

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

Mississippi Recovery-to-Work Initiative Pilot Program
Office of Workforce Development (AccelerateMS)
Funded Through the Mississippi Opioid Settlement Fund

I. Purpose

In furtherance of an appropriation under Senate Bill No. 3064 of the 2026 Regular Session, the Mississippi Office of Workforce Development (“AccelerateMS”) is soliciting applications from qualified entities to implement regional Recovery-to-Work Initiative Pilot Programs that connect individuals in recovery from substance use disorder (SUD) to sustainable employment opportunities within [Mississippi's Priority Occupations](#).

Funded through the Mississippi Opioid Settlement Fund, this Recovery-to-Work Initiative supports evidence-based workforce strategies that promote long-term recovery, economic mobility, and labor force participation by integrating workforce development, recovery services, employer engagement, and supportive services into a coordinated regional model.

The initiative is intended to strengthen Mississippi's workforce while reducing barriers to employment for individuals impacted by opioid and other substance use disorders through collaborative partnerships that connect recovery to meaningful employment. AccelerateMS shall coordinate with drug courts, treatment providers, and organizations providing recovery housing and supportive services.

II. Funding Availability

AccelerateMS was appropriated funds made available through the Mississippi Opioid Settlement Fund to support the implementation of regional Recovery-to-Work Initiative Pilot Programs. Funding is intended to support innovative workforce development strategies that connect individuals in recovery from substance use disorder to employment, training, and long-term career opportunities while advancing statewide opioid abatement goals.

Approximately \$1,000,000 is available under this Request for Applications (RFA). This is a reimbursement-based grant. Grant funds will be disbursed only after allowable costs have been incurred, paid by the Eligible Participant, submitted with the required supporting documentation for reimbursement, and approved by AccelerateMS.

Funding Period: October 1, 2026 – October 31, 2026

III. Eligible Applicants

AccelerateMS invites applications from qualified organizations with demonstrated experience serving individuals in recovery and implementing workforce development programs.

Eligible Applicants include but are not limited to:

- Mississippi Community Colleges
- Workforce Development Boards
- Nonprofit organizations
- Recovery housing providers
- Drug intervention court affiliated organizations
- Local governmental entities
- Other qualified organizations with demonstrated experience serving the target population

IV. Eligible Participants

Recovery-to-Work Initiative funds shall only be used to serve Eligible Participants who meet at least one of the following eligibility categories:

- Individuals actively engaged in recovery from substance use disorder.
- Individuals referred through a Drug Intervention Court
- Individuals referred by a licensed treatment provider.
- Residents of certified recovery housing programs.
- Individuals transitioning from incarceration and are actively engaged in recovery.

Applicants shall describe the process that will be used to verify participant eligibility and document referrals when applicable.

Participants must provide the Applicant with their express written consent to take part in the Recovery-to-Work program. Such consent shall provide for the exchange of information related to the Participant's compliance with program requirements; however, all parties agree to only share such information to the extent necessary to allow AccelerateMS to meet any relevant reporting requirements.

V. Partnerships

The Recovery-to-Work Initiative is designed to promote a coordinated regional workforce ecosystem that integrates recovery support services, workforce development, education, and employer engagement. Successful applicants must demonstrate meaningful collaboration among organizations that collectively support participant recruitment, training, employment, and long-term recovery.

Applicants are expected to establish partnerships that strengthen service delivery, reduce duplication of services, and create seamless pathways from recovery to employment.

A. Required Partners

Each application must include, at a minimum:

- One licensed substance use disorder treatment provider.
- One workforce education or occupational training provider.
- Two employer partners committed to hiring program participants.
- One recovery housing organization, when such an organization is available within the proposed service area.
- At least one drug court

B. Strongly Encouraged Partners

Applicants are strongly encouraged to include additional partners that enhance participant success, including:

- Reentry Organizations
- Community Colleges
- WIN Job Centers
- Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors
- Community-Based Organizations
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Local Economic Development Organizations
- Behavioral Health Providers
- Transportation Providers

C. Letters of Commitment

Each Required Partner shall provide a signed Letter of Commitment describing its role in the proposed project. Letters should clearly identify the services or resources each partner will contribute and demonstrate a commitment to participating throughout the grant period.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are encouraged when multiple organizations share responsibilities for participant services, case management, training delivery, or employer engagement.

VI. Program Requirements

A. Participant Assessment and Individual Employment Planning

Applicants shall implement a comprehensive assessment process for all enrolled participants to evaluate employment readiness, career interests, occupational training needs, recovery support needs, supportive service needs, and barriers to employment.

Following the assessment, each participant must have an Individual Employment Plan (IEP) that serves as the roadmap for workforce participation and employment success.

At a minimum, each Individual Employment Plan shall include:

- Career goals and employment objectives
- Employment readiness assessment
- Barrier assessment
- Supportive service plan
- Occupational training plan
- Target employer(s) or employment pathway
- Follow-up and retention strategy

The Individual Employment Plan should be reviewed and updated throughout the participant's enrollment to reflect progress toward employment and recovery goals

B. Workforce Training

Applicants shall provide or coordinate workforce education and occupational skills training that prepares participants for employment in [Mississippi's Priority Occupations](#).

Training activities should:

- Align with documented regional workforce needs.
- Lead to employment in high-demand occupations.
- Result in industry-recognized credentials, certifications, or licenses, when applicable.
- Incorporate work-based learning opportunities whenever feasible.
- Support career advancement and long-term employment.

Applicants are encouraged to leverage existing workforce training programs offered through community colleges, workforce training providers, apprenticeship sponsors, and other qualified educational partners.

C. Recovery-Friendly Employer Engagement

Applicants shall establish partnerships with employers that demonstrate a commitment to supporting individuals in recovery.

Employer engagement activities should include:

- Recruitment of recovery-friendly employers
- Supervisor education and awareness training
- Promotion of recovery-friendly workplace policies
- Second-chance hiring initiatives
- Development of employment opportunities aligned with participant skills
- Employer retention strategies
- Ongoing communication with employer partners

Applicants should describe how employers will be engaged throughout the project and how employment opportunities will be sustained beyond the grant period.

D. Training & Employment Supportive Services

Applicants may provide supportive services that are necessary to enable Eligible Participants to successfully enroll in, attend, complete, or transition from workforce training into employment. Supportive services must be directly related to removing barriers that prevent participants from obtaining, retaining, or advancing in employment.

Examples of allowable supportive services include, but are not limited to:

- Transportation assistance, including fuel, public transit, rideshare services, or minor vehicle repairs
- Childcare assistance
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Required tools and equipment
- Employment-related uniforms
- Background checks
- Drug testing required for employment
- Cell phone assistance
- Driver's license reinstatement, testing, or required fees
- Occupational licensing and credentialing fees

- Housing stabilization assistance
- Financial literacy education
- Benefits counseling
- Emergency employment-related assistance

Supportive services must:

- Support rapid entry into workforce training or employment;
- Promote successful completion of workforce training;
- Remove documented barriers to employment;
- Be necessary and reasonable;
- Be documented within each participant's Individual Employment Plan

E. Leveraging Existing Workforce Resources

Applicants shall maximize the use of existing workforce development resources before requesting settlement funds.

Before seeking reimbursement through the Recovery-to-Work Initiative, Applicants shall identify and pursue all available funding sources, including, but not limited to:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- Pell Grants
- Mississippi Upskill
- Registered Apprenticeship funding
- Employer-sponsored training
- Federal workforce grants
- State workforce initiatives
- Other public or private workforce resources

Opioid Settlement Funds shall supplement existing workforce investments and shall not replace, duplicate, or supplant services funded through other federal, state, or local funding sources.

VII. Allowable & Unallowable Costs

Grant funds may be used only for reasonable, necessary, and allocable costs that directly support the objectives of the Recovery-to-Work Initiative and comply with the Mississippi Opioid Settlement Fund requirements.

A. Allowable Costs

Example of allowable costs include, but are not limited to:

Personnel

- Personnel cost directly supporting program objectives
- Personnel performing programmatic oversight, not exceeding 20% of total project costs
- Necessary travel costs
- Training costs
- Other costs necessary to carry out program objectives

Program management and administrative oversight costs shall not exceed **20 percent** of the total approved project budget.

Program Operations

- Occupational skills training
- Industry-recognized credentialing
- Workforce navigation
- Career coaching
- Employer engagement
- Participant assessment
- Case management
- Necessary travel directly supporting program implementation
- Data collection and reporting
- Program evaluation

B. Unallowable Costs

Grant funds shall not be used for:

- General organizational operating expenses unrelated to the project
- Construction or major renovation, unless expressly authorized under the Opioid Settlement Agreement and approved by the State
- Vehicle purchases
- Treatment services reimbursable through Medicaid, or other third-party payor source
- Recovery housing operating expenses
- Lobbying activities
- Entertainment expenses
- Alcoholic beverages
- Costs unrelated to opioid abatement
- Costs that duplicate existing federally funded workforce services
- Any other costs identified in writing by AccelerateMS as unallowable
- Any costs unallowable under applicable state or federal law or regulation

VIII. Performance Requirements

Recipients shall collect, monitor, and report performance outcomes that demonstrate successful workforce participation and alignment with opioid abatement objectives.

Performance measures shall include, at a minimum:

Participant Outcomes

- Number enrolled
- Training enrollment
- Training completion rate
- Credential attainment
- Credential type
- Credential issuing organization

Employment Outcomes

- Employment placement rate
- Average starting wage
- Employer name
- Employment retention at 90, 180, and 365 days
- Employment status at 90, 180, and 365 days

Recovery Outcomes

- Participation in Peer Support
- Recovery coaching participation
- Treatment engagement, when appropriate
- Housing stability
- Reduction in justice system involvement
- Reduction in dependence on public assistance, when measurable

Satisfaction

- Employer satisfaction
- Participant satisfaction

Applicants shall demonstrate how proposed performance measures contribute to opioid abatement through prevention, treatment, recovery, workforce participation, and reduction of opioid-related harm.

IX. Reporting Requirements

Award recipients shall submit quarterly financial and programmatic reports in the format prescribed by AccelerateMS.

Quarterly reports should include:

- Participant demographics
- Referral source
- Workforce training participation
- Credentials earned
- Employment outcomes
- Wage information
- Supportive services provided
- Recovery engagement indicators
- Employer participation
- Performance outcomes
- Budget expenditures
- Program accomplishments
- Challenges and corrective actions

Financial reports shall clearly distinguish opioid abatement expenditures from all other funding sources.

In demonstrating the effectiveness of and compliance with program requirements, any information provided to AccelerateMS by or on behalf of Applicants, or their Partners, concerning Participants shall be limited to the minimum necessary to ensure that AccelerateMS may meet any reporting requirements relevant to the administration of the program.

X. Application Submission Requirements

Applicants must provide a complete application that includes the following components:

1. Executive Summary
2. Organizational Capacity and Experience
3. Partnership Structure
4. Program Design
5. Employer Engagement Strategy
6. Workforce Training Plan
7. Supportive Services Plan
8. Data Collection and Reporting Plan
9. Budget Narrative
10. Sustainability Strategy
11. Letters of Commitment
12. Opioid Abatement Justification

XI. Evaluation Criteria

Program Design & Participant Strategy – 25 Points
Employer Engagement & Workforce Alignment – 20 Points
Organizational Capacity & Partnerships – 20 Points
Outcomes & Performance Measures – 20 Points
Budget & Cost Efficiency – 10 Points
Innovation & Scalability – 5 Points

Total: 100 Points

XII. Contract Period

Date of Executed Subaward Agreement through June 30, 2027

Continuation funding may be considered based upon funding availability, performance outcomes, reporting compliance, and demonstrated return on investment.

XIII. Procurement Authority

This solicitation is issued in accordance with the [Mississippi Procurement Manual](#) and applicable state procurement laws governing competitive grant and proposal processes.

XIV. General Info

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.

Contact Information:

Please submit proposals to: info@acceleratems.org

Direct any questions to: jwillis@acceleratems.org

Applications must be submitted through the online application portal.

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/019f14694e5f7565b3bf64dea6aef77b>

Submission Deadline: September 28, 2026 at 5:00 pm CST