



CREATE BRIDGES

Before You Begin: Introduction

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: INTRODUCTION	2
OVERVIEW	2
BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW	4
TIMELINE	4
PURPOSE	5
GOAL SETTING	6
PREPARATION & NOTES	7
PROMOTION	8
PROCESS & FORMAT DESCRIPTION	9
RESOURCES	10
NEXT STEPS	11
APPENDIX	12

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Background & Overview

CREATE BRIDGES was developed to strengthen retail, tourism, accommodations, and entertainment sectors in rural communities. This module will provide an overview of how and why this program was created, as well as who the program is for and how long to expect for implementation.

Timeline: 3 years total

Purpose: From this introduction, readers will:

- Understand how and why CREATE BRIDGES was developed
- Understand the purpose and process of CREATE BRIDGES
- Understand who CREATE BRIDGES is for
- Understand how to prepare for implementing and how to know if CREATE BRIDGES is right for your community

Goal setting: This will vary at each step of the process

Preparation and Notes: Review all the materials in the Before You Begin section and determine if CREATE BRIDGES is potentially a good fit for the community (or one of the communities) that you work with.

Promotion: Various forms of promotion will be needed throughout the program, including, but not limited to social media, email invites, flyers, and radio ads.

Process and Format Description: This is an on-the-ground, hands-on project with multiple components. Most are best suited to in-person delivery but can be adapted to hybrid and virtual as well.

Resources:

- CREATE BRIDGES Overview Handout
- A Style Guide that includes:
 - Style Guide text
 - Color Guide
 - A PowerPoint style example
 - Blank slide template
- Introduction slides
- The CREATE BRIDGES logo

Next steps: Determine if CREATE BRIDGES is a good fit for your region or service area and, if so, begin forming a regional steering committee.

Appendix:

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

CREATE BRIDGES was formed in 2018 because our team recognized that the jobs rural southern communities previously relied on were disappearing and that service sector jobs such as retail, accommodations, tourism, and entertainment (CREATE sectors) were increasingly becoming the economic backbone of rural communities.

Oklahoma State University, the University of Arkansas, and the University of Kentucky, partnered with the Southern Rural Development Center through funding provided by Walmart to strengthen the service sectors. The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) had previously piloted the Stronger Economies Together (SET) initiative, which was a rural, multi-county approach to economic development. SET was used as a guideline for developing the CREATE BRIDGES process.

Rachel Welborn at SRDC, along with Alison Davis, Stacey McCullough, and Dave Shideler (at the University of Kentucky, the University of Arkansas, and Oklahoma State University, respectively) submitted a project and grant proposal to Walmart which was accepted in January 2018. These three project leaders and their team members made up Phase I of the CREATE BRIDGES pilot initiative.

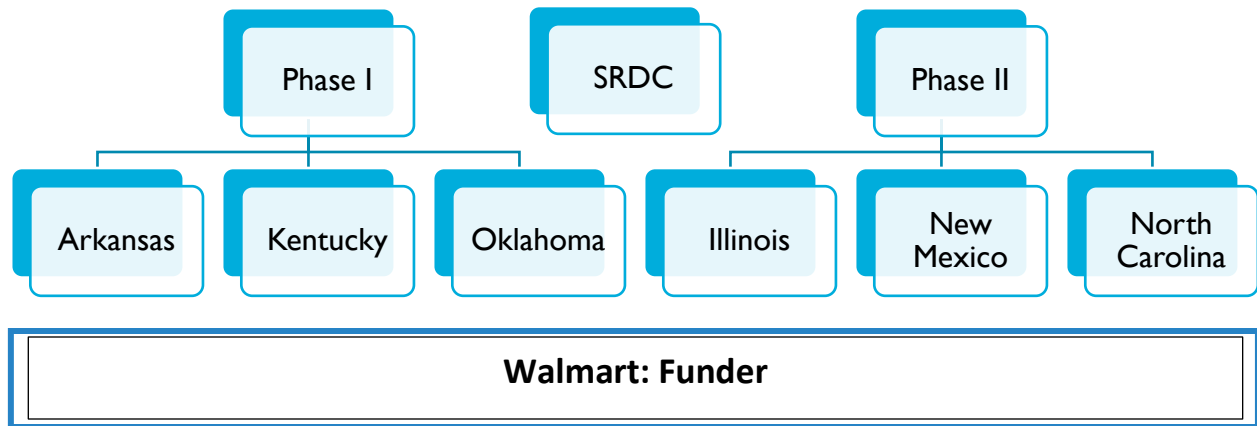
In February 2020, through additional funding from Walmart, our team decided to expand the project to three more states. These states were onboarded in March 2020. The three new state teams with their leads and host institutions include Illinois (with Susan Odum at the University of Illinois), New Mexico (with Michael Patrick at New Mexico State University), and North Carolina (with Becky Bowen at North Carolina State University). Together, the SRDC, Phase I, and Phase II states make up the national team for CREATE BRIDGES. See structure for the CREATE BRIDGES support system in the image below.

It should be noted that while Walmart provided funding for the pilot phases of CREATE BRIDGES, that funding is complete, and any future communities wishing to participate in CREATE BRIDGES will need to seek their own funding sources. This curriculum provides some suggestions for seeking and maximizing funding.

Pilot Project Funder:



Project Structure:



Pilot Project Partner Institutions:

Phase I



Phase II



CREATE BRIDGES stands for Celebrating REtail, Accommodations, Tourism and Entertainment by Building Rural Innovations and Developing Growth Economies. This acronym highlights the importance of the retail, tourism, accommodations, and entertainment sectors while also emphasizing our team’s commitment to strengthening rural economies. We refer to these four sectors as CREATE sectors and use the acronym CREATE BRIDGES to refer to this initiative.

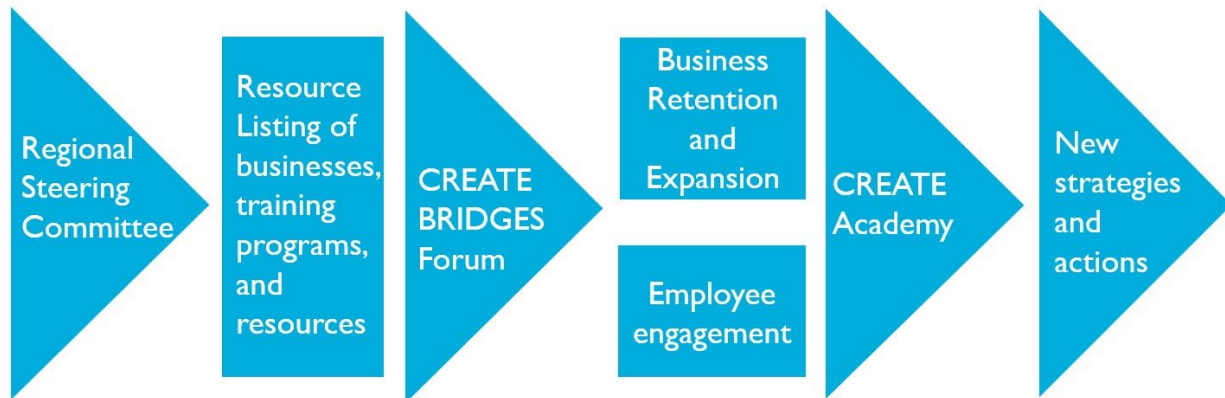
Participants:

When developing CREATE BRIDGES, our national team, chose to focus efforts on rural, multi-county regions which also qualified as economically distressed. These regions were typically 3-5 counties each. The purpose of working with multi-county regions was to leverage assets and resources as a region instead of placing all the expectation and responsibility on one county. Regions self-identified and submitted an application to each state team which provided an initial review. The national team reviewed top picks and provided feedback to the state teams before a final decision was made. While it

was recommended that multi-county regions be comprised of 2-5 county regions, two states, Kentucky and New Mexico, provided strong cases for working with larger regions. However, it should be noted that the larger regions posed unique challenges and our team still recommends 2-5 county regions. That said, it is possible to implement this program in a larger area. We also believe that these steps can be applied to smaller communities, such as one county or even one town; however, this would likely pose a unique set of challenges which are unknown to and untested by our team members. Because this program was piloted in multi-county regions, this curriculum's default language will typically refer to the service area as "region" and refer to the steering committee as a "regional steering committee" or "RSC." Feel free to adjust this terminology in the materials provided as it applies to your area of implementation.

Audience:

In creating this curriculum, our team anticipates the end users to be community development professionals working in rural communities. This could include cooperative Extension professionals, community and economic developers, or other community leaders who can act as the coordinator for this project. Our goal is that this curriculum would provide the necessary guidance and resources for such a coordinator to lead this effort in their own community.

CREATE BRIDGES Process:

This graphic depicts the basic steps of the CREATE BRIDGES implementation process to be carried out over a three-year period.

1. Form a regional steering committee (RSC): this group of individuals should be representative of the community and composed of individuals from various backgrounds and positions related to CREATE sector community development.
2. Conduct a resource listing of CREATE businesses and existing training programs and resources: a two-part listing that catalogues CREATE sector businesses as well as resources useful to those businesses, CREATE sector workforce, and the project as a whole.
3. Host a CREATE BRIDGES Forum: a guided discussion to enhance asset identification and explore opportunities and challenges for CREATE sectors.
4. Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) program: an interview-style survey intended to assess opportunities, threats, and barriers to business growth and enhance employee investment.
5. Employee engagement: a survey of the region's CREATE sector workforce to gain an employee perspective of their work experience, training needs, and support.
6. Convene a CREATE Academy: a session highlighting regional data and survey summaries to inform strategy development
7. New strategies and actions: short-, medium-, and long-term strategies and actions are developed to address CREATE sector needs and create positive change in the region.

Contact Information:

If, after reviewing this material, there are additional questions regarding CREATE BRIDGES, contact the Southern Rural Development Center at

(662) 325-3207

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TIMELINE

Preparation* and Building a Steering Committee: 3 months

Needs Assessment: 12 months

Strategy Development: 2 months

Strategy Implementation: 15 months

Planning for Long-term Support: 4 months

Total: 3 years

CREATE BRIDGES is intended to be a 3-year project that encompasses building a steering committee, conducting a needs assessment, developing strategies, implementing strategies, and forming a plan for long-term support.

The process can be stretched to four years; however, timeframes beyond four years tend to lead to volunteer fatigue, especially for steering committee members.

*This could include seeking funding which may increase the preparation time. While funding can be applied for at any point in the process, another opportunity to seek funding is after strategies have been identified and cost estimates have been collected. The downside to applying for funding after strategies have been identified is the delay between identifying strategies and having the funding to implement them. The Costs & Funding module provides more information on this topic.

PURPOSE

The purpose of CREATE BRIDGES is to:

1. Raise awareness of the role retail, accommodations, tourism, and entertainment businesses play in the local workforce and economy
2. Determine challenges, barriers, and opportunities related to those businesses
3. Develop and implement strategies to strengthen the retail, accommodations, tourism, and entertainment sectors within a region.

Throughout this curriculum, you will notice that CREATE BRIDGES takes a multi-faceted approach to economic development in these sectors, seeking to strengthen both businesses and the local workforce, recognizing that these groups function in an ecosystem. Some of the pilot regions also chose to focus on the larger community as another piece of this ecosystem and developed strategies that specifically targeted how the community could better support the CREATE sector businesses and workforce members.

GOAL SETTING

Different goals will be needed for each step of this process. This curriculum will walk you through the goals setting opportunities at each step.

Overall, this curriculum is intended to lead a community to develop and implement strategies that are needs-based and specific to the region. That is the purpose of the needs assessment process. This is not a “cookie cutter” approach; rather, it is flexible and adaptable. Our hope is that through this process, your region or community will develop and implement a set of strategies that address the unique needs of the CREATE sectors in your community, and that some type of long-term support for these sectors is established by the end of the process.

PREPARATION & NOTES

As you prepare to implement CREATE BRIDGES, some things to consider are:

- Does my region or community have the capacity to carry a project for three years? See the Costs & Funding module for more information on the time commitment required of leaders and volunteers.
- Does my region or community need additional support for the CREATE sectors?
- Is my region or community ready to work collaboratively? Or is coalition-building needed before the CREATE BRIDGES process is started?
- If conducting this as a multi-county region, does this region have the local support needed to operate a project as a region? If you are not sure, then it may be wise to have some conversations with key leaders or prospective steering committee members in each of the counties.
- Does my region or community have existing funds that can be used to implement strategies OR have the capacity to seek and manage funds for implementation? See the Costs & Funding module for more information on what is involved.
- What are unique cultural, geographic, and economic challenges that I could face as a coordinator for this project in my region or community? This question should not be a deterrent to implementing this program, but rather a way for you as the coordinator to set your own expectations. How might these challenges be addressed or mitigated?
- Does your region or community have untapped or undervalued assets and audiences?
- What is the demographic make-up of your region or community? As the coordinator, how can you facilitate representation from all members of the community on the steering committee and as beneficiaries of the program? Please note, demographics include age, race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, disability/non-disability, veteran/non-veteran, etc. This will be particularly important to consider as you form the regional steering committee since these individuals will drive the decision-making for this process. However, it is also important to consider as you gather surveys and implement strategies. At each step of the process, you will want to consider whether decisions and information are being gathered from a population that truly represents who lives in your community as well as whether the strategies developed are accessible to those individuals.

PROMOTION

Promotion will vary at each step of the process. Each module will provide guidance for promotion as needed.

Overall, we do recommend using the promotion materials provided and using the logo to market events and opportunities.

Promotion material provided include:

- A two-page handout that includes an overall description
- A PowerPoint template and presentation guides for modules as needed
- Introductory slides to be used when needed
- The CREATE BRIDGES logo
- A color guide for any additional digital products
- A style guide

You may also want to recognize funders and local sponsors throughout the process.

PROCESS & FORMAT DESCRIPTION

CREATE BRIDGES is a process that is adaptable to each individual region or community. It is best suited to in-person delivery but can also be delivered virtually. The process works best when a coordinator can oversee activities and monitor the program's process. The work is largely carried out and supported by the steering committee, though, other volunteers may be needed. CREATE BRIDGES is intended to be community led; therefore, the steering committee should be representative of the community, and the steering committee should expect to be responsible for the bulk of the effort required by this process.

Each step of the process has its own delivery format. Some steps are presentation based while others are process-centered including some that solely focus on data collection through surveys. See each module's process and format description for more details.

RESOURCES

There will be multiple resources and materials provided for each module as needed. Some resources will be used for multiple modules.

Here is a list of resources and materials that will be used throughout the life of the project.

- The CREATE BRIDGES Overview handout that includes an overall description of the project. Can be used to introduce stakeholders to the program and to promote the program at events.
- A style guide which includes
 - The style guide text which provides basic guidance for creating additional materials in Word, presentations, and graphic handouts.
 - A color guide for any additional digital products. This guide is helpful for creating exact color matches.
 - An example of PowerPoint slides variations using the template and style guide
 - Introduction slides which should be used at the beginning of any presentation where participants who are not familiar with the program may be present. This set includes the title slide, acronym slide, purpose, and process.
- A blank PowerPoint template which can be used for creating any additional PowerPoints.
- The CREATE BRIDGES logo for use on all promotional materials and presentations.

NEXT STEPS

After determining if CREATE BRIDGES is a good fit for you to lead as a coordinator, you will need to decide if CREATE BRIDGES is a good fit for your service area (hopefully the questions provided in Preparation & Notes have helped with this). Depending on your position, you may serve a state, region, county, or town. If you serve at the state or regional level, then you will need to select a region or community to work with. More details are provided on selecting a region in the next section.

After selecting a region, you will need to form a steering committee. More details are provided on selecting a steering committee in the Orientation module.

APPENDIX
