**Equitech Growth Commission Preliminary Strategic Plan: Funding Plan & Priorities**

**About the Equitech Growth Commission:**
The Equitech Growth Commission (The Commission) was established by legislation in 2023 (CH 461 of 2023) and is tasked with developing an inclusive, comprehensive, long-term strategic plan and 10-year goals for growing the State's innovation economy to be highly competitive with other states and regions relative to growing, attracting, and retaining a skilled workforce and high-growth businesses. The Commission consists of leaders from various State entities, institutions of higher education, trade and non-profit organizations, and legislative and gubernatorial appointees from the business community each bringing unique insights and perspectives to inform the development of the strategic plan and 10-year goals.

In tandem with the Equitech program, TEDCO launched an umbrella initiative – Cultivate Maryland – that captures the myriad of TEDCO programs that fall under the Equitech priorities such as TEDCO's women entrepreneur programs, R/UBII, Venture Development, the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund, Marketing, etc. Over 40 ecosystem stakeholders have pledged their support of this initiative, focused on stitching and scaling Maryland innovation assets, and addressing gaps.

The strategic plan, which must be reported to the Governor and the Presiding Officers by July 1, 2025, guides the funding priorities of the Equitech Growth Fund and must include mechanisms to increase the participation of communities in the innovation economy, create pathways for high-paying jobs, and increase and expand wealth in minority communities.

**Equitech Growth Commission: 10–year Goals for Growing the State's Innovation Economy:**
Outlined below are the Equitech Growth Commission's 10-year goals for growing the State's innovation economy. These goals provide broad based objectives for outcomes resulting from the Equitech Growth Fund and serve as guiding principles shaping funding opportunities made available through the Equitech Growth Fund.

1. **Move Maryland from 28th fastest-growing state to rank as a top-ten fastest growing innovation state**
   a. Increase high-tech employment growth rate to 3% - 4% per year; create 87,000 new high-tech industry jobs in Maryland with an emphasis on 'Middle Skill' occupations (construction and extraction; installation, maintenance, and repair; and production/manufacturing occupations)
   b. Support a high-tech recruitment and expansion strategy focused on attracting larger companies looking to expand (e.g., biomanufacturing, diagnostics, computer and electronics, transportation, and machinery manufacturing).
   c. Make investments in workforce training and infrastructure, as identified by industry in the strategic planning process.
   d. Continue to invest in high-tech startup activity and growth, which helps to attract larger biotech and IT companies through merger and acquisition and other activities.

2. **Grow investment in Maryland's manufacturing infrastructure**
   a. Recruit high-tech manufacturers and support their expansion. This will increase engineering employment and, in the life sciences, diversify the type of jobs available—e.g., biomanufacturing and diagnostics manufacturing have skills-based needs that can be met through non-degree certificates.

3. **The share of jobs at all skill levels, including high skilled jobs, for minority workers will equal their overall workforce representation**
    a. Develop a plan to substantially change participation growth rates for Black and Hispanic Marylanders in life, physical, and social sciences, and for women in computer, math, and engineering so that parity can be reached within shorter timeframes.
    b. Invest in community outreach to raise awareness about jobs and career pathways and invest in industry aligned, non-degree certificate and degree programs (and infrastructure) at minority-serving institutions (MSIs), including community colleges and HBCUs

4. **Minority entrepreneurs participating in startups at levels equal to their overall workforce representation**
    a. Expand entrepreneurial leadership training and mentoring for people of color and women.
    b. Make fund-of-funds investments in venture funds founded and managed by people of color and women.
    **c.** Sustain and expand direct investment funds targeting underrepresented founders

5. **Reach Representational Parity in workforce participation in STEM related training and employment -- the share of jobs at all skill levels, including high skilled jobs, for minority workers will equal their overall workforce representation**
    a. Develop a plan to substantially change participation growth rates for Black and Hispanic Marylanders in life, physical, and social sciences, and for women in computer, math, and engineering so that parity can be reached within shorter timeframes.
    b. Invest in community outreach to raise awareness about jobs and career pathways and invest in industry aligned, non-degree certificate and degree programs (and infrastructure) at minority-serving institutions (MSIs), including community colleges and HBCUs

**Equitech Growth Commission: Preliminary Strategic Plan: Funding Plan & Priorities**
The Equitech Growth Commission Preliminary Strategic Plan: Funding Plan & Priorities document outlines the initial funding priorities of the Equitech Growth Commission and guides the funding priorities of the first award cycle of the Equitech Growth Fund. The initial funding plan and priorities outlined in this document were developed based on initial ecosystem feedback, and the Commission's intent is to employ findings from the initial funding round to adjust and adapt the funding plan and priorities in the development of the final Equitech Growth Commission Strategic Plan: Funding Plan & Priorities and 10-year goals.

**Preliminary Funding Plan & Priorities**
Based on Ecosystem feedback and findings of the [Maryland Innovation Competitiveness Study](), the following Strategic Priorities have been identified as preliminary areas of focus. Funding programs in these strategic priority areas will address Infrastructure, Workforce Development, or both.

**Equitech Growth Commission Preliminary Strategic Plan: Funding Plan & Priorities**

**Infrastructure Projects:**

Infrastructure Projects are defined as projects that build, expand, or align existing equipment, systems, resources, and facilities in Maryland to support, attract, and retain businesses in the state and increase economic competitiveness and inclusive growth of emerging and advanced industries. Priority areas include:

**Advanced Manufacturing**

According to the 2023 Maryland Innovation Competitiveness Study commissioned by TEDCO and conducted by RTI International and Keen Point Consulting, LLC, *"Few sectors generate the economic development footprint that manufacturing does. First, manufacturing employs proportionally more skills-based workers relative to workers with a college degree, and second, manufacturing stimulates component and other contract manufacturing, as well as logistics and distribution activity."*

For Maryland to remain competitive, continued growth in the advanced manufacturing sector is needed. Biomanufacturing has been identified as one of the highest-growth employment opportunities in Life Sciences in Maryland. Given Maryland's competitive strength in Biosciences, the Commission has identified the below funding priorities:

- Biomanufacturing facilities
- Aerospace Manufacturing
- And other Advanced Manufacturing

**Advanced Technology**

Maryland currently ranks 21$^{st}$ in high-tech industry employment. According to the 2023 Maryland Innovation Competitiveness Study, for Maryland to be considered as a top-10 fastest-growing high-tech state, the state needs to generate 87,000 new industry jobs in the next 10 years. Currently, Maryland's largest high-tech industry sector is Cybersecurity and IT. Investments into infrastructure that promotes growth of the sector presents the greatest growth area for the state, and the commission has identified the below funding priorities:

- Quantum computing labs/centers
- Upgrades/Implementation of Cyber/AI Risk Management Systems/Frameworks
- SCIF Facility construction/improvements/ upgrades
- Environment Sensing Technologies

**Advanced Laboratory**

According to the 2023 Maryland Innovation Competitiveness Study, *"Over the past 20 years, Maryland's strong research, innovation, and startup activities have helped Maryland attract major industry players through merger and acquisition (M&A) activity. Many of these companies later expanded their manufacturing, R&D, or commercial office activity"* Continued ecosystem activity in this area requires modernization of existing space and the development of new spaces, and the Commission has identified the following funding priorities:

- Flexible Wet-lab space, equipment, modernization, etc.
- Laboratories designed to test advancements in existing/new technologies (Including field-based testing implementation)

**Equitech Growth Commission Preliminary Strategic Plan: Funding Plan & Priorities**

<u>**Workforce Development Projects:**</u>
Workforce Development Projects are defined as projects that provide education, training, and exposure to career pathways in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEAM) for all ages and skill levels. Priority Areas include:

**Expansion of STEAM Education**
High-Tech jobs, will require a high-tech workforce. According to 2023 Maryland Innovation Competitiveness Study, STEAM occupations, particularly in Computer and Mathematical occupations, offer the greatest opportunity to achieve parity in employment among both gender and race. The Commission has identified the following funding priorities:

- Development and expansion of STEAM Programs
- Educator STEAM Professional Development programs
- Lifetime learning (Reskilling, Upskilling, etc.) and related wrap-around support
- Expansion of work-based learning and career pathway opportunities

<u>**Dual Projects:**</u>
Dual Projects are defined as projects that address both ecosystem infrastructure needs as well as workforce development needs. Priority Areas include:

**Entrepreneur Development**
Maryland's Innovation ecosystem continues to be an integral part of the State's economy. Boasting top tier institutions of higher education and research universities, as well as the most Federal laboratories of any state in the country, the state has a robust ecosystem of new ideas. However, leveraging this ecosystem to boost the state economy requires resources that help take innovation to market. TEDCO's resources provide a boost to the ecosystem, however, growth of the ecosystem requires continued growth of entrepreneur resources. The Commission has identified the following funding priorities:

- Incubators, Accelerators, Venture Studios
- Entrepreneur education programs/academies
- Innovation Districts
- Ecosystem Lifecycle Support Infrastructure

**Cybersecurity/IT Industry Workforce Development**
According to the 2023 Maryland Innovation Competitiveness Study, Maryland's largest high-tech industry sector, by far, is Cybersecurity and IT. Within the industry, the state has a widening labor gap that requires a larger workforce, the development of which requires new and/or modernization of existing infrastructure that meets the needs of the ecosystem as well as related programming. The Commission has identified the following funding priorities:

- Intermediary/Workforce Development Centers
- Cyber Ranges
- High-Tech Sector Workforce Development Programming
- Other Cyber/IT Workforce related infrastructure

**VR/AR learning facilities and modules**
New technologies, open the doors to new ways of learning. The introduction of VR/AR systems presents opportunities supplement traditional methods of learning as well as re-examine and modernize.