

Mississippi's AI Network Drives the State's Transformation

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Mississippi, long shaped by economic and infrastructural challenges, continues to face one of the nation's highest poverty rates, with about one in five residents living below the poverty line. Today, however, the state is positioning itself for revitalization through artificial intelligence (AI). Driving this effort is the Mississippi Artificial Intelligence Network (MAIN), the first statewide AI initiative in the United States. Big tech companies such as Intel, AWS, and NVIDIA have partnered with MAIN to upskill and reskill Mississippi's workforce in AI. We asked Dr. Kollin Napier, Director of MAIN, about the background and goals of the initiative and the impact of these partnerships on the state's economy.



AN AI TRAINING NETWORK CONNECTING COMPANIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The Mississippi AI Network (MAIN) began with a grant designed to help the state's workforce adapt to the AI era. In 2023, AccelerateMS, the state's workforce development agency, awarded \$1 million to Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) to create and lead MAIN in collaboration with higher education institutions across Mississippi.

Today, participation extends beyond public and private colleges to include K-12 schools, state agencies, and private companies, all working together to advance AI talent development and industrial revitalization. MAIN has become the hub that integrates Mississippi's AI efforts into a unified framework, connecting education with industry collaboration.

"AI CATAPULT": REGIONALLY DRIVEN INNOVATION

MAIN partners with all public universities and community colleges. Rather than the state imposing a uniform program, each institution has autonomy to establish AI labs tailored to local industry needs. These labs are supported by funding from AccelerateMS and curriculum from industry partners, with MAIN facilitating and connecting them through a statewide network. For example, MGCCC works with businesses to provide practical AI training, including non-credit courses in areas such as manufacturing and cybersecurity. The college has also introduced a new for-credit AI and Data Technology program, giving students a pathway to more advanced study and career opportunities. Other institutions, including Mississippi State University, have established new bachelor's and master's programs in AI, while

Belhaven University now offers a Master of AI, advancing comprehensive AI education linked to industry. Additionally, Mississippi Delta Community College has used MAIN funding to build an AI lab outfitted with Apple hardware and software, giving rural students access to advanced tools.

Ensuring rural areas are not left behind is also a critical challenge. Partnerships with institutions like Alcorn State University and Coahoma Community College expand access to AI education and resources for rural residents. AI implementation is tailored to each region's needs. Napier refers to these partnerships as "AI catapults," explaining that they enable even smaller institutions to contribute to the state's overall AI strategy through industry collaboration.

Napier Speaking at Alcorn State University on Rural Inclusion of AI



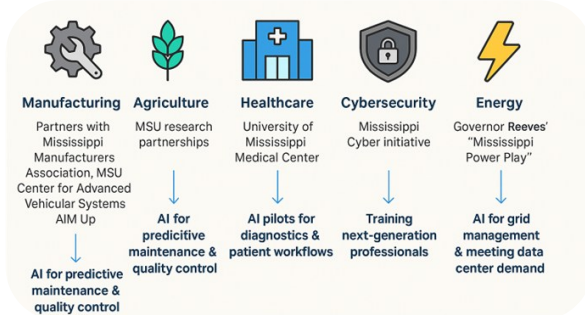
Source: MAIN

INDUSTRY COLLABORATION IN FIVE PRIORITY AREAS

MAIN's strategy focuses on advancing AI adoption across five state-defined priority sectors:

Manufacturing, Agriculture, Healthcare, Defense & Cybersecurity, and Energy.

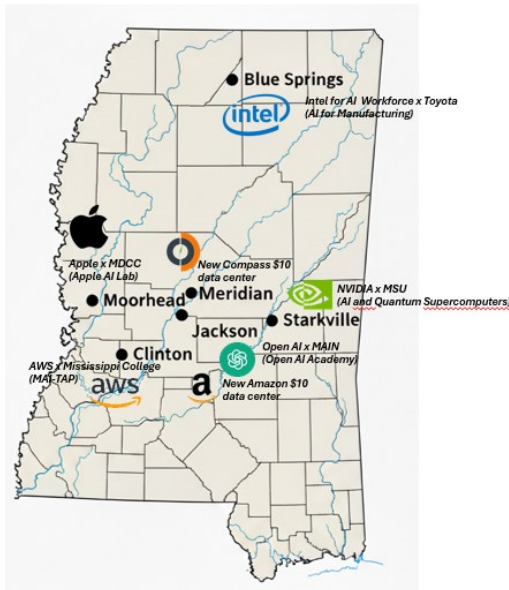
MAIN's Five Priority Sectors



Source: WCORE

At the same time, Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Compass Datacenters have each announced \$10 billion projects, while AVAIO Digital has committed \$6 billion for additional data center development. These investments underscore the importance of a skilled workforce and cross-sector collaboration. MAIN provides the framework for education and industry to connect in each priority area, ensuring that Mississippi's people and institutions are prepared to meet the opportunities created by this growth.

Big Tech Projects in Mississippi



Source: WCORE

WHY BIG TECH IS GATHERING

From its launch, MAIN partnered with Intel to deliver the "AI for Workforce" curriculum across higher education, making it available to nearly 150,000 faculty, staff, and students in Mississippi. MAIN continually expands its reach, with more than 3,000 K-12 educators engaging in the program to prepare the next generation of learners. In addition, over 5,000 employees across sectors such as healthcare and manufacturing are participating in AI training to strengthen workplace skills.

Although Intel's curriculum is offered in 39 states, its impact depends on local adoption. In Mississippi, for example, workers at Toyota's assembly plant have applied "AI for Workforce" training tailored to manufacturing, helping integrate AI directly onto the factory floor. This success has positioned Mississippi as a credible partner for larger opportunities.

Toyota Mississippi Assembly Plant



Source: The Flash List¹

AWS is expanding its presence in Mississippi through the Mississippi AI Talent Accelerator Program (MAI-TAP), a \$9.1 million partnership with AccelerateMS and the Mississippi Development Authority. The program provides grants to institutions of higher learning to launch new AI programs, endow faculty positions, and establish labs in areas ranging from data center management and maritime innovation to AI in law and business. By aligning education with industry-driven needs, MAI-TAP is strengthening the state's AI workforce pipeline and preparing both students and educators for the digital economy.

NVIDIA recently entered into a memorandum of understanding with Mississippi to expand AI education, strengthen workforce development, and promote research collaboration. Through its Deep Learning Institute, NVIDIA has partnered with MAIN to provide certifications, hands-on training, and curricula in AI, machine learning, and data science. The collaboration prioritizes access for rural and underserved communities and will advance innovation in key sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, energy, and defense, positioning Mississippi as a hub for AI-driven growth.²

Furthermore, OpenAI, the creators of ChatGPT, co-hosted a workshop with MAIN at Jackson State University in July 2025, introducing educators and students to practical applications of generative AI and promoting its adoption. “These partnerships,” Dr. Napier stressed, “were not accidents. We marketed Mississippi. We showed them what we had already accomplished and invited them to be part of it.”

A MODEL SPREADING TO OTHER STATES AND ABROAD

Currently, Mississippi is the only state in the U.S. with a comprehensive AI network uniting its business community, school system, and state government agencies. This model is drawing significant attention from other states, including Maryland, California, Texas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Tennessee, with legislators and educators actively engaging with MAIN at national and regional events.

According to Dr. Napier, inquiries are pouring in from those wanting to “learn how to implement AI in a balanced way that leads to economic development.”

Furthermore, in 2025, Mississippi’s leadership in AI was spotlighted at the Southeastern United States–Canadian Provinces (SEUS–CP)³ conference, where Dr. Napier represented MAIN by connecting with international partners and shaping dialogue on trade, innovation, and workforce development among six Southern states and seven Canadian provinces.

FROM DECLINE TO GROWTH: MISSISSIPPI’S AI NETWORK

Mississippi has experienced a population decline of approximately 45,000 people over the past decade,⁴ long grappling with population outflow. However, industry collaboration and job creation initiatives centered around MAIN are positioned to help reverse this trend.

The state’s long-term plan, “Mississippi’s Multiplan 2040,” makes an ambitious projection:⁵ increasing the population by about 19% by 2040, expanding it from 3 million to 3.5 million. Additionally, a Mississippi State University task force also emphasizes that “attractive employment opportunities are the key to stopping population outflow,” with MAIN playing a central role.⁶

Dr. Napier stresses that “economic development cannot happen without workforce development,” noting that AI is not merely a means of economic generation but has become a symbol of hope for the state’s residents. The future of AI is not being shaped solely in Silicon Valley. MAIN demonstrates that it is being forged right now in classrooms, factories, farms, and hospitals across the American South.

MAIN x OpenAI Academy Workshop



Source: MAIN

State of Mississippi



Source: Shutterstock⁷

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.theflashlist.com/vendors/automotive/toyota/2018/corolla/investment-announced-for-toyota-motor-manufacturing-mississippi.html>

² <https://www.hpc.msstate.edu/research-points/>

³ <https://seus-cp.com/>

⁴ <https://mississippitoday.org/2025/07/15/faq-mississippi-brain-drain-crisis/>

⁵ <https://mdot.ms.gov/documents/Planning/Transportation%20Asset%20Management%20/2040%20Multiplan/2040%20MULTIPLAN%20Final%20Report.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.dafvm.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/2025-08/Population-Change-and-Community-Vitality-Summary%20-%20206.30.25.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/jackson-mississippi-usa-april-23-2024-2484272465>

Interviewee



Dr. Kollin Napier serves as Director of the Mississippi Artificial Intelligence Network (MAIN). He leads efforts to expand AI literacy, workforce development, and economic growth, delivering free, cutting-edge AI training to thousands across education and industry. A recognized leader in AI innovation and workforce transformation, Dr. Napier was named 2024 Mississippian of the Year (Association of Information Technology Professionals), received the 2025 Rising Star Manager Award (American Association of Community Colleges), was selected as a 2025 Reveille 25 honoree (Mississippi State University), and earned the 2025 Hugh I. Peck Research Award (Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools) for his contributions to AI education and research.

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