



Small Communities Find Guidance with Intensive Economic Development Course

Impact Statement

The Issue

How do we make our community more attractive to business? How do we encourage companies to locate in our town rather than some place else? Those are tough questions for city and county officials across Alabama, particularly for smaller communities, chambers of commerce and other groups whose budgets do not allow for large staffs devoted exclusively to economic development.

What Has Been Done

Extension's Intensive Economic Development Course continued to provide Alabama communities with compass, sextant and maps - all the tools they need to thrive in this stormy sea in the previous year. The two-week course annually trains about 30 economic developers. Established in 1984, the course was developed at the request of several community development professionals who were concerned Alabama lacked a program for helping local communities develop a strategy for sustaining long-term economic growth. The program quickly developed into one of the Southeast's premiere economic development short courses, reaching hundreds of community development professionals throughout the state. Now co-sponsored with Auburn University's Economic Development Institute, it was initially developed with grants from the Alabama Development Office and the Economic Development Administration. Generous support from companies enables course planners to provide each class with a topflight faculty comprised of university professors and state and federal economic development experts at a reasonable cost. Alumni from previous classes also share what they have learned. The course trains economic developers from business, industry and government, who return to their local communities to implement the economic strategies they have learned. The training introduces participants to all phases of industrial development, covering such topics as taxation, venture capital and bond financing. The goal is to teach the developers how to increase employment and strengthen their local economies.

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The course has trained approximately 500 economic developers, many of whom are currently leaders in the economic development field throughout the Southeast. The course has consistently earned rave reviews from alumni who have used what they have learned to breathe hope and life back into their communities. "It is a great program that everyone in government should participate in because economic development IS the bottom line,"

says Autauga County Probate Judge Alfred Booth. "I wish everyone involved in local government could go - legislators, probate judges, county commissioners, mayors and city council members. Everyone working for the community should take that program."