The Essential Components

I. Evidence-based

Asset & Challenges: The plan is based upon a strong understanding of the region's current and/or emerging assets and challenges, as well as the demographic and economic features of the region.

Comparative Advantage: The plan's major strategies are intended to build on the region's comparative economic advantages, especially its key current and/or emerging economic clusters.

II. Practical

Focused: The plan focuses upon a small number of goals. The collective set of goals appears to be well suited to the regional team's capacity (in terms of available resources, including but not limited to person-power, regional assets, and funds). (A good rule of thumb is a maximum of five goals for a group with substantial resources available for plan implementation.)

Logical: The plan is logical. Specifically, the plan's major strategies, taken together, are designed to achieve clearly stated regional goals.

Targets: The plan specifies measurable targets that must be met along the road to goal achievement.

Time Periods: The plan includes short-term (typically less than 1 year), medium-term (2-4 years), and long-term (5 years or longer) goals, which build together toward lasting economic improvements.

Initial Tasks: The plan specifies clear tasks to be completed and delineates the person(s) or groups responsible for completing these actions, at least for the short-term timeframe of the plan (the first 6-12 months). The Plan of Work template that your team completes as part of Module Eight can help you develop this component.

Responsibility: The plan specifies clearly which person or entity (such as a committee or a specific regional body) is responsible for assuring that the implementation of the plan continues beyond the initial 6-12-months short-term time period.

III. Broadly Supported

Broad Participation: The plan is designed with input from actively engaged individuals (devoting 20 hours or more to SET planning) from a broad range of organizations and backgrounds. Substantial diversity of participation can be demonstrated across geography (participation from all the region's counties), across a broad array of sectors (such as business, education, government, economic development, non-profits), and across major demographic groups.

Public Input: Input on the plan is collected from the general public, including a range of other people and institutions not directly engaged in SET planning. Such input, collected through SET-sponsored meetings, focus/roundtable group meetings, on-line idea collection, or other appropriate venues, is used to revise and fine tune the plan based upon the feedback received from the general public.

Buy-In: The plan has buy-in from key decision-makers in the region, as demonstrated by (1) their direct participation in the planning process, (2) the involvement on the SET team of designated representatives with the authority or approval to act on behalf of the decision-makers, or (3) a clearly expressed commitment by the decision-makers to support the regional plan and its implementation strategies.

Persuasive: The plan is written and presented in a format that conveys information to interested citizens in a straightforward, non-technical manner. The plan helps persuade interested citizens who have not been actively engaged in the development of the plan of the value of pursuing a regional approach to economic development.

IV. Focused on Regional Economic Development

Economic Development Focus: The plan is clearly focused on improving the economy. The plan makes clear how each of its strategies is intended to help produce, either directly or indirectly, improvements in the regional economy. The plan should not focus strictly on quality-of-life strategies. Rather, it must embrace strategies that are specifically designed to bring about direct improvements in the regional economy.

Regional Development Focus: The plan is clearly focused on regional economic benefits (as opposed to benefits for a specific town or county). However, the region might, for example, propose a strategy to upgrade five smaller historic Main Streets (perhaps one in each of a region's five counties) under a plan goal on enhancing a tourism cluster in the region. In this case, the strategy would clearly be regional in scope.

V. Aligned with Regional Goals

Consistent & Connected: The plan is consistent with the region's overarching goals, strategies, and action steps are consistent with each other, and will help the region take positive steps toward the achievement of its regional outcomes. Logical ties can be seen that connect the actions to the strategies, and strategies to the goals, creating a well-connected package.

Common Metrics Used to Measure Regional Economic Change

BUSINESS

- Individual business profit
- Job expansion/retention
- Tax base
- Consumer spending

EDUCATION

- K-12 test scores
- SAT scores
- Graduation rates
- Educational attainment

EMPLOYMENT

- Unemployment rates
- Percent self-employed
- Average wage and salary
- Average self-employed income
- Commuting time

HOUSING

- Number of units
- Homeownership rate
- Building permits
- Average building permit value

INCOME

- Median household income
- Average wage and salary
- Average self-employed income
- Poverty rate
- Cost of living

Common Method for Measuring

Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills

- **Pre/post survey:** A few key questions related to attitudes or knowledge can help you quickly assess a participant's change in these two areas.
- **Skill assessment/demonstration:** When teaching a skill, having participants demonstrate the skill is a great way to see if they have successfully mastered it.
- **Practical application exercise:** Applying key concepts or skills to a practical exercise is another way to check understanding.
- **Willingness to participate in follow-up activities:** Sometimes a participant's willingness to participate in follow-up activities can be an important gauge. For instance, if you conduct an introductory session on an important topic, and participants sign up for the follow-up session, you have some indication of interest. This could be an indirect way to determine that the information you presented in your initial session was effective.

Behaviors

- **Logging behaviors:** This works well for participants who will be part of a program for an extended period of time. You can provide a way for them to monitor a specific behavior, such as using a log or tally worksheet.
- **Monitoring completion of follow-up activities:** Similar to logging behaviors, this method provides participants with a list of activities to complete along the way. Periodic checks with the participants can let you know whether or not your strategy is leading to the behavior you are seeking.
- **Follow-up surveys:** We've all received a survey in the mail or in our inbox asking for input after an event or experience of some kind. These can be useful tools for finding out if the strategy you selected is leading to change.
- **Observation:** Sometimes observation is a good behavior measurement tool. Suppose your regional strategy involved helping participants identify five important changes they each need to make to their business websites. A quick click of a mouse could tell you in a matter of minutes whether or not the participants went back to their shops and put the learning into behavior.

Behaviors

- **Secondary data:** Secondary data are those that already exist, such as Census data or data generated by various local and state agencies. In some cases, these types of data can, by themselves, offer you a way to measure changes in conditions (such as increases in the number of people employed or improvements in local sales tax collections). A word of caution, though, is to make sure you are looking at data realistically tied to your strategy.
- **Follow up with participants:** Using surveys, focus groups or interviews, you can check back with participants from time to time to see how conditions related to your strategies have changed.

Regional Economic Development Planning Chart: EXAMPLE

Goal: *By 2017, increase profit of small businesses in region focusing on tourism cluster.*

Assets

What do we have that can contribute to this goal?

EXAMPLES

- Library - computer lab
- Community College - instructor, tech students
- Chamber of Commerce - advertisement

Strategy

What do we need to do to help participants move toward ABCs?

EXAMPLES

- Conduct a five-week Web design course
- Provide follow-up technical assistance

Participants

Who needs to change?

EXAMPLES

- Small business owners in the region

A — Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills

Short Term (1-12 Months)

What Attitudes, Knowledge or Skills are needed to change Behavior?

EXAMPLES

- Attitude: A website would be an important tool for my business
- Knowledge: What information is needed to build a website
- Skill: How to build a website OR How to develop a plan to work with a Web designer to build a site

B — Behaviors

Intermediate Term (1-2 years)

What Behaviors need to change to reach Condition?

EXAMPLES

- Participants launch a website for their small business

C — Conditions

Long Term (5-10 years)

If we are successful, how will our region change because of this goal?

EXAMPLES

- Small businesses with new websites:
  - Increase revenue
  - Increase jobs

Regional Economic Development Planning Chart

Goal:

Assets

What do we have that can contribute to this goal?

Strategy

What do we need to do to help participants move toward ABCs?

Participants

Who needs to change?

Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills
Short Term (1-12 months)

A

What Attitudes, Knowledge or Skills are needed to change Behavior?

Behaviors
Intermediate Term (1-2 years)

B

What Behaviors need to change to reach Condition?

Conditions
Long Term (5-10 years)

C

If we are successful, how will our region change because of this goal?

Plan of Action: EXAMPLE

Strategy: *Implement a six session e-commerce workshop for small businesses and entrepreneurs by December 2016*

Steps to Accomplish	Responsibility *(Who is responsible for completing step)*	Key Contact *(If team, key responsibility)*	Goal Date *(Anticipated completion date)*	Completion Date *(Fill in once completed)*
Work with the Chamber of Commerce and Small Business Development Center to identify current Web use status and access	Jim, Shirley, & Bob	Bob	Nov. 2015	
Develop a survey for use with existing small businesses to identify current Web use status and acess	Ann, Sue, & Albert	Sue	Dec. 2015	
Identify potential curricula and trainers	Robert, Alice, Sam	Alice	Dec. 2015	
Conduct survey - Each partner will conduct at least 10 one-on-one surveys with identified businesses	All	Jim	Jan. 2016	
Analyze surveys	Jim, Shirley, & Bob	Jim	Feb. 2016	
Explore matches between identified needs (from surveys) and existing e-commerce curricula available through Extension Service	Robert, Alice, Sam	Alice	March 2016	
Finalize training series content	Robert	Robert	April 2016	
Recruit instructors	Jim, Bob	Bob	May 2016	
Develop brochure outlining training content and dates	All	Shirley	June 2016	
Conduct training series	Bob, Jim, Trainers	Jim	Aug. 2016	

Plan of Action

Handout 4

Strategy:

Steps to Accomplish	**Responsibility** *(Who is responsible for completing step)*	**Key Contact** *(If team, key responsibility)*	**Goal Date** *(Anticipated completion date)*	**Completion Date** *(Fill in once completed)*