

MAINE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM SUMMIT

BIG IDEAS & POTENTIAL ACTIONS



On March 20, 2025, the Maine Graduate and Professional Center hosted the first-ever Maine Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Summit, bringing together 83 stakeholders representing nonprofits, legal services, startups, established businesses, advisory firms, and government agencies. The summit facilitated discussions among attendees focused on strengthening the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Participants exchanged perspectives on fostering innovation and building upon Maine's distinctive welcoming business atmosphere.

What are the most promising opportunities for Maine to better inform entrepreneurial decision-making?

The big ideas

Consolidate and share widely the resources that already exist and strengthen networking across the ecosystem to support knowledge sharing.

Some specific potential actions

- Create and maintain a clearinghouse of available ecosystem resources for entrepreneurs.
- Include the full range of ecosystem actors in entrepreneurship gatherings, to encourage cross-sector networking and learning.

How can Maine's established businesses support entrepreneurs?

The big ideas

Encourage established Maine businesses to work in partnership with startups to develop creative solutions to specific needs. Foster strategic mentorships between early stage and established businesses that offer practical advice and opportunities to build social capital.

Some specific potential actions

- Host industry-based summits involving mature and start-up companies to forge collaboration and inspire action.
- Create incubation spaces – sandbox environments – within, or in partnership with, established businesses.

How do we encourage tailored business and legal advisory functions in the community?

The big ideas

Recognize the importance of small- and medium-size law and advisory firms in meeting the needs of entrepreneurs, and support their growth. Strengthen integration across services (i.e. legal and financial) to form a more cohesive web of business advisory service offerings to entrepreneurs. Find opportunities to connect businesses to affordable and free consultations services as a launching point for early-stage businesses.

Some specific potential actions

- Create a regular convening for business advisory and legal services providers to foster closer ties across service areas and firms, facilitating mutual referrals based on areas of expertise.
- Offer practical workshops for small growing businesses on effectively engaging professional services ('How to Talk to a Lawyer 101'), while providing complementary business training for legal professionals on running successful practices.
- Bring together universities, training programs, and businesses to identify needs and opportunities for building, attracting, and retaining business advisory and legal talent capable of serving the needs of entrepreneurs in Maine.

How do we address the disproportionate impact of barriers on entrepreneurs?

The big ideas

Explore solutions that are specific to entrepreneurs' needs on big issues such as childcare, housing, and insurance. Bring an entrepreneurial mindset to these challenges where possible, such as re-imagining childcare. Finally, work with funders to create opportunities for more risk-taking and innovation in social ventures.

Some specific potential actions

- Convene conversations to understand key barriers such as insurance and childcare in more detail. Explore ideas such as the Freelancers' Union in NY for insurance.
- Encourage the creation of an entrepreneurship caucus in the state legislature.
- Work with funders to establish pilot funding and success metrics that embrace innovative and unconventional approaches to social challenges.

Annex: Menti Data

Prompt: What are the most promising opportunities for Maine to better inform entrepreneurial decision-making?

- Consolidate resource accessibility
- Bring in out of state expertise and resources
- The network & accessibility to actual humans
- Need a Main(e) Portal for resources that is widely shared and collectively used.
- Early support and resources
- Navigating the regulatory environment
- Support research to inform decision making
- Navigable database with resources
- Lots of free resources (score, sbdc, mce, mti)
- Improving Entry Points (especially Bangor north)
- Learn cash flow
- Centralized portal of resources
- Access natural resources directed at emerging technology
- Access to legal advice on a budget
- State investment in centralized/shared information infrastructure.
- Funding
- Build better bridge to Boston and other out of state resources
- Less regulation
- Target commercialization outside the state
- Build locally, dream globally Early funding goes a long way
- Local service orders - take advantage of free consultations
- Peer mentoring networks
- Support with expert teams to complement visionary leaders
- Promote Maine mentor networks
- Include broad definition of entrepreneur for networking and support
- Get people connected with SCORE
- Be more proactive in identifying promising entrepreneurs and supporting resources.
- leadership skill development for entrepreneurs
- Getting accounting firms/ cpa more involved in entrepreneurship
- Lean into and expand mentor networks
- Finance-focused networking (lenders, investors & entrepreneurs)
- Small community referrals
- Rural outreach to entrepreneurs
- Extend social capital more widely.
- Attract mid and late stage investment funds
- Build sales pipelines
- A plan for the state
- Not just networking -- tactical skills -- cash flow/pricing/budgeting/sales - fundamental biz skills.
- Map the ecosystem and share it widely.
- Use AI to help synthesize resources
- map the ecosystem and the resources available, or if one exists. promote it
- Better coordination among key actors across the state
- Make sure ecosystem map is extensive and informed by subject matter experts
- Promote collaboration over competition among ecosystem members
- Hold more networking sessions with specific foci on expertise/resources
- Share best practices
- Meet people where they are to share information
- Build connections for all entrepreneurs. (Not just tech based)

Prompt: What are specific next steps to take this year?

- Find ways to build community
- Connect with colleagues in UMaine system- business resources to provide entrepreneurs I serve

- Invite people to the Maine Center to share ideas
- Meet with New Mainers to share resources and supper
- Find alignment among actors and build a common story
- Bring key sectors together to ask these same questions
- Rural outreach
- Build support networks in Portland
- Connect with local chambers to expand access
- Prompt Maine lenders to host a multi-lender meet and greet for small businesses
- Incubators and other startup orgs collaborate to host educational events across the state and engage experts to attend
- Broaden entrepreneurial training beyond tech based
- Create professional ecosystem support group for entrepreneurs
- Teach and mentor
- yes basic biz skills!
- Teach fundamental biz skills in more rural places and to broader audiences.
- Build an ecosystem that focuses on youth entrepreneurs that give them a platform to dream big about implementing innovative ideas.
- Help with PR for startups - outside of Maine. They don't have bandwidth
- Leverage AI to make the ecosystem more accessible and less overwhelming
- Create a statewide entrepreneurial hub
- Tool to connect entrepreneurs with the right resources
- Start a website of startup resources
- Map a funding path to growth
- Action plan
- Map the ecosystem and share it widely.
- Id curator for hosting/updating map of e-shop resources
- Regionalize resources to reach rural Maine
- Lawyers in the room can coordinate and collaborate more to provide the ecosystem more support.
- Provide sound legal advice.
- Build free network list for legal advice
- Business law clinic at law school
- Engage and tap in new US patent office in NH
- Share success stories inside Maine
- More forums for entrepreneurs to share their stories and connect with investors
- Share Maine success stories outside of Maine
- Promote accounting as a hot career path
- Hire ENT faculty
- Address economic precarity of workers (living wages) and the challenge of businesses to meet their needs
- Leverage common business support needs for economy of scale

Prompt: What are the most promising opportunities for Maine's businesses to support entrepreneurs?

- The opportunity for Maine service providers to collaborate to benefit the greater entrepreneurial community.
- Collaborate on product development
- More support for succession of lifestyle businesses
- Leverage a new idea or product through larger scale companies
- Entrepreneurs and established businesses don't speak the same language - translators
- Explain to established companies what's in it for them.
- Provide a platform to bring together businesses at different stages
- Build mutually beneficial relationships with towns, service providers and problem solvers.
- Industry consortiums like Maine Outdoor Brands and the Brewers Guild
- The need for supporting businesses
- Established businesses support entrepreneurs with their social capital.
- Create spaces and platforms for business challenges to be open sourced
- Collaborated efforts to solve similar problems across towns- counties- to inform policy and build resilient communities

- Shared infrastructure
- Mentorship
- Setting up opportunities for established businesses to support and mentor, but with clean ROI to gain buy-in
- Storytelling
- Leverage social capital of existing leaders to clear pathways for innovation
- Create a full-ecosystem wrap around services for entrepreneurs
- Advising / mentoring in addition to funding
- Fostering opportunities for interdisciplinary professional advice
- Incubating startups internally
- Sector specific expertise
- Model success
- Listen and serve as mentor vs war story telling
- creating program or opportunities for entrepreneurial mindset within larger companies in Maine
- Flexible timing of networking events
- Focused/facilitated networking events to foster authentic connections betw established biz and startup
- network navigators - who can help and who can get you there?
- Can we expand the focus to businesses/people with Maine links?
- Provide networking platforms/opportunities
- Create listening sessions to under common bottleneck and potential shared solutions
- Sandbox environments to test and build with startups
- Industry based summits involving mature and start-up companies.
- coordinate the legal services available
- Multi disciplinary advisory firms - commercial, financial, and legal
- Procure services from local small businesses
- Help Andy find legal director for biz law clinic
- New Maine legal/business clinic to create clearinghouse of vetted list of start up lawyers in the ecosystem
- System for funding professional services
- Create legal resource networks by sector
- Support and engage in community spaces
- Engage with schools to bring students in (from middle school through university) to expose them to businesses and business challenges. Start young.
- train on using cultural differences to strengthen outcomes
- Building human connection.
- Educate established businesses on their role in the ecosystem.
- Expand community service days to include helping small businesses
- Improve procurement
- Large companies make a commitment to procure some of their supply chain in-state
- Creating faster paths to testing (modifying legal / procurement)
- Filling key voids

Prompt: What are specific next steps to take this year?

- Matchmaking opportunities for entrepreneurs & established businesses
 - Voted most popular choice
- Corporate innovator + startup founder matching / forums
- Encourage outreach by established businesses to entrepreneurs
- Create or use an existing channel to influence larger companies about the importance of supporting Maine entrepreneurs.
- Share post for legal director of biz law clinic for Maine law on your social network
- Internships for students to work at SMBs (expand Innovate for Maine Fellowship)
- Local investment compact
- Subject matter resources (could be bud development, operations, governances, challenges of growth, etc.)
- Service providers to work together to improve referral networks
- Counsel the sides on how to talk to each other
- Survey: Ask a wide variety of businesses what they need

- Invite established businesses to participate in this forum
- Simplify opportunities for collaboration
- Community collaborations examples
- Connect with existing orgs working on this such as “Innovate for Maine.” Incentivize these connections.
- Startup maine Week
- Startup Maine resource board
- Startup Maine Week in May- more attendees!
- UMaine Law and Business host monthly free " speed-dating" sessions with providers
- Identify managers at larger companies to take in this networking initiative.
- Host a lunchtime networking event
- Topic 3/ Breakout group 1: How do we encourage tailored business and legal advisory functions in the community?
- Legal inventory resource map set up by sector - website?
- Legal practice management course
- Creative staffing models, leverage paralegal work
- Pipeline of professionals, attracting people back to Maine providing opportunities for people to stay
- Teach lawyers how to run a practice
- More base camp resources and cohorts
- Resource connections and mapping of expertise by industry and biz stage. Not just law.
- “how to talk to a lawyer” crash course
- Update clearinghouse/bar association
- Reach out to rural areas
- Maps and resources of advisors
- yes to business law catalog - would be very helpful for biz advisors to make referrals (or market events which are of interest to specific attorneys)
- Follow Northeastern program model for connecting founders to pro bono legal support
- More support and education for small practice management

Topic 4: How do we address the disproportionate impact of barriers on entrepreneurs?

What are specific next steps to take this year?

- Pilot funding to fund people/innovators to build things
- Convene a follow-up conversation with social entrepreneurs about what metrics should be added or changed when assessing their progress
- Explore universal health care models not tied to employers such as many European countries have,
- Become the 11th Canadian province for more affordable healthcare, childcare, and university education
- Again, mapping what resources are actually available
- Networking in times that work for people who have childcare or aging parents to care for
- Freelancers’ union model
- Wide-ranging exploration into what barriers exists for which types of entrepreneurs.
- Help figure out how to get bootstrapped volunteer led nonprofits into the 501c3 ecosystem
- Looks at MERIT and see how that can be leveraged/expanded/replicated
- Find a way to support entrepreneurs with basic life needs; housing, Healthcare, food, if they don't already have that support personally
- Intrigued by healthcare union, not sure what next step would be
- Policy focus on expanding childcare
- Tax credits for investment in social ventures
- Disrupt the childcare model. Try something different. Incentivize older Mainers, semi retired people to watch kids
- Entrepreneurship caucus in the legislature to focus on policies and funding to address barriers