

Mississippi AI Collaborative Celebrates Breakthrough Year

The Southern Spark Conference as a Model for Statewide AI Innovation



Jackson, Mississippi Jun 19, 2025 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - The Mississippi AI Collaborative (MAIC), one of the first statewide initiatives in the U.S. dedicated to generative AI education, workforce development, and civic access, celebrated a major milestone this June with the success of the Southern Spark Conference and the release of its 2025 Annual Impact Brief.

Founded in May 2023, MAIC is charting a bold path forward by building a comprehensive, publicly accountable model for state-level AI engagement; one now gaining traction nationwide as a template for inclusive innovation.

A Transformative Year of Impact

In just two years, the Mississippi AI Collaborative has reached more than 3,000 people statewide through training, events, and hands-on learning. The Collaborative's dual strategy, pairing educator upskilling with workforce development, has proven effective at every level.

Over 1,200 Mississippi educators have received training through the AI Educator Fellowship, integrating AI tools into classrooms from elementary schools to colleges. The Mississippi AI Collaborative utilizes a "teach the teacher" model to encourage networked participation. Participants reported stronger student engagement, increased creativity, and confidence using AI to personalize learning experiences.

Meanwhile, more than 1,300 AI certificates have been awarded to students, professionals, and community members. MAIC's AI-Thon introduced thousands to generative AI tools like ChatGPT and

Copilot through real-world problem solving. In one student's words, "I learned I could use AI to help my community, not just for fun but to actually solve problems".

The AI Agency: Workforce Development in Action

MAIC's AI Agency Apprenticeship Program pairs student talent with small business and nonprofit needs. Apprentices, primarily recruited from Mississippi's HBCUs and community colleges, receive hands-on training and then deliver real AI solutions, from chatbots and automation systems to branding and digital marketing support.

To date, the AI Agency has partnered with Jackson State University and Alcorn State University to support over 75 organizations and train 35+ student apprentices, producing more than 100 AI deliverables in sectors ranging from healthcare to retail. One client remarked, "I never had access to this kind of support before. They helped me with everything, from branding to web design, and even communicating with insurers".

The program also includes MAIC's Catalyst Accelerator, which has helped more than 60 businesses adopt AI tools in the past year. Across participants, 100% reported business improvements, and over 80% said they felt confident continuing to use AI after completing the program.

Southern Spark Conference: Building a Movement

The 2025 Southern Spark Conference marked a high point in MAIC's statewide engagement efforts. Held in Jackson, the event welcomed over 200 attendees, including representatives from 90 organizations and 80+ cities, for 48 sessions over two days.

Keynote speakers included Shaina Glass (Computer Science Teachers Association), Bob Buseck (Mississippi Coding Academies), and David Collins (Red Beans Consulting / Innovate Mississippi). Their talks, alongside dozens of breakout sessions and networking events, emphasized both the technical promise and ethical responsibilities of AI adoption.

Attendees praised the event as "inclusive," "hands-on," and "refreshingly practical." More than 90% rated the experience as "excellent," citing its focus on real-world applications and diverse perspectives.

A Blueprint for Other States

MAIC is increasingly seen as a model for how states can build comprehensive, community-centered AI ecosystems. While many initiatives across the U.S. are experimenting with AI, MAIC stands out for its public-serving structure, statewide reach, and focus on generative AI as both a skill and a civic tool.

The Collaborative is actively developing a replication toolkit for other regions, including guidance on launching educator fellowships, running AI-thons, establishing AI agencies, and forging strong public-private partnerships. MAIC's impact brief outlines how its approach can be tailored to serve different communities while maintaining core principles of inclusion and accessibility.

Looking Ahead

As MAIC plans for 2026, it will continue scaling its educator network, expanding regional AI Agency hubs, and launching MississippiGPT, a public-facing AI assistant designed for use in education, business, and civic engagement.

It will also continue to grow its policy partnerships, support AI adoption in historically underserved communities, and develop tools and research that inform responsible AI implementation statewide.

“AI adoption isn’t just a technical challenge, it’s a relational one,” said MAIC Chair David Collins. “We’ve built a model that starts with trust and ends with opportunity.”

To learn more about the Mississippi AI Collaborative, visit MississippiAI.org



Media Contact

Mississippi AI Collaborative

*****@mississippiai.org

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