



Request for Proposals (RFP)

Understanding and Co-Creating Equitable AI with Low-Income Black Communities

Issued by: Springboard to Opportunities

Issue Date: March 17, 2026

Proposal Deadline: April 17, 2026

Project Start: May 1, 2026

Organizational Background

Springboard to Opportunities is a nonprofit organization based in Jackson, Mississippi that works alongside families living in federally subsidized housing as they work to reach their goals in school, work, and life. Springboard's work is grounded in a radically resident-driven philosophy, meaning the families we serve guide our priorities, shape our solutions, and lead the work of building stronger communities.

Springboard currently serves families in multiple affordable housing communities in Jackson, Mississippi. The majority of the communities we serve are families headed by Black mothers with their children. Our approach centers the lived expertise of residents and challenges the assumption that solutions to poverty should be designed without the leadership of those experiencing it.

Through programs such as guaranteed income, educational supports, and community-driven initiatives, Springboard has demonstrated that when families have the resources and support they need to recognize their own power and voice, they are able to create the solutions that best support their own futures.

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in everyday systems — from employment and education to healthcare, housing, and public services — the communities Springboard serves are being impacted by these technologies, often without having been included in conversations about how they are designed or used.

Purpose of the RFP

Springboard to Opportunities seeks a specialized firm or interdisciplinary team to partner with us to explore and develop a community-centered understanding of AI within the low-income communities Springboard serves.

Too often, national conversations about AI ethics, governance, and innovation exclude the voices of those whose jobs, environment, and access to services are most likely to be affected by these technologies. Families living in poverty — particularly in the American South — are rarely invited into the design or decision-making processes around emerging technologies.

Springboard believes this must change.

The purpose of this project is not to immediately implement AI tools, but rather to begin by listening to families, building shared understanding, and exploring how AI might support equitable and flourishing communities rather than deepening inequality.

We are seeking partners who will approach this work with humility, curiosity, and a commitment to community leadership, equity, and ethical technology design.

The research will help Springboard understand how AI affects families' lives and how it can support their goals. Findings will guide ethical, resident-led approaches to future AI tools, inform internal governance and staff training, strengthen partnerships, and provide evidence to funders. By centering resident voices, this work ensures technology serves communities rather than imposing assumptions, while contributing to national conversations on AI equity.

Please note that the scope of this work does not include the development or implementation of an AI tool. Further development and creation of new tools would be dependent upon the results of the research requested here and contingent upon a new contract with Springboard.

Key Questions Guiding the Work

This initiative will begin with a set of core questions:

- What do families in our communities currently understand about AI?
- How do they see AI already affecting their lives, jobs, communities, and futures?
- What concerns, hopes, or questions do they have about AI?
- How might AI support families' goals and aspirations — rather than harm or exploit them?
- How can AI tools be designed to advance equity in communities, rather than deepen existing inequalities?
- How do we ensure AI systems interact with families in ways that are grounded in equity, dignity, and truth?
- How can we co-create AI-enabled tools that are relevant, affirming, and genuinely helpful to families and rooted in their real experiences, rather than being rooted in the false narrative and assumptions we make about people living in poverty?

Scope of Work

Springboard is seeking a partner to help design and facilitate a community-centered exploration and co-creation process that includes the following components.

1. Community Listening and Learning

The selected partner will design and implement a process to engage Springboard families in meaningful conversations about artificial intelligence.

This work should:

- Center listening before solution-building
- Use accessible language and learning tools
- Honor residents as experts in their own lives
- Ensure participants understand what AI is, how it works, and how it may affect them

Activities may include:

- Community listening sessions
- Resident workshops or learning opportunities
- Participatory research
- Story collection
- Surveys or focus groups
- Community-led inquiry

The engagement approach should reflect Springboard's radically resident-driven philosophy.

2. Participatory Exploration of AI Possibilities

Based on what families share, the partner will support a process of collectively imagining how AI could be used to support families' priorities and well-being.

Possible areas of exploration may include:

- Economic mobility
- Education and learning
- Access to information and resources
- Community organizing and advocacy
- Health and wellness
- Navigating complex systems
- Storytelling and narrative change

The goal is not to impose technology solutions, but to explore ideas emerging from residents themselves.

3. Ethical and Equitable AI Framework

The partner will help develop a framework and governance policy that ensures any future AI tools used with Springboard communities:

- Are designed with equity and justice at the center
- Protect the dignity, privacy, and agency of families
- Avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes or bias
- Are transparent and accountable
- Are aligned with the needs and values expressed by residents

- Provide Springboard staff, volunteers, and partners with governance policies for AI usage including what data can and cannot be used, review procedures, and acceptable tools

4. Co-Creation of Potential Tools or Prototypes

Depending on the outcomes of the listening and exploration phase, the partner may support the co-design of potential AI-enabled tools or concepts.

These could include:

- Concept prototypes
- Design mockups
- Early-stage tools
- Participatory design processes

Any technology exploration must remain community-led and iterative. Please note that the expectations of this RFP do not include the actual development or implementation of an AI tool. Discussion regarding further development and implementation can be discussed after the initial research is complete and would be contingent upon a new contract with Springboard.

5. Documentation and Learning

The partner will document the process and produce materials that capture:

- Key insights from residents and community perspectives on AI
- Lessons learned through the iterative and community-driven process
- Ethical guidelines for AI development, usage, and understanding based on community input and feedback
- Potential opportunities for future development

Springboard hopes this work can contribute to broader national conversations about AI equity and community-led technology design.

Desired Qualifications

We are seeking a partner with demonstrated experience in some or all of the following areas:

- Ethical or responsible AI development
- Community-based participatory research
- Participatory design or co-design methodologies
- Technology equity and digital justice
- Work with low-income communities and communities of color
- Facilitation of community engagement processes
- Human-centered design
- AI literacy or education initiatives

We strongly encourage teams that include expertise in community organizing, social science, design, and technology.

Values Alignment

Successful partners will demonstrate a commitment to:

- Community leadership
- Racial and economic justice
- Ethical technology
- Deep listening
- Collaborative design
- Respect for lived experience

Firms must be willing to center resident voices throughout the process and approach the work with humility and openness.

Proposal Requirements

Proposals should include:

1. Organizational Overview

Brief description of your organization, team, and relevant experience.

2. Understanding of the Project

Your perspective on why this work matters and how you interpret the goals of the project.

3. Proposed Approach

Describe your approach to:

- Community listening and engagement
- AI literacy and shared learning
- Participatory design
- Ethical AI development

Include examples of how you would ensure the work remains resident-driven.

4. Project Team

Names, roles, and relevant experience of key team members.

5. Timeline

Proposed timeline for completing the project.

6. Budget

Proposed budget with explanation of major cost categories.

7. Relevant Examples

Examples of similar work you have completed.

Project Timeline (Estimated)

RFP Released: March 17, 2026

Proposal Deadline: April 17, 2026

Invitations for Interviews: April 20, 2026

Selection of Partner: May 1, 2026

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by a selection committee from Springboard to Opportunities. The committee will evaluate submissions based on the following criteria:

1. Alignment with Springboard's Values

The extent to which the proposal reflects a commitment to Springboard's radically resident-driven philosophy and centers the voices, expertise, and leadership of families living in federally-subsidized housing.

2. Approach to Community Engagement and Listening

The strength and thoughtfulness of the proposed approach to engaging families in conversations about artificial intelligence.

3. Experience and Expertise

Relevant experience of the organization and project team in areas such as:

- Ethical or responsible AI
- Community-based participatory research
- Participatory design or co-creation
- Technology equity and digital justice
- Working with low-income communities and communities of color

Interdisciplinary teams combining community engagement, research, and technology expertise are encouraged.

4. Equity and Ethical Technology Framework

The degree to which the proposal demonstrates a thoughtful approach to ensuring AI tools and processes are:

- Grounded in equity and justice
- Transparent and accountable
- Protective of community privacy and dignity
- Designed to avoid bias and harm

Proposals should reflect an understanding of the risks AI systems can pose to marginalized communities and present strategies to mitigate those risks.

5. Project Design and Feasibility

The clarity, realism, and structure of the proposed work plan, including:

- Project phases
- Timeline and milestones
- Methods for documenting learning and insights
- Ability to adapt based on community feedback

6. Budget and Value

The overall reasonableness and transparency of the proposed budget in relation to the scope of work including appropriate investment in community engagement and fair compensation for participants where applicable. The total proposed budget should not exceed \$50,000.

Selection Process

Each applicant will receive a confirmation email from the Springboard team that your submission has been received. After reviewing applications, Springboard will invite a shortlist of applicants by April 20, 2026 to participate in follow-up conversations or interviews before making a final selection before the end of May 2026.

Submission Instructions

Proposals including all proposal requirements should be submitted electronically and sent to **info@springboardto.org**.

Questions regarding the RFP may also be directed to this email address.