VolunteerMississippi

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION FOR VOLUNTEER SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2025

Table of Contents

01 Table of Contents

02 A Letter from the Chair

03 Board of Commissioners

04 Volunteer Services

05 Disaster Services

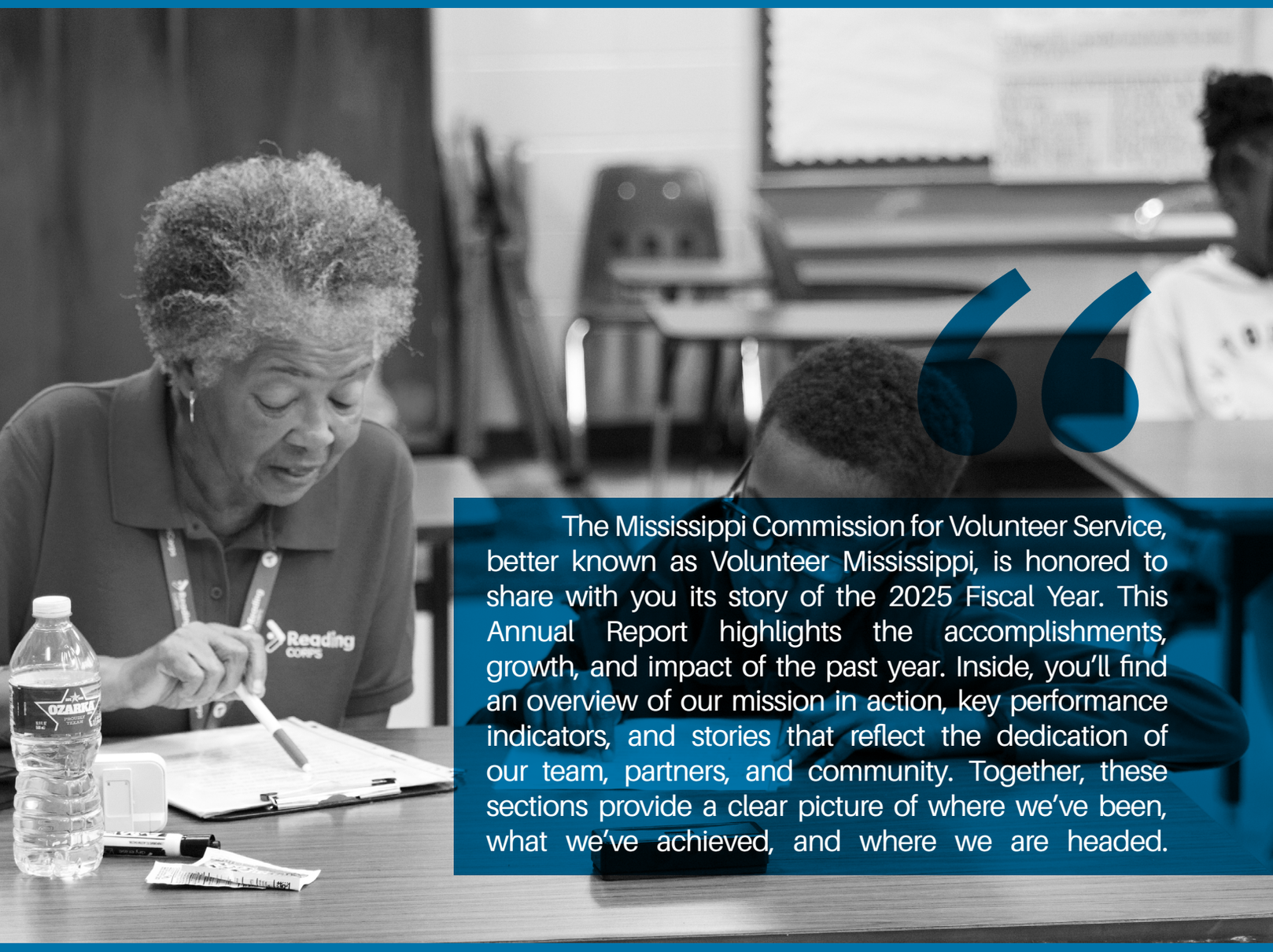
06 AmeriCorps Mississippi

07 GIVE Gallery

08 Year in Photos

09 Looking Ahead, a Letter from the Executive Director





The Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service, better known as Volunteer Mississippi, is honored to share with you its story of the 2025 Fiscal Year. This Annual Report highlights the accomplishments, growth, and impact of the past year. Inside, you'll find an overview of our mission in action, key performance indicators, and stories that reflect the dedication of our team, partners, and community. Together, these sections provide a clear picture of where we've been, what we've achieved, and where we are headed.

01



02

...our volunteers continue to be the heart of everything we do.

Harold Lyle Films

A Letter from the Chair

Jennifer Hopping

Executive Director
American Heart Association
Jackson

As my term as Chair of the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service, Volunteer Mississippi, comes to an end, I want to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to serve alongside such dedicated and passionate individuals.

Serving in this role has been an extraordinary honor. Over the past year, I have witnessed firsthand the powerful impact that volunteers have in our community. Whether through direct service, community engagement, or advocacy, our volunteers continue to be the heart of everything we do.

Together, we have accomplished so much:

- At the request of MEMA, Volunteer Mississippi provided support to Walthall County with a Volunteer Reception Center and Donations Warehouse in Tylertown. (see more on p 12)
- Over 11,000 hours and 3,000 volunteers engaged through Volunteer Mississippi funded mini-grant projects.
- Despite challenges from federal cuts, AmeriCorps Mississippi expanded from 7 to 8 programs, including 2 planning grants.
- Volunteer Mississippi partnered with Mississippi Food Network for the AmeriCorps End-of-Year service project where members and special guests packed 32,076 pounds of food.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible support of the amazing Volunteer Mississippi staff, board members, volunteers, partner organizations, and community leaders. Your passion, creativity, and commitment to service have truly inspired me this year. To my fellow commissioners - thank you for your collaboration, ideas, and unwavering dedication. It's been a true privilege to serve with you.

While my role as Chair is ending, my commitment to our shared mission remains strong. I look forward to supporting the Commission's work under new leadership and watching as even more volunteers and organizations step forward to make a difference in Mississippi.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to lead, grow, and give back through this role. It has been a meaningful and deeply rewarding opportunity.



03

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.

Aubrey Leigh Goodwin
First Vice Chair
Jackson

Celeste Brown
Second Vice Chair
Hattiesburg

Meredith Aldridge
Commissioner, outgoing
Jackson

Dr. Suzanne Bean
Commissioner
Columbus

Ashley Cannady
Commissioner
Ridgeland

Beth Fisher
Commissioner, outgoing
Canton

Susan Garrard
Commissioner
Jackson

Roschelle Gibson
Commissioner
Byram

Lisa Grantham
Commissioner
Ridgeland

Rochelle Hicks
Commissioner, outgoing
Jackson

Dr. Lemia Jenkins
Commissioner
Jackson

Merracle Jordan
Commissioner, outgoing
Southaven

Melanie Mitchell
Commissioner
Meridian

Dr. Josie (Jo) Shumake
Commissioner, outgoing
Columbus

Cole Smith
Commissioner
Jackson

Kathy St. John
Commissioner
Jackson





First Lady Elee Reeves

Honorary Chair

As Mississippi's First Lady, Elee Reeves continues to champion volunteerism across the state by uplifting the work of service-minded individuals and organizations. Through her support of Volunteer Mississippi, she highlights the spirit of service, even hand-selecting two recipients for Governor's Initiative for Volunteer Excellence Awards. First Lady Reeves remains a strong advocate for programs that encourage Mississippians to give back to their communities.

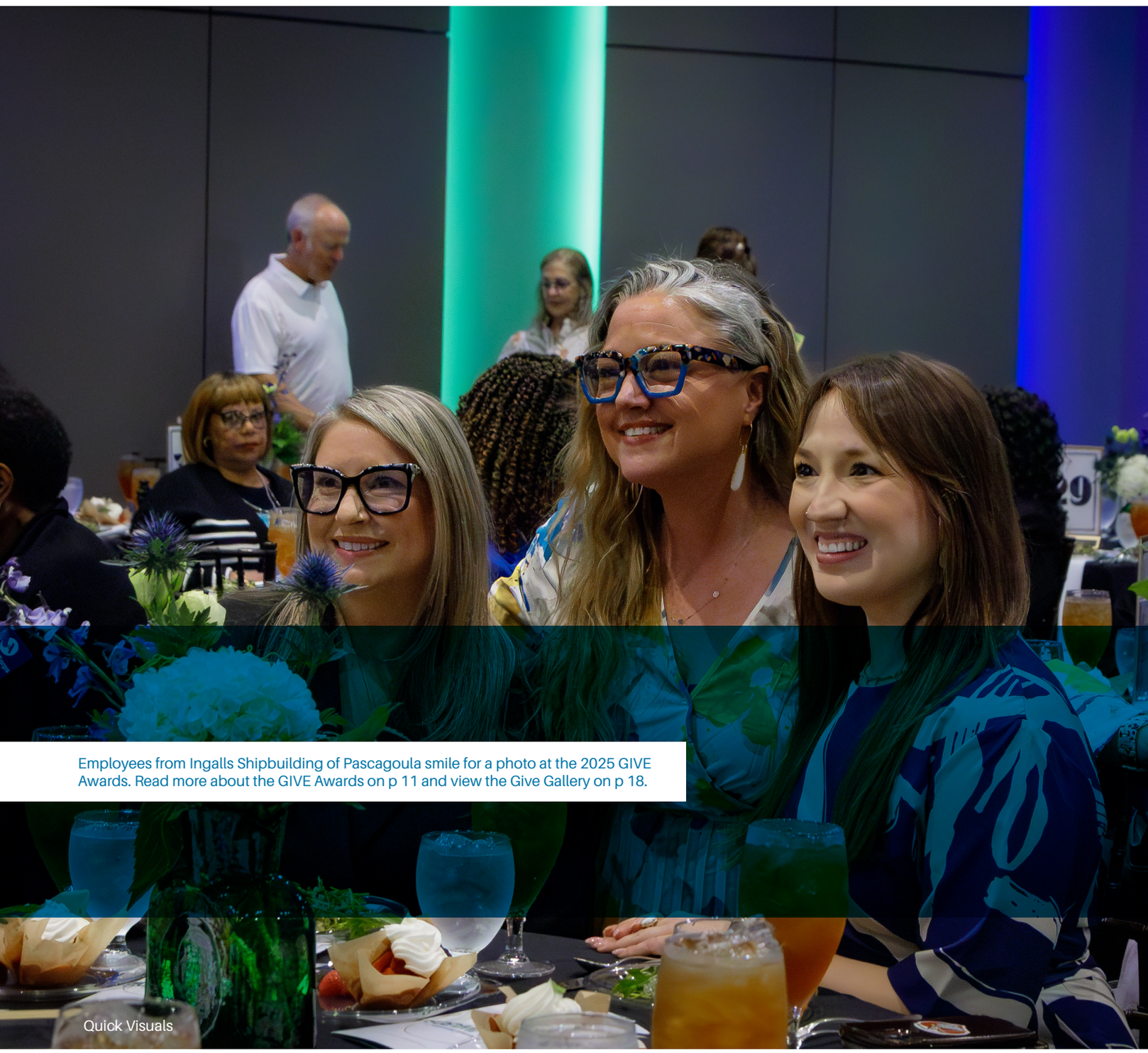


Left to Right: Celeste Brown, Jennifer Hopping, Merracle Jordan at the February 2025 Board Retreat, hosted at the Fairview Inn in Jackson.

We extend our sincerest gratitude to our outgoing executive officers: Jennifer Hopping, Board Chair; Aubrey Leigh Goodwin, First Vice Chair; and Celeste Brown, Second Vice Chair. Their dedicated service and steady leadership proved to advance our mission in FY 2025.

At a board meeting on June 11, 2025, the Volunteer Mississippi Board of Commissioners approved a new executive officer slate for the upcoming fiscal year. We are pleased to welcome Aubrey Leigh Goodwin, JD, CPPB, Senior Manager of Grant Management at BDO USA as Board Chair. Celeste Brown, Project Manager at South Mississippi Planning and Development District will serve as First Vice Chair and Roschelle Gibson, Alderman Ward 5 for the City of Byram will serve as Second Vice Chair.

We look forward to working alongside our newly elected executive team as we continue advancing our mission and supporting communities throughout Mississippi.



Employees from Ingalls Shipbuilding of Pascagoula smile for a photo at the 2025 GIVE Awards. Read more about the GIVE Awards on p 11 and view the Give Gallery on p 18.

Quick Visuals

04



Volunteer Services

Empowering *all* Mississippians in service to their communites.

At the heart of Volunteer Mississippi's mission is the belief that every Mississippian has the power to make a difference through service. Our Volunteer Services initiatives address the agency's goals to promote volunteerism, increase volunteer participation, and recognize volunteers across the state. Through strategic outreach, grant support, and statewide recognition programs, Volunteer Mississippi connects individuals and organizations to meaningful service opportunities amplifying impact, strengthening communities, and celebrating the spirit of volunteerism that defines our state.

Promote Volunteerism

Volunteer Mississippi is dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of community service and the positive change it can bring.

Volunteer Mississippi's renewed social media presence in FY2025 proved impactful in expanding and engaging audiences across the state — all through fully organic content with no paid advertising.

Despite Facebook's overall reach dip from the previous year (which included paid ads), engagement levels remained steady, reflecting a loyal and engaged community. Instagram saw remarkable growth, with reach skyrocketing by **145%** and interactions rising, signaling a strong audience engagement and content that resonates.

Top performing content included a recap from an AmeriCorps Mississippi Site Visit with Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith that reached nearly 2,000 non-followers, showing that content continues to inspire action, even without paid promotion (see more from the site visit on pg. 15).

Volunteer Mississippi's website saw consistent visits with new users discovering the site primarily through organic search, followed closely by direct search. Other top traffic acquisition channels include referral and social media platforms. This indicates that Volunteer Mississippi's online partnerships and social media presence are effectively increasing visibility, driving new audiences to our site, and strengthening engagement with our programs and initiatives.

2.7k+
average monthly website visits

21.9k+
profile visits
across social platforms

Increase Volunteer Participation

This year, Volunteer Mississippi supported volunteer and civic engagement projects across the state. Over 2,700 volunteers were engaged and served over 11,000 hours

Through its annual mini grant program, Volunteer Mississippi provides critical funding to help Mississippi organizations mobilize volunteers, expand service opportunities, and strengthen communities across the state. These highly competitive grants support short-term, high-impact service projects that address local needs while fostering a culture of volunteerism and civic engagement.

This year, mini grant projects worked in areas such as education, food security, youth development, and veteran support. Recipients included the Fiber Arts Festival in Oxford, revamping Amory Main Street, Bee the Difference mentoring program in Jackson, the Cotesworth Culture and Heritage Festival in Carrollton, the Mississippi Special Olympics, and more.

Collectively, 2,754+ volunteers served over 11,211 hours. From neighborhood clean ups to health outreach, mini grant projects continue to demonstrate the power of small grants to create big change across Mississippi.

Volunteer Mississippi also worked to expand opportunities for service by making it easy and accessible to find volunteer opportunities near you.

FY 25 marked the first full year of Volunteer Mississippi's updated volunteer opportunity calendar, powered by GivePulse. This interactive volunteer mangagement platform allows Volunteer Mississippi to connect individuals, organizations, and communities, making it easier than ever for Mississippians to find and participate in meaningful service.

Through GivePulse, Mississippians can find opportunities in their area, track service hours, share their impact, and reflect on their experience.

The word map below created from volunteer reflections highlights the themes that defined service across Mississippi this year. The larger the word, the more frequently it appeared in members' responses, illustrating the values — service, community, impact, and more — uniting volunteers in service across the state.





Recognize Volunteers

The Governor's Initiative for Volunteer Excellence (GIVE) Awards celebrate the exemplary service of Mississippi's most dedicated citizens. Hosted annually by Volunteer Mississippi, in partnership with the Governor's Office, GIVE recognizes and honors individuals and organizations that work to strengthen communities and inspire others to serve.

Held at the Two Mississippi Museums, this year's GIVE Awards ceremony brought together volunteers, community leaders, AmeriCorps members, and 9 new awardees. Miss Mississippi 2024 Becky Williams and Miss Mississippi's Teen 2024 Brooke Bumgarner joined the celebration to recognize this year's honorees.

The event was made possible through the support and creativity of several Mississippi collaborators, including Make it POP (event design), Mahaffey's Quality Printing (program), Nick Wallace Catering (culinary service), and Quick Visuals (photography and videography). These partnerships helped create the vibrant and meaningful celebration for this year's spectacular awardees.

The GIVE Awards not only honor those who give their time, talent, and energy to strengthen communities, but also serve as a reminder to Mississippians about the power of volunteerism to transform lives. By shining a spotlight on these volunteers and their spirits of service, Volunteer Mississippi continues to advance in its mission of engaging and supporting all Mississippians in service to their communities.

The 2025 GIVE Award winners are as follows:

Corporate Volunteering Champion
Ingalls Shipbuilding, *Pascagoula*

Excellence in Disaster Volunteerism
Mennonite Disaster Services, *MS/LA Unit*

Innovation in Volunteerism
Extra Table Feeds, *Hattiesburg*

Volunteer of the Year
Cassie McDuffey, *Jackson*

Volunteer Family of the Year
The Wetzel Family, *St. Martin*

Veteran "Hero in Service"
Jung Tai, *Meridian*

First Lady's Youth Rising Star
Amelia Rose Cook, *Madison*

First Lady's Youth Rising Star
Joy Kitchens, *Collinsville*

Marsha Meeks Kelly Award for Lifetime Achievement in Volunteer Service
Leola Washington, Hattiesburg



Quick Visuals (see more from the 2025 GIVE Awards on p. 18

Disaster Services

In March, Walthall County was rattled by severe storms, leaving four dead and many homes destroyed.

In response to a request from the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), Volunteer Mississippi deployed to Walthall County to support disaster response operations following severe weather. Volunteer Mississippi provided targeted support to two critical volunteer-led recovery hubs in Tylertown: the Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) and the donations warehouse.

Volunteer Reception Center
Volunteer Mississippi brought structure and efficiency to the local Volunteer Reception Center by:

- Setting up a clearly marked VRC with proper signage and intake stations
- Training onsite staff in volunteer registration and management protocols
- Providing standardized forms for consistent tracking and reporting

During the deployment, the VRC coordinated the efforts of over 120 unaffiliated volunteers who contributed over 850 service hours. Additionally, Volunteer Mississippi helped track the contributions of key affiliated response organizations including Unified Cajun Navy, 8 Days of Hope, and Mercy Chefs, which collectively provided over 1,800 volunteer hours.

Donations Warehouse Support
Although the donations warehouse was functioning upon arrival, Volunteer Mississippi stepped in to enhance operations:

- Design and implement a real-time inventory tracking system
- Establish clear safety protocols and operational best practices
- Streamline donation intake and distribution flows
- Document all incoming and outgoing donations to improve accountability
- Introduce anti-fraud safeguards to protect resources



05



2.65k+

hours served

120+

unaffiliated volunteers

2.4k+

donated items

Impact This deployment demonstrates Volunteer Mississippi's unique ability to rapidly integrate into local efforts, enhance existing volunteer infrastructure, and bring consistency, efficiency, and accountability to spontaneous disaster response operations. Through our support, Walthall County was better equipped to support affected residents and sustain recovery efforts.

AmeriCorps Mississippi

In FY2025, AmeriCorps Mississippi expanded from 7 programs to 8 programs, including 2 planning grants.

Operating Programs

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.

Golden Eagle

In partnership with the University of Southern Mississippi, the Golden Eagle Teacher Residency program blends online coursework with real-world teaching experience. Through this innovative residency, aspiring teachers are stepping up to strengthen Mississippi's teacher pipeline

Grenada School District

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 revitilization, public safety, community outreach, health services, and children and youth services.

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.

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 Mississippi 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, literacy, and social-emotional programming for preschool children, education is enhanced and confidence is fostered.

Refill Jackson Initiative

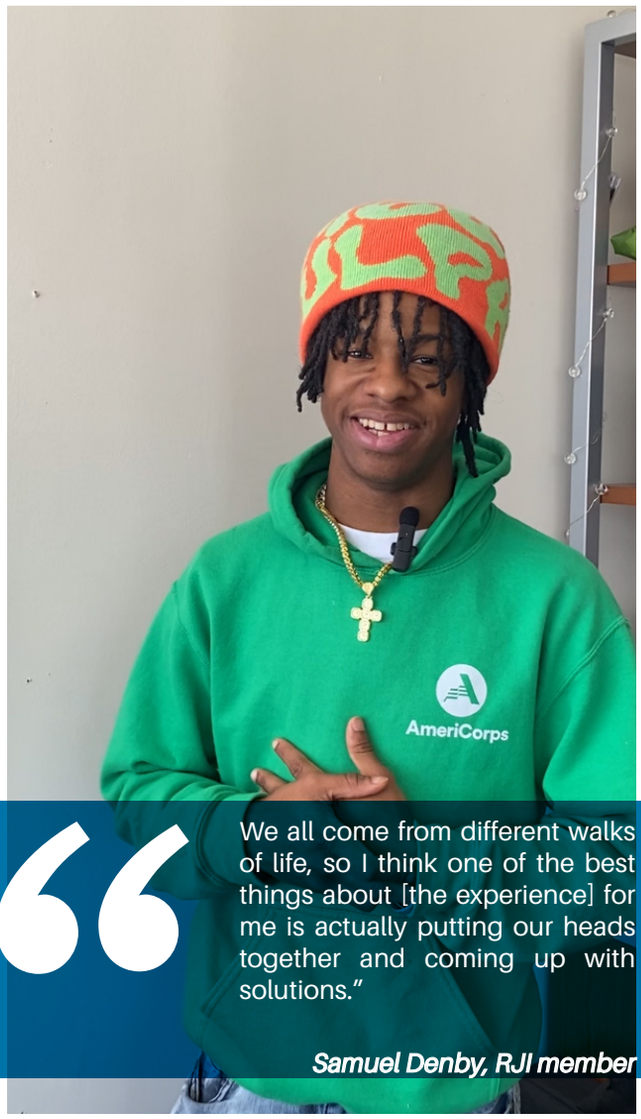
Refill Jackson Initiative is a holistic workforce development organization for young adults disconnected from school and work. RJI envisions a healthier, wealthier Jackson for everyone. They empower young adults seeking an improved quality of life, through tailored support and job training.

Improve Your Tomorrow

planning grant

MS ExCEEDS

planning grant



> We all come from different walks of life, so I think one of the best things about [the experience] for me is actually putting our heads together and coming up with solutions."
>
> ***Samuel Denby, RJI member***





Left: Samuel Denby
Top Right: Elementary Network II Assistant Superintendent Dionne Woody, Director of MS Headstart Association Eileen Beazley, Superintendent of Jackson Public Schools Dr. Errick L. Greene, Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, Timberlawn Students, Chief Advancement Officer of Reading and Math Corps Lindsay Dolce, and Volunteer Mississippi Executive Director Suzanne Rutherford
Bottom Right: Thames Elementary School classroom sing along to an educational math song

Site Visits

Volunteer Mississippi conducted 11 site visits this year, three of which with special guests. These visits provided valuable opportunities for staff and commissioners to engage directly with program staff and members, discuss challenges and successes, and celebrate local accomplishments.

In an August 2024 visit to Thames Elementary in Hattiesburg, Volunteer Mississippi staff and commissioners were able to see the Golden Eagle Teacher Residency Program in action. Staff and commissioners visited with teachers in the program, toured the school, and sat in to observe lessons.

In another visit with commissioners to Refill Jackson Initative (RJI), Volunteer Mississippi got to hear from members about why they serve and what AmeriCorps means to them. Samuel Denby, a first year AmeriCorps member with RJI, reflected on the collaborative problem-solving and teamwork that makes his AmeriCorps service meaningful to him, "We all come from different walks of life," Denby said, "so I think one of the best things about [the experience] for me is actually putting our heads together and coming up with solutions."

Finally, in April 2025, another visit welcomed U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith to Timberlawn Elementary in Jackson, where she met with Ampact members serving in the education-focused programs. Her visit highlighted the importance of national service in supporting Mississippi's schools and students, as well as the lasting difference members make each day in classrooms across the state.

Site visits continue to play a vital role in ensuring accountability, strengthening relationships, and showcasing the impact of AmeriCorps across Mississippi communities. Beyond program auditing and evaluation, these visits serve as meaningful opportunities for staff, commissioners, members and staff to engage, be heard, and witness the power of AmeriCorps service in Mississippi.

06

AmeriCorps at a Glance

169k+	$2.8m	$1.4m	333	$684k
hours served	federal funds awarded	local match invested	members	education award earned

End-of-Year Service Project

To close out another impactful program year, Volunteer Mississippi hosted an End-of-Year Service Project in place of the annual Celebration of Service as an opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year and honor those who make our mission possible. The event brought together AmeriCorps members, partner organizations, community leaders, and volunteers from across the state to celebrate service, share their 'AmeriStories' and look to the year ahead with renewed purpose and energy.

Volunteer Mississippi staff and AmeriCorps Mississippi members were joined by several special guests for this meaningful event. Miss Mississippi 2024 Becky Williams, Miss Mississippi's Teen 2025 Avery McNair, and Mrs. Mississippi Plus America Ultimate Woman Felicia Gordon participated alongside members, helping to pack foods and encouraging those in service. Representative Zakiya Summers also joined the event, sharing words of encouragement with members in light of federal cuts to AmeriCorps funding.

The event was not only a celebration of service but also a day of tangible impact for communities across Mississippi.





32,076
pounds of food

26,730
meals for Mississippians

116
backpack meals

336
senior grocery boxes

750
food commodity boxes







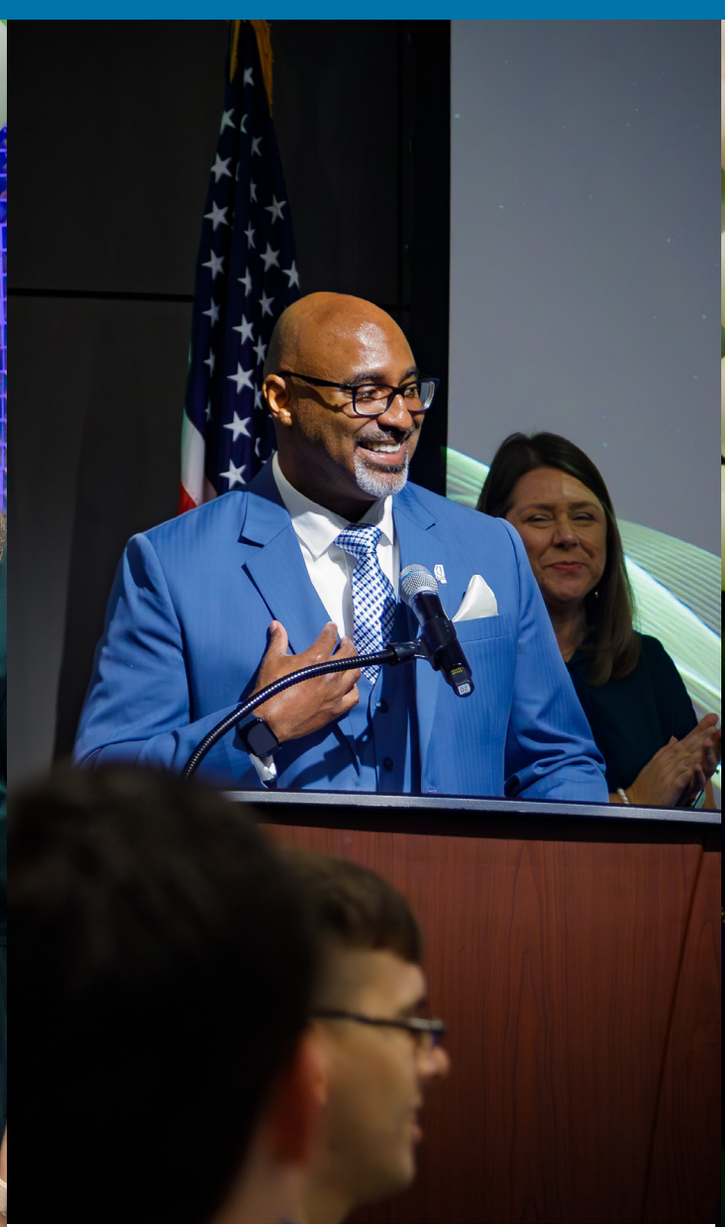








07






GIVE
23






GIVE AWARDS



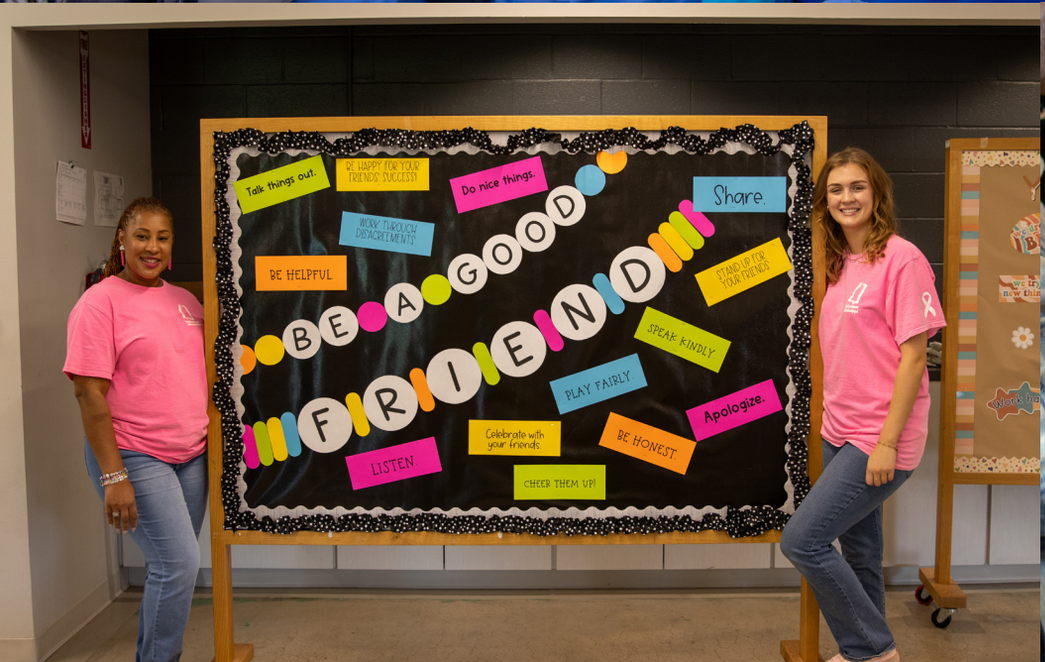

GIVE AWARDS
CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING CHAMPION AWARD




MARCH of the MAYORS
EXTRA TABLE FEEDS 15
Origin Bank.
INGALLS SHIPBUILDING
ATMOS energy
Volunteer Mississippi
Moon Pie


2025
EXTRA TABLE FEEDS 15
Volunteer Mississippi




BE A GOOD FRIEND
Talk things out.
Be happy for your friends' success!
Do nice things.
Share.
Work through disagreements
Be helpful
Stand up for your friends
Speak kindly
Play fairly
Apologize.
Be honest
Celebrate with your friends.
Listen
Cheer them up!




verizon spire
Moon Pie


Together, we are
AMERICORPS


Moon Pie
since 1917





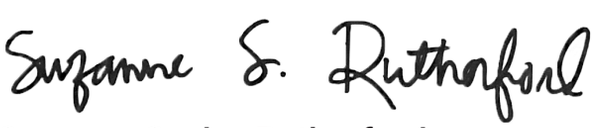


08

Looking Ahead...

As I look back on this past year, I am filled with gratitude for the privilege of serving our state and the people who give it its heart. Every day, I am inspired by the individuals who step forward —quietly and boldly — to lift up their neighbors and strengthen the fabric of our communities. Mississippi remains one of the most resilient, creative, and community-minded places in the nation. What makes our great state extraordinary is not only our heritage or hospitality, but the people who continue to invest their time, talents, and hope in the place we all call home. I believe wholeheartedly that every person has the capacity to spark change, whether through a single act of kindness or a lifelong commitment to service. This year, our work has been guided by that belief. We have strived to nurture a culture of volunteerism that is inclusive, accessible, and meaningful. And as we look to FY 2026, our vision remains clear: to empower Mississippians of every background, age, and ability to serve their communities in ways that reflect their passions and meet real needs.

The challenges ahead are real, but so is our collective strength. Together, we can continue building a Mississippi that is vibrant, connected, and full of opportunity. But we cannot do this work without you. Your voice, your experiences, and your commitment shape the future of our communities. You know what your neighborhoods and communities need to flourish — and we want to learn from you, partner with you, and walk alongside you as we move forward. Thank you for your dedication, your trust, and your belief in our shared mission. I am confident that, together, we will continue to create a brighter, stronger Mississippi for all!



Suzanne Scales Rutherford
Executive Director

> Your voice, yo
> shape the futu
> neighborhood
> want to learn f
> you as we mo



vour experiences, and your commitment
ture of our communities. You know what your
ods and communities need to flourish — and we
n from you, partner with you, and walk alongside
ove forward."



info@volunteermississippi.org



volunteermississippi.org



601.432.6779