

## Producing a High Quality Regional Economic Development Plan

SET offers your regional team an excellent opportunity to build stronger relationships across a wide variety of people, institutions and organizations. These connections will be critical as you focus your time and effort -- through the series of SET modules -- to create a sound economic development blueprint for your region. While many factors will shape your region's success in this important undertaking, the most critical benchmark that your region will reach during your first year is the establishment of a high quality regional economic development plan. The essential components of a high quality plan, outlined below, provide valuable guidance to the development of a plan that will serve as a solid foundation on which to build your region's economic future.

### *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. (Modules Two, Three, Four and Seven)
- **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. (Modules Three, Four and Eight)

#### **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. (Module Seven and Eight)
- **Logical:** The plan is logical. Specifically, the plan's major strategies, taken together, are designed to achieve clearly stated regional goals. (Module Eight)
- **Targets:** The plan specifies measurable targets that must be met along the road to goal achievement. (Module Nine)
- **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. (Module Eight)
- **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. (Module Eight)
- **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. (Module Eight)

### **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. (Module One)
- **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. (Module One)
- **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. (Module One and Eight)
- **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. (Module Three and Four)
- **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. (Modules Three, Four and Eight)

### **V. Aligned with Regional Vision and Goals**

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

## Roles and Responsibilities

### State Partner Team

The Stronger Economies Together program includes the development of a State Partner Team (SPT) to oversee the program and serve a number of vital roles in SET's success in the selected regions. While the list below is not exhaustive, it outlines points where the team's contributions will be needed:

#### **Launching SET: (16-40 hours)**

- Distribute application form to interested communities, counties, and regions
- Launch communication campaign
- Host webinars/conferences for potential applicants
- Select 3+ persons to serve on State Coaching Team
- Participate as often as possible in the monthly teleconferences organized at the national level
- Review applications
  - Conduct site visit of top applicant sites (if needed)
  - Submit in priority ranking the top four applications to the USDA RD national office

#### **Supporting SET regional planning process: (5-35 hours)**

- Assist in coaching on the SET process, where appropriate
- Provide additional subject matter expertise and/or tap the resources of staff or associate organizations to leverage or add value to the process
- Provide logistical support to the planning effort in material ways, for example:
  - Offer meeting space for the planning sessions
  - Provide support materials, flip charts, refreshments, or equipment for use during planning
- Attend at least two planning sessions in each region to better understand the process and to meet the region's participants

#### **Helping regional teams prepare for action: (5-15 hours)**

- Serve as an evaluation panel as regions make oral presentations at key points of the process:
  - Module Five: Regional vision statements and initial goals
  - Module Eight: Action plan, including finalized goals and objectives
- Assist regional teams in identifying appropriate resources and/or partnerships to help promote success toward reaching their goals
- Identify resource people within or outside your agency/organization who can help respond to the technical assistance needs of the regional teams

#### **Finding resources to complete activities in regional plans – post planning: (5-10 hours)**

- Help organize a meeting of public, private, and philanthropic agencies/organizations that may have resources to support the implementation of the regional teams' strategic plans
- Communicate information to the regional teams regarding grant opportunities that might exist to further advance the work of the regional teams

#### **Evaluating: (5-10 hours)**

- Coordinate with the external evaluation team as appropriate

## State Coaching Team

The SET State Coaching Team has the specific responsibility of guiding the selected regional teams through the SET planning modules. Specifically, the Coaching Team will be responsible for:

### Coordinating:

- Participate in monthly State Coaching Team calls with the national team
- Work with the regional team to establish a timeline that allows ample time for “roll up your sleeves” discussion and work during the planning sessions and work between sessions

### Preparing:

- Ensure that each module has at least one team member who is comfortable with and has a good command of the content, as well as has strong skills in delivering the content to adult audiences
- Prepare thoroughly for the module(s) you facilitate
- Prepare all materials (handouts, PowerPoint, etc.) for each session
- Communicate specific data requests that are needed as part of various SET modules to Rachel Welborn at [rachelw@srdc.msstate.edu](mailto:rachelw@srdc.msstate.edu) at least two weeks prior to needed date.

### Coaching:

- Coach regional teams through completion of all deliverables embedded into each of the SET modules (The point of SET is not just to get through the Modules, but rather to use the process to accomplish specific tasks during each session that will lead toward the development of a strong and thoughtful regional plan.)
- Assess the quality of products being produced as part of various modules and ensure that they are completed in a high quality manner
- Work with the regional team to identify any plan weaknesses and to upgrade the products to address those weaknesses
- Review the final plan of work and related goals to ensure that they meet the prescribed standards

### Evaluating:

- Complete all documentation needed to meet Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements; ensure the IRB materials align with the overall evaluation protocol for the SET initiative
- Administer all evaluation documents including the pre- and post-surveys, partnership matrix, and specific module evaluations
- Submit Coaching Summaries, participant evaluations, and attendance records after each session
- Coordinate with the external evaluation team as appropriate
- Serve as a peer reviewer in the High Quality Plan peer review process

### Technical Assistance:

- Respond to the technical assistance needs of the regional teams if the expertise exists within the State Coaching or Partner Team, USDA RD, and/or the state's land-grant university system
- Work with the State Partner Team and members of the State Coaching Team to identify external individuals, organizations and/or agencies that might be able to help address the technical assistance needs of the regional teams. As appropriate, consult with the SRDC and the Purdue Center for Regional Development on how best to address the technical assistance needs identified.

### Who Else Should You Invite?

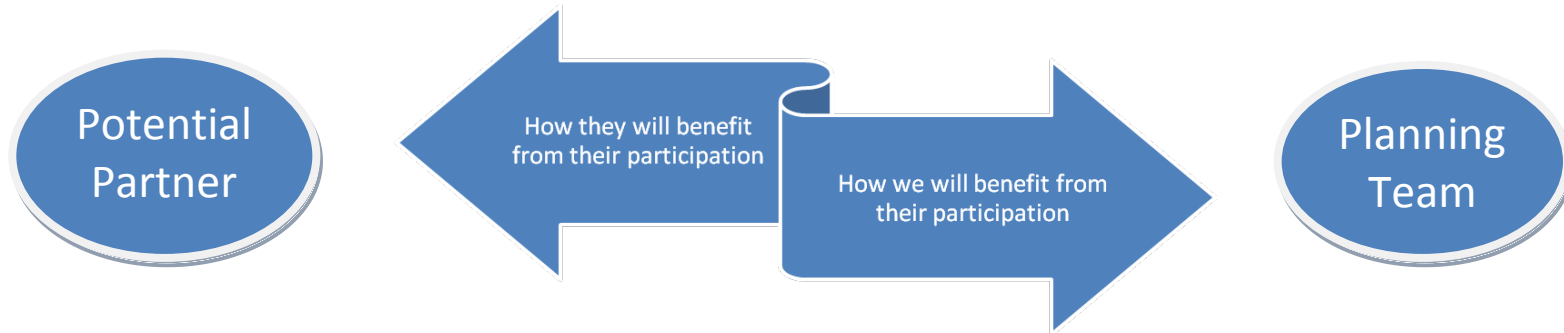
Individuals/Groups to Invite	Category/Interest Represented

**Green Light – Red Light**

<b>Current Organizations</b>	

<b>Past Organizations</b>	

## Designing a Win-Win Invitation



Potential Partner	Their Benefit	Our Benefit	Who Will Contact Them

## Call to Action

What is the regional challenge you hope to address?

What is your regional team's purpose for coming together?

What's your rationale for action? Why act? Why now?

What is your rough, yet realistic, timeline for these efforts?

How will your efforts meet the needs of the region?