Mississippi AI Talent Accelerator (MAI-TAP)

Request For Applications

Talent Development for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) at Mississippi Colleges/Universities

Issued By: Mississippi Development Authority

Mississippi continues to experience record economic development successes, highlighted by the Amazon Web Services (AWS) project, which introduces a new industry sector to the state. This expansion creates a demand for innovative approaches to human capital development to ensure a ready workforce for AWS, its customers, and clients.

To meet this demand, the Mississippi Major Economic Impact Authority (MMEIA)— effectively the Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), the state's lead economic development agency— in close coordination with AccelerateMS, the State's Office of Workforce Development, and AWS is launching the Mississippi AI Talent Accelerator Program (MAI-TAP). This initiative is designed to stimulate the development of workforce programs that address the skill development demands of the artificial intelligence sector, encompassing areas such as information infrastructure, machine learning, and related emerging technologies.

Mississippi's strategy for AI and ML workforce development is organized around five core pillars:

1. AI/ML Infrastructure human capital infrastructure: Building a skilled workforce for foundational infrastructure roles.
2. AI/ML Literacy for the population: Promoting basic understanding and competencies across the population.
3. Education and Industry-Specific Use Cases: Aligning AI education with industry-driven applications.
4. Upskilling for Product Innovation: Enhancing skills for those creating new tools and technologies.
5. Research infrastructure: Supporting the capacity for AI/ML innovation and technology advancement.

The funding will support the creation, expansion, or enhancement of AI/ML-focused training and education programs at Mississippi colleges and universities. This includes initiatives that equip students with the essential technical, analytical, and ethical skills required for careers in AI, (ML), data science, information infrastructure and related fields. Priority will be given to proposals that address critical AI/ML talent shortages and industry demands, and those that integrate AI training with real-world industry applications.

To address this need, an appropriation in the amount of $10 million was included in the AWS Mississippi Major Economic Impact Act legislation in 2024. In a subsequent agreement with AWS, language was specifically included, which states the following:

"<u>Advance AI Funds</u>. Pursuant to the authority granted in the Enabling Legislation, the State, acting through the Authority, shall make available Ten Million Dollars ($10,000,000.00) for skills training programs at State institutions of higher learning, a minimum of 30% of which will be designated for use in conjunction with historically black colleges and universities, predominantly black institutions, and minority serving institutions. The Company, the Authority and Accelerate MS will reasonably collaborate to develop a comprehensive training strategy and plan prior to Authority and Accelerate MS executing any activities."

MDA is requesting applications from eligible entities to build skills training programs at public and private institutions of higher learning within the State of Mississippi.

Proposed investments must document impacts beyond the initial funding amount and timeline, include leveraged funds, and include outcomes focused metrics that are verifiable and directly related to the proposed program.

<u>Requirements</u>

- Must be an institution of higher learning (public or private) within the State of Mississippi;
- Proposals should focus on AI related fields such as machine learning, data science robotics, and computational neuroscience;
- Proposals should include timeframe of proposed investment;
- Proposals should include estimated cost (including leveraged funds by source);
- Projects must demonstrate strong partnerships with AI-related companies, technology companies, and other stakeholders;
- Proposals must show a commitment to creating sustainable, long-term impacts on AI talent development;
- Projects that include underrepresented or underserved populations in AI training and career development are strongly encouraged;
- Proposals that include the development of an endowed Chair in related fields will be prioritized;

<u>Application and Submission Instructions</u>

1. Review this RFA document in its entirety.
2. Only one application per organization will be accepted.
3. Complete the budget template clearly and concisely. This will be a required attachment when completing the application.
4. Complete the MDA Program Application in its entirety.
5. Applications must include copies of associated training plans or program outline if proposing a training or education program; job descriptions if proposing to hire staff, faculty, or trainers; documentation related to estimates if proposing equipment or facilities.
6. **Submit completed applications to Sara Watson, at swatson@mississippi.org.**

Eligibility

- Eligible applicants are public or private institutions of higher learning within the State of Mississippi defined as 4-year colleges or universities and as well as Community Colleges.

Applicants may apply individually or in partnership with one or more industry stakeholders to create a collaborative, comprehensive program.

Eligible Expenses

- Initial Funding for the creation of an Endowed Chair in a related subject area
- Curriculum development costs (e.g., instructional materials, course design)
- Instructor salaries and benefits for teaching AI-related courses or training programs
- Equipment and technology needed for AI labs or classroom use
- Stipends for students participating in internships or work-bases learning opportunities
- Industry partner collaboration cost, including mentoring, guest lectures, or project based activities
- Administrative costs associated with running the program, including a maximum 5% administrative fee

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

Publication of Request for Applications: January 15, 2025

Webinar for questions/clarification: January 29, 2025, at 3:00PM Central
            Request link from Kari Thomas kthomas@acceleratems.org by January 27th

Deadline to Submit questions to AccelerateMS   February 10th, 2025

Application consultations w/MDA and AccelerateMS   February 13th (time TBD)
            Request appointment time from Kari Thomas kthomas@acceleratems.org by February 7th
            (These will be held in person at AccelerateMS Jackson, MS)

Initial Application Review   March 3rd, 2025

Notification of Intent to Award Begins   March 17, 2025

MDA 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 they are exhausted.

Submit completed applications to Sara Watson, at swatson@mississippi.org.

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Application

1. Provide a non-technical description of how the proposed program will address the need of increasing an AI skills training program.
2. Clearly indicate the specific activities and how they are linked to the project's purpose, key milestones, and deliverables. The proposed intervention must address the need identified clearly and concisely using relevant, local data.
3. Describe the outcome-based performance measures that will be tracked and reported, including the intended outcomes the proposed programs will impact. At a minimum, include the number of individuals expected through the program, the estimated cost per participant (stipends/wages, training, etc.), and the targeted occupations and sectors for training completers, including geographically limited wages. Applicants must collect participant information, identified by AccelerateMS, and submit it through the MSWorks website.
4. Please describe the potential for sustainability of the proposed program, beyond the initial grant funding. Important Note: This is one-time money that cannot be guaranteed or assumed to be available beyond the grant timeline. Sustainability must be addressed by the community from which the application is sent.
5. Detail the key deliverables and program schedule, by date, for your program(s).