



CREATE BRIDGES:

Celebrating REtail, Accommodations, Tourism, and Entertainment by Building Rural Innovations and Developing Growth Economies

Regional Application

About the CREATE BRIDGES Initiative: While manufacturing and professional services are often the focus of economic development, businesses focused on retail, accommodations, tourism and entertainment are important to the viability of rural communities and regions. These industries provide needed goods, services and amenities to local residents and visitors and enhance quality of life. They are a major source of jobs and tax revenue in rural communities. They often provide the first work experience for residents who move up the career path within these businesses or go on to work in other sectors.

Currently, planning and training focused on these sectors is often neglected or underemphasized despite a need to strengthen it. As a result, small and large businesses alike face high worker turnover rates and a dwindling pool of mid/upper management workers. The CREATE BRIDGES initiative was launched to develop and test a process to fill this void, particularly in rural areas. The process is designed to raise awareness of the role these important businesses play in the local economy, determine challenges and barriers negatively impacting those businesses, and develop and implement strategies to strengthen the retail, accommodations, tourism, and entertainment sectors within a region.

Focus: In the CREATE BRIDGES process, we will focus on those businesses related to **retail, accommodations, tourism, and entertainment**. Throughout this document, “CREATE businesses” refer to these four types of businesses.

Purpose: The purpose of the CREATE BRIDGES Initiative is to build the capacity of rural regions to strengthen the CREATE sectors.

Background: The CREATE BRIDGES Initiative was developed through a partnership among the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), University of Kentucky’s Community & Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK), University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service’s Community, Professional and Economic Development (UACES-CPED), Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service, the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service, and North Carolina State University.

Eligible States/Regions: Regions located in **[insert state or region]** are invited to apply for the CREATE BRIDGES Initiative. One two-to-five county region will be selected to participate.

To qualify for this program, a region must be classified as rural and economically distressed as defined below:

- **Definition of Rural Region:** The region must encompass two to five contiguous counties (with some exceptions for Tribal areas) and the total population and/or geographic area of the region must meet the following requirements: at least 51% rural in nature. Regions may cross state boundaries as long as the counties that make up that multi-state region meet the rural requirement.

For purposes of this application, rural refers to counties that are classified as non-urban. [Check the U.S. Census Bureau for current definitions of urban and non-urban. Include a link for reference.]

- **Definition of Economically Distressed:** A region is considered economically distressed if it meets one of the following requirements: (1) The poverty rate for the region is at or above the state average; OR (2) The region has high unemployment or low labor force participation rates relative to the state average. [Check the U.S. Census Bureau for the current definition of “economically distressed,” and include a link for reference.]

What will happen if my region is selected to participate in the CREATE BRIDGES Initiative? Major steps in this process will include:

- Form a Regional Steering Committee that is **diverse and representative of the population** and that represents each of the CREATE BRIDGES targeted business sectors, state/local workforce agencies, chambers of commerce, economic development, education, local government, and others as appropriate. Each Regional Steering Committee should have representation from at least **five relevant sectors** (such as education, business, workforce development, government, tourism, non-profit) with a **minimum of five active partners per participating county** and demographic representation appropriate for that region.
- Conduct an Inventory of CREATE businesses, existing training programs and workforce development resources, and service providers in your region that can support these businesses as well as resources that can support the project as a whole.
- Host a CREATE Forum as an opportunity for additional stakeholders and community members to convene, learn about CREATE BRIDGES, and provide input through guided discussion.
- Implement a Business Retention and Expansion Program to survey local CREATE businesses, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the business environment, and set priorities for action to help these businesses thrive and grow.
- Implement an Employee Perspectives survey to engage employees about their work experience and to determine challenges and barriers to employees in these sectors.
- Host a CREATE Academy to increase understanding of the interdependence of CREATE BRIDGES sectors and the rest of the economy, begin exploring workforce challenges, and build support for the initiative.
- Develop and implement new strategies and actions to strengthen the CREATE business sector, including its workforce, in your region.

How to Apply: Complete the attached Application Form and submit it by [insert time] local time on [date]. You will receive an acknowledgement of your application within two business days. We urge all applicants to contact us immediately if they have not received an acknowledgement within this time period. As part of the application you will be asked to demonstrate:

- Description of the region: Why the proposed counties make sense as a region, providing a description of the driving forces that draw them together to focus on the CREATE business sectors.

- Evidence that the rural and economically distressed criteria are met: How the region qualifies as rural and economically distressed based on the definitions above and data from the region.
- Evidence of working together: Previous experience and/or other programs the proposed counties have worked on together or completed as a region, or if the region has not worked together previously, the region’s current capacity to work together.
- Stakeholder buy-in: Letters of commitment from Regional Steering Committee members indicating a willingness to drive the process and letters of support from key stakeholders who will support the CREATE BRIDGES initiative. Key stakeholders include, but are not limited to, regional/local workforce agencies, chambers of commerce, economic development, education, and local government. These letters should include an explanation of how one or more members of the proposed Regional Steering Committee have been involved in collaborative regional efforts.
- Regions need to identify 2 people who are willing to serve as the primary contact for the duration of the project (Part 1.C of the application). These individual(s) will assist the project coordinator in leading and convening the Regional Steering Committee. It is recommended that the two co-chairs represent different organizations or entities, providing more stability to the Regional Steering Committee’s leadership if there is a change in one organization’s structure or leadership.
- Evidence that CREATE businesses are a workforce or economic development priority for the region

Selection Process: All applications will be carefully reviewed. The project coordinator may contact applicants in order to conduct site visits and a tour with representatives of your group. Once the evaluation is complete and a final decision, the selected region will be notified. An announcement will be made by [Date].

How Proposals Will Be Scored: All proposals will be scored on a **100 points basis**. The following details the maximum amount of points associated with each component of the CREATE BRIDGES application.

Proposals from regions that do not meet the definition for Rural and Economically Distressed will not be considered.

Please note that incomplete proposals will not be scored.

	<u>Maximum Points Possible</u>
Description of the region (Part 2) and evidence of rural and economic distress (Part 3)	25
Evidence of working together (Part 4)	25
Stakeholder buy-in (Part 5)	25
Evidence that CREATE businesses are a priority for the region (Part 6)	25
TOTAL POINTS	100

Questions? If you have any questions, please contact:
 [insert contact info]

APPLICATION FORM
CREATE BRIDGES Initiative

Deadline for Applications: [Date], [Time] Local Time

Please Complete All Sections of the Application Form and email to:

[Enter contact info]

Part 1: Region and Contact Information

- a. Region Name (if no formal name exists, just provide a name that best describes the geographic area of your regional group):

NOTE: For purposes of this application, a region is defined as an area that encompasses two to five counties that are contiguous to one another.

- b. List the counties included in your region: _____

- c. Primary contact persons for your region (two primary contacts required):

1. _____

2. _____

- d. Email address: 1. _____

2. _____

- e. Telephone number: 1. _____

2. _____

- f. Mailing address:

1. _____

2. _____

Part 2: Description of the Region (250 word limit)

Provide an overview of your region and why you are applying to participate in the CREATE BRIDGES Initiative. Here are the types of information you might include in your description:

- What cities and counties are included in your region?
- How are CREATE businesses distributed in the region? Is there a geographic area where these businesses are clustered, or are they spread throughout the region?

- What are some of the opportunities and challenges associated with CREATE businesses in your region?

Part 3: Evidence the Rural and Economically Distressed Criteria are Met (250 word limit)

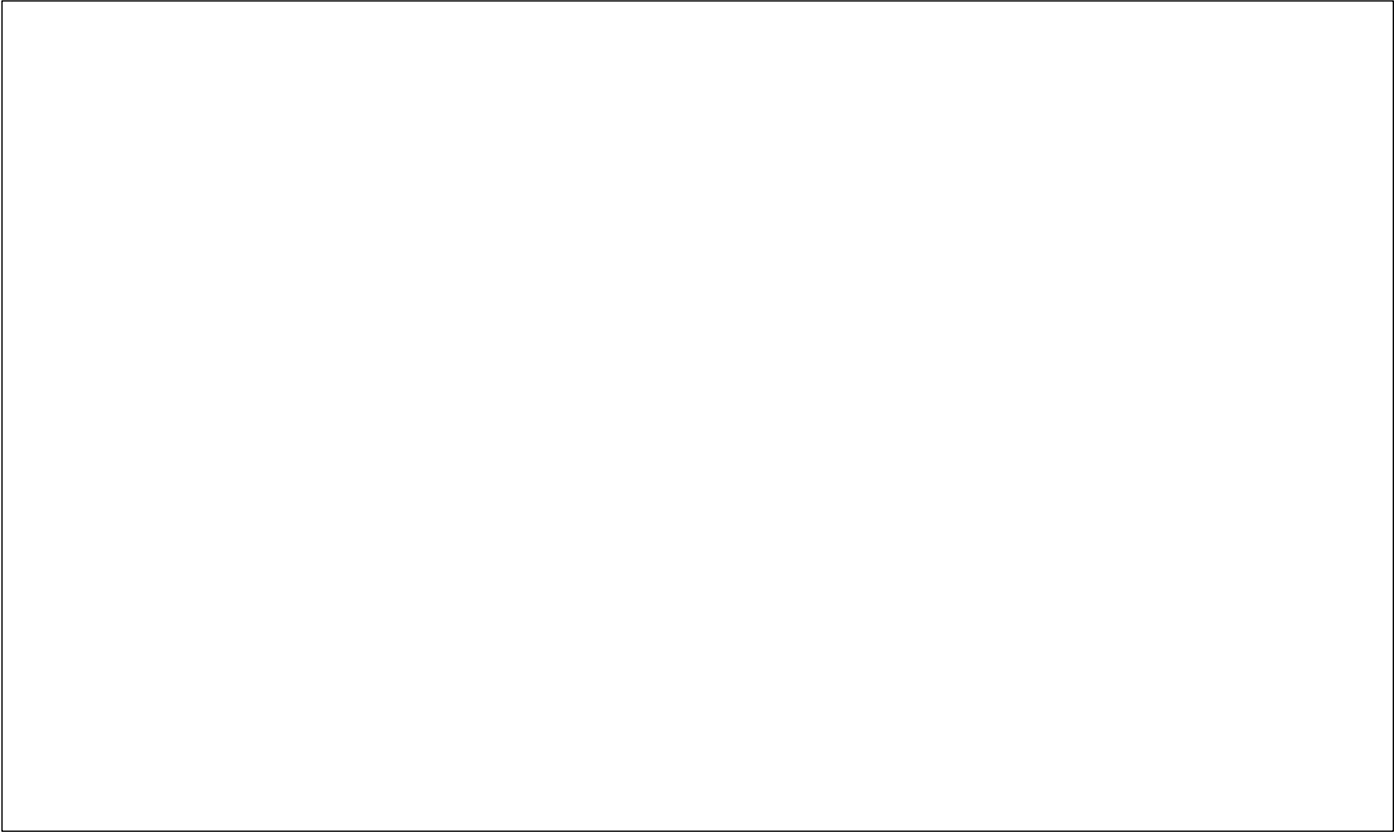
Provide a brief description of how your region qualifies as rural and economically distressed according to the definitions provided in this application. Use data available from the counties in your region to support this claim. Links to data sources to assist you can be found [\[direct applicant to appropriate website\(s\): Insert link\(s\) here.\]](#)

Part 4: Evidence of Working Together (500 word limit)

Briefly describe your regional team's past history of working together on community or economic development issues. In addition to describing the nature of collaborative efforts, you may want to address the following questions:

- What have been your successes, if any?
- What have been your challenges or barriers, if any?
- What partners have been involved in past collaborative efforts?

- If your region has no history of working together, what barriers have prevented efforts to collaborate in the past and how might these be addressed during this process?
- How have Regional Steering Committee members been involved in collaborative regional efforts?
- What evidence can you provide that the region has capacity to work through this process together?



Part 5: Stakeholder Buy-in

Please provide the names of the individuals and their respective organization/agency affiliations that have agreed to be part of your Regional Steering Committee. More effective regional teams include representation from many different types of entities. Applications with broad representation will score higher. A **signed commitment letter** from each person on your team that states that he/she has agreed **(1) to actively participate** in the CREATE BRIDGES initiative and **(2) to honor the commitments** stated below must be included with this application. Keep in mind while gathering commitment letters that selected regions will form Regional Steering Committees with a goal of at least five sectors relevant to CREATE BRIDGES (such as education, business, workforce development, government, tourism, non-profit) and at least five active partners per participating county.

Name of Regional Steering Committee Team Member	Primary Organization/Agency the Person Represents	Primary Contact: Email or Phone	Have Commitment Letter from this Person?
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

(Feel free to attach a separate sheet if needed to add more Regional Team members)

Regional Steering Committee commitment letters should include a willingness to:

- Serve on Regional Steering Committee
- Assist with inventory of CREATE businesses and existing training programs in your region that can support these businesses.
- Participate in a CREATE Academy to increase understanding of the interdependence of the CREATE businesses and the rest of the economy, begin exploring workforce and other challenges shared between the CREATE businesses and the rest of the economy, and build support for the initiative.
- Facilitate collaboration of existing efforts that can help strengthen these businesses.
- Assist with Business Retention and Expansion Program to survey local CREATE businesses, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the business environment, and set priorities for action to help these businesses thrive and grow.

- Help develop and implement new strategies and actions to strengthen the CREATE business sector in your region.

Letters of Support: *In addition to letters from people serving on the Regional Steering Committee, letters of support from key stakeholders who will support the CREATE BRIDGES initiative but will not be active on your Regional Steering Committee are also encouraged.*

Part 6: Evidence that CREATE Businesses are a Workforce or Economic Development Priority for the Region (400 word limit)

What are the key economic drivers in your region and the role of CREATE businesses in your regional economy? How are these sectors inter-related to other industries in the region? Include any data evidence that demonstrates your region’s economic dependence on these industries. Links to data sources to assist you can be found **[direct applicant to appropriate website: Insert link here.]**