Powered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation

STEAM Ahead is a statewide program administered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)'s Talent Solutions. The program aims to foster meaningful, hands-on career experiences for students interested in STEAM-related positions and to support companies in Michigan – of all sizes – with building their talent pipeline.

STEAM Ahead provides financial support to qualifying companies by matching employer contributions up to $4,000 for full-time interns and up to $2,000 for part-time interns.

This handbook serves as a living document and provides an overview of the program for employers who are participating, or interested in participating, in STEAM Ahead.

Questions?

Check out our **FAQ** section or join us at one of our **Open Office Hours**.

If you don't see your question or if you need more information, please email us at steamahead@michigan.org.

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II.   How to Participate as a Company

STEP 1: Complete the one-time Company Application.

This online application, found on the **STEAM Ahead website**, takes about 5 minutes to complete. See *Appendix A* for a copy of the application.

Once successfully submitted, an MEDC staff member will reach out within 5 business days to confirm your company's participation in the program. If approved, you'll receive guidance on.

As part of the process to participate in STEAM Ahead, companies are required to complete a simple certification form. This form must be completed to ensure you are familiar with and agree with the guidelines of the program, including having read this Handbook.

Once your company has an approved application and certification form on file, you can skip this step in future. An updated certification form may be required if needed.

STEP 2: Submit internship(s) for program funding consideration each semester.

STEAM Ahead follows a semester-based calendar. Prior to each semester, MEDC will release an online internship submission form for approved companies to submit internships for program funding consideration for that semester. See *Appendix B* for a copy of the form and **Program Deadlines** for a list of the program's important dates.

Once the form is successfully submitted, an MEDC staff member will reach out within 5-7 business days to notify the invoice / payroll processor contact listed on the form. Please note that all forms must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the start date listed on the form – this allows for adequate time for review, approval, and registration with the program.

If the internship is approved, your company will then need to enroll in our vendor's payment portal system, Coupa. You will not need to re-enroll your company each time – that is a one-time step.

STEP 3: Submit requests for payment from our vendor.

STEAM Ahead is a reimbursement-based program. Your company is responsible for recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and paying the intern directly as you typically would. You'll then request repayment (as frequently as bi-weekly) via Coupa for MEDC's contribution towards your intern's wages.

Registering in Coupa is required for approved companies to request, review, and receive payment for MEDC's contribution towards intern wages.

On the internship submission form, you must include contact information for someone at your company who processes invoices / payroll. MEDC will notify this point of contact (POC) MEDC within 5 – 7 business days if the internship is approved. If approved, the POC will also receive an invitation from the payment portal platform, Coupa, to register your company for reimbursement.

Please see *Program Funding* & *Payment Process* for further information.

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III.   Program Qualifications

Companies

Companies applying to participate in STEAM Ahead will be evaluated according to several key criteria, including the following:

- The company's **ties to Michigan**: Companies must be Michigan-based or have a strong operational presence in Michigan.
- Any size company is eligible — from enterprise organizations to startups — so long as it is a **legal entity** (e.g., C-Corp, S-Corp, LLC, LLP, B-Corp, nonprofits)
- **Technology-focused** businesses are preferred.
- A company's previous experience **working with interns.** This means that even if a company has an approved company application on file, a company's experience working with interns will be taken into consideration each time a company submits interns for program funding consideration.
- The company must be **in good standing** with the program since its inception.

Internships

Internships will be evaluated on several key criteria, including the following:

- The position description and **its relevancy to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math (STEAM)** fields.
    - Internships could be STEM or STEM + Arts focused. Some examples of STEM + Arts are Sound or Architectural Engineers, Graphic Designers/Illustrators.
- **8 to 12 weeks in length** and take place within the window of the semester.
- **Minimum pay rate of $15 per hour.**
- **On-site work experience** in Michigan for at least one (1) week or five (5) business days – the days do not need to be consecutive to qualify.
- **Intern supervision.** Participating companies must provide a **direct supervisor** to the intern that is capable and willing to provide meaningful work and career experience.

Interns

To be eligible to participate, the intern must:

- Be **attending**, or **recently graduated** from, an accredited 2-year or 4-year college or university (community colleges included).
- Have a **Michigan connection** (whether their college/university is here, they live in Michigan or have family here, etc.).

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IV.   Program Funding

If the intern and internship qualify, MEDC will match an employer's contribution *up to* **$4,000 for a full-time intern** and *up to* **$2,000 for a part-time intern**.

- MEDC's contribution will be applied to the **intern's wages only**.
- **Companies will pay for their intern directly and then request reimbursement for MEDC's contribution**. MEDC will pay 50% of the wages, alongside the employer's 50%, until MEDC's contribution has been met, the internship ends, or the semester ends – whichever comes first.
- **Part-time is defined as 20 hours or less and full-time is defined as 21 – 40 hours.**
  - Any overtime payment (above 40 hours per week) must be paid 100% by the employer.
- While the **minimum wage for this program is $15 per hour**, companies are welcome to set their own wage above that amount with the understanding that, once MEDC's match has been exhausted, the company is responsible for 100% of the cost.
- Although most internships run over the summer, **companies can apply to participate year-round**. The number of internship positions awarded will depend on availability of funds and alignment to the qualification criteria.
- Companies can submit the same intern to us for **up to two** semesters between September – August each year. Wages outside of the two semesters are the sole responsibility of the employer.

Example Funding Scenarios

MEDC calculates its expected contribution towards the internship based on the hourly wage, part time vs. full-time status (the maximum number of hours) and length of internship (within the semester framework). If you submit requests above the amount MEDC is expecting to contribute, your invoice will be disputed. **Any changes to an intern's hourly wage, status, or length of internship should be communicated to the MEDC team to ensure this information is relayed to our vendor.**

Intern A	Intern B	Intern C	Intern D
Hourly wage: $15 **Length:** 8 weeks **Status:** Part-time $15 x 8 x 20 hours = $2,400 in wages only.	**Hourly wage:** $25 **Length:** 8 weeks **Status:** Full-time $25 x 8 x 20 hours = $4,000 in wages only.	**Hourly wage:** $15 **Length:** 12 weeks **Status:** Part-time $15 x 12 x 40 hours = $7,200 in wages only.	**Hourly wage:** $20 **Length:** 12 weeks **Status:** Full-time $25 x 12 x 40 hours = $9,600 in wages only.
MEDC and the employer would **each expect to pay up to $1,200** towards the intern's wages.	MEDC and the employer would **each expect to pay up to $2,000** towards the intern's wages.	MEDC and the employer would **each expect to pay up to $3,600** towards the intern's wages.	MEDC would **expect to pay up to $4,000** and the employer would **expect to pay up to $5,600**.

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V.   Program Deadlines

STEAM Ahead follows a program semester schedule. These dates will be updated annually. [1]

2025 Important Dates	Winter / Spring	Summer	Fall
Internship Submission Form Opens *Approved employers submit internship(s) for funding consideration.*	Dec 2, 2024	Apr 14, 2025	Aug 11, 2025
Semester Begins *Beginning of reimbursement period for semester. Earliest possible 'start date' for internships.*	Jan 13, 2025	May 5, 2025	Sep 2, 2025
Internship Submission Form Closes *No submissions after this date.*	Feb 7, 2025	Jun 6, 2025	Oct 3, 2025
Last possible internship 'start dates' for interns to receive reimbursement	Feb 10 (12 wks.) Feb 17 (11 wks.) Feb 24 (10 wks.) Mar 3 (9 wks.) Mar 10 (8 wks.)	Jun 9 (12 wks.) Jun 16 (11 wks.) Jun 23 (10 wks.) Jun 30 (9 wks.) Jul 7 (8 wks.)	Sep 29 (12 wks.) Oct 6 (11 wks.) Oct 13 (10 wks.) Oct 20 (9 wks.) Oct 27 (8 wks.)
Semester Ends *End of reimbursement period for semester.*	May 2, 2025	Aug 29, 2025	Dec 19, 2025

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[1] We recognize that your intern's official start and end dates may be outside of these semester windows, however, you can only receive reimbursement between these program semester dates.

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VI.   Payment Process

If you are having trouble accessing Coupa, requesting payments, or receiving payments, please contact OpTech at steamahead.pay@optechus.com.

OpTech also offers 1:1 or group sessions if you need to set up a phone or video conference. You can also join us at one of our monthly **Open Office Hours**.

STEP 1: Coupa Registration

If you've already enrolled in Coupa *with* the STEAM Ahead program, you will not need to re-register and may skip this step in future.

Coupa registration invitations should be expected as early as **the Monday following your internship approval notification.**

The Coupa registration email will be titled: *"Action Required – OpTech US Registration Instructions"*. Please select 'Join Coupa Supplier Portal' to begin the registration process. **This link is only active for 48 hours.** If the link expires, please contact steamahead.pay@optechus.com for a new link.

You will need to create a Coupa account. Please follow the prompts and contact OpTech if you have issues creating an account.

No documents are required to register, but you will need to provide OpTech with ACH information for direct payment purposes and to confirm your company's mailing address in case a check(s) will need to be issued. For the purposes of this program, your company's tax ID is *not* required as this is a reimbursement program and OpTech will not be issuing 1099s.

If your company already has a Coupa account for other purposes, please contact OpTech for back-end support in accessing the STEAM Ahead Payment Portal.

STEP 2: Coupa Payment Request & Payment Cycle

Payment requests are due as frequently as biweekly, though companies can submit payments monthly if preferred, but no less often. **STEAM Ahead is a first come, first serve program. If your company does not submit requests for reimbursement during the semester your intern has been approved, we cannot guarantee funding can be applied later.**

Your company should expect to receive payment within 10 business days of submitting the request to Coupa. If you miss a due date, when submitting the request, you will be paid by the following payment date. If the invoice is disputed, this process could take longer.

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Invoice Cycle

The reimbursement cycle for calendar year 2025 will be:

Semester	Pay Period – Start	Pay Period – End	Request Due In Coupa By	Company Paid By
Fall 2024 Reimbursement Schedule	11/3/2024	11/16/2024	**11/19/2024**	**12/3/2024**
	11/17/2024	11/30/2024	**12/3/2024**	**12/17/2024**
	12/1/2024	12/14/2024	**12/17/2024**	**12/31/2024**
Last Pay Period for Semester	12/15/2024	12/28/2024	**12/31/2024**	**1/14/2025**
Holiday / No Active Semester - No payments made				
Winter / Spring 2025 Reimbursement Schedule	01/12/2025	01/25/2025	**01/28/2025**	**02/11/2025**
	01/26/2025	02/08/2025	**02/11/2025**	**02/25/2025**
	02/09/2025	02/22/2025	**02/25/2025**	**03/11/2025**
	02/23/2025	03/10/2025	**03/11/2025**	**03/25/2025**
	03/09/2025	03/22/2025	**03/25/2025**	**04/08/2025**
	03/23/2025	04/05/2025	**04/08/2025**	**04/22/2025**
	04/06/2025	04/19/2025	**04/22/2025**	**05/06/2025**
Last Pay Period for Semester	04/20/2025	05/03/2025	**05/06/2025**	**05/20/2025**
Summer 2025 Reimbursement Schedule	05/04/2025	05/17/2025	**05/20/2025**	**06/03/2025**
	05/18/2025	05/30/2025	**06/03/2025**	**06/17/2028**
	06/01/2025	06/14/2025	**06/17/2025**	**07/01/2025**
	06/15/2025	06/28/2025	**07/01/2025**	**07/15/2025**
	06/29/2025	07/12/2025	**07/15/2025**	**07/29/2025**
	07/13/2025	07/26/2025	**07/29/2025**	**08/12/20285**
	07/27/2025	08/09/2025	**08/12/2025**	**08/26/2025**
	08/10/2025	08/23/2025	**08/26/2025**	**09/09/2025**
Last Pay Period for Semester	08/24/2025	09/06/2025	**09/09/2025**	**09/23/2025**
Fall 2025 Reimbursement Schedule	09/07/2025	09/20/2025	**09/23/2025**	**10/07/2025**
	09/21/2025	10/04/2025	**10/07/2025**	**10/21/2025**
	10/05/2025	10/18/2025	**10/21/2025**	**11/04/2025**
	10/19/2025	11/01/2025	**11/04/2025**	**11/18/2025**
	11/02/2025	11/15/2025	**11/18/2025**	**12/02/2025**
	11/16/2025	11/29/2025	**12/02/2025**	**12/16/2025**
	11/30/2025	12/13/2025	**12/16/2025**	**12/30/2025**
	12/14/2025	12/27/2025	**12/30/2025**	**01/13/2026**
Last Pay Period for Semester	12/28/2025	01/10/2026	**01/13/2026**	**01/27/2026**

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VII.   Open Office Hours

MEDC and OpTech jointly hold Open Office Hours sessions **once a month** to provide support and answer questions that employers may have pertaining to the program.

These online sessions are unstructured and unrecorded; they are designed for participating employers to drop in and ask questions as needed. You may choose to stay on for the duration of the office hours or leave as soon as your questions are answered.

There is no requirement or obligation to attend these sessions. However, they can be especially beneficial if you need assistance with any of the following:

- Regarding internship eligibility not covered in the handbook or Frequently Asked Questions
- Regarding semester timelines and intern reimbursement start/stop dates
- Coupa Payment Portal Registration
- Support with submitting payment requests

Office Hours for 2025 will be held **from 1 – 2 PM EST/EDT*** on:

- January 27
- February 10
- March 10
- April 14
- May 19
- June 16
- July 14
- August 18
- September 15
- October 13
- November 17
- December 8

Approved companies will receive an email each month with the link to join a TEAMS call.

*If office hours are rescheduled, we will notify participating employers as soon as possible.

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VIII. Frequently Asked Questions

- ### How does my company participate in the program?

The first step is to submit a Company Application form – this online application is linked to the [STEAM Ahead website](#).

- ### What if my company isn't in the STEAM field – does it still qualify?

Your company does not need to be in the STEAM field to participate, but the internship position must be STEM / STEAM-focused.

- ### Once my company is approved, how do I submit interns for program funding consideration?

Once your company is approved, you'll receive a link to the online Internship Submission Form. The program is semester-based and, each semester, a new link will be provided to submit interns/internships for program funding consideration.

- ### What if the internship my company is offering starts before / ends after the program semester dates listed for STEAM Ahead? Will it still qualify?

We understand that the *official* start and end dates may be outside of the program semester windows, but the internship will only qualify for reimbursement for the dates which fall within the semester dates.

- ### Can my company extend an intern's internship and still receive MEDC funding for the semester?

There are case-by-case scenarios which may qualify – for example, if MEDC's contribution has not been exhausted, if the semester has not yet ended, or if the maximum number of weeks (12) has not been met yet.

- ### Is there a limit on the number of interns my company can submit to STEAM Ahead?

The program is first come, first serve. There is no maximum on the number of interns the employer can submit, however the number of awards will depend on fund availability and whether the intern/internships qualify.

- ### How many times can my company submit the same Intern to participate in STEAM Ahead?

A company can submit the same intern to STEAM Ahead up to two times in an academic year. An academic year takes place between September – August.

- ### What if my company needs to submit an internship but it's not two weeks before the start date in the Internship Submission Form?

Internship submission forms must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the intern's start date on the form – this provides us with time to review and approve the internships and ensure the company is registered in Coupa and ready to go for payment. If the internship is not submitted with at least two weeks' notice, the internship will not be accepted unless the start date is moved.

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- **What if my company is offering an internship with a higher hourly rate? Can the internship be less than the minimum number of 8 weeks?**

Employers are encouraged to pay interns higher than the $15 minimum hourly wage, but the internship must still meet the qualifying minimum number of weeks (8 weeks).

- **From where do Interns need to be enrolled or recently graduated?**

An intern must be attending or have recently graduated (within 12 months or less) from an accredited 2- or 4-year institution (e.g., community college, university) to be eligible.

- **My company would like to hire an intern who is not currently in school – can they participate in STEAM Ahead?**

Recent graduates are eligible to participate in STEAM Ahead, but the internship must begin within one year of the student's graduation date. For example, if the student graduated on May 17, 2024, the internship must start on or before May 16, 2025.

- **How long must the on-site work experience be in Michigan?**

The on-site work experience must be for at least one (1) week or five (5) business days, but the days do not need to be consecutive.

- **Are international students eligible?**

Yes! International students are eligible – and encouraged – to participate.

- **How many interns can my company submit for consideration?**

There is no maximum number, but the final number of positions awarded will depend on fund availability and alignment to the qualification criteria.

- **Can high school students participate in STEAM Ahead?**

Currently, only university / college students – or recent graduates – can participate in STEAM Ahead.

If you are interested in hiring a high school student for an internship experience, check out Digital Lakes' micro-internship program: [Programs - Digital Lakes (digital-lakes.org)](https://digital-lakes.org).

- **Do co-ops, apprenticeships, and work studies qualify for internship funding?**

Internships and co-ops are similar in nature and provide an opportunity for the student to learn and earn before being hired by an employer. So long as the co-op follows the program requirements, it could qualify. Apprenticeships and work studies do not qualify, however, there is other funding (e.g., state, federal) to support [apprenticeships](#) if your company is interested.

- **Can *any* Art internship qualify?**

While we allow internships that involve the arts, those internships must still support Michigan's S, T, E, M talent pipeline; the arts can play a crucial role in this, especially with positions including (but not limited to): graphic designers, scientific illustrators, marketing & communications analytics, CGI artists, 3D artists, video game art design, etc.

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- **Do you provide an internship matching service or have resources to help me with recruiting interns?**

We do not provide internship matching, and instead allow employers to recruit interns following internal business practices. If employers need assistance recruiting interns, we encourage them to contact their local community college / university career services. We also encourage employers to consult online recruiting sites (LinkedIn, Handshake, etc.).

- **Can STEAM Ahead funding be utilized for services other than wages help support interns, such as housing, food, transportation, etc.?**

STEAM Ahead funds are exclusively for reimbursement of intern wages and cannot be used for any other purpose.

- **What do I do if I missed my Coupa Payment Portal invitation, and the link expired?**

The link is good for 48 hours – if it expires before you can access it, then you can contact OpTech at steamahead.pay@optechus.com and they can e-mail you a new link.

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IX.   Appendix A: Company Application Form

This is an overview of the online form.

SECTION 1: Thank You for your interest in STEAM Ahead!

SECTION 2: About Your Company

1. Company Name *(open text)*
2. Company Description *(open text)*
3. Company Website *(open text)*
4. Company Email Address *(open text)*
5. Company Phone Number *(open text)*
6. Please indicate which North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Code aligns with your industry sector *(numbers)*

SECTION 3: Company Contact

Who can we reach out to if we have questions about your company application form?

1. Contact's First Name *(open text)*
2. Contact's Last Name *(open text)*
3. Contact's Email Address *(open text)*
4. Contact's Phone Number *(open text)*

SECTION 4: Qualifying Questions

1. Is your company a legal entity? (e.g., C-Corp, S-Corp, LLC, LLP, B-Corp, nonprofit) *(Y/N)*
2. Is your company Michigan-based or does it have a strong operational presence in Michigan? *(Y/N)*
    a. If Y:
        i. Company Headquarters: Building No. and Street Address *(open text)*
        ii. Company Headquarters: City *(open text)*
        iii. Company Headquarters: State *(open text)*

END OF FORM: Link to Certification Form

Note:

- The certification form must be completed and signed before your company application can be approved.
- Based on the applicant responses, some questions in the Company Application may not appear.

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X.   Appendix B: Internship Submission Form

This is an overview of the online form.

SECTION 1: Acknowledgement

1. Company Name *(open text)*
2. Acknowledgement language *(Y/N)*

SECTION 2: Basic Internship Qualifications

1. Does the position have a strong STEM or STEAM focus? *(Y/N)*
2. Which category or categories of STEAM apply to this internship? *(multiple choice)*
3. Please provide a brief description of how the position has a strong STEM or STEAM focus *(open text)*
4. Does the internship provide at least one (1) week of onsite experience at a worksite in Michigan? *(Y/N)*
5. Does the internship provide a director supervisor to the intern that is capable and willing to provide a meaningful work and career experience? *(Y/N)*

SECTION 3: Intern Information & Qualifications

1. Intern's Full Legal Name *(open text)*
2. Intern's Email Address *(open text)*
3. Intern's Phone Number *(open text)*
4. Is the Intern attending or recently graduated from an accredited 2-year or 4-year college or university? *(select an option)*
   a. When did the intern graduate? *(date)*
   b. Does the Intern have a connection to the state? *(Y/N)*
5. Name of college/university? *(open text)*
6. Is the Intern an international student or require sponsorship? *(Y/N)*
   a. Note: international students are eligible for this program. This is not a qualifying question.

SECTION 4: Internship Information & Qualifications

1. Internship Position Title *(open text)*
2. Position Description *(open text)*
3. Internship Start Date *(date)*
4. Hourly Wage? *(number)*
5. Length of Internship in Weeks *(select an option)*
6. Part-time or Full-time? *(select an option)*
7. Michigan Worksite Address: Street Name and No., Suite No. *(open text)*
8. Michigan Worksite Address: City *(open text)*
9. Michigan Worksite Address: ZipCode *(number)*

SECTION 5: Main Point of Contact for Payroll/Invoicing

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1. Contact's Full Legal Name *(open text)*
2. Contact's Job Title *(open text)*
3. Contact's Email Address *(open text)*
4. Contact's Phone Number *(open text)*
5. Would you like to add a secondary point of contact? *(Y/N)*

SECTION 6: Secondary Contact Information?

1. Contact's Full Legal Name *(open text)*
2. Contact's Job Title *(open text)*
3. Contact's Email Address *(open text)*
4. Contact's Phone Number *(open text)*

SECTION 7: Contact Information: Internship Supervisor

1. Have you already provided the supervisor's contact information? *(select an option)*
   a. Note: if the response is 'yes', the following questions will be skipped.
2. Supervisor's Full Legal Name *(open text)*
3. Supervisor's Job Title *(open text)*
4. Supervisor's Email Address *(open text)*
5. Supervisor's Phone Number *(open text)*

Based on certain responses, some questions in the Internship Submission Form may not appear.