

SPRING 2021

# John C. Stennis Institute of Government & Community Development

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## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT





## **A MESSAGE FROM STENNIS INSTITUTE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. DALLAS BREEN.**

COVID-19 dramatically changed the way we go about our daily lives within our communities. Here at the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development at Mississippi State University, we have remained vigilant in our efforts to provide the premier research, service, and training. People across our state and nation have come to expect our offerings in our 45 years of operation. 2020 saw our output increase, our reach expand to other states, and our staffing to remain at its strongest. The incredible faculty, staff, and students worked tirelessly to convert our trainings to a hybrid format, providing opportunities for individuals to learn while remaining safe and secure in their own environment. As we move

into the new year, we will continue to offer both in-person and virtual trainings, service, and applied research to all who request our services, and will do so with the same professionalism and unbiased, non-partisan approach as we have throughout our existence. It is an honor to continue to serve the people of this great state and nation, and it is my sincere hope that more will seek out our assistance to enable them to be more informed and educated public officials, government employees, and citizens of this great nation. If I or anyone in The Institute can ever be of assistance, I hope you will reach out and allow us to serve your needs.

Please continue to remain vigilant in your pursuits to remain safe during this pandemic. We are here to serve and welcome connecting with you all in the coming years.

Dr. J. "Dallas" Breen

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MISSISSIPPI STATE  
UNIVERSITY.

# DIGITAL MEDIA UPGRADE

*The Stennis Institute of Government is getting a visual update of all published, digital, and print media.*

The Stennis Institute of Government & Community Development (SIG) is currently conducting a rebranding overhaul of all published, digital, and printed media. There can be a multitude of reasons for any organization to rebrand themselves, but we are in a society where the vast majority of the public consume media from their pocket or desktop. Coinciding with our mission, SIG aims to reach 3 goals with this rebrand:

## 1. To connect with our audience

SIG would like to focus on what we can offer our audience: the citizens of Mississippi, state or local officials, and communities. Providing support and resources to Mississippi entities will raise the quality of life to citizens and benefit Mississippians

## 2. To set ourselves apart from other state entities

SIG offers services that are designed to address the unique challenges that municipal, civic, and public industries face in Mississippi. Research conducted by SIG is specific and relevant to Mississippi; the strategic implementation of new programs is both purposeful and beneficial

## 3. To stay current

Rebranding has one overall goal: to keep our brand current. Design trends play a major role in how potential or current stakeholders perceive SIG and all it has to offer. Ensuring that our look is ahead of the curve adds value and significance to the important research and work that we do at SIG. Community and state leaders have numerous documents and information brought to their attention, fresh and interesting graphic designs will catch their attention and encourage priority

This upgrade will also include a new look to [sig.msstate.edu](http://sig.msstate.edu) coming soon!



*The John C. Stennis Institute of Government performs a threefold mission: (1) to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Mississippi state and local governments through basic and applied research, training, technical assistance, and service; (2) to provide technical assistance and research for both rural development in Mississippi and regional activities in the Southeast; and (3) to promote civic education and citizen involvement in the political process.*

Using elements from the new Mississippi State Flag, administration at SIG aimed to follow State leader's direction of a modern Mississippi. The 20 stars represent Mississippi's entry into the union as the 20th state; the large star is a nod to the "Bonnie Blue Flag," which was waved when the state seceded, and the magnolia bloom symbolizes hospitality. Mississippi's first state flag featured a magnolia tree. The colors chosen for SIG's new logo and branding are from Mississippi State University brand guidelines to distinguish SIG from other institutions across the state.

**The new flag symbolizes a future for Mississippians and hope for growth across the south.**



New Branding Colors

*The Stennis Institute will be recognized at the local, state, and national levels as a leader and innovator in education, research, and training efforts that enhance government capacities to serve its constituents. To be successful, the Institute must:*

- Disseminate information and provide training on essential government functions to underserved populations in Mississippi.
- Lead in governance solutions and innovation.
- Excel and adapt programs to form to its core mission.
- Collaborate with the University, State, Nation, and International communities to address multidimensional and complex challenges.
- Effectively brand and communicate the values of the Institute to current and future markets.



Sign up to receive Stennis Spotlight, SIG's new quarterly newsletter!  
Visit [sig.msstate.edu](http://sig.msstate.edu)



# LEADERSHIP

*Highlighting our people  
who keep us running*

**Dr. J. "Dallas" Breen**  
Executive Director

"COVID-19 has created many challenges over the past year. I could not be prouder of the work the Institute's staff has accomplished during this time. Our staff helped numerous citizens and groups overcome challenges to better their quality of life."



**LeaAnn Funderburg**  
Business Manager

"Although 2020 has had challenges, The Stennis Institute is filled with dedicated staff, which made what I do flow with minimal hiccups."



**David Parrish**  
Assistant Director of Operations

"The Stennis Institute proudly contributes to vehicle occupant research on Mississippi's public road network by conducting statewide observational surveys for safety belt and child restraint usage each year, and the challenges of 2020 did not deter this important research."



**Dr. Joe Fratesi**  
Assistant Director of Community  
Development

"Despite the unique challenges presented by COVID-19, Stennis staff continued to help local communities, organizations and industries take their first steps in addressing some of the complex challenges they face."





# STATE EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The State Executive Development Institute (SEDI) is an immersive, graduate-level program offered by the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG) since the early 90s. SEDI is designed to prepare mid to upper-level state and local government executives to be more effective leaders. During the weeklong, intensive course, a broad range of topics is delivered by state and local officials, nationally recognized leaders, and Mississippi State University's premier teaching and research faculty. Curriculum topics include leadership, management theory and skills, conflict resolution, cybersecurity, and other pertinent issues facing our future state leaders. Participants in the class will network with other state executives as well as the Institute faculty and leadership.

Nominations are open to everyone. There are agencies who self-regulate who is nominated in a particular year, but each cohort is selected by a three-person committee whose purpose is to put together the best class for that year. The committee selects up to 25 participants and 2 alternates. However, there is an element of quality control in that previous years when the class was smaller and still rejected nominations.



*SEDI Program Coordinator, Frank Riley, worked closely with Dr. Dallas Breen, SIG Executive Director, to combat the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.*



By mid-March 2020, the idea of having an in person, on campus State Executive Development Institute was out of the question. In early July, Dr. Breen and Frank Riley met with the paid faculty and were surprised to hear their hesitation at a virtual event. By September of 2020, SIG took a cue from the MS legislature and embarked on a hybrid delivery of SEDI. There are many parts to SEDI other than just the delivery of content and several of those aspects were sacrificed in the cancelation of initial meetings.

The initial meetings took place by separating the class geographically into groups of roughly 5-7 participants who would drive no more than 90 minutes to attend. Through contacts with the Mississippi Community College Board, Riley secured facilities around the state that could accommodate social distancing and video conferencing. These facilities were used for four consecutive Thursdays beginning October 29th and continuing through November 19th.

"We only delivered three modules per session for the four sessions to allow for adequate travel conditions," Riley said. "As a nod to the faculty, we rotated one group per session onto campus for them to have a live audience for interaction."

The uniqueness of this delivery actually allowed for a larger pool of speakers as some came virtually due to travel restrictions. Riley noted that this will be an influence going forward.

After a break to allow for a decrease in statewide COVID-19 cases, the cohort reassembled all together for the first time in Jackson from February 23-25, 2021. The Mississippi Civil Rights Museum provided a large venue with both social distancing and proximity to the hub of state government. Topics for this session included leadership skills and the politics that may affect state government. The cohort met for two half days and one full day. The first two nights, dinner was also mandatory and additional guests included elected officials both statewide and municipal.

The 2020 SEDI cohort graduated on February 25, 2021, after a virtual session with the former executive staff of Governor William Winter, known as the "Boys of Spring," and their passage of the 82 Education Reform Act.

*"The use of small business cases has been around since the beginning of the program and although the topics may not be governmental, the process is very useful."*

For more information or to be nominated, visit [sig.msstate.edu](http://sig.msstate.edu)





# STRATEGIC DOING

## Developing Strategy to Address Complex Challenges

By Breana Norton

Why are so many leaders and citizens frustrated with the lack of action and the inability to solve challenges in their communities or organizations? Why are so many plans gathering dust on a shelf rather than being implemented? The reason is simple. Many of the challenges that organizations, communities, and regions face are rooted in a complex set of issues that no single person, entity, or organization is in charge of addressing. These complex challenges, and the environment in which groups attempt to address them, is changing rapidly. The world is moving faster and is more connected than ever, and our old models for developing and executing strategy are quickly becoming dated.

Strategic Doing is an exciting new approach that helps local communities, regions, and organizations form the collaborations needed to address complex challenges. The key to this approach is that it helps build action-oriented collaborations quickly in order to address challenges that no single entity or organizations can address on its own. Strategic Doing provides a framework to help various groups identify their assets; develop strategies to link and leverage those assets into new opportunities; and build trust between the groups by identifying initiatives that they can begin to implement immediately. The focus of the process is centered on taking action rather than producing long-range plans that gather dust on a shelf. This is achieved beginning with the current assets and resources available within a group rather than a “wish list” or pipe dream ideas. The result is a list of short-term, incremental, and achievable projects or initiatives that the group can take action on immediately.

Strategic Doing provides an alternative to the more traditional strategic planning approach. While effective for critical thinking, strategic planning often falls short when it comes to implementation and action. One reason for this is because the strategic planning approach is based on hierarchal thinking. It was designed for relatively stable, slow-moving environments. The reality is that today’s world is fast-paced and more connected than ever. Most challenges cannot be addressed by one single organization and requires a network of people and organizations working together to mitigate the problems. Strategic Doing is a tool that was designed to develop strategy in an network environment where multiple groups need to collaborate and work together, but no one is in charge. It is a process that teaches groups how to collaborate and take action together. The Stennis Institute has utilized the Strategic Doing approach with

numerous groups from across the Southeast and Midwest. These groups have included economic development agencies, municipal governments, chambers of commerce, private industry, higher education institutions, existing committees, and volunteer groups among others.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Stennis Institute has successfully modified the process to adapt to a virtual format. Recently two different groups have utilized the process to develop agile strategy in order to address complex challenges they were facing. A task force had recently been formed at Mississippi State University to explore opportunities around health sciences. The Stennis Institute worked with the Health Science Task Force at Mississippi State University to imagine a health science academic ecosystem where partners from across campus and beyond build on existing research and a history of outreach and service to collaboratively equip and prepare students to contribute to and lead health-centered efforts and enterprises.

The Strategic Doing process allowed the group to identify nearly 200 health science-related assets at Mississippi State University; develop 30 potential opportunities for capitalizing on those assets; and nearly 50 potential short-term projects that could be implemented immediately and serve as catalysts for developing this new academic ecosystem. The Stennis Institute was also enlisted by the Mississippi Development Authority to work with an action team of volunteers in the West Jackson Neighborhood to address complex challenges within their neighborhood. The Strategic Doing process was used to identify neighborhood assets and link and leverage those assets to find opportunities for making the West Jackson Neighborhood a thriving neighborhood where



*“Instead of fixing an old problem, Strategic Doing tackles the problem with the future in mind, so the result is redesigned for a new generation.”*

### COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING AND STRATEGIC DOING

	STRATEGIC PLANNING	VS	STRATEGIC DOING
Designed for...	Hierarchies		Networks
Developed through...	Top-down approach		Collaborative approach
Result in...	A plan		Collaborative action
Best environment...	Stable & slow moving		Complex, fast-paced
Best used for challenges with...	Clear problem / Technical solutions		Multiple causes / No single solution
Who is in charge?	Single entity or group		No single person or group
Focus on...	Problems (fixing old systems)		Opportunities (designing what is next)
Critical thinking and action are...	Separate		Combined
Result in initiatives/projects that are...	Long-term / Big picture		Short-term / Achievable
Based on...	Wishes & dreams		Current assets & resources

every resident could realize their full potential. Through multiple virtual sessions the team identified 20 different potential opportunities that could help improve the neighborhood and 15 potential short-term projects that could immediately be implemented by the volunteers and serve as catalysts for positive change within the neighborhood. These opportunities and projects fit into three themes: organization, business growth and assistance, and physical improvement and beautification of the neighborhood.

Additionally, The Stennis Institute worked with the City of Corinth, Mississippi, to increase tourism and activity in the downtown area. Many of the team’s ideas were focused on rebranding Corinth and attracting the next generation. The idea was to change the perception that Corinth was a small, historic, North Mississippi Civil War town, to highlighting that it was actually a vibrant, modern, and thriving community. Within three months the team, along with business owners, volunteers, and other civic organizations, designed a selfie wall mural that capitalized on the city’s long Coca-Cola history and provided a destination in the downtown area. The mural includes hashtags so the team can track activity on social media to monitor the

effectiveness of the project. A second initiative in Corinth was the inaugural Crossroad Connection Career Fair, where high school juniors and seniors across Alcorn County could begin networking and learning more about college and career options. After much planning and deliberation, almost 70 college and career vendors came to help over 800 students.

The familiar framework of long to-do lists, in depth data sets, elaborate goals, and perfectly crafted mission statements may seem appealing on paper, but most people are tired of thinking and planning. They are ready to start doing. The Strategic Doing framework allows groups to move beyond just plan development to actual implementation. By helping collaborations build off their shared resources, Strategic Doing allows groups to design and begin implementing small-scale initiatives that can spark action and lead to larger change. Rather than looking years down the road, this process encourages groups to focus on relentlessly doing the doable.

**Contact the Stennis Institute to discuss the Strategic Doing process and take the first step in moving forward, fast.**  
[sig.msstate.edu](http://sig.msstate.edu)





# STENNIS INSTITUTE 2020 FACULTY, STAFF, & STUDENTS

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The accomplishments and success of The Stennis Institute of Government & Community Development is the result of these motivated, dedicated, and dependable employees.



**Dr. Dallas Breen**

Executive Director

**Dr. Joe Fratesi**

Assistant Director for  
Community Development

**David Parrish**

Assistant Director for  
Operations

**LeeAnn Funderburg**

Business Manager

**Judy Phillips**

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**Frank Riley**

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**Claudette Jones**

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**Jeremy Murdock**

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**Bonnie Hays**

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**Johnny Mack Morrow**

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**Joe Young**

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Graduate Research Assistant

**Annie Price**

Graduate Research Assistant

**Marlee Melcher**

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**Wil Boyd**

Undergraduate Worker

**Reagan Conner**

Undergraduate Worker

**Lilly Elliot**

Undergraduate Worker

**Gracie Kelley**

Undergraduate Worker

**Max Kirchgessner**

Undergraduate Worker

**Alexx Lux**

Undergraduate Worker

**Khalil Markham**

Undergraduate Worker

**Breana Norton**

Undergraduate Worker

**Charles Raines**

Undergraduate Worker

**Garrett Swader**

Undergraduate Worker

**Gary Andrews**

Surveyor

**Mary Andrews**

Surveyor

**Benjamin Carver**

Surveyor

**Harley Meadows**

Surveyor

**Douglas Stewart**

Surveyor

**Geoff Jakins**

Surveyor

**James Carver**

Surveyor

**Anthony Varaksa**

Surveyor

**Charlotte Allen**

Surveyor

**Perry Brown**

Surveyor

**Gail Dixon**

Surveyor

**Kathy Jones**

Surveyor

**Cathy Roberts**

Surveyor

A functioning unit of The Office of Research & Economic Development and the College of Arts & Sciences at Mississippi State University, the John C. Stennis Institute of Government provides meaningful, applied research to both local and state units of Mississippi government, the Institute brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to bear on real-world issues.

Through its executive development programs, training opportunities, and technical assistance programs, the Institute provides support for today's policy-makers from the courthouse to the classroom. By playing an active role in the development of tomorrow's governmental leaders, the Institute is working to ensure that Mississippi's future remains strong.



Projects range in size and scope from specific work with Mississippi's smallest towns to federally-funded grants with multi-state application. Contact The Stennis Intsitute to find out how we can provide support and resources to your community.