

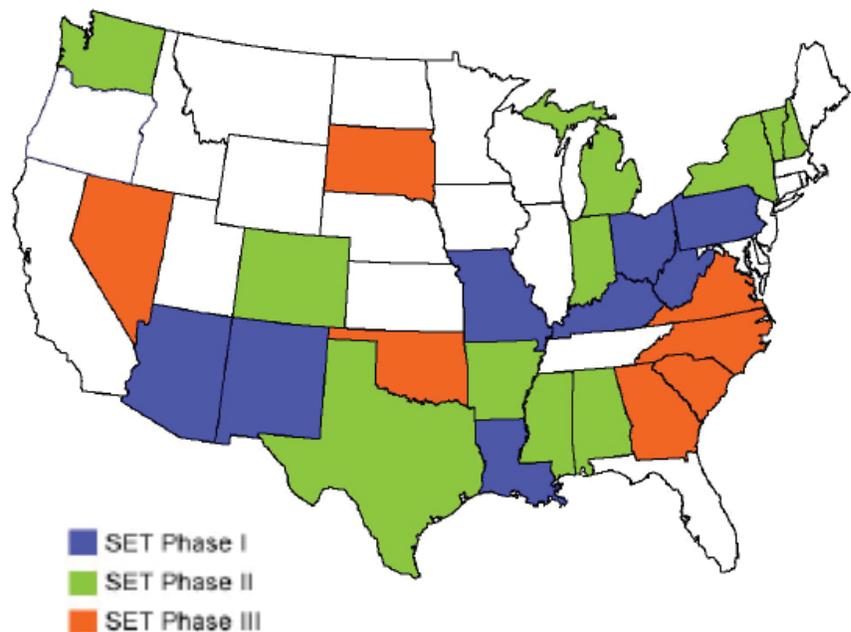


Stronger Economies Together

WHAT IS SET?

Stronger Economies Together (SET) enables communities and counties in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint for their multi-county region that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of that region.

Creating, attracting and retaining jobs as a single rural county, in isolation from other nearby counties, is becoming increasingly ineffective. In today's global marketplace, economic development progress is more likely to be realized when rural and metro counties work together as a region to assess their resources and then design and implement plans that build on their assets and comparative economic strengths.



Launched in 2010 by USDA Rural Development and the nation's four Regional Rural Development Centers and their land-grant university partners, this exciting initiative is now in place in nearly 40 regions in 19 states (Phases I and II). Regional teams in seven additional states are joining Phase III in 2012.

SET BENEFITS

- More than 35 hours of valuable, step-by-step training to guide production of a practical and viable regional economic development plan
- In-depth data tailored to the region, describing its current and emerging clusters, comparative economic advantages, and detailed demographic and socio-economic information
- Tools to uncover local assets and resources that can advance the region's economic strategies
- Up to 40 hours of technical assistance from Extension educators, USDA RD state staff and the Regional Rural Development Centers to guide the implementation of regional goals and strategies
- Opportunity to apply for a special assistance grant to support more advanced regional data analyses or to connect with those with specialized expertise needed to reach your regional goals
- Chance to share information and gather ideas from other SET regions nationwide

TRAINING PROGRAM OUTLINE

The SET Initiative: An Introduction *(Time: 1 hour)*

- What is SET?
- What it offers to a regional team
- Who's who? State partners and trainers
- Preview of the training program

Profiling Your Region *(Time: 3 hours)*

- Reviewing key elements of SET
- Defining and examining economic development activities
- Examining approaches to defining a region
- Exploring regional demographic features

Building a Strong Regional Team *(Time: 4 hours)*

- Determining elements of a sound team
- Developing a call to action
- Inviting broad participation
- Creating a succession plan
- Exploring habits of highly effective regional teams

Developing Your Vision and Goals *(Time: 4 hours)*

- Defining your vision
- Determining the features of a vision statement
- Developing a vision statement
- Determining the elements of a good regional goals

Focusing on Regional Competitive Advantage *(Time: 6 hours)*

- Investigating elements that contribute to regional economic advantage
- Exploring data that may help identify regional clusters
- Selecting clusters for further exploration

Exploring Strategies for Enhancing the Regional Economy *(Time: 4 hours)*

- Identifying economic leaks in the region
- Exploring basic avenues for strengthening clusters
- Providing specific strategies within each avenue
- Selecting potential directions for the region to explore

Discovering Regional Assets & Barriers *(Time: 5 hours)*

- Examining asset-based regional development
- Discovering assets that exist locally
- Pinpointing potential barriers

Planning for Success *(Time: 4 hours)*

- Defining the regional goals
- Identifying the ABCs of success
- Selecting strategies
- Planning for action

Measuring for Success *(Time: 4 hours)*

- Exploring the value of measuring
- Deciding what to measure
- Using measures to promote success
- Tracking appropriate measures
- Creating a regional plan for measuring success

Supplementary Modules

- Community Business Matching Model
- Entrepreneurship
- Financial Capital
- Networking
- Sustainable Communities

srdc.msstate.edu/set

CONTACTS

Suzette M. Agans
USDA Rural Development
Community and Economic Development
Phone: 202.401.1922
suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov

Bo Beaulieu
Southern Rural Development Center
Mississippi State University
662.325.3207
ljb@srdc.msstate.edu



Committed to the future of rural communities.



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

Handout 2: Roles and Responsibilities

Slide 6

Roles of the 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 Training Team
- Participate 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 training: (5 – 35 hours)

- Assist in training on the SET curriculum, where appropriate
- Provide additional subject matter experts from their staff or associate organizations to leverage or add value to the curriculum
- Provide logistical support to the training effort in material ways, for example:
 - Offer meeting space for the training sessions
 - Provide support materials, flip charts, refreshments, or equipment for use during training
- Attend at least two training sessions in each region to better understand the training 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 curriculum:
 - Module Four: 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 meet the technical assistance needs of the regional teams

Finding resources to complete activities in regional plans – post training: (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

Roles of the State Training Team

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

Coordinating:

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

Training:

- Ensure that each module has at least one team member who is comfortable with and has a good command of the content
- 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 the Southern Rural Development Center and/or the other Regional Rural Development Centers in a timely manner

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 training 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, pre/post partnership matrix, and specific module evaluations
- Submit Training Team Summaries, participant evaluations, and attendance records following each session
- Coordinate with the external evaluation team as appropriate

Technical Assistance:

- Respond to the technical assistance needs of the regional teams if the expertise exists within the State Training 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 Training Team to identify external individuals, organizations and/or agencies that might be able to help address the technical

Your involvement in SET offers your regional SET 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, Five, Six, 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 Five, Six, and Eight)

II. Practical

- ***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 Four and 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 Three)
- **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 Three)
- **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 Three)
- **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 Five and Six)
- **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 Five, Six, and Eight)

V. Aligned with Regional Vision and Goals

- **Consistent:** The plan is consistent with the region's vision statement. Goals are in synch with, and help the region take positive steps toward, the achievement of its regional vision. (Module Four and Eight)
- **Connected:** The strategies and actions outlined are clearly intended to move the region toward the achievement of its regional goals. Logical ties can be seen that connect the actions to the goals, and goals to the vision, creating a well-connected regional planning package. (Module Four and Eight)