

A NEW ECONOMIC MODEL

RETHINKING THE

delta

2008–2013 Regional Development Plan



DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY

OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL CO-CHAIRMAN

June, 2008

In 2002, the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) produced its first regional development plan. That plan helped guide the Authority in implementing its highly successful federal grant program.

As the Authority moves forward, however, it has become clear that the old economic and community development models are no longer sufficient for the knowledge-based economy of the new century. That's why we're releasing this updated regional development plan.

Most demographers believe there will be more jobs than there are qualified people to fill those jobs during the next three decades. Job creation won't be the issue. The issue will be which communities get the best jobs. The counties and parishes served by the DRA must approach economic and community development differently than in the past.

Development is no longer about industrial parks, industrial recruitment and the quest for just any new job. Today's development is a function of local leadership that builds on a community's attributes, fields a competitive workforce and attracts private investment. The DRA's regional development plan is an action plan that, if followed correctly, can produce gains in employment, personal income and quality of place.

We're pleased to release this plan and look forward to working with states, counties, parishes and cities as we collectively improve the lives of Delta residents.

Pete Johnson
Federal Co-Chairman

PJ:ps



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The suffering laid bare by Hurricane Katrina is not a phenomenon isolated to the Gulf Coast; it extends throughout one of North America's most fertile basins and along the country's most prominent river. Predominantly rural, the Mississippi River Delta region has the highest concentration of disadvantaged populations in the country. It faces profound concerns related to health, out-migration, and persistent poverty. Education and income levels are well below the U.S. average, and are lower than other rural areas.

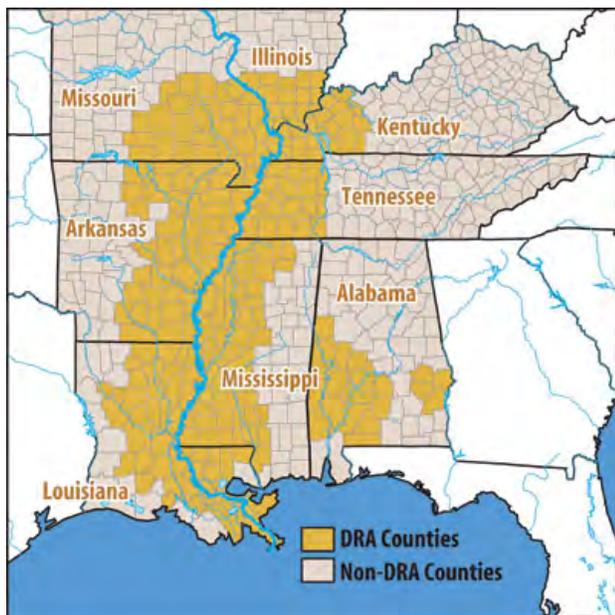
These facts about the Delta cast doubt on traditional development strategies. Economic development programs that encourage individual rural communities to offer cheap land, buildings, and labor have proven ineffective. To compound the problem, there are fewer and fewer prospects seeking industrial sites. Moreover, the Delta's



Hurricane Katrina aftermath

longstanding socioeconomic problems cannot be solved by spending more public money through the same delivery systems on the same programs. Economic and community development in the Delta must be rethought. Programs must be harmonized with the changing realities of talent, technology, and capital.

In recognition of the challenges faced by the region, Congress established the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), a federal-state partnership charged with enhancing economic development in the Mississippi Delta region. The *DRA Regional Development Plan* charts a new course for economic development in the Delta. It proposes an investment strategy and specific targets for the agency, based on a statistical model for how Delta communities grow. The plan is realistic about what federal programs should be doing. More importantly, however, it presents transparent, accountable, and achievable recommendations to deal with long-term and persistent issues of poverty and distress.



The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) is a federal-state partnership serving a 240-county/parish area encompassing portions of Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.



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Magnolia Hall; Natchez, Mississippi

resources and focus attention on the region. The DRA accomplishes its mission by fostering partnerships with public, private, and non-profit entities.

Encompassing 240 counties and parishes in portions of eight states, the Delta region has deep historical and cultural roots and is home to more than 9.5 million people. Relative to the overall economic well-being of the United States, the Delta region continues to experience pervasive economic and social distress. While many areas of the American South have prospered in the modern economy, growth and prosperity in the Delta has remained largely uneven. Indeed, only 10 of the region's 240 counties and parishes are not defined as economically distressed.

Under federal law, at least 75 percent of DRA funds must be invested in economically distressed counties and parishes. Additionally, half of the funds are earmarked for transportation and basic infrastructure projects. Despite the fact that the DRA is a relatively young federal agency — the Authority held its first board meeting on February 23, 2002 — it has already invested \$47.6 million in 333 projects

"The DRA should be a regional planner and federal investment coordinator rather than a grants administrator."
President George W. Bush

DRA OVERVIEW

Authorized under the Delta Regional Authority Act of 2000, the DRA serves as a unifying voice for economic and community development in the Mississippi River Delta. Led by a federal co-chairman and the governors of each participating state, the DRA seeks to leverage



Delta Cultural Center; Helena, Arkansas

in the eight-state region through its federal grant program. These funds have leveraged \$207 million in other public funds and \$481 million of private funds.

The DRA is committed to serving the Delta as a focal point for resources and an originator of ideas. The Authority recognizes that to be an effective agency, its mission cannot be limited to reducing unemployment and poverty in failing communities. It must instead concentrate on developing the assets needed to sustain long-term growth.

On the basis of this understanding, the Authority will work with its state, regional, local, and private-sector partners to build “critical mass” in communities throughout the region. Critical mass is central to this strategic plan. It represents the potential for sustainable growth and private sector investment.

VISION FOR THE DELTA

This plan represents a departure from traditional economic and community development models. It is a guide for championing and supporting creative approaches. The programs that emerge from this new perspective embrace the vision of the Delta as a region where people, communities, and businesses flourish. The

PLAN AT A GLANCE

Vision

After decades of decline, the Delta Region will achieve a pattern of sustained growth. Increasing **capital investment** and productivity will establish the region as a magnet for **talent and innovation**, and will nurture a **sense of place** within each community.

Mission

The DRA will serve as a regional focal point for resources, planning, and ideas. The DRA will be a catalyst for investment in the communities and in the people of the Mississippi Delta.

Strategic Goals

- **Goal 1:** Advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta workforce.
- **Goal 2:** Strengthen the Delta’s physical and digital connections to the global economy.
- **Goal 3:** Create critical mass within Delta communities.

Management Goal

Maintain organizational excellence and continue to be recognized as a steward of public resources.

plan contains prioritized goals, strategies, and actions that focus the Authority’s mission. It also emphasizes performance measures that reflect true progress for the Authority and for the region.

The challenge of this plan is to create a single vision that integrates existing programs while taking into account traditional performance measures. The challenge is met by a focus on the competitiveness of the Delta workforce.

Committing to a shared vision – one embraced both by the member states and Delta communities – is essential,



French Quarter; New Orleans, Louisiana

but it is not enough. In fact, it is increasingly obvious to economic development agencies that a healthy and educated workforce is a precondition of overall economic competitiveness. But the plan must answer one additional question. Most crucially – how can that workforce be retained? It is only against the backdrop of the out-migration of young and talented people that competitiveness can be understood. It is not enough to improve the region’s health, transportation infrastructure, and broadband access. Without the ability to retain and attract talent, the region will continue to decline.

What retains and attracts talent? The answer this plan gives is in the factors of critical mass. These factors add up to one thing: *quality of place*. The critical mass factors are discussed at length in the plan. More difficult to identify are the intangibles. What is it that makes us want to live in particular communities, that makes us feel that we want to invest in them, that draws young people? While difficult to quantify, this plan links critical mass indicators with survey data and focus groups on why young workers choose where they live. The results embody a blueprint for talent attraction.

The goals and strategies presented here are built on this foundation: The DRA will support those communities that commit to quality of place. It is in this way that the Delta can establish itself as a magnet for talent.

✓ ***Goal 1: Advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta workforce.***

This goal encompasses the vision of the plan with an aggressive agenda that includes the creation of a Delta Institute focused on addressing workforce competitiveness in the region. It also supports existing initiatives related to health, workforce training, and regional partnerships.

What is Quality of Place?

Economic development activities are often undertaken in a vacuum—as if “jobs” were somehow independent of the people who hold them. Workers need places to live, amenities, and educational opportunities. Quality housing, restaurants and good schools are not luxuries for today’s workforce—they are necessities. Communities that fail to address these concerns will fall behind those that do.

Much has been written about the importance of quality of life to the site selection process. Communities throughout the nation have positioned themselves by touting their advantages in this regard—good schools, safe streets, pleasant weather. We agree these factors are important. We take issue only with the narrowness of the focus. Quality of life assumes that everyone thrives in the same environment and is attracted to the same amenities. It assumes that current residents’ view of what makes a community would be shared by all.

By contrast, **quality of place** considers what is attractive to a range of residents, both old and new. The idea of quality of place accommodates growth and recognizes the benefits of change. Quality of place is about providing options, not just for current residents, but for those who will be residents in the future.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- DRA funded projects will be less directed to localized projects and will instead have greater sub-regional and/or **regional impact**.
- Stimulating **private investment** is the key to sustainable growth.
- Delta communities work with federal, state, regional, and local **partners**.
- The **private sector is engaged** and involved with DRA programs.
- **Creativity and innovation** are emphasized.
- Leadership is **recognized as a catalyst** for creating and sustaining growth.
- The **productivity of the region** is reinforced through health, workforce education, information technology, and multimodal and intermodal transportation.
- State and sub-state development plans will be **aligned and integrated** with the DRA regional development plan.



National Civil Rights Museum; Memphis, Tennessee

CONCLUSION

This fact must be stated: The DRA cannot focus its efforts and simultaneously retain a broad programmatic approach. The only realistic approach is to align DRA programs towards a common objective. That goal – and vision – is the competitiveness of the workforce.

The need for a competitive workforce does not require extensive documentation. It is the watchword of every business in America. To make it the focus of this strategic plan, however, is to recognize that the myriad of issues facing citizens in the eight target states is beyond the reach of the DRA. It means that health, information technology, and transportation are part of a common challenge – not goals in themselves. Of equal importance to the DRA, a competitive workforce meets the performance measures set for the agency and provides specific direction for all of the DRA’s programs.

Finally, it is the hope of the DRA Board that the approach presented in this plan will serve as a template for the states’ DRA plans, as well as for state programs directed at distressed rural areas in general.

✓ **Goal 2: Strengthen the Delta’s physical and digital connections to the global economy.**

The DRA’s continuing efforts to support telecommunications (*i*Delta), highways, and energy producing capacity are given a detailed review and connected to the larger concern for the regional workforce.

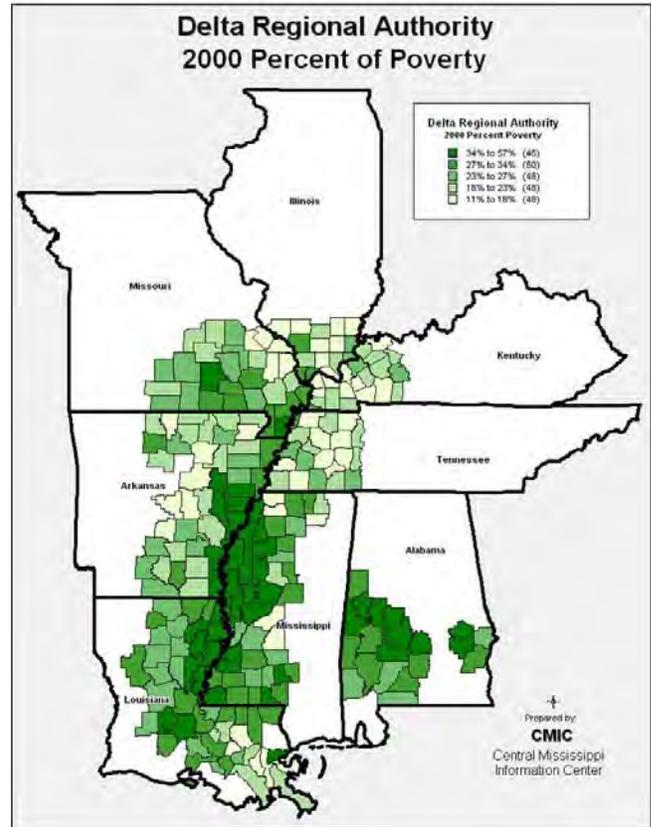
✓ **Goal 3: Create critical mass within Delta communities.**

The concept of “critical mass” reinforces what every economist and every resident already knows: growth requires jobs and investment. The critical mass that leads to economic vitality is measurable. After analyzing hundreds of variables, this plan emphasizes 10 key factors empirically shown to drive employment growth and linked to quality of place. It also provides the rational basis for future DRA investment.

THE CHALLENGE

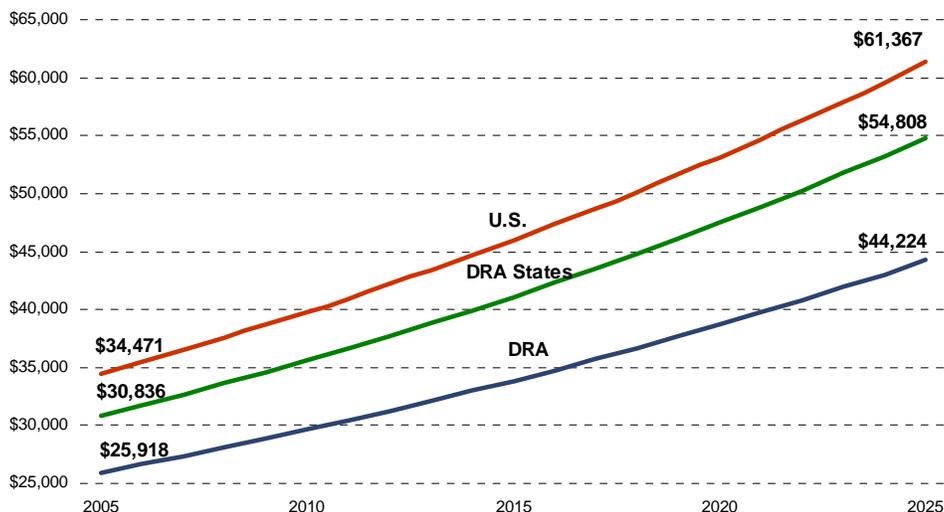
The economic challenges facing the Delta region are serious. Between 2000 and 2005, nominal per capita personal income (PCI) for the 240 counties and parishes of the DRA region grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.71 percent. In comparison, PCI for the eight DRA states and the U.S. grew at rates of 2.92 percent and 2.93 percent, respectively.

Moreover, projections of nominal per capita personal income growth based on the 2000-2005 averages show the income disparity between the region and the nation worsening (see figure below). By 2025, PCI for the U.S. is projected to reach \$61,367. For the DRA region, total per capita income is forecast to reach just \$44,224 over the same period. While PCI for the eight states would remain at 89 percent of the U.S. level in 2025, for the DRA region it would fall over the 20-year period from 75 percent to 72 percent. With shrinking opportunities to earn more money, Delta residents with marketable skills will likely migrate elsewhere in search of better paying jobs.



PROJECTED PER CAPITA INCOME

Based on the 5-year 2000-2005 CAGRs in current dollars.



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

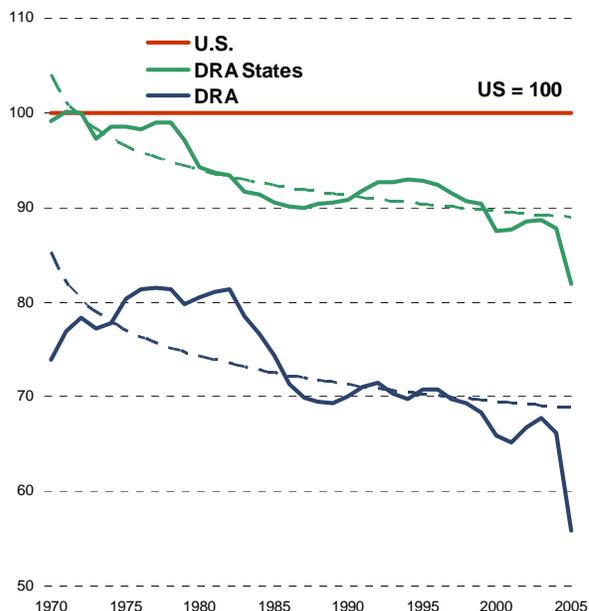


Why has income growth in the region fallen so far behind the rest of the nation, especially since the late 1990s? The most compelling economic answer has to do with a continuing dependence on a declining industrial and agricultural base. While much of the rest of the nation has made the transition to information technology and a growing professional service sector, the Delta region has persistently adhered to a failing economic model. Not surprisingly, this has forced many of the more skilled and educated rural Delta residents to leave for growing metro areas inside and outside the region. The remaining non-metro residents, especially those living in distressed areas, lack access to the resources needed to become economically competitive. As a consequence, communities fall further into decline and the population grows increasingly dependent upon public assistance.

To illustrate this point, the figure to the right shows the ratio of total wage and salary disbursements (earnings) to total government transfer payments for the DRA region and the eight DRA states. The annual ratio for the U.S. is set to 100 and represents the baseline ratio of earned income to transfer payments. The lower an index falls below 100, the greater the region's reliance on transfer payments relative to the rest of the country.

It is obvious that both the states and the region are growing increasingly dependent on transfer payments as a source of income. The sharp declines in the last year of the graph are likely the result of Hurricane Katrina related payments. Still, the overall trend of the past 35 years is clear: Delta residents are increasingly earning less income derived from work.

SOURCE-OF-INCOME INDEX



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
NOTE: Dashed lines are logarithmic 35-year trendlines for each geography.



Moving Forward from the 2002 Plan

Since 2002, the Delta Regional Authority has pursued the goals articulated in its 2002 Comprehensive Plan. The plan set out 22 long-, mid-, and short-term goals for the DRA. The four long-term goals are:

1. Increase the income levels of the individuals, families, and households within the geographic area of the Delta Regional Authority to an amount equal to or exceeding the eight states which comprise the region by the year 2025.
2. Decrease levels of unemployment and underemployment within the DRA to that of the eight states by the year 2025.
3. Decrease dependency on federal support and transfer payments within the region to a level similar to the entire eight states by the year 2025.
4. Identify and provide the infrastructure necessary to support both economic and domestic growth and development to the proper government.

In addition to these goals, the plan specifies rolling five-year regional outcome targets. These targets are related to income, unemployment, transfer payments, poverty, public assistance, education, single parent households, and labor participation.

With its modest budget and staff, however, the DRA can not realistically influence these unreasonable socio-economic targets.¹ The two figures above illustrate just how far the Delta is falling behind the states and the nation with respect to income and reliance on public

assistance. They show the gaps growing wider despite the billions of federal and state dollars invested in the region over decades.

The DRA recognizes that to be an effective agency, its mission cannot be limited to reducing unemployment and poverty in failing communities. It must instead concentrate on developing the assets needed to sustain long-term growth. Not all communities are in a position to benefit from this approach, but all communities benefit from rethinking their priorities. The model for this new concept is built around *critical mass communities*. Critical mass is defined by those factors that correlate most directly with sustainable employment gains. In other words, it is the intent of the DRA to reward those projects that have a proven relationship to future employment growth. This approach opens the door to a new way of thinking about community development and vitality. It also links directly to the expectation of the administration that employment growth is a primary metric of economic success. Among the most significant of these consequences is the need to narrow the focus of the agency to those activities that directly relate to job growth.

¹ In FY 06, the DRA operated with a budget of \$12 million and staff complement of 15. In comparison, the Appalachian Regional Commission operated with a budget of \$65 million (non-highway) and a staff of 59 (11 federal and 48 FTE non-federal trust fund employees).



THE RESPONSE

In response to these challenges, the DRA will reorganize its highly successful federal grant program to build upon a solid base that is poised for growth. The Authority's regional investment strategy will be organized around a set of competitive categorical grant funds dedicated to building critical mass within Delta communities. These "competitive categoricals" include:

- Health as an economic engine: The Healthy Delta campaign and other employer-based chronic disease education, prevention, and screening initiatives
- Information technology: Implementing the recommendations of the iDelta plan
- Transportation: Building the Delta Development Highway System
- Workforce education and leadership: Preparing and equipping Delta residents and communities to prosper in a knowledge-based economy
- Traditional localized projects: Supporting basic physical infrastructure, transportation, workforce training, and business development projects

The Authority's own limited resources are not enough to address all of these investment priorities. Therefore, in order to implement this program, the DRA will pursue interagency agreements with other federal agencies. Such agreements will allow the DRA to coordinate and direct federal investments in the Delta in such areas as health, transportation, IT, education, and workforce training. This approach also supports President Bush's directive that the DRA become a federal investments coordinator for the region.

The federal grant program will remain open to all communities in the Delta, regardless of size or wealth. The purpose is not to reward those communities that have already achieved critical mass; rather, it is to provide an investment strategy for those Delta communities that have not. Indeed, the DRA will continue adhering to the congressional mandate that 75 percent of total DRA funds are invested in distressed counties and 50 percent of grant funds are spent on transportation and infrastructure projects. DRA governors will also maintain complete flexibility and discretion in making grant decisions within each of the competitive categorical grant funds.

Local and regional organizations interested in competing for these funds will submit competitive proposals that detail the challenge they face, their response, how much they are requesting, and how funds will be spent.

In addition, the grant recipients will be required to meet DRA's pre-specified performance outcome measures. These performance measures will emphasize programmatic outcomes, rather than regional socio-economic measures such as income, poverty, and unemployment.



Critical Mass Communities

To help guide its future investment decisions, the DRA developed a statistical model for identifying the primary factors communities need to achieve sustainable growth. Distress factors provide no guidance to the DRA. The current model of identifying “distressed communities” encompasses 96 percent of the region’s counties and has limited value. The *Critical Mass* (CM) model correctly predicts the growth trajectory of 80 percent of the DRA’s 240 counties over a 20-year period. The critical mass approach provides the DRA with an empirical tool for prioritizing investments. It also offers communities in the Delta region a means to benchmark their progress toward community vitality.

What is Critical Mass?

The concept of critical mass refers to the specific amount of fissionable material required to start and sustain a nuclear reaction. This definition has been extended in daily use to refer to the point at which a thing—be it an idea, a process, or a communications network—becomes self-supporting.

Critical mass communities are those communities in which the necessary elements exist in sufficient quantity to create and sustain a vital economy.

Identifying these elements for the Delta region is at the heart of this plan.

Critical mass characteristics are directly linked to job creation. Among the many factors analyzed in this study, seven stand out at best being able to predict future employment gains. The figure below highlights the characteristics with the highest impact on jobs and then gives examples of how these characteristics can be measured. For example, we know that the greater the number of jobs in start-up companies, the better the local economy will perform overall.

These characteristics are also ranked by their impact on the economy. From the table we can see that being a healthy community has the single biggest impact on future employment growth. By paying close attention to these factors, Delta communities can dramatically change their economic prospects.

Critical Mass Community Growth Characteristics

Rank	Characteristics	Examples
1	Healthy People	Improving life expectancy
2	Expanding Population	People moving into a community
3	Skilled Workforce	Jobs for skilled labor and professional occupations
4	Multi-Cultural	Foreign-born people moving into a community
5	New Companies	Jobs in companies started in the last five years
6	Entrepreneurial Culture	Percentage of self-employed people in the workforce
7	Community-Wide Culture of Learning	Public school growth enrollment



Summary of Growth Characteristics

Variable	Explanation for Correlation	Relevance for DRA	Sample DRA Objectives
Share of workers in technical & professional occupations	A skilled workforce is at the heart of U.S. competitiveness. Places that can provide a pool of skilled workers will compete more effectively and their economies will grow.	Activities that encourage workforce readiness, education, or skill development should be supported.	Strengthen workforce education programs.
Change in life expectancy	Public health and education are the primary foundations of economic development. While healthy people live longer, they also have a greater potential to be more productive.	Any programs that enhance public health and education should be a high priority for the DRA.	Expand the Healthy Delta program.
Share of jobs in establishments started in last five years	New businesses grow faster than older ones.	Avoid allocating resources toward declining industries or processes. Long-term benefits are more likely to occur when the focus is on technologies that enhance competitiveness, whether in emerging industries or mature ones.	Support growth-oriented entrepreneurship programs.
Share of workers who are self-employed	When economies are growing they tend to capitalize more on independent contractors than when they are stagnant. Also, large corporations contract out for many professional services, creating opportunities for skilled professionals seeking economic independence.	One of the biggest needs for self-employed professionals is access to IT resources and broadband connectivity. Entrepreneurs choose to locate in communities that offer a broad range of amenities.	Support entrepreneurship mentoring networks.
Change in public school enrollment	Job creation spurs in-migration. More families mean more students in local schools.	Communities that offer high quality educational opportunities and housing will grow faster. Neighborhoods and employment centers must connect efficiently with schools.	Advance the Delta initiative.
Share of population that is foreign-born	Depending on the type of jobs available, immigrants may be encouraged to move into a community. These immigrants can be highly skilled tradesmen or professionals.	Communities that welcome and seek to integrate immigrants should be supported. Immigrants often bring energy and vitality to a region's economy.	Continue J-1 Visa waiver program for medical professionals.
Domestic in-migration	Job creation spurs in-migration. Depending on the type of jobs available, individuals from other counties or states may be encouraged to move into a community.	While it may be true that people migrate to communities that offer economic opportunity, that opportunity must be coupled with amenities attractive to outsiders.	Enhance the quality of place of Delta communities.
Patents per capita	Patents are a measurable proxy for innovation, and innovation is a primary generator of productivity and job growth	Any activities, corporate or academic, that encourage patent generation specifically or innovation in general should be supported.	Establish a Delta Institute.
Total establishment employment	Jobs are added at a faster rate in larger counties than in smaller ones.	Job growth is a primary metric of critical mass	Promote economic diversification.



Workforce Competitiveness

For this regional development plan, the DRA set out to address Delta issues in a candid way. That meant being realistic about what federal programs can, and cannot, do to address long-term and persistent issues of poverty. It also meant being realistic about the mandate and resources of the DRA itself. As with most governmental agencies, the final verdict of what counts as success is to be found in the measures by which that agency is evaluated. In the case of the DRA, those measures relate entirely to increasing jobs and private investment. In other words, DRA measures are economic development measures. Whatever programs and initiatives, whatever conferences or policy papers, the final judgment would rest with jobs and private sector involvement. These facts presented a challenge to the planning process: how to create a single vision that would encompass existing programs while taking into account OMB performance measures. The conclusion arrived at in this plan was to focus on the productivity of the Delta workforce. What does that conclusion mean, and what follows from it?

The need for a competitive workforce does not require extensive documentation. It is the watchword of every business in America. To make it the focus of the strategic plan, however, is to recognize that the myriad of issues facing citizens in the eight target states are beyond the reach of the DRA. It meant that **health, information technology, and transportation** should be dealt with as part of a common challenge – not as goals in themselves. There are three reasons the plan chooses not to address these as separate and discrete issues:

1. Each of these areas, with the exception of information technology, has large and well-established constituencies. There are federal and state departments already dedicated to them with separate funding sources. However effective these agencies may or may not be, they have a long history of involvement with the Delta.
2. The challenges and costs associated with these areas are extraordinarily complex. Even if they were within the mandate of the DRA, they could not be resolved by more federal spending, or even by a greater coordination of federal effort.
3. Finally, success towards resolving these challenges – even if that were possible – would have to conform to entirely different performance measures.

This fact must be stated: The DRA cannot focus its efforts and simultaneously retain a broad programmatic approach. The only realistic approach is to align DRA programs towards a common objective. That goal – and vision – is the competitiveness of the workforce.

Why should having a competitive workforce be the vision? Because it meets the performance measures set for the agency, it addresses the needs of Delta businesses, and it can provide a specific direction for all of the DRA's programs. The agency retains its focus, however, only by committing to the idea that health, information technology, and transportation and all the other programs are a means to an end. That end is reflected in the competitiveness of the workforce.



Quality of Place

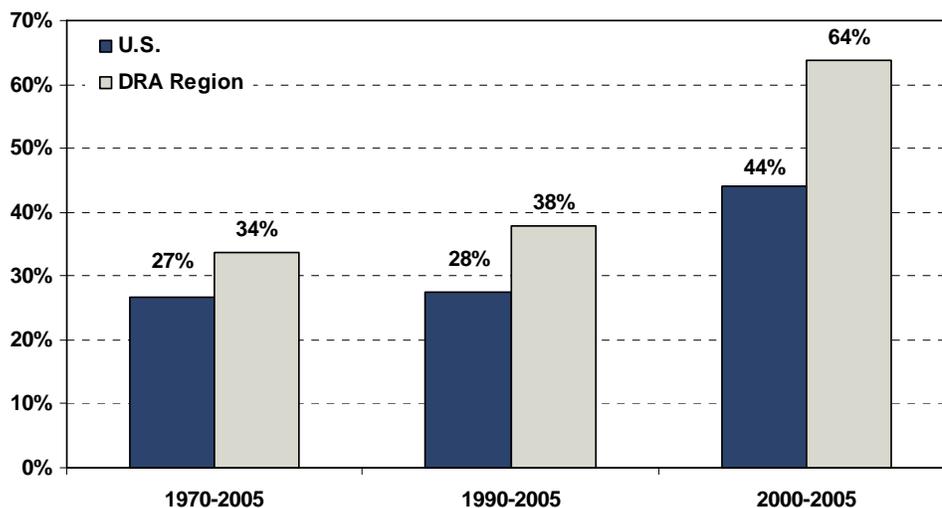
The growth characteristics show that a healthy and technically skilled workforce is a precondition of overall economic competitiveness. But the regional development plan must answer one additional question. Most crucially – how can that workforce be retained? It is only against the backdrop of the out-migration of young and talented people that competitiveness can be understood. It is not enough to have information technology, highway, and diabetes reduction programs. Without the ability to retain and attract talent, the region will continue to decline.

For the Delta, this point is explicitly illustrated in the figure below. Shown are the percentages of U.S. and DRA counties that experienced no (zero or negative) population growth for three time periods since 1970. The data reveal the percentage of no-growth counties for both the U.S. and the DRA region increasing over time. This is not surprising, given the concentration of population created by the continuing national trend toward urbanization.

Most troublesome for the Delta region, however, is the widening disparity between the region and the U.S. This growing chasm culminates in the first five years of this decade. Between 2000 and 2005, 64 percent of counties in the DRA territory did not experience population growth, compared to 44 percent of U.S. counties.

While critical mass is an important analytical tool for identifying the factors that support job growth, no community will ever attract people and investment by touting its growth characteristics. This requires something more visceral. *Quality of place* provides that framework. In communities across the United States and in Delta states particularly, there has been an enthusiastic embrace of this concept. Emphasis on “quality of life” no longer addresses what is required for rural communities to grow. Quality of life emphasizes the values of the existing population. The concept of place accentuates the attributes that attract new talent. Uniting place with creative programs will promote investment, economic diversification, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Percentage of Counties Experiencing No Population Growth





Education

For years, economic development has been willing to abdicate responsibility for improving local public school systems. It has done this not because state or local economic development councils were indifferent to the declining quality of schools in struggling areas, but because this challenge was not core to their own mission. However under-achieving the students may have become, local economic development organizations knew that their performance was measured by jobs, not test scores. Hence, inexpensive land and generous incentives packages were the preferred tools.

Then something changed. Businesses began sounding the alarm on a workforce that was inadequate for an economy tied to services and information technology. Even the shrinking manufacturing sector demanded higher skilled workers to operate sophisticated equipment and machinery. Their concern was amplified by a measured decline in basic skills, from reading comprehension to simple arithmetic ability. It became clear to private industry that tax incentives, land availability, and subsidized infrastructure meant little without a skilled workforce. We have reached the point where this issue is fundamental to economic growth.

The initial economic development response to private industry was to make a broader commitment to workforce skills training. Unfortunately, for many areas of the Delta region, that investment in time and money did not return the expected dividends. There were two reasons for this:

1. It made little sense to train people for advanced workplace demands when they had no mastery of basic skills.
2. In those cases where programs were effective, there was no way of ensuring that people would stay in the area after they had completed their training.

The lessons learned were that traditional workforce training efforts do not resolve local education problems and do not directly meet the needs of businesses. While these programs certainly have value, they are not far-reaching enough to address the labor crisis businesses face. If economic development is to be successful in the Delta, it must acknowledge the effects of failing schools.

What does it mean, however, to acknowledge a crisis? In this case it means that local development organizations cannot pretend that business recruitment can succeed in the absence of a qualified workforce. And a qualified workforce requires a school system that prepares students to compete in a global economy.

Improving public schools is largely a local and state matter and the Authority's ability to bolster struggling schools is limited. Still, the DRA is committed to improving workforce education in the Delta. This involves supporting partnerships between economic development organizations, the business community, and other stakeholders concerned with the quality of the region's existing and future workforce. In Appendix B, the Economic Development Toolkit, we highlight creative responses to the education challenge.



Health as a Regional Priority

While public health is often taken for granted in the U.S., stabilizing public health often comes before literacy and education as a policy priority in the least developed countries. The relationship between health and economic development goes beyond the fact that healthy people live longer and are therefore able to be productive members of society longer. They also show up regularly for work and they cost their employers less in health care. Their productivity is higher.

The leadership of the DRA understands how important a region's health care is to its economy. That's why, at a meeting in December 2005, the DRA board voted to devote almost \$1 million to begin a diabetes education and prevention program. Known as the Healthy Delta program, this effort will attempt to bring about real change, starting with diabetes.

Coordination with State DRA Plans

Under federal law, each DRA member state is required to submit a development plan for the counties of the DRA territory represented by that state. In accordance, each member state has submitted a regional development plan that corresponds to the 2002 DRA Comprehensive Action Plan. However, because this new DRA regional development plan represents a significant departure from the previous plan, each state will be required to update their existing state DRA plan. This will allow the states to conform to the goals, objectives, and strategies established in this new regional development plan. Each state's DRA plan should also be a sub-set of its statewide plan. The DRA will then ask that each state submit annual updates to DRA in the form of a strategy statement. A sample template for the annual strategy statement is provided as an appendix.

Local Partners

In order for the DRA to promote sustainable economic growth in the Delta, it must work in concert with its local partners. The Authority's critical mass community model has identified the primary factors driving job growth. It is up to local and regional partners to identify and implement the specific programs that address these issues. Key to this process are the 44 local development districts (LDDs). They serve as the Authority's "distribution system." The LDDs promote the DRA federal grant program to local and regional organizations and provide technical assistance to grant applicants. Accordingly, the LDDs are responsible for ensuring the suitability, completeness, and quality of grant applications, and sign their own federal grant application agreeing to do so for compensation. It is, therefore, critical that regional economic development strategic plans of the LDDs also reflect the DRA's investment priorities. The DRA will work with the 44 districts to incorporate the components of critical mass into their regional development plans and initiatives, thereby aligning strategic federal, state, regional, and local economic development initiatives in the Delta.

Additional Considerations

Even the best strategic plans face difficult hurdles to implementation. *The most serious of these may be internal to the organization.* The sense that "we tried this before and it failed," or that "no one will buy into this" overshadow the pressing need for a creative approach. It is the goal of the DRA that this regional development plan be unfettered by these concerns. As a consequence, it bears saying what this plan does *not* propose to do. Each of the points below are held by strong constituencies and must be taken seriously. The debate



about what can change the downward trajectory of the Delta is one that we must have, and that we must continue to revisit on a regular basis.

- The plan does not recommend industrial recruitment as a solution to unemployment.

Industrial recruitment is the traditional economic development solution to high unemployment. But it ignores the fact that employment gains do not come from the manufacturing sector. Communities can no longer assume that manufacturing companies will drive their economy.

- The plan does not assume that training workers, or advancing leadership, can ensure that the talented young people of the Delta will remain in their communities.

It is a fact conveniently ignored by workforce training organizations that local opportunity fails to anchor talented workers. More typically, as soon as motivated individuals acquire skills and education, they leave the region for flourishing tech centers elsewhere in the country.

- The plan does not recommend actions that compromise the efforts of organizations already operating in the region.

*The DRA is not the only federal or state agency investing in the Delta. While that may be entirely obvious, it is vital that it not be ignored. From health to transportation, from technology to education, from housing to economic development, federal and state agencies continue to spend heavily in the eight Delta states. **The success of the DRA lies along two paths: creative approaches and cooperative planning.***

- While the plan narrows the focus of the DRA, it respects the importance of continuity and support for existing initiatives.

The DRA may be a young agency, but it has a base and a constituency whose needs must be recognized.

Finally, the plan recognizes that while poverty is not unique to the Delta, the mix of historical injustice and racial inequality poses enormous burdens. These burdens, however, cannot be resolved by any governmental agency. They require private investment and individual initiative in equal measure.



SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES

Goal 1: Advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta workforce.

Objective 1.1: Improve the health of the region's workforce through the Healthy Delta initiative.

Strategies

- Work with employers and other regional partners to develop innovative worksite, retail-site, and school-based programs designed to prevent and reduce the incidence of chronic diseases within the workforce, including such conditions as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.
- Continue diabetes prevention, education, and outreach efforts (public relations, website, paid media, grassroots, community health events, minority and faith-based programs, inbound diabetes information call center).
- Work with major employers and key public sector officials in the region to organize a Healthy Delta regional summit that addresses new public-private strategies and approaches for improving the health and productivity of the Delta's workforce.

Objective 1.2: Expand access to healthcare professionals.

Strategies

- Continue bringing new physicians to the region through the Delta Doctors J-1 Visa Waiver program.

- Work with major regional employers to establish worksite healthcare clinics and other innovative prevention and wellness programs.
- Work with regional partners to expand healthcare services education and training programs in the region. Potential partners include universities, medical schools, hospitals, and community health and education centers.
- Support efforts to provide rural health hospitals, clinics, and other primary care providers with broadband Internet access to advance the use of information technology. This strategy is a key component of the *iDelta* initiative described in Goal 2.

Objective 1.3: Establish a Delta Institute.

Strategies

- In the fourth year of the five-year plan, conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the specific challenges in the region the Institute should address as well as the public and private resources available to support it.
- Seek the active support of the private sector. Begin by commissioning a survey of regional employers to gauge their views on the most pressing workforce issues in the region. These findings should then be presented as part of a DRA-organized regional summit on workforce productivity. In addition, launch a capital campaign aimed at major employers, corporate foundations, and private foundations with a two-year goal of raising \$15 million in private funds to support the Institute and its activities.



- Determine if the institute will be independent or affiliated with an existing institution. A major research university (or university consortium) may form the basis of a partnership. This decision will affect other considerations such as legal structure and location.
- Obtain public sector support at the state and federal levels. Meet with governors and key congressional leaders of the eight states to generate official support for the institute.

Objective 1.4: Work with other regional partners to improve the employability and productivity of Delta residents.

Strategies

- Continue supporting the Pre-Employment Training Program.
- Work with current and future WIRED regions in the Delta to serve as a coordinator and facilitator of workforce transformation grants. Current WIRED designees in the Delta include the Western Alabama, Eastern Mississippi, and Arkansas Delta regions.

Objective 1.5: Strengthen workforce education and professional skills programs.

Strategies

- Work with regional community colleges and local school districts to align vocational education and professional certification programs with local, regional, and statewide industry cluster development efforts.

- Support efforts to link and integrate community colleges with community and regional economic development efforts.
- Support employer-based training and education programs that equip people to work in technical and professional occupations.
- Support partnerships between industry and workforce training providers that offer skills training programs in emerging technology fields.

Goal 2: Strengthen the Delta's physical and digital connections to the global economy.

Objective 2.1: Advance the Delta initiative.

Strategies

- Work with all Local Development Districts (LDDs) to use GIS systems. Place emphasis on regional initiatives in health, transportation, economic and community development, homeland security, disaster pre-event planning and recovery.
- Augment the expansion of healthcare access to all Delta citizens through the use of information technology. Emphasize *telehealth* applications that include basic and/or specialized clinical services, professional continuing education, and improved medical practice management.
- Work to ensure that all citizens in the DRA region will have access to broadband Internet in their community, and the knowledge and training to operate in the Internet environment.
- Improve the awareness of all citizens and businesses of the value of technology to their economic future and the resources available to achieve success.



- Support the use of distance education capabilities in all schools and the training of personnel to manage the operations.
- Enhance workforce development in the Delta by providing all adults access to training in computer literacy, workforce skills, and business practices such as e-commerce and entrepreneurship.
- Work with all communities in the region to develop and maintain Internet home pages that provide information and services to their citizens, as well as the public outside the communities.
- Create a DRA *i*Delta Center to address access and awareness issues in the region and to implement the recommendations of the *i*Delta report.

Objective 2.2: Build the Delta Development Highway System (DDHS).

Strategies

- Work with federal and state transportation officials to secure long-term funding for the planning and construction of major corridors of the DDHS.
- Coordinate with federal and state transportation officials to overcome technical, financial, legal, and political barriers to the development of the DDHS.
- Facilitate construction of state-line crossings of DDHS corridors.
- Incorporate transportation improvements into the DDHS – such as for a major economic development project in the DRA region.

- Advance a development approach for the DDHS that respects local cultural and economic interests and preserves the natural resources of the Delta.

Objective 2.3: Expand intermodal and multimodal transportation nodes and networks.

Strategies

- Prepare an overall multimodal transportation plan for the region. The plan will assess the transportation assets in the 240 counties and parishes of the DRA – highways, bridges, railroads, airports, river ports, ocean ports and more.
- Support the development of intermodal transportation networks that allow for the movement of international shipments via container using water, air and land modes.

Objective 2.4: Expand the region's energy infrastructure and production capacity.

Strategies

- Fund a next-step feasibility study for new energy refining capacity and facilities in the Delta.
- Support planning and policies that increase the Delta's capacity to produce, transport, and refine energy resources.
- Create a plan to develop the DRA Center for Bio-Technology and Alternate Fuels. The purpose of the center will be to initiate, coordinate and enhance biotech activities within the DRA region, as well as to provide a clearinghouse of information available for biotech projects.



Goal 3: Create critical mass within Delta communities.

Objective 3.1: Enhance the quality of place of Delta communities.

Strategies

- Support downtown revitalization efforts in Delta communities.
- Support local-level grant research, writing, and administration training.
- Enhance the quality, safety, and affordability of the region's housing stock.
- Support the construction and expansion of local/regional medical facilities.
- Work to protect the region's environmental assets.
- Support the development and marketing of local entertainment, recreation, cultural, and tourism assets.
- Expand the application of green technologies in the region.

Objective 3.2: Promote innovation and diversification within local and regional economies.

Strategies

- Support local and regional efforts to recruit and retain companies that employ advanced processes and technologies.
- Support local programs that assist existing companies in adopting new technologies and processes.

Objective 3.3: Support growth-oriented entrepreneurship.

Strategies

- Support entrepreneur education, training, and support programs.
- Support mentoring and networking events that bring together entrepreneurs, potential investors, and service providers.
- Support local efforts to form angel networks with the goal of linking and educating both investors and entrepreneurs on the risks and rewards of angel and venture capital.

Objective 3.4: Foster local leadership.

Strategies

- Continue training new leaders in the region through the Delta Leadership Institute (DLI).
- Encourage graduates to participate in DLI alumni networks and events.
- Support local leadership training initiatives launched by DLI graduates.

Objective 3.5: Build and augment basic infrastructure.

Strategies

- Support the construction and extension of basic infrastructure and services within exurban communities situated in the path of fast-moving metropolitan growth.
- Leverage federal, state, local, and private investments to develop and improve water and wastewater systems in distressed counties in region.



- Support the construction of last-mile infrastructure and transportation linkages to local economic development assets.

Management Goal: Maintain organizational excellence and continue to be recognized as a steward of public resources.

Initiatives

- Create an advisory council consisting of the region's corporate foundations and business leaders. The role of the council should be to advise the DRA – from the private sector perspective – on such matters as workforce productivity, information technology, transportation, and entrepreneurship.
- Pursue interagency agreements with other federal agencies to achieve its regional initiatives.
- Evaluate the DRA's progress in achieving its performance goals. This review should be conducted annually by an independent party.
- Improve efficiency through information technology, including online grant applications and scoring system.



GOAL 1

Priority Initiatives:

- **Healthy Delta**
- **Delta Doctors**
- **Delta Institute**

ADVANCE THE PRODUCTIVITY AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS OF THE DELTA WORKFORCE.

Introduction

The economic competitiveness of rural areas is no longer assured through natural resources and inexpensive labor. The Delta region, predominantly rural and still largely agricultural, must develop and retain the talent necessary to find a place in a global economy – an economy in which knowledge and innovation are rewarded. Moreover, developing talent encompasses more than providing a technically skilled workforce; it entails educated, healthy, and

motivated citizens who elevate the communities they live in and the enterprises they work for.

In order for the Delta to achieve a higher level of economic vitality, it must have a healthy and educated population. Poor health diminishes economic output by reducing both labor productivity and the relative size of the labor force. Low educational attainment suppresses income potential and is increasingly linked to lower life expectancy.

Recognizing these connections, the DRA is working to enhance the competitiveness of the people of the Delta. This is being accomplished by sponsoring region-wide initiatives designed to address issues of chronic disease, healthcare access, adult literacy, and workforce productivity. Moreover, the DRA is forming new partnerships with the private sector and other regional partners to apply new ideas and delivery methods for solving these longstanding problems.



OBJECTIVES

1.1 Improve the health of the region's workforce through the Healthy Delta initiative.

The federal co-chairman and the board members representing the eight states have identified health as a major focus of the Authority. The growing incidence of chronic disease is a formidable challenge for the region and for the nation. The CDC estimates that in 2005 20.8 million Americans – 7 percent of the population – had diabetes. Within DRA states, 2.57 million people are estimated to suffer from diabetes.

Age-Adjusted Prevalence of Diagnosed Diabetes per 100 Adult Population for the Delta, 1994 and 2005				
	1994	2005	1994-2005 Pct. Chg.	2005 U.S. Rank
Alabama	4.2	8.6	104.8%	5
Arkansas	5.2	7.2	38.5%	21
Illinois	5.4	7.0	29.6%	25
Kentucky	3.9	8.0	105.1%	12
Louisiana	6.1	8.7	42.6%	4
Mississippi	6.1	9.6	57.4%	2
Missouri	4.9	7.2	46.9%	23
Tennessee	5.4	8.5	57.4%	6

Source: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

The productivity costs to the nation of diabetes are severe. According to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), poorly treated diabetes results in the loss of 88 million disability days per year. The ADA estimates that complications from diabetes in 2002 cost the nation \$132 billion in lost productivity and medical costs. This figure is projected to rise to \$156 billion by 2010 and to \$192 billion by 2020.

Diabetes and the U.S. Economy

"Eliminating or reducing the health problems caused by diabetes through factors such as better access to preventative care, more widespread diagnosis, more intensive disease management, and the advent of new medical technologies could significantly improve the quality of life for people with diabetes and their families while at the same time potentially reducing national expenditures for health care services and increasing productivity in the U.S. Economy."

–*Diabetes Care*, Vol. 26, Number 3, March 2003

In response to this national and regional epidemic, the DRA has launched the Healthy Delta initiative (www.healthydelta.com). The mission of Healthy Delta is to treat health as an economic engine. The initial goals of Healthy Delta include:

- Improve health in general
- Improve diabetes in particular
- Position DRA as the catalyst to move citizens into the healthcare system
- Provide an access point for entry
- Track results

The initial phase has focused on educating residents of the Delta region about the dangers and symptoms of diabetes and encouraging those suffering from the disease to seek treatment. The next phase of Healthy Delta will involve greater engagement with the private sector and other regional partners. A joint effort is essential in the fight against diabetes and other chronic diseases.



Strategies

- Work with employers and other regional partners to develop innovative worksite, retail-site, and school-based programs designed to prevent and reduce the incidence of chronic diseases within the workforce, including such conditions as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.
- Continue diabetes prevention, education, and outreach efforts (public relations, website, paid media, grassroots, community health events, minority and faith-based programs, inbound diabetes information call center).
- Work with major employers and key public sector officials in the region to organize a Healthy Delta regional summit that addresses new public-private strategies and approaches for improving the health and productivity of the Delta’s workforce.

Innovative Employer Programs

In response to the skyrocketing employee healthcare costs, several major U.S. employers have begun taking matters into their own hands by developing innovative employer-based disease prevention and wellness programs. Companies such as Dow, Pitney Bowes, and Lands End offer their employees worksite medical clinics, weight management and smoking cessation assistance, and price reductions for diabetes and asthma drugs. The direct and indirect savings to these companies has been significant. Pitney Bowes, for example, has experienced a 66 percent drop in the average length of disability leave and a 19 percent reduction in lost workdays.

1.2 Expand access to healthcare professionals.

Access to quality healthcare is a significant challenge facing rural America, especially among the poorest and most disadvantaged regions. Many medically underserved areas struggle to recruit and retain high quality physicians, nurses, and other medical specialists. Moreover, local residents who are trained for such occupations often choose to live in more urban and affluent areas.

The lack of health care providers and services, combined with greater financial and geographic barriers common to rural areas, condemns many rural Americans to higher rates of chronic disease, physical limitations, and premature death. The number of physicians in the Delta region is 23 percent lower than in the rest of the nation. The number of dentists in the Delta is 24 percent lower.

Number of Physicians per 10,000 Civilian Population, 2004		
State	Number	U.S. Rank
Illinois	27.2	13
Missouri	25.7	22
Louisiana	25.3	25
Kentucky	22.7	35
Alabama	21.1	43
Arkansas	20.5	46
Mississippi	18.4	50
U.S.	26.3	--
Includes the 50 states and District of Columbia		
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <i>Health, United States, 2006</i>		



To increase the numbers of physicians serving Delta residents, the Authority officially launched the Delta Doctors program in 2004. The program allows foreign physicians who are trained in the United States to work in medically underserved areas. The DRA can recommend visa waivers to the U.S. State Department for foreign-born medical school graduates who commit to providing primary and specialty to underserved populations for three years.

Strategies

- Continue bringing new physicians to the region through the Delta Doctors J-1 Visa Waiver program.
- Work with major regional employers to establish worksite healthcare clinics and other innovative prevention and wellness programs.
- Work with regional partners to expand healthcare services education and training programs in the region. Potential partners include universities, medical schools, hospitals, and community health and education centers.
- Support efforts to provide rural health hospitals, clinics, and other primary care providers with broadband Internet access to advance the use of information technology. This strategy is a key component of the *iDelta* initiative described in Goal 2.

1.3 Establish a Delta Institute

There is a very real danger that the Delta region will drift from the national consciousness. Despite the attention focused on Louisiana and Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Delta – with all of its historical resonance – is easily discounted. *There is little doubt that this region represents the single greatest concentration of need in the country. The purpose of a Delta Institute is to focus attention on this situation.*

The idea of a regional institute is not unique. What similar institutes have in common is the ability to focus resources on a common set of problems. The problems, in the case of the Delta, are profound and nearly intractable. Without a committed response to these issues, the Delta will move rapidly from a region in crisis to a national disgrace.

Potential Role for the Delta Institute

- **Mission:** To serve as a regional interdisciplinary, non-partisan think tank that identifies innovative workforce productivity solutions for the Delta.
- **Products:** Data, reports, maps, research tools, policy briefs, listserv.
- **Research support:** Endowments, fellowships, data center, symposiums and seminars, seed grants, website hosting.
- **Areas of study:** Workforce productivity, innovation



Institutes serve other purposes as well. They bring together talent. They solve problems. They leverage funding.

The intersection of the crisis in which the Delta finds itself and the traditional role of an institute lies in the growing national workforce shortage. In other words, a trained and educated talent pool must be the primary task set by the institute. Certainly, this problem has national dimension. It is equally clear, however, that a successful resolution to the problem will not be realized by our dynamic technology centers – Silicon Valley, Research Triangle, Boston, Austin, or Phoenix. These communities are talent magnets. They cannot resolve the national situation because, ironically, they are part of the problem. Without a broader base of skilled workers, not just in our technology centers but throughout rural America – and particularly in the Delta – we are shortchanging our national potential.

The institute must address both the shrinking proportion of workers as well as the need for a *talented* workforce. In this context, “talented” means motivated, educated, and skilled – essentially in that order. With health as an essential precondition, it is incumbent on us to know what the next steps will be. This takes us to the heart of the institute’s purpose: the realization that the workforce crisis cannot be solved by the public sector alone. The effectiveness of the institute will depend on the active participation of major corporations operating in the Delta. While public sector organizations such as education and government are important, the emphasis should be placed on the private sector. In other words, the institute cannot meet its objectives

by re-packaging existing workforce development ideas and training programs.

Among the key corporations active in all of the Delta states are the following:

- **Major medical centers:** Medical centers dominate employment in all states, from Ochsner in Louisiana, Baptist Health in Arkansas, to University Hospital in Mississippi. They are projected to add significant number of employees over the next decade. Close cooperation with these institutions is essential for the success of the institute and for the larger goal of employment growth in the entire Delta region.
- **Large retailers:** Dominated by Wal-Mart, this category also represents one of the highest demand professions (cashiers and sales assistance).
- **National level manufacturers and food processors:** This category includes large employers ranging from automotive companies and suppliers to meat processing facilities. While overall growth in manufacturing employment is projected to remain flat, this category is essential to the national and regional economy. These corporations are also finding it difficult to attract and retain workers.
- **Distribution and logistics:** Companies in this sector are especially important to the Delta. From FedEx to UPS to trucking and transport, employment demand will be high.



With the cooperation of these four sectors, the institute has a significantly higher likelihood of meeting the DRA's broader goals.

A Potential model for the Delta Institute

Located in San Diego, California, Southwest Consortium for Environment Research and Policy (SCERP) is a collaboration of five U.S. and five Mexican universities located in all 10 border states. It was created in 1989 and was first funded by Congress in 1990 to address environmental issues of the U.S.-Mexico border region. The collaboration has the multi-fold mission of applied research, outreach, education, policy development, and regional capacity building for border communities.

With the support of the U.S. EPA, SCERP has developed a strategy that targets complex, region-wide environmental issues through directed research programs that are multi-disciplinary, multi-year, and multi-institutional, involving three or more members of the consortium. The steps taken to develop a Directed Research Program include the following:

1. A descriptive white paper is created.
2. SCERP's Management Committee and SCERP's Project Officer at EPA approve the concept.
3. A research team is selected.
4. The research team submits a program proposal that is reviewed by peers and approved by the Management Committee and EPA Project Officer.

SCERP is also the primary sponsor of an annual think tank-style policy conference, called the Border Institute, which convenes the 100 top decision-makers and stakeholders from the region to examine complex and critical issues and recommend policy actions.

Strategies

- In the fourth year of the five-year plan, conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the specific challenges in the region the Institute should address as well as the public and private resources available to support it.
- Seek the active support of the private sector. Begin by commissioning a survey of regional employers to gauge their views on the most pressing workforce issues in the region. These findings should then be presented as part of a DRA-organized regional summit on workforce productivity. In addition, launch a capital campaign aimed at major employers, corporate foundations, and private foundations with a two-year goal of raising \$15 million in private funds to support the Institute and its activities.
- Determine if the institute will be independent or affiliated with an existing institution. A major research university (or university consortium) may form the basis of a partnership. This decision will affect other considerations such as legal structure and location.
- Obtain public sector support at the state and federal levels. Meet with governors and key congressional leaders of the eight states to generate official support for the institute.



1.4 Work with other regional partners to improve the employability and productivity of Delta residents.

Through a partnership with the B.F. Smith Foundation of Stoneville, MS, the DRA is addressing issues of adult illiteracy and workforce training through its Pre-Employment Training Program. The program seeks to increase adult literacy through individualized reading programs. The partnership also provides a seamless transition for participants into training programs and links to employment agencies upon completion of the program. Partner organizations providing training programs include universities, community colleges, and workforce training centers.

Strategies

- Continue supporting the Pre-Employment Training Program.
- Work with current and future WIRED regions in the Delta to serve as a coordinator and facilitator of workforce transformation grants. Current WIRED designees in the Delta include the Western Alabama and Eastern Mississippi region and Arkansas Delta region.

Workforce Training and Target Industries

Through its Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) initiative, Florida's Great Northwest is funding \$1 million in secondary education grants to school districts in the 16-county region. These grants are intended to promote career skills training or intense, accelerated math and science training for post-graduation employment in the targeted industries of Aerospace & Defense, Life Sciences, Information Technology, Alternative Energy, and Construction Services.

1.5 Strengthen workforce education and professional skills programs.

Access to skilled talent is the most pressing challenge facing American and foreign-owned companies operating in the United States. While many lower-skill, lower-wage jobs are either eliminated through technology or moved offshore, skilled positions that require more advanced training and expertise are increasing in demand. In the manufacturing sector, jobs go unfilled as modern production and assembly occupations require higher-level knowledge and training. Moreover, as the “baby boom” generation begins entering retirement age in significant numbers –around 2011 – the demand for skilled and educated workers will intensify.

As a consequence, regions that cannot offer a talent base with the ability to learn and acquire advanced skills will not be able to compete for new jobs. For the Delta region, which suffers from chronic high unemployment and poverty, its workforce must be equipped with the skills and training necessary to fill 21st century occupations. To meet this challenge, over the past four years the DRA has awarded over \$4.5 million in federal grants funds toward local workforce training initiatives and programs.

Strategies

- Work with regional community colleges and local school districts to align vocational education and professional certification programs with local, regional, and statewide industry cluster development efforts.



- Support efforts to link and integrate community colleges with community and regional economic development efforts.
- Support employer-based training and education programs that equip people to work in technical and professional occupations.
- Support partnerships between industry and workforce training providers that offer skills training programs in emerging technology fields.



GOAL 2

Priority Initiatives:

- **iDelta**
- **DDHS**

STRENGTHEN THE DELTA'S PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL CONNECTIONS TO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY.

INTRODUCTION

Impoverished regions around the world face formidable barriers in their desire to become competitive. In addition to improving their inadequate physical infrastructure, they have to anticipate the changing face of technology. Surprisingly, this confers a certain advantage on them. Not having made substantial investment in “old technologies,” these regions are free to embrace new systems, new ideas, new products. In varying ways, India, Kenya, and the former

East Germany have embraced this notion. The changing face of telecommunications (with wireless broadband), of sophisticated mobile phones (allowing financial transactions), and of a new transportation infrastructure (“agile ports” that combine multi-modal capability with advanced cargo storage) are vivid examples of this pattern. They tell us that we can operate differently and more creatively.

The findings of the *iDelta* initiative reinforce the notion that broadband access is critical to the economy, regardless of its employment base. These findings also suggest that a given technology (such as fiber optic cable) may not be the best solution to an under-served area. Similarly, a broad view of transportation considers the movement of goods and people from one *nexus* to another. Highway corridors function best when they anticipate development patterns, not when they try to create them. There are too many communities who assume that their presence on an Interstate highway will automatically generate jobs. The pattern of job growth in metropolitan areas (and their suburbs) is well established. The Memphis International Airport is the world’s leading cargo hub; the ability to connect through and with Memphis is critical to the Delta region. Interstates 55 and 40 are among the most traveled north-south and east-west corridors. Ensuring the free flow of goods along these major highways is one of the highest priorities for the Delta region.

One conclusion to draw from these observations is that highway development cannot be capricious. It must be linked to larger transportation needs. Since these needs are predominantly urban, it should not be assumed that road construction *per se* represents a solution to rural development. A practical response to this goal – primarily in the DRA grants program – is to *re-direct* rural transportation infrastructure funding into linked networks. The airline hub and spoke concept is equally valid for trucking, rail, and shipping. The critical mass community concept further underscores the notion that value is created around existing opportunity – not by trying to create it from scratch.

The dominant concepts for this goal are connectivity and access. Improving the existing highway infrastructure – and ensuring its continuing viability through intermodal capacity – is essential. And the same concepts that apply to the movement of goods apply to people and ideas. The citizens of the Delta must be able to connect with one another in the most direct and unencumbered ways. When this connectivity is optimized, it opens the door to a wide range of still unrealized applications. Among these are medicine, education, and entrepreneurship.



OBJECTIVES

2.1 Advance the *i*Delta initiative.

The information technology (IT) revolution of the last few decades has permanently altered the economic and social environment of the nation and the world. Unprecedented levels of economic and productivity growth have occurred in communities, regions, and societies that have fully embraced IT and its numerous applications. To measure the presence and role of IT in the economic development of the Delta, the DRA commissioned a two-part plan from the Southern Growth Policies Board (SGPB). The first volume assesses the level of IT utilization in the domains of education, healthcare, government, business, and personal and community engagement. The second volume offers recommendations for expanding its use in order to maximize the region's potential. From the research, three fundamental conclusions are drawn:

1. The accessibility, awareness, and utilization of broadband infrastructure and resources are absolute necessities for individual, business, government, and institutional success.
2. DRA counties and parishes, generally, trail non-traditional DRA counties and parishes and the U.S. in accessibility, awareness, and utilization of broadband infrastructure and resources.
3. The DRA is the ideal organization to play a lead role in assembling and distributing resources for information technology in its constituent counties and parishes.

In response to these issues, the DRA has launched an initiative to increase the knowledge, training, adoption, and utilization of information technology throughout the region: *i*Delta. It is through *i*Delta that the DRA intends to focus resources, planning, and attention on information technology and economic development.

Findings from the *i*Delta report include:

- In DRA's rural counties, the number of counties and parishes lacking high-speed service is almost 18 percent.
- The percentage of DRA school districts with a website lags the U.S., 54 percent compared to 62 percent.
- Only 22 percent of counties and parishes offer online government services.
- Only 15 percent of DRA local governments have a website, compared to about 24 percent of the U.S.

Source: iDelta, Measuring Information Technology in the Delta, Southern Growth Policies Board



Strategies

- Work with all Local Development Districts (LDDs) to use GIS systems in order to support their community's (and DRA's regional) initiatives in health, transportation, economic and community development, homeland security, disaster pre-event planning and recovery, and other areas.
- Augment the expansion of healthcare access to all Delta citizens through the use of information technology. Such *telehealth* applications may include basic and/or specialized clinical services, professional continuing education, and improved medical practice management.

IT and Health

Located at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, the Addressing Diabetes in the Delta (ADD) program seeks to provide diabetes care and education to 300 residents in six counties across state lines. The primary goal is to demonstrate the value of health information technology intervention that delivers best practices care to an underserved population.

- Work to ensure that all citizens in the DRA region will have access to broadband Internet in their community, and the knowledge and training to operate in the Internet environment.
- Improve the awareness of all citizens and businesses of the value of technology to their economic future and the resources available to achieve success.

- Support the use of distance education capabilities in all schools and the training of personnel to manage the operations.
- Enhance workforce development in the Delta by providing all adults access to training in computer literacy, workforce skills, and business practices such as e-commerce and entrepreneurship.
- Create a DRA *iDelta* Center to address access and awareness issues in the region and to implement the recommendations of the *iDelta* report.
- Work with all communities in the region to develop and maintain Internet home pages that provide information and services to their citizens, as well as the public outside the communities.

E-Government

ConnectKentucky develops and implements effective strategies for technology deployment, use, and literacy in Kentucky. Its mission is to accelerate the growth of technology in support of community and economic development, improved healthcare, enhanced education, and more effective government. It has four main functions: technology expansion, planning, public policy, networking, and recruitment.



to connect industrial sites to adequate road facilities.

- Incorporate transportation improvements into the DDHS – such as, for a major economic development project in the DRA region.
- Advance a development approach for the DDHS that respects local cultural and economic interests and preserves the natural resources of the Delta.

2.3 Expand intermodal transportation nodes and networks.

Multimodal transportation has long played a key role in the Delta region’s economy. The navigable waters of the Mississippi river, and its historical network of wagon, rail, and – more recently – trucking ports, has been the lifeblood of the nation’s north-south connections. However, for the Delta to advance in today’s “just-in-time” environment it must develop an efficient intermodal transportation network. Particularly critical are facilities and equipment that can accommodate containerized cargo.

Strategies

- Prepare an overall multimodal transportation plan for the region. The plan will assess the transportation assets in the 240 counties and parishes of the DRA – highways, bridges, railroads, airports, river ports, ocean ports and more. We next will assess the demands being put on the current assets.
- Support the development of intermodal transportation networks that allow for the movement of international shipments via container using water, air and land modes.

2.4 Expand the region’s energy infrastructure and production capacity.

Also critical to the long-term growth of the region, as well as for the nation, is access to dependable and affordable energy resources. The DRA is committed to ensuring the region and the nation possess enough energy to meet current and future needs. This includes traditional fossil fuel sources such as oil, gas, and coal, as well as less polluting sources such as nuclear, bio-fuels, and renewable energy.

Strategies

Delta Region Refinery Study

In April 2007, the DRA released a detailed study that identifies sites in the region where oil refining facilities can be located. Such a facility has not been constructed in the United States since 1976. As a result of a stringent evaluation process, seven counties and parishes in three states were identified in the study as possible sites for a modern oil refining facility.

- Fund a next-step feasibility study for new energy refining capacity and facilities in the Delta.
- Support planning and policies that increase the Delta’s capacity to produce, transport, and refine energy resources.
- Create a plan to develop DRA Center for Bio-Technology and Alternate Fuels. The purpose of the center will be to initiate, coordinate and enhance biotech activities within the DRA region, as well as to provide a “clearing house” of information available for biotech projects.



GOAL 3

Priority Initiatives:

- **Quality of place**
- **Innovation and diversification**
- **Leadership**

CREATE CRITICAL MASS WITHIN DELTA COMMUNITIES.

INTRODUCTION

The future of the Delta rests with its people and its communities. Understanding what makes communities flourish and grow is the key to a successful strategic plan.

The ability to identify factors linked to flourishing communities is essential, but it is not sufficient. It must be matched with a new framework for thinking about “place.” It must be matched with the tools that allow investment to take hold. Two concepts drive this goal: critical mass and quality of place. Critical mass is an analytical approach to *why* communities grow. As the federal co-chairman has repeatedly – and correctly – emphasized “the data must tell a story, and they must provide a direction for DRA action.” Appendix A (Critical Mass Community Analysis) lays out the methodology for assessing Delta communities.

While “critical mass” is an important analytic tool – as well as a means for the DRA to evaluate funding proposals, it lacks marketing excitement. No community will ever attract people and investment by touting its critical mass percentages. This requires something more visceral. *Quality of place* provides that framework. In communities across the United States, and in Delta states particularly, there has been an enthusiastic embrace of this concept. Emphasis on “quality of life” no longer addresses what is required for rural communities to grow. Quality of life emphasizes the values of the existing population. The concept of place accentuates the attributes that might attract new talent. Uniting place with creative programs that promote investment, economic diversification, leadership, and entrepreneurship will provide Delta communities with the means to achieve sustainable growth.

The final objective of this goal addresses traditional infrastructure needs: water, wastewater, and electricity. Without them, growth is not possible. As with the transportation system, however, it is not enough to build a power plant or a wastewater treatment facility and assume that growth will simply occur as a result. Infrastructure investment is most effective when it anticipates growth patterns, not when it tries to determine them.

Federal and state economic development grants have long been used to support traditional infrastructure projects. When successful, they help stimulate industrial development by enhancing business parks. More recently, they have a questionable record. Job promises fall short. Industries do not relocate. Fully serviced industrial parks stand unused along major highway corridors, adjacent to national research labs, and in near proximity to major metropolitan areas. At the same time, warehousing and distribution centers, flex space, and mixed-use projects show tremendous strength. This phenomenon is evident in the Delta. Where industrial development is market driven, real estate growth is rapid. To be effective, the DRA’s infrastructure grant awards must build from critical mass concepts. Funds will not be given simply on the basis of assumed business attraction. The traditional “but for” clause (“but for public participation, the private investment would not have occurred”) is no longer adequate. It must be replaced by the realization that DRA funds are most effective as a co-investment in projects that private investors have already deemed market-worthy.



OBJECTIVES

3.1 Enhance the quality of place of Delta communities.

The underlying demographics of the American workforce are approaching a seismic shift. As the baby boomer generation enters retirement age in significant numbers, U.S. employers will become increasingly desperate to attract and retain talented workers. Many will respond to the upcoming labor shortage by locating some operations offshore and downsizing others through technology and innovation. A primary strategy employed by both U.S. and foreign-owned companies seeking to tap into the domestic talent pool – especially for younger workers – will be to locate operations in communities with a strong sense of place. Companies increasingly recognize that communities that offer amenities will be the ones attracting skilled and talented workers. While no set definition for “quality of place” exists, the one common factor is the wide availability of choices in housing, entertainment, culture, recreation, retail, and employment.

Place before Job

“Two-thirds of college-educated 25 to 34 year-olds choose place before job, and this preference was true across all life stages and genders (male, female, single, married, with children, without children).”

- *College-Educated, Young Adults Consider “Place” First When Choosing Locations*, CEOs for Cities, June 2006

For the majority of Delta communities already struggling to retain people and business, adopting the philosophy of quality of place will be crucial to their long-term economic competitiveness. Communities must invest in the amenities that will make them more attractive to new residents if they are to survive. The DRA is committed to helping our communities plan for and implement new strategies for enhancing the quality of place.

Redefining PLACE

Much has been written about the importance of quality of life to the site selection process. Communities throughout the nation have positioned themselves by touting their advantages in this regard—good schools, safe streets, pleasant weather. We agree these factors are important. We take issue only with the narrowness of the focus. **Quality of life** assumes that everyone thrives in the same environment and is attracted to the same amenities. It assumes that current residents’ view of what makes a community would be shared by all.

By contrast, **quality of place** considers what is attractive to a range of residents, both old and new. The idea of quality of place accommodates growth and recognizes the benefits of change. It recognizes that one person’s “good place to raise a family” might translate into another’s “there’s nothing to do in this town.” Quality of place is about providing options, not just for current residents, but for those who will be residents in the future.



Strategies

- Support downtown revitalization efforts in Delta communities.
- Provide planning grants for revitalization projects.
- Support local-level grant research, writing, and administration training.
- Enhance the quality, safety, and affordability of the region's housing stock.
- Support the construction and expansion of local/regional medical facilities.
- Work to protect the region's environmental assets.
- Support the development and marketing of local entertainment, recreation, cultural, and tourism assets.
- Expand the application of green technologies in the region.

3.2 Promote innovation and diversification within local and regional economies.

In order for Delta communities and regions to compete, they must diversify their local economic bases toward sectors that utilize technology and advanced processes. Communities unwilling to embrace new and emerging economic sectors will be at a competitive disadvantage. For the Delta, with its traditional agricultural and resource-based economy, diversification and innovation are crucial. The DRA has an important role to play in helping to transform the region's economic base.

Strategies

- Support local and regional efforts to recruit and retain companies that employ advanced processes and technologies.
- Support local programs that assist existing companies to adopt new technologies and processes.

3.3 Support growth-oriented entrepreneurship.

Traditional economic development philosophy emphasizes industrial recruitment as the most important role for the economic development practitioner. There is an emerging consensus, however, that other avenues for economic growth and vitality are just as essential—especially in rural communities lacking the key attributes sought by selectors and recruitment prospects. In most communities, plentiful economic development opportunities lie close to home. These opportunities include:

- Expansion of existing companies
- Retention of at-risk businesses
- Small business support
- Entrepreneurship

Among the options for business support, entrepreneurship rises to the top. The Economic Development Toolkit in Appendix B contains a practical guide to promoting local entrepreneurship.



Entrepreneurship Fundamentals

A healthy entrepreneurial environment requires three key components:

- Ideas
- Management Talent
- Capital

Like a three-legged stool, if any of these elements are missing, the entrepreneurial program will fail. More importantly, these three elements are true of virtually all businesses.

Mom & pop enterprises might have ideas and management talent in a single person and capital could come in the form of savings, credit cards, or bank loans.

Emerging growth companies will likely have ideas in the form of patentable technology or other intellectual property, management talent from serial entrepreneurs or professional managers, and capital from professional venture capital firms.

Without a healthy supply of each of these three elements, no entrepreneurship program can succeed.

Strategies

- Support entrepreneur education, training, and support programs.
- Support mentoring and networking events that bring together entrepreneurs, potential investors, and service providers.
- Support local efforts to form angel networks with the goal of linking and educating both investors and entrepreneurs on the risks and rewards of angel and venture capital.

3.4 Foster local leadership.

The most important ingredient of successful community growth is leadership. Communities with assets sufficient to achieve critical mass may still not live up to their potential. They may fail – despite these advantages – to create an economic climate that attracts private investment. When this is the case, it is because of a lack of leadership. Similarly, there are many examples where asset-poor communities have overcome adversity through bold and progressive leaders.

Recognizing the importance of local leadership, the DRA has established the Delta Leadership Institute (DLI). The DLI is designed to educate, inform, and inspire a new generation of leaders throughout the region. Each of the eight governors and the federal co-chairman nominate four people to participate in the year-long program.

“Too often as I travel across our region, I see a lack of investment in leadership development and strategic planning. This leadership void, in turn, leads to a lack of direction. Communities never decide on their priorities. With no leadership, vision or plans for growth, these communities will continue to struggle.”

Pete Johnson, Federal Co-Chair

The Delta Leadership Institute is sponsored by the DRA, in partnership with the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, College of Continuing Studies. The Institute features a variety of lectures, seminars, and workshops, and centers on four curricular themes:



regionalization, issues management, leadership and change, and leadership capacities. The DLI graduated its first class of leaders in 2005.

One of the primary goals of the Delta Leadership Institute is for each graduate of the DLI to teach others the knowledge and skills they have learned. DLI graduates are encouraged to return to their respective communities and become actively engaged in initiating and leading new local leadership training programs.

Strategies

- Continue training new leaders in the region through the Delta Leadership Institute.
- Encourage graduates to participate in DLI alumni networks and events.
- Support local leadership training initiatives launched by DLI graduates.

3.5 Build and augment basic infrastructure.

Recognizing the fundamental importance of basic infrastructure to the economic development of the Delta, Congress charged the DRA with investing in safe and reliable water/wastewater systems, as well as decent and affordable housing. No amount of technology and training will advance the region if its people do not have access to basic infrastructure. As a consequence, the DRA has invested almost \$20 million toward basic infrastructure through its federal grant program.

Strategies

- Support the construction and extension of basic infrastructure and services within exurban

communities situated in the path of fast-moving metropolitan growth.

- Leverage federal, state, local, and private investments to develop and improve water and wastewater systems in distressed counties in region.
- Support the construction of last-mile infrastructure and transportation linkages to local economic development assets.

DRA Federal Grant Program to Date	
Basic Infrastructure	\$19.8 million
Transportation Infrastructure	\$14.9 million
Business Development	\$6.3 million
Workforce Training	\$4.0 million
Other	\$3.5 million
Total	\$48.5 million



MANAGEMENT GOAL

MAINTAIN ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CONTINUE TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A STEWARD OF PUBLIC RESOURCES.

INTRODUCTION

In order for the DRA to achieve the ambitious mission, goals, and objectives, and strategies laid out in this plan will demand a commitment to organizational excellence and strong leadership. As a relatively young agency with a modest budget, it is critical for the Authority to maximize its limited resources and to ensure that each dollar invested will yield a positive return for the people of the Delta.

This will require prudent resource management, effective organizational planning, and the proficient utilization of information technology.

Moreover, in accordance with the presidential directive to be a regional planner and federal investments coordinator, the Authority must continue building collaborative partnerships with our federal, state, and local allies. The DRA must provide support and services to the local development districts as well as other economic and community development organizations in the region if its federal grant program is to be effective. The Authority must also partner with other federal agencies through interagency agreements if its regional initiatives in the areas of health, information technology, and transportation infrastructure are to be realized.

Initiatives

- Create an advisory council consisting of the region's corporate foundations and business leaders. The role of the council should be to advise the DRA – from the private sector perspective – on such matters as workforce productivity, information technology, transportation, and entrepreneurship.
- Pursue interagency agreements with other federal agencies to achieve its regional initiatives.
- Evaluate the DRA's progress in achieving its performance goals. This review should be conducted annually by an independent party.
- Improve efficiency through the utilization of information technology, including online grant applications and scoring system.



DRA PERFORMANCE MEASURES

These results substantiate the need for the DRA to stress new performance outcomes for the agency. Rather linking the success of programs to unrealistic regional measures of success (e.g., regional income, welfare dependency, and unemployment), this plan emphasizes the establishment of annual and long-term outcome measures that correspond to the primary factors that will drive job growth for the region. As required by Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) guidelines, these performance measures are “discrete, quantifiable, and measurable.” Emphasis was given to designing a performance measurement system 1) that is results-oriented, 2) allows independent evaluation, and 3) ties to existing performance-program budgeting requirements.

OMB requires performance measures to be based on an agency’s historical data. OMB also requires an agency to have enough historical data to project statistically appropriate performance measures. In its 2007 PART evaluation of DRA, OMB determined that the DRA did not have a sufficient history from which to prepare an OMB-accepted set of projected performance measures. However, DRA staff members are currently examining the grant records in order to assemble and verify the data needed to base annual and long-term targets. Once this process is complete (expected in the spring of 2008), the DRA will resubmit to OMB for approval of its performance measures and targets. The table below contains the measures for which the DRA is collecting data.

Measures for DRA Data Collection

Measure	Type
Goal 1: Ensure the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta.	
Number of participants in workforce training and education programs	Annual Output
Delta residents positioned for enhanced employment opportunities.	Long-Term Outcome
Non-DRA investment ratio for employability projects	Annual Matching
Goal 3: Create critical mass within Delta communities.	
Jobs created or retained	Long-Term & Annual Outcome
Private investment (non-project) ratio for diversification projects	Annual Matching
Non-DRA investment ratio for basic infrastructure projects.	Annual Matching
Households served with basic infrastructure and services.	Long-Term & Annual Outcome
Management Goal: Maintain organizational excellence and continue to be recognized as a steward of public resources.	
Average grants processing time.	Annual Efficiency

Additionally, as the Healthy Delta, Delta Development Highway System, and iDelta programs develop and mature, targeted output and outcome performance measures will be designed and submitted to OMB for their approval.



STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

To develop the regional development plan, the DRA initiated a nine-month strategic planning process that involved extensive participation by the federal co-chairman, the alternate federal co-chairman, DRA staff, the Delta governors' DRA board alternates, state economic development officials, the Association of Delta Development Directors, and other local partners in the region. The process was lead by a strategic planning team that consisted of the senior advisor to the federal co-chairman, the chief operating officer, TIP Strategies, and Tamerica Management Company.

The strategic planning process included three phases: Discovery, Opportunity, and Implementation. Each of these phases is summarized below.

Phase One: Discovery

This phase began with a review of the existing organization, including current initiatives, and existing planning documents. This was followed by an extensive data and literature analysis intended to define the critical mass sub-regions in the Delta and to also identify critical mass assets and resources. The analysis also included an update of the DRA's long-term performance goals contained in the 2002 Comprehensive Plan.

This phase involved significant stakeholder input. The strategic planning team met with DRA state and local partners to identify areas of concern and to shed light on current economic development issues in the region. Based on this input, the team prepared a prioritized list of policy areas for senior DRA leadership and the board to consider in the opportunity phase. The stakeholder input process involved the following activities:

- Board alternates from the states were visited by the strategic planning team to discuss the governors' economic development priorities in their DRA counties.
- DRA staff members were interviewed to gather their input and recommendations on the Authority's proper mission and the steps required for its achievement. Staff members also provided extensive supporting information and data pertaining to the functions they perform.
- The team met with representatives from the region's 44 local development districts.
- The team gathered input from the state LDD directors at a meeting of the Association of Delta Development Directors in Memphis, Tennessee.

Phase Two: Opportunity

Based on the findings of the Discovery Phase, the strategic planning team worked with senior leadership and the board to develop policy recommendations for each of the priorities identified. Emphasis was given to recommending policies and initiatives that will enable DRA's existing programs to leverage other private and federal resources and eliminate duplication and overlap. The recommendations were provided in the hierarchical structure (vision, mission,



goals, objectives, and major initiatives). The planning team presented its initial findings and recommendations to the DRA board at its annual meeting in Tunica, Mississippi.

Phase Three: Implementation

In the final phase, the planning team developed the specific initiatives, actions, timelines, and performance measures that will guide the DRA's activities for the 2008-2013 period. The team worked closely with the leadership and its partners to ensure that the resulting policies and performance criteria are actionable and measurable.



COMMUNICATIONS

Critical to the successful implementation of this regional development plan is a communications program that clearly articulates DRA's vision for the Delta and the new course we are pursuing to get us there. The DRA is determined to make the execution of the regional development plan a top priority for the Authority. In order for that to occur, our local, regional, state, and federal partners must have a firm understanding of its goals, objectives, strategies, and initiatives. Also key to the plan's success is securing congressional acceptance and support. Therefore, the federal co-chairman will commit DRA leadership and staff to the task of effectively publicizing and conveying to our partners and constituents how we intend to help move the Delta toward achieving a pattern of sustained growth.

Because this plan represents a departure from more traditional approaches to promoting economic development, educational outreach will be necessary. There may be some initial questions and hesitation; however, the DRA is confident that any unease can be overcome by transparency, openness, and honesty.

The actions and communications tools the DRA will utilize to communicate the plan include:

- **The *Delta Views* e-newsletter:** One of the DRA's most effective means of publicizing its work and activities is a regular e-news update it publishes and distributes to constituents via e-mail. In the months following the adoption of the regional development plan, the federal co-chairman will address regional challenges and opportunities identified in the plan through the *Delta Views* newsletter.
- **Local presentations:** DRA leadership and staff will embark on a local outreach campaign designed to present our plan to local and regional economic development groups. We will present our ideas, priorities, and programs to local development districts, economic development corporations, chambers of commerce, cities, and community non-profits. We will also use these events as opportunities to get additional input which will assist us in fine tuning our programs and identifying additional needs in the region.
- **Regional print media:** DRA leaders will meet with editorial boards of regional newspapers to discuss the plan and the major initiatives it proposes. In FY 08, for example, a major emphasis will be placed on presenting the case to regional editors for promoting health as an economic engine in the region.
- **National and international media:** The DRA will ensure that national and international media outlets are made aware of its plan for reinventing the Delta.
- **Conferences:** The DRA will regularly sponsor and host conferences in the region that address specific challenges and opportunities facing the Delta. We will bring together key leaders in business, government, education, health, and community service to discuss and present ideas for addressing the region's major issues.
- **Private sector outreach:** We will enhance our engagement and partnership with the private sector on major issues of workforce productivity, competitiveness, and availability. A major effort in this regard will be to meet with leaders of major employers in the region to build public and financial support for the Delta Institute.



DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY

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