



**Request for Applications:
Mississippi Reconnect 2.0 FY26**

Mississippi continues to make substantial progress in strengthening its workforce development system, investing millions in human capital infrastructure to better align education and training with the needs of both current and emerging industries. Yet, many Mississippians—particularly those who are disconnected from the labor force, underemployed, or long-term unemployed—remain on the sidelines of these opportunities.

To address this gap, AccelerateMS developed and launched the Mississippi Reconnect Program, designed to engage unemployed and significantly underemployed residents with accelerated training for priority occupations. Through this initiative, participants can access short-term training opportunities lasting from 40 to 320 hours (up to 8 weeks), or, in some instances, leads to enrollment into degree programs tied to critical-need occupations identified below. The specific targeted priority occupations for this RFP are listed below. These occupations align with the priority occupations identified by AccelerateMS, which provides a comprehensive list across all ecosystems at mspathfinder.org/priority-occupations.

Priority Occupations*

This RFP is for these specific occupational trainings:

1. Plumbing
2. Commercial and Industrial Electrical (including Marine Electrical)
3. Water and Wastewater Operators
4. Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs)
5. CNC Machinists
6. Manual Machinists
7. Tool & Die Technicians
8. Composite Technicians
9. Commercial Construction Carpenters and related construction industry occupations

*Additional occupations considered IF adequate data and justification provided for consideration.

Recognizing that sustainable career advancement often requires more than an initial short-term credential, all Reconnect-funded programs must include clear pathways for continued education and upskilling, which must be detailed in the proposal. For example, an "Introduction to Commercial Electricity" course should be intentionally connected to follow-on opportunities such as local electrical training programs or registered apprenticeship.

Training must go beyond compliance-based certifications (e.g., NCCER Core, OSHA 10/30,

CPR/First Aid) to address industry-specific skill requirements and credentials that lead directly to employment or advancement in high-demand, high-wage fields. Unless otherwise approved by AccelerateMS staff and justification is provided.

The total funding available under this RFP is \$5 million, to be awarded for one fiscal year. Grants may be reevaluated after the first year for potential additional funding based on performance and program outcomes.

Eligible Training Providers:

Eligible training providers for this initiative include a wide range of organizations capable of delivering high-quality, industry-aligned programs. These include public secondary schools, institutions of higher learning (IHLs), non-profit organizations, local workforce development areas, and public community colleges. All training providers must demonstrate the capacity to deliver curriculum that aligns with AccelerateMS priority occupations, offer measurable skill development, and maintain strong connections with employers to ensure participants have clear pathways to employment or continued education. Collaborative approaches between providers and local workforce development areas are strongly encouraged to maximize reach and impact.

Eligible Applicants for this program include:

Eligible applicants for this initiative Mississippi local workforce development areas, public community colleges, and institutions of higher learning. It is recommended that all parties work together in each ecosystem to submit a single application. Competing applications will not be funded. Only one application per applicant will be accepted. Multiple programs may be proposed on a single application. Private training providers should work with local workforce development areas to propose training solutions. Secondary schools may be eligible to apply directly with prior approval by AccelerateMS. If interested, reach out to Krystle Culver (kculver@acceleratems.org) for a pre-application inquiry.

Eligible Populations

Unemployed*: The primary goal of this program is to provide accelerated training opportunities to long-term unemployed¹ and significantly underemployed Mississippians, thus necessitating that training opportunities targeting the unemployed be less than 8 weeks in length, with a minimum of 20 hours per week (preferred 30+ hours) dedicated to formal training.

Underemployed: The secondary goal of this program is to provide upskilling opportunities for significantly underemployed² Mississippians. Associated training opportunities may provide wage reimbursements not exceeding 50% of wages for a maximum of 8 weeks not to exceed \$20 per hour of reimbursement. Individuals must receive documented training above and beyond ‘on- the-job’ training. A training plan must be provided by the employing company and approved by

¹ Reconnect program grantees may pay training allowances or stipends to participants for their successful participation in and completion of education or training services (except such allowance may not be provided to participants in OJT). Allowances or stipends may not exceed \$10 per hour from grant funds. Participants in a training activity may not be paid when the person fails to participate without good cause. If a participant is involved in an employer-employee relationship, that participant must be paid wages and fringe benefits at the same rates as trainees or employees who have similar training, experience, and skill. Employees of companies are only eligible for wage-related offsets.

subrecipient prior to enrolling individuals in this program and receiving any fund benefit.

Secondary Students (11th and 12th Grade, age 16 and above): For the purposes of this RFA, secondary students are considered 'long term unemployed' unless they are employed. Training providers may propose programs specifically targeting this population offering training durations of up to sixteen (16) weeks for completion. Stipends are not recommended for students, unless programs are directly connected to work-based learning opportunities following the training intervention. Secondary School students (targeting 11th and 12th grade students ages 16 or above) must be a minimum of 5 hours per week and a maximum of 20 hours per week, unless students have completed the majority of their high school curriculum, thus not competing with formal education time.

Participants with Barriers:

Individuals currently eligible to receive benefits through WIOA Title I or II, SNAP E&T, TANF, Vocational Rehabilitation, or Medicaid should be considered automatically eligible to participate in Reconnect-funded opportunities.

Objectives

- Increase the number of individuals trained in high-priority technical careers statewide.
- Rapidly expand training capacity and enrollment in occupations listed under the Priority Occupations section above.
- Serve targeted populations with accelerated training formats that lead to credentials and/or direct employment.
- Enhance partnerships with employers and education/training providers to build sustainable career pipelines.
- Facilitate work-based learning by providing meaningful training experiences

Basic Program Requirements

Training opportunities must align with and/or lead to Career and Technical Education (CTE) coursework and result in pathways to current jobs, with guaranteed interviews/ and or internships by local companies for program completers (at a minimum), or work-based learning. Participants must successfully complete identified and approved credentials and/or checkpoints during the training opportunities to continue receiving stipends or funding from the grant. Those not successfully completing the defined outcome may remain in the training program, unless removed by the training provider for cause, but shall not continue to receive any stipends or wages from the grant until such time as they successfully meet the requirements.

- It is preferred that associated training opportunities partner with an established training provider where programs exist or can and should be stood up quickly to meet this need. If such is not available, the applicant should work with appropriate training providers to meet priority needs.
- Individuals must be enrolled in MSWorks through the subrecipient prior to being eligible to receive associated grant benefits.
- Applicants must apply for both unemployed and underemployed funds at the same time. Applications only addressing one population will not be considered.

- Wage-based programs are only available to Mississippi employers hiring unemployed Mississippians and may include 100% wages for a maximum of two weeks with an AccelerateMS approved off-production line training program. Otherwise, a minimum of 50% match is required for wages for the duration of the documented training program.

Training Plan Requirements

Each requested program must include a documented training plan, signed by the training provider (company, college, secondary school, or third-party) detailing, at a minimum:

- Detailed curriculum outlining the program's duration (hours/weeks), course sequence, and type of training (classroom, online, or hands-on).
- Include subject areas covered, credentials participants will earn, defined learning outcomes, and methods for measuring achievement (e.g., assessments, demonstrations, or evaluations).
- # of participants to be trained

Skill. Intern. Prepare (The SIP) Program Requirements

Skill.Intern.Prepare (SIP) Program

To further expand career-connected learning, AccelerateMS is proud to announce the **Skill.Intern.Prepare (SIP) Program**. This program provides funding for participants to complete internships with priority sector employers and occupations. All participants must complete an approved training/upskilling program prior to interning. These opportunities reinforce technical skill development and support meaningful exposure to Mississippi's most critical industries and occupations. Funded experiences must focus on priority occupations and be designed to support real-world, work-based learning.

If you are seeking funding for apprenticeships, please refer to the **Mississippi Apprenticeship Accelerator** for more information regarding available apprenticeship funding opportunities at <https://acceleratems.org/rfps/>

Each internship request must include a documented explanation for how the program will utilize and collaborate with the secondary education, post-secondary education, or, career coach (where available), training provider, and employer. Only internships providing documented and aligned CTE Coursework or workforce training in priority occupations will be considered. At a minimum, the plan must include:

- Internship Goals and Learning Objectives
 - Clear description of the purpose of the internship program, including:
 - Alignment with AccelerateMS priority occupations (as listed in this RFP)
 - Intended career outcomes based on the participant's interests and training background
 - Confirmation that Career Coaches (where available) are included in the process of selecting participants. Documentation must be on file outlining the selection process.
 - Connection to related workforce training. Subrecipient must have documentation on file where on-site supervisors provide verification of internship hours and daily activities in associated workforce training.
- Schedule and Duration
 - Anticipated dates of the internship program (i.e. specific semester or quarter)

- Anticipated number of hours per intern. Total internship duration: Minimum 80 hours; Maximum 320 hours
 - Proposed hourly wages (only for hours worked)
- Career Pathway Alignment and Follow-Up Opportunities
- Outline of how the internship program connects to longer-term training or employment opportunities, such as:
 - Apprenticeships
 - Additional CTE or community college programs
 - Industry certifications
- Estimated Cost and Participation
 - Number of participants estimated by participating employers
 - Estimated cost per intern

Application and Submission Instructions:

1. Review this RFA document in its entirety.
2. Complete the budget template clearly and concisely. This will be a required attachment when completing the application.
3. Complete the AccelerateMS Reconnect Program Application in its entirety.
4. Applications must include copies of associated training plans, programs curriculum, and letters of intent to hire from eligible industry partners (At a minimum, the employer letter must indicate open positions and the intent to interview completers from the program). All submitted companies and training opportunities must be approved by AccelerateMS prior to initiation of training/work to ensure alignment with the goals/objectives of the grant and scope of work.

Priority will be given to applicants based on the following criteria:

1. Applications specifically detailing how the proposed funding will be utilized to increase labor force participation of Mississippians who currently receive or have exhausted unemployment benefits, decrease time to productivity for new hires previously unemployed, and increase individuals' engagement with priority sector occupations.
2. Applications for programs leading to certificates of value.
3. Applications indicating a minimum of 20% of the funding will be utilized to impact priority sector companies not served by existing state and federal funds in the past year (WIOA, WET, Works, etc.).
4. Applications clearly communicating anticipated outcomes by the individual participant and how eligible participants will be identified, contacted, and managed through the program. All applicants must use the MSWORKS platform for participant tracking and reporting.
5. Applications detailing how and what existing funding will be leveraged (or braided) to support proposed initiatives.

Eligible Expenses:

Expenses eligible include but are not limited to:

Unemployed:

1. Stipends for unemployed Mississippians while in AccelerateMS Priority Occupation eligible accelerated training programs with documented regional need. Training programs must have documented employer partners committed to interviewing trainees for current, available jobs.
 - Stipends may not exceed \$10 per hour. Stipend-based programs are only available to individuals who remain unemployed as part of the program, otherwise, programs must request wages and provide a company match of at least 50% within 2 weeks of program entry.
2. For internships, applicants must specify the anticipated dates of the internship program, including the specific semester or quarter in which the internship will take place.
 - Each proposal should outline the anticipated number of hours per intern, with a minimum total of 80 hours and a maximum of 320 hours for the entire internship period.
 - Hourly wages must be based solely on actual hours worked. During the first year of funding, up to 100% of intern wages and associated costs may be requested reimbursement.
 - If approved for the second year, up to fifty percent (50%) of wages will be eligible for reimbursement. Continuation of wage reimbursement beyond the second year will be contingent upon the evaluation of grant performance and achievement of established outcomes.
3. Per Participant fees may be eligible when directly associated with approved program training costs but must not duplicate the benefits provided by other sources and recipient must document all funding associated with the program as required by state and federal law.
 - This fee reflects the cost of the training itself and represents the participant's investment in their skill development. It includes expenses such as instructor and/or consumable (educational supplies related directly to training) costs, etc. This cost excludes equipment.
4. Registration for associated short-term programs. Recipients must not duplicate the benefits provided by other sources (WET, WIOA, participant fees, etc.)
 - The fee a participant would pay to enroll or sign-up for associated short-term programs.
 - Training programs that lead to careers in high-demand fields may qualify for degree tuition reimbursement under specific conditions. Only accredited degree programs that align with AccelerateMS priority occupations are eligible within this RFP. All requests must receive prior written approval from AccelerateMS, and retroactive reimbursement will not be allowed.
 - Reimbursement is limited to 75% of tuition and mandatory fees, up to \$4,500 per participant up to one academic year.
 - For programs lasting two years, funding will only be provided for up to one year

- of study.
 - For reimbursement, applicants are required to submit official tuition cost verified by the training provider's authorized representative, proof of enrollment in the associated training program, and itemized costs before reimbursement is issued.
5. A 5% administrative fee may be requested for the applicant.
 6. Failure to meet reporting or performance standards may result in termination of funding and ineligibility for future reimbursement.

Underemployed:

1. Wages for new-hire trainees at an eligible sector company in priority occupation, non-production line training programs (i.e. not producing a product but are in a separate, non-productive environment like a classroom, lab, or unattached machinery). May request up to 100% of wages for a maximum of two weeks, not to exceed \$40 per hour of the reimbursement. May not include benefits.
2. Wages for trainees in work-based learning programs where work is being done at a priority sector³ company in a priority occupation with documented, formal training occurring. May request up to 50% of wages for a maximum of 8 weeks, not to exceed \$20 per hour of the reimbursement. May not include benefits.
3. Instructor and/or consumable costs may be eligible when directly associated with approved program costs. Must not duplicate the benefits provided by other sources. Recipient must document all funding associated with the program as required by state and federal law. Course schedules and session attendance/login records must be maintained for all courses.
4. Registration for associated short-term programs. Recipient cannot duplicate the benefits provided by other sources (WET, WIOA, participant fees, etc.).

Reporting Metrics but not limited to:

- **Participant Enrollment and Completion:** Number of participants enrolled and completed, with corresponding program names.
- **Credential Attainment:** Number and names of credentials awarded by program.
- **Internships:** Number of internships provided, including names of participating businesses and industries aligned with priority occupations identified in this RFA.
- **Partnerships:** Updates and supporting documentation for active partnerships.
- **Upcoming Programs:** List of upcoming classes and training programs.
- **Stipends:** Number of stipends disbursed, and total amount distributed.
- **Participant /Registration Fees:** Number of participant/registration fee awarded, including program names and associated costs.
- **Employer Wage Reimbursements:** Names of employers and total amount awarded to date.
- **Aligned Pathway through Postsecondary Education:** Updates on participants enrolled into aligned pathways

All performance outcomes must be reported on a quarterly basis. Reports are due by the 15th

day following the close of each fiscal quarter. Each submission must include updated data for all applicable measures. Timely submission of accurate quarterly reports is required to ensure compliance with grant performance and funding requirements

Key Terms and Definitions:

¹Long-term Unemployed:

A long-term unemployed individual is a person who has made specific efforts to find full-time employment and is:

- a) An unemployed individual who has been unemployed for 12 consecutive weeks or more, including students aged 16 and above;
- b) An unemployed adult, 18 or older, who has been unemployed for 14 out of the last 27 weeks;
- c) An unemployed adult, 18 or older, with a sporadic work history, including a history of temporary/seasonal employment, multiple terminations, or multiple quits;
- d) An unemployed individual who has never had a job and is seeking employment; or
- e) An unemployed individual who has a significant barrier to employment.

²Significantly Underemployed:

An underemployed individual must meet one of the below categories to be determined significantly underemployed:

- a) Individual employed full-time or less than full-time in a position paying less than 85% of the state's average wage with the opportunity to advance into a position paying 85% or more of the state's average wage.
- b) Individual self-employed and is seeking full-time employment in a non-contractual role.
- c) Individual employed less than full-time for 12 consecutive weeks or more and is seeking full-time employment;
- d) Individual who is employed in a position that is inadequate with respect to their skills and training;

³Priority Sector:

Priority Sector companies are those formally documented in the Local Workforce Development Area Plan, the Mississippi WIOA Plan, or deemed acceptable by AccelerateMS. Typically, these consist of Advanced Manufacturing, Agribusiness, Information Technology, Healthcare, Construction, Forestry, and Energy. Targeted occupations must pay above \$16/hour and have established pathways into associated degree programs.

By submitting an application, the potential Awardee understands, as a condition of approval and continued funding, it must ensure the funded program is aligned with AccelerateMS goals and agrees to share data with AccelerateMS, as needed, to meet reporting requirements and to measure the success of desired outcomes. These requirements will be outlined in the Subgrant Agreement between Subgrantee and AccelerateMS.

Important Dates and Deadlines: Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until funds are exhausted.

Event	Date/Deadline
Publication of Request for Applications	October 24, 2025
Application Review Begins	December 1, 2025

AccelerateMS reserves the right to fund applications as they are received if it determines the timeline for the work, is a priority. Funds will be awarded until exhausted. Applications without clear outcomes measures will not be considered.

Please submit proposals including the Reconnect 2.0 application and the budget template via email to grants@acceleratems.org with the subject line **“Reconnect 2.0 Submission.”** Direct any questions to Krystle Culver at kculver@acceleratems.org.