

**Southern Region Program Leadership Network  
Community Development Committee  
2008 State Report  
Alabama**



**Report Submitted by:**

**Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI)**  
*Auburn University and Alabama Cooperative Extension System*

**Program Description and Staffing Plan**

**Auburn University Reorganization**

On June 1, 2006, Auburn University and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) combined forces and resources into a single comprehensive economic and community development program, creating the Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI). The former AU Economic Development Institute (EDI) and the Extension Community Resource Development (CRD) program were merged to create ECDI.

The mission of ECDI is “to promote economic prosperity and improved quality of life for communities throughout Alabama.”

ECDI has four primary goals:

1. *Connections and Partnership*: “Facilitate communication, coordination, and partnerships among Alabama’s economic development community, Extension, and Auburn University.”
2. *Education and Training*: “Improve the practice of economic and community development in Alabama through targeted educational programs.”
3. *Research and Communication*: “Conduct research and disseminate research findings on issues related to economic and community development in Alabama.”
4. *Consultation and Engagement*: “Help build and strengthen economic and community capacity in Alabama communities through a) leadership development, b) civic engagement, c) strategic planning, and d) economic development.”

ECDI seeks to play a leading role in revitalizing Alabama communities, especially in the state’s rural areas. ECDI intends to strengthen community capacity to engage local challenges, take advantage of opportunities, and build on available assets.

**Staff**

- Dr. Joe A. Sumners serves as the Director of ECDI, providing leadership for economic and community development programming for both Extension and Auburn University.
- Mr. Mike Easterwood, Senior Outreach Associate. Mr. Easterwood has expertise in policy research, grant writing, and strategic planning.
- Ms. Amelia Stehouwer, Research and Communications Specialist. Ms Stehouwer has expertise in economic research, education / training program development, marketing, and civic engagement.

- ♦ Dr. Thomas Chesnutt, Tourism Specialist, works the areas of tourism, agri-tourism, and retiree attraction. He also is chair of the Extension Economic and Community Development Program Priority Area.
- ♦ Mr. Arturo Menefee, Leadership Specialist, works in the area of leadership (youth, adult, community, and organizational).
- ♦ Ms. Allyson Martin, Community & Economic Development Training Specialist, manages the ECDI education and training programs and coordinates the I-85 Corridor Alliance.
- ♦ Ms. Markie Southerland is the ECDI administrative assistant.
- ♦ In addition to these statewide specialists, Extension also allocates 25% of the time of each of the three Extension District Directors, and not less than 10% of the time of each of the 67 County Extension Coordinators, to the community and economic development program area.

### **Program Highlights for 2008**

#### **Goal #1: Connections and Partnership:**

##### **1. I-85 Corridor Alliance.**

- ♦ ECDI is the home for the I-85 Corridor Alliance and Joe Sumners serves as the executive director. The I-85 Corridor Alliance is a regional partnership of government, civic, business and educational stakeholders dedicated to promoting innovation, prosperity, collaboration, and competitiveness along Interstate 85 in Alabama. – <http://www.auburn.edu/i85corr>
- ♦ ECDI developed and maintains a regional economic development asset inventory for the I-85 Corridor. - <http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/edi/i85assetinventory.pdf>

##### **2. Alabama Community Leadership Network (ACLN)**

- ♦ ECDI now serves as the administrative home for the ACLN. ECDI is hosting the 2008 ACLN Conference (with Leadership Lee County) in Auburn (October 8-9, 2008). The ACLN serves as a link between all of the community leadership programs throughout Alabama. ECDI has created a website ([www.acln.info](http://www.acln.info)). ECDI plans to create a newsletter and provide opportunities for training, networking, and the sharing of best practices. With the addition of ACLN management, the creation of a new leadership development staff position, and the grant support for adult and youth programs provided through the Rural Alabama Initiative, ECDI is the center of Alabama's community leadership development training.

##### **3. Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) Program.**

- ♦ ECDI is participating with representatives of other organizations in the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) Program. Joe Sumners serves as president and chairman of the Board of Directors. ACE, a unique partnership of Alabama private-sector,

public-sector and non-profit organizations, currently provides community development assistance to small communities throughout Alabama. -

<http://www.alabamacommunitiesofexcellence.org>

**4. Governor's Alabama Black Belt Action Commission.**

- Joe Summers and Tom Chesnutt are serving as technical advisors to the Alabama Black Belt Commission. Joe is working with the *Skills Training* and *Community Development* committees. Tom is working with the *Marketing and Tourism* committee. – <http://www.blackbeltaction.org>

**5. Governor's Alabama Rural Action Commission.**

- Joe Summers serves as special advisor to the Alabama Rural Action Commission Executive Committee.

**6. Rural Alabama Committee of 100**

- The Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries appointed Joe Summers to serve as a member of the Rural Alabama Committee of 100. This is the rural advisory council for the Center for Rural Alabama, a new division of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries.

**7. Newsletter.**

- ECDI publishes the Extension ACTION quarterly newsletter, which is distributed to stakeholders throughout Alabama. Each issue highlights one topic of interest related to community and economic development.

**Goal #2: Education and Training**

**1. Auburn University Intensive Economic Development Training Course**

- ECDI conducts an annual two-week AU Intensive Economic Development Training Course. In its 24-year history, over 800 economic and community developers have participated. Participants include city and county elected officials, representatives of utility companies, chambers of commerce, industrial development boards, state agencies, regional planning commissions, and private industry. The first week of the 2008 Auburn University Intensive Economic Development Course was conducted July 14-18 at the Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center. The course included 50 participants. The second week of the course is scheduled for September 15-19.

**2. Auburn University Graduate Minor in Economic Development**

- ECDI administers the inter-disciplinary (business, economics, education, public administration, community planning, rural sociology) Graduate Minor in Economic Development. Ten students are currently enrolled in the program.

**3. Impact Alabama Roundtable.**

- ECDI, in partnership with the Auburn University president's office, has created a new executive economic development training program for Alabama's top economic developers. *The Impact Alabama Roundtable* brings together a class of 12 economic development executives each year for six two-day issue-oriented forums -- addressing important issues

facing Alabama in the field of economic development. *Impact Alabama* meets on a bimonthly basis. ECDI provides program management for *Impact Alabama*, and Joe Summers serves as the course manager. This year's class includes: the President and CEO, Economic Partnership of Alabama; the Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives; the Director, Alabama Development Office; the VP for Economic and Community Development, Alabama Power Company; the President, Metropolitan Development Board (Birmingham); the President, Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce; the President, Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce; the President, Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce; the President and CEO, North Alabama Industrial Development Association), the Executive Director, Calhoun County Economic Development Council, the President, Economic Development Association of Alabama; and the President, PowerSouth Electric Cooperative.

#### **4. *Alabama Prosperity Forum***

- ECDI has recently initiated a new educational program, "The Alabama Prosperity Forum". This series explores strategies that lead to economic prosperity. The courses are designed to provide interaction and discussion among course participants. The 2007-2008 classes were: "Education and Workforce Development: Making the Connection" (November 2007); "Strategies for Retail Development" (March 2008); "Success Strategies for Small Towns" (May 2008); and "Going Green: Strategies for Sustainable Economic Development" (November 5-6, 2008).

#### **5. *County Extension Coordinator (CEC) Training***

- ECDI staff conducted regional economic and community development training workshops for CECs (Demopolis, May 8, 2007; Opelika, August 6, 2007; Abbeville, August 13, 2007). Staff provided an overview of community and economic development topics. They also led a roundtable discussion of needs and opportunities for county community development and potential roles for CECs.
- ECDI staff participated in the ECDI Rural Community and Economic Development Workshop conducted for all members of the ACES Economic and Community Development Priority Program Team (Montgomery, December 11-13, 2007). About 60 County Extension Coordinators and all three District Directors attended the 3-day training session. The final day included a round table discussion about community and economic development. Feedback was extremely positive.
- Joe Summers named Tom Chesnutt as the co-coordinator of Extension's Economic and Community Development Priority Program Team (PPT). The PPT serves as a vehicle to improve communications and to provide increased opportunities for CECs to engage in community development activities.

### **Goal #3: Research and Communication**

#### **1. *Civic Engagement and Civil Economics***

- ECDI has an ongoing project with the Kettering Foundation to conduct research on civic engagement and civil economics. A previous report of the project, "Building Community:

The Uniontown Story,” has been translated into Spanish and distributed throughout Latin America.

- Joe Sumners and Amelia Stehouwer have written a book chapter, “Community Building in Smalltown,” for a forthcoming Kettering Foundation-sponsored book about civil economics and international economic development.

## 2. *Success Strategies for Small Towns*

- Joe Sumners wrote a chapter for a new book about economic development. The book, Building the Local Economy: Cases in Economic Development, was co-edited by Doug Watson and John Morris. Joe’s chapter, “Strategies for Small Town Success,” focuses on development in rural and economically-challenged communities. The book was published by the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute (June 2008).

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~~Amelia and Abby are conducting a research project focusing on how Census reports misreport economic demographics for cities with major universities. Specifically, university towns, like Auburn, typically are reported as having lower than average household incomes, due to the number of students living off campus. Although normally supported by parents, these students appear to be low income. This has implications for economic development, especially retail development, since site locators look at the buying power of an area as a major site.~~

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## 3. *Alabama Black Belt Research Project*

- ECIDI is conducting research focusing on civic engagement and economic development in the Alabama Black Belt. ECIDI will develop a publication based on this research by the end of 2008.

## 4. *Economic Impact/Forecasting*

- ECIDI purchased economic modeling software from EMSI (Economic Modeling Specialists) of Moscow, Idaho. ECIDI is using the new software in its research and technical assistance programming. The software is a web-based tool that includes modules for: Economic Impact Analysis, Economic Forecasting, and Workforce Analysis and Projections.

## 5. *Economic & Community Development Resource Directory*

- ECIDI has developed a comprehensive statewide economic development resource directory. The guide will be available in both print and web-based versions.

## Goal #4: Consulting and Engagement

### 1. *Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) Program.*

- ECIDI is an active participant in the ACE Program, which focuses on assisting communities with populations between 2,000 and 12,000. ACE communities are guided through three stages of assistance, including an inventory of community assets (phase 1), creation of a leadership program and strategic plan (phase 2), and help with comprehensive planning, industrial attraction and retention, commercial and business development, tourism, education enhancement, health and human services, recreation, and general quality of life improvements (phase 3). Fourteen communities have been designated Alabama Communities of Excellence. ECIDI and its ACE partners are currently working with ten other communities. – <http://www.alabamacommunitiesofexcellence.org>

**2. Rural Alabama Initiative.**

- ECDI is administering the approximately \$500,000 Extension-funded mini-grant program to support community and economic development projects throughout Alabama. Grants of between \$1,000 and \$25,000 were awarded to worthy education-related projects submitted by County Extensions Coordinators (CECs) and organizations partnering with CECs.
- In 2006, 48 projects were funded (\$497,000), many focusing on community leadership development and workforce development. In 2007, 36 projects were funded (\$505,000).

**3. ACES-Rural Conservation & Development Councils (RC&D) Grant Program**

- ECDI administers the approximately \$1 million dollar Extension-funded RC&D grant program. Grant guidelines were revised to strengthen Extension's role in the development and implementation of these grants.

**4. Strategic Plan for the Poarch Creek Indians.**

- ECDI is facilitated a strategic planning process for economic development for the Poarch Creek Band of Choctaw Indians (Atmore, Alabama). The Bureau of Indian Affairs funded the project.

**5. Headland Strategic Plan**

- ECDI staff helped the City of Headland (Henry County) conduct a strategic plan for economic and community development for the city.

**6. Lee County Comprehensive Plan: Economic Development Strategy**

- ECDI is developing an economic development strategy for Lee County as a component of the county's comprehensive infrastructure and land use plan.

**7. Rural and Agri-Tourism**

- ECDI provides consultation services to communities throughout Alabama on rural and agri-tourism projects.

**Plans/New Directions for 2009**

- Create an ECDI Advisory Council.
- Conduct quarterly meetings of AU units with roles in economic or community development.
- Conduct additional economic development training programs for County Extension Coordinators.

**Collaborative Activities and Funding Sources**

ECDI engages in numerous collaborative activities through the I-85 Corridor Alliance, the Alabama Communities of Excellence Program, and the Governor's Black Belt Action Commission, among others.

**Contact Information**

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