



Southern Rural Development Center FY2015 Plan of Work

The SRDC's 15-member Technical and Operational Advisory Committee (TOAC) met in October 2014 to review the priorities and the Research/Extension activities of the Center. TOAC membership, composed of six Research faculty and six Extension specialists from the 1862 and 1890 land-grant schools in the region, as well as three non-land-grant representatives, provides programmatic guidance to the SRDC, ensuring that the work of the Center is aligned with the needs of people and communities in the rural South. TOAC continues to believe that SRDC's three overarching priorities remain relevant to the needs and issues in the rural South. TOAC provided the SRDC staff with its recommendations on how to fine tune its proposed FY15 activities during its fall face-to-face meeting. On behalf of the TOAC, the chair of this advisory group formally presented the proposed FY15 plan of work to the SRDC Board of Directors. The Board voted unanimously in support of the plan as developed by the TOAC in partnership with the SRDC staff. The following outlines the efforts that will be pursued in FY15 by the SRDC.

PRIORITY 1: Fostering Civic-Minded Communities

The Center will continue to make important strides in advancing work designed to facilitate and strengthen the engagement of people in their communities. The following are the key efforts the SRDC will carry out over the next fiscal year:

- 1. Turning the Tide on Poverty:** Over the course of several years' work, a rich collection of associated data has been gathered in order to better understand how to foster civic engagement in the context of this program. During 2015, the SRDC plans the following activities to continue support of this work: (a) *Facilitate the work of the multi-state research team:* Through a joint learning agreement from the Kettering Foundation, the SRDC will coordinate a multi-state research team that is finalizing work on a series of research articles to be published in a special issue of the Community Development Society Journal (anticipated release Feb. 2016). (b) *Coordinate a joint Tide and Horizons team meeting:* An opportunity to examine the Tide data alongside the Horizons data (Tide's sister program in the northwest portion of the nation) is planned for March 2015.
- 2. Investigate the core leadership competencies/skills** needed for people to be effective as community leaders in the 21st century – particularly among retirees/seniors, youth, underserved/limited-resource populations. Uncover what LGUs are doing in the form leadership development and where the gaps may be that we can build capacity, etc. *Background for this suggestion:* In reviewing the CED Initiatives (prepared by Helen Sauer/A. Davis @ UK), all of the LGUs listed leadership development as a priority area to some extent. Most states are using different curriculum and the target audiences seem to be strictly youth or farmers in some cases and in other cases the programming targets the general public. Therefore, it is difficult to assess what skills/competencies are being targeted through those programs. Also, some of the smaller LGUs that have interest to provide leadership development to their constituents but may not have the capacity to due to staffing and budgetary constraints.
- 3. SERA-37 – Latinos in the New South:** The SERA 37 team is planning a regional conference in fall 2015. The SRDC will work with their planning committee facilitate this meeting. Additionally, the Center will continue to provide assistance in promoting events,

sharing information, and facilitating communication through its various resources (webinars, listservs, social media, and website linkages).

4. Explore targeted programming to county/municipal officials, which may support them in being effective as local leaders. A handful of Extension programs in the South (Mississippi State, Auburn University and few others), actively work with this target audience. In environmental scans completed by Extension staff, there is a need to support these officials in an array of areas (e.g., how mobilize their constituents around issues; building grassroots rapport, grant-writing/securing funding; conflict resolution/management etc.).

5. Expand civic engagement to other topics: (1) Investigate other civic engagement programs being done in the region and what's working. (2) Explore opportunities to use civic engagement practices in other topic areas (i.e. foods systems). (3) Extend training opportunities to build capacity for civic engagement to other Extension professionals.

6. Offer training on ripple mapping as a means to document programs impacts. Ripple mapping uses elements of mind mapping, qualitative data collection, and appreciative inquiry.

PRIORITY 2: Build Economically Vibrant Communities

The Center will continue to carry out the variety of efforts that are intended to advance the economic health of rural places in the region. It will do so in partnership with its land-grant university colleagues and other key external partners.

1. Stronger Economies Together (SET) Initiative: The SRDC will continue, in partnership with USDA RD and the Purdue Center for Regional Development, to provide overall coordination for the SET initiative as the program enters its fifth year. As such, the Center will carry a diversity of activities in support of this key initiative, including the following:

- *Communications:* Maintain conference calls and email communications with all states that are part of the SET program
- *Coordination of Evaluation of SET:* Continue to evaluate data related to the effectiveness of SET
- *Revision of SET Materials:* Guide the refinement of SET materials based on the FY14 evaluation
- *Launching SET V Regions:* Coordinate application period, training, and technical support to facilitate selection and launching of new SET regions
- *Specialized Data Reports:* Coordinate the development of socio-demographic and cluster analysis data needed to support the SET efforts in cooperation with Purdue Center for Regional Development
- *Presentations:* Present highlights of SET at various national and regional meetings

2. Food Systems: Collaborate with partners to initiate research and Extension programming to build and support local food systems.

- Implement the Ag Marketing Services funded proposal.
- Implement SRDC's RIDGE program, funded through ERS.
- Collaborate with Purdue on the Rural Veteran's project, funded in a partnership between USDA and Veterans' Affairs.

- Align new initiatives with existing work on local food systems, including the eXtension Community of Practice on Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems; the AFRI Community Foods Projects program; the Southern Region Program leadership Committee; Southern SARE; and others.
 - Survey southern region to identify both researcher and Extension professionals working on aspects of food access. Explore opportunities to generate cross-discipline, multi-state working teams.
 - Examine opportunities to re-initiate Sustainable Community Innovation Grants in partnership with Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension (SSARE).
- 3. Entrepreneurship:** Research and explore entrepreneurship programs and partnerships to support community-based entrepreneurship for youth and adults.
- Coordinate the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative and the production of related educational products.
 - Support the National Broadband Extension/Research Team in addressing digital literacy and broadband issues relevant to small businesses, workforce development agencies and municipal governments. The Center maintains a national Listserv of professionals engaged in this work and hosts a repository of broadband resources.
 - Explore youth entrepreneurship partnerships and opportunities, including 4-H and FFA.
 - Compile and disseminate information on programs, needs, and opportunities related to entrepreneurship and workforce service for rural veterans.

PRIORITY 3: Strengthening Capacity of Communities

While the priority title has changed from “Enhancing Distressed Communities” to “Strengthening Capacity of Communities” to reflect a more positive direction, continued emphasis will be placed on those communities with the greatest needs under this priority. Some programs from other priorities noted above overlap to this priority such as Tide, RIDGE, youth programming, leadership and food systems. In addition to those, the SRDC will maintain a focus on the following over the next year:

- 1. ReadyCommunity: Building Disaster Resilient Places:** In partnership with University of Kentucky, the SRDC will continue to guide the piloting and evaluating of the recently revised ReadyCommunity process and materials, targeting low resource communities. Toward that end, the Center will (a) coordinate monthly check-in calls with 1890 Land Grant Partner teams, (b) refine the training materials based on the pilot efforts, and (e) present information about this program at appropriate national and regional meetings/conferences.
- 2. Community Assessment and Education to Promote Behavioral Health Planning and Education (CAPE II):** Work in concert with the other three RRDCs to support work with index partner communities and innovation communities.
- 3. Examine the Opportunities for Poverty Research in the South:** Explore options for building on the existing research in the region.

- 4. Investigate youth programs** related to community and economic development being done in region and what's working (e.g., entrepreneurship, leadership, citizenship and civic engagement)

Capacity-Building and Other Support Activities

The SRDC will continue to undertake a variety of activities to keep its stakeholders (especially our region's 29 land-grant schools) aware of key rural development opportunities and activities. Collectively, these efforts are designed to help strengthen the capacity of our region's land-grant schools to focus on high priority rural development research and Extension outreach efforts.

Among these activities are to:

- *Provide assistance to the National Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Center (NARDeP) initiative along with the three other Regional Rural Development Centers*
- *Provide leadership to the southern CRD State Program Leaders in establishing regional CRD indicators.*
- *Collaborate with the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) to provide capacity building opportunities across the land-grant system in community development.*
- *Expand the research partnerships within the Southern Region by creating a database of Southern research professionals exploring key rural development issues, examining current multi-state research teams around rural development issues and seeking new opportunities to expand capacity.*
- *Maintain active communication with land-grant faculty and other clientele in the South. This will be done by the following channels:*
 - (a) Provide timely information on a variety of rural development-relevant matters via the SRDC website;
 - (b) Publish *Around the South* newsletter on a monthly basis, a newsletter that provides information on a host of rural development issues relevant to the South and nation;
 - (c) Coordinate bi-monthly calls of Extension community development program leaders in the Southern region;
 - (d) Coordinate the annual meeting of the community development program leaders carried out as part of the Southern Region Program Leadership Network (PLN) conference, as well as work with the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors (ASRED) and Association of Extension Administrators (AEA) in managing all the logistics associated with the PLN meeting;
 - (e) Meet with the regional leadership of the 1862 and 1890 research and Extension leaders in the South to help inform and guide their rural development efforts in their states;
 - (f) Host quarterly calls of the SRDC Board of Directors and the Technical and Operational Advisory Committee, and organize an annual face-to-face meeting of these two groups in the region to ensure that the Center continues to meet the research and Extension outreach needs of its primary audiences;
 - (g) Participate, as needed, in community/rural development efforts of land-grant institutions in the region;
 - (h) Maintain strong working ties and interactions with the SRDC's sister Regional Rural Development Center staff, with NIFA and with other federal partners who can further advance the work of the SRDC in the Southern region