

GULF COUNCIL

ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE

Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino

Biloxi, Mississippi

August 24, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
Kevin Anson.....Alabama
Brenda Ballard.....Texas
Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
Troy Frady.....Alabama
Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
John Marquez.....Louisiana
Jason Osborne.....Louisiana
Anthony Overton.....Alabama
Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

Mike Allen.....Florida
Kesley Banks.....Texas
Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG
John Sanchez.....Florida
Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
Ed Walker.....Florida

STAFF

Alyssa Clift.....Administrative Assistant
Assane Diagne.....Economist
Leonardo "Leo" Egula.....Fishery Outreach Specialist
John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
Anabelle Suitor.....Social Scientist
Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Frank Helies.....NOAA

1 Judy Helmey.....SAFMC
2 John Walter.....SEFSC
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5

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1 The Administrative/Budget Committee of the Gulf Council convened
2 at the Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on
3 Monday morning, August 24, 2026, and was called to order by
4 Chairman Joe Spraggins.

5
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
7 **APPROVAL OF JANUARY 2026 MINUTES**
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
9

10 **CHAIRMAN JOE SPRAGGINS:** We'll get started with the
11 Administrative/Budget Committee, and I would like to call it to
12 order. First off, the committee is myself, and Mr. Donaldson is
13 vice chair, Anson, Ballard, Frady, Marquez, Sweetman, Schieble,
14 Osborne, Overton, and Geeslin.

15
16 With that, I would like to get an adoption of the agenda, if I
17 could.

18
19 **UNIDENTIFIED:** So moved.

20
21 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Second.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** All right. All in favor. All right. Now,
24 if I could get approval of the minutes from January 2026.
25 Sweetman, and then a second?

26
27 **MR. DONALDSON:** I'll second.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. All right. All in favor. All right.
30 With that, we'll move to Dr. Simmons.

31
32 **REVIEW FINAL 2026 FUNDED BUDGET AND ACTIVITIES**
33

34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good
35 morning, everyone. All right, and so the first item we have for
36 the committee, Beth is going to go through Agenda Item IV. She's
37 going to review our final 2026 funded budget and some of the
38 activities, and so, in January, the committee reviewed the draft
39 activities schedule and draft budget, based on our 2025 funding
40 level, because we did not know what our 2026 level would be at
41 that time.

42
43 All administrative funds have been received from NOAA for the 2026
44 fiscal year, and that total is \$4.6 million and change, and it's
45 an increase over 2025. However, the \$323,650 is a one-time funding
46 to support operationalizing some of the executive orders on
47 restoring American seafood competitiveness.
48

1 Staff is going to review the revised original budget to reflect
2 those planned activities for the remainder of 2026, and have
3 included columns for year-to-date activity, and the approved 2025
4 budget as well. The committee should review this, ask any
5 questions, and possibly pass a motion approving at the end of the
6 discussion. Mr. Chair.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Thank you very much, and, if we can,
9 any questions on that? If not, we can go ahead and move with Ms.
10 Hager.

11
12 **MS. BETH HAGER:** Okay, and so what we're presenting here, these
13 numbers are rounded to the thousands, as usual. We have the
14 approved 2025 in the first column, then your proposed 2026, and so
15 what you all will be looking at to vote on is that middle column.

16
17 Just for you all's reference, so we can, you know -- So that you
18 have an idea, we do have the actual to-date, as of the end of June,
19 numbers for 2026 in there, figures of what was spent so far, and
20 so I'm going to -- As we go through, I'm just going to bring your
21 attention to a few items that are maybe pretty decent changes,
22 based on our activities.

23
24 Most of our activities were already approved and discussed in
25 January, but there were some things that we were not sure of which
26 direction we were headed, like the moving of our office, and so,
27 as we go through travel expenses, we are sitting a little
28 underspent for travel, but we were trying to be conservative,
29 because we didn't know where our funding was going to end up, and
30 that's okay.

31
32 We, in the other travel line there, decreased that budget slightly,
33 because that had originally included potential moving costs for
34 new staff, and that was not a thing, and so we were able to draw
35 that budget in just a little bit.

36
37 In personnel costs, council salaries are right around 50 percent.
38 SSC salaries are currently spent a little lower than what's
39 budgeted. At the beginning of the year, we had some virtual
40 attendance, and a virtual meeting, and so we still have the budget
41 in there though to be able to continue the activities as normal
42 through the rest of the year.

43
44 Fringe benefits are also right where fulltime staff salaries are,
45 which is just under 50 percent expended. Overall, our budget is
46 at 45 percent expended, and so that's -- Those things are running
47 right in range with what we were expecting.

1 Things to point out here are the supplies line, and you can see
2 the 2026 budget, in the middle, is significantly bigger than 2025,
3 and that's weighted towards expenses for the end of the year, the
4 moving, refurbishing the meeting space, adding tables and things, and
5 that all needs to be included in that supplies line, and so that's
6 why you see a change there. Also, in the contractual line, we
7 have moving costs, and so that's a big change in there.

8
9 As we go down, we see that we have some budget for the new staff,
10 for their annual leave and sick leave. We don't expect that to be
11 expended this year, because we actually do that expense, that
12 accrual, at the end of the award, based on funding that's available
13 at the very end of the period and in relation to what needs to be
14 possibly added to that account, and so it's just a buffer there to
15 allow us to potentially put that money in there at a later date if
16 we need to.

17
18 Rents, you can see that it's a big jump, but that's the deposit
19 for our new space. One thing to note here is that it's not going
20 to cost us that much for the deposit the entire time. We're going
21 to get some of that back. The negotiation with the landlord was
22 that we would get credited that back at Month 36, and so not 100
23 percent of it, but we'll get a third of it back, which is good,
24 considering some other terms that other folks in our market are
25 having to face.

26
27 Then we also have the copier lease is up a little bit in this year,
28 but we will be probably getting rid of the big copier that we have,
29 because we are not utilizing the functions of it as much, and so
30 I expect that to drop off significantly next year, and so there's
31 some buffer in here to do something different with the copier
32 situation, and then it won't cost us what the monthly rent is in
33 the future, and so there's that.

34
35 Meeting room costs are just higher, and we're already at 55 percent
36 expended. Each year these are going up, and so we're back into
37 having to go over \$100,000 for meeting space each year, and the
38 only other thing that's a little bit higher expended here are
39 publications and subscriptions. Those renew at the beginning of
40 the year. It's a small number, but it is mostly taken up so far,
41 and the expenditures are expected to be nothing for the rest of
42 the year, other than potentially some internet costs.

43
44 There we have it, folks. As Carrie mentioned, the total funding
45 does include some onetime funds. We have \$323,000 for the
46 executive order. We have a small SERO contract for some travel
47 for our social scientist.

1 The actual increase, if you take those guys off, is 1 percent, 1.3
2 percent, and so we are effectively still level-funded. We're just
3 trying to make sure that we can save more in the future, and so
4 any questions?

5
6 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Mr. Schieble.

7
8 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so two real quick,
9 easy questions, I think. What happened with the difference in the
10 salaries with the SSC? It went from \$80,000 to \$57,000, and what's
11 the difference there?

12
13 **MS. HAGER:** We didn't spend it at the beginning of the year, and
14 so it really isn't a good place to be sitting funding in that line,
15 and we didn't spend it because of the virtual meetings that we've
16 already had this year.

17
18 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So it's the number of meetings that we base it on?

19
20 **MS. HAGER:** Yes.

21
22 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** That makes sense. Then I guess, second of all, and
23 this may be the next topic you're going to talk about, but do you
24 expect the funding appropriations to be similar to what we had
25 this past year, where you don't get them when you're used to, or
26 you get them in these stages?

27
28 **MS. HAGER:** Well, that is a whole conversation that we're talking
29 about here in the future. Now, overall, we do have a little
30 cushion from last year, but, as Carrie will be presenting in the
31 next few slides in the presentation, that cushion may not be enough
32 to carry us. We've got to be very careful about our expenditures,
33 and the periods that we're expending them in matter.

34
35 That's why I'm starting to bring back part of the conversation to
36 you all, so that you're aware that, yes, it may look like we have
37 a significant amount of budget room in certain areas at the halfway
38 point, but possibly not, and also the areas that we frontload,
39 like subscriptions, and maybe we need to start spacing those out
40 through the year. I mean, these are things that we're evaluating
41 currently, to try and make better use of the funds when we get
42 them, because it really is going to matter in the future.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Dr. Simmons.

45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, just to
47 kind of build on what Ms. Hager was saying, some of the SSC meetings
48 have been reduced this year, just because we're waiting for so

1 many stock assessments, and we're waiting for the MRIP-FES pilot
2 to come out, and I think there's going to be a lot of bottleneck
3 issues once we get some of that information and it becomes
4 available through the process, and so I suspect we'll be very
5 active when all those things happen, but we have not -- We've had
6 shorter meetings, and we've had virtual meetings, and so that's
7 why that line item is down a little bit in 2026 so far.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any other questions? You know, first
10 off, I would like to thank the staff, Carrie and the staff and
11 everybody, for what you are doing, because they are fighting the
12 hard battle here. You know, a lot of us in our states and all, we
13 have this capability, where -- I don't know if you all work like
14 Mississippi, but, you know, we usually don't get funding until
15 after everything is done, but it's in the fund anyway, and I send
16 our bill to the State of Mississippi, and they pay for it.

17
18 Well, they don't have that luxury. They don't have the luxury of
19 sending the bill to Washington, D.C., and then Washington pays for
20 it. You know, they don't have the luxury of doing the things that
21 we have to do, that we get to do, in the states, and to be able to
22 manage what they're doing is amazing, and I appreciate what you
23 all are doing.

24
25 I mean, you all try to cut it every chance you get, and, you know,
26 I'm sure that everybody is trying to help as much as possible, and
27 so, with that, I would like to consider if someone would please
28 look at making a motion to be able to pass the revised final 2026
29 budget.

30
31 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** A motion.

32
33 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Second.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** All right. Any questions? **All in favor.**
36 **All right.** Dr. Simmons, I think you're going to talk about the
37 future.

38
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let's -
40 - If Bernie could just get the motion up on the board for everyone.
41 Sorry.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Did I get ahead of myself? You know, I'm
44 pretty quick sometimes.

45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and you've had a lot of coffee
47 this morning, obviously.

1 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** General Spraggins, who made the motion, and who
2 seconded it?

3
4 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** I made the motion.

5
6 **MR. DUGAS:** Mr. Osborne.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Dakus seconded it, I think.

9
10 **MR. DUGAS:** Dakus seconded it.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** I'm so used to talking to my phone, and it
13 just takes everything and just does it, you know? The bad part
14 about it is it says some things that I didn't think I said. All
15 right. We have the motion on the board, and it passed. Are there
16 any questions? Are we good on this one now? Did I get myself
17 back in line? All right. Well, let's go to Future Funding,
18 Timing, and Planning with Dr. Simmons.

19
20 **DISCUSSION OF FUTURE FUNDING CYCLE, TIMING OF RELEASE, AND**
21 **COUNCIL PLANNING**

22
23 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so this is
24 just the start of a couple of slides. I wanted to get everyone's
25 minds thinking about this, and trying to think about what we can
26 do better, and trying to be more efficient and have some cost-
27 saving measures here, and so this is just the start of our
28 conversation, and so we're looking for just some feedback, and
29 this is just a very brief overview about some of the recent history
30 on timing and amount of funding that we've received annually for
31 the regional management councils, and this impacts all eight
32 regional councils, and so we're just looking for any ideas, any
33 feedback from you all, on this very short presentation. Bernie,
34 could you please pull up Tab G, Number 5?

35
36 This just shows you, in the last ten years, the timing of the
37 funding we've received, and whether it's been at the start of the
38 year or before the start of the year, and so you can see, in the
39 last three years, it's been after the start of the year, and so
40 are funded on a calendar year, the council is, and so, since 2024,
41 as I said, the funding has been received entirely after the start
42 of the year, increasing our reliance on any carryover we have from
43 the year before. Just as a reminder, 2025 started our new four-
44 year award, and so 2026 is our second year of that award.

45
46 We took a look at the last three years, to visually show the
47 percent of the actual funding that was received, and the timing of
48 that funding, and so, although the timing in 2026 was somewhat

1 better than it has been in the previous two years, we're already
2 halfway through the year.

3
4 You can just see it's pretty sporadic there, and so this is making
5 it pretty logistically challenging to plan and hold meetings,
6 because of the amount of funding that's being released, and the
7 timing of that, and so this is an issue across the regional
8 councils, obviously, and it's not just us. We are working with
9 our colleagues in the other regions and thinking about things that
10 they're doing as well to plan and budget in this environment.

11
12 At the CCC meetings, we are informed in January, or we had the
13 meeting in May, excuse me, that the January release and later time
14 period of the funds would kind of be the new normal, and so, in
15 response to that, a lot of the other regional councils are holding
16 virtual meetings at the start of the year, and often the meetings
17 are very short, you know, because virtual meetings can be difficult
18 as well logistically.

19
20 We want to avoid that if we can. If we have a virtual meeting, we
21 want it to be short, but mainly only have like a couple of agenda
22 items. We want to allow the process, the stakeholders to still
23 have access to council members and staff, and the process to remain
24 intact as much as possible, but we do need to figure out how to
25 slow our spend rate at the start of the year until we have an
26 understanding of what our annual funding will be.

27
28 I think, the figures on the right, we just wanted to show that
29 basically, as of June 2026, we spent about half of our year-to-
30 date funding, which she's gone through, and so we're pretty much
31 on track, with just that 5 percent buffer, and then the 16 percent
32 cushion was from the 2025, and so that will be important to carry
33 over with this environment, as far as our funding timing and
34 amount.

35
36 We started to review some variables, you know, just try to look at
37 locations, meeting attendees, and we wanted to look at in-person
38 public commenters, just to see months of council meetings and years
39 after COVID -- When we were coming out of COVID, we excluded those
40 years, and what our numbers were. This does not include virtual
41 commenters, but we were just trying to see if there's any type of
42 trend, and we would like to dig into this a little bit more, but
43 this is just the start, to kind of see what's happening.

44
45 Some ideas we had for consideration, the meeting dates, and lengths
46 of those, maybe starting in 2028, we can perhaps consider starting
47 in February, and we have to map those out, because we really need
48 to make sure we have enough time in between meetings.

1
2 We have to have the materials, and we might have memos that we
3 send to the Science Center and the Regional Office, and to get the
4 data ready, and so we need a certain amount of time between
5 meetings, and so we could work on that and see if there's some
6 improvements we could possibly make there. Obviously, there's a
7 lot of other meetings we have to work around, and so that's why we
8 were suggesting starting that in 2028.
9

10 We could decrease, perhaps, the number of meeting days for some of
11 the meetings, and we could do some cost estimates on what the
12 savings would be, or not, and sometimes places that are more
13 logistically challenging to get into, because of the travel funds
14 that are spent, may not be an actual cost saving.
15

16 We could decrease some of the days, which we have done in recent
17 history, primarily because of the shutdown, and the materials that
18 were ready, and not because we were trying to save money, and so
19 what we've tried to do with our hotel contracts now, that we're
20 signing in 2027, and we're finishing up those right now, is make
21 sure that we have a clause in there that, if we do need to shorten
22 it, but we don't have the materials ready to shorten it on the
23 agenda to three days, we don't have a penalty, because it can work
24 in the opposite direction.
25

26 If we don't plan out accordingly, we could get penalized from that,
27 and so there is a lot of planning that has to go into these
28 contracts way in advance, and we have delayed also, with the
29 support of the council chair and vice chair, signing those 2027
30 contracts as long as possible, until we have stability.
31

32 Maybe we would, like I said, decrease a day or so, maybe some of
33 the meetings that would be less attended. We are going to try
34 this in June of 2027. Again, that will be a three-day meeting.
35

36 We could consider holding meetings at our new office. We have to
37 look at that, once everything is set up. Maybe we could do it
38 every other year, or something like that, and possibly non-peak
39 months, you know, when it's not January, and everybody wants to go
40 to Florida because it's cold, and so, again, we have to look at if
41 that is actually a cost savings or not.
42

43 Again, we would really -- We want to look at the public meeting
44 attendance, testimony considerations. Probably a lot of this has
45 to do with what's on the agenda more than location, but we want to
46 dig into that to determine any type of patterns. We could try to
47 figure that out and bring something back to you.
48

1 One of the other things we've talked about with our state partners
2 is possibly adjusting the timing and release of the state liaison
3 contracts, to maybe slow that down at the beginning of the year
4 and split the first advance into two quarterly payments in January
5 and April at 25 percent, and then do the last advance at 50 percent
6 in July, when the funding has been received, or it could be later
7 in August, like it was received in 2025.

8
9 These are just some ideas staff wanted to put forward and get a
10 little bit of feedback, so we have some direction to bring
11 something back in more detail, probably for 2028, Mr. Chair.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and, you know, it
14 definitely looks like you've worked hard, you and your staff, to
15 put a plan together to be able to keep us operating, and that is
16 fantastic. I appreciate that, and I do agree with everything that
17 you talk about, and I think we've talked about this before, that
18 we need to look at shortening some meetings, look at what we're
19 going to do, and, you know, the timing and all.

20
21 You know, I personally think that, you know, obviously, splitting
22 the first advance is something -- That should be something that we
23 should do, and does anybody have any questions or anything on that?
24 Mr. Dugas.

25
26 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. I was going to Carrie,
27 or I guess the states, you know, and what's the response from the
28 states on this? Do they concur? Do they agree? Dr. Sweetman has
29 his hand up, but has that conversation been had, and, also, what's
30 the amount of the funds in quarterly payments?

31
32 **MS. HAGER:** Sorry. I was waiting for C.J. The total amount is
33 \$50,000, and so we would have \$12,500 in the first two quarters,
34 and then the other \$25,000.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Dr. Sweetman.

37
38 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, General. Yes, J.D., and Carrie has
39 gone out and called -- At least it sounds like -- I mean, she has
40 called me, and it sounds like she has called some other states,
41 too. From my perspective, we're good with this. We understand
42 the challenges that are associated with this. Quite frankly, I
43 think the last thing we want to do is be holding virtual meetings
44 because of some financial issues that are, you know, unpredictable,
45 and, if this gives us a little bit of a buffer room, I mean, I
46 think, at least from the State of Florida's perspective, we're
47 totally good with this.

1 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Mr. Schieble.

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I agree with Dr. Sweetman. I think, from the state
4 standpoint, you know, the funds cover a good portion of the travel
5 costs and stuff like that for the liaisons that are here, but,
6 also, Louisiana specifically, we have three members of the SSC,
7 right, and so they charge their time also to this grant, I guess,
8 if you will call it that, and so, generally, we cover a large
9 portion of the costs from the state perspective anyway, and so we
10 don't have any issue with the payments coming in portions like
11 that.

12
13 Our fiscal year starts in July, and so, if it was a January, I
14 think it would be a little bit different for us. It's not going
15 to impact that. We did it this way this year, didn't we, correct?
16 Weren't there like two sets of payments, right?

17
18 **MS. HAGER:** It was a little delayed, but that was due to the
19 funding, and also some reporting, and so some folks wound up with
20 extensions because of delayed reporting.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any other questions? Yes, sir, Mr.
23 Anson.

24
25 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, General Spraggins. I had a couple of
26 questions. One is it relates to the meetings, and you propose
27 potentially -- I appreciate all the thought that you all have done
28 this, and I echo General Spraggins' comments about you all being
29 very diligent in managing the money and setting yourself up for
30 success, if you will, by having the money available in the first
31 of next year.

32
33 I guess just a comment about the having the meetings at the office,
34 the new office. I've not seen it, and I don't know what the
35 capacity is, but that's an issue is, you know, whether or not --
36 How that would fit in with our overall schedule with trying to
37 approve documents that might be contentious for final action and
38 such, and whether or not there'll be enough physical space, without
39 violating any fire codes and that type of thing, and so just a
40 comment to think of.

41
42 Then the next is relative to the end of the four-year grant, and
43 then you still -- You have extra time the following year to kind
44 of close out, and so how would the year-five of this current four-
45 year cycle look like relative to you being able to roll over those
46 monies, and have them available to spend and all that, and then
47 report-out and that type of thing?

1 **MS. HAGER:** Well, and that's a part of the planning. That's a
2 part of it, because we don't get a no-cost extension because we
3 haven't spent the money. We get a no-cost extension for work that
4 still needs to be continued, and so we have to plan those things
5 separately, but in consideration of each thing, and so, if we do
6 have activities that haven't finished, we need to have a buffer.

7
8 If we have finished all the activities, in a perfect world, then
9 all of the money is spent, and we start January 1 with nothing.
10 That's not ideal. Historically, I don't think we've ever not had
11 a no-cost extension, at least not in my recollection of the last
12 twenty years, and so I'm guessing we're probably going to have
13 some activities that need to be completed, which will allow us to
14 account for a buffer. How much that is depends on the work that
15 needs to be done, truly.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Mr. Anson.

18
19 **MR. ANSON:** I don't want to get too much in the weeds here, but I
20 guess, you know, you have your salaries and such of personnel.
21 That's probably your biggest expense for the rollover monies, and
22 so how would the discussions go relative to those being carryover
23 expenses, I guess, relative to a contractual item or some other
24 ongoing work? That's just my concern, and again trying to think
25 this out from my perspective.

26
27 **MS. HAGER:** We would actually have to allocate time if we were to
28 allocate salaries to the no-cost, and we have done that, and other
29 councils do that too. That's not at all uncommon. You just have
30 to account for how much time is staff actually in that meeting
31 discussing that subject. It becomes a lot more record-keeping and
32 administrative burden, but, if it needs to be done, it needs to be
33 done.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Mr. Geeslin.

36
37 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Beth, as usual, Texas does
38 things a little differently. Fact-check me here in the fact that
39 we, Texas, bills -- We incur those costs upfront, and then we bill
40 back to you all.

41
42 **MS. HAGER:** That's correct.

43
44 **MR. GEESLIN:** We're certainly -- Gosh, I sympathize with the
45 struggles, and the uncertainty, and trying to forecast and predict
46 when and where this may come, your funding, and so we're completely
47 flexible and willing to, you know, bend over backwards to
48 accommodate any of your funding challenges where we can, but I do

1 want to keep this in perspective, that the state liaison contracts,
2 and the grant, in the big picture, is relatively small percentage
3 of overall operating costs, right?
4

5 **MS. HAGER:** Yes, and it's not necessarily the overall cost. It's
6 the timing.
7

8 **MR. GEESLIN:** Got it. Okay. That make sense.
9

10 **MS. HAGER:** It's not like we have this money in our account. We
11 have to request the draw, and, if we physically don't have the
12 cash on hand, we can't make those kinds of expenditures, and so,
13 if we're trying to make the expenditure for over 50 percent of the
14 year, and that falls within the first 2 percent of the year, that
15 creates a burden for us if we don't actually have that money in
16 the bank.
17

18 **MR. GEESLIN:** Understood, and so, in that scenario, now I've got
19 a clearer picture, and does the model that we work by benefit you?
20

21 **MS. HAGER:** It does. It does, but not all states, or all agencies,
22 can necessarily work on -- A lot of them work on a reimbursement
23 already for some of their other things, and so, historically, I'm
24 sure that's why the contracts were developed this way, and it was
25 only about fifteen years ago that, and maybe not even that long
26 ago, and maybe twelve years ago, that Texas went to reimbursement.
27 You all did used to get advances.
28

29 **MR. GEESLIN:** Carrie, before you chime in on that, and please do,
30 but I want to hear a little bit about the positive side of this,
31 your new office. I appreciate you all really thinking about that,
32 and can somebody here, in just a second, kind of lay that out,
33 what you're looking forward to, kind of the capacity that -- You
34 know, highlight the -- Act like a realtor and sell it to me.
35

36 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Dr. Simmons.
37

38 **MS. HAGER:** It's very close to the existing space, which was
39 fantastic. It's a very tough market. It's one of the highest
40 real estate areas in Tampa. Unfortunately, we have to be close to
41 the airport, because that saves a significant amount on having
42 people travel in for meetings. It's similar in size, although it
43 is somewhat smaller, but that's the workspace and the offices and
44 things like that. The actual meeting room is slightly larger, and
45 so there's that. Those are great things.
46

47 I think it's going to be laid out a little nicer. We don't have
48 the doors leading into the meeting space from everyone's office,

1 like we do currently, and it's more of a separated space, and so
2 there's a lot of up-sides to having it in this area.

3
4 **UNIDENTIFIED:** (The comment is not audible on the recording.)

5
6 **MS. HAGER:** I think we are, and we also wound up with a ten-year
7 lease here, which is fantastic, because, unfortunately, that's
8 what happened with our other space. Within that first seven-year
9 contract, the building was sold, and so then we weren't able to
10 extend the lease, and so at least now we have ten years of
11 stability, hopefully. That's always the consideration in our area,
12 is the stability.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Dr. Simmons, do you have --

15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I just
17 wanted to add to that. Yes, I think it's a very nice space. It's
18 in a nice area. It's not far from where we are currently, and I'm
19 just waiting for that buildout, and those permits, but we don't
20 have to start paying rent until it's ready, and so that's some
21 initiative there to get it done.

22
23 Just back on the contracts again, and one thing we don't want to
24 do with this is create any more administrative burden for the staff
25 on your end, and on our end, and back to Mr. Anson's point about
26 having something in the office, you know, points well taken about
27 the fire codes and all those types of things, and what's on the
28 agenda, but there may be some meetings that could be appropriate,
29 and it's something we should consider as part of our budgeting
30 process, I think.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Mr. Anson.

33
34 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and I didn't chime-in earlier about the question
35 to the states about the liaison contracts, and so, I mean, for
36 most of our other grants, nearly all of our other grants, we, you
37 know, work on a reimbursement schedule, and so, if it helps, and,
38 again, it's a relatively small amount of money, at the end of the
39 day, but we could follow what Texas is doing, and so I don't know
40 if that is an option, or an opt-in or opt-out type thing, but, you
41 know, we could bill, you know, semi-annually, too. I mean, that's
42 not an issue either, and so just throwing that out there.

43
44 **MS. HAGER:** Thank you very much for that consideration.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

47
48 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thanks. I'm not on your committee, but I

1 want to commend the staff for thinking outside the box. I guess
2 my question -- So a lot of factors going to meeting locations.
3 Participation of stakeholders, to me, is critical to the process.
4 I would be curious to see like the cost of meetings based on
5 location, and that includes travel and meeting space, and are there
6 certain locations that maybe we should start taking off the table?

7
8 I hate to even say that, because we may not get to certain
9 stakeholder communities, or look at other communities, maybe where
10 we haven't been, that would be more cost effective, but have you
11 thought of that?

12
13 **MS. HAGER:** We're actually starting to evaluate some of that, too.
14 That's why Carrie was saying there are multiple factors involved.
15 It's not just public comment. It can't be the only means to
16 evaluate, because we were not expecting, necessarily, for the
17 meetings where we had the most comment to be the ones that were,
18 and so that was good information for us.

19
20 We also, in next year, are going to Pascagoula, which is not
21 someplace we've been in a long time, and so we are also looking
22 from that perspective.

23
24 The difficulty, a lot of times that we face, is the space
25 requirement that we have to hold the meetings, and to have a U,
26 and to have all of the space for public participation, are
27 frequently in larger areas that don't -- Smaller hotels in smaller
28 areas don't necessarily have that capacity. Plus, it's a cost
29 savings if it's a very easy hub to get in and out of. New Orleans
30 has a whole bunch of flights, and much less in Gulfport, and so,
31 you know, just as an example of two cities that are, you know,
32 significantly different in terms of getting to them.

33
34 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, just to add onto that, I assume kind of
35 the current rotation takes into account where we have cost savings
36 just based on time of the year as well, right?

37
38 **MS. HAGER:** As much as humanly possible, yes, and that was a
39 significant consideration when we were evaluating this current
40 coming cycle.

41
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** As much as I love to be in Texas in August, I
43 mean, Dakus' home state, it would be great to be there when it's
44 a little cooler.

45
46 **MS. HAGER:** Yes, and the hotels even will turn us down if it's
47 their high season. They don't want to try and lease out their
48 space to this many government rate rooms, and so that is definitely

1 something that we don't even have direct control over.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Any other questions on this? Yes, sir, Mr.
4 Dugas.

5
6 **MR. DUGAS:** Beth hit the nail on the head. You know, for the last
7 several months, we've been working with Kathy, and Carrie mostly,
8 and Beth, going back and forth of where can we go, and what can we
9 do, and what can we cut, and so, you know, just to respond to Andy,
10 and staff has been on top of this for quite some time already.

11
12 You're going to see some changes next year, different locations,
13 different smaller, shorter meetings, because we had to make
14 adjustments already, and so this is already in progress. We just
15 need to support the staff to continue on this path to make cuts,
16 and shorter meetings, but they're already on it.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any other questions? Dr. Sweetman.

19
20 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So, Key West next Florida meeting?

21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** That's about 100 percent. Mr.
23 Spottswood said we could all come.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Well, I was going to tell you, you know, we
26 can welcome you all to Mississippi from here after, but, you know,
27 we can get you the room rate, but I just don't know about the
28 flight rate, you know, and that's another thing that you have, and
29 I mean, it does happen. You know, if you find a cheaper place,
30 because of the hotel or whatever, then next you've got to look at
31 what it costs to get there, and there's a lot of issues in there,
32 but I don't know.

33
34 Does anybody have any objection with them doing what they're
35 looking at with 25-25, you know, in the first quarter, and then
36 looking at where we're at? Is there any objections to any of that?

37
38 I think that will help you a lot, and, you know, I would say, as
39 far as a lot of states, I think all of us could -- We could probably
40 do the funding upfront, but the other problem is it adds another
41 level of us having to go back and, you know, put money into it,
42 and then take money out of it, and put money into it, and take
43 money out of it, and so, you know what I'm talking about, and it's
44 a budget thing, but, you know, we'll help you any way we can, and,
45 if you run short, let us know. We'll see, and Mississippi might
46 have a little dollar or two we can help you with, but any other
47 questions on that?

1 If not, is there anything else we need to bring for the
2 Administrative and Budget meeting? If not, Mr. Chairman, I'll
3 give you back twenty-six minutes, and I expect that to be the
4 standard for the rest of the meetings.

5
6 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 24, 2026.)

7
8 - - -
9