

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE - OFFICE OF ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT

MISSISSIPPI DEFENSE DIVERSIFICATION INITIATIVE

The University of Southern Mississippi

Chad R. Miller, Ph.D. – Principal Investigator

Shannon L. Campbell, Ph.D. – Co-Principal Investigator

Andy Kilgore, LTC(R), MBA – Program Director

The University of Southern Mississippi was selected by the United States Department of Defense's (DoD) Office of Economic Adjustment to support economic diversification efforts for defense contractors and communities in Mississippi and to support national security technology acceleration. This **Mississippi Defense Diversification Initiative** (MDDI) includes the development of three pilot models to aid regions whose economic health is dependent on defense programs. Military bases and defense contractors, along with their supply chains, are a major part of many local economies. To assist defense-dependent companies and communities, MDDI will 1) provide economic diversification technical assistance for Mississippi companies and communities, 2) create a mechanism for technology transfer related to defense intellectual property into new economic opportunities, and 3) create a defense community specialization for the Master of Science in Economic Development program.

Technical assistance for Mississippi companies and communities include cataloging existing assets that can be relied upon to support implementation of a statewide comprehensive strategy (market, supply chain, workforce analyses, etc). MDDI is building a network of interrelated defense companies through business-to-business opportunities to encourage diversification into other defense and non-defense markets. For example, the MDDI team connected two defense contractors: Madison-based L3 Vertex Aerospace and Tupelo-based Hyperion Technology Group. The introduction between the two companies focused on improving production efficiency by moving away from manual calibrations at L3 to automated calibrations for remanufactured parts.

The MDDI team is assisting defense-dependent communities in planning short-term and long-term **economic development strategies** designed to encourage data-driven, resiliency-focused action planning. For example, the team is providing research and data to Vicksburg-Warren County Chamber of Commerce to prepare for an upcoming strategic planning process. The new strategic plan will place emphasis on technology-led economic development strategies.

USM is providing **support for expansion of DoD's National Security Technology Accelerator** as a means of encouraging a greater number of entrepreneurs and small businesses to transfer technology and innovations into commercial opportunities. A new MDDI website will connect to the national network and align the defense technology innovation community of practice to integrate U.S. DoD stakeholders, the traditional defense industry, startup and venture capital communities, and the academic research community. A component of technology commercialization includes USM's adoption of the Hacking-for-Defense model to encourage solving of day-to-day defense warfighter problems using new innovations and technologies. Solutions not only address defense problems, but they can then be deployable into commercial markets. University students learn how to innovate and deploy solutions to solve national security problems that can be used in commercial markets.

USM is diversifying its Master of Science in Economic Development degree program to offer a fully online option for working professionals and military personnel seeking to transition into civilian employment. Professional economic developers are in high demand, and the degree program is expanding its course content to include an emphasis in defense sector economic diversification.

