

AFFPIF Governance and Procedural Plan

**Maine Agriculture, Food System, and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund
Working Draft for Discussion**

Purpose of this Working Draft

This document outlines governance and procedural principles intended to serve as procedural rules and guidance for the Maine Agriculture, Food System, and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund (AFFPIF), its Advisory Board, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, and the Department of Economic and Community Development. It is designed to operationalize the statute, clarify Board and Department roles, and provide a practical framework for fund administration, outreach, application review, funding decisions, and program evaluation.

This plan is a living document to be periodically evaluated by the board. It may be revised as needed as the program develops, funding becomes available, and legal guidance is clarified.

Table of Contents

Section 1. Principles and Intent..... 3

 A. Statutory Intent..... 3

 B. Purpose of the Plan..... 3

 C. Relationship to Statute, Rules, and Solicitations..... 3

 D. Mission..... 3

 E. Vision..... 4

 F. Core Goals..... 4

Section 2. Governance and Procedural Principles 4

 A. Organizing Principles..... 4

 B. Flexibility and Program Design..... 4

Section 3. Definitions..... 5

Section 4. Organization of the Advisory Board..... 6

 A. Board Composition 6

 B. Member Terms 6

 C. Officers..... 6

 D. Committees and Subcommittees 6

 E. Member Expectations 6

 F. Reasonable Time Commitment..... 7

Section 5. Fund Administration 7

 A. Department Responsibilities..... 7

 B. Advisory Board Responsibilities..... 7

 C. Relationship Between Department and Board..... 8

Section 6. Funding Structure and Use..... 8

 A. Funding Categories 8

B. Allowable Grant and Loan Recipient Activities.....	8
C. Allowable Contracted Service Provider Activities.....	8
D. Ineligible Activities and Uses.....	9
Section 7. Eligibility.....	9
A. Headquartered in Maine.....	9
B. Eligible Entity Types.....	9
C. Eligible Activity Areas.....	9
Section 8. Funding Modalities.....	10
A. Grants.....	10
B. Loans and Financing Tools.....	10
C. Contracts to Service Providers.....	10
Section 9. Application and Review Process.....	11
A. Timing.....	11
B. Types of Solicitations.....	11
C. Department Review.....	11
D. Board Packet and Coversheet.....	11
E. Special Considerations.....	11
Section 10. Voting and Decision-Making.....	12
A. Quorum and Voting.....	12
B. Remote Participation.....	12
C. Recusals and Voting.....	12
Section 11. Conflict of Interest and Board Recusal.....	12
A. Actual Conflict of Interest.....	12
B. Perceived Conflict of Interest.....	12
C. Disclosure.....	12
D. Recusal and Participation.....	14
E. Documentation and Determination.....	14
Section 12. Public Process, Records, and Confidentiality.....	14
A. Public Meetings.....	14
B. Confidentiality and Business Information.....	14
C. Executive Session.....	14
D. External Communication.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Section 13. Appeals, Waivers, and Amendments.....	15
A. Appeals.....	15
B. Waivers.....	15
C. Amendments.....	15
Appendix A. Metrics and Evaluation Framework.....	15

Section 1. Principles and Intent

A. Statutory Intent

The Maine Agriculture, Food System, and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund (AFFPIF or the Fund) is established and administered by the Department in accordance with Title 7 M.R.S., Chapter 10-C §320-A-B. The Fund consists of money appropriated to the fund, any subsequent appropriations, and, whenever possible, any additional funding that may be available from other public or private sources.

The Fund is intended to support public-private partnerships and investments that address infrastructure gaps and bottlenecks, expand access to capital, and increase opportunities for Maine producers, processors, small businesses, value chain enterprises, and consumers. The Fund prioritizes efforts that reduce barriers to accessing credit and capital for businesses, sectors, and communities that have historically lacked access to capital.

The Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Advisory Board (the Advisory Board or Board) is established in accordance with Title 5 M.R.S. §12004-J(1-A) and Title 7 M.R.S. §320-C to oversee and determine expenditures from the Fund.

B. Purpose of the Plan

This Plan translates the AFFPIF statute and Board input into a practical operating framework. It clarifies how the Advisory Board and the Department work together to carry out the Fund's purpose.

The purpose of this Plan is:

- Define and delineate the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Department;
- Support a transparent, accountable, and workable funding process;
- Provide parameters that allow Board members to engage meaningfully while recognizing reasonable time expectations for a volunteer Board;
- Provide clarity to applicants, partners, and the public about how funding opportunities will be developed, reviewed, and approved;
- Establish a flexible process that can function at different funding levels; and
- Serve as a living document that may be revisited and revised as needed.

C. Relationship to Statute, Rules, and Solicitations

This Plan applies to Fund activities and operations to the extent they are not otherwise governed by statute, Department rules, procurement requirements, or a specific funding solicitation. This Plan does not replace statute, Department rules, procurement requirements, or grant-specific, loan-specific, contract-specific, or other funding solicitations. When formal funding opportunities are issued, the applicable solicitation will set out the specific application requirements, evaluation criteria, funding guidelines or limits, documentation requirements, deadlines, award conditions, and any additional procedures that apply to that funding opportunity.

D. Mission

AFFPIF's mission is to strengthen Maine's agricultural, food system, and forest products economy by investing in infrastructure, capital access, and technical assistance that helps businesses, sustain, scale, and innovate.

E. Vision

Maine has a resilient, inclusive, and competitive agricultural, food, and forest products economy supported by infrastructure that connects producers, processors, businesses, and value chain partners to each other and to markets, strengthens supply chains, and expands opportunity in rural and under-resourced communities.

F. Core Goals

The Commissioner of Maine’s Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry in coordination with the Commissioner of Maine’s Department of Economic and Community Development, industry stakeholders, local communities and populations, and other relevant agencies, shall strengthen Maine's agricultural, food system, and forest products economy with a priority toward:

- i. Addressing barriers to accessing capital and business assistance, to scale, sustain, and innovate businesses in sector and/or communities that have historically faced barriers to accessing capital;
- ii. Expanding critical infrastructure investments to increase access to new markets and production, processing, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, marketing, sale, and consumption opportunities;
- iii. Establishing and supporting technical assistance programs in collaboration with state agencies, economic development organizations, and other sector partners and intermediaries; and
- iv. Establishing and maintaining a flexible program structure that can support grants, loans, financing tools, service provider contracts, and innovative opportunities.

Section 2. Governance and Procedural Principles

A. Organizing Principles

The Advisory Board value accountability, equity, transparency, stakeholder input and practicality, and in the responsible stewardship and impactful investment of public funds.

The Board adheres to a process that:

- Uses the experience, expertise, and relationships of Board members, Department staff, financial partners, technical assistance providers, and sector experts to inform program strategy and funding decisions;
- Provides clarity, accessibility, and consistency to applicants;
- Supports a fair and efficient application review process that aligns with statute, program priorities, and funding availability;
- Allows Board members to exercise informed judgment without requiring them to independently review every administrative or technical detail of each application.

B. Flexibility and Program Design

The Fund may be implemented through different funding structures based on statutory authority, funding availability, program priorities, administrative capacity, and Board direction. This may include grants, loans, financing tools, service provider contracts, technical assistance, targeted funding opportunities, or other innovative approaches consistent with the purpose of the Fund.

Specific funding structures, eligibility requirements, review criteria, documentation requirements, timelines, and award conditions may be established through individual solicitations.

Section 3. Definitions

All terms used in this Plan shall be defined as indicated in 7 M.R.S. §320-A unless specifically provided herein.

1. **AFFPIF.** The Maine Agriculture, Food System, and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund or the “fund” established by 7 M.R.S. Chapter 10-C.
2. **ADVISORY BOARD.** The Maine Agriculture, Food System, and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Advisory Board established by 5 M.R.S. §12004-J(1A) and described in 7 M.R.S. §320-C.
3. **COMMERCIAL FARM.** A farm that produces farm products with the intent that those products be sold or otherwise disposed of to generate income.
4. **COMMERCIAL HARVESTER.** An entity engaged in the harvesting of forest products that have commercial value.
5. **DEPARTMENT.** The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, unless the context indicates otherwise.
6. **DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.** The Maine Department of Economic and Community Development.
7. **FOOD PROCESSOR.** An entity that changes the form of farm products through actions such as cooking, baking, heating, drying, mixing, grinding, churning, separating, extracting, cutting, fermenting, preserving, dehydrating, freezing, packaging, value-added processing, or otherwise preparing food products for human consumption.
8. **FOOD SYSTEM.** Has the same meaning as in 7 M.R.S. §320-A.
9. **FOREST PRODUCTS.** Has the same meaning as in 12 M.R.S. §8881 subsection 3. "Forest products" means logs, pulpwood, veneer, bolt wood, wood chips, stud wood, poles, pilings, biomass fuel wood, fuel wood, bark or other products commonly known as forest products, but does not include Christmas trees, maple syrup, nursery products used for ornamental purposes, wreaths, bough material, cones or other seed crops.
10. **FOREST PRODUCT PRODUCER.** A business, organization, or individual engaged in the growth, manufacture, harvest, transport or creation of forest products.
11. **HEADQUARTERED IN MAINE.** The entity's primary office is located in Maine, and the address associated with the entity's EIN or UEI is located in Maine.

12. **INFRASTRUCTURE.** Has the same meaning as in 7 M.R.S. §320-A.

13. **PRODUCER.** A person in the State that grows, manufactures, harvests, or otherwise creates agricultural, food, or forest products and value-added products, including persons engaged in farming, harvesting, or other agricultural and forestry manufacturing activities.

14. **SUPPLY CHAIN.** Has the same meaning as in 7 M.R.S. §320-A.

15. **VALUE-ADDED.** Has the same meaning as in 7 M.R.S. §320-A.

Section 4. Organization of the Advisory Board

A. Board Composition

Board composition, appointment, terms, and statutory seats are established in 7 M.R.S. §320-C and related provisions. This Plan does not restate the full statutory membership list and should be read consistently with statute.

B. Member Terms

Board members serve terms as established in 7 M.R.S. § 320-C and any applicable appointment requirements. Vacancies, reappointments, term expirations, and any applicable limits on service shall be managed consistent with statute and appointing authority requirements.

When a vacancy occurs before the end of a member's term, a replacement member may be appointed to serve the remainder of that term, consistent with the applicable appointment process. A replacement member may be considered for reappointment after the partial term, if otherwise eligible.

To support continuity, the Board and Department may track term dates and anticipated vacancies and may coordinate with appointing authorities as needed to support staggered transitions and continuity of Board expertise.

C. Officers

The Board may elect a Chair, Vice Chair, and any other officers the members determine necessary and appropriate to perform the Board's work. Officers may support agenda development, coordinate with Department staff, preside over meetings, support orderly discussion, and help guide decision-making.

Officers may serve one-year terms and may be re-elected. The Board may fill officer vacancies as needed. Officer roles do not change the statutory authority of the full Board or the Department's responsibility for program administration.

D. Committees and Subcommittees

The Board may establish committees or subcommittees as needed. Committees may support work such as funding strategy, application review process design, technical assistance planning, evaluation, policy development, or sector-specific analysis.

Committees and subcommittees may make recommendations to the full Board but may not take final action unless authorized consistent with statute and applicable public meeting requirements.

E. Member Expectations

Board members are expected to:

- Attend meetings and actively participate in discussions;
- Review agendas, application summaries, funding recommendations, and other materials in advance of meetings;
- Bring sector expertise with a regional and statewide perspective to Board discussions;
- Disclose conflicts of interest and recuse as appropriate;
- Maintain confidentiality regarding protected or non-public information;
- Support transparency, integrity, and accountability in the use of Fund resources;
- Respect differing viewpoints and engage in deliberative decision-making; and
- Recognize that the Board's role is strategic and decision-oriented, while the Department is responsible for program administration and execution.

F. Reasonable Time Commitment

The application review process is designed to allow Board members to engage meaningfully without requiring unreasonable time commitments. Department staff may prepare summary packets, evaluation materials, funding recommendations, ranked lists, or other tools to support Board review.

Section 5. Fund Administration

A. Department Responsibilities

The Department serves as the Fund administrator and is responsible for program execution. The Department may:

- Develop and issue Requests for Applications, loan application solicitations, Requests for Proposals, and other funding opportunities;
- Conduct initial eligibility review, technical review, financial review, and scoring;
- Prepare Board packets, cover sheets, summary materials, recommendations, and decision documents;
- Coordinate with the Department of Economic and Community Development, relevant agencies, industry stakeholders, agricultural, food system, and forest products businesses, producers, processors, and communities;
- Hire or assign staff or contractors, including community development financial institutions, economic development organizations, quasi-governmental entities, financing partners, and technical assistance providers;
- Seek and accept funds from public and private sources, including state appropriations, bond revenues, federal funds, philanthropic funds, and other sources as identified by the Department;
- Execute or direct to be executed, contracts, awards, loan agreements, service provider agreements, and disbursement documents;
- Maintain records, award files, conflict disclosures, and meeting materials; and
- Ensure compliance with applicable statutes, rules, procurement requirements, fiscal controls, and public access requirements.

B. Advisory Board Responsibilities

The Advisory Board is responsible for providing strategic direction and taking action on funding decisions consistent with statutory authority. The Board may:

- Review applications, Department-prepared materials, funding recommendations, and summaries;
- Make, approve, modify, decline, or otherwise act on funding recommendations and funding decisions consistent with statutory authority;;
- Advise on annual priorities, funding modalities, infrastructure needs, and program strategy;

- Identify gaps and opportunities in Maine's agricultural, food system, and forest products economy;
- Recommend program improvements based on data, stakeholder input, funding outcomes, and sector needs;
- Advise on the use of service provider contracts for technical assistance, workforce development, assessment and evaluation, or other program needs;
- Conduct periodic analysis of Fund and technical assistance use; and
- Disclose conflicts of interest and follow the recusal process set out in Section 11.

C. Relationship Between Department and Board

The Department's review, scoring, and recommendations are intended to support, but not replace, the Advisory Board's review and decision-making. The Board retains the ability to review, discuss, modify, approve, or decline recommendations based on the materials before it.

The Department is responsible for administering the Fund, maintaining the administrative record, executing awards, and disbursing funds consistent with Board decisions and applicable statute, rules, procurement requirements, and fiscal controls.

Section 6. Funding Structure and Use

A. Funding Categories

All eligible expenditures must align with one or more statutory funding categories, including:

- Investments in agricultural, food, and forest products communities that typically lack access to capital to start, sustain, scale, and innovate businesses;
- Investments in the agricultural, food, and forest products economy to support production, processing, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, marketing, sale, and consumption of agricultural, food, or forest products and value-added products; and
- Establishment of technical assistance programs that strengthen the State's agricultural, food, and forest products economy.

B. Allowable Grant and Loan Recipient Activities

Grant and loan recipient activities must align with the Fund purpose, statute, this Plan, and applicable solicitation requirements. Allowable activities may include:

- Equipment purchases;
- Facility, site, or infrastructure renovations or construction, including investments necessary to comply with food safety, environmental, or other regulatory standards, or to improve climate or operational resilience;
- On-farm, supply chain, or forest products producer infrastructure improvements that increase resilience, market access, production capacity, processing capacity, storage capacity, distribution capacity, or other eligible business capacity;
- Shared-use, cooperative, or regional infrastructure that provides sector-wide or multi-entity benefits;
- Training and technical assistance directly tied to the use, installation, or operation of funded equipment or infrastructure;
- Other activities specified in the applicable funding solicitation.

C. Allowable Contracted Service Provider Activities

The Department and Advisory Board may utilize contracts with service providers, technical assistance providers, financing partners, community development financial institutions, economic development organizations, or other qualified entities to support implementation of the Fund.

Contracted services may support:

- Technical assistance and application readiness support;
- Business planning, financial planning, capital readiness, and market development;
- Feasibility studies, engineering, permitting, infrastructure planning, and development assistance;
- Workforce development coordination and training support in consultation with relevant state agencies;
- Program administration, outreach, evaluation, or implementation support;
- Research, sector analysis, and investment planning activities; and
- Other activities determined necessary to support the effective administration and implementation of the Fund consistent with statutory authority.

The Department may develop Requests for Proposals or other procurement processes for contracted services consistent with applicable state procurement requirements and program needs.

D. Ineligible Activities and Uses

Unless expressly authorized in the applicable solicitation, loan application, contract, or award agreement, funds may not be used for:

- Indirect expenses that are not directly related to an eligible project;
- Salaries or general operating expenses not directly tied to an eligible project;
- Land acquisition or real estate purchases;
- Building construction, site work, or facility improvements that are not directly related to eligible funding categories;
- Debt refinancing or repayment of existing obligations;
- Political or lobbying activities; and
- Activities inconsistent with the purposes and goals of the Fund.

Section 7. Eligibility

A. Headquartered in Maine

Eligibility for grants, loans, and other funding from the Fund is limited to entities headquartered in Maine, unless otherwise allowed by statute or the applicable solicitation.

B. Eligible Entity Types

Eligible entities may include for-profit, nonprofit, and cooperatives. Eligible entities must perform a primary business role in the agricultural, food system, or forest products economy.

Eligible entity types may include:

- Aggregators, processors, distributors, or other supply chain enterprises;
- Commercial farms;
- Commercial harvesters;
- Food processors and manufacturers;
- Forest products producers and businesses;
- Producers;

- Other entities identified in a funding solicitation.

C. Eligible Activity Areas

Eligible entities may conduct commercially viable market-chain activities within one or more of the following areas:

- Agricultural production;
- Food systems;
- Forest products production, harvesting, processing, manufacturing, or distribution;
- Infrastructure;
- Supply chain distribution;
- Value-added processing or manufacturing; and
- Other eligible areas identified in the applicable solicitation.

Section 8. Funding Modalities

Funding modalities may be administered directly by the Department or through contractual agreements with financing partners, service providers, or other qualified entities. Funding modalities may vary by funding availability, program priorities, Board direction, and solicitation design.

A. Grants

Grant structures may include:

- Grants that require matching funds;
- Grants that do not require matching funds;
- Capital access grants or grants that must be utilized as down payments;
- Gap financing grants;
- Early-stage grants;
- Targeted funding opportunities; and
- Other grant structures identified in a solicitation.

B. Loans and Financing Tools

Loans and financing tools may be developed in partnership with qualified financing partners, such as financial institutions, community development financial institutions, or other entities with underwriting and loan servicing capacity.

The Department will not act as a direct lender. Loan underwriting, servicing, and related financial functions will be conducted by these financing partners.

Loan or financing tools may include:

- Forgivable loans;
- Subordinated loans;
- Loan guarantees;
- Hybrid grant-loan structures;
- Credit enhancements;
- Capital risk reserves; and
- Other tools that leverage additional financing consistent with statutory authority.

C. Contracts to Service Providers

Contracts to service providers may be used:

- To facilitate technical assistance;
- To support management and administration of the Fund;
- To provide marketing assistance, market development, business planning, or financial planning;
- To conduct feasibility studies, investment impact studies, or other organizational, regulatory, or program development support;
- To support workforce development programming in consultation with relevant state agencies; and
- To provide other services identified by the Board.

Section 9. Application and Review Process

A. Timing

The timing and frequency of funding opportunities are at the Department's discretion, based on funding availability, program priorities, administrative capacity, critical infrastructure needs, and Board direction. This Plan does not require the Department to issue funding opportunities on a fixed timeline.

B. Types of Solicitations

Funding opportunities may include:

- Requests for Applications for grants or other awards;
- Loan application solicitations;
- Requests for Proposals for service provider contracts;
- Targeted funding opportunities; and
- Other funding or investment processes consistent with applicable requirements.

C. Department Review

The Department may conduct an initial eligibility and completeness review, technical, financial, and risk assessment, and application scoring using the criteria established in the applicable solicitation.

The Department may include award conditions, cost-sharing requirements, reporting requirements, disbursement schedules, and other requirements in solicitation and award documents.

D. Board Packet and Coversheet

To support efficient review, the Department may prepare a standard Board packet and application coversheet for Board consideration.

Materials may include:

- Applicant name, location, entity type, and sector;
- Funding amount requested and recommended amount;
- Project summary and eligible use of funds;
- Reviewer score or rating;
- Reviewer comments and eligibility determinations;
- Alignment with statutory purpose and Board priorities;
- Staff and reviewer notes;
- Recommended conditions or partial funding rationale; and
- Conflict of interest disclosures or recusals, if applicable.

The packet may summarize or exclude information determined to be proprietary, confidential business information, or otherwise exempt from public disclosure under applicable law.

E. Special Considerations and Partial Funding

Applications may be required to include additional materials based on award size, funding modality, project type, or applicant type. Examples may include proof of business operations, sales receipts, profit and loss statements, tax returns, business registration, project budgets, bids, vendor quotes, feasibility materials, or business plans.

The Department may recommend simplified documentation requirements for small awards, targeted initiatives, or other funding opportunities, provided sufficient information is available to determine eligibility and proper use of funds.

The Board may consider partial funding when specific portions of an application do not align with the Fund's statutory purpose, this Plan, funding priorities, or solicitation criteria, and the funded portion of the proposed project can move forward without the unfunded portion.

The Board may also consider partial funding when, after review of the application, budget, financials, or other relevant materials, the Board determines that the full amount requested is not necessary or justified to achieve the purpose of the Fund.

Partial funding should be documented clearly, including the rationale for the partial award and any conditions attached to the award.

Section 10. Voting and Decision-Making

The Advisory Board shall review materials included in the board packet and coversheet and/or other materials prepared by the Department, including applications and funding recommendations.

All materials, assessments, and recommendations provided by the Department are intended to support, but not replace, the Advisory Board's review and decision-making authority. The Advisory Board retains the ability to review, discuss, and modify funding recommendations.

The Advisory Board shall take action on funding decisions in accordance with its statutory authority. Actions may include approving, modifying, declining, or partially funding applications.

The Department shall execute awards and disburse funds consistent with Board decisions and applicable statutes, rules, and procurement procedures.

A. Quorum and Voting

Quorum and voting requirements shall be governed by statute and any additional procedures adopted by the Board. A majority of the sitting members constitute a quorum, and action taken by the board may be authorized by a majority of the members present and voting at any regular or special meeting at which a quorum is present. The board may permit any or all members to participate in a regular or special meeting by conducting the meeting through any means of communication, including electronic telecommunications or a telephone conference call, by which all members participating may communicate with each other during the meeting. A member participating in a meeting by means approved by the board under this subsection is deemed to be present in person at the meeting.

B. Remote Participation

The Board may permit members to participate in a regular or special meeting through remote means, including electronic telecommunications or telephone conference call, if allowed under applicable law and Board procedures. A member participating remotely is deemed present for purposes of quorum and voting, provided the member can participate in the meeting and vote directly.

Board members may not vote by proxy or authorize another person to vote on their behalf, unless specifically authorized by statute. Commissioner designees may participate only as allowed by statute.

C. Recusals and Voting

When a Board member is recused from a matter due to an actual or perceived conflict of interest, the recusal shall be documented as appropriate. Applications requiring recusals may be considered separately to allow the Board to act on other applications without unnecessary disruption.

A recused member may be excluded from review, discussion, deliberation, scoring, or voting on the matter, depending on the nature of the conflict and the process established for the funding opportunity.

Section 11. Conflict of Interest and Board Recusal

The Board values fair, objective, and transparent decision-making. Board members are expected to disclose actual or perceived conflicts of interest so that funding decisions are made by members who can act impartially and in the best interest of the Fund.

A. Actual Conflict of Interest

An actual conflict of interest may arise when a Board member, immediate family member, household member, or an entity the Board member directly works for or governs has a specific and direct financial or organizational interest in an application or funding decision.

Board members may not apply as individuals for funding from the Fund while serving on the Board. If an application is submitted by an organization, business, or entity connected to a Board member, the Board member must disclose the relationship and may be recused from review, discussion, scoring, deliberation, and voting, depending on the nature of the relationship.

Examples of actual conflicts may include, but are not limited to:

- An application submitted by a Board member, their business, or their employer;
- An application submitted by an immediate family member or household member;
- An application submitted by an organization where the Board member serves as an employee, officer, board member, contractor, consultant, or paid advisor;
- An application where the Board member would receive compensation, contract work, employment, or another direct financial benefit;
- An application where the Board member advised, consulted with, assisted in preparing the application, or submitted a letter of support or similar endorsement; or
- A personal or professional dispute with the applicant that could affect, or appear to affect, the Board member's judgment.

B. Perceived Conflict of Interest

A perceived conflict of interest may arise when a Board member has a relationship, affiliation, or role that does not create a direct interest in the application, but could cause a reasonable person to question whether the member's participation is impartial.

The Board recognizes that members are appointed in part because of their expertise and involvement in Maine's agricultural, food system, and forest products sectors. Relationships or circumstances that could reasonably raise a question of impartiality should be disclosed so the Board can determine whether recusal or another limitation is appropriate. Perceived conflicts do not automatically require recusal. When a perceived conflict is disclosed, the Chair, in consultation with Department staff as needed, may determine whether the Board member may participate fully, participate with limits, or refuse from the matter.

C. Disclosure

Board members are expected to disclose actual or perceived conflicts as soon as reasonably practicable and before participating in application review, deliberation, scoring, or voting.

The Department may require Board members to complete a conflict of interest disclosure form before each funding round. If a Board member identifies a conflict after receiving additional application materials, the member must promptly notify the Department and refrain from further review until the conflict is evaluated.

D. Recusal and Participation

Depending on the nature of the conflict, a Board member may be recused from receiving application materials, reviewing, scoring, discussing, deliberating, or voting on an application. Applications requiring recusals may be considered separately to allow the Board to act on other applications without unnecessary disruption. If applications are anonymized or partially anonymized, the Department shall establish a process for Board members to identify potential conflicts before review begins.

E. Documentation and Determination

Disclosures and recusals shall be documented in meeting records or award files as appropriate. The Chair, in consultation with Department staff as needed, may determine how an actual or perceived conflict should be handled.

Section 12. Public Process, Records, and Confidentiality

A. Public Meetings

Board meetings shall be conducted in accordance with applicable public meeting and transparency requirements. Meeting notices, agendas, minutes, and records shall be maintained by the Department.

B. Confidentiality and Business Information

Applications may contain sensitive business, financial, or proprietary information. The Department shall manage records consistent with applicable public records laws, confidentiality requirements, and state records retention policies.

Applicants may be asked to identify materials they believe contain confidential business or financial information. The Department will determine whether records are subject to disclosure or exemption

under applicable law. Board packets may summarize or exclude information determined to be confidential, proprietary, or otherwise protected from public disclosure, unless the information is needed for Board review or action.

C. Executive Session

The Advisory Board may enter executive session consistent with applicable law to review confidential, proprietary, financial, or otherwise protected business information contained in applications or supporting materials.

Executive session may include discussion of business plans, financial statements, profit and loss information, trade information, underwriting materials, or other records determined to be confidential under applicable law.

Votes shall be taken and final funding decisions shall be made in public session.

D. External Communication

The Department will manage official communications with applicants regarding award decisions, conditions, and contract obligations. Board members should not independently communicate with applicants about their application status, award outcome, or contract details.

Section 13. Appeals, Waivers, and Amendments

A. Appeals

AFFPIF is a competitive funding program. Submission of an application does not create a right or entitlement to funding.

Final funding decisions may be reviewed only as provided by applicable law.

Funding solicitations may include additional information about administrative review, reconsideration, correction of errors, or appeal procedures, as appropriate.

B. Waivers

Upon the request of any person subject to this Plan, or upon its own motion, the Board, for good cause, may approve a waiver of any procedural requirement of this Plan. The waiver may not be inconsistent with the purposes of this Plan, Title 7, Chapter 10-C, the applicable solicitation, or other applicable law.

C. Amendments

This Plan is a living document. It may be reviewed and revised as needed to reflect statutory updates, funding availability, program experience, legal guidance, Board priorities, or administrative needs.

The Board may adopt procedural rules, including amendments to this Plan, as necessary and appropriate to perform the Board's work, consistent with statute.

Appendix A. Metrics and Evaluation Framework

AFFPIF should track outputs and outcomes that demonstrate responsible use of funds, progress toward statutory goals, and the effectiveness of the Fund in reaching a broad range of sectors, geographies, and business types across Maine.

Metrics may vary by funding modality and solicitation.

Potential metrics may include:

Reach and Distribution

- Total funds awarded;
- Number and type of businesses served;
- Geographic distribution of awards across Maine;
- Distribution of awards across sectors (agriculture, food systems, forest products);
- Distribution across business types and scales, where applicable;

Access and Participation

- Number and type of applicants;
- Comparison of applicant pool to awardees;
- Indicators of expanded access to funding opportunities over time;

Infrastructure and Economic Impact

- Infrastructure investments completed;
- Increased processing, storage, distribution, manufacturing, or market access capacity;
- Jobs created or retained, where applicable;

Program Delivery and Support

- Technical assistance provided;
- Project completion and compliance status;

Outcomes and Learning

- Follow-up outcomes reported by award recipients;
- Lessons learned to inform future funding rounds, outreach, and program design.