



Workforce Leadership Academy Participant Overview

What is the Jackson Leadership Academy?

City of Jackson and the Aspen Institute, and local stakeholders are partnering to create a Workforce Leadership Academy for workforce development professionals in Jackson, Mississippi. The purpose of this Academy is to develop a network of workforce development leaders who are not only able to lead their own programs or organizations, but who can also work collaboratively to build effective workforce systems.

Workforce Leadership Academies create and support peer-learning communities of workforce leaders from nonprofit organizations, business associations, community colleges and universities, union-based training efforts, and public agencies. Participants in Academies work with leading practitioners from around the country, learn about practical planning tools, and have the rare opportunity to reflect on and develop effective workforce strategies to strengthen their local workforce system. Participants also engage in leadership development activities, including a 360-degree leadership assessment. Fellows are selected in a competitive application process and are typically senior-level managers with authority to implement program changes. Alumni of the Academies are part of the Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunity Fellows Network](#).

What challenges and opportunities does the Academy address?

Workforce development has been shown to help individuals prepare for and connect to better quality jobs than they might secure on their own. However, effective workforce development strategies are complex. They frequently involve multiple partners and require collaboration, for example, to work across organizations or to engage with employers about their workforce practices in new ways.

Successful initiatives require strong organizations with capable leaders who understand the complexities of their labor markets, bring together disparate funding sources to support their strategy, and collaborate with partners, including employers, local government, and community organizations. They deal with systemic barriers to employment opportunity that their constituents encounter and address disparate outcomes that job seekers face due to race, ethnicity, and gender. At the same time, senior workforce positions can be difficult to fill with qualified and diverse candidates, and few training programs exist to support professionals in the field. The Academy responds to this need by building local and regional workforce leadership and capacity to strengthen local workforce systems and advance equitable opportunities for workers.

What are the goals of the Academy?

The Academy will address the following key goals:

- Support a 12-month fellowship among leaders from across the workforce development system including leaders from nonprofit organizations, business associations, community colleges and universities, union-based training efforts, and public (city and state) agencies.
- Provide a forum to work collaboratively to identify local and regional systems-based challenges and create shared solutions.
- Build the capacity of participating institutions to collaborate more deeply with employers and other strategic partners.



- Deepen skills and competencies of workforce practitioners to lead within their organizations and work collaboratively with stakeholders across the local workforce system.

How did the Academy get started?

Since 2012, the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program has collaborated with local and regional organizations to offer Workforce Leadership Academies. Recent academies have taken place in Seattle, Maryland, Toronto, Detroit, and Hartford. These academies evolved from the Economic Opportunities Program's long-running national Sector Skills Academy. The national Sector Skills Academy has documented success in supporting workforce leaders to develop and implement effective workforce strategies. In a 2015 survey of more than 200 national alumni, respondents indicated that the Academy prepared them to effect meaningful change at the local level, create and strengthen partnerships with critical stakeholders, and strategize beyond their individual organizations for policy and systems change. The national Academy also provided participants access to a unique and valuable network of peers.

What are systems changes?

Long-term, sustainable solutions to workforce challenges often require strategies designed to overcome structural issues faced by workers. The Workforce Leadership Academy draws on the Economic Opportunities Program's systems change framework. "Systems change" refers to:

- **Industry practices** that shape the way individuals are recruited, hired, trained, promoted and compensated within the workplace.
- The **education and training infrastructure** (including Workforce Investment Boards, community-based training providers, community colleges, union or apprenticeship programs).
- **Public policy**, including rules, regulations, and funding streams related to the workforce and education systems as well as those that influence business practices.

Using practical tools, Fellows will explore strategies focused on systems changes, including "raising the floor" and "building career ladders" for workers; responding to industry needs within and across sectors; and navigating the workforce policy and funding environment. Fellows also bring systems thinking to issues of race, ethnicity, and gender, including how these impact opportunities in the labor market and service delivery strategies. Fellows have an opportunity to step back from their day-to-day experiences to reflect on their own leadership style and the role of their organization within the local system.

For more information on systems change, please see the Economic Opportunities Program's paper [Sectoral Strategies for Low-Income Workers: Lessons from the Field](#).

Who is qualified to participate?

Appropriate applicants are:

- Located and working within Jackson, MS.
- Workforce development representatives working within nonprofit organizations, business associations, community colleges and universities, union-based training efforts, and public agencies.
- In a position of leadership and decision-making authority related to workforce development efforts, with the capacity and ability to execute strategies on behalf of their organization.



- Engaged in or planning workforce development efforts in Jackson, MS related to connecting workers to quality jobs and/or career pathways.
- Interested in designing and implementing effective strategies to strengthen their local workforce system.
- Committed to achieving equity across race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
- Eager for the opportunity to collaborate with others in their local workforce system, to reflect on their current work, to explore leadership practices, and to gain feedback from colleagues.

Inclusivity and diversity are core values of the Jackson Leadership Academy. Applicants of color are strongly encouraged to apply. The cohort will be established to represent diversity of organization type, industry focus, as well as race, ethnicity, and gender.

What is my commitment?

Each Fellow is expected to engage in 12 days of in-person sessions as well as continued learning, application, and collaboration between sessions. Participants are asked to commit to the process in writing and agree to fully participate in:

An Academy **opening three-day retreat (scheduled for March 25 -March 27, 2020)**. The opening retreat requires two overnight stays at Eagle Ridge Conference Center.

A series of five full-day workshops, occurring approximately every six weeks, scheduled between April 2020 and October 2020. These sessions will take place at the Hilton Garden Inn Jackson Downtown:

- April 29, 2020
- June 3, 2020
- July 22, 2020
- September 2, 2020
- October 14, 2020
- Continued learning, application, and collaboration between workshop sessions (self-directed time of up to two hours between sessions as well as nine to 12 hours of collaborative project work across a small team of Fellows.
- **A closing three-day retreat (scheduled for December 9-11, 2020)** that requires two overnight stays at the Eagle Ridge Conference Center
- **A final, one-day reflective session on January 20, 2021** that includes a Collaborative Learning Lab presentation to local and regional workforce development stakeholders at the Hilton Garden Inn Jackson Downtown.
- Fellows commit to participate fully and actively in all Jackson Workforce Leadership Academy events, both to enhance their individual experience and to contribute to peer learning for the group.

The opening and closing retreats will take place at the Eagle Ridge Conference Center. All one-day sessions will take place at the Hilton Garden Inn Jackson Downtown. These sessions will run a full day, typically 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.



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Is there a cost to participate?

The program cost per participant is \$500, from the organization where the Fellow works which assists with meeting costs and program materials. Financial assistance is available on a limited basis to those with financial need to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation.

Application Process and Deadline

The Jackson Workforce Leadership Academy application deadline is **Friday, February 7, 2020 at 5:00p.m. CT**

Applications will be reviewed and approved by members of the Jackson Workforce Leadership Academy Local Advisory Council. All applicants will be notified of the status of their applications by Wednesday, February 26, 2020.

The electronic application can be accessed and completed [here](#).

A PDF version of the application questions is available [here](#).

Tips for completing the online application:

1. View the application PDF before beginning your application.
2. Draft your responses in a separate document and paste them into the application to avoid losing your work.
3. Save your work by clicking “submit”. You will receive a copy of your application and be able to edit your work until the deadline on February 7, 2020.

The materials for submission include:

- A completed application submitted online
- Email the following completed forms to jackson.mswla@gmail.com
 - Your resume and/or link to your LinkedIn page emailed to
 - Organizational chart
 - Letter of reference from a supervisor or external collaboration partner
 - A Commitment to Participate Form signed by you and your supervisor

Academy Facilitation Team

Dr. Robert Blaine
Jan Mangana
Jessica Nelson
Nafeesa Edges
Mya Lee
John Cooper



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The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington DC. Its mission is to spark intellectual inquiry and exchange, create a diverse worldwide community of leaders committed to the greater good, and provide a nonpartisan forum for reaching solutions on vital public policy issues. The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program advances promising strategies and policies to help low- and moderate- income Americans connect to and thrive in a changing economy. Over its 25 years of work, the Economic Opportunities Program has focused on expanding individuals' opportunities to connect to quality work, to start businesses, and to build assets and economic stability.

Jackson Local Advisory Council Members

Ms. Ivey Allen, Foundation for the Mid South
 Dr. Robert Blaine, CAO, City of Jackson
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 Dr. Ira Murray, President, United Way of the Capitol Area
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 Mr. Alexander Washington, Workforce Development and Diversity Specialist, Entergy Nuclear
 Gen. A. Leon Collins, Minact, Inc.

Need additional information?

If you have any questions about the Jackson Workforce Leadership Academy, your eligibility to apply, or the application process, please email:

Jessica Nelson
 Mobility Innovation Team
 Lead for America Hometown Fellow
 Office of the Chief Administrator,
 City of Jackson
 (713) 858-1449

Nafeesa Edges
 Mobility Innovation Team
 Lead for America Hometown Fellow
 Office of the Chief Administrator,
 City of Jackson
 (202) 304-4362

If you experience technical difficulties with the application submission, please email:

Tony Mastria, Digital Communications Associate
 The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

tony.mastria@aspennst.org