

**News Release**

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PRAM Central members display awards during the 2026 Outstanding Practitioner of the Year awards ceremony. Pictured are (from left) Kalli Hedgepeth, Chrystelle Thames, APR; Emily-Kate Ford, Sophie McNeil-Wolf, APR; Vanessa Lowe-Garcia, Micheal King and Jan Schaefer, APR.

## **PRAM Central Chapter honors 2025 Outstanding Practitioners**

JACKSON, Miss. —The Public Relations Association of Mississippi, Central Chapter honored three members as 2025 Outstanding Practitioners of the Year and presented the President’s Award during its annual awards program, recognizing professionals whose work and service have made significant contributions to the public relations profession and the organization.

Each year, PRAM Central recognizes one member in each of three practitioner categories—Emerging Practitioner (0-5 years of experience), Practitioner (5 to 15 years of experience) and Advanced Practitioner (15+ years of experience)—and presents the President’s Award to a member who demonstrates exceptional service and leadership within the chapter.

“These awards recognize the exceptional professionalism and impact of our members in our community,” said Chrystelle Thames, APR, 2026 PRAM Central president. “This year’s honorees exemplify excellence in public relations and a strong commitment to service and leadership within the profession.”



Nominees were evaluated based on professional achievements, creative and resourceful problem-solving, commitment to professional development and meaningful service to the community. Judges considered certifications, awards and career milestones, as well as innovation in practice, leadership within the profession and contributions beyond the workplace through community service.

**Emerging Practitioner of the Year – Micheal D. King**

Micheal D. King is a Communications Specialist with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, where he oversees design, digital strategy and public information initiatives focused on environmental stewardship. He previously served as multimedia Specialist Team Lead for the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), supporting brand development and agencywide communications.

King co-chairs the Mississippi Litter Prevention Task Force and led the MDHS Blueprint Annual Report project, which earned a 2025 Southern Public Relations Federation Lantern Award. He is currently pursuing his Accreditation in Public Relations (APR).

In addition to his professional work, King has volunteered for nearly two decades through his “Call Me Claus” initiative, supporting families and local charities across the state.

**Practitioner of the Year – Vanessa Lowe-Garcia**

Vanessa Lowe-Garcia is a public relations specialist with 11 years of experience and currently works with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, where she develops and implements comprehensive communication strategies that support public engagement and organizational visibility.

Lowe-Garcia has led media relations, crisis communication and social media efforts, serving as one of the agency’s points of contact for media inquiries and interview requests. Her work includes coordinating press coverage, managing digital platforms and supporting timely communication during high-profile and critical situations. She has also expanded social media strategies to amplify traditional press efforts and increase audience reach and engagement.

In addition to her professional responsibilities, Lowe-Garcia serves as vice president of membership and president-elect for PRAM Central and is actively involved in community service initiatives across central Mississippi. Her commitment to professional development, service and strategic communication reflects the values recognized by the Practitioner of the Year award.

**Advanced Practitioner of the Year – Sophie McNeil Wolf, APR**

Sophie McNeil Wolf, APR, is Director of Communications and Insights for the Community Foundation for Mississippi and has nearly 20 years of experience in communications and public relations. Her career includes roles with Visit Jackson, Millsaps College, the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning and Mississippi Public Broadcasting.

Wolf holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Southern Mississippi, a master’s degree in integrated marketing communications from the University of Mississippi and a graduate certificate in economic development from the University of Southern Mississippi. She earned her Accreditation in Public Relations in 2024.

Wolf is a past president of PRAM Central and serves as member at large for PRAM Central, co-vice president of programs for PRAM State, as well as professional awards chair and professional development vice-president for the Southern Public Relations Federation. She also volunteers as a Certified Master Gardener with the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

**President’s Award – Emily-Kate Ford**



Public Relations Association of Mississippi  
CENTRAL CHAPTER

The President's Award is given at the discretion of the outgoing president, and this year honors a volunteer board member who demonstrates a strong work ethic, a positive attitude and a willingness to serve beyond their role to support the success of the organization.

This year's recipient, Emily-Kate Ford, is Associate Director of Communications at Baptist Children's Village and Family Ministries, where she leads creative strategy and messaging that support the organization's mission to serve children and families across Mississippi.

Ford is recognized for her professionalism, collaborative leadership and consistent dedication to PRAM Central. She assumed a significant leadership role and is noted for her dependability, thoughtful contributions and commitment to strengthening the chapter through service.

"Emily-Kate consistently showed up with professionalism, a positive attitude and a genuine willingness to lead," said Jan Schaefer, APR, 2025 PRAM Central president. "She took on a significant leadership role and delivered every time, strengthening the chapter through her collaboration, dependability and grace. Emily-Kate represents the future of PRAM Central, and it has been a pleasure to watch her grow in this profession."

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#### **About PRAM Central**

Founded in 1956, PRAM Central is the largest of nine local chapters geographically located throughout the state. It serves as the premier source for networking, continuing education and professional development for public relations professionals in central Mississippi. With over 130 members, its membership includes professionals from agencies, corporations, nonprofits, government, education and industrial sectors, as well as students aspiring to join the profession. The chapter is an autonomous affiliate of the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM State).