interinstitutional, collaborative, multidisciplinary, centers-based research projects; advocate for the state's research and development sector and interests; and disseminate information about its work throughout the state.

**Most Recent Actions in this area of responsibility** – MIEAB has not undertaken actions under this area of responsibility as a formal Board in recent memory. The last time the Board met was March 2019.

3. The advisory board also serves as the EPSCoR steering committee, as referred to in Title 5, section 13110, for the State and evaluate proposals made to the Maine EPSCoR Program and related programs.  [PL 2007, c. 420, §7 (NEW).]

**Most Recent Actions in this area of responsibility** – MIEAB served in this capacity for the [Maine EPSCoR program](#) for its most recent submission – a process that lasts approximately 18months.
The effort resulted in Maine receiving a $20M five-year NSF EPScoR award for the eDNA project in August 2019.

**Reporting Requirements.** MIEAB is tasked with submitting annual progress reports on the innovation economy action plan each year in March to the Economic Growth Council, the Legislative Committee overseeing Innovation, and the Governor.

**Most Recent Actions in this area of responsibility** – MIEAB has not submitted an annual report on progress against the plan since the 2017 plan was published and submitted. The 2017 plan includes a report out on the 2010 Plan, thus 2017 was the last time MIEAB as a statutory body made a public report on Maine’s Innovation Economy. An informal subcommittee within the MIEAB Board has twice begun the annual report out against plan, once in 2018 and again in 2019, but has not completed the task due to competing requirements of MTI staff time. The MIEAB has not met since March 2019.

**MIEAB MEMBERSHIP**

The membership of the Maine Innovation Economy Advisory Board is outlined in statute. It includes two ex officio members (MTI’s President and the Director of the Office of Innovation at DECD (position vacant) or a designee) and thirty other members appointed by the Governor. Those members include seven representatives from the for-profit business community within the 7 targeted technologies; seven representatives involved with nonprofit research institutions within the 7 targeted technologies; four representatives of the Maine Biomedical Research Board; two representatives from nonprofit research laboratories with main offices or headquarters in this State and demonstrated expertise and credentials in marine research; one representative of the University of Maine; one representative of the University of Southern Maine; four representatives of private universities and colleges within the State; one representative of the University of Maine Center for Law and Innovation; one representative of the Maine Venture Fund; and two representatives with demonstrated expertise in venture capital.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

There are several current challenges that have already been identified by the members of the Innovation Subcommittee. First, the membership is not made up of front-line entrepreneurs and innovators but is instead designed for sector representation and R&D institutional representation. Second, MIEAB does not have a designated staff, which has made it challenging to get the required work done. And finally, the Board has not had new appointments in nearly ten years. These challenges have meant that MIEAB has not spoken with one voice as the advisory body it was intended to be. MIEAB has met only sporadically over the past 4-8 years. In an effort to help fill the void and ensure that the state’s five-year innovation action plan was completed, the Maine Technology Institute provided the administrative backbone for MIEAB the past few years and worked closely with former MIEAB Chair to make sure that it met the
minimum requirements of the statute (specifically, developing the state’s five-year action plan and serving as the EPSCoR steering committee).

While each time the MIEAB Board did come together members indicated finding a value in having an entity like MIEAB, the lack of staffing and energy from those who were and are serving in expired terms have kept the work from gaining momentum and having a strong voice in its advisory capacity. In addition, in MIEAB’s absence, other collaborative efforts have emerged and may be stronger in terms of energy and capacity.

With the recommendation in the 10-year plan and the ERC-Innovation Subcommittee, we have an opportunity to evaluate the purpose, duties, make-up, role, relevance and value of the Maine Innovation Economy Advisory Board to determine if it still has a useful and beneficial role in the recovery of the economy and the bridge to continued growth.

Questions to consider include whether an entity like MIEAB ought to continue to exist or if its responsibilities should be absorbed by another entity (Like MTI for example). Or, should it “merge” with other collaborative efforts serving similar purposes like Maine Accelerates Growth (MXG), Maine IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE), or other analogous collaborations that have filled some of the void in the intervening years?

If MIEAB does add value, then what should be recommended to reimagine, redesign, reinvigorate and revive it as an important vehicle for supporting Maine’s economic resilience and recovery? How might a statutory board like MIEAB serve the themes that have emerged for the ERC-Innovation Subcommittee of diversity, inclusion and indeed, innovation itself.