Delta Bridge Project

Strategic Community Plan

Mississippi County, Ark.

(2013-2023)

CARL B. & FLORENCE E. KING FOUNDATION

Southern Bancorp
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April 29, 2014

To the people of Mississippi County, Arkansas:

On behalf of the Carl B. and Florence E. King Foundation, it is my pleasure to offer my congratulations and commendation for your hard work and dedication which has resulted in Mississippi County's Strategic Community Plan. Your intense collaboration over the past year has the potential to reap great rewards as your ambitious, yet achievable, vision for this community is realized.

The King Foundation has long been a supporter of Arkansas communities. Our founders, Carl and Florence King, spent much of their lives on their Arkansas farm, where they established a lifelong affection for the state. We see in Mississippi County a tremendous opportunity to improve the quality of life in a way that honors both the Kings' values and the philanthropic legacy that is our privilege to steward.

On behalf of everyone at the King Foundation, I thank you for allowing us to play a role in Mississippi County's future. I look forward to watching your community grow and thrive as the Delta Bridge Project transitions from paper to reality.

Sincerely,

Michelle Monse
President

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STATE OF ARKANSAS
MIKE BEEBE
GOVERNOR

April 21, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to write in support of the Mississippi County Strategic Community Plan as it seeks to provide economic revitalization in the Arkansas Delta. This region of the Arkansas Delta has suffered for decades from extreme poverty, population migration, and an eroding economic base. Community leaders and Mississippi County residents have developed a Strategic Plan for ongoing economic and social change in the hope that Mississippi County will continue its efforts to move forward.

I am encouraged that the people of Mississippi County have accepted responsibility for their future and have actively taken steps to address their needs. I hope that other Arkansas communities will follow this example and work to develop initiatives for revitalization. Successful community development must begin with local citizens acting in concert for the benefit of all concerned.

More than 300 committee members have participated in the most recent strategic planning effort, devoting time and energy to the work of the Goal Teams. The plan is a blueprint for transforming Mississippi County in terms of economic development, quality of life, housing, health, education, and leadership. Revitalizing Mississippi County through the Delta Bridge Project is a public-private partnership between dozens of local organizations and hundreds of area individuals and is intended to coordinate community and economic development efforts. I pledge state cooperation, coordination, and partnership whenever possible to help implement Mississippi County's strategic objectives. I urge you to celebrate your victories, but never lose sight of your ultimate goals.

Our collective future depends on our ability to work together for a common purpose, even in the face of great obstacles. I enthusiastically endorse this plan and am available if I can be of assistance in the future.

Sincerely,

Mike Beebe

MARK PRYOR
ARKANSAS
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March 24, 2014

To The Mississippi County Delta Bridge Project:

I am proud to offer my support to the Mississippi County Delta Bridge Project and to the citizens of Mississippi County as they seek to provide economic and community revitalization in the Arkansas Delta.

In 2012, Southern Bancorp and community leaders from Mississippi County came together to discuss establishing a Delta Bridge Project for Mississippi County. Since the initial meeting, community leaders and Mississippi County residents have generously volunteered time and expertise in developing and organizing this project. Your leadership and hard work to develop community and economic initiatives for Mississippi County will ensure that the Arkansas Delta is prepared for a competitive future in the 21st Century.

Congratulations on your progress and please accept my support as you continue to implement Mississippi County's Delta Bridge Project. I am proud of your commitment to work together to improve the Arkansas Delta and look forward to your accomplishments.

Sincerely,

Mark Pryor

Mark Pryor

RICK CRAWFORD
1ST DISTRICT, ARKANSAS

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March 6, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with pleasure that I write and commend the residents of Mississippi County for coming together to create a comprehensive strategic plan to serve as a blueprint for economic revitalization in the Arkansas Delta.

I am encouraged by the recent success in Mississippi County, and I look forward to working with local officials during the implementation phase of the Mississippi County Strategic Plan. This long-term plan can transform Mississippi County by focusing on the County's strengths while also preparing for future growth.

Please know I am proud to support the Mississippi County Strategic Plan, and I am happy to lend my support and assistance as this process moves forward.

Sincerely,

Rick Crawford
Member of Congress

RC/CL

Endorsements or Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Carl B. & Florence E. King Foundation for their vision and philanthropic support which has made this project a reality.

CARL B. & FLORENCE E. KING FOUNDATION

Academic Organizations

Arkansas Northeastern College
Arkansas State University
Armorel School District
Blytheville School District
Gosnell School District
KIPP Delta Public Schools
Manila School District
Osceola School District
Rivercrest South Mississippi County School District
University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service

Business Organizations

Dawson Employment
Delta Auto Parts
Delta Drugs
Hubbard and Hoke Furniture
Mailboxes and Beyond
Southern Bancorp
Taimerica
Temps Plus Staffing
Westminster Village
William Laurence Photography

Faith Based Organizations

First Baptist Church- Blytheville
Living Waters Church of God in Christ
Mount Moriah Church
New Faith Missionary Baptist Church
Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
Well Spring Church

Nonprofit Organizations

Arkansas Community Foundation
Arkansas Minority and Women's Contractors Association
Boys and Girls Club of Mississippi County
Delta Gateway Museum
East Arkansas Planning and Development District
Legacci Educational Development Foundation
Main Street Blytheville
Mississippi County Economic Opportunity Commission
Southern Bancorp Community Partners
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Public Organizations

Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Arkansas State University Delta Center
Blytheville Chamber of Commerce
City of Blytheville
City of Gosnell
City of Joiner
City of Manila
City of Osceola
Delta Regional Authority
Mississippi County
Osceola/ South Mississippi County Chamber of Commerce

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Executive Summary

In October 2012, leaders from Southern Bancorp and its nonprofit affiliate Southern Bancorp Community Partners (collectively "Southern") met with leaders from Mississippi County to discuss the feasibility of launching the Delta Bridge Project in the area. The Delta Bridge Project is a comprehensive strategic community development process that has serves as a blueprint for community revitalization; it is described in more detail in the Delta Bridge Project discussion beginning on page 5. The process, which was initiated in Phillips County, Arkansas in 2003, proved so successful that it was subsequently launched in Clark County, Arkansas and Sunflower and Coahoma Counties in Mississippi. Based on the successful track record of this nationally recognized and award-winning revitalization process, the leadership of Mississippi County and Southern agreed that the Delta Bridge Project would be an effective strategy to address the county's community development needs.

Following the initial meeting a Steering Committee, co-chaired by Mr. Sam Scruggs and Dr. James Shemwell was formed to guide the Delta Bridge Project strategic planning and implementation process. Co-chairs were also identified and appointed to form Goal Teams in Economic Development, Education, Housing, Quality of Life, Leadership, and Health and Wellness. The newly formed Delta Bridge Project Steering Committee consisted of 18 members, including the co-chairs of the Goal Teams (See organization chart). In March 2013, the Steering Committee and Goal Teams were expanded by including members of the East Arkansas Planning and Development District's (EAPDD) Building Communities planning teams. Simultaneous to the launch of the Delta Bridge Project, EAPDD initiated a 12-county planning effort funded through the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which included Mississippi County. The Delta Bridge Project and EAPDD worked collaboratively to ensure that the two planning efforts were complementary and supportive of successful implementation.

A professional facilitation company, Taimerica Management Company of Mandeville, LA, was selected in November 2012, to assist in informing and managing the Delta Bridge Project planning process. Taimerica researched Mississippi County and the "competitor" counties (Craighead, Arkansas; Desoto, Lee and Tunica, Mississippi; Dyer and Madison, Tennessee in December and January 2013, issuing a community assessment report in March 2013. The community assessment report contained information on commuting, comparative wages, the composition and dynamics of the economic base in Mississippi County, life expectancy and health metrics, housing conditions, educational attainment and performance, and crime rates. This report was supplemented with confidential interviews with major employers, an internet survey of community leaders in Mississippi County, and studies of the tourism and retail development potential by the Delta Center at Arkansas State University.

The Goal Teams met monthly from February through November 2013. All of the reports and information developed to inform the Delta Bridge Project process were shared with the Goal Teams in a series of monthly meetings. Goal Teams developed vision statements and a series of goal statements for achieving these visions during the monthly meetings from July through October. In the month of November, Goal Teams developed a series of strategic goals and action steps to implement the Delta Bridge Project Plan over the next decade.

In total, more than 300 committee members participated in the strategic planning effort, devoting time and energy to the work of the Goal Teams. The resulting plan is a blueprint for transforming Mississippi County in terms of economic development, quality of life, housing, health, education and leadership. The vision for the revitalization of Mississippi County through the Delta Bridge Project is presented in its entirety in the Vision section of this document, beginning on page 5, followed by the individual elements of the plan that will be implemented through each of the Goal Teams. Each Goal Team element shares the vision for that priority area in addition to goals, objectives and strategic action steps for implementing each of the goals.

Key Community Issues Identified

The Delta Bridge Project is implemented through a Steering Committee and five Goal Teams in the focus areas of: Economic Development, Education, Housing, Quality of Life/Health and Wellness, and Leadership. The priority issues that underpin the Delta Bridge Project plan were identified in a workshop with the HUD Sustainable Communities planning process on March 27, 2013. Over 45 representatives from all areas of Mississippi County participated in the workshop held at the Osceola Chamber of Commerce. Participants were asked to rank the most important issues for the future development of Mississippi County. The issues identified in that workshop are listed in Table 1 on the following page. Each of the issues was assigned to one of the Delta Bridge Project Goal Teams. The issues of highest importance identified by workshop participants were shared with the Goal Teams and these issues formed the priorities for action targeted by each of the Goal Teams. The goals, objectives and action steps in the Delta Bridge Project plan are intended to address the issues of greatest importance to community leaders and citizens.

Youth Sports Complex in Blytheville

Ranking of Mississippi Countywide Issues

27-Mar-13
Sustainable Communities (EAPDD) process

Rank	Issue	Top Priorities	Goal Team
1	Removal of dilapidated buildings	91%	Housing
2	More HS Graduates	91%	Education/Leadership
3	Restaurants-retail	91%	Economic Development/QOL
4	Crime	91%	QOL
5	Workforce development	89%	Economic Development
6	Code enforcement/property maintenance	88%	Housing/Leadership
7	Urgent care	82%	Health Care
8	Marketing and promotion materials	77%	Quality of Life
9	Internal communications	77%	Leadership
10	Physician recruitment	76%	Health Care
11	Downtown building rehab	71%	Quality of Life
12	K-12 rating improvements	71%	Education/Leadership
13	Rural health clinic	68%	Health Care
14	Downtown business recruitment	66%	Economic Development
15	Infrastructure plans	64%	Leadership
16	More parental involvement in education	60%	Education/Leadership
17	Street repairs	58%	Leadership
18	Youth activities and sports	57%	Quality of Life
19	Hospital expansion	57%	Health Care
20	Intergovernmental relationships	56%	Leadership
21	Website development	53%	Leadership
22	Telecomm upgrade	47%	Leadership
23	Downtown beautification	47%	Quality of Life
24	New single family dwellings	45%	Housing
25	New rental units	45%	Housing
26	Parks and recreation facilities	45%	Quality of Life
27	Tourism marketing	43%	Economic Development
28	Post-secondary education expansion	31%	Education/Leadership
29	Water/sewer lines	30%	Leadership
30	Downtown staffing	27%	Economic Development
31	K-12 expansion	26%	Education/Leadership
32	Water/sewer extensions	24%	Leadership
33	Walking paths	20%	Quality of Life
34	New streets	15%	Leadership

Community History

Located in the northeast corner of Arkansas, Mississippi County is bordered to the east by the Mississippi River. Home to 45,966 residents, Mississippi County faces many of the same challenges that affect most struggling communities in the Mississippi River Delta, one of the nation's most daunting development challenges. The mechanization of the farming industry triggered a long-term economic and population decline in the region. Since 1950, the county's population has declined 43.5 percent with a particularly steep drop after the closure of Eaker Air Force base in 1992, which dealt another serious blow to the county's economy. Even though this event occurred a decade ago, the effects of this closure were so profound that they continue to impact Mississippi County's economic environment.

Vietnam War Memorial at Blytheville Courthouse

Today, Mississippi County has become one of the top producers of steel in the country, with major companies like Nucor-Yamato, Nucor Hickman, and Tenaris Manufacturers in Blytheville, yet the county's unemployment rate is 11 percent, significantly above the 7.2 percent statewide and 8 percent nationally. The unemployment rate does not account for unemployed individuals who, after years of disappointment, are resigned to living in poverty. Contributing to this factor, many local candidates do not qualify for well-paying jobs at the steel plants. Relocating new hires often choose to live in communities in Missouri or Tennessee rather than Mississippi County. Mississippi County has a 24.2 percent poverty rate, which is well above the state rate of 18.7 percent and the national rate of 14.9 percent. The county's residents have a median income of $35,651, only 67.2 percent of the national average. 58.9 percent of the county's residents are homeowners, below both the state 67.2 percent and 65.5 percent national averages. The county's citizenry is rich in diversity, with approximately 34 percent African Americans, 3.4 percent Hispanic, and smaller populations (2.3 percent) of multi-racial, Native American, and Asian residents.

DELTA BRIDGE PROJECT AND STRUCTURE

What is the Delta Bridge Project?

The Delta Bridge Project (DBP) is a public-private partnership between dozens of local organizations and hundreds of area individuals that is intended to coordinate community and economic development efforts in Mississippi County. Local leaders, with the support of Southern's community development staff, work through a Steering Committee and five Goal Teams to implement the goals and action steps identified in the planning process. The document you are holding, the Mississippi County Strategic Community Plan, guides the Delta Bridge Project and defines its objectives. The overall mission of the Delta Bridge Project is to implement the Strategic Community Plan and update the plan as goals, objectives, and action steps are successfully implemented. No single entity or individual owns this plan. It belongs to the community and its success relies on the desire and drive of the community residents to make the vision outlined in this plan a reality.

Structure of the Delta Bridge Project

The Delta Bridge Project is primarily composed of local leadership bodies that draw from the communities of Mississippi County. The DBP Steering Committee functions as a Board of Directors for the Delta Bridge Project and is comprised of the Goal Team co-chairs and other "at large" citizens of Mississippi County. As a body, it provides overall governance for the Delta Bridge Project and approves or rejects any proposed additions to the Mississippi County Strategic Community Plan. The Steering Committee meets throughout the year to review the progress of the Goal Teams. A unique aspect of the Delta Bridge Project is the continued guidance and support provided through Southern's community development and other staff who work with Steering Committee and Goal Team leaders to facilitate plan implementation, build local capacity, leverage funding, track the impact of plan achievements, keep the public informed of DBP activities, and support the community as revitalization is pursued.

Steering Committee Formation, Governance and Reporting

The DBP Steering Committee provides overall governance for the Delta Bridge Project and is the primary interface between the project and the general public. The Steering Committee will (I) foster partnerships between community organizations, (II) coordinate activities of Goal Teams, (III) be reflective of the geographic, racial and gender composition of Mississippi County, and (IV) include individuals with expertise in education, housing, business/economic development, leadership, and health and wellness.

Goal Team Formation, Governance and Reporting

Goal teams provide the "boots on the ground" piece to the process model. They give hands and feet to the ideas captured in the strategic plan and formulate proposals to guide those ideas. Each Goal Team has two co-chairs, appointed and approved by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee can form a sub-committee to appoint new team chairs as needed. The Goal Team chairs and co-chairs will sit on the DBP Steering Committee and ideally attend at least 75% of the monthly meetings.

Goal Team Chairs and Co-Chairs will serve for a two-year period, with replacements approved by the Delta Bridge Project Steering Committee. Goal Team members can serve for an indefinite period.

Five goal teams have been created by the Delta Bridge Project Steering Committee, as follows:

Goal Teams

1. Leadership
2. Economic Development
3. Education
4. Quality of Life/ Health and Wellness
5. Housing

Local Development Council Option

The Steering Committee may decide to form a Local Development Council (LDC) which would be comprised of Mississippi County residents representing diverse sectors of the community. The LDC would be a separate entity from the Steering Committee and Goal Teams, and could be tasked with reviewing potential grant proposals submitted by the Goal Teams. The LDC's role would be to determine the readiness of proposed projects for funding, the viability of proposed projects for success, the capacity of those seeking to implement projects, and the potential of sustaining proposed projects beyond any funding that may be secured through the Delta Bridge Project. The LDC Council members could be approved by the Delta Bridge Project Steering Committee. The LDC Council members could serve for a two year period, with replacements determined by the Delta Bridge Project Steering Committee.

Members of the Local Development Council would not be members of any other Delta Bridge Project organization (Steering Committee, Goal Team or any subgroups, such as an Objective Team or Task Force). In addition, Local Development Council members would not vote on any activity in which they have a personal financial interest or other personal involvement that might be considered a conflict of interest.

In the absence of an LDC, the Steering Committee may choose to function in this role. When performing this role, the committee members must also refrain from voting on any activity in which they have a personal financial interest or other personal involvement that might be considered a conflict of interest.

Tenaris — Blytheville

PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIAM LAURENCE PHOTOGRAPHY

Organization Chart

Spring 2014
Mississippi County Delta Bridge Project

A.R.T. — Aviation Repair Technologies — Blytheville

PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIAM LAURENCE PHOTOGRAPHY

"Relationships and education move individuals out of poverty"

— Ruby Payne, Ph.D.

Leadership

In 2023, Mississippi County is recognized inside and outside of its boundaries by the phrase, "One County, One Community." Elected leaders are a diverse representation of the community, and are willing to make tough, equitable choices. Business, government and civic leaders are known for their honesty and integrity, and citizens trust them. Civic organizations continue to take an increasingly active role in leadership within the county.

Goals

1. A high level of cooperation and collaboration exists among the Mississippi County's government entities as well as between governments, civic, non-profits, education, faith-based and business organizations.

2. Citizens of Mississippi County trust their elected and government leaders as exhibited in opinion surveys and in public discourse.

3. The level of generational poverty in Mississippi County has dropped to the lowest rates among other Arkansas states in the Delta through the deliberate identification and grooming of leaders from within generational poverty by Mississippi County's established leaders.

KaBOOM! Playground in Coahoma County, MS – Delta Bridge Project

GOAL #1: A high level of cooperation and collaboration exists among the Mississippi County's government entities as well as between governments, civic, non-profits, education, faith-based and business organizations.

Rationale

Collaboration and cooperation are vital for action and progress in democracies. Research demonstrates that collaboration is needed to advance community development since resources for solving problems are subject to approval by a majority vote of citizens.

Mississippi County is the largest county in Arkansas in terms of geography. Its vast size has been a barrier to collaboration and cooperation. Mississippi County is one of only 35 counties in the United States with two county seats; 20 of these counties are in Arkansas and Mississippi. The legal and business communities have been less united than in counties with a single county government seat.

Colorado Springs and El Paso County, Colorado, which has multiple planning areas much like Mississippi County, demonstrate that collaboration can become a part of the political culture in a community. The secret is to establish institutions that reward collaboration and that provide a framework for solving problems that overlap jurisdictions and political offices. The Four Star group in Colorado Springs (an informal group consisting of the County executive, Mayor, School Superintendent and County Economic Development Director) have met monthly for 20 years to work on a defined agenda of issues that affect all of their offices and jurisdictions.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Visit communities such as Colorado Springs, Tupelo and Williamson County, TN, where formal collaboration among multiple jurisdictions is well-established. The purpose of these visits is to observe and learn how to implement a system of collaboration in Mississippi County that builds the influence to institutionalized collaborations (Leadership Goal Team).

B. Develop a website dedicated to the implementation of the Delta Bridge initiative in Mississippi County. The site will serve as a communication tool for sharing

information among the Goal Teams and other Team members, media, and citizens in Mississippi County (Leadership Goal Team).

C. Unveil the initial public relations and communications campaign created by the Delta Bridge Project which will be maintained by the Leadership Goal Team to create an awareness of the "One County, One Community" theme. The campaign will issue quarterly reports of economic activities, collected from primary sources such as the Great River Economic Development Foundation. The purpose of the reports is to share positive economic successes and comparisons with the media in Mississippi County (Leadership Goal Team).

D. Host public celebrations of the milestones and significant accomplishments from the Delta Bridge Project initiative in order to build public awareness that community improvement is underway. This will be accomplished though a number of vehicles including the public unveiling of the strategic plan; regular news releases; social media and the internet; surrogate speakers; as well as key public celebrations (Leadership Goal Team).

GOAL # 2: Citizens of Mississippi County trust their elected and government leaders as exhibited in opinion surveys and in public discourse.

Rationale

Public trust in government is critical to effective community development. Research shows that public trust is built through transparency, communication and government responsiveness. The International City Management Association (ICMA) defines trust in government as "confidence that authorities will observe the rules of the game and act in the general interests." Citizens trust governments that demonstrate the ability to solve problems of most concern to them (responsiveness). Among the recommendations from the ICMA report on public trust are that governments instill within all employees a culture of respect for citizen opinions, proposing reasonable solutions and following though in a timely manner. Poorly maintained streets and utilities, or neighborhood crime are constant reminders to citizens that their government is ineffective at addressing the problems of most concern to them. Calls to government offices that are not answered in a timely fashion, or where employees are unwilling or incapable of resolving problems are additional sources of unresponsiveness in government. The culture inside city hall or at county offices is an important ingredient in instilling trust in government.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Government in Mississippi County builds transparency through enhanced communications with voters and the public

A. Assist elected leaders in Mississippi County to develop a formal schedule of press conferences and media briefings to share information with the public on the state of the County's financial conditions and operations. These meetings will be well publicized in advance, and media outlets will be encouraged to ask questions. The public will also be invited to attend these meetings (Leadership Goal Team).

B. Assist elected leaders for the County and Cities to develop and maintain websites that provide relevant information to citizens and the media. The sites

should be professionally developed with the help of citizen-led committees that provide guidance on the most important information to include on the websites (Leadership Goal Team).

C. Videotape official meetings including committee meetings, and post those videos on their websites. A model program to follow is from Bastrop, LA http://www.cityofbastrop.com/ (City and County Government).

D. Develop a program to recognize and reward public transparency by government leaders in Mississippi County. The awards should be annual with significant public recognition of leaders earning the rewards, such as a public recognition dinner or ceremony with press coverage (Leadership Goal Team).

E. Adopt and implement corrective plans that assure proper management of public funds and restore public confidence that public funds will be managed responsibly (Mississippi County Government).

Objective 2: Governments in Mississippi County become more responsive to the needs of citizens

A. Work with mayors and elected officials to formally evaluate the responsiveness of Mississippi County government. Collect a baseline of information through citizen surveys about the responsiveness and issues of concern to citizens for each of the major divisions of the government, such as public safety, public works, billing, etc. The survey information should be used to develop performance measures for all public services (Leadership Goal Team).

B. Conduct an annual survey of community leaders and citizens in Mississippi County to measure their perceptions of the degree of cooperation and collaboration among governments, and gauge the level of trust that citizens have in their leaders. The survey should be standardized to allow monitoring of trends in public confidence and public perceptions for comparison over time. The results of the surveys should be released to the public and media (Leadership Goal Team).

C. Promote efforts by governments in Mississippi County to develop and implement organizational strategic plans based on a set of priorities. Research by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) shows that trust in government is weakened when governments adopt plans with an unrealistic number of goals and strategies. Goals should be prioritized to insure that governments have and utilize their resources to address the concerns of most importance to citizens (Leadership Goal Team).

Objective 3: Governments in Mississippi County become more efficient

A. Sponsor a study to collect information from governments in Mississippi County that measure efficiency, such as expenditure per citizen. These efficiency measures will be compared against average benchmarks for communities of the same size within Arkansas and in surrounding states. Budged expenditures will be evaluated by categories such as salaries and benefits as a percent of total budget, to identify reasons for deviations from average (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

B. Hold scheduled meetings with government leaders from the county and cities to review the report of findings. The joint group will identify issues for further analysis and discussion. At the conclusion of the process, a report of the findings and recommendations on the budget examination will be issued (Leadership Goal Team).

Mississippi River near San Souci Park

GOAL #3: The level of generational poverty in Mississippi County has dropped to the lowest rates among other Arkansas counties in the Delta through the deliberate identification and grooming of leaders from within generational poverty by Mississippi County's established leaders.

Rationale

Communities in the Delta have witnessed generations of migration where educated citizens leave to find work opportunities in northern cities such as Chicago, Detroit and beyond. Today, Mississippi County has more work opportunities than qualified candidates to fill them. A large portion of the current population comes from families where multiple generations have not had consistent employment. As Ruby Payne has observed, these families inherit some cultural, economic, and educational characteristics that place them at a disadvantage for succeeding in the middle and upper income world of salaried and stable work. Goal Team discussion and interviews held during the development of this plan suggested that Generational Poverty is the most important community development issue in Mississippi County. Payne's research identifies four reasons why individuals leave poverty: it's too painful to stay poor; a vision or goal drives them to leave; a key relationship changes their awareness of opportunities; a special talent or skills opens doors of opportunity.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Leaders and Citizens become aware of effective interventions for generational poverty

A. Host a meeting of elected leaders for training sessions in the subject of generational poverty. A nationally recognized expert such as Ruby Payne should lead these sessions (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

B. Visit communities such as Akron, Ohio to investigate programs that address generational poverty (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

Objective 2: Leaders in Mississippi County identify and dialogue with leaders from generational poverty in Mississippi County

A. Develop, from within the communities that suffer with generational poverty, a list of potential leaders (Ministerial Alliances and member congregations).

B. Host quarterly meetings between government and business leaders and leaders from within generational poverty communities. The meetings will serve to build an understanding of the day-to-day problems faced by families living in generational poverty. The ultimate goal of these meetings is to develop concrete initiatives for providing needed resources to families that will allow them to keep their children in school until graduation (Ministerial Alliances).

C. Plan and execute a series of county-wide community collaborations. These cooperative events will be held in a public space, and members of all religious faiths are invited (Ministerial Alliances).

Objective 3: Faith Based organizations in Mississippi County serve as a conduit for adult education and training for citizens in generational poverty

A. Investigate the financial viability of a mentoring program for youth from generational poverty, using the experience of the South Akron Youth Mentorship as a template for the local institutions (www.saymentor.org) (Ministerial Alliances).

B. Collaborate with existing parks and recreation departments and school based programs to develop a plan for funding and implementing a youth mentoring program (Ministerial Alliances and member congregations).

Objective 4: Civic, Government and Non-Profit organizations in Mississippi County implement programs to reward good outcomes by those in generational poverty

A. Investigate the potential to fund and implement a conditional cash transfer program through the non-profit community that provides tangible non-cash rewards to target families that maintain high school attendance and graduation rates for their

children. The World Bank has demonstrated the effectiveness of conditional cash transfer programs on increased school attendance and reduced dropout rates among impoverished communities throughout the world (http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Safety-Nets-DP/0603.pdf) (Mississippi County leadership).

B. Investigate the desirability and viability of enhancing the Blytheville Youth Coalition through affiliation with the World Vision Youth Empowerment Program (www.worldvisionusprograms.org/yep_affiliate.php). Tapping into an established national program with fundraising capabilities and a validated model for youth engagement may be a more efficient solution to youth engagement that launching a new program (Leadership Goal Team).

Community Cleanup

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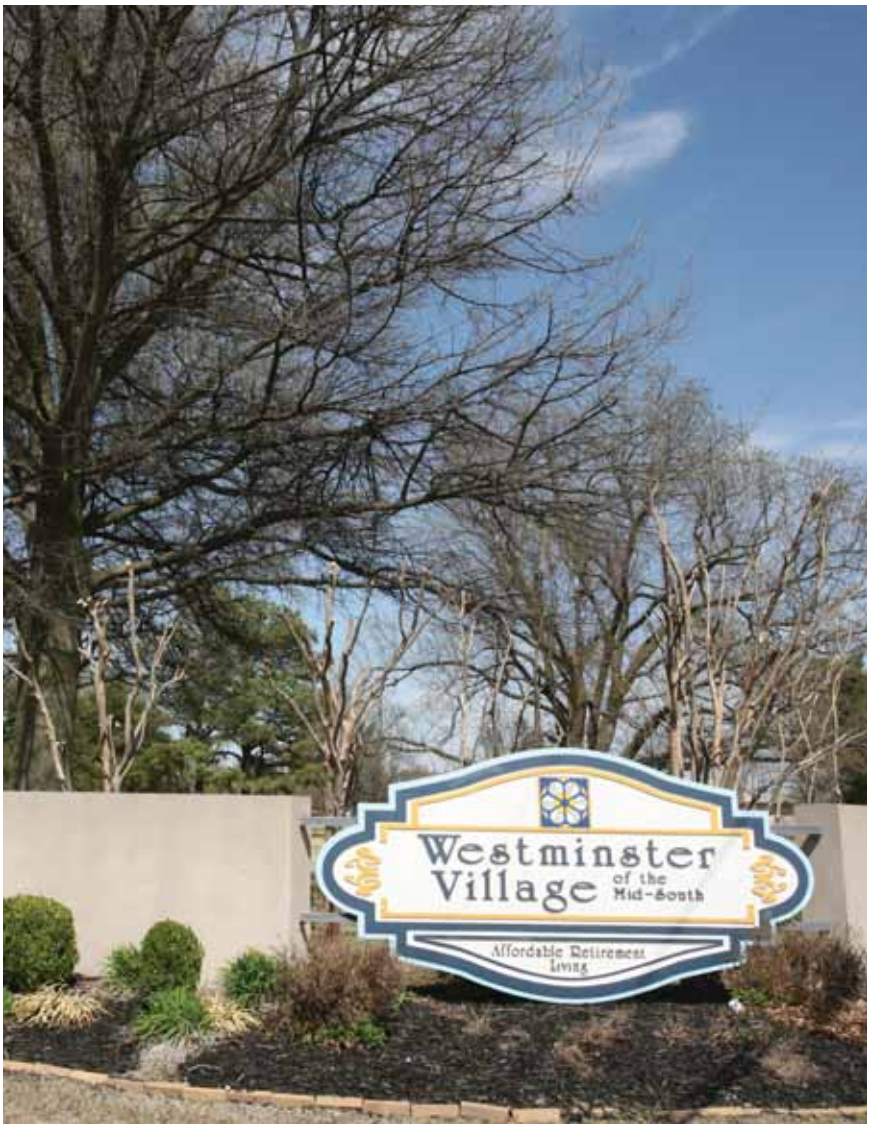

Westminster Village of the Mid-South Retirement Community

Housing

In 2023, a variety of safe, affordable housing is available for all those who seek to live in Mississippi County. The County has minimal, if any, blighted or abandoned housing. Revitalization incentive programs have made renovation-to-code a much more common practice.

Goals

1. In 2023, dilapidated housing is no longer an issue.
2. The selection of housing and apartments throughout the county has expanded with a balanced rental and sales market at all price points.
3. Residents throughout Mississippi County have ample options to buy and build new housing in well-planned and attractively designed subdivisions and infill development as appropriate.
4. Uniform residential codes are enforced in Mississippi County municipalities by highly trained code enforcement staff.

Before Remediation

GOAL #1: In 2023, dilapidated housing is no longer an issue.

Rationale

The need for quality housing is a concern for the betterment of the general welfare of the community. Citizens that live in well maintained houses spend less money on utilities, which provides more disposable income to spend on household necessities and retail goods in Mississippi County. Quality housing for all citizens is also an important social issue that demonstrates progressive thinking by community leadership.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Jurisdictions in Mississippi County will have a complete picture of the size and scope of the dilapidated housing issue with adequate financial resources in place to address it

A. Identify inventories of vacant and dilapidated housing in local jurisdictions. These inventories will be shared with the Housing Goal Team (Mississippi County cities).

B. Identify sources of funding for demolishing dilapidated structures. As funding becomes available Southern will establish a fund to reimburse the County and City for razing of dilapidated structures (Southern and Housing Goal Team).

C. Develop a grant program with guidelines for selecting properties for demolition. The selection criteria will balance the supply of funds with the demand for demolition, prioritized by the community development return for the funds expended (Delta Bridge leadership).

D. Examine the viability of a buy-back program for dilapidated housing conversion, using the Memphis model as an example. The concept behind the buy-back program is that adjudicated properties are offered to buyers who agree to rehabilitate them within a set period of time. The buy-back concept provides a market mechanism for rehabilitating dilapidated

housing stock. The proceeds from sales are used to demolish housing that is not viable for rehabilitation (Housing Goal Team).

E. Evaluate programs in other communities that provide financial incentives to help homeowners and small business repair dilapidated structures. Evaluate whether the programs are viable for adoption in Mississippi County (Housing Goal Team).

F. Identify historic commercial and residential properties that are important to preserve for historic reasons. Investigate financing programs that other communities have used to preserve historic structures and determine if they are financially viable for adoption (Housing Goal Team).

After Remediation

GOAL # 2: The selection of housing and apartments throughout the county has expanded with a balanced rental and sales market at all price points.

Rationale

Quality housing is both an economic development and community development issue. The selection and affordability of housing is an asset for recruiting and retaining workers to live in Mississippi County. Quality housing can help increase the number of manufacturing workers that live in Mississippi County.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: The real estate development community in Mississippi County will maintain an accurate picture of the housing market at all times

A. Conduct a housing market assessment, including each of the submarkets. The assessment will estimate the real vacancy rates for single family housing and apartments at different price points and the current sales prices for housing at various price points. The County Assessor's reports on real estate sales should be incorporated into the report to provide objective data on market conditions (EAPDD and Delta Bridge leadership).

B. Provide rewards and sanctions for Board of Realtors' members to maintain current listings in its MLS system (Board of Realtors).

C. Issue periodic reports to Board of Realtors' members and the public tracking trends in housing sales, market absorption and pricing (Board of Realtors).

Objective 2: Apartment developers inside and outside of Mississippi County will be aware of market fundamentals and unmet needs

A. Work with Chambers of Commerce located with the county to identify regional apartment developers who have the financial and technical ability to provide new apartments for the market (Housing Goal Team).

B. Work with Southern Bancorp to develop promotional materials that capture the apartment market opportunities (Housing Goal Team).

C. Contact the developers identified in action #H2.4, and reference the market data regarding the various opportunities; share this information with the developers (Housing Goal Team).

Objective 3: Community Development Corporations will be active in providing financing for affordable housing in Mississippi County

A. Charter a federal Community Development Corporation to provide housing development for low and moderate income families (Mississippi County leadership).

B. Transform the former Eaker Air Force Base into a vibrant residential and commercial community (Housing and Economic Development Goal Teams)

C. Assemble a team of lenders (Westminster Village board, the BGRAA/Blytheville-Gosnell Regional Airport Authority, and business leaders) to form a committee to evaluate the revitalization of the housing, commercial and industrial areas at the former Eaker Air Force Base (Delta Bridge leadership; this effort is duplicated in the Economic section).
   1) The committee should include representation from both the Economic Development and Housing Goal Teams.
   2) The committee will evaluate means of revitalizing the housing stock and commercial buildings at the former base.
   3) The evaluation will also assess the impacts of changing ADEQ and Brownfield regulations on the revitalization and remodeling of facilities.
   4) As part of this project, committee members will travel to the England Airpark in Alexandria, LA to review the elements of that plan which have led to its success.
   5) The committee should explore grant funding for this plan with the Office of Economic Adjustment at the Department of Defense.
   6) The Arkansas congressional delegation could be instrumental in finding federal funding for the project.

GOAL #3: Residents throughout Mississippi County have ample options to buy and build new housing in well-planned and attractively designed subdivisions and infill development as appropriate.

Rationale

Many residents and potential residents of Mississippi County prefer to live in newer subdivisions and newer houses with the latest features and services. The lack of subdivision lots is a barrier to attracting new residents to Mississippi County.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: The utility and regulatory situation in Mississippi County will provide ample opportunities for new subdivision development

A. Investigate the feasibility of developing new subdivisions, spec housing (housing built without a particular buyer in mind) and apartment construction. The investigation will quantify the costs of property development plus the costs of construction. The investigation should estimate the probable market prices of developed property. Market prices will be compared to income levels to identify the price points where new housing is feasible and price points that will not be supplied through market forces. The study will consider regulatory or administrative changes that could increase the supply of new housing in the market (EAPDD and Delta Bridge Project leadership).

B. Work with the Delta Bridge Project leadership and EAPDD to identify land parcels that have the services, zoning and market features for new subdivision and apartment development. These parcels will be maintained in an inventory that is available for promotion to subdivision developers (Housing Goal Team).

C. Enact modern ordinances to govern subdivision development (Jurisdictions in Mississippi County).

D. Adopt policies and procedures for extending utility services to subdivision sites (Jurisdictions in Mississippi County).

E. Adopt a subdivision review and approval processes that minimize the delays and surprises in subdivision development (Jurisdictions in Mississippi County).

Objective 2: Subdivision developers throughout the region will be aware of unmet market needs

A. Work with the Greater Blytheville Chamber of Commerce and the Osceola/ South Mississippi County Chambers of Commerce to identify regional subdivision developers who have the financial and technical ability to provide new apartments for the market (Housing Goal Team).

B. Work with Southern to develop promotional materials that capture the subdivision market opportunities (Housing Goal Team).

C. Contact developers identified in Action Step Objective 2 letter A above and market data on the opportunities will be shared with these developers (Housing Goal Team).

Objective 3: Lenders in Mississippi County will supply capital for subdivision development

A. Educate Mississippi County lenders, periodically, on real estate market trends and gaps to enhance their ability to evaluate loan requests from private developers.

B. Ensure that homebuyers have access to credit and educational programs that enhance their abilities to maintain houses without financial default.

C. Provide education and counseling programs and financial coaching to educate first-time homebuyers on the financial and home maintenance requirements that come with home ownership (Mississippi County EOC or other organizations).

D. Introduce individual development accounts (IDA's) that provide tax-advantaged savings vehicles for mortgage down payment and home repairs (Mississippi County financial institutions).

Objective 5: Mississippi County will maintain an adequate supply of upper middle income rental properties

A. Meet with major industrial employers to investigate the feasibility of forming a real estate corporation that provides short-term rental housing to newly recruited middle and upper management employees. The concept for the project is similar to the housing provided by oil and gas companies in the Middle East to expatriate employees. Rather than providing a long-term solution, the short-term rental program would provide a housing option that would provide time for employees to consider long-term housing options, such as housing purchases or housing construction (Housing Goal Team).

Dixie Line Park — Blytheville

GOAL #4: Uniform residential codes are enforced in Mississippi County municipalities by highly trained code enforcement staff.

Rationale

Code enforcement through Mississippi County should be applied uniformly and professionally. This is both a fairness and efficiency issue for Mississippi County jurisdictions, contractors, developers and citizens alike. The location of new construction should not be influenced by the level of code enforcement.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Jurisdictions in Mississippi County will have adopted uniform residential codes

A. Invite code enforcement officials to meet with state building code officials to review code enforcement ordinances. The intent is to identifying gaps and conflicts that should be resolved to lessen the variation in code interpretation between jurisdictions (Housing Goal Team).

B. Develop a model code from the process in Action H4.1. The model code will be introduced and approved by jurisdictions in Mississippi County.

C. Meet to discuss the viability and efficiency of combining code enforcement on a county level (City Mayors).

Objective 2: Code enforcement officials in MS County will be trained in modern building practices and procedures

A. Identify experts that will provide uniform training to code enforcers. Sponsor periodic training programs for code enforcement officials that provide training in electrical and building codes, which are not currently available in Arkansas for building inspectors (Delta Bridge Project leadership and Housing Goal Team).

Objective 3: Builders in Mississippi County will exchange information with code enforcement officials on new building practices and materials

A. Identify the most active builders in Mississippi County. Invite builders to a meeting to discuss organizing a committee of builders that can meet with code enforcement to exchange information on new building practices and materials and provide feedback on code enforcement improvements (Housing Goal Team).

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Blytheville High School Students

Education

In 2023, parents and the community are strongly engaged in students' lives and education. Schools are safe with only rare instances of violence, bullying or discrimination. Ninety percent of students entering ninth grade graduate from high school and rarely need remedial courses when enrolled in post-secondary institutions. An awareness of prosperity pervades the curricula, school culture and the community at large. Educational opportunities designed to achieve life and career goals abound for all residents from the cradle to the grave.

Goals

1. The education system, from pre-K through post-secondary, is rated above average within Arkansas and delivers demand-driven college and career ready education.

2. The overall community has a strong investment in education, starting at birth, as a tool for developing human abilities that lead to higher incomes and a diversity of job opportunities.

3. School districts have reduced remediation rates for students enrolling in college to levels below the national average. Graduation rates for high schools are above the national average.

4. Educators have closed the achievement gap whereby students from generational poverty exhibit the same graduation rates and educational attainment as other students.

5. Schools are safe havens for learning.

GOAL #1: The education system, from pre-K through post-secondary, is rated above average within Arkansas and delivers demand-driven college and career ready education.

Rationale

Research for this plan demonstrates that the percentage of manufacturing jobs in Mississippi County held by residents is constrained by the large proportion of dropouts in the population. Almost 100 percent of the employees working in the highest paying industrial plants are individuals who have a minimum of a high school diploma. As the most desirable jobs in the national economy require post-secondary training, graduation is only a piece of the educational puzzle. Graduates must have the requisite skills to succeed in post-secondary training and education without remediation. With a rapidly growing industrial base, Mississippi County has more high-wage jobs than qualified applicants to fill them. Solving the problems of low educational attainment offers a prescription for advancing both the community and economic development of Mississippi County.

Research by James Heckman at the University of Chicago demonstrates that socio-emotional skills and attitudes are more important to academic and work success than cognitive abilities. Society receives a higher return on programs that address these needs at a younger age than they receive by waiting until the school years to address socio-emotional and motivational needs of children. For this reason in great part, the Education Goal Team has chosen to adopt actions that begin prior to pre-K education in the Delta Bridge Project for Mississippi County. (http://heckmanequation.org/heckman-equation)

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Quality Pre-School programs will be available to all children in Mississippi County

A. Appoint a task force that works specifically on early-childhood interventions in Mississippi County. The Early Childhood Task Force will invite the Better Beginning program at the Arkansas Department of Human Services (www.arbetterbeginnings.org) to attend their first meeting to share statewide early

childhood resources and programs with the committee. Among those resources is a numerical rating for each of the 61 licensed facilities in Mississippi County, technical assistance and training (Educational Goal Team).

B. Set a goal of assisting each of the licensed facilities in Mississippi County to attain the highest rating level possible under New Beginnings. Consider providing technical assistance and training to help facilities achieve these ratings (Early Childhood Task Force).

C. Visit with the Conway Chamber of Commerce to confer with its Early Childhood Program coordinator about initiatives that the Chamber has found valuable in improving the quality of early childhood education in Conway (Early Childhood Task Force).

D. Visit with the mayor's office in Bryant, Arkansas to discuss the training and technical assistance that the mayor's program has found effective in improving the educational quality of early childhood programs in Saline County (Early Childhood Task Force).

E. Work with pre-K providers to identify foundation support for expanding programs to meet the full needs for quality pre-k education in Mississippi County. School districts, Head Start and private day-care facilities in Mississippi County will continue funding of Pre-K programs through the attraction of additional federal and state grants plus foundation grants (Education Goal Team).

F. Implement the new federal tracking system to monitor the progress of children from generational poverty in attaining the skills and values needed for educational success. Pre-K providers will be invited to participate in the mentorship and county-wide educational initiative outlined in Education Goal E3, objective #2, in order to leverage community resources to support the needs of Pre-k students (Educational Goal Team and Pre-K providers).

Objective 2: Quality Primary and Secondary Education will be offered throughout Mississippi County

A. Explore ways to address barriers that hamper the ability of school districts in Mississippi County to attract and retain certified teachers, including incentive packages that provide assistance with health insurance costs, teacher incentive pay, and student loan forgiveness. The committee will issue a report that is shared with the entire Delta Bridge Project and interested business leaders, government officials and the legislative delegation (Educational Goal Team).

B. Organize a task force of Education Goal Team members to work with school superintendents in Mississippi County to adopt common educational outcomes that all students will meet upon graduation. The outcomes should include skills such as oral communications, work ethic, and team collaboration that are essential both in the workplace and for college and career education. The members of the Task Force should include committee members from industry and business with formal hiring standards. At the culmination of the action, the Education Goal Team and the school superintendents group will publish a joint document that conveys the educational outcomes to the general public in Mississippi County. The Delta Bridge Project leadership will assist in widely disseminating the report throughout the county (Education Goal Team).

Objective 3: Post-Secondary institutions will have rebranded the attractiveness of professional and career training in Mississippi County

A. Develop a center for allied technologies that combines physical locations of customized training, secondary career programs and A&P and customized welding programs in a centrally located facility that is equivalent to facilities used for academic training. The new facility will be incorporated into the campus with academic programs and employment services to create a one-stop career shop (Arkansas Northeastern College).

B. Continue to host monthly meetings of school superintendents from Mississippi County school districts. The agenda of discussion items in the meeting

should include articulation agreements, remediation programs and mentorship programs (Arkansas Northeastern College).

Objective 4: Educational Institutions in Mississippi at all levels will provide seamless transitions for students

A. Develop a Task Force to examine initiatives that connect educational systems at all levels, similar to the P-20 initiatives underway in Missouri and other states. The task force should include members from all levels of education, from pre-K through post-secondary. The task force will share its findings and recommendations (Educational Goal Team).

GOAL #2: The overall community has a strong investment in education, starting at birth, as a tool for developing human abilities that lead to higher incomes and a diversity of job opportunities.

Rationale

Collaboration and cooperation among residents, community leaders and officials to provide the highest level of education to Mississippi County children is critical. Strategic investments made into the futures of Mississippi County children can yield positive results, which can include some of the children returning from university and other vocational training to help build and sustain the area.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Institutions from all geographic sections of Mississippi County, representing civic and community groups, the business community and faith based organizations will collaborate to better Mississippi County Schools

A. Produce a master list of civic and community groups, Chambers of Commerce and business associations and faith based organizations in Mississippi County (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

B. Work through the Mississippi County Community Foundation to invite members of the Blytheville and Osceola/South Mississippi County Chambers of Commerce Education Committees to form a Joint Committee that meets quarterly to work on a county-wide basis for the dual purposes of strengthening educational values among citizens and to improving schools and school programs through more active participation by citizens and parents (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

C. Investigate public and private grant opportunities to support the activities of the county-wide Education Committee (Southern Bancorp Community Partners).

D. Survey a sample of Mississippi County residents annually to gauge trends in the level of support within the community for the value of education (Joint Committee).

GOAL #3: School districts will have reduced remediation rates for students enrolling in college to levels below the national average. Graduation rates for high schools will be above the national average

Rationale

When children receive the correct level and type of support to stay in school and work beyond levels that they themselves thought were possible, they will begin to take ownership of their education and employment future.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: School Districts will have adopted validated programs and initiatives to decrease the remediation rate and raise the graduation rate to the national average

A. Expand the Arkansas Northeastern College ACT Academy as demand for services increases during the life of this plan. Efforts will be made to secure sustained funding and services from the business community to support the conditional cash transfer component of the ACT program that provides funds for transportation and day care expenses and stipend reimbursement (Arkansas Northeastern College).

B. Monitor the Career Coaches program between Arkansas Northeastern College and school districts in Mississippi County through annual updates from the program director so that the Delta Bridge Project can assist in identifying resources to continue the program after the end of federal funding (Education Goal Team).

Objective 2: School districts have implemented validated programs of mentoring and monitoring family outreach and attention to students' out-of-school needs, in order to increase the graduation rate to the national average

A. Provide annual training to new teachers and refresher courses for existing teachers on the value differences of students from generational poverty and effective measures for working with students from generational poverty to improve educational achievement (Mississippi County School Districts).

B. Implement mentoring and close monitoring programs to work with individual students from generational poverty, which is one of the validated components of effective drop-out prevention (Mississippi County School Districts).

C. Work directly with school districts to prosecute chronic cases of absenteeism, one of the precursors of drop-outs (Mississippi County Law Enforcement).

D. Develop after-school courses for at risk students to better prepare them for high-stakes testing (Mississippi County School Districts).

E. Determine how to use the Check and Connect model pioneered in Minnesota and now adopted in Augusta, AR. Check and Connect coordinates services among students, family, school, and community to help the student stay in school. A key element of the Check and Connect program is the assignment of performance monitors for students. Additional information on the Check and Connect initiative can be found at http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/ (Mississippi County School District and community organizations).

F. Identify sponsors to pay for training and the use of consulting assistance from the University of Minnesota to implement "Check and Connect," initiatives in Mississippi County schools, one of the validated programs for dropout prevention (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

G. Adopt Career Academies and School-within-School Models where appropriate to reduce dropout rates (Mississippi County School Districts).

Objective 3: Institutions in Mississippi County will have expanded "second chance" programs as needed to increase the GED attainment rate of adult dropouts

A. Continue to support the GED program operated by Arkansas Northeastern College to provide high school credentials for older drop-outs who want to complete their secondary education. The program will offer night classes for working adults. Research shows that community engagement is an important component of success for second chance programs (Educational Institutions in Mississippi County).

B. Promote the second chance program to candidates needing educational credentials. The likely information path is from institution to family member to targeted individual (Civic and faith-based organizations).

KIPP Delta-Blytheville

GOAL #4: Educators have closed the achievement gap whereby students from generational poverty exhibit the same graduation rates and educational attainment as other students.

Rationale

Mississippi County takes the approach and attitude that what separates children in generational poverty from those born into generational wealth is access to knowledge, opportunities, and supportive social networks.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: School districts have implemented validated programs to reduce the achievement gap for students from generational poverty

A. Develop a method of identifying students from generational poverty. The method should be designed to conform to privacy laws that schools must follow. Collaboration with the member congregations of the ministerial alliances in Mississippi County should be considered as a method for identifying target students, as well as self-reporting via some form of conditional cash transfer incentive. The task force should also evaluate ways to identify generational poverty using statewide databases, the method used by the Utah Intergenerational Welfare Reform Commission (Educational and Leadership Goal Teams).

B. Identify funds for analyzing the factors behind the success of the "Gentlemen of Knowledge" initiative stimulated by students at Rivercrest High School. (Membership requirements in the group included a 2.5 grade point average, good behavior and demonstrated leadership). The purpose of the investigation is to identify effective techniques for motivating students to form similar initiatives in other Mississippi County high schools. The local Rivercrest school district can serve as a resource in this initiative. The investigation should also look at tools for motivating female student participation (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

C. Follow the template created by Rivercrest High School that closed the achievement gap in their district. The template starts with interviews with students from low achieving groups to identify problems the school can solve in order to close the gap (Mississippi County High Schools).

D. Investigate effective student leadership and student voice initiatives such as the "Gentlemen of Knowledge" program at Rivercrest High School (Mississippi County School Districts and Educational Goal Team).

E: Collect insights from teachers that have demonstrated small reductions in achievement gaps to identify critical success factors in teaching students from generational poverty. This knowledge will be consolidated at a county level by a task force of the Education Goal Team (Mississippi County School Districts).

F. Develop measurement systems to frequently monitor the educational attainment progress of students from generational poverty (Mississippi County School Districts).

G. Develop after-school and summer tutoring programs designed specifically for students from generational poverty (Mississippi County School Districts).

H. Provide professional development training for staff and teachers on working with students from generational poverty (Mississippi County School Districts).

Objective 2: School districts will work with generational poverty mentorship programs to provide outside resources to students

A. Establish programs to connect volunteer mentors from the community with students from generational poverty that could benefit from mentoring (Mississippi County School Districts).

B. Provide more field trip activities, especially in summer programs, to expose students from generational poverty to other cultures and cities. The purpose of this activity is to expose or further expose students to experiences, cultures, and institutions that promote success in the workplace and in educational achievement. The Education Goal Team will identify sources of private and foundation donations to support the financial requirements of this goal (Mississippi County School Districts and Educational Goal Teams).

GOAL #5: Schools are safe havens for learning.

Rationale

Children are more likely to excel when they believe that they are safe and protected from harm. All children have the right to feel safe and explore their academic abilities and potential in a safe, supportive environment.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Organize a committee (Committee for Safe Schools) to work with school districts to implement the National Crime Prevention Councils Safe and Sound School program. The program has a free School Safety and Security Toolkit (http://www.ncpc.org/resources/files/pdf/school-safety/bsstoolkit_complete.pdf). The Committee for safe Schools will affiliate with the NCPC to obtain technical support, publications and news (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

B. Achieve NCPC Safe and Sound designation for each school in its district, starting with high schools. The point of contact for schools should be the school principal and superintendent (Mississippi County School Districts).

C. Enlarge membership to include students, school administrators, business and community leaders, and school security personnel as needed. Work with the Crisis Planning Teams at schools within Mississippi County (Committee for Safe Schools).

D. Identify safety and security problems that schools are currently facing. The data for gauging the importance of the problems should include existing statistics, surveys, and assessment data (Committee for Safe Schools).

E. Hold a school safety and security forum to prioritize school safety and security problems and then figure out what to do about them (Committee for Safe Schools).

F. Incorporate the Bullying Prevention Training Center materials into the Safe Schools in MS County initiative (www.stopbullying.gov) that are not currently part of the anti-bullying training mandated by Arkansas law (Committee for Safe Schools).

G. Work with administrators from each district to develop specific action plans for addressing the specific safety and security problems in respective districts and, if possible, each school in each district (Committee for Safe Schools).

H. Work with the leadership of the Delta Bridge Project to publicize the initiatives for Safe Schools (Committee for Safe School).

Tenaris — Blytheville

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Economic Development

In 2023 Mississippi County has a larger and growing population. It has a well-trained workforce prepared for employment in all sectors of the economy. Downtowns throughout the county are vibrant, and vacant retail space is limited. The county has significantly reduced retail leakage. Mississippi County has a collection of vibrant lifestyle centers with mixed retail, restaurant, entertainment and residential uses. Tourism venues and programs are well-developed with enough activities to keep visitors busy for prolonged periods.

Goals

1. The perception of Mississippi County residents about their communities has shifted from apathy and indifference to personal pride and ambition for change.

2. Entry level workforce from Mississippi County, with the requisite soft and hard skills, is available to meet staffing needs of all county employers, even for hospitality and retail. Per capita incomes are raised to the national average.

3. Perception of cities, both from visitors and residents, is that roads are clean and well maintained with few dilapidated or vacant commercial properties.

4. Financial institutions are providing access to capital for small businesses.

5. Workforce development and training institutions in Mississippi County have built a regional talent pool for in-demand occupations of existing and future industry.

6. Cities in Mississippi County have become entertainment and retail centers for the region, offering a range of restaurants, retail stores, and entertainment venues. These developments have created a variety of new jobs for citizens of all levels of educational attainment.

7. Mississippi County has become an automotive sales destination for car shoppers within a 30 mile radius.

8. The downtowns in Mississippi County cities are vibrant centers of activity throughout the day and evening, offering retail, entertainment, and residential space.

9. Tourism, particularly natural and outdoor activities, has become an important component of the economic base of the county. The county has a strong tourism promotion program and organization.

GOAL #1: The perception of Mississippi County residents about their communities has shifted from apathy and indifference to personal pride and ambition for change.

Rationale

The old adage, "Perception is Reality," reigns in economic development. Communities where residents and businesses believe that the future will be better and brighter outperform residents and businesses that are stuck in the past. Leaders in Mississippi County recognize that the time is right to reverse community attitudes that have prevailed since the closure of Eaker Air Force Base.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Residents and media will be aware of the economic findings of this plan

A. Share the results of the competitive assessment from this report (Attachment A) with the media in Mississippi County through press releases or a press conference (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

Objective 2: Residents and media will be constantly aware of economic improvements occurring in the county

A. Place ads in local media semi-annually to promote economic progress under the "One County, One Community" campaign (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

Objective 3: The former Eaker Air Force Base will be transformed into a vibrant residential and commercial community (jointly with Housing Goal Team)

A. Assemble a team of lenders (Westminster Village board, the BGRAA/Blytheville-Gosnell Regional Airport Authority, and business leaders) to evaluate the revitalization of the housing, commercial and industrial areas at the former Eaker Air Force Base (Delta Bridge Project leadership; this effort is duplicated in the Housing section).
   1) The committee should include representation from both the Economic Development and Housing Goal Teams.
   2) The committee will evaluate means of revitalizing the housing stock and commercial buildings at the former base.
   3) The evaluation will also assess the impacts of changing ADEQ and Brownfield regulations on the revitalization and remodeling of facilities.
   4) As part of this project, committee members will travel to the England Airpark in Alexandria, LA to review the elements of that plan which have led to its success.
   5) The committee should explore grant funding for this plan with the Office of Economic Adjustment at the Department of Defense.
   6) The Arkansas congressional delegation could be instrumental in finding federal funding for the project.

GOAL # 2: Entry level workforce from Mississippi County with the requisite soft and hard skills is available to meet staffing needs of all county employers, even for hospitality and retail. Per capita incomes are raised to the national average.

Rationale

Generally employers, especially those in hospitality and retail, observe that entry level workers lack the soft skills needed to function in the workforce. This observation is pervasive throughout the United States and is attributed to differences in work and social values of "Generation Y". The situation is more acute in Mississippi County.

Almost universally, major employers in Mississippi County report that the minimum education credential for employment is a high school diploma. Efforts that improve the graduation rate or that provide GED level educational credentials to adults will yield a larger pool of residents that are qualified for higher paying plant jobs.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Encourage educational institutions to include soft skills training in the academic calendar to insure that all high school students understand the importance of prompt attendance, the characteristics of good customer service and how to establish a reputation for reliability with employers. Educational outcomes from public schools are aligned with the hiring needs of business and industry.

B. Ask educational institutions, civic groups, and member churches of the Ministerial Alliances to make members aware of the WORK initiative at Arkansas Northeastern College. Members will be asked to identify individuals who could benefit from this training. This knowledge should extend from institutions to family member to targeted individual.

C. Request that civic groups and member churches of the Ministerial Alliance make their members aware of the day and night GED programs offered by Arkansas Northeastern College throughout Mississippi County. This should make individuals who could benefit from GED training aware of the resources currently available for enhancing their employability. This knowledge should extend from institutions to family member to targeted individual.

GOAL #3: Perceptions of cities, both from visitors and residents, is that roads are clean and well maintained with few dilapidated or vacant commercial properties existing.

Rationale

This goal overlaps goals and actions in the Housing and Quality of Life Goal Teams. Objectives and strategic actions for achieving this goal are imbedded in those sections of the plan.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Conduct an annual survey of residents in Mississippi County to gauge changes in perceptions about the cleanliness of cities in Mississippi County (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

B. Develop recommendations on tools that provide incentives for infill conversions of vacant commercial properties. The evaluation should include an assessment of incentives that have been proven effective for infill development in other communities (Economic Development Goal Team).

C. Develop recommendations on tools that provide incentives for the maintenance of downtown commercial properties. The recommendations should be based on an evaluation of effective programs in other communities (Economic Development Goal Team).

GOAL #4: Financial institutions are providing access to capital for small businesses.

Rationale

Members of the Economic Development Goal Team report that small businesses in Mississippi County have not always had access to capital for expansion. The wider availability of SBA loan guarantee programs and other programs for small business lending will partly address the need for small business capital, which is likely to grow as the population in the county begins to grow again.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Financial Institutions throughout Mississippi County will offer SBA guaranteed loans and other types of small business assistance

A. Survey lenders throughout Mississippi County to identify existing programs and lending services offered to small business (Delta Bridge Project leadership).

B. Add programs, as needed, to build the capacity of lenders to increase lending to small business, such as Individual Development Accounts for entrepreneurship and small business support (Mississippi County leadership).

C. Organize a task force to investigate small business and startup counseling needs in Mississippi County, including the demand for an incubator facility (Economic Development Goal Team).

GOAL #5: Workforce development and training institutions in Mississippi County have built a regional talent pool for in-demand occupations of existing and future industry.

Rationale

As the economy in Mississippi County changes and develops, occupational requirements will change as well. The objectives and actions in this goal overlap those listed in Goal #1 of the Education Goal Team. Only those objectives and actions that are not duplicated under the Education Goal Team are listed here.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Workforce development and training institutions will anticipate changing occupational needs in Mississippi County

A. Survey employers in Mississippi County every two years to identify emerging and growing occupational needs (Arkansas Northeastern College and other training providers).

B. Develop a task force to examine the opportunities of providing bachelors and professional degrees through distance learning or a local presence for technical disciplines such as engineering that are in demand because of industrial growth (Economic Development and Education Goal Teams).

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Vintage Greyhound Bus

GOAL #6: Cities in Mississippi County have become an entertainment and retail center for the region, offering a range of restaurants, retail stores, and entertainment venues. These developments have created a variety of new jobs for citizens of all levels of educational attainment.

Rationale

The expansion of high quality entertainment and retail venues in Mississippi County increases entry level job opportunities for residents lacking post-secondary credentials and provides new career opportunities for residents of the county. These activities also enhance the quality of life and livability of communities, which leads to higher population growth rates over time.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Commercial sites at high traffic locations will be available for new lifestyle and retail centers in Mississippi County cities

A. Work with property owners and realtors to identify properties that are available for retail real estate developers. Information about the properties will be packaged into a brochure for distribution among retail property developers and listed on www.arkansassiteselect.com (Economic Development Goal Team).

B. Collaborate with the Delta Center at Arkansas State University or other entities to identify retail real estate developers who have an interest in Mississippi County projects (Economic Development Goal Team).

C. Cooperate with city administrators and Chambers of Commerce in Mississippi County to contact developers with retail and lifestyle opportunities identified in B above (Economic Development Goal Team).

GOAL #7: Mississippi County has become an automotive sales destination for car shoppers within a 30 mile radius.

Rationale

The retail leakage study completed for this plan indicates that a significant opportunity exists to generate additional retail jobs in automotive sales. Interviews with dealers indicate that Mississippi County dealers should be competitive for auto sales within 30 miles of their stores.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Work with Chambers of Commerce of Mississippi County to identify retail sites that meet the needs of automotive dealers. The concept of an auto row should be explored as one of the location alternatives (Economic Development Goal Team).

B. Identify auto and truck brands that are popular in Mississippi County through an analysis of auto registrations. Brands that lack a local dealership will be identified and ranked (Economic Development Goal Team).

C. Consult how-to publications that describe the process of filling retail gaps, such as Leisure and Lifestyle Retailing by the International Council of Shopping Centers (Economic Development Goal Team).

D. Investigate the most appropriate method of reaching potential dealers with the facts and figures about the unmet needs in Mississippi County. The companies that are rated as the highest priority leads will be contacted in a coordinated fashion using the most appropriate marketing technique (Economic Development Goal Team).

GOAL #8: The downtowns in Mississippi County cities are vibrant centers of activity throughout the day and evening, offering retail, entertainment, and residential space.

Rationale

Vacant space in downtown is an obstacle to downtown development. Downtowns throughout the United States have become vibrant mixed-use centers of residential and lifestyle activity over the last decade, but this activity has not occurred in Mississippi County. "Generation Y" residents in particular are enthused at the opportunities to live and work in older downtown buildings because of their historic character and richness. Downtown development is a better opportunity today than it has been in past decades. However, nothing gets done without a plan of action, which is the first step in the process.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Downtowns in Blytheville and Osceola will adopt development strategies that are market driven for transforming the use of vacant downtown space into lifestyle, retail and residential space

A. Develop and implement strategies that provide incentives for redevelopment of the existing space into lifestyle, retail and residential space. The plans will identify zoning changes needed to expedite the redevelopment process (downtown development authorities in Osceola and Blytheville).

B. Offer façade grants, business IDAs, and tax advantaged financial tools for redevelopment in downtowns (Mississippi County lenders).

C. Work with downtown development authorities in Mississippi County to plan and support an annual series of events that attract residents to frequent downtowns to participate in social, entertainment and leisure activities (Economic Development Goal Team).

GOAL #9: Tourism, particularly natural and outdoor activities, has become an important component in the economic base of the county. The county has a strong tourism promotion program and organization.

Rationale

Tourism, particularly outdoor recreation, is a growing sector in the tourism economy, which has become one of the major employment-generating sectors in the U.S. economy. Mississippi County has significant assets to promote to tourists. Proximity to the large flow of international tourists visiting Memphis plus a significant flow of potential visitors that transit I-55 are reasons why this goal is of such importance to Mississippi County.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Mississippi County will develop a market driven plan to market itself to potential visitors as a site for outdoor recreation

A. Work with the Delta Center to develop an action strategy for implanting the tourism development recommendations made in their 2013 analysis of tourism venues (Economic Development Goal Team).

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B. Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce in Mississippi County to develop a funding plan for implementing the tourism plan (Economic Development Goal Team).

Objective 2: Mississippi County will form a well-funded county-wide entity to promote the county to tourists for outdoor recreation and its historic sites

A. Create a tourism promotion board to conduct promotional activities identified in the tourism plan. This will be done after funding sources are identified and an implementation plan is completed.

Thunder Bayou Golf Course — Blytheville

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Quality of Life and Health and Wellness

In 2023, individuals in Mississippi County feel that the community is safe, offers quality health care, and is a positive environment in which to live. Crime rates are at historic lows. The county is recognized as a model of effective crime prevention in Arkansas and beyond. Cities are clean, attractive, and well maintained. An abundance of indoor & outdoor recreational activities are available for individuals, families, and visitors of all ages and stages of life. Mississippi County has modern health care facilities with access to advanced specialty care in all fields including alternative medicine. Citizens are educated in health and wellness, and teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and drug abuse are decreasing.

Goals

1. Residents live and work in clean, safe and attractive residential and commercial areas.
2. Crime rates are below the urban index for Arkansas within each of the cities.
3. Citizens embrace the 'One County One Community' motto.
4. Outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities enhance the quality of life for visitors and residents of all ages.
5. Residents have access to quality health care professionals and are knowledgeable of the steps to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
6. Community health outcomes exceed the Arkansas average.

Dr. Thomas and Mrs. Freda Westbrook

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GOAL #1: Residents of Mississippi County live and work in clean, safe and attractive residential and commercial areas.

Rationale

The first impression that visitors and potential residents have of a community is its appearance. Unkempt communities turn off potential residents and deter visitors from enjoying its tourism activities. Appearance therefore affects the ability of a community to grow and develop.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Form chapters of Keep Arkansas Beautiful (KAB) to coordinate year-round volunteer cleanup and beautification activities in the cities (Cities in Mississippi County).

B. Establish a Joint Council of Keep America Beautiful Chapters. The Joint Council will develop a strategic plan for sustaining residential and commercial cleanup activities. The plan should have goals for measuring progress. A multi-year work plan of activities to harness volunteer cleanup resources should also be developed (Mississippi County Chapters and Joint Council of Keep Arkansas Beautiful).

C. Apply for grants and awards to fund its activities through the KAB national business sponsors program (KAB Joint Council).

D. Compete for national and state achievement awards to demonstrate that Mississippi County communities are leaders in community beautification. The national awards are a device for focusing community efforts toward beautification and cleanup (KAB Joint Council).

GOAL #2: Crime rates are below the urban index for Arkansas within each of the cities.

Rationale

High crime makes residents feel unsafe in their neighborhoods and it wastes resources. High crime can have long-term, detrimental effects on community development because it can adversely affect how residents behave and react to people and the changes within their communities. High crime rates reduce the number of new residents who move to communities, lowering population growth rates which eventually affect housing values.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Meet with city and county officials to solicit the active participation of law enforcement officials from all jurisdictions on the crime reduction committee.

B. Assemble a committee of community leaders to work with law enforcement agencies on crime reduction activities. The agenda for the committee should be to exchange information with law enforcement agencies on community actions and resources that could help reduce high crime rates. Tactics for crime prevention should continue and/or expand to include Neighborhood Watch and Crime Stoppers. The work of the committee should end with a Blueprint for Crime Reduction, which is a written plan with initiatives to address the community factors contributing to high crime rates.

C. Affiliate with the National Crime Prevention Council to enhance resources for addressing crime in Mississippi County (www.ncpc.org). The committee will continue to meet to implement community initiatives for crime reduction.

GOAL #3: Citizens in Mississippi County embrace the 'One County One Community' image.

Rationale

Mississippi County is the largest county in Arkansas in terms of geography. Historically, because of the distances between the various areas of the county, communities have had little interaction. Over time, the lack of interaction has created mistrust that hampers efforts to work jointly to solve county problems. The small population and limited resource require community leaders to work collectively to solve economic and community development problems. Efforts to work collaboratively must echo the public relations efforts that reinforce the "One County, One Community" directive.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Leaders in Mississippi County will meet on a scheduled basis to work collectively on problems that cross jurisdictional lines

A. Schedule quarterly meetings for public officials and business leaders to discuss community concerns that cross jurisdictional lines, such as code enforcement, transportation, economic development, housing and public safety. These meetings will include pre-set agendas determined by committee members. Minutes will be recorded.

Objective 2: Business and Community groups in Mississippi County will hold county-wide events and festivals

A. Establish a Joint Leadership Council that meets quarterly to discuss county-wide events and programs (Both Chambers of Commerce).

B. Encourage civic clubs in Mississippi County, such as Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis, to meet at least twice a year on a county-wide basis.

C. Convene meetings twice a year Ministerial Alliances leaders throughout Mississippi County.

D. Meet to identify and plan an annual county-wide social event that will bring together citizens from all areas of the county (Representatives of each of the groups identified in the action steps above.

Objective 3: A program of public and social media will support the development and deepening of the "One County, One Community" image for Mississippi County

A. Form a public relations and social media committee to develop a Mississippi County website, bulletin board of county events, and to organize a media relations program for the "One County, One Community" image. The committee should be tasked with developing materials for media promotion of the image. In its meetings, the committee should draft press releases and enlist media coverage of significant county-wide community events and activities (Delta Bridge Project).

Manila Waterpark

GOAL #4: Outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities enhance the quality of life for visitors and residents of all ages.

Rationale

There is a shortage of outdoor and indoor recreation facilities in Mississippi County. Such facilities, especially outdoor recreational assets, are a resource for attracting and keeping visitors. Progressive communities recognize this and invest in a variety of leisure activities both to enhance the quality of life for residents and to improve the tourism experience of visitors. Recreational pastimes vary with stages of life; different types of facilities are needed to support the needs of families with children, empty nest households and seniors, etc.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Communities in Mississippi County will develop master plans for recreational facilities

A: Organize a Recreation Task Force to work with city parks and recreation leaders, AR Game and Fish and others to evaluate recreational facilities and needs in Mississippi County. Organized events and programs for outdoor recreation and exercise and leisure should be included in this initiative. Existing master plans for parks and recreation should be incorporated into the evaluation. The plan should also investigate opportunities to expand programs in smaller communities. An example is the Charles Strong Recreation Center in Luxora.

B: Meet quarterly to review and coordinate activities. These activities will come from various recreation programs. A quarterly schedule of activities will be widely shared and publicized by the Delta Bridge Project (Recreation Task Force).

GOAL #5: Residents have access to quality health care professionals and are knowledgeable of the steps to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Rationale

Health care improvement is critical throughout the Mississippi Delta. Research shows that male residents of Mississippi County have life-spans that are a decade shorter than residents in Minnesota communities. Female residents in Mississippi County have shorter life-spans today than in 1988, making the county one of only 13 in the United States that has witnessed a decline in life expectancies since 1988.

Strategic Action Steps

A. Organize a task force to implement the recommendations for health care improvement identified in this plan. Supporters of this initiative should include members from both the urban and rural areas of Mississippi County (Health Task Force and Quality of Life).

B. Hold a meeting with state health care leaders from Arkansas to Mississippi County to evaluate how the new federal health care program will affect health care service providers in Mississippi County (Health Task Force).

C. Develop a health care delivery strategy that anticipates changes needed to adapt to health care reforms (Health Task Force).

D. Meet with major employers in Mississippi County to quantify the needs for urgent care and other health care services not currently offered. Citizens will be surveyed to determine their unmet needs for health care services. Based upon this input from the survey, a plan will be implemented to identify the means of attracting service providers to the county to fill the unmet needs (Health Task Force).

GOAL #6: Community health outcomes exceed the Arkansas average.

Strategic Action Steps

Objective 1: Citizens in Mississippi County will be well educated in health and wellness

A. Work with the Arkansas Department of Health to develop an ongoing public relations program to educate citizens on the importance of exercise and healthy eating for maintaining personal health and wellness. The program should enlist media allies in the initiative, such as food editors in local newspapers (Health Task Force).

B. Partner with the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) to implement a local version of the Healthy Delta Initiative. Preparation for this initiative should include a review of DRA's Growing a Healthy Workforce in the Delta: http://www.dra.gov/%21userfiles/editor/docs/HDI%20Growing%20a%20Healthy%20Workforce%20in%20the%20Delta%20Plan.pdf (Health Task Force).

C. Collaborate with local clinics and hospitals to organize annual health screenings in Mississippi County communities. The screenings would be supported by health care professionals who would check blood pressures and blood sugar levels; professional counselors would provide assistance to those who exhibit acute or looming health problems associated with high blood pressure or diabetes (Health Task Force).

D. Coordinate with the school districts to develop a county-wide organization to address childhood obesity within the school systems (Health Task Force).

Objective 2: Rates of teenage pregnancy in Mississippi County will have dropped below the national average

A. Develop a joint plan with the local office of the Arkansas Department of Health to lower teenage pregnancy rates. Allies would include local churches, faith based charities, and civic groups. Strategically, the plan should be modeled after the 11 evidence-based programs studied by the Office

of Adolescent Health (http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/db/programs.html). These programs were after-school and/or community-based initiative (Health Task Force).

B. Work with rural leaders to insure that services are available throughout Mississippi County (Health Task Force).

Objective 3: Rates of sexually transmitted diseases in Mississippi County will have dropped below the national average

A. Investigate the suitability of implementing HIV/AIDS prevention interventions similar to the ones studied by the National Resource Center for HIV/AIDS Prevention among Adolescents. Information on more than 20 programs that have been deemed successful is listed on the resource center's website: https://preventyouthhiv.org/category/topic/blackafrican-american (Health Task Force).

B. Work with rural leaders to insure that information and prevention services are available throughout Mississippi County (Health Task Force).

Objective 4: Rates of drug abuse in Mississippi County will have dropped below the national average

A. Meet with the County Health Department to develop a plan for research-based prevention. The plan should assess the prevalence and types of drug problems experienced by the community. Effective planning steps are listed on the NIH website: http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/preventing-drug-abuse-among-children-adolescents/chapter-2-planning-drug-abuse-prevention-in-community/how-can-0 (Health Task Force).

B. Investigate possible affiliation with nationally recognized programs aimed at drug prevention and treatment, such as African American Family Services (http://www.aafs.net/index.asp) (Health Task Force).

C. Implement a drug prevention program that is nationally recognized for its impact on community drug abuse, such as those listed by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/preventing-drug-abuse-among-children-adolescents/chapter-2-planning-drug-abuse-prevention-in-community/how-can-0). Research suggests that the family is the best institution for addressing drug abuse (Health Task Force).

D. Work with rural leaders to insure that services are available throughout Mississippi County (Health Task Force).

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Dental Program at ANC

Benchmarking Progress

Southern is committed to working with its community partners through the strategic planning process toward achieving the transformational goals of reducing poverty increasing employment, and raising educational attainment over the next generation. To ensure that the work results in life changing impacts, measurable indicators or metrics are being established to track and evaluate each community's progress toward these goals. The metrics will be based on verified, documented standards and updated regularly to show performance and inform program improvements; periodic updates will be at www.deltabridgeproject.com. The provisional benchmarks below illustrate this concept and the community level goals:

Population % change 2010-2013		**PROGRAM BENCHMARK:**
Mississippi County	-3.7%	***Reduce the variance between state and county population rate of change by 2.6 points***
State of Arkansas	1.5%	
US	2.4%	
Population change gap US/County	6.1%	
Population change gap State/County	5.2%	

Educational Attainment % of population w/Associates degree or higher		**PROGRAM BENCHMARK:**
Mississippi County	20.2%	***Reduce the variance between state and county % of population with an Associate degree or higher by 3.1%***
State of Arkansas	26.4%	
US	36.5%	
Educational Attainment gap County/US	16.3%	
Educational Attainment gap County/State	6.2%	

High School Graduation Rate		**PROGRAM BENCHMARK:**
Average All MS Co. Districts	86%	***Continue to improve the graduation rate in all districts in Mississippi County***
State of Arkansas	84.10%	
High School Graduation Gap County/State	1.9%	

Economic Development: Employment %		**PROGRAM BENCHMARK:**
Mississippi County	49.50%	***Reduce the variance between state and Coahoma County rate by 2.3%***
State of Arkansas	54.10%	
US	57.20%	
Employment gap County/US	7.70%	
Employment gap County/State	4.60%	

Poverty Rate		**PROGRAM BENCHMARK:**
Mississippi County	25.70%	***Reduce the variance between the state and Mississippi County poverty rates by 3.2%***
State of Arkansas	19.30%	
US	15.70%	
Poverty Rate Gap County/US	10.00%	
Poverty Rate Gap County/State	6.40%	

Sources: Education data, 2012, AR Department of Education; Unemployment data, 2012, Bureau of Labor Statistics; Poverty Rate, Educational Attainment, Employment Rate; 2010-2012 American Community Survey. Population Change 2010-2013 – United States Census Bureau Population Estimates

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Strategic Community Plan

Mississippi County, Ark.

(2013-2023)