EDA Recompete Strategy Development Grant Narrative
Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES)
<u>**Project Summary**</u>

Mississippi has a longstanding history of high unemployment rates across large geographic swaths of the state. Given that Mississippians have experienced decades of economic distress and extreme disinvestment, the prime age employment gap (PAEG) has widened, exposing extreme economic and social inequities among the states' underserved populations. Despite these factors, traditionally under-resourced regions of Mississippi (rural, urban, and exurban) also have extant and emerging opportunities for job creation and economic growth in key occupational sectors. These concomitant factors point to a crucial need for investments in programs, infrastructure, resources, and systems that build place-based economic security.

The **Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) is submitting this Recompete Plan Approval (MDES)** as the lead applicant and convener of the **Mississippi Alliance for Targeted Career Help (MATCH) project**. As the convener of a statewide coalition of public-private partners, MDES proposes collaborations and strategies that collectively will address indicators of economic distress in unique regions of the state. The proposed project will activate and resource a statewide collaborative of public and private partners with the overarching goal of supporting targeted workforce and economic development projects in distressed regions of the state in which prime-age employment falls significantly below the state and national average.

The **MATCH** coalition proposes both a Strategy Development Phase and a Recompete Plan to activate new and emerging partnerships operationalized through three Economic Development Districts (state Planning and Development Districts/Ecosystems) in Mississippi to support infrastructure needs and complementary education and training initiatives. The projects will build regional workforce readiness for good jobs in the *healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and information technology/cybersecurity sectors*. Partners will engage in system building and resource development activities that will support and sustain opportunities to connect residents of the targeted areas to existing and new jobs.

1. Service Regions

1.1. Eligible Geography

MDES and project operational lead Accelerate MS have identified three economically distressed regions as target 'ecosystems' where proposed EDA investments in high PAEG locations will support unique investments *(also see Eligible Service Area list, attached)*.

1.2. Regional Challenges and Causes of PAEG

MATCH is designed to address statewide

Figure 1: PAEG Eligibility of Target Service Geographies

challenges in Mississippi by focusing on three regions (ecosystems) in the state. Investments in *Jackson, Hattiesburg, and the Delta regions* will support unique projects that can be scaled to additional regions and replicated at local and regional levels. Significant declines in the number of working age adults in MS present both challenges and opportunities for state, regional, and local economic and workforce development entities. The state's population demographics are shifting; a new report from Mississippi State University demonstrated that the population under the age of 55 declined significantly from 2010-2022, while the population aged 55+ experienced a significant increase. *Population declines were most significant for the age group of 45-54 (19.7*
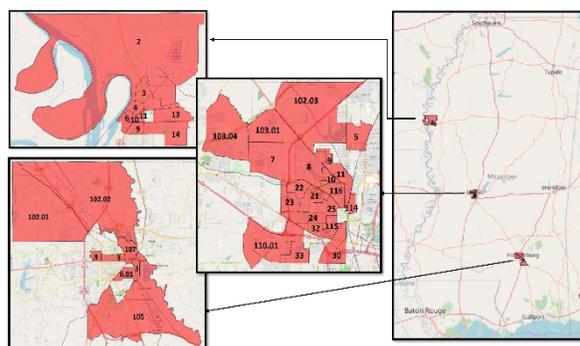
percent), while the population ages 65-74 doubled during the period.[1]

Jackson: Jackson is Mississippi's capital city and the hub of business and political activity for the state. Despite their proximity to these assets, Jackson's underserved residents face enormous challenges. The city's population declined by 11.42% between 2010 and 2020, *a steeper decline than any major city in the U.S.* Population decline, exacerbated by persistent crime and infrastructure challenges, has resulted in diminished tax revenues. Proposed investments in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology/cybersecurity training will target Hinds Community College's Jackson Academic Technical Center, which is located in a low-to-moderate income community that faces severe economic challenges, low workforce participation, socioeconomic barriers to mobility, and skilled workforce shortages.

Hattiesburg: The Greater Hattiesburg MSA is experiencing an economic boom, *but this is not the case for the city's underserved residents*. There is a stark contrast between greater Hattiesburg's thriving financial sector (and other economic development successes) and the experiences of people who live in the urban city center. The poverty level in the city of Hattiesburg remains at an astounding 32%, meaning one-in-three residents lives in poverty. Although the population is growing, manufacturing employers and hospitals struggle to find and retain the workforce needed to meet demand, *an issue that has led to a high PAEG*. The site for the proposed PRCC Bridge Center in Hattiesburg's Ward 5 rates in the 9th decile of most disadvantaged neighborhoods in Mississippi and the 95th percentile for most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the U.S.[2] Proposed investments at the Bridge Center will support workforce training and infrastructure to meet expanding needs of manufacturing and healthcare employers.

Mississippi Delta: The deeply rural Mississippi Delta region faces extenuating socioeconomic conditions resulting from population decline. The region lost 7,384 residents between 2017 and 2022 (a decline of 5.5%) and population numbers are projected to decrease by 3.8% between 2022 and 2027. Between 2017 and 2022 the region's available jobs declined by 8.1% (83,614 to 76,833), 11.9% below the national job growth rate. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate decreased from 51.4% to 46.5%. Regional average earnings per job of $48.6K are **$32.3K below the national average earnings** of $80.8K per job. Unemployment numbers (April 2023) demonstrate a high PAEG; 23.25% of those ages 25-34, 25.81% ages 35-44, and 21.51% ages 45-54.[3] Healthcare occupations are in high demand in the region, with an average of 120 monthly job postings.[4] MATCH investments in the Delta will prioritize methods to connect disconnected populations to skill-training in healthcare and advanced manufacturing.

1.3. Regional Assets for Anticipated Interventions

An investment in the MATCH Strategy Development proposal will allow partners to activate and leverage key assets and regional partnerships collaborations that can optimize interventions and enhance outcomes. *Table 1* demonstrates local and regional resources that will contribute to the coalition goal of reducing PAEG. Planned interventions are described provided in Section 3.

Table 1: MATCH Project Regional and Statewide Assets and Resources		
Sector	**Assets**	**Partners** *(*letters attached)*
Economic Development	Growth opportunities and resources. One example: the attraction of defense contractors to Mid-Delta Airport is projected to add 332 new jobs, $21.3 M in new income, and $1.88 M in additional local tax revenue in Washington County, with 93% of the new supply chain jobs in the economically distressed Delta region. Other assets available to	Delta Compass*, Greater Jackson Chamber Partners*, Hines Co. Econ. Dev. Authority*,

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[1] Mississippi State Univ. National Strategic Planning and Analysis Center. MS Population and Labor Force Profile. August 2023.
[2] 2020 Census Data, Census Block Group. Ret. August 2023 from www.nhgis.org.
[3] Lightcast Q3 2023 Data Set. Ret. August 2023 from lightcast.io
[4] Ibid.

	MATCH include strong economic development/employer connections, regional focus, entrepreneurship, and business growth opportunities.	Area Dev. Partnership of Greater Hattiesburg*,
Workforce education and training	Customized occupational runways to meet regional workforce needs; alignment of training and credentialing to industry needs; work-based learning opportunities. Assets of the 3 community colleges and 1 HBCU partnering on this project include targeted outreach in local communities, existing partnerships with employers, and leveraged facilities and staff.	MS Community College Board*, Pearl River CC, Hinds CC, Jackson State Univ., Mississippi Delta CC*
Government	Fiscal management, subawards, personnel, project management, data analysis. MDES, AMS, and Regional Ecosystem Coordinators will leverage staff and resources as statewide convener/project coordinator.	MDES, Accelerate MS and Regional Ecosystem Coordinators (co-signed)* MS Dev. Authority
Employers	Subject matter experts in industry skills; hiring/upskilling project participants. Employer partners' assets include current and new jobs, commitments to project need-to-hire, employer-based skill training, work-based learning, internships/apprenticeships, and job retention/upskilling.	MS Hosp. Assoc.*, Milwaukee Tool, Robinson Electric, Long Term Health Facilities, Idaho Forest Products, Nissan, Cspire,
Wraparound and support service providers	Core services to ensure equitable access and success for participants; DEI&A strategies for project design and implementation. Community-based organizations and regional nonprofits will provide wraparound services to project participants, linkages, recruitment, and outreach, and identify first-dollar funding (as applicable).	WWIS Community Action*, United Way of SE MS*, Alliance of Nonprofits, Goodwill
Other private partners	Subject matter experts in DEI&A strategies to increase recruitment, outreach and engagement; mentoring. MATCH will leverage assets of local, regional, and statewide private partners to inform project design, access worker/participant voice, and bake DEI&A into all activities.	Jayne Avenue Neighborhood Assoc.*, MS Manufacturers' Assoc.* 100 Black Men of Jackson

2. Strategy Development

3.1. Planning Strategy. In the Recompete Strategy Development phase, consortium partners will engage in a two-stage process designed to create systems and strategies that will *1) increase MDES' competitiveness as an EDA Recompete partner and 2) prepare MDES, AMS, and coalition partners for an Implementation Grant under Recompete Phase 2.* Key objectives of the Strategy Development phase are: (1) Organize and operationalize a statewide coalition to evaluate Prime Age Employment gaps and develop a foundation for Recompete Phase 2 implementation, (2) Identify and evaluate barriers to labor force participation and occupational skills attainment in key regions and industry sectors, and (3) Formalize a plan to implement economic development investments and targeted education and training interventions in three regions. Adopting the systems perspective of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, workgroups will develop Strategy, Structure, and Systems for achieving high-level objectives (*see Table 2*). The process will be implemented sequentially in two phases:

Phase 1: Learning. Preliminary research, fact-finding, and baselining will inform the strategic planning process. Activities will incorporate stakeholder voice and include benchmarking existing initiatives, mapping assets, and identifying gaps in the ecosystems.

Phase 2: Designing. As the learning phase gains momentum, workgroups will engage in design sessions to establish plans for the consortium's projects. Cross-workgroup design sessions will occur regularly to ensure that synergies are identified, and information gaps are addressed.

Table 2: MATCH Workgroups			
Workgroup	**Core Function**	**Lead(s)**	**High-level Objectives**
Workforce training and	Identify and align occupational runways, industry credentials,	AccelerateMS, MDES, MDA,	-Develop occupational runways aligned to workforce needs

Area	Description	Lead	Deliverables
education	work-based learning, training delivery modalities, and participant stipend structure to increase recruitment, engagement, and career navigation for residents.	and Ecosystem Coordinators in three PDDs	-Design plan to integrate industry-aligned credentials into runways -Develop recommendations for work-based learning activities -Create participant stipend framework
Infrastructure and Economic development	Identify opportunities for business attraction and expansion with a goal to increase the number of jobs in targeted areas.	Mississippi Development Authority	-Develop plan to identify and address infrastructure needs to increase jobs and job access -Develop key performance indicators for job growth
Resource development	Identify and secure resources to support Recompete Phase 2 activities and sustainability.	MDES	Create a sustaining resource development plan with key performance indicators for Phase 2 implementation
Participant services/ CBOs	Coordinate and develop core services to ensure equitable access and success for participants; recommend DEI&A strategies for project design and implementation	AccelerateMS	-Develop locally targeted strategies for participant outreach, engagement, and retention -Recommend core participant supports -Create a Phase 2 DEI&A guide

3.2. Proposed Activities and Objectives

Activities proposed for the MATCH strategy development phase are designed to incentivize and catalyze worker skill training and economic development while mitigating conditions that contribute to high PAEG, intergenerational poverty, and economic immobility.

Table 3: MATCH Proposed Activities and Objectives

Area	Activities and Objectives	Objectives
AccelerateMS Ecosystem PDD 8 Hattiesburg	*Objective:* Address gaps in workforce training for good jobs in advanced manufacturing. *Activities:* (1) upgrade infrastructure at Pearl River Community College Bridge Center training facilities; (2) design advanced manufacturing and healthcare occupational runways; (3) determine participant stipend structure; (4) design workforce strategies to attract manufacturing and healthcare companies. Investments will add capacity to train a minimum of 275 participants annually by renovating the facility for welding, construction, electrical, and other industry-aligned training. Adult education, career services, employer-driven training, mentoring, wraparound services, and paid internships/apprenticeships will co-locate to serve 300 people annually. The facility will have 20,000 sq. ft. for temporary training facilities for rapid customization for economic development expansion projects.	
Accelerate MS Ecosystem PDD 3: Mississippi Delta	*Objective:* Address high PAEG through workforce training and business attraction. *Activities:* (1) upgrade infrastructure in training spaces at the Mid-Delta Regional Airport; (2) operationalize career-based training with industry-aligned credentials and supportive services (including participant stipends) in occupational runways in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology, building capacity to train at least 230 participants annually; (3) design workforce strategies to attract defense-related manufacturing to the Mid-Delta Airport.	
Accelerate MS Ecosystem PDD5: City of Jackson	*Objective:* Increase access to workforce training for underserved prime-age workers. *Activities:* (1) build and equip a new workforce training facility to house advanced manufacturing, information technology, and healthcare training; (2) build infrastructure for expansion of the Cybersecurity Center of Excellence; (3) operationalize career-based training with industry-aligned credentials to train 410 participants annually; (4) design workforce strategies to attract manufacturing and IT companies to the Jackson Metro area. Investments will create new facilities and programs to increase good jobs in the Jackson Metro region and mitigate barriers to access for residents in the West Jackson area.	

3. Organizational and leadership capacity

Lead applicant **Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES)** will have oversight, fiscal management, and accountability responsibilities for Recompete initiatives. MDES is the state's lead agent for employment security programs and serves as the connecting entity for Workforce Investment & Opportunity Act funds (WIOA). Additionally, MDES is home of the MS Apprenticeship Program and works directly with employers, community colleges, and labor partners to create and promote associated apprenticeship opportunities.

AccelerateMS (AMS) will serve as the operational and strategy lead for all Recompete initiatives. AMS was created in 2020 by the Mississippi State Legislature to lead workforce development strategies and deliver services that align educational, training, and economic development initiatives. AMS is managed by the State Workforce Investment Board and partners with state agencies, industry employers, academia, nonprofits, legislators, and the Governor's office to enhance collaboration using an ecosystem model via sustainable workforce policies and initiatives. AMS successfully secured $12M in funding for the state's first statewide Career Coach program which establishes career coaches in eight ecosystems by partnering with economic and industry leaders and school districts to implement academics and work-based learning for meaningful employment. As of August 2023, career coaches are in nearly 80% of MS high. AMS also manages the MS Workforce Enhancement Training Fund, a $20 million-dollar annual fund for employer training needs.

For the purposes of preparing for Recompete projects, MDES has established a coalition structure and engagement plan for convening partners, activating key assets, and garnering private-sector, public-sector, and philanthropic commitments. The governance structure includes an advisory board, MDES staff time and effort, leadership from Recompete Project Manager

Figure 2: MATCH Coalition

Yolonda Fredericks Boone. Ms. Boone has more than 25 years of industry experience in planning and managing workforce development projects and has worked as a policy analyst and project manager for the State Workforce Investment Board. Ms. Boone will convene and guide regional partners to ensure that DEI&A is baked into all Recompete planning, communication, and implementation strategies.
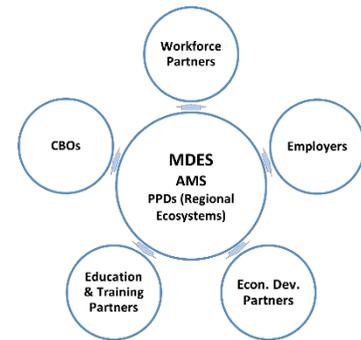
4. Efficiency and appropriateness of project budget

MDES is requesting $499,470 for an 18-month period of performance (details in attached *Budget Narrative)*. All costs are appropriate and necessary to provide capacity for project scope.

Table 4: Recompete Strategy Development Grant Budget Overview		
Line Item	**Description**	**Budget**
Personnel (MDES Administrative)	-Recompete project accountant (24% of time to project) -Recompete benefit specialist (24% of time project)	$58,725
Fringes for above personnel	Fringes for above personnel based on time to project	$18,205
Contractual	-Recompete Plan Coordinator (Project Manager)	$45,000
	-Data Consultant	$60,000
	Subaward: AMS Ecosystem 3 (Delta)	$100,000
	Subaward: AMS Ecosystem 5 (Jackson)	$100,000
	Subaward: AMS Ecosystem 8 (Hattiesburg)	$100,000
Indirect	Administrative Indirect Cost (22.8% of salary and fringe)	$17,540
Total EDA Recompete Strategy Development Budget Request		**$499,470**