



2026

ANNUAL REPORT

Welcome to Our **ANNUAL REPORT** 2025-2026



1996 - 2026

BENJAMIN L. HOOKS
INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS AND STILL RISING

In 2026, the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis proudly celebrates 30 years of advancing social change, strengthening democracy and serving the Greater Memphis community and beyond.

Founded in 1996 by the late Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks in partnership with the University of Memphis, the Hooks Institute was created with a vision of bringing scholarship, service and community engagement together to address the challenges facing our communities. For three decades, that vision has remained at the heart of the Institute's work.

Through research, community programs, student initiatives, documentaries, exhibitions, public lectures and the preservation of civil rights history, the Hooks Institute has worked to address disparities in education, economic mobility, health, race and opportunity. The Institute has also created opportunities for

University of Memphis students to develop academically and professionally while encouraging them to become engaged and responsible leaders within their communities.

The Institute's impact has been strengthened by partnerships across the public, private, nonprofit and university sectors, as well as the commitment of donors, supporters, faculty, students and community leaders who share a belief in the promise of social change.

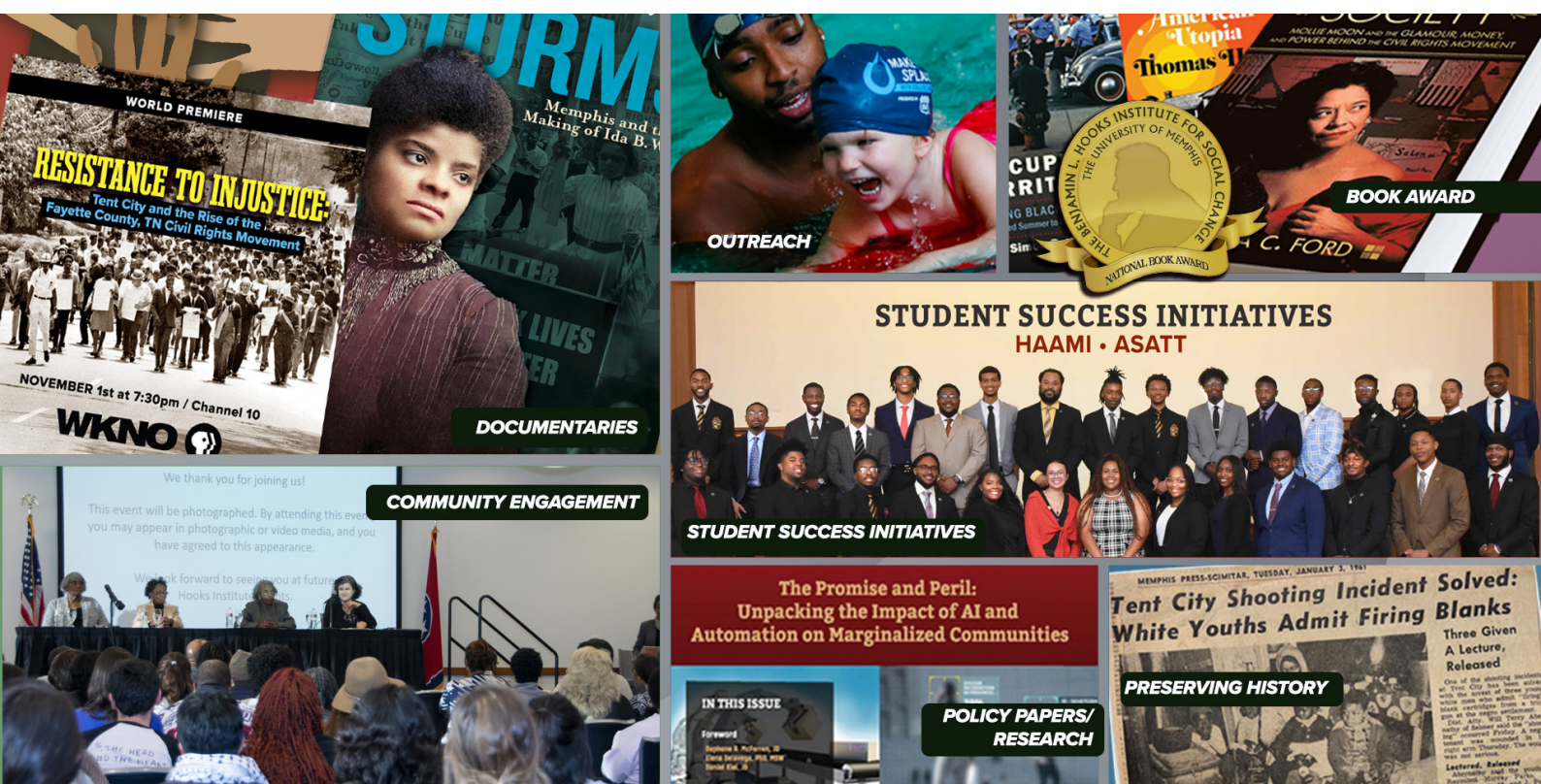
As we celebrate this milestone, we honor the legacy of Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks while looking toward the future. Thirty years later, the work continues. Renewed purpose, stronger partnerships and an enduring commitment to helping build communities where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

**Thirty years of service. Thirty years of progress.
Thirty years...and still rising.**

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Executive Director's MESSAGE



On April 10, 2026, the Hooks Institute began celebrating 30 years of advancing scholarship and community engagement to educate, inform and inspire the people we serve. Located on the University of Memphis campus, the Hooks Institute draws on the collective scholarship of the faculty, experts from other academic and government Institutions, and the needs of the community to create research publications and other programs. Our community engagement programs have positive community impact among people of all ages. Our research draws on the collective scholarship of Hooks Institute staff, the University of Memphis, and other institutions and activists to address, with proposed solutions, problems facing Memphis communities. This work continues to shape how the Hooks Institute implements its strategies and tactics to create a community where all people can realize their potential. Our nationally recognized accomplishments include reducing the drowning rates of African American and Hispanic children in Memphis by both teaching children how to swim or understand water safety so these children can enjoy a sport that promotes physical and mental health. Other programs involve providing intensive academic and career coaching to university students – most of whom are Pell Grant eligible – to achieve successful graduation and employment outcomes. Our Public forums provide to the public access to government officials and experts where individual concerns can be heard and addressed. Our documentaries, broadcast on public television, educate and entertain the public on the civil rights movement and its relevance to current events. Our National Book Award promotes exemplary scholarship on the civil rights movement and its legacy.

As with many communities, the Memphis community lacks an understanding of the American Constitution, the historical facts surrounding it and how the Constitution, through war and activism, was changed to recognize the rights of African Americans, women, and other

Our public forums create opportunities for residents to engage directly with government officials and experts, ensuring that community voices are heard and valued.

marginalized groups. Indeed, if voter turnout is any evidence, the level of civic engagement among Tennessee citizens is very low. According to MIT's Election Performance Index, Tennessee ranks 51st in the nation in voter turnout.

During the summer of 2026, the Hooks Institute began planning for a course on the Constitution, its history and impact today. On September 11, 2026, the Hooks Institute began teaching university students about the Constitution. In 2027, we seek to expand this work to adults and children in the Greater Memphis community. The Hooks Institute knows that a better understanding of the Constitution, its history and its statutory and judicial interpretations will better prepare individuals to understand and participate in the civic process. Greater participation in the civic process allows our elected officials and community leaders to better understand community needs and equally allows community members to hold elected officials and community leaders accountable to the people they were elected to serve. This is the essence of democracy.



Daphene R. McFerren

Executive Director

Associate Research Professor, College of Arts and Sciences

Recipient - 2026 Distinguished Research Award Engaged Scholarship

The Hooks Institute is a changemaker in Memphis and beyond. As with the changemakers of the past, the Hooks Institute seeks to create a beloved Memphis community as an example for communities everywhere. We know this is an ambitious goal. However, the civil rights leaders of the past, confronted what some might have seen as insurmountable obstacles to changing customs, practices and laws that created second-class citizenship for African Americans. The work of these civil rights leaders created a just and more equitable nation not only for African Americans, but for whites, women and others. Because we understand this history, we move forward with boldness, enthusiasm, and positivity to create just and equitable communities so that all people can achieve the rights set forth in the Declaration of Independence of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.



OUR MISSION

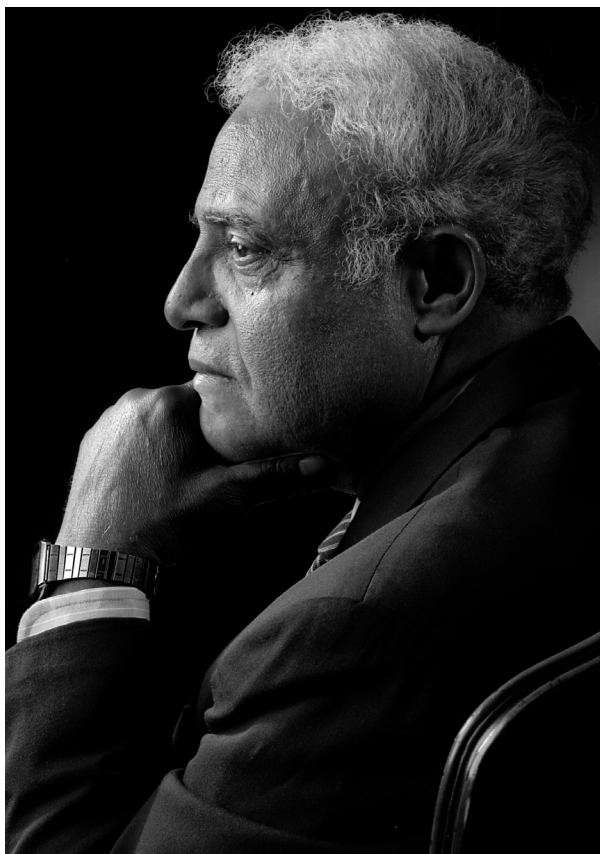
The Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, an interdisciplinary research center at the University of Memphis, was founded in 1996 with funding from the State of Tennessee and the United States Congress. Benjamin L. Hooks was an activist from the early days of the civil rights movement, serving as the first African American commissioner at the U.S. Federal Communications Commission and the executive director of the NAACP. The Hooks Institute's programs embody the highest ideals of service, activism and commitment reflected by his life.

Advancing Social Change and Strengthening Democracy Through Research, Service and Historical Preservation

The Institute's mission is "advancing social change and strengthening democracy through service, research, and historical preservation." Through education, scholarship, and public engagement, the Institute works to uplift through our programs, the economic, educational, health and life of communities in Memphis and the Mid-South, while demonstrating how our local impact can contribute to national progress.

The Institute's longstanding commitment to voting rights and civic engagement is particularly relevant now. The Hooks Institute has preserved and elevated the history of voting rights and civic participation through documentary films, student voter registration initiatives, archival collections, exhibitions, and educational programming.





OUR FUTURE

The Hooks Institute envisions a future where it **doubles its capacity** to address racial, economic and other disparities in the Mid-South by:

Building Program Capacity through philanthropic and donor support to sustain social change initiatives.

Engaging Diverse Communities in partnerships to address racial, economic, health and other disparities.

Expanding Partnerships with philanthropic organizations, corporations, foundations, non-profits and local and state governments.

Increasing Research Publications, Grants and Awards to improve and expand data concerning social justice issues.

Developing Multimedia Projects including documentaries, websites and social media platforms to inform and empower local and national communities on civil rights history and its relevance to contemporary issues of social change.



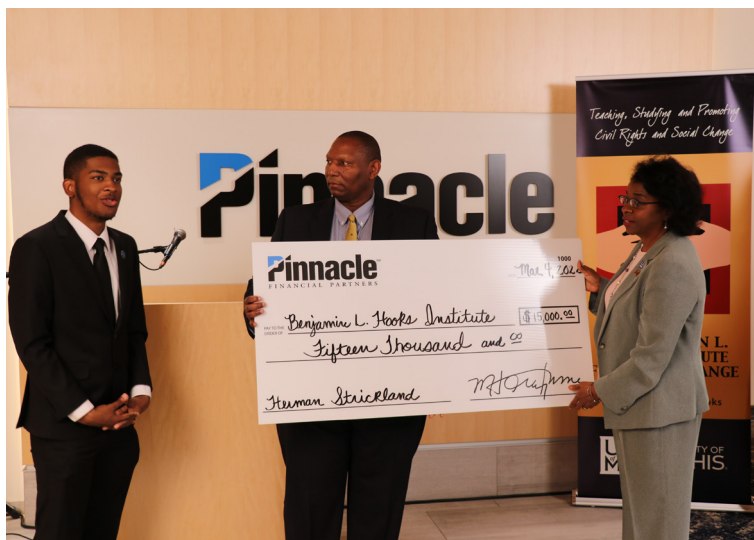
Promoting academic achievement and economic mobility

HAAMI

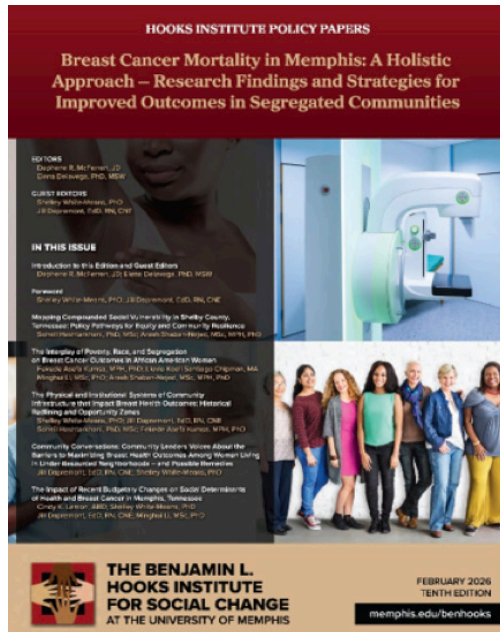
The Hooks Academic Achievement and Mentoring Initiative promotes academic and career readiness by providing intensive coaching, mentoring, financial literacy, job preparedness, and professional development to HAAMI members.



In 2025, an external evaluation of HAAMI found that compared to their student cohort group on campus, HAAMI students had higher graduation rates, higher career starting salaries, and were more likely to attend graduate school than their university cohorts. More than 300 students have completed the HAAMI program in the last 14 years.



Turning research into action



HOOKS POLICY PAPERS

In 2026, the Hooks Institute published its Tenth Edition of the Hooks Policy papers, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Memphis' Loewenberg School of Nursing and the UT Health Science Center on research outcomes from an NIH grant that focused on breast health in segregated communities in Memphis.

Looking into the impacts of various social determinants of health, the research revealed that Black women living in segregated communities experience higher breast cancer mortality rates when compared to White women living in segregated communities.

Our annual publication provides thorough analyses and policy recommendations from scholars, practitioners and grassroots activists on topics that include reforming the criminal legal system, disparities in education; voter education; AI and its impact on the workforce, and socio-economic issues.

The Hooks Institute Policy Papers are catalogued by the Library of Congress, informing federal and state officials and educating the public on relevant local issues and solutions. The link to the Policy Paper can be found.

Championing the arts as a force for social change

FRANCES DANCY HOOKS ART AWARD and EXHIBITION



This annual award and accompanying month-long exhibition acknowledge the importance and impact of artists in the work of social change. Memphis-based visual artists are invited to submit original works that explore themes in social change. Named in honor of the late Francis Dancy Hooks, who was a force in civil rights, social change and education, the award and exhibition highlight the power of the arts to build bridges across cultures and human experiences.



In October 2025, Hooks Institute awarded Lonnie Robinson the Art Award for his submission *Freedom*. You can find Robinson's work throughout Memphis, including the stained glass installed in the Historic Clayborn Temple.

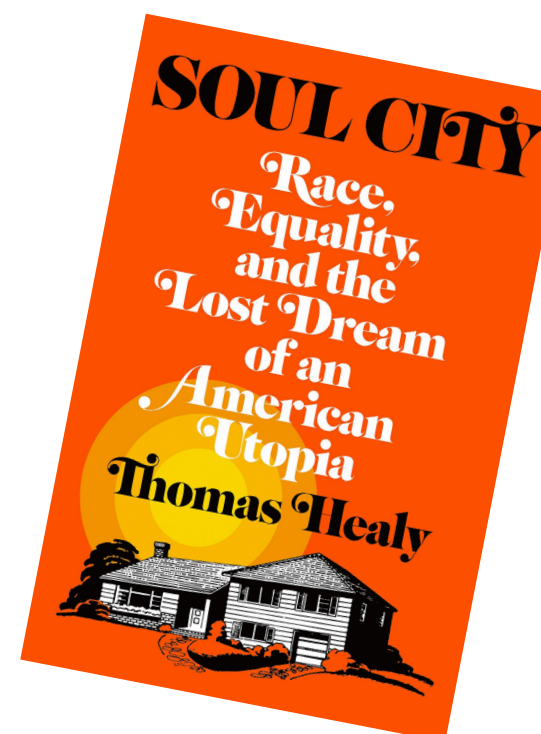


Advancing civil rights understanding

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

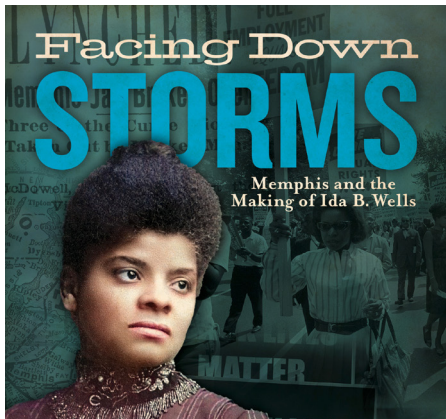
The **Benjamin L. Hooks National Book Award** is an annual award that recognizes groundbreaking scholarship on the legacy of the American civil rights movement and its continuing relevance today. Since 2010, over 900 books from distinguished authors have been considered for this prestigious award.

In February 2026, Hooks Institute hosted the 2024 National Book Award winner Joy Ann Reid, author of *Medgar and Myrlie: Medgar Evers and the Love Story that Awakened America*. More than 400 people attended this free event, held at the Michael D. Rose Theatre Lecture Hall on the University of Memphis campus. Copies of past award winners' books are available to students and the public at the University's Ned McWherter Library.

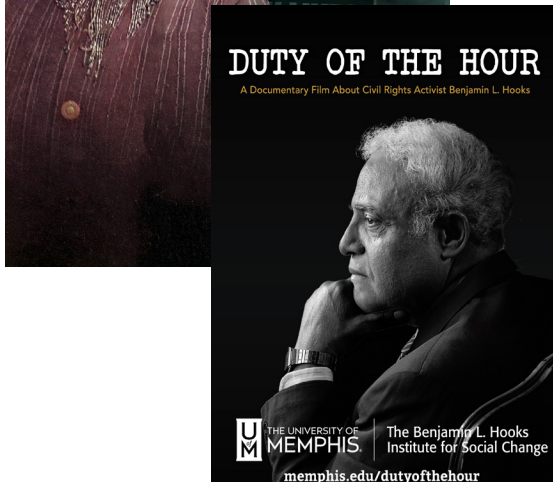


Preserving stories of justice and courage

DOCUMENTARY FILMS



We produce acclaimed documentaries and videos addressing historical and contemporary civil rights and social change issues. Projects include *Duty of the Hour*, *Facing Down Storms: Memphis and the Making of Ida B. Wells*, *Resistance To Injustice: Tent City and the Rise of the Fayette County, TN, Civil Rights Movement*, and *End of An Era: James Meredith and His March Against Fear*. through documentaries on human and civil rights activists, broadcast on public television.



ARCHIVAL PRESERVATION

In collaboration with the University of Memphis Libraries, the Hooks Institute played a pivotal role in digitizing the extensive papers of Benjamin L. Hooks and creating the collection of primary source materials about the Fayette County, Tennessee civil rights movement. Both projects are managed and housed in the Special Collections, University of Memphis Libraries.



The Constitution, the Nation, & YOU



Engaging the public in civic discourse

CIVIC SEMINARS



The Hooks Institute Civics Enrichment Series, The Constitution, the Nation and You, a pilot initiative, launched in fall 2026, is designed to increase civic knowledge, civic confidence and civic participation among college-age and high school students, and adults. Peer Power, Inc. is a Memphis nonprofit focused on tutoring high-school students to increase their academic performance. In partnership with Peer Power, Inc., we plan to engage with participants to increase their understanding of the Constitution, the roles of local, state and the national government. Our goal is to increase participants' confidence in engaging in civic activities, and public discourse to further the interests of their communities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We host public events and conferences featuring prominent scholars, government officials, activists and community members to address social change issues. Notable speakers have included Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education; Kristen Clarke, Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice; Ambassador Andrew Young; Marvin Ellison; University of Memphis Trustee, CEO Lowe's; and the late Julian Bond, civil rights activist.



Who We Serve

The University of Memphis and Mid-South Communities: We address local challenges in Memphis with the aim of generating solutions with national relevance.

Educators Nationwide: Teachers receive specialized training on civil rights history, especially as it unfolded in the Mid-South.

University of Memphis Students: Our success initiatives offer university students comprehensive academic support, career readiness, and financial literacy coaching.

University Faculty: Researchers are awarded grants from the Hooks Institute to investigate societal disparities and their underlying causes.

Policymakers and Leaders: Grassroots activists, government officials, and business leaders use our Research Policy Papers for developing programs and policies.

Historians: Researchers seeking insights into social change and civil rights, particularly regarding Mid-South events, find valuable resources through our work.

Impact by the Numbers

More than **700**
Hooks' Event Attendees

Book Award Presentation	343
30th Anniversary Gala	238
Breast Health Panel	40
Art Award and Exhibition	105
Volunteers	15

Students and Scholars Research and Publish Papers

Twenty-four (24) researchers published through the Hooks Policy Papers and 'Uplift Memphis, Uplift the Nation' Blog, while 40 students participated in Hooks Institute classes, seminars and events through HAAMI.



More than **90%**
of media interactions are local.

Facebook

- 4,948 followers, up 4.8% from the previous year
- 280,246 views
- 19,490 engagement views, up 364% over the previous year
- 212 new follows, up 1667% over the previous year

Instagram

- 1,662 followers
- 131,068 views
- 36,669 individual reaches, 127% increase
- 5,000 content interactions, 500% increase

YouTube

- 2,540 subscribers
- 21,450 views
- 979.5 watch hours

Blog

- 16 posts

Constant Contact

- 2,361 Contacts
- 41% open rate
9% higher than industry average,
2% increase from FY25



Our Donors

Together, we continue the legacy of Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks by creating opportunities, preserving history and building a more equitable future. Our Donors' generosity empowers us to advance social change and strengthen democracy through research, service and historical preservation. Donor support helps sustain programs that address social, economic and educational disparities while keeping many of the Institute's programs accessible to the communities we serve.

\$15,000 - \$40,000

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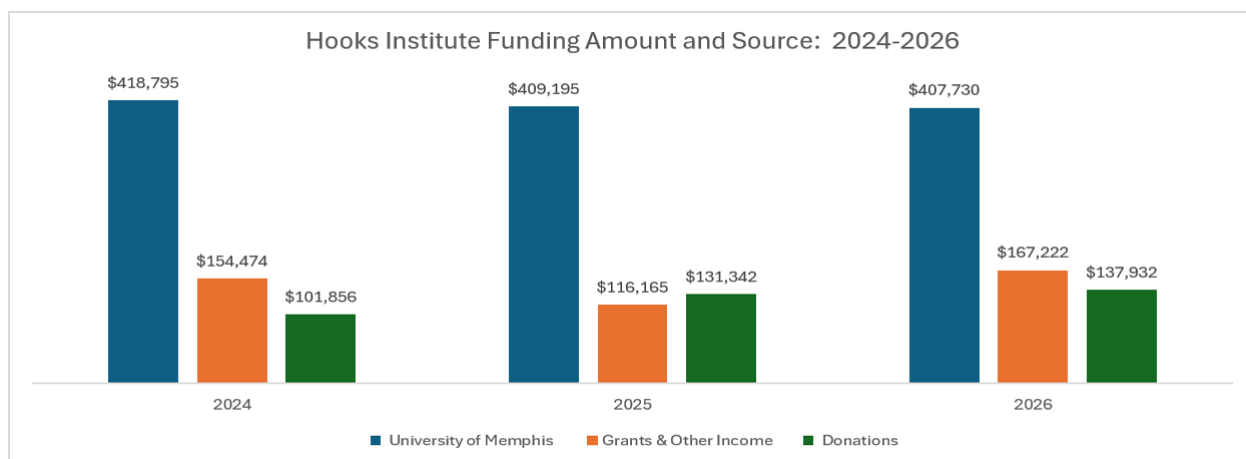
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Our Financials

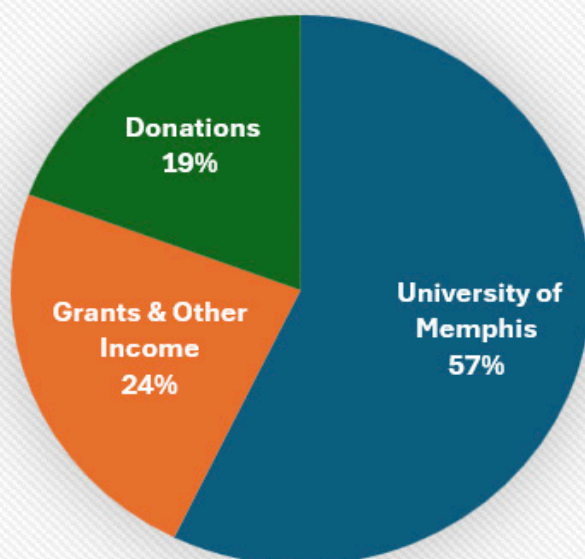
At the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, progress is measured not only in our community outreach, research initiatives or public forums, but also in the quiet, meticulous lines of financial reports.

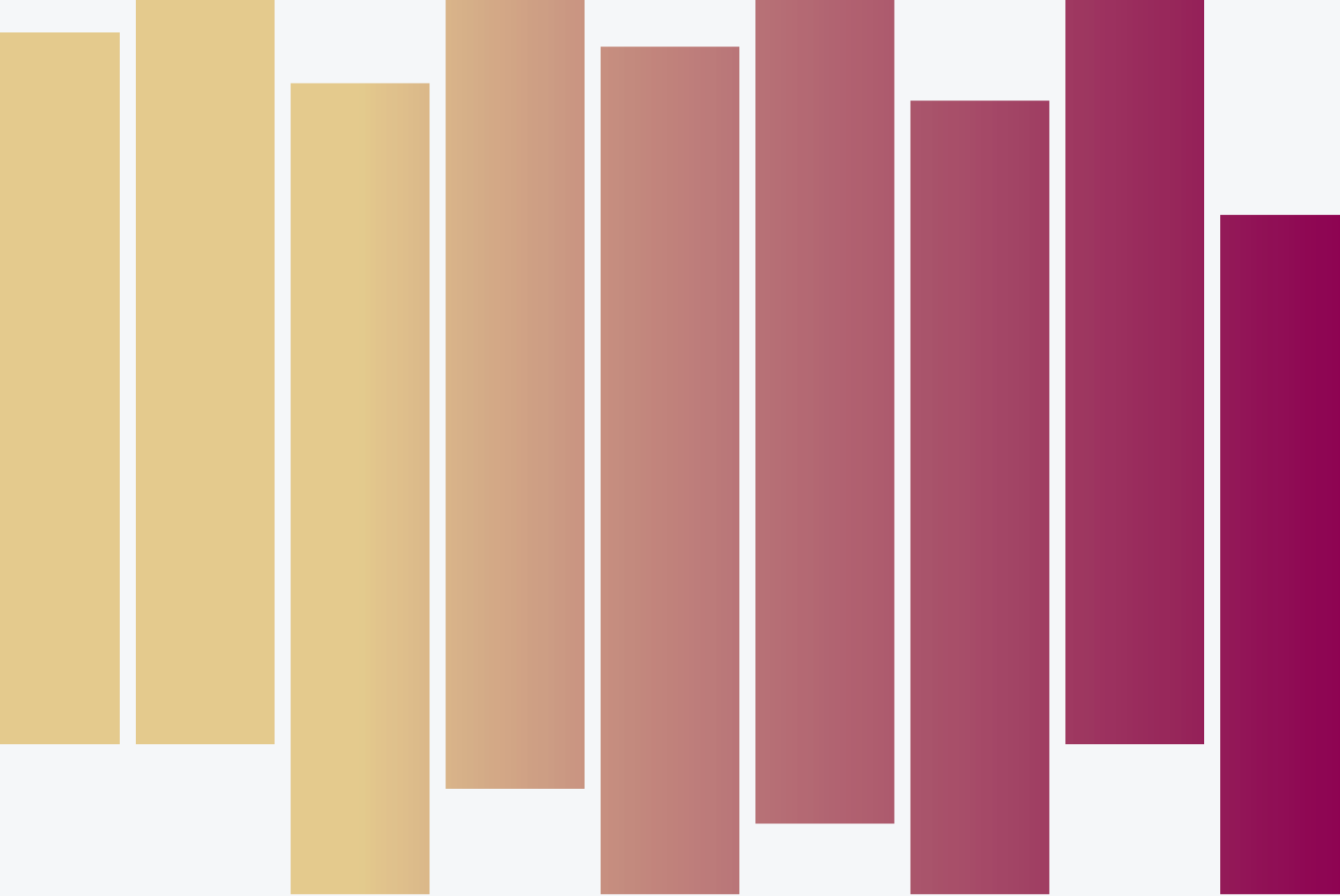
Each year, the number and amount of individual donations and other income slowly increase, while University of Memphis funding remains steady. This reflects a growing trust in the Institute's mission. These charts are more than just data, they are students served, minds opened, research published, and community voices given a platform.



Support from individuals, grants and other income account for nearly half, 43% - of all funds received, including grants from national foundations, gifts from local businesses and heartfelt donations from individuals who had seen the Institute's work firsthand. Each segment is a thread in a larger fabric, woven from belief and generosity.

FY26 Revenue Source by Percent





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2026



**BENJAMIN L.
HOOKS INSTITUTE
FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

Wilder Tower, 11th Floor
3675 Alumni Avenue
Memphis, TN 38152
Phone: 901-678-3974 | bhi@memphis.edu

memphis.edu/benhooks