



Wednesday, January 29, 2025

12:00-1:30 PM

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Mina Izadjoo, Integrated PharmaServices
Sue Chambers, Strouse
Luke Chow, Prime Manufacturing Technologies, Inc
Sam Griffith, National Jet
April Richardson, Food Opportunity, LLC
N. Scott Phillips, Scott Phillips Consulting

Commerce Staff & Invited Speakers:

Ricardo Benn, Deputy Secretary, Innovation and Growth
John Gilstrap, Assistant Secretary, Innovation and Growth
Ulyana Desiderio, Senior Director, OSIE
Benjamin McGlaughlin, Manufacturing Program Manager OSIE
Michael Kelleher, Executive Director, Maryland MEP

I. Call to Order & Chairman Remarks

At 12:06 pm Ben McGlaughlin called the meeting to order.

II. Approval of the December 2024 minutes

Board members were provided the draft minutes from the December 18, 2024 meeting both via email before-hand and hard copy at the meeting. Ben asked the Board to review the minutes, then requested a motion to approve. A motion was made to approve by April Richardson, this motion was 2nd-ed by Luke Chow, with no discussion the minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Maryland MEP and NIST Program Updates

Below is a summary of the discussion Mike Kelleher, Executive Director for Maryland MEP provided to the Board:

Role of Maryland MEP in Maryland

Maryland MEP works to support and grow manufacturing across all regions of the state by leveraging partnerships with state and local government, third-party providers, and

national networks. While headquartered in Columbia, the organization serves all manufacturers in Maryland that fall under NAICS codes 31, 32, and 33, regardless of company size. The MEP is a partner in the national MEP network under NIST, which includes one center in each U.S. state and Puerto Rico.

Manufacturing Landscape in Maryland

According to state data, Maryland has approximately 4,677 manufacturing firms, employing about 115,000 workers and contributing \$28 billion to GDP and \$13.5 billion in exports. The average wage in manufacturing is around \$130,000, though this is skewed by high-paying sectors like aerospace and defense. More than 50% of manufacturers in Maryland have fewer than five employees, and over 90% have fewer than 100. Maryland's manufacturers are predominantly small and diverse, lacking the industrial concentration found in states with dominant sectors like automotive or heavy industry.

Key Industry Clusters

Major sectors in Maryland include aerospace and defense, food and beverage (the fastest-growing), chemicals, machinery, and computer/electronics. Life sciences—including biotech, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices—is also a fast-growing area, although not always captured in broader data due to how it's categorized. The quantum sector is emerging and typically aligns with defense or electronics based on its funding sources.

Workforce and Succession Issues

Workforce remains the top concern for Maryland manufacturers, across all skill levels. Unskilled and semi-skilled labor, in particular, is hard to find and retain. The state's strength in highly educated labor supports higher-skilled roles, but gaps persist in trades like machining, welding, and general production roles. Maryland has also seen generational turnover in family-owned manufacturing businesses, with challenges in succession when heirs are uninterested or unprepared to take over.

Innovative Workforce Practices

Some companies have adopted creative approaches to staffing, such as flexible shifts, seasonal and migrant labor, and partnerships with organizations supporting asylum seekers. High school work-study programs exist in many counties, with Harford and Cecil counties noted for strong participation. However, barriers exist, such as age restrictions preventing youth from working on manufacturing floors.

Technology, Innovation, and Program Impact

Maryland manufacturers are increasingly using technology to remain competitive, especially as regional labor costs are higher than surrounding states. Programs like Maryland Manufacturing 4.0 and Maryland MADE, supported by DOE, offer grants and roadmapping to help small manufacturers adopt new technologies. Automation and

innovation are not leading to job losses but rather to redeployment or increased efficiency.

Supply Chain and “Buy America” Policy

MEP assists companies with compliance and supplier scouting for Buy America/Build America mandates. Maryland companies, often embedded within broader supply chains rather than producing finished consumer goods, benefit from stronger upstream and downstream supply chain capabilities. Maryland Department of Commerce manages this [website](#) that helps to connect manufacturers with suppliers in-state.

Federal and State Policy Outlook

While federal MEP funding is uncertain due to potential cuts, the current Maryland administration has proposed increased funding for manufacturing programs, including an Innovation Infrastructure Act and additional Manufacturing 4.0 support. Concerns were raised about job creation metrics in grant programs, particularly for companies focused on automation that are replacing hard-to-fill low-skill roles rather than reducing workforce size.

Maryland MEP Role and Engagement

MEP delivers direct support on plant floors through services like lean/six sigma training, plant layout, technology adoption, and succession planning. The organization aims to be a convener of industry voices, coordinating with partners like RMI and the Maryland Department of Commerce to amplify efforts and share impactful success stories. Monthly partner calls, workforce summits, plant tours, and internship programs are among the many engagement strategies being used.

Closing Notes

Participants expressed strong interest in continued support for flexible training programs and encouraged a broader understanding of how automation-driven efficiency aligns with economic development goals. The group also emphasized the need to document and share success stories from state-supported programs to highlight impact and build support.

IV. Department of Commerce Manufacturing Program Updates

Benjamin McGlaughlin, Manufacturing Program Manager provided the following updates on the Department of Commerce’s efforts engaging the manufacturing community:

Ben McGlaughlin, Manufacturing Program Manager, provided a brief update on the upcoming Maryland Manufacturing 4.0 grant awards. The list of recipient companies, along with details on their industry sectors and locations, has been submitted to the Governor’s Office and the Commerce marketing team for the

creation of an official press release. That announcement is expected in the coming weeks.

Ricardo Benn, Deputy Secretary of Commerce, followed with remarks on the department's transition and strategic direction. He introduced incoming Secretary Harry Coker, Jr., who brings extensive experience in cybersecurity and technology. Ricardo also highlighted Commerce's new strategic plan and reorganization, which includes a focus on "lighthouse sectors" where Maryland has unique strengths—namely life sciences, aerospace, and quantum technology. These areas were selected for their existing base of companies, institutional R&D, and federal partnerships. Ricardo emphasized the critical role of next-generation manufacturing across all of these sectors and the importance of telling Maryland's story effectively, especially in niche areas where the state has a competitive edge. He noted that while Maryland may not be the location for massive manufacturing facilities, it is well-positioned for specialized, high-value manufacturing operations.

V. Public Comments/Discussion

There were no members of the public in attendance

VII. Closing Comments/Discussion

During the closing portion of the meeting, the group discussed updates and logistics for the board's continued work. A permanent chair for the board is expected to be appointed in the coming month or two, following the leadership transition at the Department of Commerce. The next board meeting is scheduled for March 12, with the location still to be determined. Attendees were asked to suggest potential venues or hosts and share preferences regarding meeting times (morning, lunch, or afternoon). A poll may be distributed to help finalize the logistics. Several members expressed interest in hosting and noted the value of including facility tours where possible.

A key suggestion was raised around increasing the board's impact by directly engaging with Maryland manufacturers. The group discussed the importance of gathering current, firsthand insights through informal phone conversations and structured outreach rather than relying solely on older reports and surveys. This could potentially be supported by existing contact databases held by the Department of Commerce and MEP. There was consensus that a more nimble and informal approach would yield more timely and useful data, avoiding the delays associated with formal government surveys. Members agreed to further discuss targeted questions and outreach strategies as an agenda item at the March meeting.