

# *Stronger Economies Together*

Strategies for Building New Economic Opportunities

## **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 progress is 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’s 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 in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint for their multi-county region, one that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of that region.

### ***Sponsors:***

The *Stronger Economies Together* (SET) Program is sponsored by USDA Rural Development (USDA RD), in partnership with the nation’s four Regional Rural Development Centers.

### ***Eligible States:***

Any state that is not involved in Phase I (launched in 2010) or Phase II (launched in 2011) of SET may apply.

### ***Some Key Benefits of SET:***

Delivers high quality training 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, viable economic development blueprint for their region.

### ***Deadline Date for Applications:***

Applications are due electronically no later than January 20, 2012 (by 11:59 p.m. Central Time) to the Southern Rural Development Center, c/o Rachel Welborn at [rachelw@srcd.msstate.edu](mailto:rachelw@srcd.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 all applicants to contact us immediately if they have not received an acknowledgement within this time period.

### ***Questions?***

If you have any questions, please contact:

Bo Beaulieu  
Southern Rural Development Center  
[ljb@srcd.msstate.edu](mailto:ljb@srcd.msstate.edu)  
Phone: 662-325-3207

Suzette Agans  
USDA Rural Development  
[suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:suzette.agans@wdc.usda.gov)  
Phone: 202-401-1922

## *Roles & Responsibilities*

### **Roles & Responsibilities of State Partner Team Members**

The State Partner Team (SPT) provides key oversight and guidance for the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program. This team serves a number of vital roles in the successful launching and subsequent success of SET in the selected regions. Identified here are common tasks that most SPTs will need to undertake. You may identify additional tasks that are needed to help make your regions successful.

#### ***Develop Communication Plan, Seek Applicants, Recommend SET Sites:***

- Select four or more people to serve on State Training Team.
- Develop a communication plan (including strategies to reach communities/counties located in more remote areas or that are otherwise hard to reach).
- Implement communication plan, including hosting webinars/teleconferences for potential applicants, as appropriate.
- Distribute application forms to interested communities, counties and regions.
- Review applications:
  - Conduct site visits of top applicant sites (if needed to help select the best applicants).
  - Review and submit in priority ranking the top four applications to the USDA RD national office.
  - Work with the State RD and CES Directors to notify awardees and non-awardees.
  - Compose and submit press releases to announce awardees.

#### ***Support SET Regional Training:***

- Assist in training on the SET modules, where appropriate.
- Provide additional subject matter experts from own organization or other institutions as needed to help expand on SET materials to fit particular regional needs. This could involve direct teaching of a particular part of the SET training or providing supplemental information regarding a particular topic, perhaps in a special session outside of the nine SET modules.
- Serve as an evaluation panel for regions as they make oral presentations at key points of the training materials. For example:
  - Module Four: Developing Your Vision and Goals: Offer feedback on the organizational goals of the regional team.
  - Module Eight: Planning for Success: Provide input on the team's major program goals and action plans.
- Provide logistical support to the training effort in various ways, for example:
  - Offer meeting space for the training sessions.
  - Provide support materials, such as flip charts, refreshments or equipment for use during training (if needed).
- Review each region's regional economic development plan to be sure it is shaping up to be a "solid" plan. If the plan needs to be strengthened, provide guidance on how to make the plan stronger.
- Each SPT member is expected to attend at least two SET training sessions in each of the selected regions (as a way to gain a better understanding of how SET is meeting the needs of the regional teams).

***Identify Resources that Can Help the Teams Implement Their Regional Plans:***

- Assist regional teams in identifying appropriate resources and/or partnerships to help promote success toward reaching their goals.
- Identify human resources within or outside your agency/organization that can help meet the post-training 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.

***Support National Level Activities:***

- Participate in monthly SET national teleconferences (or be sure that your SET Training Team has these covered).
- Participate in occasional SET national webinars.
- Communicate as requested with SET national external evaluation team.

***Estimated time commitment for each SPT Member (over a two-year period):***

<u>Function</u>	<u>Total Number Hours</u>
Develop Communication Plan, etc.	20-30
Support SET Regional Training	20-40
Identify Resources to Implement Regional Plans	10-20
Support National Level Activities	20-25

**Roles/Responsibilities of State Training Team Members**

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

***Coordinating:***

- Participate in monthly STT conference calls with the national training team.
- Work with your state’s regional team(s) to establish a training timeline that allows for action-oriented discussion 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 module content. The trainer(s) for each module must come to the training session well prepared.
- Prepare all materials (e.g., handouts, PowerPoints, 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 appropriate Regional Rural Development Centers at least two weeks before these resources will be needed for your training session.

***Coaching:***

- Coach regional teams through completion of all deliverables embedded into each of the SET modules. (Remember that 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 solid regional economic development plan.)

- Assess the quality of products being produced by each region as part of various modules and ensure that they are completed in a high quality manner.
- If products are not strong enough to meet the guidelines provided in the SET modules, work with the regional team to identify the weaknesses; coach the regional team so they can revise and strengthen these products.
  - Review each region’s regional economic development plan to be sure it meets the definition of a strong plan. If it does not meet the guidelines of a solid plan, provide guidance to the region team on steps that can be taken to produce a solid plan.
  - Involve the SPT and, as appropriate, other persons/institutions to guide the regional team in the implementation of various components of the regional plan.

***Evaluating:***

- Complete all documentation needed to meet Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, and ensure that the IRB materials align with the overall evaluation protocol for the SET initiative. (This will be accomplished by the CES team member via his/her university).
- Administer all evaluation documents including the pre- and post-surveys, pre/post partnership matrix, and specific module evaluations.
- Submit STT summaries and attendance records following each session to the Southern Rural Development Center and USDA RD national office.
- Submit all completed evaluation forms (pre-/post-participant questionnaires, pre/post partnership matrix and the evaluation of SET sessions) to the Southern Rural Development Center.
- Submit products completed by the regional teams as part of their module activities to the SRDC (i.e., vision statement, goals, final plan).
- Cooperate with the external SET evaluation team, as necessary and appropriate.

***Providing Technical Assistance:***

- Respond to the technical assistance needs of the regional teams if the expertise exists within the State Training Team or the State Partner Team, USDA RD, and/or the state’s land-grant university system.
- Work with the State Partner Team and other members of the State Training 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 Southern Rural Development Center and/or the other Regional Rural Development Centers on how to best address the technical assistance needs identified.

***Estimated Time Commitment for Each STT Member (over a two-year period – per region):***

*Note: Time commitments will vary greatly depending on the different roles of each Training Team Member.*

<u>Function</u>	<u>Total Number Hours</u>
Coordinating	25-35
Training	40-50
Coaching	10-20
Evaluating	10-20
Providing Technical Assistance	30-40

APPLICATION FORM

*Stronger Economies Together Program*

Deadline for Applications: January 20, 2012; 11:59 p.m. Central Time

Please Complete All Sections of the Application Form

**Part A: Information about Your State Partner Team (SPT)**

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

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

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

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

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

c. Primary Rural Development (RD) Contact Person:

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

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

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Part B: Key Members of your State Partner Team (SPT)**

Please provide the names of at least five individuals who have agreed to be part of your State Partner Team. In addition, identify the primary organizational/agency affiliation of each of these individuals or the key population the individual represents. Please remember the importance of recruiting individuals who can help promote the SET program in the state, who are willing to take part in SET sessions on a periodic basis, and who can help identify resources that might be available to advance the economic development plans of their state’s SET region(s).

**NOTE:** At least one person each from your state’s USDA Rural Development and Cooperative Extension Service **MUST** be included in your list of SPT members.

Name of State Partner Team Member	Primary Organization/Agency or Population Group the Person Represents	Agreed to Participate as a State Partner Team Member?*
<i>Example:</i> Roberta Jones	Aspen County Chamber of Commerce	Yes

\* “YES” in this column indicates the individual list has read the above section on “Roles and Responsibilities of State Partner Team Members” and has verbally agreed to be a SPT member.

**Part C: Key Members of your State Training Team (STT)**

Please provide the names of the individuals who will play major roles in delivering the Stronger Economies Together (SET) training as member of your State Training Team (STT). Indicate the primary organizational/agency affiliation of these individuals.

**NOTE:** At least one person from your state’s Cooperative Extension Service **MUST** be a member of the STT and actively engaged in the delivery of the SET modules. If the state’s USDA RD office has a staff person with good training credentials in the community or economic development area, then we urge that this person be recruited to be part of the STT. 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 STT is essential.

It is acceptable to have some people serving on both the SPT and STT teams. However, it is critical for a core group of STT members to have a good amount of experience delivering training programs targeted to adult audiences.

Name of State Training Team Member	Primary Organizational or Agency Affiliation	Agreed to Participate as a State Training Team Member? *

\* “YES” in this column indicates the STT member listed has read the above section on “Roles and Responsibilities of State Training Team Members” and has verbally agreed to be a STT Member.



**Part D: Readiness of State Teams**

Please provide a brief statement of approximately two to three sentences on each member of your State Partner Team (SPT) **AND** State Training Team (STT) that clearly states what each person brings to the team of which he/she is a part. For instance, what pertinent skills and/or experiences does each person have that can contribute to the work of his/her team? Please do not include any resumes of the individuals you have listed below.

Person's Name	Relevant Skills and/or Experiences	SPT, STT, or Both
<i>Example:</i> Jane Doe	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.	Both

\*Feel free to attach another page if needed.



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

Explain the major strategies that you will use to recruit multi-county regional groups to apply for inclusion in the SET initiative. 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 websites, emails, or newspapers)? Feel free to use bullets to outline the key approaches you intend to pursue.

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

The success of the SET initiative 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 initiative in the state. The responsibilities of the individual(s) selected include:

- Serve on the State Partner Team and/or State Training Team;
- Inform communities/counties about the SET program and recruit regions to apply;
- Review and score all SET applications prepared by regions in the state;
- Take part in the Spring 2012 national SET train-the-trainer workshop for Phase III SET states;
- Attend, and if appropriate, help deliver the training modules to the selected SET region(s);
- Take part in monthly calls held with SET State Training Team members across the nation;
- Provide post-training technical assistance and other follow-up activities.

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

- Dedicating travel funds to allow the RD person(s) to attend the Spring 2012 national SET training and SET training 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 SPT and/or STT to facilitate SET planning and training 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 G: 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 training modules in the state's SET region(s), a modest amount of funds will be available to help support the time, travel and training supply needs of one Extension educator for each region selected to be part of the SET program in your state. Extension educators serving on the STT will be expected to devote a substantial amount of time planning and delivering the SET modules.

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

- Serve on the State Partner Team and/or State Training Team;
- Inform communities/counties about the SET program and encourage regions to apply;
- Review and score all SET applications prepared by regions in the state;
- Take part in the Spring 2012 national SET train-the-trainer workshop for Phase III SET states;
- Help deliver training modules to the SET region(s);
- Take part in monthly calls held with SET State Training Team members across the nation;
- Provide post-training technical assistance and other follow-up activities, as appropriate.

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*Name of the State CES Director*

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*Date*

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*Signature of the State CES Director*

### ***Deadline for Application***

States wishing to apply to join the SET initiative in Phase III must submit their application no later than January 20, 2012 to:

The Southern Rural Development Center, c/o Rachel Welborn at [rachelw@srdc.msstate.edu](mailto:rachelw@srdc.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, USDA-RD and the SRDC will look for a good geographic mix of states, with some representation from each region (i.e., South, Midwest, Northeast, and West).

<b>Scoring Index</b>	<b>Maximum Points Possible</b>
The diversity and quality of people and organizations committed to be part of your SPT and STT (PARTS B & C) *	20
Readiness of SPT and STT members, in terms of having a good mix of backgrounds and experiences relevant to the SET initiative (PART D)	20
Description of the Recruitment Plan (PART E)	20
Commitments from RD and CES State Directors (PARTS F & G)	25
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 State Partner Team. 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.