



117th Congress Community Project Funding
Financial Services and General Government
Small Business Administration, Small Business Initiatives

Request Project Title:
**MISSISSIPPI SMALL BUSINESS
TECH COMMERCIALIZATION CENTER**

Request Amount:
\$742,800

Sharon K. Nichols
State Director
Mississippi Small Business Development Centers
The University of Mississippi
School of Business Administration
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Project Description: Mississippi Small Business Tech Commercialization Center

The Mississippi Small Business Development Center (MS-SBDC) proposes to build a system to offer technical and business assistance by connecting innovation resources of the Mississippi Research Consortium (MRC) (which comprises Mississippi's four research universities: University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, Jackson State University, and University of Southern Mississippi), with two external groups:

1. Small innovative businesses and startups across the state; and
2. Additional Mississippi universities (public and private) and community colleges.

While the universities in the MRC have internal resources to promote tech commercialization efforts, the state's other 31 public and private universities and community colleges do not share those capabilities. The Mississippi Small Business Tech Commercialization Center will address this deficit by providing *dedicated and accessible connections* to each MRC office, MS-SBDC, and Innovate Mississippi. This center will enable better, more efficient, and more effective processes in sharing resources and collaboration among our higher learning institutions.

The MS-SBDC network proposes to add a dedicated Center focusing on Tech Commercialization for the purpose of connecting any innovative need to the MRC resource that best matches that need. Mapping of research resources within the MRC and connecting innovative small businesses and startups will facilitate a more robust tech commercialization network for the state.

The requested funding is to finance staff and support funds to build and launch the Mississippi Small Business Tech Commercialization Center.

Mississippi SBDC's proposed Tech Commercialization Center will focus efforts connecting university-based researchers to small tech-based firms, innovative faculty, staff and students outside of the research universities and across Mississippi that do not currently have access to research resources. The project is designed to provide maximum assistance as needed to individuals, particularly for the following types of businesses/underserved populations:

1. Woman-owned
2. Rural-based
3. Socially and economically disadvantaged businesses and small firms that have not traditionally accessed university resources

The Mississippi Small Business Tech Commercialization Network will support statewide tech commercialization efforts through three (3) key functions:

FUNCTION 1: TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH RESOURCE MAP

The requested funds will support the creation and building of research resources available in the MRC units that are accessible to other educational entities' faculty, staff, and students as well as innovative small businesses and startups. The mapping of research resources available at the MRC units will enable the Tech Commercialization Center staff to match research resources to the needs of clients.

FUNCTION 2: TECHNICAL AND BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

The Tech Commercialization Center will host two accelerator cohorts and a mentoring program. These activities will provide individualized, expert assistance to a minimum of 45 clients interested in pursuing the commercialization of their research. Technical and business assistance will be collaborative in nature, working in conjunction with the staff of the tech commercialization departments at each MRC university.

FUNCTION 3: RAISING AWARENESS

The MS-SBDC will raise awareness of resources and specialized expert assistance in technology commercialization across Mississippi. Building the bridge between innovative faculty, staff, and students of non-research higher educational entities as well as private small businesses and startups will create opportunities to bring new technologies to market and encourage collaboration, creating a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem.

FUNCTION 4: INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY

Compared to urban regions, Mississippi's rural and underserved communities lack affordable, reliable, and accessible broadband and therefore have limited access to available resources. This creates an even greater disadvantage for rural and underserved communities. With COVID-19, most if not all federal and state resource providers have transferred operations to a virtual platform.

In March 2021, the Mississippi Small Business Development Center was awarded a USDA DLT grant. With this grant, the MS-SBDC will be deploying 27 business assistance sites in Mississippi's rural communities. These sites will provide a space for virtual meetings and connectivity to resources. The majority of sites are expected to be housed within community colleges and workforce development centers.

Deployment of these sites will leverage college system resources and create accessibility for rural and underserved populations. These sites make it possible to meet entrepreneurs within their communities while also increasing access and connection between non-MRCs and MRCs.

Key Personnel and Essential Functions

1. **Project Director (located at an MRC institution to be determined):** The Project Director supervises and trains business counselors and ensures project meets timeline and deliverables.
2. **UM Business Counselor (located at University of Mississippi):** The UM Business Counselor provides technical assistance emphasizing overall market feasibility. The counselor is focused on market research, lean canvas training, business development, and intellectual property protection processes.
3. **MSU Business Counselor (located at Mississippi State University):** The MSU Business Counselor provides technical assistance emphasizing prototyping/product development. The counselor utilizes manufacturing connections and MSU resources including but not limited to CAVS and Extension services.
4. **JSU Business Counselor (located at University of Jackson State University):** The JSU Business Counselor provides technical assistance emphasizing HBCU/minority services. The counselor is tasked with identifying minority- and woman-owned funding opportunities and rural development efforts.
5. **USM Business Counselor (located at the University of Southern Mississippi):** The USM Business Counselor provides technical assistance emphasizing Government contracting. The counselor works with SBIR/STTR contractor and collaborates with Stennis Center and ERDC to identify early-stage government contracting opportunities.

Responses: Financial Services and General Government Community Project Funding Questions

1. **Why is the project a priority, including the local, regional, and/or national benefits provided by the project?**

The Mississippi Small Business Tech Commercialization Center will be beneficial on a macro and micro level across the United States.

1. Nationally, this program will serve as a model for the United States Small Business Development Center network. This program is unique because the centralized tech commercialization office expands the scope of SBDC support.
2. Regionally, this program will enhance opportunities for all businesses and maintain and attract highly educated members of the millennial population and Gen Z in the state. Mississippi's population is in decline and has a large exit population. New opportunities in remote work structure following COVID-19 may also mean there is an increased need to provide professional opportunities within the state. The project will also generate an economic impact through its tech commercialization and the other benefits of building.

2. What is the total cost of the project? Please include funding requested broken out by discrete activity, if applicable.

The requested funding is SEVEN HUNDRED FORTY-TWO THOUSAND, EIGHT HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$742,800).

Salaries	\$390,000.00
Fringe and Benefits	\$129,000.00
Equipment/Supplies	\$50,000.00
Travel	\$20,000.00
Other (Professional Development)	\$30,000.00
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS	\$619,000.00
SBA Indirect Rate 20%	\$123,800.00
TOTAL PROPOSED BUDGET	\$742,800.00

3. If the request does not fully fund the project, describe where the remaining funding comes from to fund the project.

The request fully funds the project. However, the project could be launched as a scaled version using core SBDC funding with increased local and/or state match.

4. If the appropriations committee is not able to provide the full amount of funding requested, can this project start in a limited capacity? {yes/no}

Yes.

5. Is this a new or ongoing project?

New.

6. Please provide a history of funding for the project, including Federal, state, or local government; non-profit; corporate.

The MS-SBDC has been funded since 1981 with strong federal, state, and local support.

In 2020 and 2021 the MS-SBDC secured additional grant funding to increase activity in underserved areas through the following:

1. *(2020) SBA Portable Assistance Grant:* The MS-SBDC was awarded one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00) for 3 years with additional award potential to accelerate business starts in communities affected by plant closures.

2. (2021) USDA DLT Grant: The MS-SBDC was awarded four hundred thousand dollars (\$400,000.00) for equipment to deploy twenty-seven (27) virtual access centers for the purpose of connecting MS-SBDC and other business development resources to individuals and small businesses in underserved and rural communities.

7. Are there matching funds associated with the requested funds? If yes, please list the source(s) and amount(s). Only as needed.

Committed match funds are potentially available through unrecovered indirect fees and local match by current or new Small Business Development Center sub awardees, including in-kind support.

8. Will the funds go to an organization that will make sub-grants of those funds to other organizations? If yes, please list the sub-grantees.

Yes. MS-SBDC, hosted at the University of Mississippi, will utilize other organizations through sub-grants for business counselors to the other three Mississippi Research Consortium (MRC) universities: Mississippi State University, Jackson State University, and University of Southern Mississippi.

9. Is the project a capital project or will the funds support operating costs?

The funding request supports operation costs.

10. Provide the oversight and management structure, including accountability measures, of the project. Who will oversee and be accountable for the administration/management of the project?

The MS SBDC state director will serve as principal investigator for the project and provide oversight and accountability for the administration and management of this project. The MS-SBDC associate state director will provide management of the financial and operations areas and a MS-SBDC assistant director will provide daily management of the project including performance.

The state director reports directly to the dean of the School of Business Administration at the University of Mississippi, who ultimately reports to the university's Chancellor.

Within the University of Mississippi, financial and programmatic oversight for the MS-SBDC program is managed by the University of Mississippi's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Accounting Office, and Internal Audit. Further, the MS-SBDC program falls under the supervision of the U. S. Small Business Administration, which provides financial and programmatic oversight through annual reviews and biennial audits. Additionally, each sub-

award issued under the MS-SBDC program has additional financial and programmatic oversight by its host institution/municipality.

11. What performance standards will be used to evaluate whether the program or project supported by the funds meets its mission?

The program will use Small Business Development Center metrics and an existing database in addition to the University of Mississippi Office of Technology Engagement based on its Economic Development Administration grant. Performance standards will include:

1. Number of connections and usage of research resources within the MRC universities,
2. Build and usage of research resource map, and
3. Events to increase awareness and demonstrate how to access MRC research resources.

12. Has the organization or any potential sub-grantees been subject to sanction or litigation by State, Local, or Federal governments in the past five years? If so, please provide details.

No.

13. Community engagement and support is crucial in determining which projects are worthy of Federal funding. To that end, please describe or include evidence of community support that were compelling factors in the Member's decision to submit this project request. You may include any relevant links to information posted on your website, or online, including letters of support.

The following entities offered letters of support for this proposed project:

1. Mississippi Development Authority (Exhibit 1)
2. Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (Exhibit 2)

Letters of Support:

Exhibit 1: Mississippi Development Authority



State of Mississippi

TATE REEVES
Governor

MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
JOHN ROUNSAVILLE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

March 30, 2021

Ms. Sharon K. Nichols, State Director
Mississippi Small Business Development Center
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677-1848

Dear Ms. Nichols,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to submit a letter of support for the Mississippi Small Business Development Center's (MS-SBDC) proposal to build a system to connect innovation resources available at Mississippi's research universities with the regional universities, private universities, community colleges and small, innovative businesses and start-ups across the state.

Using the MS-SBDC Community Tech Commercialization program to identify the research resources available at the research universities and match them to the needs of the clients seeking assistance will enhance commercialization efforts in our state. The proposed accelerator cohorts and mentoring program will boost the commercialization of research in our state.

Building the bridge between innovative faculty, staff and students of non-research higher education entities as well as private small businesses and startups will accelerate bringing new technologies to market, enhance collaboration and establish a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem. These efforts will lead to the creation of new businesses and jobs to advance Mississippi's economy.

Connecting research university capabilities with the regional public universities, private institutions and community colleges will provide commercialization support for faculty, staff and student innovations. We look forward to working with the MS-SBDC Tech Commercialization Center to build a more robust tech commercialization network for the entire state of Mississippi.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Rounsaville".

John Rounsaville

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Exhibit 2: Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING**

Alfred Rankins, Jr., Ph.D.
Commissioner of Higher Education

March 29, 2021

Ms. Sharon K. Nichols, State Director
Mississippi Small Business Development Center
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677-1848

Dear Ms. Nichols:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to submit a letter of support for the Mississippi Small Business Development Center's (MS-SBDC) proposal to build a system to connect innovation resources available at Mississippi's research universities with the regional universities, private universities, community colleges, and small, innovative businesses and start-ups across the state.

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Connecting research university capabilities with the regional public universities, private institutions and community colleges will provide commercialization support for faculty, staff and student innovations. We look forward to working with the MS-SBDC Tech Commercialization Center to build a more robust tech commercialization network for the entire State of Mississippi.

Respectfully,

Alfred Rankins, Jr., Ph.D.
Commissioner of Higher Education

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