

EMPOWERMISSISSIPPI



IMPACT REPORT 2023

EDUCATION • WORK • JUSTICE

A MISSISSIPPI WHERE EVERYONE CAN RISE



Founded in 2014, Empower Mississippi is a solutions center, working with stakeholders to tackle Mississippi's biggest challenges. We remove barriers to opportunity so all Mississippians can flourish.



EDUCATION

We believe every child is unique, full of potential, and deserving of a quality education that works for them.

WORK

We see every Mississippian as a contributor to society, deserving of the opportunity to earn success and find fulfillment in their work.

JUSTICE

We believe justice is foundational to a safe society and requires fairness, equality, and when appropriate, a path to redemption.

Dear Friends,

2023 was a year to build for Empower Mississippi. We invested in all three of our focus areas – EDUCATION, WORK and JUSTICE – and secured significant wins for Mississippi this year, while building a foundation that will lead to greater opportunities for Mississippians to rise in 2024 and beyond.

Here are just a few of the highlights of our work over the past 12 months:

- We led the critical effort to bring continuity of representation to our judicial system, ensuring that our criminal justice process is fairer for everyone (page 16).
- Every Mississippi business will benefit from the tax reform we championed that allows for full expensing for capital investments (page 14).
- Our Embark initiative supported school leaders to open new public charter schools and private microschools across the state (page 8).
- And, last year, we held our largest ever gathering of state and national policy leaders for our 3rd annual *Unleash Mississippi* policy summit (page 5).

What's more, we doubled down on our strategy to invest in local, homegrown leadership through our Ambassador Program, giving citizens the tools and platform to tell their stories and engage with lawmakers to bring about meaningful policy change.

As we look to 2024, our Ambassadors will play a key role in our education policy efforts to give every Mississippi parent the freedom and agency to help their children thrive, just like Marcus and Christeen Moffett have done for their four children (page 10).

This year, we look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Governor's office, state lawmakers, local, state and national organizations, community organizers, and engaged citizens to build a Mississippi we can all be proud of.

Our past success and ambitious goals for the future would not be possible without your continued support. We are grateful to you and look forward to working with you throughout the year.

Onward,



Grant Callen



Gerard Gibert



UNLEASH MISSISSIPPI

For the past three years, Empower Mississippi has hosted *Unleash Mississippi*, a policy summit that brings state and national leaders together with policy experts in Empower's three pillars for a solutions-centered discussion on how to tackle our state's biggest challenges and help every Mississippian rise.

Leaders from the education, workforce, criminal justice, private industry and government sectors spoke at our 2023 summit, which had record attendance.

PRESENTERS INCLUDED:

- Jon Caldara, President, Independence Institute
- Breanne Davis, Arkansas State Senator
- Robert Enlow, President & CEO, EdChoice
- Russ Latino, CEO, Magnolia Tribune
- Bradley Lum, MDOC Deputy Commissioner of Workforce Development
- Ian Rowe, author and Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute
- Tate Reeves, Governor of Mississippi
- Ja'Ron Smith, former White House Advisor
- Jonathan Williams, Chief Economist and Executive Vice President of Policy, American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)



GRANT CALLEN
Founder & CEO



KIENNA HORN
Communications Manager



KATIE ELLIOT
Operations Manager
of Embark



ELYSE MARCELLINO
Director of Embark



WIL ERVIN
Senior Vice President



GINA METZGER
Executive Vice President



BRANDI FLOOD
Executive Assistant
to the CEO &
Development Manager



PATRICK MILLER
Vice President of Development



JOANNA HOLBERT
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MARIE SANDERSON



GEORGE WILLIAMS

CONTRIBUTING FELLOWS

J. ROBERTSON Fellow on Criminal Justice Reform

CHRISTOPHER KOOPMAN Fellow on Regulation & Innovation

CONOR NORRIS Fellow on Entrepreneurship

MATTHEW LADNER Fellow on Education

JOE BISHOP-HENCHMAN Fellow on Tax Policy

EMPOWERED BY YOUR GENEROSITY 7

Empower was founded to be different. Our unique, multi-organization structure allows us the greatest flexibility in activity and safety in complying with all federal and state regulations.

Empower Mississippi is the umbrella organization, income tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)4, with Empower Mississippi Foundation, an internal educational trust fund, tax-exempt under IRC 501(c)3, and Empower PAC, a connected state PAC, exempt under IRC 527. Embark, LLC, is a single-member LLC, wholly owned by the foundation.

Each entity is privately funded by individuals, foundations, and corporations. Financials below are preliminary and unaudited. Audited financial statements will be available for review on or after November 15, 2024.

2023 FINANCIALS

EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI

\$692,577

\$578,707

EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI FOUNDATION

\$1,101,334

\$880,314

EMBARK

\$781,289

\$389,194

EMPOWER PAC

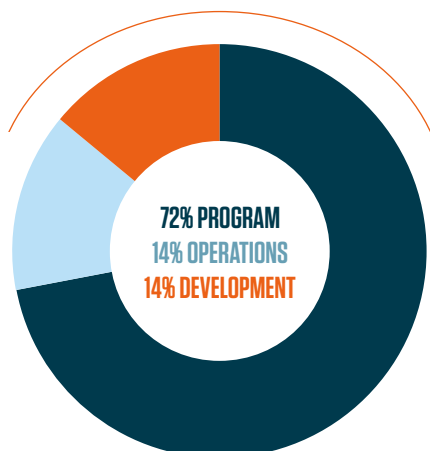
\$25,000

\$95,730

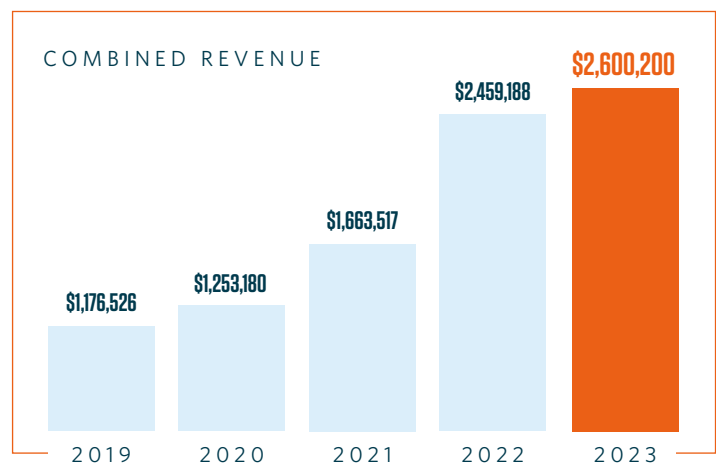
\$2,600,200

\$1,943,944

2023 EXPENSE ALLOCATION



5 YEARS OF FINANCIAL GROWTH AND EXPANDED IMPACT



2023 REVENUE BREAKDOWN

27% INDIVIDUALS

40% FOUNDATIONS

33% CORPORATIONS

Embark

New Schools for Mississippi

Embark, an initiative of Empower Mississippi, is a new schools accelerator supporting founders to open charter school and microschool options across the state.

Embark provides free guidance to leaders who want to start new schools to serve Mississippi students. From ideation and early planning to school development and launch, the journey to opening a new school is full of obstacles that can result in losing momentum. Embark is there to *find*, *guide*, and *invest* in new school founders.

www.Embark.ms

EXPANDING MISSISSIPPI'S PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Mississippi's public charter school law has been on the books for a decade, yet Mississippi has only 10 charter schools open today. Submitting a successful charter application and preparing to serve students takes approximately three years of planning and hard work.

Embark offers introductory webinars and resources to help anyone interested in opening a charter school in Mississippi understand the state landscape and requirements. In addition, the Embark Fellowship prepares and supports promising charter school founders to submit an excellent charter application to the state authorizer board. Throughout the year-long fellowship, Embark walks alongside each Fellow to build a customized program of support based on the Fellow's unique needs and experience.

In 2024, Embark plans to support two Fellows through Mississippi's annual charter application cycle.



CASE STUDY

A NEW MISSISSIPPI DELTA HIGH SCHOOL IN 2025

Clarksdale Collegiate Public Charter School is a high-quality K-8 charter school in the Mississippi Delta, preparing students "to excel in high school and college by providing rigorous instruction within a structured, ambitious, and jubilant school community."

Clarksdale Collegiate had previously applied to open a high school but had been rejected. With Embark's customized support throughout 2023, Clarksdale's revised application was approved, and plans are underway to open the high school in 2025.

"Embark's tailored support was vital during our planning and application stages," says Clarksdale Collegiate Executive Director, Amanda Johnson. "Thanks to Embark, we will achieve our dream of serving students through high school next year."



MICROSCHOOLS BLOSSOMING ACROSS THE STATE

Microschools are intentionally small educational settings, usually launched by entrepreneurial educators or parents. They are the “modern, one-room schoolhouse,” typically offering a multi-age classroom experience that includes opportunities for students to learn flexibly and at their own pace. Since 2020, interest in creating new microschools across the state has exploded as more and more parents seek out a tailored, more responsive educational setting for their children.

The timeline for developing a microschool idea and making progress toward launch depends on experience, context, and other factors. However, one of the attractions of microschools is that they can be planned and opened quickly – generally within a year.

**“Embark has been
an invaluable
resource towards
taking those
first steps.”**

– MONICA HILL
School Founder

2023 IMPACT

FIVE NEW MICROSCHOOLS OPENING

Through Embark’s *Momentum Microgrants* program, which provides microschool founders with financial and planning support, five new microschools have opened or are in the process of opening their doors, and Embark currently has a pipeline of more than 30 potential microschool founders exploring the opportunity through workshops and other events.

In 2024, Embark plans to support the planning and opening of up to 15 new microschools across the state.

EDUCATION FREEDOM IN ACTION

*Every child
is unique.
Their school
should be too.*

That's the lesson Marcus and Christeen Moffett of Jackson learned early on. With four children attending three different schools and three different school models (private, charter, traditional), the Moffetts are living proof that for children to thrive, they must find the school that is right for them, not just the school that is assigned to them because of their zip code.

The Moffetts' oldest son Taylor, 15, attends St. Joseph's Catholic School, a private school in Madison, where he plays football. Kasey and Kaleb, 11-year-old twin boys, are in the sixth grade at Midtown Public Charter School in Jackson, while 9-year-old Serenity attends Spann Elementary School, her residentially assigned public school in Jackson, where Christeen says she is thriving.

This is what a thriving educational marketplace should look like - each school competing for the chance to serve kids; and parents empowered to make the choice that works best for them.

ONE
FAMILY

FOUR
KIDS

THREE
SCHOOLS



Kasey and Kaleb attended Spann Elementary School, and as middle school approached, Christeen began exploring her options. After looking at several schools in the area and not finding what she was looking for, Christeen decided to look at a charter school. She met with Kevin Parkinson, principal at Midtown Public Charter School, to see if this school would be the right choice for Kasey, who has dyslexia.

“He listened to my concerns and explained what they offered. It was invaluable to me as a parent,” Christeen says. Finding Midtown was a “breath of relief.”

The Moffett children are flourishing because their parents chose educational settings that specifically meet the needs of each child.

“As a parent, you know your child best, and it’s important to have options for school,” says Christeen. “We need options in life because one size doesn’t fit all.”

This philosophy drives Empower Mississippi’s education focus. Education freedom is about empowering parents – the adults who know their children best – to access the academic setting that best suits the child’s individual needs. The goal isn’t to support one form of school over another, but to support every child in achieving their full potential.

“Our ultimate goal,” Christeen says, “is for our children to get through school and to be productive citizens. We’ve been through times where I’ve stressed about my son’s grades or the school testing, and Marcus reminds me that that is not the goal. The goal is for them to be happy, productive citizens in life.”

EMPOWER OUR ECONOMIC

THE DIGNITY OF WORK

At Empower Mississippi, we believe that work can provide purpose, identity, and a sense of belonging. Work helps us care for ourselves and our families. It provides a path to help improve lives and communities. Almost all people are capable of making meaningful contributions to their community and their own lives, and work can be a source of great accomplishment and personal fulfillment.

That is why Empower Mississippi proactively works to expand economic opportunity to more of our neighbors to help make the Magnolia State the most job-friendly state in the nation.



The State of Work in Mississippi

We all know Mississippians work hard. Whether it's a single mom in the Delta working two jobs to make ends meet for her and her kids, or a young man from the Gulf Coast piecing together a living wage through multiple gig economy jobs, Mississippians are no stranger to hard work to get by.

But when it comes to our state's overall job market, compared to the rest of the country, we have a lot of work to do.

Our state's unemployment rate hovers near 3%, one of the lowest in the nation, meaning most Mississippians who want a job are able to find one. **But, Mississippi also ranks last in the nation in labor force participation for residents 16-years-old or older.** This tells us we have a historically high number of Mississippians who are of working age, but are no longer looking for work. The reasons for this are multifaceted, but chief among them are our state's relatively low levels of education attainment and our world-leading incarceration rate.



“All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.”

– MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY FOR ALL

We need more Mississippians in the workforce, and to achieve this, we must invest in education choice options that prepare the next generation of workers for success beyond the classroom.

But beyond preparing Mississippians to enter the workforce, we must also foster an environment where businesses can thrive and create job opportunities. This includes reducing bureaucratic red tape and supporting entrepreneurship at the grassroots level. It also includes tapping into an often-overlooked pool of candidates: those who are re-entering society post-incarceration (a key focus of our Justice

initiatives). Historically, marginalized communities, including people with disabilities, veterans, and those with criminal records, often faced barriers to employment. By creating pathways for these individuals to enter (or re-enter) the workforce, we not only uplift them, but also enrich our communities with diverse perspectives and talents.

Building a society where all Mississippians can participate in meaningful work is not just about creating jobs; it's about creating the right kind of jobs. Mississippians don't just want to work; they want to engage in work that aligns with

their passions, skills, and aspirations. This means that as we think about workforce development, we must also think about how to match individuals with opportunities that allow them to shine, and our education system must be structured to align with the needs of the business sector, today and into the future.

Work is more than a means to an end. It's a pathway to dignity, purpose, and community. Empower Mississippi is committed to ensuring that this pathway is accessible to all in our state. Because when we uplift our workers, we uplift Mississippi.

EMPOWERING BUSINESS

In the 2023 Legislative Session, Mississippi enacted a simple tax reform measure that will benefit every business and worker in the state. **EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI LED THE ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN** for this “full expensing” policy, which garnered unanimous bipartisan support, and national headlines from the likes of National Review. Here are some excerpts from their article.

NATIONAL REVIEW

MISSISSIPPI'S NEW TAX MODEL CAN WORK FOR AMERICA

By Michael Lucci | May 19, 2023

Full expensing can help secure a domestic home for more of America's critical supply chains.

In a rare feat of bipartisan tax reform, Mississippi lawmakers have begun addressing the pressing needs of the post-pandemic economy. On March 27, Governor Tate Reeves signed H.B. 1733 into law after it cleared both legislative chambers unanimously. Sponsored by Representative Trey Lamar and Senator Chris Johnson, the new law creates full expensing for capital investments in research, experimentation, machinery, and equipment in the Magnolia State.

Other state legislatures and Congress should take notes. Full expensing addresses two problems facing the post-pandemic American economy: the need to re-shore critical supply chains and the need to protect business capital investments from the ruinous effects of inflation. Regardless of political affiliation, people concerned about securing America's vital supply chains and leading in the global economy should support the implementation

of full expensing in both state and federal law...

...Full expensing enables businesses to immediately deduct the entire cost of capital expenditures from taxable income, rather than spreading out those deductions over years or decades. This simple change unlocks surprising investment and growth...

...The good news is that Mississippi lawmakers did not invent this policy out of the blue. They simply made permanent a tax policy that used to be a part of federal law... Moving forward, other state and federal budget writers should take note of Mississippi's full-expensing program and implement similar measures. If more states and the federal government get on board, the U.S. will attract vital capital investments that lead to job creation, wage growth, economic expansion, and a secure domestic home for more of America's critical supply chains.

BRIAN AND MARIE SANDERSON

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP, SERVICE, AND PHILANTHROPY

For Brian and Marie Sanderson, service to their community, state, and country is a central value and a core part of their family life. It's that spirit of service and positive impact that led them to Empower Mississippi, where they have been generous supporters of our work for several years.

Both Mississippi natives, Brian and Marie met in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. "I worked with Senator Cochran and Governor Barbour on recovery efforts, and Brian served as General Counsel to the Recovery Commission," Marie told us.

Fast forward almost fifteen years to 2020, and Brian and Marie once again felt called to step up during a time of dire need. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, they launched Mississippi 30 Day Fund, offering Mississippi small businesses up to \$3,000 in emergency forgivable loans.

"The loans were designed to be quick, easy, and free of red tape as small business owners worked to keep employees onboard and operations running," Brian said.

The Sandersons' focus on common sense solutions inspires them both in business and in their philanthropy.

"We believe in measurable outcomes," Marie said. "Everything we do as business owners involves measuring our success and deliverables for clients. We review our nonprofit giving through the same prism, and the return on investment we receive by investing in Empower Mississippi is exceptional."

Marie began her career on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, after graduating from

Mississippi State University. Returning to Mississippi, she worked with Governor Haley Barbour's administration and then the Republican Governors Association. Today, she is the founding partner in a national public affairs practice, where she focuses on public policy advisory and strategy.

Brian is the founder and president of Three Oak Group, a government relations and public policy consulting firm that provides

Their impressive government and private sector experiences give them each a unique perspective on how to solve Mississippi's most challenging issues, and they view Empower Mississippi as central to that goal.

"Empower is a convening place for people who share the same values and goals," Marie said. "It's also an incubator and distributor of how ideas can become policy for Mississippi across numerous public policy areas."

Brian added, "We saw firsthand how good leadership and good policy can rebuild communities and rebuild lives, and Empower is not only a great steward of resources, but also a wonderful steward of time. We find that when Empower seeks our time or financial assistance, it is well reasoned and informed."

Of Empower's three focus areas, Marie admits education is her passion. Having settled in Ocean Springs to raise their three children, Marie and Brian are grateful for the quality education their children receive at St. Alphonsus Catholic School. "They receive an excellent education in a positive learning environment," Marie said. "That's so important to us, and we are passionate advocates for educational freedom, so every Mississippi parent can send their children to a school that supports and reinforces the values they hold at home."

"Our hope is to see Empower Mississippi grow and grow," Brian added. "A strong and effective Empower Mississippi will mean a stronger, fairer, more prosperous Mississippi for all."



Brian and Marie Sanderson and their three children make their home in Ocean Springs.

key services for businesses, advocacy organizations, political campaigns, and public policy think tanks. Previously, Brian served in leadership roles with the Republican Governors Association, the Republican Attorneys' General Association, and on the senior staff for Governor Barbour's administration.

BUILDING A FAIRER SYSTEM



*Empower Mississippi
led the effort to
bring continuity of
representation to our
judicial system.*

A years-long effort, led by Empower Mississippi, resulted in an important rule change this year that makes our state's criminal justice process fairer for everyone.

States are entrusted under the Constitution to make attorneys available to defendants. Most states manage public defenders through a central office, but Mississippi handles the appointment of public defenders at the local level, with individual judges assigning cases to attorneys. This system often results in a gap in counsel known as "the dead zone." One attorney is appointed to represent a defendant for a preliminary hearing and then another attorney is appointed before trial. In effect, this means that

there is a lengthy period when defendants have no counsel to protest excessive bail or move a case along to trial.

The MacArthur Justice Center, which has conducted extensive record requests on Mississippi's jails, said that based on their findings, approximately 47% of detainees in Mississippi county jails had been there for more than three months. "More than 1,000 have been detained for at least nine months, and 731 have been stuck in county jail for over a year," according to MacArthur.

In some cases, people who could not afford an attorney or assigned bail have waited multiple years without an



Photos c/o Clarion Ledger: Rory Doyle/MCIR

CASE STUDY

indictment. It is an egregious miscarriage of justice that someone could face the deprivation of liberty for so long without a trial and conviction.

In 2022, Empower Mississippi filed a motion with the state's Supreme Court to change the procedure for appointing public defenders to ensure that criminal defendants have continuity of representation to defend their rights throughout criminal proceedings.

In direct response to our efforts, this past April, the Court adopted new language for Mississippi Rule of Criminal Procedure 7.2 to ensure this critical safeguard for every Mississippian.

Duane Lake was arrested in 2015 on the very serious charge of double homicide. He consistently denied the accusation, and was not indicted until 2017, at which time he received counsel. He was finally tried in 2021 and was acquitted by a jury of his peers after spending six years in jail, losing his wife, children, and career.

Continuity of counsel will lead to more efficient proceedings- both convictions of the guilty and acquittals of the innocent; both of which are in the interest of the accused and the state.



BUILDING COALITIONS

Throughout 2023, Empower Mississippi convened dozens of workshops, seminars, meetings, and discussion groups with our Ambassadors from across the state, focused on a myriad of issues related to Education, Work, and Justice.

We know that meaningful change begins with community engagement and action – and that’s what the Empower Mississippi Ambassador Program is all about. We empower concerned citizens by providing a platform for them to tell their stories and engage with lawmakers to bring about change.

If you are interested in supporting our work and learning more about our Ambassador Program, please reach out to us at www.empowerms.org/become-an-ambassador.



A QUALITY
EDUCATION
FOR EVERY
CHILD

MEANINGFUL
WORK FOR
EVERY ADULT

JUSTICE
FOR ALL



Empower Mississippi could not accomplish our mission without your generous financial support. We are deeply grateful.

Your support of Empower is an investment in our state. Your support sends a clear message that you believe in the worth of every child, the dignity of every adult, and the principles of equal opportunity for every Mississippian.

We love Mississippi, and we know you do too.

As we continue our efforts to make our state more competitive and prosperous, remove burdensome taxation and regulation that impedes growth, create more innovation and competition in our K-12 education system, and ensure individuals who have earned a second chance get one, we are counting on your support. So, thank you again and as you consider your 2024 philanthropic giving, we hope you will keep Empower Mississippi in mind.

Give a tax-deductible gift today to help us help every Mississippian rise! Just scan this code and contribute today.

You can also mail your tax-deductible gift to:
Empower Mississippi Foundation
1000 Northpark Drive
Ridgeland, MS 39157



EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI



Founded in 2014, Empower Mississippi is a solutions center, working with stakeholders to tackle Mississippi's biggest challenges. We believe every Mississippian can rise, so our work focuses on removing barriers to opportunity so that people in the Magnolia State can earn success, contribute to their families and communities, and live meaningful lives.

To find out more, please visit [**empowerms.org**](https://empowerms.org).