

# Profile: Department of Tourism Secretary Sara Meaney

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WisPolitics.com is profiling some of the newly announced state agency heads. The latest installment features Department of Tourism Secretary Sara Meaney.

Meaney was most recently chief marketing and development officer for Milwaukee Film and was involved with the firms BVK, Comet Branding and Hanson Dodge Creative.

## **Birthplace, age?**

44 years old, born in Milwaukee.

## **Job history?**

Held executive leadership and management roles at several advertising and marketing agencies. Owned her own marketing agency, Comet Branding + PR, before leading a successful merger with Hanson Dodge Creative. Most recently worked as chief marketing and development officer for Milwaukee Film.

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## **Education?**

Earned a degree from UW-Madison and majored in psychology and pre-med. Attended executive education programs at Harvard Business School and Kellogg School of Management.

## **Family?**

Married. Mother of four children.

## **Favorite non-work interest?**

Passionate about the arts and film in particular. Enjoys going to art museums with her family. Dabbles in art and writing. Fond of home improvement projects and

working in her garden at home.

### **Why the interest in being in the Evers administration?**

“I had never met Gov. Evers until I entered the interview process. I had read a lot about him, I know his style of leadership is something I believe in and I hope to espouse in my own leadership in my professional career. So when I had the opportunity to meet him in person, it connected the dots for me to understand he is exactly how he seems. He’s a man of integrity, he is a person who inspires people to lead and lead by example. So I’m really excited and really honored to be a part of the team he put together.”

### **What are your priorities for the agency under your leadership?**

“Tourism is this incredible strength for this state. The tourism economy in the state of Wisconsin is the third largest industry, so what’s really important is that we build off of the strength that’s already in place. Wisconsin has some incredible natural resources that are widely known throughout the state. Ultimately, in order to see the growth and prosperity we would like to see through our efforts, we’re going to need to find new opportunities to attract new audiences. So one of the really important ways to do that is to understand what is our greatest strength or what are the greatest strengths we can build off of. And the data tells us that the number one reason people report that they come to the state of Wisconsin is outdoor recreation, and outdoor recreation happens to be a large majority, a huge majority of the actual total tourism industry in the state of Wisconsin. So I think we see an opportunity to dig a bit deeper there, look into how we can best leverage that existing base, that existing resource, and make sure we tell the story to more people in the future to really leverage what we already have.”

### **What should the agency be doing differently?**

“There’s always something in terms of change that we can look into and do a bit more of. With marketing, what we have is the opportunity to do a lot of tweaking... We have an opportunity to invest further in paid advertising within specific audiences. But also mixing it up with earned media, which is of course PR and influencers and things like social media, but also owned media. So owned media of course is kind of that third leg of the stool. It’s that piece of content, what we put on our website, the types of videos we create, the blog posts we create, the stories that we can write and the people we can tap into to be telling the story of Wisconsin.”

### **What’s the best advice you’ve received since getting the job?**

“I think Gov. Evers gave really, really good advice to all of us when we agreed to take the position and that is to do what you do best and lead by example, be compassionate leaders and be transparent and strong communicators.”

**Worst advice?**

“As a marketer I find it to be both refreshing and interesting when people offer their recommendations for the next state tourism slogan or campaign. What I can’t say is that all of them are terrible ideas, but I can’t say all of them are the best either. So I’m not going to be taking everyone’s advice, but maybe a couple folks will see some of their ideas play out in the future.”