



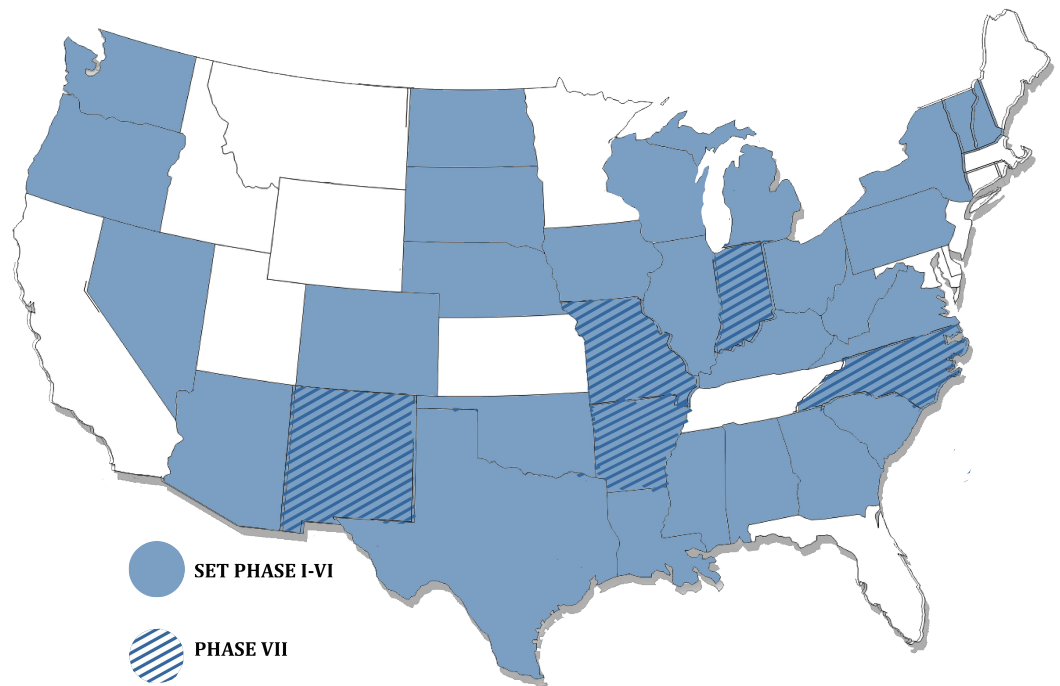
Stronger Economies Together

PURPOSE OF 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 94 regions in 32 states.



BENEFITS OF SET:

- Step-by-step coaching to guide the design and implementation 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 Technical assistance from Extension educators, USDA RD state staff, the Regional Rural Development Centers, and the Purdue Center for Regional Development to guide the initial stages of implementation of regional goals and strategies

PLANNING PROCESS: 6 TO 7 MONTHS

Civic Forum

(Time: 4 hours)

- Examining the Region's Positive Features
- Exploring the Region's Challenges
- Considering Key Data on Your Region
- Identifying the Region's Opportunities

SET Overview and Exploration of Regional Data

(Time: 4 hours)

- Lay the Foundation for SET Work Together
- Review the Regional SET Forum
- Explore the Regional Economic Data:
 - Regional Industry Clusters
 - Employment and Occupation

Evidence-Based Planning

(Time: 4 hours)

- People You Invited and/or Interviewed
- Exploring Regional Clusters in Depth
- Identifying Priorities

Connecting Capitals

(Time: 4 hours)

- Community Capitals Framework
- Your Team's Assets
- Regional Opportunities: What Assets Are Available?
- Recognizing Potential Barriers
- Building Regional Goals: A Start

Finalizing the Plan

(Time: 5 hours)

- Finalizing SMART Goals
- Designing Strategies and Actions to Meet Goals
- Identifying Appropriate Measures
- Deliverable: Crafting Strategies, Actions, and Measures to Support the Regional Plan

Tailored Sessions

(Time: varies by module)

- Communication
- Entrepreneurship
- Grant Writing Basics
- Leadership and Sustainability
- Local and Regional Food Systems
- Sustaining Existing Businesses
- Tourism

IMPLEMENTATION: 6 TO 7 MONTHS

- Develop a model for action and accountability
- Design leadership structure appropriate for regional plan implementation
- Identify technical assistance needs for success
- Secure resources needed for success

CONTACTS

Hiwot Gebremariam
USDA Rural Development
Community & Economic Development
202.690.4749
hiwot.gebremariam@wdc.usda.gov

Rachel Welborn
Southern Rural Development Center
Mississippi State University
662.325.5885
rachel.welborn@msstate.edu

Bo Beaulieu
Purdue Center for Regional Development
Purdue University
765.494.7273
ljb@purdue.edu





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.

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.

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.)

Logical: The plan is logical. Specifically, the plan's major strategies, taken together, are designed to achieve clearly stated regional goals.

Targets: The plan specifies measurable targets that must be met along the road to goal achievement.

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.

Initial Tasks: The plan specifies clear tasks to be completed for at least the short-term timeframe of the plan (the first 6-12 months).

Responsibility: The plan specifies clearly which person or group (such as a committee) is responsible for assuring plan implementation takes place beginning with the initial 6-12 months and beyond.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

V. Aligned with Regional Goals

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



Session 1: SET Data Scavenger Hunt

Business/ Industry	Number of Employees	Workforce Skills	Type	Earnings	Size Large/ Small	County/ Location	Supported by this Business/ Industry



Evaluation | Session 1

SET Overview & Exploration of Regional Data

Region Name:

Today's Date: _____

Training Location: (town, county, state)

Please indicate how useful this module was to your regional strategic effort.

Major Topics	Not Useful	Not Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Fairly Useful	Very Useful
Review of the Civic Forum Results					
Exploring Regional Economic Data					
Understanding and Interpreting Industry Clusters					
Selecting Initial Clusters to Examine Further					

What might we do to improve this session?

What is your most significant take-away from this session?