

FY 2025 Annual Report: A Review of the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Advertising Fund

A Report to the Mississippi Legislature
Report #723
November 18, 2025



PEER Committee

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Robin Robinson, Vice-Chair

Chad McMahan, Secretary

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About PEER:

The Mississippi Legislature created the Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER Committee) by statute in 1973. A joint committee, the PEER Committee is composed of seven members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House and seven members of the Senate appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. Appointments are made for four-year terms, with one Senator and one Representative appointed from each of the U.S. Congressional Districts and three at-large members appointed from each house. Committee officers are elected by the membership, with officers alternating annually between the two houses. All Committee actions by statute require a majority vote of four Representatives and four Senators voting in the affirmative.

Mississippi's constitution gives the Legislature broad power to conduct examinations and investigations. PEER is authorized by law to review any public entity, including contractors supported in whole or in part by public funds, and to address any issues that may require legislative action. PEER has statutory access to all state and local records and has subpoena power to compel testimony or the production of documents.

PEER provides a variety of services to the Legislature, including program evaluations, economy and efficiency reviews, financial audits, limited scope evaluations, fiscal notes, and other governmental research and assistance. The Committee identifies inefficiency or ineffectiveness or a failure to accomplish legislative objectives, and makes recommendations for redefinition, redirection, redistribution and/or restructuring of Mississippi government. As directed by and subject to the prior approval of the PEER Committee, the Committee's professional staff executes audit and evaluation projects obtaining information and developing options for consideration by the Committee. The PEER Committee releases reports to the Legislature, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, the agency examined, and the general public.

The Committee assigns top priority to written requests from individual legislators and legislative committees. The Committee also considers PEER staff proposals and written requests from state officials and others.



Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review

PEER Committee

P.O. Box 1204 | Jackson, Mississippi 39215-1204

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November 18, 2025

Honorable Tate Reeves, Governor

Honorable Delbert Hosemann, Lieutenant Governor

Honorable Jason White, Speaker of the House

Members of the Mississippi State Legislature

On November 18, 2025, the PEER Committee authorized release of the report titled ***FY 2025 Annual Report: A Review of the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Advertising Fund.***

Senators

Robin Robinson
Vice Chair

Chad McMahan
Secretary

Kevin Blackwell

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Scott DeLano

Dean Kirby

Charles Younger

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Kevin W. Felsher".

Representative Kevin Felsher, Chair

Executive Director

James F. (Ted) Booth

This report does not recommend increased funding or additional staff.

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CONCLUSION: Under the authority of MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64 (1972), the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) oversees deposits to and expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund. As required by state law, PEER conducted a review to detail how funds were spent and deposited in FY 2025. In FY 2025, the Tourism Advertising Fund received approximately \$15.1 million in revenues and MDA expended approximately \$13.5 million from the fund to promote tourism in Mississippi.



BACKGROUND

Background

MISS CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (b) (1972) requires the Joint Legislative PEER Committee to provide an annual report to the Legislature reviewing the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund established by MISS CODE ANN. § 57-1-64 (1972) to include the amount of funds and a detail record of how the funds are spent.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64 created a special fund in the State Treasury known as the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund (Tourism Advertising Fund).

MDA is authorized to sell advertising and other promotion information and enter into agreement with other tourism associations for the purpose of facilitating revenue to deposit into the Tourism Advertising Fund. Additionally, MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) requires a certain percentage of each month's sales tax collections from restaurants and hotels to be deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) requires a 3% of each month's sales tax collections from restaurants and hotels to be deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund.



KEY FINDINGS

- **As provided by MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) the Tourism Advertising Fund received approximately \$15.1 million in restaurant and hotel sales tax revenue.**

MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) mandates a 1% increase in the amount of sales tax collections deposited into the fund from FYs 2020 through 2022. The Tourism Advertising Fund received an increase of approximately \$440,000 over FY 2024 collections.

- **In FY 2025, MDA expended approximately \$13.5 million from the Tourism Advertising Fund, primarily on advertisements promoting tourism in Mississippi.**

FY 2025 expenditures decreased by \$700,000 from FY 2024 expenditures. MDA worked with four companies to place advertisements in FY 2025. Local destination marketing organizations utilized MDA's cooperative advertisement program to place advertisements during FY 2025, sharing the cost burden of placing advertisements.

- **MDA establishes spending levels based on the immediate past revenue collected and deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund.**

During FY 2025, MDA spent an average of \$1.13 million from the Tourism Advertising Fund and received an average of \$1.26 million in sales tax collections per month. Proceeding into FY 2026 and future fiscal years, MDA's goal is to operate the fund at a near net-zero balance.

RECOMMENDATION

The Mississippi Development Authority should ensure that it is planning expenditures around marketing activities that show increased tourism as well as increased restaurant and hotel sales tax revenue collection.

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FY 2025 Annual Report: A Review of the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Advertising Fund

Introduction

Authority, Scope, and Purpose

MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (b) (1972) requires the Joint Legislative PEER Committee to provide an annual report to the Legislature reviewing the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) Tourism Advertising Fund established by MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64 (1972).

This FY 2025 report on the Tourism Advertising Fund includes an update on revenues and expenditures and addresses the following questions:

- How much in restaurant and hotel sales tax revenues were distributed to the Tourism Advertising Fund during FY 2025?
- How did MDA expend the sales tax revenue directed to the Tourism Advertising Fund during FY 2025?
- How does MDA intend to expend and manage funds in FY 2026?

PEER conducted this review in accordance with MISS. CODE ANN. § 5-3-1 (1972) et seq.

Method

To conduct this analysis, PEER:

- reviewed relevant sections of state law;
- reviewed data reported in the state's accounting system, Mississippi Accountability System for Government Information and Collaboration (MAGIC);
- obtained programmatic information from MDA; and,
- obtained sales tax collection and revenue distribution information from MAGIC and MDA.

Background

This chapter serves as a review of tourism-related laws and statutory requirements and presents the following information:

- creation of the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund;
- structure of the Mississippi Tourism Association Marketing Advisory Board (Advisory Board); and,
- percentages of restaurant and hotel sales tax collections deposited into the Mississippi Tourism Advertising Fund.

Creation of the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund

MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64 (1972) created the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund and authorized MDA to sell advertising and promotional information to generate revenues to deposit into the fund.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64 created a special fund in the State Treasury known as the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund, hereafter referred to as the Tourism Advertising Fund. This law states MDA can use amounts in the fund for:

...the purpose of paying costs incurred in connection with the purchase of Internet advertising and other promotional information and materials related to Mississippi tourism resources and activities...

Additionally, MDA is authorized to sell advertising and other promotional information and enter into agreements with other tourism associations for the purpose of facilitating sales revenue to deposit into the Tourism Advertising Fund.

Structure of the Mississippi Tourism Association Marketing Advisory Board

MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64.1 (1972) created the Mississippi Tourism Association Marketing Advisory Board to assist MDA with advertising and promotion of tourism in Mississippi.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64.1 created the Mississippi Tourism Association (MTA) Marketing Advisory Board to assist MDA in planning the initiatives for advertising and promoting tourism in Mississippi. The Advisory Board provides input and advice to MDA on marketing and advertising planning; however, it has no executive powers at MDA.

The statute provides the following composition for the Advisory Board:

- MTA Executive Director;

- the members of the MTA Board of Directors representing each of MTA's five tourism regions (i.e., the Hills, the Delta, the Capital/River, the Pines, and the Coastal regions), and three at-large members;
- three at-large members appointed by the Governor;
- one at-large member appointed by the Lieutenant Governor; and,
- one at-large member appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Advisory Board's statute does not establish any term length or term limits for sitting members.

Establishment of Restaurant and Hotel Sales Tax Collections Deposits into the Tourism Advertising Fund

MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) (1972) requires percentages of sales tax revenue collected from Mississippi restaurants and hotels to be deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) requires a certain percentage of each month's sales tax collections from restaurants and hotels to be deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund. The law requires a set percentage of these sales tax collections to be distributed as follows:

- For the period from August 15, 2019, through July 15, 2020: 1% of total sales tax revenue collected from restaurants and hotels;
- For the period from August 15, 2020, through July 15, 2021: 2% of total sales tax revenue collected from restaurants and hotels; and,
- From August 15, 2021, and each month thereafter, 3% of total sales tax revenue collected from restaurants and hotels.

Sales tax collections are to be deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund and used exclusively for the purposes established by MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64.

MDA Tourism Advertising Fund Revenues and Expenditures

This chapter discusses:

- FY 2025 restaurant and hotel sales tax collections;
- FY 2025 Tourism Advertising Fund expenditures; and,
- FY 2026 projected revenues and expenditures.

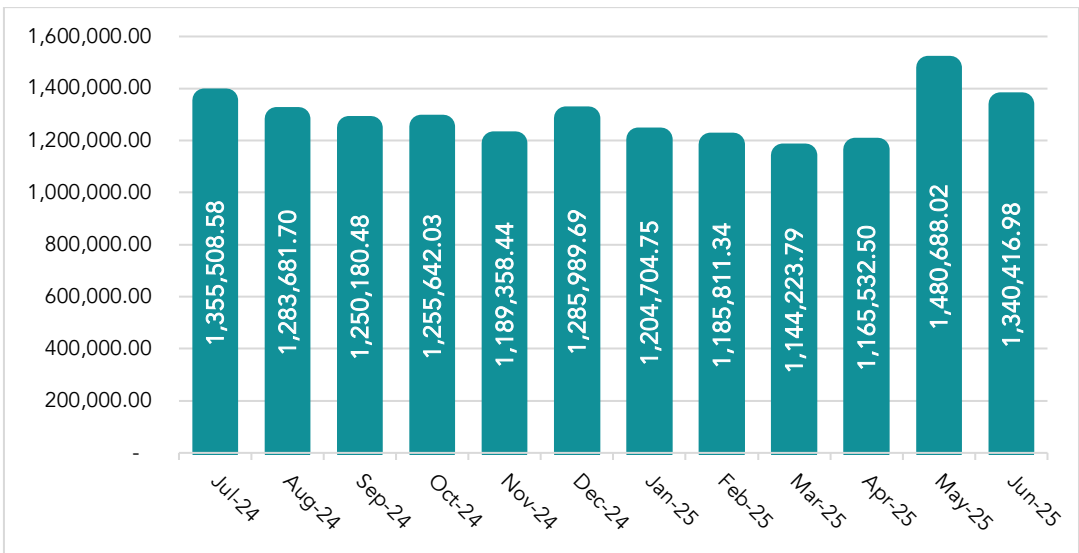
FY 2025 Tourism Advertising Fund Revenue

As provided by MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a), the Tourism Advertising Fund received approximately \$15.1 million in restaurant and hotel sales tax revenues in FY 2025.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) requires a percentage of each month’s sales tax collections from restaurants and hotels to be deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund. In FY 2025, MDA received approximately \$15.1 million in restaurant and hotel sales tax collections into the Tourism Advertising Fund.

Exhibit 1 on page 4 shows the amount of restaurant and hotel sales tax collections deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund per month.

Exhibit 1: Monthly Restaurant and Hotel Sales Tax Collections Deposited into the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund in FY 2025

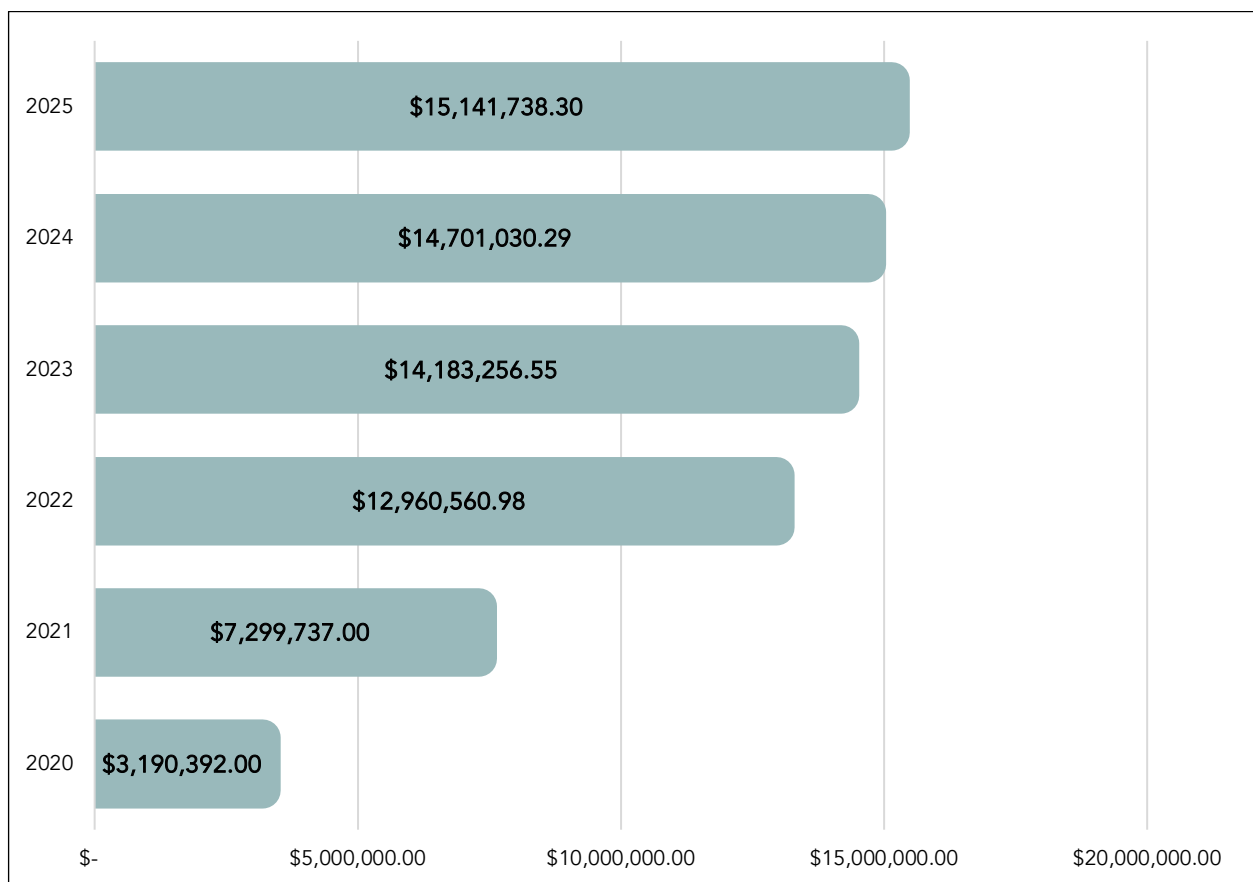


SOURCE: PEER analysis of data reported in the Mississippi Accountability in Government Information and Collaboration.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 27-65-75 (24) (a) mandated a 1% increase in the amount of sales tax collections deposited into the fund from FYs 2020 through 2022. These annual increases occurred in August of FYs 2020 through 2022. Because the fiscal year begins in July, the first fiscal year in which 3% of restaurant and hotel sales tax collections were deposited into the fund for every month of the year was FY 2023.

FY 2025 deposits from these sales tax collections increased from \$14.7 million to \$15.1 million (an approximate \$440,000 increase). As shown in Exhibit 2 on page 5, the Tourism Advertising Fund received more collections in FY 2025 than in prior fiscal years since inception. Appendix A on page 16 shows monthly deposits by fiscal year into the Tourism Advertising Fund since inception.

Exhibit 2: Total Restaurant and Hotel Sales Tax Collection Deposits into the MDA Tourism Advertising Fund from FY 2020 through FY 2025



SOURCE: PEER analysis of data reported in the Mississippi Accountability in Government Information and Collaboration.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 57-1-64 authorizes MDA to “sell advertising and other tourism promotional information through the MDA Internet website and other marketing outlets” and deposit the revenues from any sales into the Tourism Advertising Fund. According to the data in MAGIC, no revenues or profits were made from selling advertisements and other tourism promotional information; therefore, the only money deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund in FY 2025 was from restaurant and hotel sales tax collections.

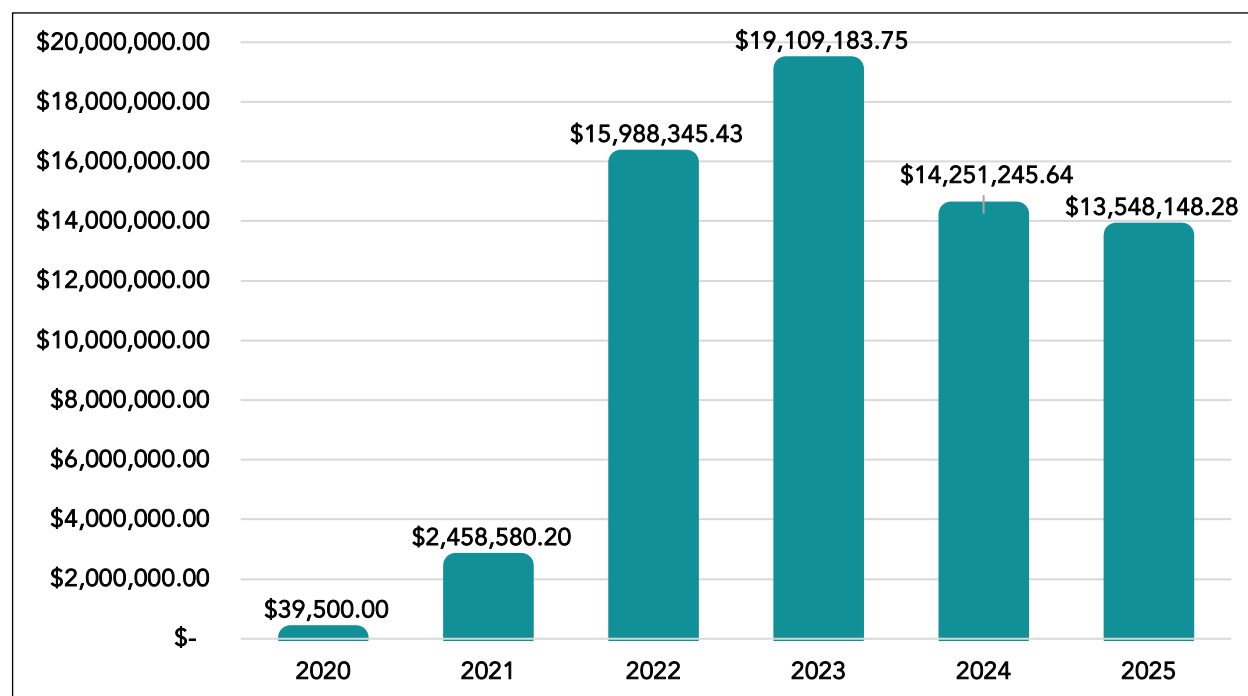
Currently, state law does not mandate any more increases in restaurant and hotel sales tax collections to be deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund. Therefore, MDA could expect to receive similar levels of funding moving forward depending on the stability of future sales activities of restaurants and hotels within the state.

FY 2025 Tourism Advertising Fund Expenditures

In FY 2025, MDA expended approximately \$13.5 million from the Tourism Advertising Fund, primarily on advertisements promoting tourism in Mississippi. FY 2025 expenditures decreased by approximately \$700,000 from FY 2024 expenditures.

Expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund for FY 2025 were approximately \$13.5 million, a decrease of approximately \$700,000 from FY 2024 expenditures of approximately \$14.2 million. See Exhibit 3 on page 6 for annual expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund since inception.

Exhibit 3: Annual Expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund Since Inception



SOURCE: PEER analysis of data reported by the Mississippi Accountability in Government Information and Collaboration and Mississippi Development Authority.

MDA's expenditures in FY 2025 focused on the following areas of interest:

- a study of visitors to Mississippi;
- culinary event-related costs;
- music event-related costs;

- media placement; and,
- production of advertisements both domestically and internationally.

According to MDA staff, the Visit Mississippi marketing campaign in FY 2025 was updated utilizing a combination of its available data resources, new strategic plan, and stakeholder input by the Mississippi Tourism Association. During FY 2025, Visit Mississippi used marketing dollars to launch and execute the first phase of its Birthplace of America's Music campaign. This campaign began with Mississippi's participating in the 2025 Rose Parade and was followed by an advertisement campaign and the launch of a podcast series titled *Mississippi on the Map*. MDA utilized marketing dollars to create a five-year comprehensive strategic plan to guide the state's tourism efforts. MDA works with data firms to monitor visitor trends (e.g., point of origin, spending impact, length of stay, demographic information) which provides more timely insight into both state and local tourism. MDA also created and shared travel itineraries for travel markets with highest visitor interest. These itineraries provide potential visitors with information and experiences that showcase Mississippi attractions.

According to MDA staff, in response to input from the Advisory Board, during FY 2025 MDA has undertaken the following new initiatives:

- sharing monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly marketing data highlights with the advisory committee; and,
- target marketing for the Mississippi Tour Guide.

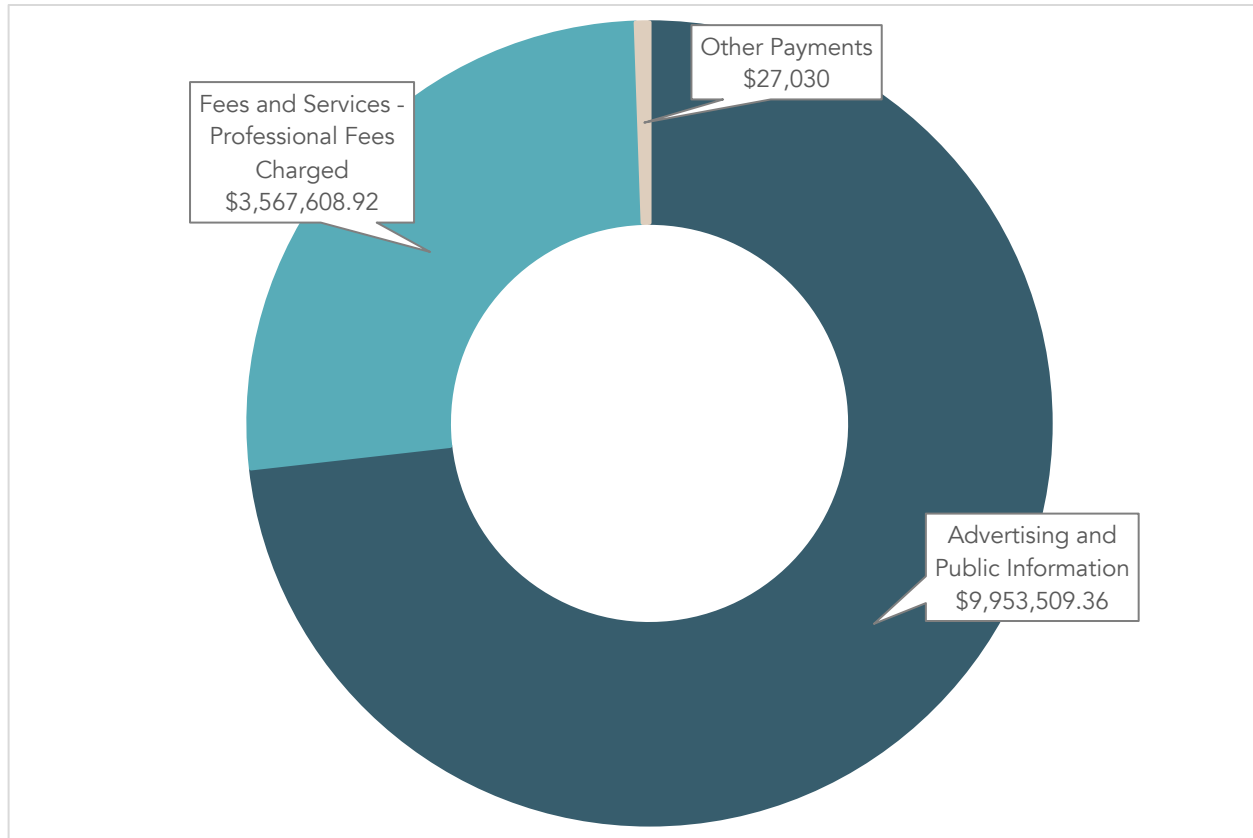
MDA also used expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund to assist local communities and tourism associations (e.g., Corinth, Natchez, Ocean Springs). Through MDA's cooperative advertisement program, local destination marketing organizations (DMO's) pay a portion of the advertisement placement cost while MDA pays the other portion of the cost. MDA's cooperative advertisement program matched up to \$50,000 for local DMO's during FY 2025. Cooperative advertising placement helps local DMOs advertisements reach broader audiences by sharing the cost of advertisement placement. During FY 2025 Visit Mississippi paid \$805,518.12 in cooperative advertising to assist local DMO's.

Exhibit 4 on page 8 illustrates FY 2025 total expenditures into 3 categories:

- advertising and public information;
- fees and services – professional fees charged;
- other payments.

Of the total FY 2025 Tourism Advertising Fund expenditures, 73% (\$9,953,509.36) were for Advertising and Public Information, 26% (\$3,567,608.92) were for Fees and Services – Professional Fees, while less than one percent (\$27,030) was spent on Banking and Credit Card Fees, Membership Dues, and Prior Year Expense – Contractual 1099.

Exhibit 4: FY 2025 Tourism Advertising Fund Expenditures



NOTE: Other Payments includes: Banking and Credit Card Fees (\$30), Membership Dues (\$25,000), and Prior Year Expense-Contractual 1099 (\$2,000).

SOURCE: PEER analysis of data reported by the Mississippi Accountability in Government Information and Collaboration and Mississippi Development Authority.

The following section discusses the contracts in effect during FY 2025 and the services provided through those contracts. See Appendix B on page 17 for a list of expenditures made to each vendor by category of spending. See Appendix C on page 18 for a list of the total expenditures made to each vendor.

Fees and Services – Professional Fees Charged

Fees and Services – Professional Fees Charged expenditures accounted for 26% of expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund during FY 2025 at \$3,567,608.92. MDA made payments to seven vendors for Professional Fees Charged during FY 2025. The contract with Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., was entered into during FY 2022 and extended in both FY 2024 and FY 2025. Contracts with Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD; Coraggio Group, LLC; and Miles Partnership, LLLP were entered into during FY 2024. During FY 2025 MDA entered into a contract with Longwoods International.

Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., Contract¹

MDA entered into a professional services contract with Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., on July 7, 2021, to serve as their domestic agency of record for tourism at MDA. MDA amended the contract on May 9, 2022, increasing the total contract maximum and extending the contract terms for an additional year (through July 6, 2024). MDA exercised its option to renew the contract for an additional one-year term on June 5, 2024. MDA again renewed its contract with Maris, West, & Baker, Inc. with a final contract term beginning July 7, 2025, and ending March 31, 2026.

MDA paid Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., \$2,742,230.42 for professional services in FY 2025. Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., provides professional services to MDA including, but not limited to the following:

- advertisement creation;
- graphic creation; and,
- video production.

Longwoods International

On October 1, 2024, MDA signed a contract with Longwoods International to provide a study on domestic tourism in Mississippi. The contract was in the amount of \$44,500 for a custom overnight and day visitation study to be delivered in May 2025. According to the contract, this study provides a comprehensive view of visitors to and within the state to provide insights for MDA when promoting travel to Mississippi.

According to the Longwoods International contract, the company's visitor report includes, but is not limited to, various visitor data pertaining to the following:

- number of trips to the destination;
- trip expenditures;
- visitor origin markets;
- visitor demographics;
- main purpose of the trip; and,
- activities on the trip.

According to the Longwoods International Contract, the data from its report will be delivered directly to Tourism Economics, who publishes the final visitor volumes and expenditures as part of the economic impact reporting.

EBP US, Inc.

Chapter 392, Laws of 2022 (H.B. 1093 Regular Session 2022) specifically directed PEER to conduct a review of the advertising and marketing efforts paid for through the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Advertising Fund to be paid for by MDA. On August 1,

¹ MDA compensated Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., for both professional services and advertisement and public information services in FY 2025. Any professional services provided by Maris, West, & Baker, Inc. are billed to the total value of the contract while advertisement and public information service charges are not billed to the total value of the professional services contract.

2024, the PEER Committee entered into a contract with EBP US, Inc. to review the following:

- MDA's effectiveness of attracting out-of-state visitors to Mississippi;
- MDA's effectiveness of digital advertising efforts; and,
- MDA's administration and oversight of expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund.

This report, *A Review of the Effectiveness of the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Advertising Fund*, was published on November 25, 2024. MDA paid EBP US, Inc. \$85,638.00 during FY 2025 after the completion of the effectiveness review.

Corragio Group, LLC

MDA entered into a contract with Corragio Group, LLC, on May 1, 2024, to provide professional services developing a statewide strategic plan for tourism at MDA. According to the contract, Corragio Group, LLC, was paid to develop an outcome-based and actionable 2025-2030 strategic plan. The Corragio Group, LLC, delivered a 2025-2030 strategic plan to MDA staff. The strategic plan includes an implementation plan that transforms the strategic plan into a workable, actionable plan. This implementation plan includes initiatives with steps for MDA staff and external partners to follow with proposed outcomes expected. The implementation plan has three phases. MDA paid the Corragio Group, LLC, \$188,890.58 for services provided in FY 2025.

Hederman Brothers

Hederman Brothers produced profile sheets for MDA staff to use to promote Mississippi at tradeshow and events. These profile sheets show highlights of Mississippi tourism including destinations, travel time from major travel hubs, and highlights key tourism sectors such as history, music, outdoors, and culinary. MDA paid Hederman Brothers \$1,350 during FY 2025 for printing these profile sheets.

Miles Partnership, LLLP

MDA contracted with Miles Partnership, LLLP, on July 1, 2024, to provide strategic support for MDA's international marketing efforts. This includes, but is not limited to, acting as the agency point of contact with suppliers regarding all Travel South USA and Brand USA co-op programs, developing updated trade and industry assets for MDA sales kits, updating the image library content for Travel South USA, and providing support to MDA's international marketing partners. According to MDA, Miles Partnership, LLLP, creates collateral materials and advertisements that are used in international marketing efforts in the following market areas:

- The United Kingdom;
- France;
- Benelux;
- Germany; and,
- The Nordic region.

During FY 2025 MDA paid \$49,999.92 to Miles Partnership, LLLP.

Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD

MDA signed a contract with Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD to provide marketing assistance by promoting Mississippi as a tourism destination in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. This contract is for a period beginning July 5, 2023, through July 5, 2025. Previously, in September 2022, MDA utilized an emergency procurement to contract with Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD to provide marketing services internationally to help promote international travel to Mississippi. Examples of work provided by Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD include attending trade shows to promote visitation to Mississippi, representing Mississippi at media networking events, and commissioning publications to create and print media featuring Mississippi's tourism destinations.

Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD payments are made through Regions Bank. According to MDA staff, the State Treasury of Mississippi does not have a system in place to make international wire transfers. Since Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD is a company based in the United Kingdom, MDA sends money to Regions Bank in large blocks of funding. These funds are then used to pay invoices as they are received. According to MDA staff, the funds in the Regions Bank account are replenished as needed. MDA wire transferred \$455,000 from the Tourism Advertising Fund to the Regions Bank account which was used to pay the Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD invoices during FY 2025.

Advertising and Public Information Expenditures

MDA paid four vendors during FY 2025 for advertising and public information services. Advertising and public information expenditures accounted for 73% of expenditures from the Tourism Advertising Fund during FY 2025 at \$9,953,509.36.

Advertising and Public Information Expenditures in FY 2025 were \$1,737,219.90 below FY 2024 expenditures in the same category.

Maris, West, & Baker, Inc.

In addition to professional services expenditures, MDA paid Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., \$9,541,718.08 in FY 2025 for placing advertisements on media outlets. See Appendix D on page 19 for Maris, West, & Baker, Inc. advertisement placement purchases for FY 2025.

Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., purchased advertisement placements on MDA's behalf. Maris, West, & Baker, Inc. began placing all cooperative advertisements for Visit Mississippi in April 2025. According to MDA staff, allowing Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., to purchase advertisements streamlines the process because they are also the company that creates the content. Therefore, it has the content in-house and ready to be distributed. This prevents MDA from having to retrieve the content from Maris, West, & Baker Inc., to distribute it to another company for purchasing advertisements. Maris, West, & Baker, Inc. also provided creative activation support for the 2025 Rose Parade and the Chicago Blues Festival.

Advance Local Media, LLC

Advance Local Media, LLC, is a marketing and advertisement firm that purchases digital advertisements for MDA. During FY 2025 Advance Local Media placed ads on behalf of

MDA and placed cooperative media ads for Visit Mississippi and local DMO's. MDA paid Advance Local Media \$98,091.28 during FY 2025 for both direct advertisement placement and cooperative advertisement placement.

The Corporation for Travel Promotion d/b/a Brand USA

The Corporation for Travel Promotion which does business as Brand USA is a nonprofit corporation based out of Washington, DC. Brand USA is an international marketing nonprofit designed to increase international visitation and tourism to the United States. Brand USA offers cooperative marketing programs, that allow states to buy into international marketing opportunities. During FY 2025, MDA selected international advertisements through Brand USA in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada. MDA paid Brand USA \$188,700.00 during FY 2025 for professional services.

U.S. Civil Rights Marketing Alliance, Inc.²

MDA entered into a cooperative endeavor agreement with the U.S. Civil Rights Marketing Alliance from August 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025. According to the agreement, its purpose is:

...To exchange ideas and programs that would be of mutual benefit, to foster world-class promotional plans, to build the image of the US Civil Rights Trail brand to inspire travelers to visit the sites; to position the US Civil Rights Trail sites as tourism experiences vital in the economy of the South; to work closely with chambers of commerce, travel councils, and travel-oriented organizations, to position the US Civil Rights Trail sites as tourism experiences vital in the economy of the South...

Through its partnership with the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Marketing Alliance, MDA placed a full page ad in the U.S. Civil Rights Trail 2025 Travel Guide and an advertisement was published in *The Oprah Daily Magazine* in May 2025. MDA paid the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Marketing Alliance \$125,000 for Advertising and Public Information. This amount was for United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Application for the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument and Marketing Assessment.

Other Payments

During FY 2025, MDA spent \$27,030 expenses other than Professional Fees Charged and Advertising and Public Information. MDA paid these expenses into Banking and Credit Card Fees (\$30), Membership Dues (\$25,000) and Prior Year Expenses – Contractual (\$2,000).

Banking and Credit Card Fees

MDA spent \$30 on Banking and Credit Card Fees in FY 2025 to Regions Bank. This charge is for a \$30 wire transfer fee assessed by Regions Bank to wire an international payment. Regions Bank facilitates payments for MDA to Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD, one of MDA's international advertising partners.

² MDA compensated the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Marketing Alliance for both professional services and membership fees in FY 2025.

Membership Fees

MDA entered into a cooperative endeavor agreement with the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Marketing Alliance beginning August 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025. MDA spent \$25,000 on Membership Fees in FY 2025. This payment was made to the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Marketing Alliance to pay the Annual Alliance Membership fee. MDA expects to pay an annual \$25,000 membership fee each year it chooses to maintain membership with the US Civil Rights Marketing Alliance.

Prior Year Expense – Contractual 1099

MDA spent \$2,000 on prior year contractual expenses during FY 2025. According to MDA staff Advance Local Media sent invoices for April 2024 and May 2024 on October 23, 2024, resulting in a payment during FY 2025 for FY 2024 expenses. These invoices were for cooperative advertisements placed during FY 2024.

Projected FY 2026 Revenues and Expenditures

MDA establishes spending levels based on the revenue collected and deposited into the Tourism Advertising Fund in the previous quarter. MDA sets monthly spending levels relative to the monthly amount of revenue received and factors such as inflation, fuel prices, and other factors affecting travel.

FY 2026 Operational Plans and Expectations

FY 2025 is the third complete fiscal year that the Tourism Advertising Fund received 3% of the hotel and restaurant sales tax collections. Because the rate of collections distributed to the Tourism Advertising fund will remain at 3%, MDA should anticipate similar rates of funding in future fiscal years should other economic factors that influence public travel remain stable.

The Tourism Advertising Fund held a \$3,539,964.38 balance at the end of FY 2025. According to MDA staff, proceeding into FY 2026 and future fiscal years its goal is to operate the fund at a near net-zero balance by setting expenditures relative to the immediate past collected revenues. MDA staff explained that they review immediate past revenue deposit amounts into the Tourism Advertising fund on a quarterly basis to determine spending levels for planned tourism promotion expenditures. MDA staff furthered that because the Tourism Advertising Fund funding is revenue-based, that it must also factor in aspects such as inflation, fluctuating fuel prices, and any unforeseen circumstances that might hinder tourists from traveling when forecasting expenditures.

According to MDA staff, all advertising, media, promotional services, and events are evaluated according to available metrics to ensure funds are being spent on activities that maximize the reach and impact of the funds. The metrics used to measure these effects are impressions (the number of times a person sees an advertisement), clicks (someone seeing an advertisement and clicking the advertisement to be taken to the webpage), website visits (the number of people who visit the Visit Mississippi webpage), press coverage (the amount of press coverage received by Visit Mississippi events), social media amplification (paid social media posts), search engine activity (people who click a Visit Mississippi webpage link based on the page whether the link was paid to

be the first hit on the search engine or if the person searched Visit Mississippi on their own), and visitation/spending in Mississippi from out-of-state visitors.

Recommendation

1. The Mississippi Development Authority should ensure that it is planning expenditures around marketing activities that show increased tourism as well as increased restaurant and hotel sales tax revenues collection.

Appendix A: Monthly Tourism Advertising Fund Deposits from Inception through FY 2025

Month	FY 2025	FY 2024	FY 2023	FY 2022	FY 2021	FY 2020
July	\$1,355,508.58	\$1,289,786	\$1,250,764	\$792,062	\$279,205	³
August	1,283,681.70	1,293,974	\$1,172,360	1,162,828	628,418	\$229,333
September	1,250,180.48	1,259,670	\$1,217,945	1,177,451	622,799	227,166
October	1,255,642.03	1,197,293	\$1,145,435	1,053,341	618,255	219,832
November	1,189,358.44	1,179,027	\$1,156,231	1,099,301	608,368	205,223
December	1,285,989.69	1,226,527	\$1,190,159	1,126,774	667,632	220,229
January	1,204,704.75	1,135,503	\$1,071,931	1,032,630	565,847	255,231
February	1,185,811.34	1,187,888	\$1,168,636	1,068,080	593,696	807,281
March	1,144,223.79	1,066,042	\$1,104,886	978,213	613,500	294,322
April	1,165,532.50	1,203,331	\$1,137,276	1,048,065	555,529	277,965
May	1,480,688.02	1,356,109	\$1,311,355	1,228,917	770,011	243,291
June	1,340,416.98	1,305,880	\$1,256,279	1,192,900	776,477	210,519
Total	\$15,141,738.30	\$14,701,030	\$14,183,257	\$12,960,561	\$7,299,737	\$3,190,392

SOURCE: PEER analysis of data reported by the Mississippi Accountability in Government Information and Collaboration and Mississippi Development Authority.

³ The law establishing the distribution of restaurant and hotel sales tax collections to the Tourism Advertising Fund was enacted during the 2019 Regular Session; therefore, it did not begin receiving funds until August 2019—one month after the start of FY 2020.

Appendix B: FY 2025 MDA Tourism Advertising Fund Expenditures by Vendor and Spending Category

Advertising And Public Information	
Advance Local Media LLC	\$98,091.28
Maris West & Baker Inc	\$9,541,718.08
The Corporation for Travel Promotion (d/b/a Brand USA)	\$188,700.00
US Civil Rights Trail MarketingAlliance	\$125,000.00
Subtotal	\$9,953,509.36
Banking And Credit Card Fees	
Regions Bank	\$30.00
Subtotal	\$30.00
Fees And Services - Professional Fees Charged	
Coraggio Group, LLC	\$188,890.58
EBP US, Inc.	\$ 85,638.00
Hederman Brothers	\$1,350.00
Longwoods International USA Inc	\$44,500.00
Maris West & Baker Inc	\$2,742,230.42
Miles Partnership LLLP	\$49,999.92
Regions Bank (for Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD*)	\$455,000.00
Subtotal	\$3,567,608.92
Membership Dues	
US Civil Rights Trail Marketing	\$25,000.00
Subtotal	\$25,000.00
Prior Year Expense - Contractual - 1099	
Advance Local Media LLC	\$2,000.00
Subtotal	\$2,000.00
Grand Total	\$13,548,148.28

*Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD is a company based in the United Kingdom. Therefore, MDA sends money to Regions Bank to make international payments on behalf of MDA to this vendor.

SOURCE: PEER analysis of data reported in Mississippi's Accountability System for Government Information and Collaboration and from the Mississippi Development Authority.

Appendix C: FY 2025 Expenditures by Vendor

Vendor	Amount Paid
Advance Local Media LLC	\$100,091.28
Coraggio Group, LLC	\$188,890.58
EBP US, INC.	\$85,638.00
Hederman Brothers	\$1,350.00
Longwoods International USA, Inc.	\$44,500.00
Maris West & Baker, Inc.	\$12,283,948.50
Miles Partnership, LLLP	\$49,999.92
Regions Bank (for Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD*)	\$455,030.00
The Corporation for Travel Promotion (d/b/a Brand USA)	\$188,700.00
US Civil Rights Trail Marketing	\$150,000.00
Total	\$13,548,148.28

*Travel and Tourism Marketing LTD is a company based in the United Kingdom. Therefore, MDA sends money to Regions Bank to make international payments on behalf of MDA to this vendor.

SOURCE: PEER analysis of data reported in Mississippi's Accountability System for Government Information and Collaboration and from the Mississippi Development Authority.

Appendix D: FY 2025 Maris, West, & Baker, Inc., Advertisement Placement Purchases

Vendor	Amount
AAA Explorer Alabama	\$ 4,720.00
AAA Explorer Midwest	\$ 15,865.00
AAA Explorer Southern	\$ 9,480.00
AAA Explorer Texas	\$ 12,000.00
Adara Digital Campaign	\$ 17,062.17
Advance Local	\$ 3,417,333.16
Advance Local Co-op	\$ 260,249.70
Advance Local DMO Flight Assistance	\$ 3,291.66
Advance Local MMA Grant	\$ 8,916.66
American Blues Network Radio	\$ 13,300.00
American Bus Association	\$ 7,500.00
American Mainstreet Publications	\$ 29,600.00
Arkansas Times	\$ 2,625.00
Arrivalist Co-op for DMOs	\$ 14,000.00
Bally Sports	\$ 288,455.48
Blues Festival Guide	\$ 3,875.00
Bluffs & Bayous	\$ 1,225.00
Broadcast	\$ 1,611,390.60
Cable	\$ 460,873.13
Capital City Press	\$ 20,000.00
Carvertise Project	\$ 28,000.00
Chicago Jazz Magazine	\$ 1,250.00
CityBridge	\$ 18,000.00
Clear Channel Outdoor Airport	\$ 13,375.00
Compass Media Co-op	\$ 162,949.10
Country Roads	\$ 13,310.00
Destination Signals	\$ 1,175.00
Expedia Co-op	\$ 200,000.00
Expedia Minneapolis Air	\$ 50,000.00
Food & Wine	\$ 145,500.00
Food Network Magazine	\$ 70,000.00
Garden & Gun	\$ 190,092.00
Going on Faith	\$ 1,800.00

Golf Georgia	\$ 11,750.00
Golf Oklahoma	\$ 8,640.00
Good Grit	\$ 31,460.00
Group Travel Leader	\$ 23,800.00
Hoffman Media	\$ 25,000.00
Hootsuite	\$ 12,500.01
iHeart Media	\$ 180,000.00
Intersection Media	\$ 16,460.00
Intrinsic Media	\$ 149,469.37
Jackson Tour Guide	\$ -
Lamar Outdoor	\$ 181,200.00
Lamar Outdoor Airport	\$ 9,017.50
Living Blues	\$ 2,767.00
Madden Media	\$ 67,000.00
Matador	\$ -
Mistletoe Marketplace Magazine	\$ 1,150.00
MS Business Journal	\$ 3,500.00
Northside Sun	\$ 983.50
Okra Magazine	\$ 8,208.00
Oxford American	\$ 47,565.00
Pioneer Woman	\$ 14,500.00
Powerplay Marketing	\$ 219,448.00
Premier Travel Media - Leisure Group Travel	\$ 4,295.00
Professional Sports Publication	\$ 15,500.00
Radio	\$ 8,033.33
Smithsonian	\$ 66,609.89
Sojern	\$ 88,057.96
Southbound	\$ 10,200.00
Southern Living	\$ 98,804.00
Sports Events Media Group	\$ 13,742.00
Style Blueprint	\$ 115,913.00
Supertalk MS News & Agrinews	\$ 14,666.67
Texas Monthly	\$ 73,721.00
The Local Palate	\$ 55,500.00
Travel & Leisure	\$ 110,000.00
Travel Taste and Tour	\$ 4,450.00
Trip Info	\$ 4,200.00

WBRZ-TV	\$ 1,079.50
WKRN SEC Sports TV	\$ 17,451.35
WKRS Jackson	\$ 30,800.00
Subtotal	\$ 8,844,655.74
MWB Media Commissions Print	\$ 438,457.51
MWB Media Commissions Digital	\$ 258,604.83
Subtotal	\$ 697,062.34
Grand Total	\$ 9,541,718.08

SOURCE: Data provided by Mississippi Development Authority staff on September 19, 2025.

Agency Response

The Mississippi Development Authority reviewed the report and elected not to provide a formal agency response, as it noted no issues with the report as written.

SOURCE: Mississippi Development Authority.

James F. (Ted) Booth, Executive Director

Reapportionment

Ben Collins

Administration

Kirby Arinder

Stephanie Harris

Gale Taylor

Quality Assurance and Reporting

Tracy Bobo

Bryan "Jay" Giles

Performance Evaluation

Lonnie Edgar, Deputy Director

Jennifer Sebren, Deputy Director

Taylor Burns

Emily Cloys

Kim Cummins

Kelsi Ford

Will Harper

Matthew Holmes

Chelsey Little

Ryan Morgan

Meri Clare Ringer

Sarah Williamson

Julie Winkeljohn