



# annual report 24



# 2024

The Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service (Volunteer Mississippi) is honored to share its story of the 2024 Fiscal Year with you. Our mission to engage and support Mississippians of all ages and backgrounds in service to their communities has been at the forefront of our work each and every day. For over thirty years, MCVS has worked to encourage a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility to Mississippi, to these United States, and to the world at large. As you read through our accomplishments of the last year, we encourage you to consider how your skills and talents are utilized in your community. Then, let us know how we can help YOU be the change you wish to see!

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# a letter from the chair



**Becky Cade**

Chair, Board of  
Commissioners

This past year, the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service, also known as Volunteer Mississippi, experienced numerous staffing changes and increased priorities as set forth by the Commission. As a result, the Commission interviewed and hired a new Executive Director, who in turn revised the agency's organizational chart, hired new employees to fill turnovers, and created new positions.

The increased priorities set forth by the commission were largely due to needs identified in the Executive Director hiring process. While much of this work is ongoing, each of these priorities was addressed and enhanced during the past year.

The Executive Director enhanced communication by introducing a newsletter between board meetings, implementing an open-door policy, and increasing email communication as needed. Commissioners had the opportunity to attend three site visits, and board meetings were held in two locations outside of Jackson, with road shows at four other locations across the state. To improve governance, nine committees were established, each chaired by one or more commissioners. A commitment form outlining commissioner roles and responsibilities was created, with each commissioner reviewing and signing it. A strategic planning workshop for both staff and commissioners was held outside Jackson followed by a commission meeting. Increased local involvement was fostered through road shows, mini-grants, volunteer listings, and re-establishing partnerships. Volunteerism was further supported by expanding small grants, holding road shows, and building new partnerships. AmeriCorps programs were expanded with two new initiatives for the upcoming year. Additionally, the disaster services role was reestablished, and the fund agreement with the Community Foundation was updated. Finally, the agency's policies and procedures were reviewed, and recommendations for revisions were made.

As I roll off the commission and pass chairmanship to the next chair, I am very proud of the work that was accomplished this year. I am excited about the future of the commission, its excellent commissioners, and agency staff. I feel that we are in the best shape we have been in during my time on the commission due to the hard work and commitment of those involved. It has been a pleasure to serve the state through Volunteer Mississippi.

*Becky Cade*

# board of commissioners

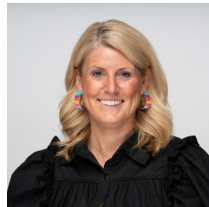
Volunteer Mississippi's Board of Commissioners is comprised of members appointed by Governor Tate Reeves. The commissioners are each individuals with true hearts for service who make a powerful impact on the most critical issues facing Mississippi.



**Jennifer Hopping**  
*Jackson, MS*  
First Vice Chair



**Merracle Jordan**  
*Southaven, MS*  
Second Vice Chair



**Meredith Aldridge**  
*Jackson, MS*  
Commissioner



**Dr. Suzanne Bean**  
*Columbus, MS*  
Commissioner



**Chief Cyrus Ben Choctaw**, MS  
Commissioner, Outgoing



**Celeste Brown**  
*Hattiesburg, MS*  
Commissioner



**Ashley Cannady**  
*Ridgeland, MS*  
Commissioner



**Beth Fisher**  
*Canton, MS*  
Commissioner



**Susan Garrard**  
*Jackson, MS*  
Commissioner



**Roschelle Gibson**  
*Byram, MS*  
Commissioner



**Aubrey Leigh Goodwin**  
*Ridgeland, MS*  
Commissioner



**Lisa Grantham**  
*Ridgeland, MS*  
Commissioner



**Rochelle Hicks**  
*Jackson, MS*  
Commissioner



**Dr. LeMia Jenkins**  
*Jackson, MS*  
Commissioner



**Katherine Krehbiel**  
*Asheville, NC*  
Ex-Officio AmeriCorps Representative



**Aysha Robertson**  
*Hattiesburg, MS*  
Youth Commissioner



**Dr. Josie (Jo) Shumake**  
*Columbus, MS*  
Commissioner



**Cole Smith**  
*Jackson, MS*  
Commissioner



## First Lady Elee Reeves, *Honorary Chair*

First Lady of Mississippi, Elee Williams Reeves leads by example. Committed to giving back to her community and fellow Mississippians, Elee volunteers her time to numerous charitable and civic organizations. She has served as vice chairwoman of the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra Foundation Board, president of the Jackson Symphony League, president of Hinds County Republican Women, and president of the Official Mississippi Women's Club. Elee currently serves on the Mississippi Museum of Art Foundation Investment Committee, the Board of Directors for the University of Mississippi Medical Center MIND Center Board, the Center for Violence Prevention Advisory Board, and Junior League of Jackson.

# volunteer services

At Volunteer Mississippi, we seek to promote, increase, and recognize volunteers.

## OUTREACH GROWTH

# in numbers

### FACEBOOK

**47%**

REACH

**30%**

LINK CLICKS



### INSTAGRAM

**40%**

REACH

**100%**

INTERACTIONS

**100%**

LINK CLICKS

*compared to previous year*





The 2024 Governor's Initiative for Volunteer Excellence (GIVE) Awards were held at the Old Capitol Inn on April 18, 2024. The GIVE Awards celebrate the exemplary service of Mississippi's most dedicated citizens. This awards program, presented annually by Volunteer Mississippi in partnership with the Governor's Office, recognizes and honors the valuable contributions of some of Mississippi's extraordinary citizens while inspiring others to follow their example. Award-winning comedian, musician, and military veteran, Rita Brent served as emcee for the awards.

This year's awards consisted of ten honors:

**First Lady's Youth Volunteer Rising Star**

Ella Boykin, Jackson  
John Clayton Kitchens, Collinsville

**The Marsha Meeks Kelly Award for Lifetime Achievement in Volunteer Service**

Shequite Johnson, Indianola

**Volunteer of the Year**

Ryan Upshaw, Jackson

**Volunteer Family of the Year**

The Fluker Family, Black Hawk

**Service Learning Champion**

Madison Crossing Elementary, Madison

**Innovation in Volunteerism**

Big House Books, Jackson

**Excellence in Disaster Volunteerism**

Sharkey-Issaquena Academy, Rolling Fork

**National Service "Make-A-Difference"**

Dr. David Daigneault, Grenada

**Veterans "Heroes in Service"**

Mission Vigilant for the 22, Madison

# mini-grant recipients

Volunteer Mississippi awarded **\$256,670.63** to support volunteer and civic engagement projects. These projects engage Mississippians of all ages and backgrounds and include mentoring and tutoring programs, restoring natural areas, literacy projects, and more!





# givepulse

**In 2024, Volunteer Mississippi implemented a new platform for connecting volunteers and organizations. Introducing GivePulse...**

GivePulse is a platform designed to connect organizations with volunteers and volunteers with organizations. Organizations with their own GivePulse pages can affiliate with Volunteer Mississippi to have their events shown on our opportunity calendar. For those with no organization, opportunities can be submitted on the Volunteer Mississippi page!

Volunteers can visit [volunteermississippi.givepulse.com](https://volunteermississippi.givepulse.com) and enter their zip code to see a list of opportunities near them. Sydni Vandevender, public relations officer at Volunteer Mississippi, headed implementation of this new platform.

"The goal was to make the calendar easily accessible and increase filtering options," said Vandevender, "The previous calendar didn't allow for filtering by location, type, cause, or age limit. With GivePulse, these filters and more are available, making it easier for volunteers to find opportunities that fit them."

Colleges and universities in Mississippi, non-profits, and many of Volunteer Mississippi's community partners have been using GivePulse. After just four months, the number of volunteer opportunities listed on Volunteer Mississippi's calendar saw an increase of 52.3%

The screenshot shows the Volunteer Mississippi GivePulse page. At the top left, a callout points to the Volunteer Mississippi logo with the text: "Whitelabeling creates a seamless transition when accessing GivePulse through volunteermississippi.org". At the top right, a callout points to the "Sign Up" link in the navigation bar with the text: "Create an account to register for volunteer events or submit opportunities to our calendar". The main header area features the text "Volunteer, Mississippi!" and "Life is too valuable not to help others. You were made for MORE!". Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text "I am looking to volunteer in" and a dropdown menu showing "39211". A callout points to the search bar with the text: "Enter your zip code to see a list of opportunities near you". At the bottom left, a callout points to the Volunteer Mississippi logo in the footer with the text: "Click the logo in the top left to view Volunteer Mississippi's profile". At the bottom center, a callout points to the main content area with the text: "Visit [volunteermississippi.givepulse.com](https://volunteermississippi.givepulse.com) to find or submit opportunities!". The background of the page is a blue gradient with a photo of a person wearing a black graduation cap and a green sash, with the word "VOLUNTEER" printed in large white letters on their back.

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# disaster services



**Tanya Fortenberry**

**VOLUNTEER & DISASTER SERVICES OFFICER**

The Volunteer and Disaster Services role of Volunteer Mississippi is deeply committed to the commission's mission to uplift and strengthen our communities by coming together. We provide resources through social media, our website, and GivePulse, enabling individuals to discover and list volunteer opportunities that resonate with them.

Our team is dedicated to working diligently across the state to foster connections, build confidence, support those in need, and assist communities affected by disasters in their recovery efforts.

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## **VOLUNTEER RESOURCE CENTERS**

Disaster Services plays a vital role in helping communities recover after catastrophic events. We have developed a comprehensive plan to organize volunteers who are not affiliated with other agencies or organizations. This plan, known as the Volunteer Resource Center (VRC) allows us to respond quickly to affected areas, establish operations, and begin vetting and assembling volunteer teams to support recovery efforts. In addition to direct response efforts, Volunteer Mississippi is also committed to bringing VRC training to groups and individuals across the state. This year, we achieved a significant goal by delivering VRC training to over 100 new and returning AmeriCorps members. These individuals are scattered throughout the state and have committed themselves to answering the call to serve outside of their respective programs. This marks the largest cohort to date and highlights their dedication and willingness to serve.

We are proud to have extended VRC training to agencies across the state, including in Hancock County and the city of Oxford, and we look forward to expanding this outreach in the coming year.

"TO BE OF SERVICE IS ONE OF THE HIGHEST CALLINGS  
YOU CAN RECEIVE IN LIFE."

# Q&A

## Q: What part does Volunteer Mississippi play in disaster services?

Volunteer Mississippi is outlined in the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan to establish or provide support to VRCs in the wake of disaster. Volunteer Mississippi is also tasked with establishing and maintaining donation centers when an abundance of unsolicited donations has inundated a disaster area. VRC trainings are available to organizations across the state interested in learning how to establish and manage a VRC.

## Q: When would a community need to establish a VRC?

When an overwhelming amount of unaffiliated volunteers present themselves to assist with recovery efforts. In the wake of past events, Mississippi has seen volunteers converge on an area numbering in the hundreds and even thousands in cases of widely televised disasters.

## Q: Why focus on Volunteer Resource Center?

When a community in our state has been ravaged by disaster, volunteers and their service hours play vital roles in recovery. By building teams with proper training, we can focus on the task at hand, ensuring volunteers assigned possess the skills and knowledge necessary to accomplish the recovery goals set before them.



# americorps mississippi

BRINGING OUT THE *BEST* IN AMERICA



## **AMPACT**

The Ampact Reading and Math Corps believes that every student deserves an opportunity to succeed through proficiency in reading and math. Members serve as tutors to support readers in kindergarten through third grade and math students in fourth through eighth grade.



## **GRENADA**

The Grenada School District AmeriCorps program is committed to assisting at-risk kindergarten through eighth grade students to increase reading and/or math skills by at least 15%. Through one-on-one and small group tutoring, students stay on course with their grade level and are inspired to want to learn.



## **LAUREL PLAYS**

Laurel Plays is a comprehensive development program where members serve in an array of areas such as environmental stewardship, neighborhood revitalization, public safety, community outreach, health services, and children and youth services.



## **MS DELTA NATURE & LEARNING CENTER**

The MS Delta Nature & Learning Center offers a unique opportunity for members to make a positive impact on the community and environment. Previously a planning grant (FY 2023), the MS Delta Nature & Learning Center ensures children in the MS Delta have access to high-quality outdoor education opportunities.



## MS JUMPSTART

Jumpstart is a national early education organization working toward the day every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. By providing language, literary, and social-emotional programming for preschool children, academic achievement and confidence is fostered.



## MISSISSIPPI MISSION ACCELERATION

Mission Acceleration is a high-dosage tutoring program designed to accelerate reading achievement for kindergarten through fifth grade students in Mississippi. Through their tailored academic assistance model, students identified as struggling readers can learn and excel!



## TRIAD

TRIAD (Training, Resources and Information for the Advancement of Disability) is committed to providing support for economically disadvantaged youth with disabilities through health education. Members participate in various community service activities from preparing food for underprivileged families to being involved in environmental clean ups with local parks, gardens, and beaches.



## DRIVE TO THRIVE

*planning grant*

Drive to Thrive is a mentoring program set to provide exceptional enrichment and leadership development opportunities to youth in the city of Vicksburg. Through a wide range of educational and leadership activities, youth have an opportunity to gain confidence and become socially and academically aware.



## WE WILL GO

*planning grant*

We Will Go ministries focuses effort toward education, essential food, and engagement. This evangelism-driven program distributes groceries to low-income families, offers afterschool care with a focus on literacy, and provides all-day summer learning for students in need.





A smiling woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue t-shirt with the AmeriCorps Mississippi logo, is holding a clear coffee cup with a black lid. The background is blurred, showing other people and an outdoor setting.

# americorps mississippi in numbers

7

operating  
programs

2

planning  
grants

383

member  
positions

\$2m+

local match  
invested

\$3.3m

federal  
funds awarded

\$717k+

education  
award earned





**AmeriCops**  
Mississippi



# looking ahead...



## Suzanne Scales Rutherford

### Executive Director

As I reflect on Volunteer Mississippi's work in FY 2024, I find myself more and more grateful for the opportunity to support and serve our beloved state. Mississippi is one of the most diverse, creative, and light-filled places on this earth. And I am proud to serve alongside some of Mississippi's best and brightest. It's our sense of community, our cultures, our hospitality, and -most importantly- our people that make Mississippi what it is and what it can be. I firmly believe that every individual has the potential to make a meaningful and long-lasting impact on their communities (in whatever form that make take). And as such, Volunteer Mississippi will work to foster a culture of service and volunteerism across the state. I know that, in 2025, we will continue to engage Mississippians of all ages and backgrounds in service to their communities. We will come together and work collaboratively to create a stronger, more vibrant state. But we cannot do that alone: we need you! YOU are the reason we work for a better, brighter, healthier place for ALL Mississippians to live, work, and play. YOU know exactly what YOUR community needs to make that happen. So let us hear from you on how we can navigate this journey together!

*Suzanne S. Rutherford*

# thank you to our partners in service!

**AMERICA'S  
SERVICE  
COMMISSIONS**



**Mississippi**  
Voluntary Organizations  
Active in Disaster

COOPERATION | COMMUNICATION | COORDINATION | COLLABORATION



**National**  
Voluntary Organizations  
Active in Disaster



**AmeriCorps**



MISSISSIPPI  
**ALLIANCE**  
of **NONPROFITS**  
AND **PHILANTHROPY**



**MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**



**Community Foundation  
FOR MISSISSIPPI**



**FEMA**



## GET IN TOUCH

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JACKSON, MS 39211  
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[volunteermississippi.org](http://volunteermississippi.org)  
[volunteermississippi@ihl.state.ms.us](mailto:volunteermississippi@ihl.state.ms.us)

