



INNOVATION AWARD RULES: The Milken-Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing

The Milken-Motsepe Innovation Prize Program is a series of innovation competitions and awards that target some of the world's most pressing challenges. The Milken-Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing is designed to award companies that demonstrate scalable innovations across manufacturing value chains that use artificial intelligence to measurably improve efficiency and reduce waste. This innovation award offers \$2 million in total prizes, including a \$1 million Grand Prize. Participating companies will also gain access to networking and pitching opportunities. Registration is free and open globally. This document contains the timeline, specifications, and requirements for participating in the Milken-Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing.

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1. Why AI and Manufacturing?

The Milken–Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing is designed to accelerate economic transformation by uncovering breakthrough solutions at the intersection of AI and manufacturing. To catalyze scalable innovations that leverage artificial intelligence to revolutionize manufacturing systems across Africa and other frontier markets. The prize aims to unlock the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Manufacturing 4.0, emphasizing efficiency, technological integration, and job creation, and driven by the convergence of AI, robotics, automation, and smart production technologies that are reshaping manufacturing and economic growth.

Africa stands at a pivotal moment. By 2050, its population is expected to surpass 2 billion, with over 1.3 billion people living in urban areas, creating urgent demand for jobs, infrastructure, and economic opportunity. Manufacturing generates up to 20 additional jobs per role, absorbs large labor pools, and attracts long-term investment.

In 2025, global spending on goods and services is expected to surpass \$5 trillion, making manufacturing one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world. As digital advancements continue to reshape our world, manufacturing is entering a new era of innovation – powered by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. AI, robotics, nanotechnology, 3D printing, and other emerging technologies are transforming business as usual.

Strategic investments in manufacturing have never been more critical. Emerging technologies and AI can unlock transformative growth, fuel technological breakthroughs, and build long-term economic resilience. With global populations expected to surge in the coming decades, it's essential to prioritize opportunities that drive job creation—especially in Africa and other emerging economies.

The Milken–Motsepe Innovation Prize Program is calling on bold innovators revolutionizing manufacturing value chains in African markets. If your company is using AI and advanced data analytics to boost efficiency, reduce waste, and deliver measurable impact—this is your moment. We're looking for scalable, tech-powered solutions ready to drive job creation, unlock commercial growth, and ignite breakthroughs across global markets.

Apply now and prove your innovation can shape the future of manufacturing.

2. Challenge Statement

The winning team will demonstrate a scalable innovation across manufacturing value chains that leverages AI to measurably improve efficiency and waste loss. Teams will be evaluated on commercial viability, operational economics, technological integration, and market scalability in Africa.

3. Eligibility and Registration

a. Eligibility and Exceptions

Registration is free and open to everyone from around the world who meets the screening criteria, with certain exceptions defined below. The Milken-Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing encourages established companies with a proven track record of reaching underserved communities to apply. Participants can be a single individual or a team of individuals.

Screening Criteria:

- 2+ years in operation
- Series A+ in funding
- Operating in Africa's manufacturing sector
- Advancing workforce and job growth

The following individuals or companies are *not* eligible to participate:

- Any individual or entity organized or with primary residence in a country embargoed by the USA;¹
- Any individual or entity listed on OFAC's Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List, or other sanctions lists administered by any agency or department of the United States government;² and

¹ See [U.S. Department of the Treasury. Financial Sanctions and Country Information.](#) for more information.

² See [U.S. Department of the Treasury. Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List.](#) for more information.

- Any current or recent employee or immediate family member of an employee of the Milken Institute or the Motsepe Foundation.

b. Registration

The registration and application window opens on May 7, 2025, and closes on July 31, 2025 (see the timeline in Section 4 below). Companies may register and apply at any time during that period.

The designated team leader must register on behalf of the team. The company’s team leader is the individual who enters into a legal agreement with the Milken Institute to be responsible for the management of their team, and who will provide the Milken Institute with banking details for the administration of the award funds, if judges choose the team as one of the prize winners. The team leader will be responsible for maintaining rosters of all team members and for their ongoing compliance with Innovation Award Rules and the Participant Agreement companies will sign when submitting applications. The team leader must submit in writing any substantial changes they propose to make to their team leadership or prize designation during the course of the Milken-Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing.

4. Award Overview

a. Innovation Award Timeline

Date	Activity	Description
May 7, 2025	Registration and Application Window Opens	Eligible companies can register and apply for the Milken-Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing.
July 31, 2025	Registration and Application Window Closes	All applications due for judging by 6 pm UTC, July 31, 2025.
Q3 2025*	Semi-Finalist Awards	Semi-Finalists announced no later than Q3 2025. Ten companies will be awarded \$50,000 USD each.
Q4 2025*	Finalist Awards	Ten Semi-Finalists will designate one representative per company to pitch their innovations at a pitch event (Location TBC).* Five Finalists will be determined at the pitch event and awarded \$30,000 USD each.
Q1 – 2026*	Grand Prize Submissions	Grand Prize submissions due by

		6 pm UTC, Q1 2026.*
May 2026*	Grand Prize Announcement	The Grand Prize winner and runners-up will be announced in May 2026. One company will be awarded \$1 million Grand Prize; One company will be awarded \$250,000 Runner-Up Prize; and One company will be awarded \$100,000 Most Advanced Use of 4IR Prize.

**Exact dates to be confirmed.*

b. Judging

A panel of independent experts with deep experience in artificial intelligence, manufacturing systems, engineering, and emerging market dynamics will serve as Judges for the Milken-Motsepe Prize in AI and Manufacturing. Judges will be selected for their technical expertise, market knowledge, and ability to fairly assess innovations with both social and commercial impact. All Judges shall be independent from participating teams, and the Milken Institute, and must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest. Judges shall not evaluate any team with which they have a financial, professional, or personal relationship that could impair their impartiality.

The Judges shall have full authority to evaluate team submissions based on established criteria and determine which teams advance through each stage of the Prize. All judging decisions are final and shall not be subject to appeal or review.

In consultation with and at the direction of the Milken Institute, the Judges may:

- Adjust the number of teams advancing at any stage of the competition;
- Recommend revisions to the Innovation Award Rules in response to new developments in AI technologies or manufacturing feasibility.

Any approved rule changes will be communicated to all teams in writing and shall take immediate effect. All such changes are final and not subject to challenge.

c. Judging Rubric

The judging panel will apply the following criteria to evaluate Semi-Finalist, Finalist, and Grand Prize submissions:

Commercial Viability	
Criteria	Application Requirement
Revenue Growth Trajectory	YOY revenue growth; Revenue breakdown by geography and/or segment; Comparison to industry benchmarks
Customer Base & Retention	Number of active customers; Customer retention and churn rate; Size and duration of contracts; LOIs
Go-to-Market Strategy & Channel Partnerships	Strength of value proposition; CAC and LTV; Quality and scope of GTM efforts; Distribution and sales partnerships
Funding History & Financial Position	Amount and sources of funding; Burn rate and capital efficiency; Runway
Team Experience & Governance	Founder & team bios; domain expertise; Governance structure

Operational Economics	
Criteria	Application Requirement
Cost Breakdown per Deployment	Per-site/user cost (hardware, software, installation); Implementation requirements; Comparison to industry standards
Time to Value	Speed of deployment to measurable impact; Timeline by solution type (e.g., predictive maintenance)
Efficiency Gains Delivered	Quantified improvement in process speed, output, energy use, labor productivity; Reduced downtime and quality defects
Sustainability – Waste/Loss Reduction	Percent reduction in material and energy loss, yield loss, or waste; Integration of circular economy practices
Customer ROI / Payback Period	Average ROI timeline; TCO vs. value delivered; Net cost savings or increased revenue per client

Technological Integration	
Criteria	Application Requirement
Depth of AI Integration	Degree of AI centrality in product; Use of proprietary models vs. APIs; Maturity of 4IR integration

Performance Benchmarks	Accuracy, precision, and latency vs. industry standard; Cost per inference or prediction
Integration with Client Systems	ERP, MES, and IoT platform compatibility; Deployment flexibility (cloud, edge)
Regulatory & Compliance Preparedness	Certification and legal readiness by market; Internal compliance team and processes
Data Handling & Feedback Loops	Batch/real-time data use; Continuous learning and personalization; Customer-specific model improvement

Market Scalability in Africa	
Criteria	Application Requirement
Geographic Footprint	Number and diversity of live/pilot deployments in Africa and all markets; Penetration by country
Localization Readiness	Platform adaptability to low-resource settings; Multilingual interface; Pricing strategy suited for SMEs and local markets
Sector Versatility	AI stack adaptability across industries; Number and diversity of verticals served; Cross-sector case studies
Workforce	Direct/indirect job creation; Upskilling and retention programs; Workforce satisfaction indicators
Pipeline & Expansion Strategy	12–24 month roadmap; Avg. deal size and sales cycle; Sources of pipeline growth (inbound, referral, etc.)

d. Intellectual Property Rights/Public Demonstration

Companies will retain complete ownership of all intellectual property (IP), including any IP newly-developed for the Innovation Award.

The Judges shall treat as confidential all non-public information contained in team applications and submissions and shall enter into a Non-Disclosure Agreement (“NDA”) with the Milken Institute prior to receiving access to any such information. Notwithstanding the continued ownership of intellectual property rights by Semi-Finalists and Finalists, each such team acknowledges and agrees that participation in the Innovation Award may require the demonstration and public description of their innovations, including those involving AI, machine learning, data analytics, automation, robotics, or other 4IR technologies.

By participating, teams consent to publicly presenting functional capabilities, intended use cases, and real-world applicability of their innovations, provided that such disclosure does not extend to source code, proprietary algorithms, trade secrets, or other protected elements expressly designated as confidential under applicable NDAs.

5. Application

a. Application Submission

All mandatory and optional documents must be in English. Videos must either be in English or contain English subtitles. Links to Google Docs, Google Sheets, or other online materials are not acceptable **(Companies or individuals that do not submit PDFs in English and videos in English or with English subtitles will be disqualified)**.

Companies may submit materials anytime between May 7, 2025, and July 31, 2025 (6 pm UTC). Submissions that do not contain all required materials, follow the formatting and language rules as set forth above, or do not comply with minimum/maximum lengths, will be disqualified. Submissions after the deadline of 6 pm UTC on July 31, 2025, will be automatically disqualified.

b. Prizes and Opportunities

Following the application submission, 10 companies will be selected as Semi-Finalists and will receive \$50,000 USD each of non-dilutive funding. "Non-dilutive funding" refers to financial support for a business that does not involve giving away ownership shares to new investors, allowing a business to retain control over its company's ownership.³ This funding aims to enhance the scale of their operations and the ambition of their innovations. Semi-Finalists will have the opportunity to designate one representative per company to pitch their innovations at a pitch event in Q4 2025. Five Finalists will be determined at the pitch event and will receive \$30,000 USD each. These five Finalists will have an opportunity to compete for the Grand Prize. One company will be awarded \$1 million Grand Prize; One company will be awarded \$250,000 Runner-Up Prize; and One company will be awarded \$100,000 Most Advanced Use of 4IR Prize.

³ [Saratoga Investments Non-Dilutive Funding](#)

6. Grand Prize Submission

The Milken Institute may request additional business information or supporting materials as needed, and Finalists will receive timely guidance on all submission requirements.

7. Summary of Prize Amounts

Prize Type	Amount
Semi-Finalist Prizes (10 Semi-Finalists)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$50,000 USD each
Finalist Prizes (5 Finalists)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$30,000 USD each ▪ One invitation to the Milken Institute’s flagship Global Conference in May 2026.
Final Prizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grand Prize: \$1,000,000 USD ▪ Runner-up: \$250,000 USD ▪ Most Advanced Use of 4IR: \$100,000

All prizes will be awarded in U.S. dollars and sent to team bank accounts by wire transfer. Current exchange rates at the time of transfer will apply if the receiving account is not dollar-denominated. The decisions of prize judges are final and not subject to appeal.

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