

2011-2012

Auburn University

Alabama

Community & Economic Development Report

University: Auburn University

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Please briefly discuss:

1. Staffing changes (levels, new allocation system, staffing patterns, etc.)

The Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI) is a partnership between Auburn University Outreach and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. ECDI has a director (Joe Sumners), 6 professional staff (Tom Chesnutt, Mike Easterwood, Amelia Stehouwer, Artie Menefee, Dennis Evans, and Emily Blejwas), and two support staff (Markie Southerland and Anne Woodsmall). In addition, ACES allocates not less than 10% of the time of each of the 67 County Extension Coordinators to the community development program area. ECDI bridges two administrative structures and cultures to maintain a seamless, effective organization.

ECDI and its staff operate with a clear mission: "To improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in communities throughout Alabama." ECDI works toward advancing economic and community development goals in four primary program areas: 1) Education and Training, 2) Research and Communication, 3) Consulting, Community Support, and Engagement, and 4) Connections and Partnerships.

2. Financial Changes (budget cuts / growth, new funding opportunities, new partners, etc.)

ECDI had about level funding from state appropriations in from FY 11 to FY 12. However, ECDI generated over \$1.4 million in grants and contracts: for a Sustainable Broadband Adoption Project (U.S. Department of Commerce), a Gulf Coast Economic Recovery Plan (contract with the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama (EDPA) on an Economic Development Administration (EDA) funded project, the Stronger Economies Together Project in the Black Belt (grant from USDA Rural Development). ECDI also designed and managed the Old Federal Road Rural Development Project (funded by the Alabama Legislature). ECDI also collected approximately \$100,000 in revenues from training and community assistance programs.

3. Notable programming successes and their impact

The Economic & Community Development Institute (ECDI) is Alabama's leading organization for economic development education and training. The annual two-week Intensive Economic Development Training Course has trained over 1,000 state and local economic developers during its 28-year history. The average participant evaluation for the 2011 course for "overall value" was 9.8 on a 10-point scale.

ECDI and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) are conducting a \$1.2 million project, "Connecting Alabama: Boosting Broadband to Bridge the Digital Divide." The project, funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce, is educating and training residents and community leaders, in every Alabama county, about the social and economic benefits and applications of broadband technology. Extension's 67 County Extension Coordinators conduct the initiative at the local level.

ECDI manages the Alabama Community Leadership Network (ACLN), which serves as a link between all community leaderships programs throughout Alabama (55 adult programs and 25 youth programs). Over 1,500 local leaders are trained through this leadership network each year.

ECDI conducts an education and training program for Alabama's top economic development leaders. Each year *Impact Alabama* brings together a class of 15 executives for two-day issue-oriented forums -- addressing important issues facing Alabama in the field of economic development. This unique program has provided a forum for deliberation and public-private collaboration at the highest levels of government and industry.

ECDI conducts over 100 consultation sessions each year in support of tourism-related entrepreneurs, primarily for rural and agri-tourism initiatives. ECDI also promotes education and training in rural tourism through its sponsorship of an annual Alabama-Mississippi Tourism Conference.

ECDI administers the Extension-funded Rural Alabama Initiative (RAI) mini-grant program to support local community and economic development projects throughout Alabama. Since its inception in 2006, RAI has funded 136 projects (Over \$1.25 million). Most of these projects have focused on workforce development, adult/youth leadership development, and entrepreneurship.

In partnership with USDA Rural Development and the Southern Rural Development Center, ECDI manages the "Stronger Economies Together (SET)" project aimed at regional economic development training and strategic planning for a five-county region of the Alabama Black Belt (Perry, Marengo, Sumter, Dallas and Wilcox counties).

ECDI partnered with the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama (EDPA) to develop a strategic economic development plan for eight Alabama counties most directly impacted by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill (Baldwin, Mobile, Washington, Etowah, Clarke, Monroe, Conecuh, and Choctaw). The primary purpose of the project, funded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA), was to create a regional long-term plan to achieve economic diversification and sustainability. ECDI's role was to engage a broad cross section of regional stakeholders to identify solutions and build consensus for implementation of the plan's key priorities.

ECDI facilitated citizen-based strategic planning efforts in several Alabama communities and counties:

- ♦ Coastal Gateway Economic Development Alliance Strategic Plan (2012)
- ♦ Choctaw County Strategic Workforce Plan (2012)
- ♦ City of Hartselle Strategic Plan for Economic Development (2011).
- ♦ Russell County Comprehensive Plan: Economic Development Strategy (2011).

ECDI developed Community Questions: Engaging Citizens to Address Community Concerns, an instrument to bring citizens and stakeholders into a deliberative process to identify the heart of the problem, identify options for addressing the problem, weighing costs, benefits, and tradeoffs associated with each choice, designing a possible course of action, and engaging others in working toward a solution.

ECDI has created an External Board of Advisors that includes leaders of all major economic development organizations in Alabama, including the Alabama Department of Commerce, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), Economic Development Association of Alabama (EDAA), Alabama Power Company, Alabama Gas Corporation, PowerSouth Energy Cooperative, Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES), Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama (CCAA), Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC), and Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT), among others. The Board of Advisors provides evaluation, feedback, and guidance for ECDI goals, strategies, and programs.

4. New initiatives proposed

ECDI has assumed program management responsibilities for the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program. ACE, a unique partnership of Alabama private-sector, public-sector and non-profit organizations, provides community development assistance to small communities in Alabama. The ACE Program focuses on assisting communities with populations between 2,000 and 18,000. 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). Twenty-eight communities have been designated Alabama Communities of Excellence. Other ACE partners include the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, Alabama Power Company, Alabama Association of Regional Councils, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama, Alabama Commerce Department, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, USDA Rural Development, the Alabama Historical Commission, Goodwyn, Mills, and Cawood, Alabama Farmers Federation, and Regions Bank. In addition to helping the participating communities, the ACE program is creating new standards of excellence for small towns throughout Alabama.

5. Opportunities for collaboration

Turning the Tide on Poverty and Stronger Economies Together.

6. Other

Book chapter: Joe A. Sumners and Amelia Stehouwer. "Politics and Economic Development in the Southern Black Belt," Oxford Handbook of Southern Politics (Oxford University Press, 2012).