

**MISSISSIPPI ETHICS COMMISSION
FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
FY 2021-2025**

1. Comprehensive Mission Statement for the Agency

The mission of the Mississippi Ethics Commission is to build public confidence in the integrity of state and local government. The Commission accomplishes this mission by assisting public servants in identifying and avoiding conflicts of interest, investigating complaints against public servants, collecting and maintaining personal financial disclosure forms of public servants, and enforcing the Open Meetings Act, Public Records Act, and Ethics in Government Laws. The Commission's enabling legislation is found at Section 25-4-1, *et seq*, Section 25-41-15, and Section 25-61-13, Miss. Code of 1972.

2. Statement of Agency Philosophy

The Mississippi Ethics Commission exists to promote integrity and openness in state and local government. The Commission strives to assist public servants in identifying and avoiding conflicts of interest. The Commission serves the public by enforcing laws which hold public servants accountable to the public. The Commission and its staff believe openness and integrity in state and local government promote responsiveness in government and confidence among the public. The Ethics Commission and its staff are committed to helping public servants comply with the law and ensuring the highest standards of governmental integrity for the people of Mississippi.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

Statewide Goal: To create an efficient government and an informed and engaged citizenry that helps to address social problems through the payment of taxes, the election of capable leaders at all levels of government, and participation in charitable organizations through contributions and volunteerism.

Relevant Benchmark: Mississippi is frequently ranked as one of the most corrupt states in the nation. Our state can reduce the incidence of corruption by ensuring that governmental decisions and policy are made in the proper channels of government, that public office not be used for private gain, that there be public confidence in the integrity of government, and that the formation and determination of public policy be conducted in public.

4. Overview of the Agency Five-Year Strategic Plan

Increased public education about the Ethics in Government Laws, Open Meetings Act and Public Records Act can reduce the occurrence of violations which in turn could reduce the number of complaints and opinion requests presented to the Commission. The Commission's ability to mediate disputes under the Public Records Act and Open Meetings Act should also result in greater public confidence in state and local government. Better understanding of the Ethics in

Government Laws, Open Meetings Act and Public Records Act on the part of public officials should result in a reduction of violations of these laws.

5. External/Internal Assessment

5.1 Significant External Factors Which May Affect Performance

A. Public Input:

The Commission has no control over the number of complaints or opinion requests it will receive from the public in any given year. Likewise, the complexity of ethics investigations is determined by the allegations made within complaints. Thus, the Commission cannot control a significant part of its workload.

B. Complexity of Law:

The complexity of the Ethics in Government Laws results in significantly varying amounts of time needed to complete investigations and opinions. Likewise, disputes arising under the Open Meetings Act and Public Records Act often involve complex issues of law, resulting in varying amounts of time needed to render decisions in open meetings and public records cases.

C. Public Servants:

The Commission can only assist public servants in conflicts of interest determinations upon request by public servants. Thus, the Commission cannot accurately predict how many requests it will receive.

D. Elections:

State and local elections, while in progress, create more requests for assistance and in some instances create more complaints. Also, the Commission receives more disclosure forms in election years, because candidates are required to file the forms in compliance with state law.

5.2 Internal Management System Utilized To Evaluate Performance

Commission staff uses internal record keeping systems to monitor and track cases and opinions and generate reports. Analysis of the reports coupled with ongoing meetings with personnel gives management continual oversight and control. This process enables management to constantly monitor the progress of active cases and to ensure that fairness and confidentiality are inherent, while all legal requirements are met.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Measures by Program

The Mississippi Ethics Commission is a single program agency. The single program is entitled "Oversight of Public Officials."

6.1 *Agency Goals by Program*

1. Maintain the average number of days needed per investigation, in order to keep the case log current and prevent backlogs.
2. Reduce the statement of economic interest delinquency rate by increasing efficiency in tracking disclosures.
3. Increase number of ethics training seminars given in a year.
4. Render timely decisions in all cases pending before the Commission.
5. Render timely ethics advisory opinions requested from the Commission.
6. Mediate disputes pending before the Commission under the Open Meetings Act and Public Records Act.

6.2 *Objectives by Program*

1. Reduce the backlog of pending complaints to be investigated.
2. Increase number of ethics seminars given in a year.
3. Continue to render timely decisions and opinions.

6.3 *Strategies by Program*

1. Track pending complaints to be investigated.
2. Solicit additional ethics seminars given in a year.
3. Monitor meetings and records cases to ensure efficiency.