

## Memphis, Tennessee – GROWWTH

**Location:** Memphis, Tennessee

**Venue:** University of Memphis

### **Intro to the City, Distinctive Aspects and Demographics:**

Memphis, Tennessee, is a vibrant city situated on the Mississippi River, known for its rich history, cultural heritage, and pivotal contributions to American music. As the largest city in Tennessee, Memphis has a population of over 630,000 residents, with a metropolitan area that exceeds 1.3 million people. The city is characterized by its diverse demographic makeup, with approximately 64% of the population identifying as African American, 30% as White, and the remainder composed of Hispanic, Asian, and other ethnic groups. This diversity has been a cornerstone of Memphis' identity, shaping its culture, cuisine, and community life.

Memphis is also home to a significant youth population, with over 20% of its residents under the age of 18, and a median age of approximately 34 years. This youthful demographic highlights opportunities for growth and innovation, particularly in education and workforce development.

**Overview of the Local Economy:** The economy of Memphis is robust and multifaceted, driven by its strategic location as a transportation hub. Nicknamed "America's Distribution Center," Memphis boasts a thriving logistics industry anchored by the presence of FedEx, which has its global headquarters in the city. The Memphis International Airport is one of the busiest cargo airports in the world, facilitating the city's position as a leader in shipping and distribution.

In addition to logistics, Memphis has strong healthcare and bioscience sectors, with institutions like St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare contributing to both employment and innovation. Agriculture also plays a role, with Memphis serving as a key trade point for cotton and other commodities. Tourism is another economic driver, with attractions like Graceland, Beale Street, and the National Civil Rights Museum drawing millions of visitors annually. Despite these strengths, economic disparities persist, which directly ties to the city's ongoing challenges.

**The Poverty and Disadvantage Challenge in the City:** Memphis faces significant challenges related to poverty and economic inequality. With a poverty rate of approximately 24%, Memphis consistently ranks among the poorest large cities in the United States. The challenges are



particularly pronounced in certain neighborhoods, where access to quality education, affordable housing, and healthcare is limited. Historical patterns of segregation and systemic disinvestment have exacerbated disparities, creating pockets of disadvantage that disproportionately affect African American communities. These issues are compounded by unemployment rates higher than the national average, as well as underemployment in low-wage sectors. To combat these challenges, Memphis has initiated various community-driven efforts, including workforce development programs, educational reforms, and initiatives aimed at fostering entrepreneurship in underserved areas. However, achieving sustainable change remains a complex and ongoing process that requires collaboration across sectors.

**Growth Program and Micro Business Program at the University of Memphis:** *A community partnership led by the University of Memphis has been awarded a Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative Implementation Grant in the amount of \$25,000,000 to improve outcomes for West Tennessee's low-income families. The grant was awarded in November 2022 by the Tennessee Department of Human Services and Families First, the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. This represents the largest grant received by the University of Memphis to date. **GROWWTH** is a part of a study funded by the Tennessee Department of Human Services which is being conducted to determine how these pilot programs help people improve their economic well-being.*

**Who We Are Serving:** GROWWTH serves constituents in the 21 counties that make up West Tennessee, including Benton, Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Decatur, Dyer, Fayette, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Henry, Lake, Lauderdale, Madison, McNairy, Obion, Shelby, Tipton and Weakley. The GROWWTH goal is to serve 2,500 low-income households during the three-year funding period. The resulting outcome will yield a net benefit of an estimated \$850 million over the next 10 years, including a boost to the gross domestic product and a savings of \$330 million from reduced social safety net spending.

**Program Administration:** The program is managed by the University of Memphis' Crews Center for Entrepreneurship, which operates under the guidance of a dedicated program director.

### **Unique Aspects of Our Approach**

- **Focus on Micro-Businesses:** Unlike traditional entrepreneurship programs that often emphasize high-growth startups, the Growth Program is tailored to support **micro-businesses**—small-scale enterprises that serve local markets and create immediate economic impact within the Memphis community.
- **Hands-On Learning:** Participants engage in real-world projects such as developing business plans, creating prototypes, and testing their products or services in the marketplace.



- **Mentorship-Driven:** A hallmark of the program is its emphasis on mentorship, pairing participants with seasoned entrepreneurs who provide personalized guidance and support throughout the journey.
- **Accessible Resources:** To reduce barriers to entry, the Growth Program offers subsidized participation fees, free access to coworking spaces, and connections to micro-financing opportunities.

