Goal 5: Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Vision: All entrepreneurs and innovators in Maine have the opportunity to bring their big ideas to life.

Maine is historically a place of innovation. The list of individuals who have created successful Maine-based businesses from their ideas, big and small, is long. They are our neighbors, family members, colleagues – and they may not even associate themselves with the word “entrepreneur.” Today, much of the Maine economy is comprised of homegrown businesses; and we are increasingly reliant upon these entrepreneurs. Sometimes turning innovative concepts into marketable products and services can be challenging.

By creating the right conditions, such as strengthening networks that support innovation and increasing access to reliable, high-speed internet, we will help Maine entrepreneurs in their endeavors. Their success will in turn help to improve the economy and quality of life for themselves and others.

Strategy Highlight: MaineCF established the Downeast Innovation Network as a pilot project in Hancock and Washington counties. The program’s goal is to strengthen the network of organizations that support entrepreneurship and innovation in the local economy. So far, we’ve awarded grants totaling $90,000 to ten organizations and we will continue to support similar work until at least 2021. Recognizing that high-speed internet service is a critical tool for entrepreneurs and innovators, we launched the new Connectivity Initiative that provides community grants and supports advocacy and public policy work to expand.

For more information, contact Senior Program Officer Maggie Drummond-Bahl at (207) 761-2440.

Opportunities To Support This Work

Each of the five strategic goals has a fund set up to support the work being done in that area. It is possible to donate to specific activities or competitive grant funds that have been created to support the vision within a particular goal area. The MaineCF donor portal has added the strategic goals as an option for grantmaking.

If you are interested in having a more in-depth conversation about any of this work, please reach out to your MaineCF staff contact or Lelia De Andrade, vice president of community impact, at ldeandrade@mainecf.org or (207) 412-0843, or Laura Young, vice president of philanthropy, at lyoung@mainecf.org or (207) 412-0844.

Our Mission: To work with donors and other partners to improve the quality of life for all Maine people.
Goal 1: Strong Start
Vision: All Maine children receive a healthy start and arrive at kindergarten developmentally prepared to succeed in school and life.

Maine’s youngest children are tomorrow’s students, workers, parents, and community members. We know from brain science that the first years of life are critical for laying a foundation that enables children to reach their full potential. Without this early support, challenges may emerge later in life that are much harder and more expensive to address. Children thrive when they are part of stable, healthy families, live in safe environments, and have access to quality early care and education. In Maine, we have an amazing investment opportunity. With just 12,500 babies born annually in the state, the goal of ensuring that all children have a strong start is realistic and achievable.

Strategy Highlight: The Early Childhood Community Grant Program is designed to help communities create their own change. Six communities received MaineCF planning grants to identify local resources and challenges related to the well-being of children birth to age five. They engaged a broad range of community partners, including health care providers, schools, businesses, and parents. Their goal is to develop strategies to improve outcomes for young families. The communities also received professional assistance to develop their assessments and came together to share what they learned. MaineCF has raised additional funds to support these communities as they implement their action plans over the next two years and share what they learn with other Maine communities.

For more information, contact Senior Program Officer Stephanie Eglinton at (207) 761-2440.

Goal 2: Access To Education
Vision: All Maine people, including adult learners and other nontraditional students, can complete a degree or certificate program to maximize their potential.

Education and training lead to better wages and improved life outcomes across all sectors and populations. In Maine, a growing gap exists between the skills employers need and the skills workers have, while too many residents work below their potential. Increasing access to education and training for adult learners and other nontraditional students addresses this gap. We want to understand what keeps Mainers from the education and training they need and help remove those barriers. Investing in increased access to education helps improve employment opportunities and incomes of individuals, the well-being of families, and Maine’s overall economy.

Strategy Highlight: Taking lessons learned from past work, MaineCF worked with partners and donors to design our new Adult Learner Scholarship. This program meets the varying needs of adult learners with flexible awards for direct and indirect expenses, such as child care and transportation, and will award approximately $400,000 annually. MaineCF is also working to raise emergency funds for adult learners with critical and unexpected needs so they can stay in school and complete their education. Finally, we will work with Adult Promise, a statewide collaboration focused on degree attainment, to build the skills of support specialists – called Navigators – who can ease the path back to education.

For more information, contact Director of Educational Initiatives Cherie Galyean at (207) 761-2440.

Goal 3: Racial Equity
Vision: All people of color in Maine have access to opportunities and life outcomes that are not limited in any way by race or ethnicity.

There are more than 75,000 people living in Maine who identify themselves as other than white. These people of color are of Native American, Asian, African, and Latino descent. They live in every county in Maine and are not new to Maine. In fact, many have been here for generations, others for thousands of years. People of color are an important and vital resource for Maine. However, race-related barriers prevent them from accessing resources and opportunities available to other Mainers. We need to ensure that all people of color can realize their full potential so they can thrive in Maine and maximize their contributions to a stronger economy and improved quality of life for all Maine people.

Strategy Highlight: The Investing in Leaders of Color Program supports nonprofit leaders of color in Maine. These leaders have deep knowledge in their fields, but economic, racial and cultural barriers often limit access to resources to continue their work with maximum impact. This program provides one-on-one coaching, training, and other professional development. Economic Opportunity Grants, offered through MaineCF’s People of Color Fund, support efforts to increase access to employment opportunities, as well as education and professional development. It also helps programs that support business development and innovation within communities of color.

For more information, contact Senior Program Officer Gloria Aponte C. at (207) 761-2440.

Goal 4: Thriving Older People
Vision: All older people in Maine are valued and able to thrive and age in their workplaces and communities with health, independence, and dignity.

Many Mainers are living longer and healthier lives, and many of us want to continue to live in our homes and communities as we grow older. Many places, however, do not have the infrastructure, policies, or services needed to support us as we age. Making a community better for its older residents results in a better community for people of all ages. Many communities across Maine are making big and small changes, such as adding benches, organizing volunteer drivers, or changing zoning laws. Older people have experiences, skills, and insights developed over a lifetime. They can and do contribute to the vitality of Maine’s economy and community life. By investing in community-based solutions, MaineCF helps to power changes to make communities truly “lifelong” places.

Strategy Highlight: MaineCF is supporting initiatives that focus on older people’s health, well-being, and ability to age in the community. Through our Lifelong Communities Mini-Grant Program, MaineCF supports small community projects that directly impact older residents, such as resource guides to support healthy aging and projects to improve access to outdoor space and healthy food for older people. The new Lifelong Communities Fellows Program complements the grant program by matching communities with fellows who have gained experience doing similar work in their own communities. The program provides training and support to the fellows to build the resources within our state for this critical community development work.

For more information, contact Director of Grantmaking Laura Lee at (207) 761-2440.