



In 2007, the Gulf Coast Business Council Research Foundation launched the Masters Leadership Program aimed at furthering professional development and community leadership among business leaders to drive public policy discussion on key or emerging issues affecting the business community in Coastal Mississippi. The program brings together a wide array of coast leaders to become the regional “think tank” for one year. Each year the class learns, challenges assumptions, and develops solutions with a goal of making the Gulf Coast region the most livable place in the United States.

The 2026 Masters Leadership Program will take on the ambitious task of crafting a regional plan for Coastal Mississippi powered by artificial intelligence and grounded in the plans our cities, counties, and regional organizations have already adopted. Our region is positioned for economic growth but faces complex challenges in economic development, housing, transportation, and workforce readiness. By using new AI tools and existing regional plans, we will shape a regionally aligned path forward. If you are eager to gain hands-on AI training and collaborate with fellow participants to develop strategies that support long-term growth and improve quality of life for Coastal Mississippi, then this year’s Masters Program is for you.

The Masters program consists of monthly sessions held from February through October. These sessions are designed to develop and enhance critical leadership skills of Gulf Coast leaders. The theme-based program creates a practical application forum where the curriculum is applied to build individual leadership skills and enhance group leadership capacities. The 2026 curriculum includes the following study areas:

- Aim to align shared priorities across Coastal Mississippi
- 101 instructions on Artificial Intelligence and hands-on application
- Identifying comprehensive plans already adopted in Coastal Mississippi
- Identify issues like economic development, transportation, housing and workforce
- Influencing political will & gaining public support
- Develop a regional plan to support long-term growth of the region

The culmination of these sessions and field study will result in the class developing a position paper on recommended solutions and courses of action that will be presented to the Gulf Coast Business Council.

The class will have the opportunity to meet and dialogue with leaders and strategists with expertise in different areas with the goal of developing solutions to improve our Coast. In addition, the class will have the opportunity to sustain its work after 2026, with future Masters Program classes building on the work of each of the preceding classes.

The Masters Program does not seek to replace or replicate other leadership programs in each of the three Coast counties but is designed to enhance the skills developed there at a deeper and more engaged level.

Instructions

Type or print in black ink. Please complete each section fully. Limit answers to the space available. Application must be signed by both applicant and employer or sponsoring organization (as applicable) and received by the GULF COAST BUSINESS COUNCIL, 11975 Seaway Road, Suite A-180 Gulfport, MS 39503 by close of business on **February 4, 2026**.

Selection Criteria

Participation in the Masters Leadership Program is open to persons living or working in one of the three Coast counties of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson who possess a demonstrated ability to critically examine issues on a regional basis and actively engage in efforts important to the region. Applicants should have a demonstrated record of leadership in their respective businesses or other organizations. No more than 25 individuals will be selected to participate in the program. Applicants not selected this year may be nominated in subsequent years.

Participants will be chosen by a confidential selection committee based upon the information completed on this application. The committee will seek a diverse class but will not select participants based upon a predetermined apportionment system.

Applicants must have the full support of the organization or corporation they represent. Full tuition is \$2,000 per selected member and is due within 30 days of selection. Scholarships are available on a limited basis and are capped at 40% (\$800).

Attendance at and engagement in each of the eight sessions is expected. Those who fail to attend or to actively participate may be asked to withdraw, with no refund of tuition.



Office Use Only:

Received

**MASTERS PROGRAM
CONFIDENTIAL APPLICATION**

I. PERSONAL PROFILE

Date _____

Name _____

Last

First

Middle

Business Name _____

Business _____

Address _____

Number

Street

City

Zip Code

Cell Phone _____

Business
Phone

Email _____

Address _____

Length of Residence on Gulf Coast

Area _____

II. EDUCATION

(Begin with college(s), advanced degrees and/or specialized training.)

A. Name of Institution _____ Degree _____ Major _____

B. Special Awards

C. Extracurricular Activities: (Leadership positions held, special honors and awards received during school years.)

III. PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Employer _____

Type of Organization _____

Title _____

A. Briefly describe your responsibilities in your employment:

B. What do you consider your highest professional achievement to date?

C. Business/Professional Affiliations (if any):
(Not including civic organizations, public office or political activities)

Name or Group	Positions Held or Assignments	Period of Affiliation
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IV. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A. Include community, civic, religious, political, government, social, athletic, or other activities. Do not include business/professional activities.

Organization _____

Assignment/
Position _____

Describe
Responsibilities _____

Organization _____

Assignment/
Position _____

Describe
Responsibilities _____

IV. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (continued)

Organizati

on

Assignment/

Position

Describe

Responsibilities

V. COMMITMENT

To graduate from the MASTERS PROGRAM, a participant is expected to attend and engage in all sessions. Most of the below sessions are expected to last nearly a full day.

Event Date Purpose

Sessions generally are scheduled 8:30-4:00

Session I

February 18, 2026

Orientation

Session II March 18, 2026 Regional Overview

Session III April 15, 2026 Identify Key Stakeholders

Session IV May 20, 2026 Identify & Assess Needs

Session V June 17-19, 2026 Model City/Organization Visit

Session VI July 15, 2026 Trip Debrief

**Session VII August 19, 2026
Influence Political Will & Public Support**

Session VIII

Session IX

September 16, 2026

October 21, 2026

Prioritizing Program Implementation Steps

Finalize Deliverables, White Paper, etc.

AGREEMENT:

I understand the purpose of the MASTERS PROGRAM and if I am selected, I will devote the time and resources necessary to actively engage in each session. I understand the above commitment and agree to be bound by them in signing this application.

Applicant Signature

Date

VII. SCHOLARSHIP NEED

If you are requesting a tuition scholarship, please briefly describe the reason for your request and the amount requested. The maximum scholarship available is 40% of tuition (\$800) balance of \$1,200 to be paid by participant.

Amount Requested: \$ _____

Reason: _____

Applicant Signature (if requesting scholarship)

Date

VII. EMPLOYER COMMITMENT (if applicable)

This application has the approval of this organization and the applicant has our full support which includes the time required to participate in the program.

Firm _____

Signature _____

Title _____

VIII. TUITION

If accepted into the MASTERS PROGRAM, you or your employer/sponsor will be responsible for the tuition fee of **\$2,000** which covers all program costs, unless scholarship is awarded. (Costs include meals, outside area travel, required books, other reading material, supplies and graduation recognition) Checks should be made payable to "**Gulf Coast Business Council**" and mailed to the address below.

APPLICATIONS SHOULD BE MAILED OR

DELIVERED TO: GULF COAST BUSINESS COUNCIL
RESEARCH FOUNDATION
11975 SEAWAY ROAD, SUITE A180
GULFPORT, MS 39503

OR EMAILED TO: jhart@msgcbc.org