

Stronger Economies Together

Strategies for Building New Economic Opportunities

Module One: The Stronger Economies Together (SET) Initiative: An Introduction

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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.

Using the *Participants' Guide*

The *Participants' Guide* contains handouts designed to assist participants in planning their economic development effort.

Group Exercises

The group exercises in this session provide a break from listening to the presenter, while helping the participants understand the materials and get to know each other.

- Slide 1: Introductions
- Slide 2: The Challenge in Rural America
- Slide 3: The Response: SET (Handout One)
- Slide 6: Two Key SET Groups in Your State (Handout Two)
- Slide 12: Producing a High Quality Plan (Handout Three)
- Slide 14: Final Thoughts

References

Burkhart-Kriesel, C. (2002). A new twist to regional economic development. *Cornhusker Economics*. University of Nebraska, Department of Agricultural Economics.

Lawrence, S. (2001). Can it work here? The regional innovation strategy approach to regional economic development. *Corporation for Enterprise Development*. Volume 3, Number 7 (July). Retrieved from <http://www.e-innovation.org/stratinc/files/library/19.pdf>

Leiken, S., & Kempner, R. (2010). The challenge of regionalism and the elements of regional collaboration. *Collaborate: Leading Regional Innovation Clusters*, (pp. 11-18). Council on Competitiveness. Retrieved from http://www.compete.org/images/uploads/File/PDF%20Files/Final_Collaborate.pdf.

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 first SET session 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 providing you with an overview of 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).”

[When introductions are over, indicate that you would now like to offer some brief highlights of the SET program.]



Slide: 1

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

Instructions:

One of the key reasons why SET was launched is to help address the economic struggles that many small towns and cities in rural areas are facing 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 rural small towns and cities. It is 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.

[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.]

The Challenge in Rural America

“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.”

Tom Vilsack
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture



Slide: 2

Time: 5 Minutes

Instructions:

In many respects, SET provides a vehicle to tackle the major challenge noted by Secretary Vilsack. This presentation helps provide an overview of the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program. Draw from the script below to help introduce SET to individuals and groups who are considering becoming a part of the SET program.

Script:

“How can we respond to the challenge posed by Secretary Vilsack? We believe SET is part of the answer.

Many of you are here to learn more about the SET program, to see if it is a good fit for your region. I will introduce you to key elements of the SET effort. Once I share a brief overview of the program, my hope is that you will embrace SET as an effective process for working together to build and implement a viable economic development plan for your region.”



Slide: 3

Time: 2 Minutes

Handout: SET Overview

Instructions:

Discuss the purpose of SET as presented on the slide.

Script:

“SET encourages counties and communities to join hands and begin carving out a sound regional economic development plan that builds on the region’s economic strengths. When counties and communities discover and build on their comparative economic advantages as a region, they are better able to compete in a broader array of markets (be they multi-state, national and/or international in scope).”

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: 4

Time: 1 Minute

Instructions:

Share with the meeting attendees the fact that SET is truly about partnerships built all the way from the local level to the national level.

Here are some of the key points to share with the group about the different layers of partnerships:

(NOTE: No need to go through this in detail; the intent is to demonstrate to those attending the meeting that SET is the result of many people and agencies from national, state and local levels working together to help promote sound regional economic development strategies. The information below will help in case someone inquires about these partnerships.)

National Level: USDA Rural Development (RD) is the major funding agency for the SET program and RD has partnered with USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (or NIFA) and the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) to launch the SET program across the country. Individuals from these three groups (RD, NIFA, RRDCs) worked with representatives of key land-grant institutions across the nation to design and produce the SET training materials and to deliver training to states that have elected to take part in SET.

State Level: The two major anchors of the SET program at the state level are the State Office of USDA Rural Development along with the leadership of the state land-grant universities' Extension Services. SET also involves reaching out to other state agencies and organizations that have a high level of interest in regional development. It is these three groups of agencies, organizations, and institutions that come together to form the "State Partner Team" and the "State Training Team." There will be more about these two teams in an upcoming slide.

Local Level: The State Partner Team plays a key part in helping identify and select regional teams to be part of SET. Once these teams are selected, the State Training Team delivers the SET training program in the region. At times, the county Extension educators located in the region will serve as part of the SET training team or as members of the citizen-based regional team.

University of Cincinnati External Evaluation Team: An objective assessment of the SET program is being conducted by a research team from the University of Cincinnati. They are examining how SET is working at all three levels – national, state, and local.



Slide: 5

Time: 5 Minutes

Instructions:

Two groups are highlighted in this slide – the State Partner Team and the State Training Delivery Team. The State Partner Team is composed of representatives from 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. Distribute Handout Two: Roles and Responsibilities as you discuss these teams.

Script:

“Two teams highlighted in the previous slide should be discussed a bit more -- the State Partner Team and the State Training Delivery Team.

The State Partner Team is made up of representatives from agencies and institutions that oversee and guide the SET program in the state. The USDA RD office in the state and the land-grant university’s Cooperative Extension Service are two major anchors of the state partner team. This group keeps tabs on how SET is going in regions that are part of the SET program in the state. In addition, this team works hand-in-hand with the regional teams once their economic development plans are completed. In particular, the State Partner Team tries to determine funding opportunities that might exist with various governmental agencies, private sectors, and/or foundations that can help get a variety of components in the regional plan off the ground.

The State Training Delivery Team is composed of individuals taking the lead role in the delivery of the SET program to the regions that have been accepted into the SET program. These individuals often have years of experience providing training, mentoring, and technical assistance to local communities and groups.”

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

- Drawn from the State Partner Team
- Includes people with expertise in conducting training with local groups
- Delivers the SET program to the regions

Slide: 6

Time: 2 Minutes

Handout Two: Roles and Responsibilities

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

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 tapped during 2010-11. The third group of SET states was selected in early 2012.

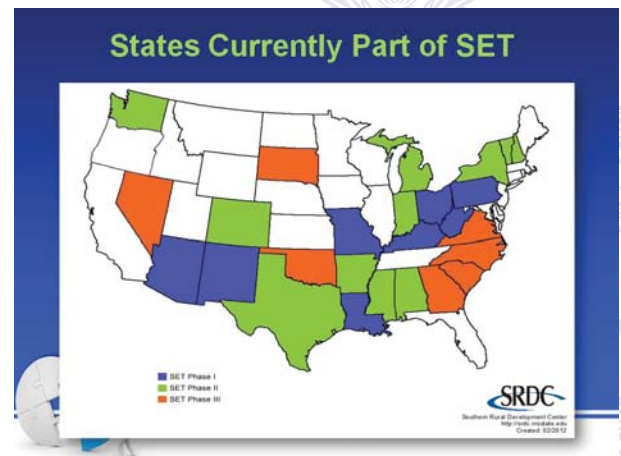
Script:

“This map shows how many states have now become part of the 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 second group of states, Phase II, was recruited in late 2010 and early 2011. Seventeen regions are part of this second wave of SET sites.

Seven new states were selected in early 2012 to be part of Phase III of the SET program. The selection of regions in these new states will take place in July 2012.

Twenty-six states are now part of the SET family.”



Slide: 7

Time: 2 Minutes

Instructions:

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

Script:

“Counties/communities involved in the SET program as a regional team receive a number of benefits.

First, the local group has the opportunity to receive more than 35 hours of SET training delivered by the State Training Team right in your own region.

In addition, the team is provided with valuable data that are tailored to the specific region – information that the group uses to better assess the strengths and needs of their region.

Third, the team is 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 technical assistance tends to occur after a regional team has developed its regional economic development plan.

Finally, the regional teams are offered the opportunity to take part in webinars that focus on topics of interest to several SET regions (such as advanced manufacturing and alternative energy clusters). Of course, members of the State Partner Team and State Training Team are able to take part in monthly calls, which allow them to share ideas, seek advice, and discover exciting programs being launched in other regions that might be adapted to their own region.”



Slide: 8

Time: 3 Minutes

Instructions:

This slide provides a visual overview of the four major phases of the SET program and the related modules.

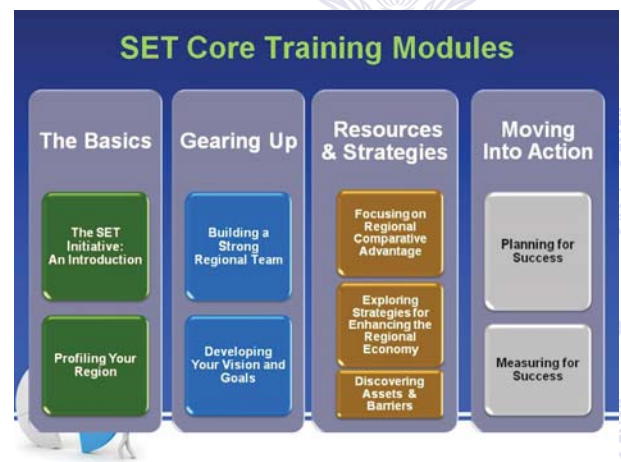
Script:

“Here is a visual of the SET modules that serve as the core 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: one introduces you to the SET program, and the second helps the SET team understand some of the key features of their region, including some of the important population changes taking place in the region.

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, keeping in mind some of the population shifts showcased in the previous module. This section also focuses on the elements of producing an inspiring regional vision and the important elements of sound regional goals. If a team has its vision and goals already completed, we urge the team to work through Module Four anyway since it offers the team the opportunity to double check whether revisions in its vision statement might be warranted.

The third phase is focused on RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES. The three modules in this section showcase the many tools and resources a team can employ as it builds and implements its regional goals and plan. These resources include important economic characteristics of the region, such as the attributes of its workforce. The region’s comparative economic advantages, especially the presence of economic clusters, is examined in the first of the modules in this section. The second module in this section gives attention to economic development strategies a team can use to strengthen and add value to the cluster being addressed by the team, while the third module introduces innovative ways to uncover regional assets and possible barriers that might impact the achievement of the team’s regional goals.

The final section focuses on MOVING INTO ACTION. The two modules associated with this last phase of SET offer a detailed roadmap on how to get important projects off the ground and how to gather the type of information needed to ensure these regional efforts stay on track.”



Slide: 9

Time: 5 Minutes

Additional Comments: We encourage SET regional teams not to bypass any of the modules. There is a good possibility that a team will discover some useful information in each of the modules, even if a module happens to address a topic they feel they have already addressed in some other training venue.

Instructions:

The Three Cs offer a nice way to show why a regional approach is important. Regionalism helps promote conversation, connection and capacity.

Script:

“Some may be wondering what the benefits might be of pursuing regional development strategies. According to the Council of Competitiveness, regionalism helps foster the three Cs: Conversation, Connection and Capacity.

Conversation: Helps promote discussions among public and private sector leaders and local residents, builds regional awareness, and focuses on consensus-building with an eye towards the future. One of the major challenges of regional economic development is getting local jurisdictions that have little history of working together to sit down and begin having a dialogue. Regional development encourages local governments, local economic development organizations, business leaders, education leaders, residents, and others to have a conversation that focuses on the future of the region. This helps build awareness of the possibilities that exist when a region works together.

Connection: Regionalism is often described as a ‘contact sport’ that requires personal interactions at every stage of the game. When businesses consider coming to a region, they may want to look for a well-trained workforce, innovative job training centers, quality health care, decent schools, good infrastructure (such as broadband), adequate financial services, and more. Smaller communities and counties are hard pressed in their ability to offer the full range of resources that businesses need unless they can creatively weave the different people, groups, resources, and services together at the regional level.

Capacity: Helps leverage key assets and connects the system of support that is needed to create and attract businesses. Pursuing a regional approach helps develop a mindset or a culture in which local governments, community leaders, and others begin to think like a region. The region works to leverage the unique assets of different communities – their businesses, various institutions (such as schools, government, health), labor force, facilities, and services – in ways that bring new economic opportunities and benefits to the entire region.”



Slide: 10

Time: 5 Minutes

Sources: The discussion of the three Cs is drawn from: Leiken, S., & Kempner, R. (2010). The challenge of regionalism and the elements of regional collaboration. *Collaborate: Leading Regional Innovation Clusters*, (pp. 11-18). Council on Competitiveness. Retrieved from http://www.compete.org/images/uploads/File/PDF%20Files/Final_Collaborate.pdf.

See also: Burkhart-Kriesel, C. (2002). A new twist to regional economic development. *Cornhusker Economics*. University of Nebraska. Department of Agricultural Economics.

Lawrence, S. (2001). Can it work here? The regional innovation strategy approach to regional economic development. *Corporation for Enterprise Development*. Volume 3, Number 7 (July). Retrieved from <http://www.e-innovation.org/stratinc/files/library/19.pdf>

Instructions:

Individuals who are hearing about the SET program for the first time may be wondering what they will be required to do. This slide outlines three important expectations. Review these items with participants.

Script:

“If you hearing about SET for the first time, you may be wondering what is expected of you if you decide to be part of the SET program in your region. Without question, one of the things on the to do list for any person who wants to be part of a SET team is committing to take an active part in the SET training sessions. Even if you feel you have participated in a similar type of training before, I can assure that you will be introduced to new information and strategies of value to a SET team.

A second expectation is that the region team will do its utmost to get a wide range of people, organizations, agencies, and community/county stakeholders to share their insights as a regional economic plan is being developed on a step-by-step basis.

Third, the regional team will commit to creating and launching a high quality regional economic development plan. This is an essential component of the SET program.

The next slide gives a bit more information on the important elements of a high quality plan.”

[Go to the next slide.]

Sounds Great. What's Expected?

Establish a regional team that is committed to:

- Taking an active part in the entire SET training
- Getting a diversity of people and organizations across the region to provide input on the regional plan
- Working to produce and implement a high quality regional economic development plan



Slide: 11

Time: 3 Minutes

Instructions:

When a group of counties/communities is contemplating applying for the SET program, they might ask: “What are we supposed to do or produce as a regional team?” The answer: they are expected to produce and implement a high quality regional economic development plan – one that functions as a roadmap on how they plan to grow and sustain the region’s economy over the long-term.



Script:

“Any regional team interested in being part of the SET effort will find value in the training and activities provided as part of this program, but the bottom line is that the SET regional group is expected to produce a regional economic development blueprint. Not just any plan, but one that can be labeled ‘high quality.’ What are the critical elements of a high quality plan? This slide captures the essential elements.

Evidence-based: The plan builds on the region’s economic strengths – including its current and emerging economic clusters and other relevant assets.

Practical: The plan is logical and clear, has a well-developed timeline, indicates who is responsible for carrying out the various components of the plan, and indicates outcomes to be achieved over the short, medium, and long-term basis.

Broadly Supported: Having support of a wide range of people, governments, and community-based organizations is essential for the plan. Not only is it important to have a plan that is supported by economic development and local government leaders, but also one that has buy-in from people representing the region’s education, health, business, faith-based, and nonprofit sectors, as well as key demographic groups.

Focused on Regional Economic Development: The central focus of the plan must be on strategies that directly or indirectly advance regional economic development. That is, the economic development blueprint must be designed to benefit the whole region rather than a single community, county or sub-area of the region.

Aligned with the Vision and Goals: The plan must be in synch with the regional team’s vision statement and the specific goals they have developed.”

Slide: 12

Time: 7 Minutes

Handout Three: Producing a High Quality Plan

Instructions:

If this introductory presentation is intended to recruit regions to consider applying for the SET program, let the participants know about the SET application and briefly walk through the document. If, however, the application period has already passed, delete this slide.

Script:

“I would like to share with you a copy of the application form that regions are asked to complete in order to be considered for inclusion in the SET program. I urge you to carefully study the document since it contains important information on the step-by-step process for completing the application. If you believe there are counties and communities in your region that want to work together in hopes of developing a solid regional economic development plan, and that meet the rural requirements of the SET program, then please take an application. Get your counties/communities together and see if SET can be of value to them working as a region. If so, please fill out the application. Contact the Cooperative Extension Service or Rural Development representative listed on the application if you have any questions about the form.”

Interested? Next Steps



- Get a copy of the SET application
- Invite people from contiguous counties (and their communities) to review the application
- If interested, form a regional team
- Complete and submit the application

Slide: 13

Time: 2 Minutes

Additional Comments: Have copies of the SET application form available for distribution to those attending the SET overview presentation.

Instructions:

Take a few minutes at the end of the module to ask individuals if they have any additional questions. Take the time to clarify any items that remain unclear. Provide contact information from Extension and RD, as participants can follow-up with these individuals if they decide to submit a SET application. NOTE: Be sure to add the names and contact information to this slide.

Script:

“Is there anything about SET that remains unclear? Anything about SET you want clarified? Do you think SET could be a good fit for your region?”

The contact information for individuals who can answer any questions about the SET application are listed on this slide.

Any final thoughts or comments? If not, thank you for your participation in this introductory presentation on the Stronger Economies Together initiative.”

Final Thoughts



- Anything need clarification?
- Other questions about SET?
- SET contact persons:
 - Extension Service:
 - State USDA RD:



Slide: 14

Time: 5 Minutes



Acknowledgements

The Stronger Economies Together (SET) Program is sponsored by USDA Rural Development (USDA RD), in partnership with the 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 worked on the development of the SET training modules and the generation of the data products.

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
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

