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INTRODUCTION

Finding ways to create, attract and retain jobs remains a challenging process in many rural counties today. This is especially true for counties that remain committed to a strategy of “out competing” their neighbors for economic opportunities, such as recruiting a firm to the area. Since many rural businesses must now contend with enterprises located across the globe, survival is difficult without linking resources into a more comprehensive economic development plan that builds on the region’s unique economic strengths and opportunities. In a nutshell, that is what the Stronger Economies Together (SET) initiative is all about.

SET is intended to help 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/or emerging comparative economic advantages of that region. The materials contained in this document serve as the core resources needed to get SET off the ground in a region. It includes core planning sessions, supplemental modules to tailor the regional planning process, an instructor’s guide, participant handouts and a variety of evaluation instruments that can be used to track progress and outcomes over time.

We urge you to visit the SET website in order to stay apprised of new or updated resources being released as part of the SET initiative. Visit <http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/>. We want to caution you that embracing the SET process is no easy task. Regional teams must work over an extended period of several months to produce a sound plan, one that is the product of many people, organizations and institutions working together to create a better future for their region and its communities. However, the hard work is well worth it. The payoff is not only the creation of a high quality regional plan, but also a rigorous timeline for getting the important work of the region off the ground and sustained over time. We wish you much success in this important endeavor.

IMPORTANCE OF A FORMING A STRONG COACHING TEAM

Having quality training resources is certainly important, but having a top-notch team of trainers who can deliver SET in a highly creative and engaging manner is just as important. While SET contains a tremendous amount of valuable information, coaches are encouraged to use engaging means to communicate this information with your team. While sharing key information about each SET topic will require some use of the lecture-type approach, balance this strategy with a variety of hands-on activities, small group discussions, real life examples and more. Employing a variety of approaches is the best way to keep the teams interested and actively engaged throughout the series of training sessions. Having SET trainers who can operate comfortably using these various delivery modes is essential.

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