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USPTO selects Georgia and Alabama HBCU and MSI innovation ecosystems for Southeast Community Engagement Office expansion

Regionally specialized innovation ecosystem partnerships to serve as nodes of university research excellence and engagement with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions

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ALEXANDRIA, VA — America's Innovation Agency, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), in furtherance of its statutory obligations under the 2022 UAIA, today announces the selection of Georgia and Alabama innovation ecosystem partnerships in response to its recent RFC to further the agency's Community Engagement Office expansion to include the Southeast region. The selection of Georgia and Alabama will focus particularly on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs).

Beginning with the Mountain West region announcements of Montana and Utah Community Engagement Offices, the USPTO reimagined its university partnership footprint to build an agile model of meeting innovators where they are and more importantly, driving commercialization, manufacturing and marketplace adoption.

The Southeast Community Engagement Office expansion will include regionally specialized innovation ecosystem partnerships anchored in Georgia and Alabama, reflecting distinct regional strengths spanning commercialization, entrepreneurship, branding, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, engineering, and strategic technologies.

As robust engines of invention and innovation, HBCUs receive more than $810 million of federal research and development funding according to the National Science Foundation's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NSF-NCSES). Indeed, innovation at HBCUs is vast, cutting across a wide spectrum of science and technologies including medicine, engineering, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, defense technologies, and the physical sciences.

Across America, university research and breakthroughs fuel our nation's leadership not only in innovation but also in commercialization, manufacturing, and technology. The innovation ecosystem partnership announced today help connect HBCUs and Minority-Serving Institutions directly to the engines of entrepreneurship, advanced manufacturing, strategic technologies, and economic growth. The partnerships announced today provide robust hubs where researchers, innovators and funders can help translate research into real-world impact and in turn drive the next generation of American ingenuity and stronger infrastructure to ensure American innovation is developed, commercialized, and scaled in the United States.

The Georgia and Alabama innovation ecosystem partnerships will carry out the strategic direction of the USPTO's Office of Public Engagement and ensure the USPTO's initiatives and programs are tailored to each community's unique ecosystem of industries and stakeholders.

The ecosystem partnerships will work closely with intellectual property practitioners and services, startups, commercialization initiatives, and job-growth accelerators. They will also collaborate with local STEM organizations on outreach and educational programming.

Georgia

In Georgia, the USPTO will work with universities in the Atlanta University Center Consortium (AUCC – Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Spelman College) and the Center for Black Entrepreneurship (CBE - founded by Spelman, Morehouse, Black Economic Alliance Foundation, and Bank of America) which has a national reach with its experiential Launch Incubator for Traction (LIFT) program. USPTO will work with the AUC-GRANTED Initiative which has a collaborative approach to expand the research support and service capacity including technology transfer.

The Georgia ecosystem partnership will emphasize commercialization, entrepreneurship, branding, startup ecosystems, and innovation acceleration.

"Clark Atlanta University is honored to be selected for this USPTO innovation ecosystem partnership, which recognizes the critical role HBCUs play in America's innovation leadership — from research and invention to commercialization and economic impact," said Clark Atlanta University President George T. French, Jr., Ph.D. Dr. French continued, "For too long, HBCU innovators have faced barriers in accessing resources to protect intellectual property and scale breakthrough ideas into viable enterprises. This partnership directly addresses that gap by connecting our researchers, students, and faculty to the full spectrum of support — from patent protection to startup acceleration to manufacturing pathways," French adds. "This is about ensuring HBCU-driven innovation translates into ventures, jobs, and wealth creation while strengthening America's competitive edge globally."

Dr. Mark Lee, SVP for Academic Affairs and Provost at Spelman College said, "Spelman has a long-standing legacy of fostering academic excellence and empowering Black women to lead and innovate on a global scale. This partnership with the USPTO provides our students and the broader Atlanta University Center community with vital resources to protect their intellectual property, cultivate their entrepreneurial talents, and turn groundbreaking ideas into real-world impact. Our focus remains entirely on equipping the next generation of innovators with the tools they need to thrive and build lasting legacies."

Kendrick Brown, PhD, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs offered, "At Morehouse, we prepare men not only to lead in their fields but to own what they create. The USPTO's investment in the

Atlanta University Center Consortium reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that HBCU students, researchers, and entrepreneurs have direct access to the intellectual property systems that protect innovation and generate economic opportunity. This partnership strengthens our capacity to connect academic excellence to real-world commercialization, and we are proud to be part of it."

Dr. Grant Warner, the Executive Director of the CBE who has dedicated his career to implementing new opportunities for Black entrepreneurs, particularly at HBCUs said, "It is an honor to be selected as a site for a USPTO Community Engagement Office engagement partnership. It will allow us to take our programming to the next level with respect to both innovation and branding."

Alabama

In Alabama, the USPTO will work with Alabama A&M University and the broader Huntsville-area innovation ecosystem, including stakeholders connected to aerospace, advanced manufacturing, defense technologies, space commercialization, and STEM workforce development. Huntsville serves as one of the nation's leading strategic technology corridors with substantial federal research, engineering, and commercialization activity connected to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, Redstone Arsenal, and the region's advanced manufacturing and aerospace sectors.

"Alabama A&M University has a long-standing commitment to building partnerships that advance innovation, research, and economic opportunity. Establishing a U.S. Patent and Trademark Office presence on campus will provide students, faculty, and small businesses with greater access to intellectual property resources and expertise. Such access also serves to drive economic growth in this region and transform research into real-world solutions," stated AAMU President Dr. Daniel K. Wims.

The Alabama ecosystem partnership will emphasize strategic technologies, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, engineering, and commercialization connected to federal and national-security-adjacent innovation ecosystems.

"A USPTO presence at AAAMU creates new opportunities for our students, faculty, and businesses. It also more effectively moves innovative products and services from offices and laboratories to the marketplace," said Dr. Majed El-Dweik, Vice President of Research and Economic Development.

These offices will collaborate with existing Southeast-based USPTO program participants like the USPTO Patent Pro Bono Program which provides free patent legal assistance. Georgia PATENTS (Georgia) and Gulf South Invents are the local program participants. The USPTO also imagines that the agency's existing HBCU-based Law School Clinics in the Southeast at North Carolina Central University School of Law and the Southern University Law Center will be able to support and enable these innovation ecosystems.

The purposes of these ecosystem partnerships, as stated in the UAIA of 2022, include:

1. To partner with local community organizations, institutions of higher education, research institutions, and businesses to create tailored community-based programs that provide education regarding the patent system and promote the career benefits of innovation and entrepreneurship; and
2. To educate prospective inventors, including individual inventors, small businesses, veterans, low-income populations, students, rural populations, and any geographic group of innovators that the Director may determine to be underrepresented in patent filings, about all public and private resources available to potential patent applicants, including the patent pro bono program.

The decision on the Georgia and Alabama ecosystem partnerships was based on the following criteria:

1. Robust research activity and graduate-level programs of study in areas which lead to innovations, IP, and IP-intensive companies/industries;
2. Availability and concentration of existing commercialization and business development resources (Innovation Ecosystem); and

Ability to support all innovators, as set forth in UAIA, Sec. 104(b)(3).

Today's announcement furthers the USPTO's plan to develop and advance specialized engagement partners as engines of opportunity, growth and global competitiveness. With specialized nodes of university research excellence as active partners, the USPTO is building a nationwide infrastructure comprising nodes of American ingenuity with start-up, university, incubator, manufacturing, advance technology and innovation-ecosystem communities as its lifeblood. America's Innovation Agency congratulates and welcomes its new partners.

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