

Why Regionalism Works

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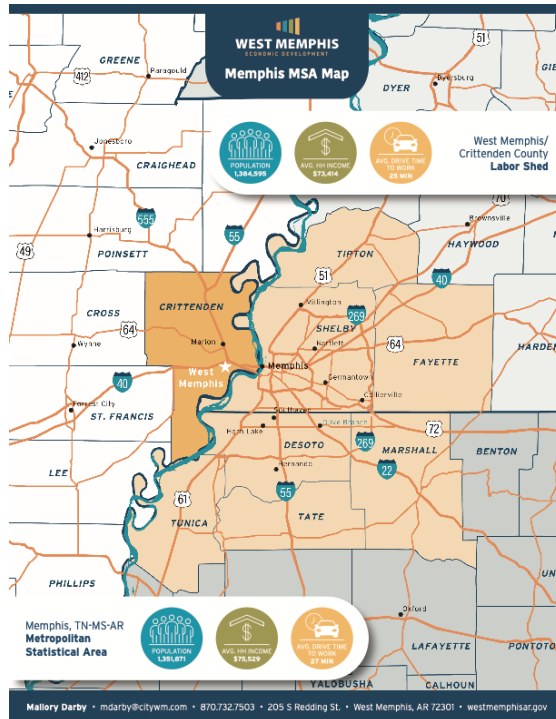
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## **Introduction**

Memphis is the second-largest city in the state of Tennessee and a major entertainment and economic center in the Mid-South. It is a river city and a significant center of commerce and transportation. Memphis has a major port on the Mississippi River and major interstate highways. Look at the Memphis International Airport, it is one of the world's busiest air cargo operations and serves as a hub for FedEx. Memphis has a significant role as a regional hub. First, look where it is situated, it is clear that Memphis can serve as a source of trade because of its location on the Mississippi River. Additionally, its location is particularly appropriate for commerce because it is at a southern transportation gateway to the nation. Not only as a center of important industries such as agriculture and logistics economic sectors, but Memphis also has several art galleries, museums, and hometown music. Memphis has a significantly vital role in the economic landscape of the Midwest.

Memphis is the largest city in the Memphis, TN – MS - AR metro, which has a population of over 1.3 million people. As shown in the map below, the Memphis MSA covers the 3 counties in Tennessee: Shelby, Fayette, Tipton; 1 county in Arkansas: Crittenden; & 4 counties in Mississippi: Tunica, Tate, Desoto, & Marshall.

The Memphis area is well-positioned to be a center of commerce and industry for the entire Mid-South region. By working together, Memphis, Mississippi, and Arkansas can leverage their strengths, present a more attractive proposition to businesses, and build a stronger, more diversified economy for the entire region.



## Pathways for Sustainable Development

### Economic Collaboration

The cooperation of Memphis, Mississippi, and Arkansas will help each attract joint investment and business to these three, by offering a substantially larger and more marked marketing outlet. The first way the MSA can market each other as a single and attractive market is by looking at how large is its consumer base. Although Memphis itself has more than 630,000 population, integrating the tri-state region covering millions of potential customers market will be surely a more attractive ground for businesses compared with what Memphis has. Memphis has the major international airport and a bunch of major highways passing through it, Memphis will enjoy a huge advantage in being the distribution center for the whole region. Upon additional cooperation and infrastructural investment within the region, this advantage will be

sure to become more apparent. For instance, better transportation inside of three states will naturally make the movement of goods cheaper and easier.

Next, a unifying branding campaign could be created under the MSA – positioning the tri-state as a vibrant and interconnected economic zone, drawing in businesses and tourists alike. Working together helps to finance common, large-scale investment projects that serve the whole sub-region, such as improvements to waterways or bridges, or even a high-speed rail line connecting Memphis to the big cities of Mississippi and Arkansas. These boost the flow of goods and people across the region, generating employment and stimulating local business activity.

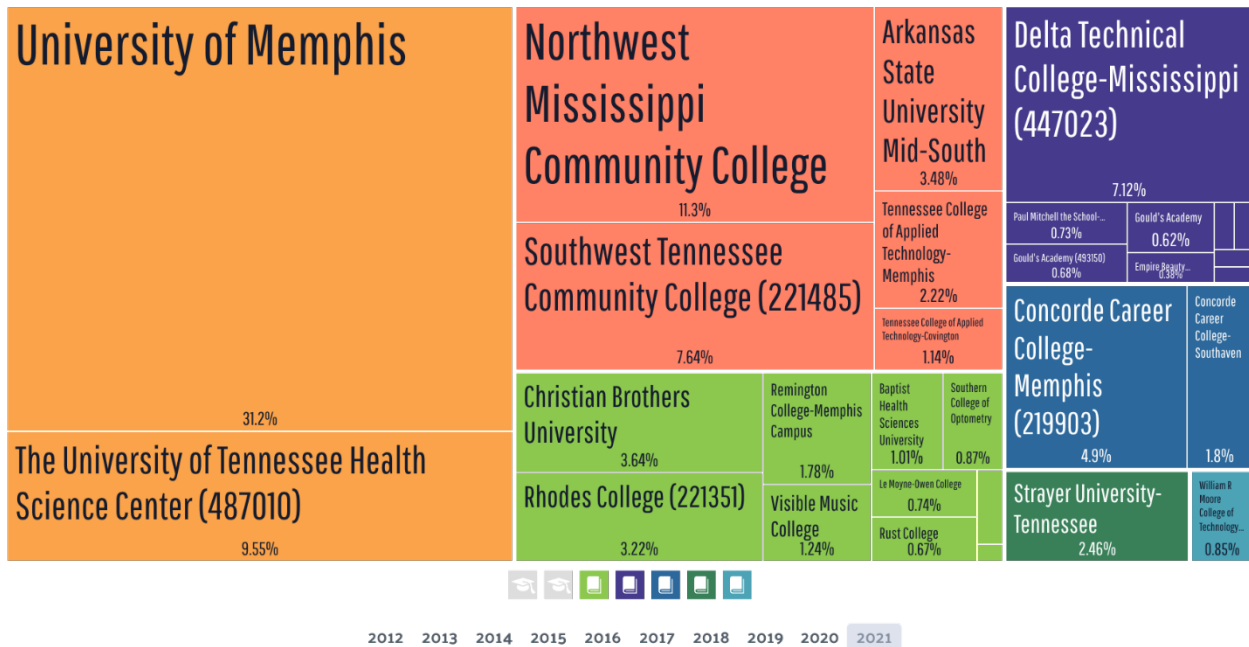
Finally, inter-state cooperation could mean a bigger and better-skilled workforce for businesses to draw on. Imagine joint technical schools or community colleges online and across borders for the region’s businesses to draw on. Shared vocational training would supplement and sustain a ready supply of workers with the required set of skills.

Memphis, Mississippi, and Arkansas will ultimately prosper when they present themselves as a tri-state region, effectively using the combined forces of their economies to attract major, shared investments and new business. With the regional market, diverse industries and expanded economic efficiencies, the tri-state region will become the destination for the expanding companies that want to grow and succeed.

### **Educational Partnerships**

The Memphis MSA Region has a huge potential in education partnerships. According to Data USA, there are over 334 universities that range from 4-year programs to tech/trade school programs. By collaborating together, the MSA can identify their strengths and weaknesses across the region and work together to continue to strengthen the workforce of the area.

Total: 15,462



## Benefits & Challenges

### Benefits

The Memphis, TN-MS-AR MSA can serve as a transportation and distribution hub thanks to its size and central location. It has the Mississippi River waterway, I-55, I-40, and the Memphis International Airport. Since the metropolitan area could offer infrastructure and labor areas that are important to firms that need to ship things quickly to customers all over the US, in the short run this would attract businesses and, in the long run, stimulate the economy of the entire metro. These businesses would create jobs in all three of those States. Instead of competing with each other, suddenly the States are working together and building an ecosystem that benefits all of them.

To the extent possible, Memphis, Mississippi, and Arkansas should coordinate their education and training programs to make sure that, for example, shared vocational schools are available or that an online platform is available to learners in these states. Overall, mobile skills are one of the greatest assets to the agricultural sector. In the MSA, the geographical distribution

of workers should incentivize employers to collaborate so that they have access to mobile skilled labor.

The Memphis, TN-MS, AR MSA can also partner to develop a shared branding identity to define and promote an entity that might stand out on the strength of its cultural attractions (Memphis) natural beauty (Mississippi), and technological innovation (Arkansas) through into a single marketing campaign – making the whole of it much more appealing for tourists and industry (and so more immune to geographical or local influences).

### **Challenges**

There are a few challenges that could arise while working towards a 3-state region, but the biggest concerns would be political hurdles, state-specific regulations, and building trust. Reaching agreements and implementing economic development strategies across state lines can be complex due to differing regulations and priorities. Overcoming these hurdles will be crucial to achieving the full potential of the MSA.

Each of the three states has its own set of regulations and political landscape. Reaching agreements on economic development initiatives that work for all three states can be complex and time-consuming. Streamlining regulations and finding common ground will be crucial for creating a unified economic front. A potential issue that could arise would be working through state/county-specific incentives. This could cause a major issue especially since Mississippi and Arkansas have state income tax and Tennessee does not. The states would have to work together to figure out how to navigate the challenges of providing equal incentives to businesses looking to locate in the region. Another challenge that could arise would be that Shelby County is historically known to be a Democratic county, whereas the rest of the MSA falls under the Republican party.

The Memphis, TN-MS-AR covers a large land mass with a diverse population possibly having diverse priorities and needs, comprising stressed communities and those facing gentrification, and three multi-county metropolitan areas with potentially competing priorities and needs – as well as three states. Given these complexities, engaging and involving Memphis, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas’s business, government, non-governmental, and resident-led institutions, all with different vested interests and capacities, into conversations that foster trust and consensus challenging will be the central organizing imperative in developing a meaningful economic development plan.

It will take a communal effort, but open conversation, shared purpose, and commitment to each other will help create an agile and vibrant Memphis metro area.

### **Towards a Model Tristate Region**

By working together, Memphis, MS, and AR can create a more attractive market for businesses seeking a wider range of resources and a skilled workforce. This collaboration could involve joint marketing initiatives, streamlined permitting processes, or even a shared workforce training program, making the Memphis MSA a more cost-effective and competitive environment for businesses to flourish.

An example of a regional effort that has been done well is the Greater Chattanooga Economic Partnership (GCEP). The GCEP works with 9 counties in Tennessee, 2 counties in Alabama, and 5 counties in Georgia. The regional population is 1,087,998 and they have seen a 2.1% growth since 2018. The GCEP’s main goal is to build awareness of the region for business expansion and relocation. The GCEP has 5 employees – 3 of which work through the Chattanooga Chamber and 2 that work specifically for the GCEP. Since 2018, the GCEP has worked to help announce 158 projects, 14,286 jobs, and \$4.9 billion in investments into the

region. The GCEP has a very comprehensive website that covers everything from incentives, workforce, logistics, key industries, etc. Based on the numbers listed above, the GCEP is doing something that is working very well for their community.

There are many ways that the Memphis, TN-MS-AR MSA can start working more collaborative with each other. Here are a few concrete steps that they can take to further the idea:

- **Gather Stakeholders:** Before beginning anything, it is important to gather all the Chambers, Economic Development Players, Local Elected Officials, etc. to meet and discuss any thoughts and ideas on the topic. There needs to be buy-in from 3 states before moving forward with anything else.
- **Tri-State Skills Gap Analysis:** Conduct a joint study to identify the current and future skill needs of major industries across the Memphis MSA. Based on this analysis, develop shared online or vocational training programs to ensure a skilled workforce is readily available throughout the region.
- **Unified Memphis MSA Brand Development:** Create a unified marketing campaign that showcases the Memphis MSA as a dynamic and diverse economic hub. This campaign could highlight the region's strengths across all three states, targeting specific industries and promoting the tri-state area's unique offerings to potential businesses and investors.



## **Data Sharing and Research:**

- **Memphis MSA Economic Data Platform:** Establish a platform where each state contributes economic data to a centralized platform. This would allow businesses and investors to easily access comprehensive data on the entire Memphis MSA, facilitating informed decision-making. The Greater Memphis Economic Research Group would be a great resource for this idea. This data could range from traffic patterns, incentives, taxes, available property, etc. Anything that would help each state get to know the other states better.

## **Early Wins and Public Engagement:**

- **Tri-State Innovation Challenge:** Organize a competition focused on developing innovative solutions to regional challenges. This could spark collaboration among businesses, universities, and entrepreneurs across the Memphis MSA, fostering a spirit of innovation and showcasing the region's problem-solving capabilities.
- **Memphis MSA Welcome Week:** Host a joint event welcoming new residents and businesses to the Memphis MSA. This could involve cultural events, business networking opportunities, and informational sessions highlighting the benefits of living and working in the tri-state region.
- **Establishing A New Organization:** Establish a whole new organization, similar to the GCEP, that would work solely on supporting all 3 states as a tri-state region. This organization could have 2-3 dedicated employees and also have representation from each of the 3 states.

These are just a few initial steps. By focusing on collaborative projects with tangible benefits, the Memphis MSA can build momentum and demonstrate the value of a unified tri-state approach. This will not only attract investment and businesses but also foster a sense of shared identity and purpose for the entire Memphis, TN-MS-AR region.

## **Conclusion**

The Memphis tri-state region, encompassing Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas, embodies the potential for a groundbreaking model of 21st-century collaboration. By leveraging its diverse economic base, central location, and strong infrastructure, the Memphis MSA can transform itself into a magnet for businesses and investment. By taking a unified approach to infrastructure development, workforce training, and marketing, this will prove to be a testament to successful collaboration across state lines. This model, if successful, could serve as a blueprint for other regions seeking to unlock their collective economic potential in the dynamic and interconnected world of the 21st century.

By harnessing the strengths of each state – Mississippi's agricultural bounty and manufacturing might, Arkansas' burgeoning tech sector, and Memphis' established leadership in logistics and healthcare – they can create a powerhouse unlike any other in the Mid-South.

### **A call to action:**

- **Businesses:** Invest in the Memphis MSA - Be part of a dynamic and diverse market with a skilled workforce and a commitment to innovation.
- **Educators:** Develop training programs aligned with the tri-state's economic needs. Equip our workforce with the skills to thrive in the 21st century.

- **Policymakers:** Champion joint initiatives that streamline regulations, improve infrastructure, and make the Memphis MSA the most attractive place to do business.
- **Residents:** Become an ambassador for the tri-state region! Spread the word about the vibrant communities, rich culture, and exciting opportunities that await here.

The future of Memphis, Mississippi, and Arkansas as a united tri-state region is bright with untold possibilities. Imagine a Memphis MSA that transcends state lines, not as three separate entities, but as a single, powerful economic force. By highlighting the unique strengths of each state, they can cultivate a diverse economic landscape brimming with opportunity. This united front will attract businesses seeking a wider market, a skilled workforce, and a commitment to innovation.

The road ahead requires collective effort. Businesses, large and small, can invest in the tri-state region, becoming integral parts of its vibrant economic tapestry. Educational institutions can develop training programs aligned with the MSA's specific needs, ensuring a workforce equipped to tackle the challenges of tomorrow. Policymakers, working together, can streamline regulations and invest in infrastructure that benefits the entire region. And the residents? They are the heart and soul of the tri-state. By embracing this spirit of unity, residents can become ambassadors, spreading the word about the Memphis MSA's rich culture, welcoming communities, and boundless potential.

## Resources

1. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/memphis-tn-ms-ar#education>
2. <https://www.greaterchatt.com/data-maps/regional-stats/>