



Request for Applications Mississippi Reconnect 3.0 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. In this Reconnect 3.0, certain changes have been made to clarify programs, requirements, and justifiable outcomes. Through this Program, participants can access short-term training opportunities lasting from 40 to 480 hours (up to 12 weeks). In some cases, these opportunities may also serve as a pathway to enrollment in degree programs aligned with high-demand, critical-need occupations. The Program is designed to support participants in securing employment and, where appropriate, transitioning into additional workforce development programs. The specific targeted priority occupations for this Request for Applications are listed below. These occupations align with the priority occupations identified by AccelerateMS, which provides a comprehensive list across all ecosystems at atmspathfinder.org/priority-occupations. In addition, proposed training should include employer-requested or employer-driven training that aligns with these priority occupations and demonstrated workforce needs.

Priority Occupations

The occupations listed below represent priority areas identified to address critical projected workforce demands. While the following occupations represent established priorities, consideration may be given to other programs that can substantiate a demonstrated and immediate workforce need.

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.

Applicants must demonstrate documented employer demand and clearly outline how the proposed program will address workforce gaps in targeted regions while expanding access to employment opportunities within those areas.

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, upskilling, and employment which must be detailed in the proposal. For example, an “Introduction to Commercial Electricity” course should be intentionally connected to opportunities such as local electrical training programs or registered apprenticeships.

Training must go beyond compliance-based certifications (e.g., 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.

Potential Training Providers

Potential training providers for this Program include organizations capable of delivering high-quality, industry-aligned programs. These include public secondary schools, institutions of higher learning (IHLs), non-profit organizations, and public community colleges. All training providers must demonstrate the capacity to deliver curriculum that aligns with AccelerateMS priority occupations or employer requested training to offer measurable skill development and maintain strong connections with employers to ensure participants have clear pathways to employment or continued education.

Potential Applicants for this Program

Potential applicants for this Program are Mississippi local workforce development areas, public community colleges, and institutions of higher learning. Others may be approved at the discretion of the Executive Director of AccelerateMS. Only one application per applicant will be accepted. Multiple programs may be proposed on a single application. Private training providers and secondary schools should work with local workforce development areas to apply. Collaborative approaches between providers and local workforce development areas are strongly encouraged to support the development, delivery, and management of training programs, and to maximize reach and impact across regions.

Under this initiative, the applicant serves as the fiscal and administrative entity responsible for applying for and receiving grant funds, and for contracting or partnering with eligible training providers to deliver approved training programs. Private training providers and secondary schools are not eligible to apply independently and should work in partnership with local workforce development areas or other eligible applicants.

Eligible Populations

Unemployed: The primary goal of this Program is to provide accelerated training opportunities to long-term unemployed individuals ages 16 and older. Accordingly, training opportunities targeting unemployed participants must be less than 12 weeks in length and include a minimum of 20 hours per week (preferred 30+ hours) dedicated to formal training to facilitate rapid workforce entry and employment outcomes.

Underemployed: The secondary goal of this Program is to provide upskilling opportunities for significantly underemployed Mississippians.

Objectives

- Increase the number of individuals trained in high-priority technical careers statewide.
- Rapidly expand 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.

Basic Program Requirements

Training opportunities must align with and/or lead to Apprenticeships and/or Post-Secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) coursework and/or result in pathways to current jobs, with guaranteed interviews. Participants must successfully complete identified and approved credentials and/or checkpoints during the training opportunities to continue receiving stipends or funding from the grant. 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 an established training providers to meet priority needs.

- Participants must be enrolled in the MSWorks system through the Applicant prior to being eligible to receive associated grant benefits.
- Absolutely NO reimbursements will be considered for items not previously approved. These will be rejected until they are removed from the request.

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).
- Specific checkpoints for success for participants to continue with stipend benefits.

Application and Submission Instructions: <https://acceleratems.org/rfps/>

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 3.0 Program Application in its entirety.
4. Applications must include copies of associated training plans, programs curriculum, and letters of intent to hire from industry partners (At a minimum, the employer letter must indicate open positions and the intent to interview companies from the program). **All participating employers and proposed training opportunities must receive approval from AccelerateMS prior to the start of any training or work activities to ensure alignment with the goals, objectives, and scope of work of the grant.**
5. Applicants must document all resources supporting the program, including any state and federal funds to be braided, identifying funding sources, amounts, and uses, while ensuring no duplication of costs and compliance with all applicable requirements.

Evaluation 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 participants' 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 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.

Eligible Expenses

Expenses eligible include, but are not limited to:

1. Stipends for unemployed Mississippians within a Reconnect 3.0 program training program 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 participants who remain unemployed as part of the program.
 - Applicant must detail how they will verify positive progress of participants to avoid applying stipends to participants who are not serious about the path.
 - Participants are limited to stipends for multiple programs only within a single career program path.
 - Applicants must document all resources received from other sources that will be braided within the program as required by state and federal law.

2. Per Participant fees may be eligible when directly associated with approved program training costs and must not duplicate the benefits provided by other sources.
 - Public Community colleges are ineligible for receiving Per Participant fees within Reconnect 3.0.
 - This fee reflects the cost of the training itself including expenses such as instructor and/or consumable (educational supplies related directly to training) costs, etc. This cost excludes equipment.
 - No other instructional costs will be paid.
3. OJT (On the Job Training)
 - Upon successful completion of a training program, participants may be placed with a partnering employer for employment. Employers may be eligible to receive wage reimbursements of up to 50 percent of the participant's wages for a period not to exceed 8 weeks or 320 hours, with reimbursements capped at \$20 per hour. A training plan must be provided by the employer and approved by applicant prior to enrolling Participants in this program and receiving any fund benefit. If further training is supported through MAA (Mississippi Apprenticeship Accelerator) program, participants may not receive duplicative benefits from any other program; all assistance must be coordinated to ensure no overlap in funding or services.
4. 3% administrative fee may be requested for the applicant.
5. Program Support are limited up to 20% of direct cost for program for staff directly supporting program administration, coordination, and compliance activities.
6. Failure to meet reporting or performance standards may result in termination of funding and ineligibility for future reimbursement.

Reporting Metrics

- The following reports and supporting documentation must be submitted by grant recipients as part of the required reporting processes:
 - **Partnerships:** Updates and supporting documentation for active partnerships.
 - **Stipends:** Number of stipends disbursed, and total amount distributed.
 - **Employer Wage Reimbursements:** Names of employers, number of employee participants, and total amount awarded to date.
 - **Aligned Postsecondary and Employment Outcomes:** Updates on participant progress in aligned pathways leading to postsecondary attainment, employment placement, and career advancement opportunities. 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

1. Long-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.

2. Significantly 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.

3. Participant:

A Participant is an individual who enrolls in and actively engages in a program, training opportunity, or grant-funded activity.

4. Established Training Provider:

Established Training Provider is an organization that has been actively engaged in workforce or technical training services and can demonstrate successful delivery of comparable training programs through documented performance outcomes, employer partnerships, participant completion rates, industry-recognized credentials, or job placement results.

5. Priority Sector:

Priority Sector companies are those formally documented in the Local Workforce Development Area Plan, the Mississippi WIOA Plan, or deemed acceptable by AccelerateMS, in its sole discretion. Typically, but not always, 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.

AccelerateMS reserves the right to reject any or all applications, in its sole discretion. It is expressly understood and agreed that by issuing this Request for Applications AccelerateMS has no obligation to issue an award or enter a contract, and it, in its sole discretion, may withdraw or amend this Request for Application before doing so. Applicants understand AccelerateMS's obligations hereunder are contingent upon necessary state and/or federal funding, and in the event sufficient funding is unavailable, AccelerateMS may elect to not award further funds and may terminate any related Agreement without notice.

Important Dates and Timeline

Applications will be reviewed in the order in which they are received, and funds will be awarded to eligible applications until exhausted.

AccelerateMS reserves the right to fund applications on a rolling basis as they are received if the proposed work aligns with identified priorities and the timeline supports timely implementation.

Applications without clear outcome measures will not be considered.

Please submit proposals including the Reconnect 3.0 application and the budget template via email to grants@acceleratems.org with the subject line **“Reconnect 3.0 Submission.”** Direct any questions to Krystle Culver at kculver@acceleratems.org.