



Stronger Economies Together

Strategies for Building New Economic Opportunities

Module One: A Snapshot of SET

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Module One: Introduction

This instructor's guide outlines the content, activities and handouts that should be used to teach this section. Refer to this document for detailed guidance on how to deliver each module.

Instructions:

Please have this slide showing as people enter the meeting room.

As the meeting starts, take time for introductions so that participants can learn a bit more about the members of their regional team. Even if participants are acquainted with one another, introductions get people comfortable and engaged from the very outset of the meeting.

Script:

“I would like to welcome you to the session today/tonight and look forward to providing an overview of the Stronger Economies Together (SET) initiative. My name is _____ and I am part of the SET Training Team. [NOTE: If other members of the training team are in attendance, please introduce them at this time.]

Before sharing with you some information about SET, I would like to take a moment to ask each of you to introduce yourself. Please tell us your name and the organization you represent (if pertinent).”



Slide: 1

Time: 15+ Minutes, depending on group size and if an ice-breaker is used

Instructions:

Take a moment to acknowledge the key role that USDA Rural Development and the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) have played in supporting the development of the SET program. You will also want to identify some of the other key partners in the development of the SET training materials.



Sponsors & Partners

- SET Sponsors:
 - USDA Rural Development
 - Four Regional Rural Development Centers

- Key partners:
 - Extension and research faculty from land-grant universities in the U.S.
 - National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA
 - Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce



Script:

“I’m sure you know that programs like SET just don’t happen without a lot of hard work by a dedicated team of people. The Stronger Economies Together (SET) initiative is sponsored by USDA Rural Development (USDA RD) in partnership with the nation’s four Regional Rural Development Centers. In particular, USDA RD provided financial support for this important initiative while the RRDCs organized the team of land-grant university-based Extension and research faculty who developed the SET training modules and generated the data products. Their names are listed in the handout that you’ve received for today’s session. The Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University is providing overall coordination to SET.

Also, we want to express our appreciation to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the component of USDA that works hand-in-hand with the RRDCs and the land-grant university system across the U.S.

Finally, we want to offer our thanks to the Economic Development Administration for granting us permission to use selected portions of its “Know Your Region” training materials. These resources will be noted at various places in the SET materials.”

Slide: 2

Time: 1 Minute

Instructions:

In order to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the SET program, it's crucial that individuals participating in the SET program complete a pre-assessment survey. By completing the questionnaire, we'll be able to determine how the participants' familiarity with the SET topics change over time. We also want to assess whether SET provides regional teams with valuable guidance on formulating and pursuing appropriate regional economic development activities. While individuals are encouraged to complete the questionnaire, a person may refuse to complete the survey if he/she chooses.

Script:

“To help us gauge the effectiveness of the SET program, particularly in terms of the knowledge you've gained or the contributions that SET makes in guiding and strengthening the work of your regional team, we are asking you to complete a brief survey. The information being gathered in this pre-assessment will provide the critical baseline data we need to evaluate the effectiveness of the SET program over the next several weeks.

Please know that the information you provide will be confidential and only accessible to members of the USDA RD and RRDC staff who are responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the SET program. [Describe the numbering systems the State Training Team is using – whether participants self-identify a number or the Training team provides it. Make sure that participants know that they will use their numbers on each survey.] The number system means that you do not need to write your name on the survey.”

Pre-Training Assessment

- Please take a few minutes to complete the brief questionnaire.
- Why? To determine your level of familiarity with the topics being covered in the SET training program



Slide: 3

Time: 15 Minutes

Additional Comments:

Once participants have completed the pre-assessment, collect the documents and mail them to:
Rachel Welborn,
Southern Rural Development Center
Box 9656
Mississippi State, MS 39762-9656

Instructions:

Module One provides a nice synopsis of the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program. Use the script below to help introduce SET to the regional team members taking part in this meeting.

Script:

“The first module in the SET program is designed to provide a brief overview of what SET is all about. By the time this session is over, you will have a pretty good idea of the important topics and discussions we will explore over the course of the next several weeks.”



Slide: 4

Time: 1 Minute

Instructions:

Discuss the purpose of SET as presented on the slide.

Script:

“Many of you are well aware that communities are facing some major challenges when it comes to creating or expanding local job opportunities, especially if these places have small populations or limited economic activities. Although these places may be working hard to attract firms, the reality is that only a small handful of firms are looking to relocate or expand to new localities. Unfortunately, communities and counties competing for such businesses are located in close proximity to one another. In these economically challenging times, does it not make more sense for these neighboring counties (parishes) or communities to work together?”

SET is designed to help encourage counties (parishes) and communities to join hands and begin carving out a sound regional economic development plan, one that builds on the region’s economic assets and strengths. Keep in mind that we are not urging communities and/or counties (parishes) to come together just for the sake of coming together. Rather, we want communities and counties (parishes) to collaborate for the purpose of finding the distinct comparative advantages they have as a region – economic activities that can position the region to effectively compete in multi-state, national and/or international markets. Over the course of the SET program, you’ll have the opportunity to delve more deeply into information that will help you determine what your region’s comparative advantages might be.”

Purpose of SET

Help rural communities/counties to work together as a regional team in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint that builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of their region.



Slide: 5

Time: 2 Minutes

Instructions:

SET was launched because of the economic struggles that many small towns and cities in rural areas face today. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack made this statement about the increasing need for communities and counties to work together regionally in order to remain economically healthy in the future.

Script:

“Many of you can probably identify with the fact that some rural communities are facing tough times in keeping their economies strong. Generating jobs that provide workers with good wages is difficult to do, especially when you have to compete with so many other communities for the few firms that are thinking of locating to less populated areas. It’s this economic reality that prompted Secretary Tom Vilsack, head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to share his thoughts about the economic future of rural America. Here is what he said...[Read the quote from Secretary Vilsack.]

Do you agree with Secretary Vilsack? Why or why not?” [Try to get participants to share their reactions to this statement. After a few minutes, go on to the next slide.]

Why We Launched Set

Concern for the economic health of rural areas

USDA Secretary Vilsack commented:

“I have reached the conclusion that we must overhaul our approach to economic development in rural America. The framework of the new effort recognizes that the rural economy of tomorrow will be a regional economy. No one community will prosper in isolation.”



Slide: 6

Time: 2 Minutes

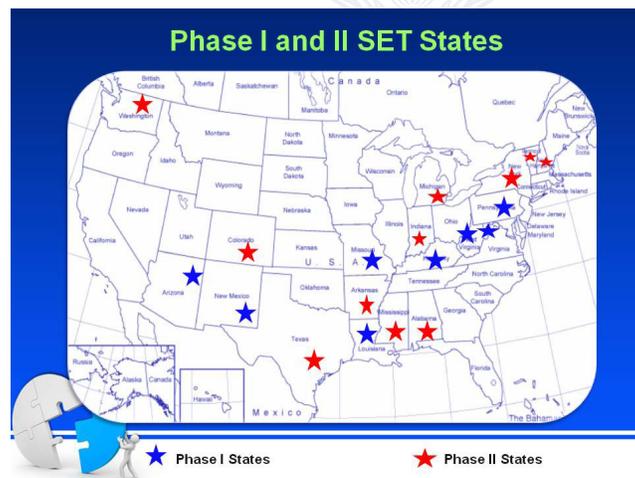
Instructions:

The map identifies the states that are now part of the SET initiative. Phase I states were selected in the fall of 2009 and the Phase II states were selected in early 2011.

Script:

“Let me show you how many states have now become part of the important SET effort. Phase I represents the eight states that began to launch SET in the fall of 2009. Twenty-two regions were involved in this phase of SET.

The latest group of states (what we call Phase II) was recruited in late 2010 and early 2011. Nineteen regions are part of this second wave of SET sites. By the way, another group of states and regions will be selected in Phase III, which is expected to get underway in late 2011. The map reveals the wide array of states across the nation that are part of the SET network.”



Slide: 7

Time: 2 Minutes

Instructions:

Two groups guide SET at the state level. The State Partner Team is composed of agencies and institutions with interests in helping the selected SET regions reach success in the initiative. Likewise, the State Training Team, usually a subset of the State Partner Team, is charged with delivering the SET program to the regions.

Script:

“Two teams are guiding SET on the state level. The State Partner Team is made up of representatives from agencies and institutions that are overseeing and guiding the SET program in your state. The USDA RD office in the state and the land-grant university’s Cooperative Extension Service are two major anchors of this partner team. This group keeps tabs on how SET is going in your region and will meet with your team once your regional plan is developed to see what funding opportunities might exist with various governmental agencies, private sectors and/or foundations that can help get your regional plan off the ground.

The State Training Team is composed of individuals taking the lead role in the delivery of the SET program to your regional team. You will get to know this team very well over the course of the SET project.”

Two Key SET Groups in Your State



State Partner Team

- Composed of state/regional agencies and institutions
- Anchored by USDA RD & Extension Service
- Oversees and guides the SET initiative



State Training Team

- Usually a subset of the State Partner Team
- Delivers the SET program to the regions

Slide: 8

Time: 2 Minutes

Additional Comments:

If members of the State Training Team are in attendance, re-introduce them to the regional group.

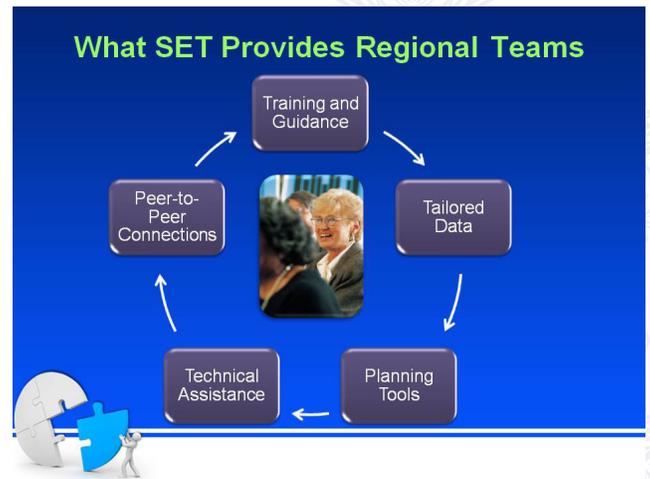
Instructions:

Share with the group some important benefits associated with their involvement in the SET program.

Script:

“A number of valuable benefits will result from your involvement in the SET program. First of all, you’ll have the opportunity to take part in more than 35 hours of SET training that will be delivered by the state training team that has been assembled to guide your team’s work over the course of the next few months. In addition, we’ll be providing key data that will be tailored to your region – information that will help you better assess the strengths and needs of your region. Third, we will share a variety of planning tools that will add value and strength to your team’s regional plans and activities. Moreover, throughout the SET program, you will be able to tap the technical assistance capabilities of the various partners who are part of the SET program in the state – including the state USDA RD office, the Cooperative Extension Service, and other partnership agencies. Most of the technical assistance is likely to occur after you have developed your regional economic development plan.

Finally, one of the most exciting aspects of the SET program is the chance to interact by conference calls and/or web-based forums with regional teams in other states that are part of the SET program. You can share ideas, seek advice on ways to overcome barriers and learn about exciting efforts being launched in other regions that your team may wish to consider adopting. Having the chance to network with other regions across the U.S. and share opportunities and challenges associated with the development and implementation of regional economic development plans will certainly prove valuable.”



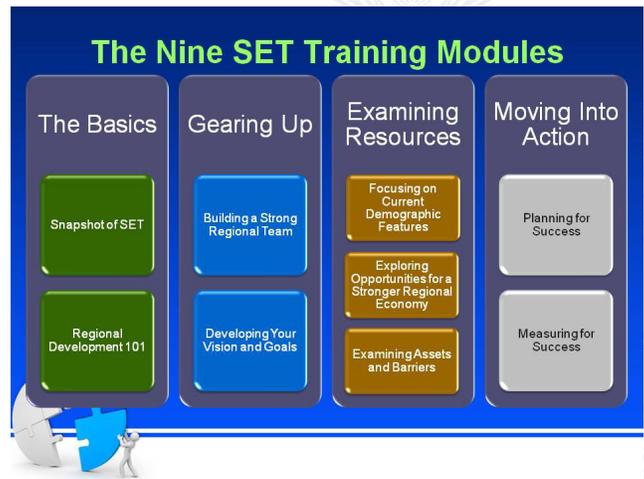
Slide: 9

Time: 2 Minutes

Instructions:

This slide provides a visual overview of the four major phases of the SET program and the modules that are associated with each of these four sections.

Script:



“Here is a nice visual of the nine SET modules that are part of the SET program and the four key headings under which these modules align. The first section, dealing with the BASICS, is composed of two modules – this one that introduces you to the SET program and a second that highlights some of the key elements of regional economic development.

The second section, focusing on GEARING UP, offers guidance on some of the important attributes of a strong regional team. Even if your regional team is already in place, reviewing this module will help you determine if additional people need to be added to your team. This section also focuses on the elements of an inspiring regional vision and discusses some of the core elements of developing solid regional goals. If your team has its vision and goals already completed, we still encourage you to work through Module Four. By doing so, you’ll have the opportunity to double check whether revisions in your vision statement might be warranted.

The third phase of SET is focused on EXAMINING RESOURCES. The three modules in this section showcase the many tools and resources that your team will employ as it builds and implements its regional goals and plan. These resources will help you examine the population, education and workforce features of your region, uncover the region’s comparative economic advantages, and discover the variety of people and organizational assets existing in the region.

The final section of SET focuses on MOVING INTO ACTION. The two modules offer a detailed roadmap on how to get important projects off the ground and how to gather the type of information needed to ensure your initiative stays on track.”

Slide: 10

Time: 2 Minutes

Additional Comments:

We urge you to resist efforts by the regional team to bypass some of the modules. There’s a good possibility that the team will discover some useful information in each of the modules, even if a module happens to address a topic they feel they’ve already addressed in some other venue. For example the modules on “Building a Strong Regional Team” and “Developing Your Vision and Goals” may be ones that the team will encourage you to skip. However, we believe that they will be exposed to new and valuable information by working through all of the modules.

Instructions:

Understanding what SET participants hope to get out of this program, both personally and as a regional team, will be important. People may have different expectations so spend some time exploring these varying perspectives.

Round 1: Start off by asking people to write on a small post-it note pad the two or three things they hope to personally gain from SET. The person should write one item per post-it note, so if the individual has three things he/she hopes to personally gain from SET, he/she will have three post-it notes. Once everyone is done, ask them to place their notes on the large easel pad sheets posted on the walls of the meeting room. If possible, ask two or three members of the team to begin putting similar themes together (for example, several individuals may mention their hope is that SET will expand their network of relationships with others in the region, so put items that deal with networking together). If you want, you can ask the group to study the notes and help decide the key themes associated with these personal hopes. List common themes on a clean flip chart and post for all to see.

Round 2: Repeat the process you used in Round 1, but focus now on what the participants hope SET will do for their region. Again, have two or three people work on placing similar comments together and then ask the group identify common themes. List those themes on a flip chart and post.

Invite people to comment on the two lists or to add other ideas at this point.

Script:

“It probably goes without saying you may have different reasons for taking part in this introductory session on SET. We want to get a better feel for what you hope to gain from SET, both personally and as a regional team.

I'd like to ask you to take three sheets from the small post-it note pad on the table. Please jot down two or three things you hope SET will do for you personally. That is, what do you as an individual hope to gain from your involvement in SET? Use a separate note for each idea. When you are done, post these on the sheets we have on the walls.

SET: What Are Your Hopes?



- **Round 1:** 2-3 things you hope SET does for your personally
- **Round 2:** 2-3 things you hope SET does for your region
- What items were identified most often? Anything missing?

Slide: 11

Time: 15-20 Minutes

Script (Cont.):

[When everyone is finished] I'd like to encourage you to move around the room and study what various participants have identified. Let's get a few people in the group to begin bundling similar ideas together. Feel free to help them find items that are similar. [Allow time to work.] What are the major themes identified in terms of personal benefits people hope to get out of SET? [Write these key themes on the easel pad and the post on the wall.]

[Ask them to return to their seats at this point.] Let's change gears just a little bit. What two or three things do you hope SET will do for your region? Again, write each idea you have on a separate post-it note and then place your comments on the easel pad. [Once people are finished] Walk around and study the input from your team members to see if common ideas or themes exist. [Write the major themes on a easel pad and then post on the wall.]

What are your reactions to the hopes you have about SET, personally and for the regional team. Anything missing from either list? If so, what?"

SET: What Are Your Hopes?



- *Round 1:* 2-3 things you hope SET does for your personally
- *Round 2:* 2-3 things you hope SET does for your region
- What items were identified most often? Anything missing?

Slide: 11 continued

Time: 15-20 Minutes

Instructions:

SET participants are probably wondering what the whole SET program will help them do as a team. This slide, along with the following slides, outlines some important products the team will generate over the next few months.

Script:

“I know that many of you hearing about SET for the first time are a bit unsure of what you’ll be expected to do as a regional team member. Without question, the biggest thing on the ‘To Do’ list is to help formulate a sound regional economic development plan that aligns with the strengths of your region. Keep in mind that you have people on the State Training Team and State Partner Team who are here to help. We will be working alongside your team, providing you with information and tools you need to make the economic blueprint a reality.

Of course, developing a sound regional plan requires time. During each SET session you will work on one or more elements you need to create that plan. Some core activities you will complete as part of SET are shown on the following slides.”
[Go to the next slide.]

What Will Your Team Do?

- Develop an economic development blueprint for the region
- Complete several activities throughout SET that will build that plan



Slide: 12

Time: 2 Minutes

Instructions:

Continue to highlight the activities that regional teams members will carry out as part of SET.

Script:

1. Explore existing economic development trends and strategies.
2. Build a regional team that is representative of the region, one that includes a good mix of people who represent different interests in the region.
3. Examine the characteristics of your region – its population, educational status, quality of the workforce – and determine how these important features are changing.
4. Analyze the economic clusters that exist in your region. Examine whether they are growing, declining or remaining fairly stable.
5. Compile a list of people and groups that have assets that can be mobilized to help carry out various facets of your plan.
6. Build an inspiring vision statement that reflects the hopes and aspirations you have for the region.” [Continue to the next slide.]

Activities You Will Undertake

1. Explore existing economic development trends and strategies
2. Build a team reflective of the region
3. Design an inspiring vision statement
4. Examine the characteristics of your region's population, education and workforce
5. Analyze regional economic clusters
6. Compile a detailed list of regional assets



Slide: 13

Time: 2 Minutes

Instructions:

Continue to highlight the activities that regional teams members will carry out as part of SET.

Script:

7. Develop goals that are clear, concise, achievable and measurable.
8. Develop strategies that make sense in light of your goals and that build on the assets and economic strengths of your region.
9. Build and launch an action plan.
10. Keep tabs on how the action plan is going and if necessary, refine your strategies and activities as needed.
11. Determine the impacts of your efforts – document what your team is achieving as a result of your regional activities.
12. Figure out how to keep the momentum going. Keeping a regional economic blueprint relevant means that you have to keep fine-tuning the plan and adding new elements, as necessary. It's important not to let the hard work of the team stop. Always think about how to bring more people and groups to the table to keep the regional plan moving in the right direction.

As you can see, a good bit of important work is ahead for the SET regional team, but you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have been a key part of creating a new economic future for your region.”

More Activities

7. Develop strong, viable regional goals
8. Define strategies to achieve these goals
9. Build and implement an action plan
9. Monitor progress; adjust as needed
10. Determine impacts of your efforts
11. Keep the momentum going!!



Slide: 14

Time: 2 Minutes

Instructions:

Take a few minutes at the end of the module to ask individuals what they felt with the major takeaways. What did they find most valuable, and what remains a bit unclear to them? Clarify these items, as appropriate. Also help them consider steps needed to prepare for the next session. These may include inviting others to join or compiling a list of current economic development activities being pursued by counties and communities in the region.

Script:

“I’d like to ask you to reflect on the information in Module One. What did you find most useful? What key takeaways do you have at this point? Are there topics that you’d like me to clarify at this point? What specific activities are needed to prepare for the next SET meeting? For instance, are there others that you believe should be invited to participate? Another helpful resource would be a list of the current economic development activities that the individual counties and communities in this region are pursuing. Are there any other thoughts or comments that you would like to share?”

Final Thoughts



- Any items to clarify?
- Other questions about SET?
- Preparing for the next session
 - Others to invite to the next SET meeting
 - Current economic development activities of counties/communities in the region



Slide: 15

Time: 5 Minutes

Instructions:

Remind the team of the major topics that will be addressed in Module Two.

Script:

“Module Two, Regional Development 101, will offer you a valuable overview of local and regional economic development approaches in the context of major global trends. We look forward to seeing you next time.”

What's Ahead in Module Two

- Defining economic development
- Exploring major trends
- Examining your economic development activities
- Defining a region: Different approaches
- Determining key features of successful regions



Slide: 16

Time: 1 Minute

Acknowledgements

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Key partners involved in the development of SET educational materials include:

- Extension and research faculty from a variety of land-grant universities in the U.S.
- The National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA, that works hand-in-hand with the RRDCs and the land-grant university system across the U.S.
- The Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce for granting us permission to use selected portions of its *Know Your Region* training products.



Committed to the future of rural communities.



United States Department of Agriculture
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