



# Stronger Economies Together: Phase V

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**About the Stronger Economies Together (SET) Program:** In many counties – especially counties with smaller populations – finding ways to create, attract, and retain jobs is a challenging process. Pursuing economic development as a single rural county – in isolation from other nearby counties – is oftentimes unproductive. In today’s global marketplace, economic development improvements are more likely to be realized when rural and metro counties work together as a multi-county region to assess, design, and implement plans that build on their assets and comparative economic strengths. That is what the *Stronger Economies Together* (SET) project is all about.

**Purpose:** The purpose of SET is to strengthen the capacity of communities/counties in rural America to work together to develop and implement an economic development blueprint for their multi-county region, one that strategically builds on the region’s current and emerging economic strengths.

**Sponsors:** The *Stronger Economies Together* (SET) program is sponsored by USDA Rural Development (USDA RD), in partnership with the four Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs), Purdue Center for Rural Development and their land-grant university-based Cooperative Extension Service colleagues.

**Eligible States:** Any state is eligible to apply for Phase V of the SET program, even those that may have been engaged in prior phases of SET.

**Key Benefits of SET:** Delivers high quality comprehensive coaching that: (1) guides the formation of strong, inclusive and effective teams; (2) helps teams discover the economic assets and strengths of their region; (3) builds strong working ties between USDA RD and Extension Service staff in SET states; and (4) promotes the development of a high quality economic development plan and offers guidance on how to get the plan off the ground, how to sustain momentum, and how to achieve success. [Go to the following site to review the 15 elements of a high quality regional plan: [http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/high\\_quality\\_ed\\_plan.html](http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/high_quality_ed_plan.html)].

**Deadline Date for Applications:** Applications are due electronically no later than January 31, 2015 (by 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time) to the Southern Rural Development Center, c/o Rachel Welborn at [Rachel.welborn@msstate.edu](mailto:Rachel.welborn@msstate.edu) and to USDA RD, c/o Suzette Agans at [suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov). You will receive an acknowledgement of your application within two business days. We urge you to contact us immediately if you have not received an acknowledgement within this time period.

**Questions?** If you have questions about any aspects of the SET application or the training program, please contact:  
Rachel Welborn, Southern Rural Development Center      Suzette Agans, USDA Rural Development  
[Rachel.welborn@msstate.edu](mailto:Rachel.welborn@msstate.edu)      [suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov)  
Phone: 662-325-3207      Phone: 202-401-1922

## ***Stronger Economies Together Program – Phase V***

**Deadline for Applications: January 31, 2015; 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time**

### ***State Resource Team***

The State Resource Team (SRT) provides oversight, guidance, and coaching for the SET program at the state level, the SRT serves a number of roles that are vital to the successful launching and subsequent success of SET in the selected regions. The more common set of tasks that the SRT will undertake are outlined below. As your state prepares to launch SET, discuss as a team who will take responsibility for the various tasks outlined below. While different individuals/agencies may take the lead during a particular phase or task, the SRT should develop a plan for keeping all members informed and active in key actions. Throughout the process from the first call to proposals well into the implementation phase, the SRT should be aligned to support and boost regions toward success.

### ***Application Phase:***

- Develop a sound communication plan to share the application opportunity, including strategies to reach communities/counties located in more remote areas or that are otherwise hard to reach. In addition, specify the activities that each member will undertake as part of the communication plan.
- Implement communication plan, including face-to-face introductory sessions around the state, hosting webinars/teleconferences for potential applicants, and/or other outreach methods, as appropriate.
- Clearly delineate the name and contact information for the person(s) who are available to respond to questions from interested regional teams regarding the application content and process.
- Distribute application forms to interested communities, counties, and regions.
- Review regional applications:
  - Conduct site visits with top candidate regions. Meet with those named on the application and determine level of readiness for undergoing the SET planning and implementation process. Use readiness assessment tool.
  - Submit in priority ranking the top four applications to the USDA Rural Development National Office, including summary notes from the site visit.
  - Work with the State Rural Development and Cooperative Extension Service Directors/Administrators to notify awardees and non-awardees once final approval is given by USDA RD National Office.
  - Compose and submit press releases to the appropriate media outlets to announce awardees.

### ***Planning Phase: 1-2 individuals should serve as consistent coaches in the region(s) (6 to 7 months)***

*Specific responsibilities include:*

- Customize the SET planning materials, as needed, to better align with the needs of the region and capabilities of the regional team.
- Ensure that logistics are arranged to facilitate the meeting, including:
  - Adequate meeting space for the sessions that promotes group interaction. (Avoid lecture type seating).
  - All support materials in place, such as flip charts, handouts, refreshments, or equipment, for use during sessions.
- Prepare thoroughly for each session. DO NOT read the materials to participants. Rather, employ highly

participatory methods that actively engage the team in the session.

- Communicate specific data needs to the Purdue Center for Regional Development at least 2-3 weeks before these resources will be needed for your regional session.
- Coach regional teams through the process of developing and writing a High Quality Plan.
- Review each region’s regional economic development plan to be sure it meets the definition of a high quality plan. If it does not meet the guidelines of a solid plan, provide guidance to the regional team on steps that can be taken to produce a more solid plan. Go to the following site for information on key elements of a high quality plan: [http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/high\\_quality\\_ed\\_plan.html](http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/high_quality_ed_plan.html).
- Provide timely feedback to the SRDC on the work of SET in the region through the submission of:
  - Evaluation instruments for regional participants
  - Session summaries
  - Attendance records

***Implementation Phase: Support Regional Team Post Planning Phase (6 to 7 months)***

- Coach the region in launching initial steps of Plan; foster development of a sustainable work plan and process with leadership structure adequate to support the work long term. This may include facilitating initial meetings as the region moves towards implementation, delivering appropriate leadership training for regional members, assisting the region in designing a sustainable organizational structure, or other assistance needed to promote sustainable progress.
- Provide technical assistance to help facilitate action on the region’s plan. Work with other members of the SRT 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/or the other RRDCs on how to best address the technical assistance needs of the regional team.
- Assist regional teams in identifying appropriate resources and/or partnerships to help promote success in achieving their goals or even leading one or more goals.
- Identify human resources within or outside your agency/organization that can help meet the post-planning technical assistance needs of the regional teams.
- 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 their work. Provide linkages to foundations, agencies, other potential funders/partners that may have an interest in the region’s plan.

***Support National Level Activities:***

- Actively participate in monthly SET national teleconferences.
- Take part in the SET national webinars that are offered on a periodic basis.
- Assist with evaluation efforts, as needed.

***Estimated time commitment for the SRT (over a 1-year period):***

<b>Function</b>	<b>Number Hours</b>
State’s planning, solicitation and selection of region(s)	40 as a state
Region’s planning	120 per region
Region’s implementation phase	100 per region
National level reporting	40 as a state
Evaluating	10 per region
Providing technical assistance	20 per region

## APPLICATION FORM

### *Stronger Economies Together Program – Phase V* Deadline for Applications: January 31, 2015; 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time

Please Complete All Sections of the Application Form

#### ***Part A: Information about Your State Resource Team (SRT)***

a. State: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Primary Cooperative Extension Service (CES) Contact Person:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Primary Rural Development (RD) Contact Person:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

d. If the state is selected as SET state, who will receive the regional application and answer questions from potential applicants? If more than one person, include both persons below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part B: Readiness of Your State Resource Team (SRT)**

Please provide the names of at least six individuals **who have read the SRT description in this document and agreed** to be part of your SRT; and include their primary organizational/agency affiliation or the key population the individual represents. Please remember the importance of recruiting individuals who can promote the SET program in the State, who will take an active part in SET sessions on a regular basis, and who can help identify resources that might be available to advance the economic development plans of the SET region(s) in the State.

Please provide a brief statement of approximately two to three sentences that describes the relevant attributes that each member of the SRT brings to the team. For instance, what pertinent skills and/or experiences does each person have that can contribute to the work of the team? Why is it important to have this person on your SRT?

**Coaching Role:** At least 1-2 persons on this team will need to play a major role in facilitating the SET planning process by delivering and guiding the regional team through modules, ensuring accountability for benchmarks, and assisting the Regional Team in the implementation of the plan. At least one person from your State’s Cooperative Extension Service (CES) **MUST** be a member of this coaching group and actively engaged in the delivery of the SET modules. If the State’s USDA RD office has a staff person with good facilitating credentials in the community or economic development area, then we urge you to recruit this person to be part of the SRT. If such expertise does not exist at the USDA RD State Office, then having an RD staff person who will work hand-in-hand with the coach is essential.

**Please indicate below which individuals will be serving as coaches by placing an asterisk (\*) by their names:**

*Please attach another page if needed.*

Name	Primary Organization/Group the Person Represents	Relevant Skills
<i>Example:</i> Jane Doe*	Cooperative Extension Service	Jane is a Community Development Extension specialist who has worked with several communities in the State on their economic development plans. She has provided training to community leaders and to county Extension educators on community strategic planning.

**Part C: Recruitment Plan (200 word limit)**

Explain the major strategies that you will use to recruit multi-county regional groups to be an active part of the SET program. In particular, how do you plan to market the SET opportunity to communities and counties in your State? In addition, what specific steps will you take to reach out to remote and/or socioeconomically distressed areas of your State, places that are not likely to be reached using more conventional marketing or community channels (such as Web sites, e-mails, or newspapers)? Feel free to use bullets to outline the key approaches you intend to pursue. In addition, specify what the team will do to help generate a good number (4-6) of strong applications. It is highly recommended that the SRT host face-to-face sessions throughout the state and/or webinars to help orient potential regions to the process and intended outcomes prior to the regional application due date. A short module is available for this purpose for states to use.

#### ***Part D: Commitment of Resources by the State Rural Development (RD) Office***

The success of the SET program depends on the investment of time and resources by the State RD Director. It is critical for the State RD Director to dedicate sufficient RD resources to enhance the success of SET in the State.

The key investment by the RD Director is to assign one (or more) key RD staff member(s) to dedicate a substantial amount of his/her work time to work with CES to help spearhead the SET program in the State. The responsibilities of the individual(s) selected include:

- Serve on the State Resource Team;
- Inform communities/counties about the SET program and recruit regions to apply;
- Review, conduct site visit(s), and score all SET applications prepared by regions in the State;
- Take part in the Spring or Summer 2015 national SET train-the-trainer workshop for Phase V SET States;
- Attend and, if appropriate, help deliver the planning modules to the selected SET region(s);
- Take part in monthly calls held with SET Coaching members from across the Nation;
- Participate in the implementation phase and provide post-planning technical assistance and other activities, as appropriate.

Furthermore, the State RD Director agrees to provide sufficient travel resources to the RD person(s) appointed to work on the SET program. This includes:

- Dedicating travel funds to allow the RD person(s) to attend the Spring/Summer 2015 national SET coaches' training and SET planning sessions delivered to the SET regional team(s) in your State;
- Setting aside travel funds to allow the RD person to meet on a face-to-face basis with members of the SRT and Coaches to facilitate SET planning and implementation activities.

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***Name of the State RD Director***

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***Date***

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***Signature of the State RD Director***

**Part E: Commitment of Cooperative Extension Service (CES) Resources to SET**

In light of the central role that Extension educators will play in the delivery of the SET modules in the State’s SET region(s), a modest amount of funds will be available to help support the time, travel, and supply needs of one CES educator for each region selected to be part of the SET program in your State. CES educators serving as coaches will be expected to devote a substantial amount of time planning and coaching on the SET modules.

The CES Director/Administrator agrees to support the involvement of at least one Extension educator per SET region to carry out the following responsibilities:

- Serve on the State Resource Team;
- Inform communities/counties about the SET program and encourage regions to apply;
- Conduct site visits, review and score all SET applications prepared by regions in the State;
- Take part in the Spring/Summer 2015 national SET train-the-trainer workshop for Phase V SET States;
- Help deliver planning modules to the SET region(s);
- Take part in monthly calls held with SET coaching members from across the Nation;
- Actively facilitate the early stages of the implementation phase and provide technical assistance and other activities, as appropriate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of the State CES Director/Administrator**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of the State CES Director/Administrator**



## Deadline for Application

States wishing to apply to join the SET program in Phase V must submit their application no later than January 31, 2015, (11:59 pm Pacific time) to:

The Southern Rural Development Center, c/o Rachel Welborn at [Rachel.welborn@msstate.edu](mailto:Rachel.welborn@msstate.edu) *and* to USDA Rural Development, c/o Suzette Agans at [suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov).

## How Proposals Will Be Scored

All proposals will be scored on a **100 points basis**. The following details the maximum amount of points associated with each component of the State SET application. Please note that in addition to the scores associated with each application, the National SET Team (comprised of USDA RD, the SRDC, the PCRD, and perhaps others) will look for a good geographic mix of States, with some representation from each region (i.e., South, Midwest, Northeast, and West).

Scoring Index	Maximum Points Possible
Commitments from RD and CES State Directors/Administrators (Parts D and E). If either commitment is missing, this disqualifies the applicant.	Required
Sufficient members who can undertake the duties and commitment to take part in your SRT (Part B).	20
High level of experience and knowledge of coaching and facilitation with rural communities to accomplish the tasks and good mix of backgrounds and experiences relevant to the SET Program. (Part B).	35
Description of the Recruitment Plan (Part C).	30
Overall quality and completeness of the proposal.	15
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>100</b>

\*NOTE: By **diversity**, we mean a variety of organizations have agreed to be an active part of the SRT. For example, a diverse team could involve a mix of representatives drawn from the government, economic development, business/industry, education, non-profit, and health sectors.

<http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/>