

ALABAMA'S DELTA REGION DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Prepared for the
Delta Regional Authority



Robert Bentley, Governor

February 2016

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROBERT BENTLEY
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STATE OF ALABAMA

February 16, 2016

Dear Stakeholder:

It is my pleasure to present the State of Alabama's Five-Year Delta Region Development Plan, which serves as a state-level companion to the Delta Regional Authority's Regional Development Plan III. Alabama's plan is a guide for local communities, economic developers, elected officials, and planning and development districts throughout the Alabama Delta Region seeking Delta Regional Authority Grant funding.

Alabama's Five-Year Delta Development Plan allows flexibility to create projects that meet local needs with emphasis on investments that create or retain jobs, advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta workforce, strengthen the Delta's physical and digital connections to the global economy, and facilitate capacity building within Delta communities.

I appreciate your interest in improving the lives of Alabama's Delta Region citizens and I look forward to partnering with you in achieving this noble goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Bentley".

Robert Bentley
Governor

RB:JB:AJ

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Introduction

The Delta Regional Authority

Established by Congress in 2000, the Delta Regional Authority, or DRA, makes strategic investments of federal appropriations into the physical and human infrastructure of the 252 counties and parishes within the eight-state Delta region. The DRA works to improve regional economic opportunity by helping to create jobs, build communities, and improve the lives of the 10 million residents of the Delta region.

The 252 counties and parishes served by the Delta Regional Authority in Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee make up the most persistently distressed area of the country. The DRA works with local, state, and federal leaders, creating partnerships among all three levels, to bring investment and opportunity back to this region.

The Delta Regional Authority makes investments through the **States' Economic Development Assistance Program (SEDAP)** to improve transportation and basic public infrastructure, and to strengthen workforce development systems and local business environments. The DRA supports job creation and economic development through innovative approaches to growing local and regional leadership, increasing access to quality healthcare, and boosting opportunities for entrepreneurs to access capital.

Since 2000, the DRA has invested nearly \$129 million in the Delta region – strategic investments that have been leveraged 21.3 to 1 by other public and private investments. As a result, more than 17,000 jobs have been created and retained throughout the region. More than 25,500 families have gained access to clean, safe water and sewer service.

DRA funding requirements stipulate that at least 75% of funds must go to economically distressed counties, and at least 50% of funds be directed toward basic infrastructure and transportation infrastructure improvements.

DRA Funding in Alabama

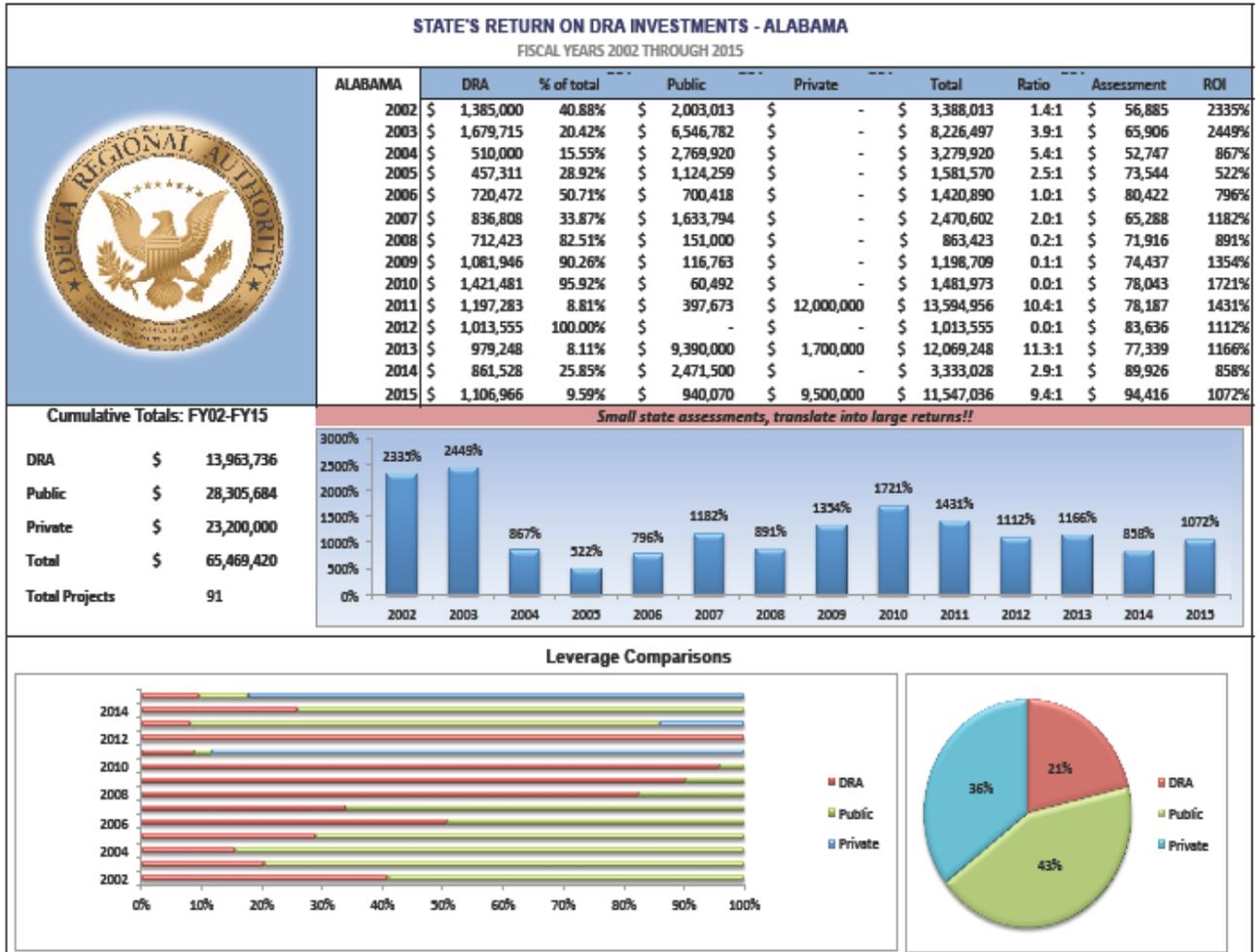
In 13 funding cycles since 2002, the Delta Regional Authority has invested \$13.1 million in Alabama. Those funds have been leveraged by \$41.1 million in other public and

private investments, a ratio of 3.1 to 1. The following graphic details the history of DRA funding within Alabama:

FIGURE 1

DRA Investments in Alabama 2002 – 2015

source: Delta Regional Authority



Regional Development Plan III

Working to enhance the long-term prosperity and growth of the region, the Delta Regional Authority recently undertook to develop its third five-year strategic plan, known as Regional Development Plan III (RDP III). In the new plan, DRA sought to build on the success of existing programs but also widen the range of activities with new initiatives to enhance the region's infrastructure as well as workforce and community competitiveness. The result is RDP III, completed in 2015. Based on DRA's dual imperative of innovation and resiliency, RDP III is focused around three foundational 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:

Facilitate capacity building within Delta communities

Plan Development Overview

The plan development process for Alabama's new Delta Region Development Plan started with a review of existing documents related to economic and community development in Alabama's Delta region. These documents include:

- The Delta Regional Authority's ***Regional Development Plan III*** (RDP III)
- Each of the most recent *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies* (CEDS) adopted by the planning agencies serving the Alabama Delta region
- The state's ***Accelerate Alabama*** economic development strategic plan, which identifies 11 targeted business sectors and 3 primary economic development drivers
- Governor Robert Bentley's new strategic plan for Alabama, ***Great State 2019***. This new plan has several strategies directly related to economic development, aligning with goals and strategies of the Delta Regional Authority, including:
 - Workforce Development system improvements

- Other education initiatives, including free community college tuition
- Broadband network expansion
- Support for small business development and success
- Focus on transportation infrastructure through the creation of an Alabama Transportation Institute
- Emphasis on other issues of great importance to rural communities, particularly rural access to quality health care

On January 25, 2016, the Alabama Department of Economic & Community Affairs hosted a public input session on the new plan. Feedback was received regarding these issues, among others:

- Tourism and outdoor recreation have good potential for building up local economies in rural Alabama. Related efforts should be strengthened, particularly infrastructure improvements that support tourism and outdoor recreation.
- The most important needs in rural Alabama communities are infrastructure (water and sewer systems) and transportation infrastructure (especially roads). Funding for these efforts is critical – not only to rebuild or expand systems, but for ongoing maintenance as well.
- Examples of successful economic development projects in Alabama's Delta region include Chowel Industries in Ft. Deposit (350 jobs created) and Golden Dragon in Wilcox County (250 jobs created).
- DRA office staffing levels
- Local development district training needs
- Working with Alabama's legislative delegation for more funding from the federal level
- Request to agencies from around Alabama's Delta region for "best practice" case studies, summaries, and photographs to enhance the plan

In developing this new plan, individuals from the local, regional, and state levels worked together to unite Alabama's goals with the priorities of RDP III.

Section A: Challenges and Opportunities: The State of the State

Alabama's Delta region is comprised of 20 counties in the southwestern and southeastern areas of the state. Thirty-three percent (33%) of Alabama's land area is included within the Delta Regional Authority's jurisdiction, the fourth highest percentage among the eight DRA states. However, as will be shown later in this section, Alabama's Delta area has a much lower population density than the remainder of the state, and only 9% of Alabama's total population resides in the Delta region.

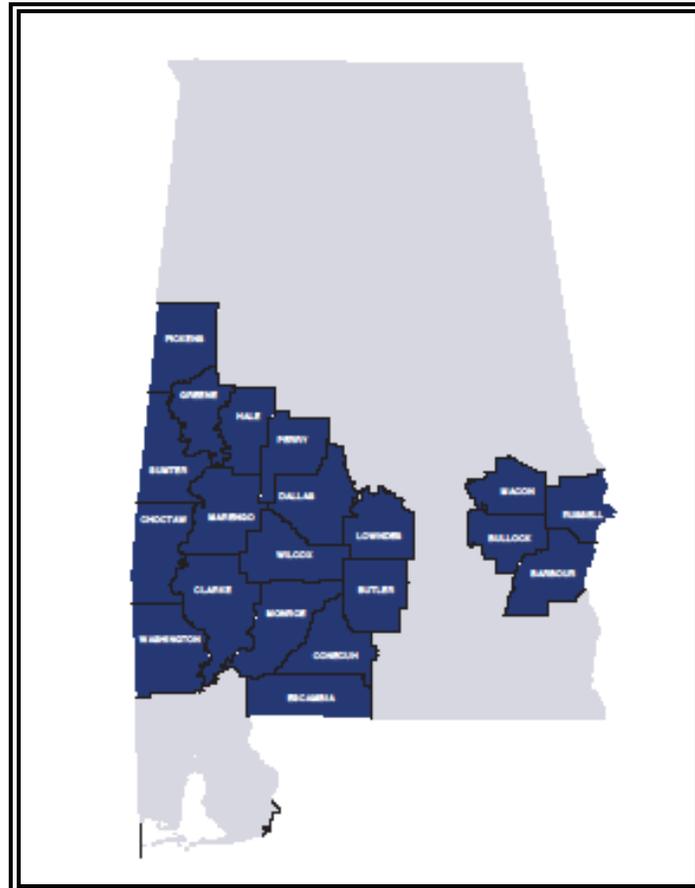
The 20 Delta counties include 16 in the southwestern part of the state: Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Dallas, Escambia, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Marengo, Monroe, Perry, Pickens, Sumter, Washington, and Wilcox

and 4 in the southeastern portion: Barbour, Bullock, Macon, and Russell.

FIGURE 2

Alabama's Delta Region Counties

source: Delta Regional Authority



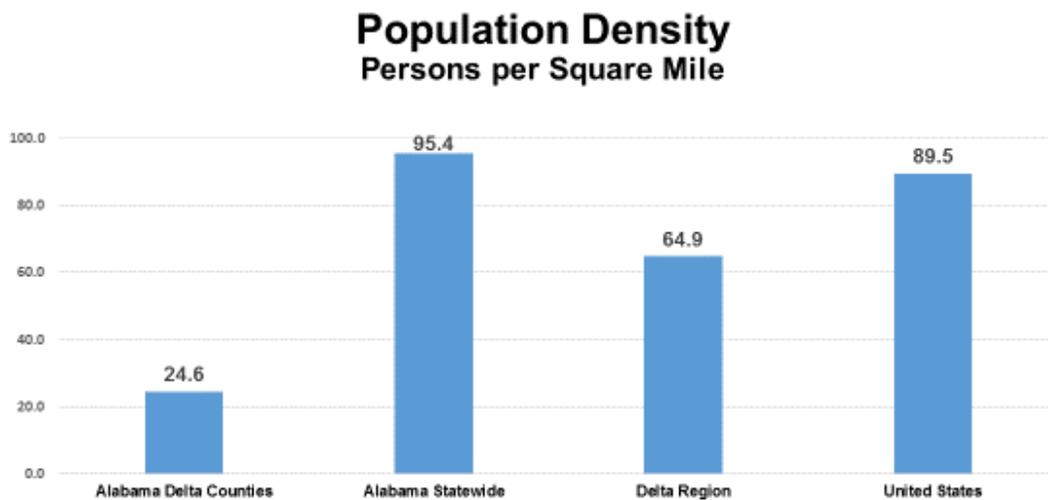
According to DRA criteria using unemployment rates and per capita income figures, **all 20 Delta region counties within Alabama are classified as “distressed”**. In addition, according to DRA statistics a staggering 90.0% of Alabamians in the Delta region are classified as experiencing “persistent poverty”. This compares with 43.3% of all residents in the 252-county, eight-state DRA region, and just 28.4% of Alabama residents statewide.

Demographic and Economic Information

As the charts below make clear, although Alabama’s demographic and economic data as a whole generally equals or outperforms the eight-state DRA region, Alabama’s 20-county Delta area substantially under-performs the rest of the DRA region, making it one of the most distressed parts of the United States.

FIGURE 3

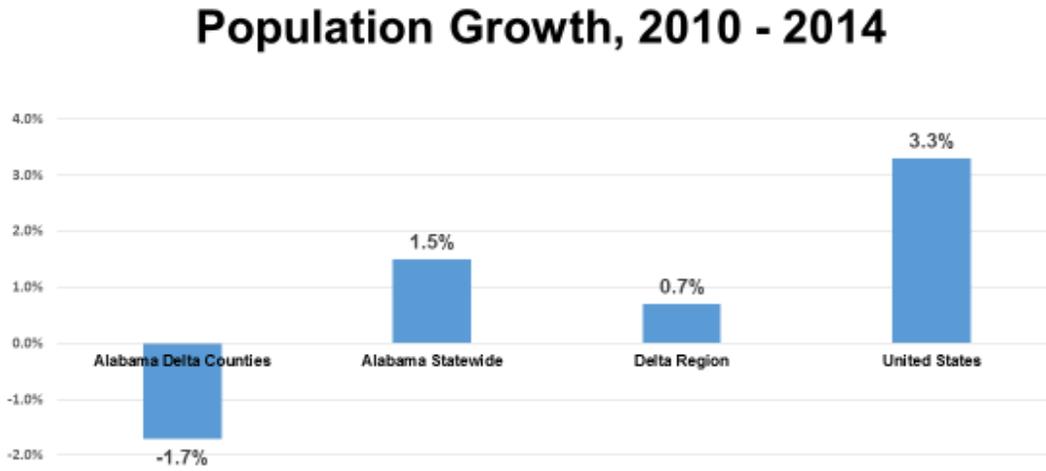
Alabama’s Delta Region is a sparsely-populated area



Source: Delta Regional Authority, “Today’s Delta” online data tool, accessed February 2016

FIGURE 4

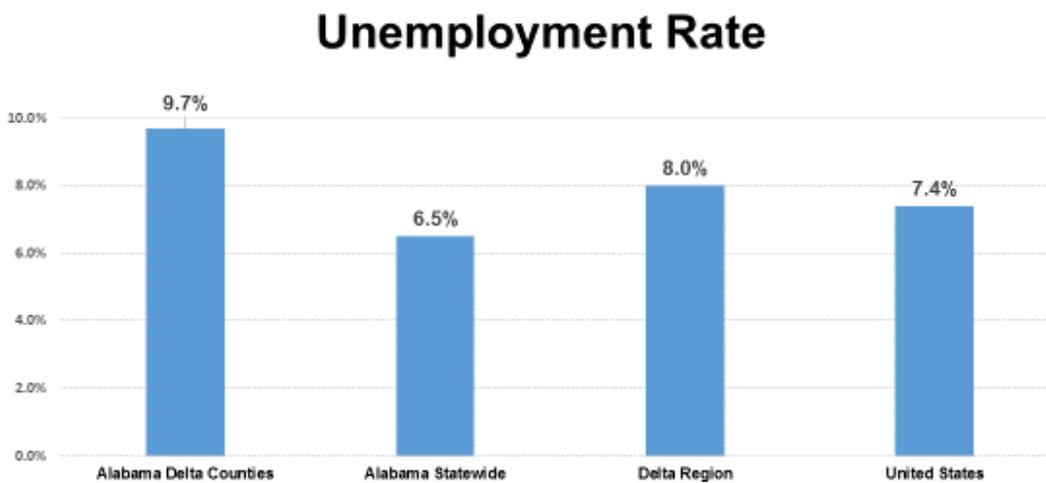
Alabama's Delta counties have lost population since 2000



Source: Delta Regional Authority, Regional Development Plan III

FIGURE 5

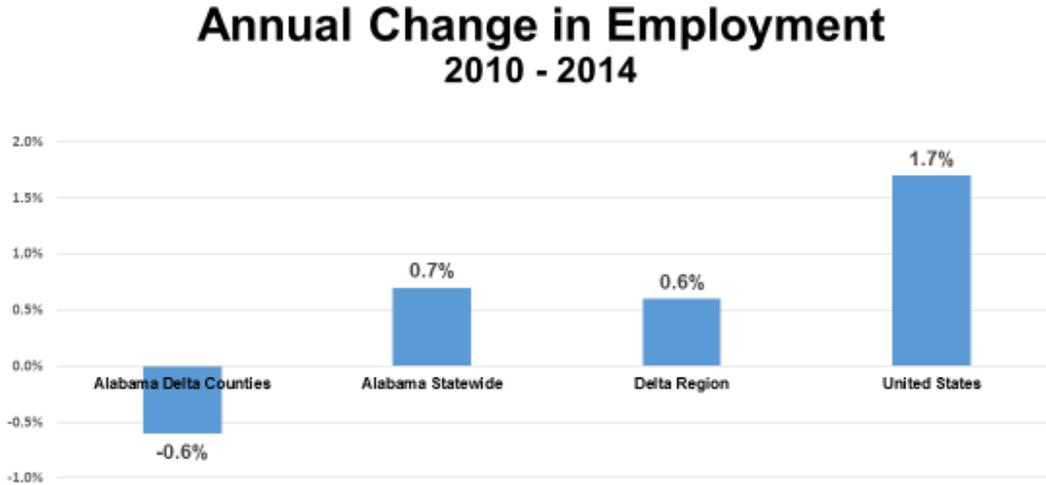
The Delta counties' unemployment rate is nearly 50% higher than Alabama's statewide figure.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, "Today's Delta" online data tool, accessed February 2016

FIGURE 6

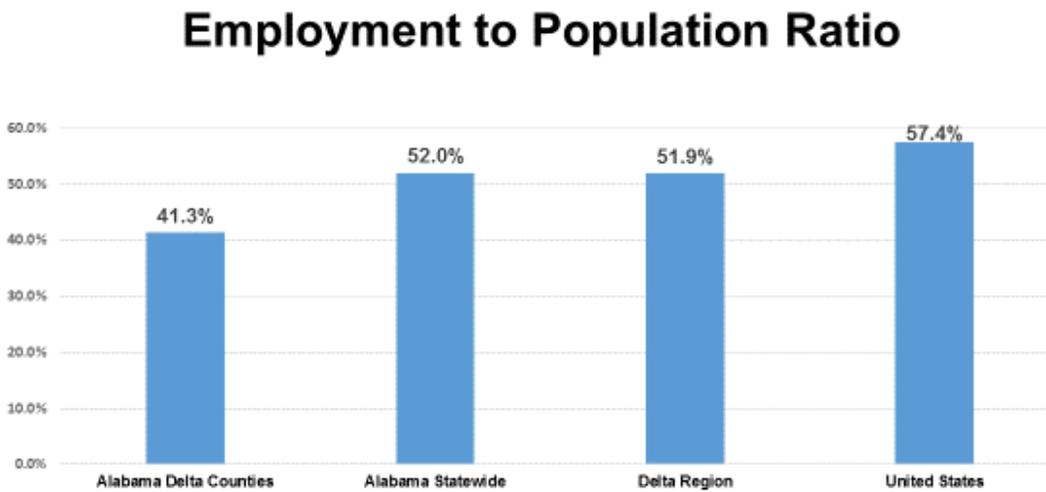
Alabama's Delta counties have not shared in the recent economic recovery, losing jobs since 2000.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, Regional Development Plan III

FIGURE 7

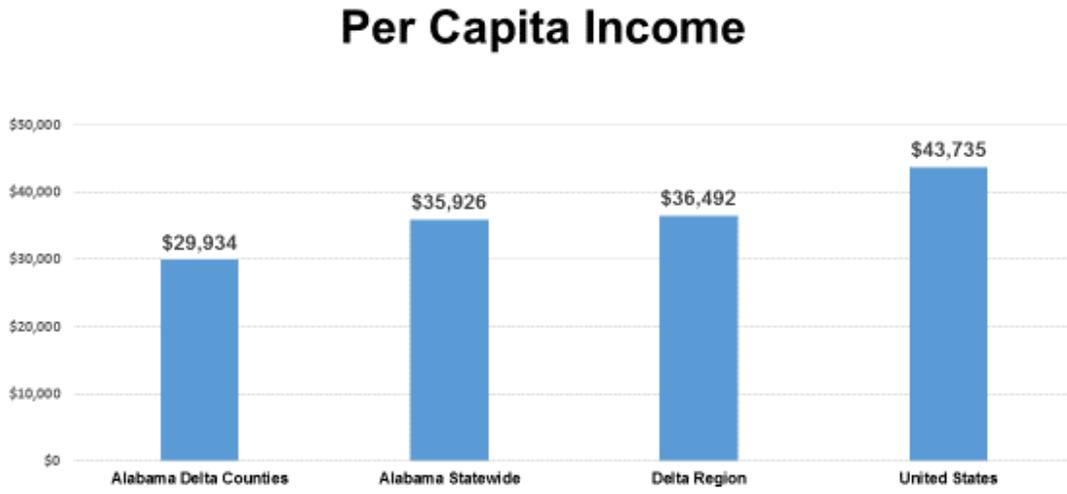
The state's Delta counties have a significantly lower ratio of employment to population.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, "Today's Delta" online data tool, accessed February 2016

FIGURE 8

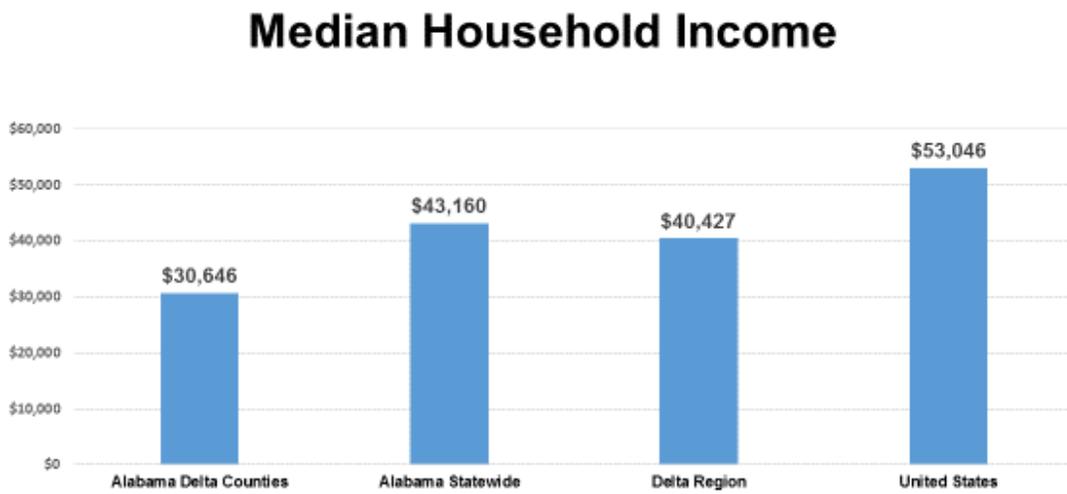
Per capita income in the state's Delta counties is less than \$30,000.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, "Today's Delta" online data tool, accessed February 2016

FIGURE 9

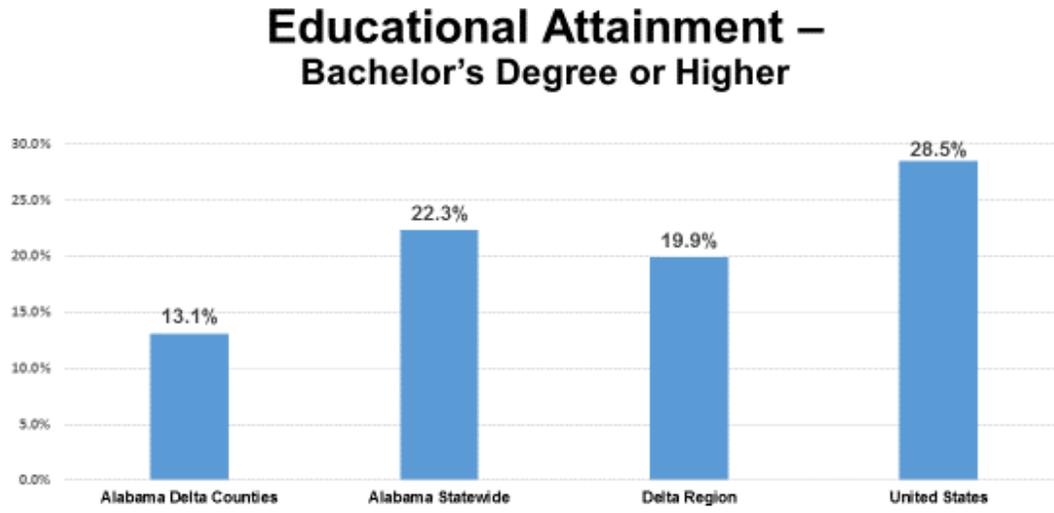
Alabama's Delta residents have median household incomes about 29% below the state average and 42% below the national average.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, "Today's Delta" online data tool, accessed February 2016

FIGURE 10

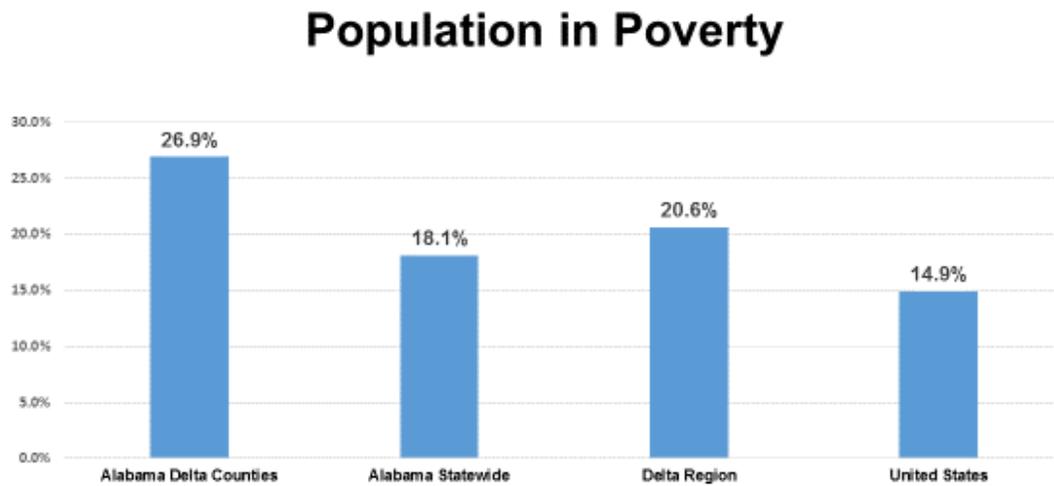
Just 13.1% of Alabama Delta area residents have at least a bachelor's degree.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, "Today's Delta" online data tool, accessed February 2016

FIGURE 11

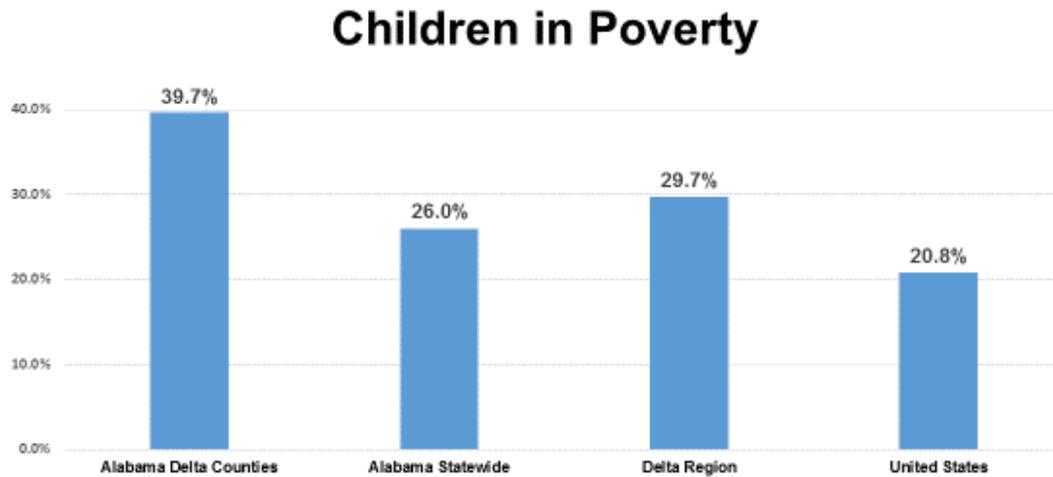
Alabama's Delta counties have a poverty rate far exceeding the statewide and Delta region rates.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, "Today's Delta" online data tool, accessed February 2016

FIGURE 12

The child poverty rate in the state's Delta counties is nearly 40%.



Source: Delta Regional Authority, "Today's Delta" online data tool, accessed February 2016

Evaluation of Challenges and Opportunities

Economic development documents from regional agencies within Alabama's Delta (particularly district *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies*, or CEDS), as well as plans from the state level, provide a good understanding of the region's greatest strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Figure 13 on the following page summarizes these findings:

FIGURE 13:
SWOT Analysis Summary

<p>STRENGTHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forests & other natural resources Recreation & tourism options Automotive manufacturing (Mercedes and Hyundai) Moderate cost of living Strength of urban centers Health care (near urban areas) College & universities Leadership – collaboration in economic development efforts 	<p>WEAKNESSES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low educational attainment Persistent poverty Out-migration in rural areas Aging population, aging workforce Lack of public water/sewer systems and system capacity Lack of funds (tax base) for improvement projects Lack of planning, especially in rural areas Negative perceptions and attitudes about the region
<p>OPPORTUNITIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional cooperation & marketing Public-private partnerships Tourism expansion Downtown & riverfront redevelopment Focus on entrepreneurship & innovation Better land use planning & growth management Focus on leadership training & development Better capture of retail sales 	<p>THREATS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aging or inadequate water & sewer systems Needed transportation improvements to roads, rail, and ports Over-dependence on a few economic sectors Lack of identified future leadership Absence of rural planning & zoning Public perception that things can't improve

Regional Industry Clusters

The following were identified as the most important existing industry clusters in Alabama's Delta region:

- Automotive Manufacturing
- Forestry and Wood Products
- Mining

Regional Goals and Strategies

From the various regional economic plans of the districts containing the 20 Delta counties, these goals and strategies emerged as the most prominent:

- A. Strive for a more balanced and diverse economy
- B. Make leadership development a priority; emphasize the need for regional collaboration among leaders
- C. Create and improve tourist attractions
(example: Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center)
- D. Develop business incubators and innovation centers
- E. Expand small business lending and seed capital availability
- F. Expand skilled trade and craft training in high schools
- G. Emphasize the region's quality of life
- H. Expand exports
(example: farm-raised seafood)

Section B: Governor's and State's Goals, Priorities and Programs

In 2011, The Alabama Economic Development Alliance was created by an Executive Order of Governor Robert Bentley. The Alliance worked with consultants to develop **Accelerate Alabama**, a new Economic Development Strategic Plan for the state. **Accelerate Alabama** provided direction for economic developers and officials throughout the state.

A four-step process was used to develop the **Accelerate Alabama** plan. This process included completing a competitive assessment of Alabama and how its assets compare to the competition from an economic development perspective; identifying potential targeted business sectors that Alabama has the assets to support; developing strategic accelerators to enhance Alabama's efforts in key areas; and preparing an implementation process to accompany the plan.

Stakeholder Input

To create the plan there was extensive input from elected officials, community leaders, economic development partners, and citizens of Alabama. The consultants used input tools, including regional visioning meetings, interviews and online surveys for key audiences that provided the opportunity for more than 1,200 Alabamians to participate in the process.

Alabama Economic Development Drivers

The Alliance was created to ensure the recruitment, retention and renewal of business and industry in Alabama. These three economic development drivers serve as the basis for recommendations included in the **Accelerate Alabama** plan. These drivers are defined as follows:

Recruitment: Programs that focus on the attraction of new business and industry.

Retention: Programs that focus on the retention and expansion of existing business and industry.

Renewal: Programs that focus on job creation through innovation, entrepreneurship, research and development, and commercialization.

To successfully compete for the jobs of tomorrow in each of the targeted business sectors, the state must diversify its economic development efforts through a balanced emphasis on recruitment, retention and renewal. The recommendations are designed to

accelerate the state's economic development efforts with each tactic providing a path to success. The accelerators are organized within the context of the three economic drivers, but most will require collaborative efforts across the full spectrum of Alabama's economic development community. There are some economic development accelerators that transcend the three primary economic drivers. These recommended initiatives have been presented after the three drivers in an "Other" category. The chart below summarizes the economic development drivers and accelerators associated with each in the plan:



Alabama Targeted Business Sectors

Eleven targeted business sectors, and specific areas of focus for each, were identified for the state to focus its recruitment, retention and renewal efforts. The determination of the targets identified for **Accelerate Alabama** involved thorough research, including the review of the current business/industry base in Alabama, current targeted sectors of state, regional and local economic development organizations in Alabama, as well as the various power providers, recent project activity, and other emerging sectors that have shown growth at the national, state and possibly local level.

Advanced Manufacturing

- Aerospace/Defense
- Automotive
- Agricultural Products/Food Production
- Steel/Metal
- Forestry Products
- Chemicals

Technology

- Biosciences
- Information Technology
- Enabling Technologies

Distribution/ Logistics

Corporate Operations

Many more details are provided in the **Accelerate Alabama** plan. That information can be found at <http://www.madeinalabama.com/assets/2013/03/AccelerateAlabamaPlan.pdf>.

On February 1, 2016 the office of Governor Bentley released its strategic plan for 2015-2019, the "**Great State 2019**" plan. The plan details the Governor's priorities for the next four years. Excerpts are detailed below.

Investing in Alabama's Education

Investment in High Quality Pre-Kindergarten

In 2015, the Governor restructured early childhood education and renamed the Department of Children's Affairs the Department of Early Childhood Education. The goal

of this restructuring was to further develop a cohesive system that coordinates the efforts of providing high quality early learning. For the next three years, it is the governor's goal to have First Class Pre-K available to every parent who chooses to enroll their four-year-old child in a classroom.

Alabama's FUTURE Scholarship Program

Alabama is blessed with a vibrant community college system with abundant educational opportunities. In 2015, the state restructured the community college system, creating a stand-alone board to oversee the system and empowering the chancellor to more effectively direct the system. To better utilize the resources of our community colleges, the Governor proposed a last dollar tuition scholarship program to allow every Alabama child the opportunity to attend a community college. The FUTURE Scholarship program will target seventh-graders in the most under-served counties first, and expand as results are proven and resources are identified.

An "Education Advisor" will partner with the student, and their parents or guardians, beginning in seventh grade and will coach that student through high school graduation and into postsecondary education. Upon high school graduation, the students would receive a last dollar tuition scholarship to attend a community college in the state. With the potential for two years of education at no cost, participating students could then join the workforce or pursue additional education.

Program goals will include:

- Increasing the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education for the enrolled and participating students
- Increasing the rates of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education for enrolled and participating students
- Increasing the program's students' and their families' knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing
- Increasing the percentage of students who enroll in and succeed in postsecondary education
- Increasing the preparation of the project teachers and staff to teach and serve these students

Workforce Development

Education prepares students for the future. A great education provides for the necessary training to join the workforce. To that end, the state can fill a critical role by bridging the gap between the education system and the private sector. In 2015, the Governor signed Executive Order Number 6 to better connect education to the workforce by creating a statewide longitudinal data system to link information from early

learning through postsecondary education and into employment. This will ensure that Alabama students graduate from school ready for college and/or a career. Other workforce development initiatives include the creation of the new Alabama Workforce System and funding for an executive director at every Regional Workforce Development Council.

Increasing the Number of Health Professionals in Rural Areas

According to “America’s Health Rankings” for 2015, a report by the United Health Foundation (2015 Report), Alabamians tend to have access to fewer primary care doctors and dentists than people in most other states. Among the fifty states, Alabama had the third-lowest number of dentists per 100,000 people and the eleventh-lowest number of primary-care physicians per 100,000 people, according to the 2015 Report. Access to care tends to be even worse in many of Alabama’s rural counties.

The high cost of education for health care providers is one of the primary reasons for this shortage. To encourage health care providers to practice in rural counties, the Governor proposed the creation or expansion of loan repayment programs for doctors, physician’s assistants, dentists, and nurse practitioners. Recipients would receive funds to repay student loans if they contract to practice in their fields of medicine for a certain amount of time in specifically defined, low-access areas of the state.

Rural health care will also be enhanced by greater access to broadband. Telemedicine is an important tool used in other states but minimally in Alabama which can potentially drive health care costs down. However, telemedicine is only possible if patients and doctors have access to high quality, robust broadband.

Alabama’s HOPE (Helping Our People Excel) Through Broadband

A fundamental cornerstone of a vibrant economy is affordable, fast internet. High-speed, high capacity internet, or broadband, spans borders, impacting rural as well as urban communities. In 2015, the Governor created the Office of Broadband Development and the Advisory Board on Broadband.

Providing state funds to match federal funding will be crucial in expanding access to affordable and sufficient broadband within schools and could lead to partnerships with internet providers to further increase broadband capabilities to rural and low-access communities.

Assessing the State's Water Resources

Water is a vital resource affecting the lives of every Alabamian. Not only does it add to the beauty of the state, water enables population and economic growth. Water crises facing other states highlight the need for effective management of our different types of water resources to ensure its availability for future generations.

Supporting Small Business Development and Success

Small business is the engine of job growth, creating three-out-of-four jobs, and small businesses are an integral part of the framework in the American economic system. In 2014, the Governor established the Alabama Small Business Commission (SBC). The SBC promotes small business development in the state through legislative and executive policy recommendations, including increased access by small businesses to resources and information and enhanced communications between the state and the small business community.

Alabama is also developing a small business resource website called Atlas Alabama, offering a comprehensive guide to small business services available throughout the state. The website includes checklists and information so that entrepreneurs can take the required steps to launch a new business or manage an existing one.

<https://www.atlasalabama.gov/>

Creation of the Alabama Transportation Institute

In the previous four years, Alabama made great strides in improving transportation. One of the most notable projects is the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP), which improved roads throughout the state. By leveraging better information, detailed analysis and the host of resources offered by a public research institution, such as the University of Alabama, government can more effectively meet the transportation and infrastructure needs of the state.

Over the next four years of his administration, Governor Bentley will also establish a new Alabama Transportation Institute (ATI), to be housed at the University of Alabama. This interdisciplinary research institute will be focused on better decision-making for transportation system improvements throughout the state.

More details from Governor Bentley's **Great State 2019** plan can be viewed here: <http://governor.alabama.gov/assets/2016/02/2015-2019-Strategic-Plan-2-1-2016-Final.pdf>

Section C: Alignment of State Priorities with Delta Regional Authority Priorities and Implementation Plan

This section of Alabama's Delta Region Development Plan illustrates how the state's economic development priorities and goals are aligned with those of the Delta Regional Authority's Regional Development Plan III (RDP III).

DRA's three Foundational Goals as expressed in RDP III are:

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: Facilitate capacity building within Delta communities

In addition, RDP III focuses on four specific Priority Area Goals:

Workforce Development

Small Business and Entrepreneurship

**Basic Public Infrastructure
such as water, sewer, and broadband**

**Transportation Infrastructure
such as roads, ports, and rail**

DRA Foundational Goal 1:

Advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta workforce

The goals of Governor Bentley and Alabama mesh with DRA's first foundational goal in these ways:

- The **Accelerate Alabama** plan, under the economic driver of Recruitment, puts a priority on "Human Capital". "Alabama cannot be successful with new recruitment without providing a workforce whose skills are aligned with the needs of future prospects." It calls for alignment of programs at the high school, two-year, and four-year college levels with the workforce needs of targeted industries. It also urges better use of technology and distance learning to extend education and training resources to more Alabamians, such as those in the rural Delta region.
- Within **Accelerate Alabama's** economic driver of Retention, the plan calls for formal alignment of workforce services in community colleges, under the umbrella of the Alabama Workforce Training System. It also strengthens each college's Training for Existing Business and Industry through a process of "re-engineering" and "re-focus" facilitated by the Governor's Office of Workforce Development.
- The first goal of Governor Bentley's new **Great State 2019** plan is to invest in education, particularly improving the workforce development system. It tasks all regional workforce entities with meeting the needs of businesses by developing a "talent supply chain". Other education initiatives in the plan include the FUTURE Scholarship program for free community college tuition, and a greater emphasis on pre-kindergarten learning opportunities.

DRA Foundational Goal 2:

Strengthen the Delta's physical and digital connections to the global economy

- The **Great State 2019** plan emphasizes the need for broadband expansion throughout the state via the "Alabama's HOPE" (Helping Our People Excel) program. The plan states that a "robust broadband network will lead to a stronger education system, increased capabilities for health care, a more efficient, connected law enforcement network and enhanced economic

development opportunities.”

- This plan also focuses on transportation infrastructure, highlighting the ongoing Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program, as well as a new Alabama Transportation Institute research center. Finally, the state's water resources infrastructure is addressed, with a goal of creating a new, comprehensive water management policy for the state.
- Under the economic development driver of Recruitment in the **Accelerate Alabama** plan, “Physical Capital” is listed as a key accelerator. It calls for ensuring that transportation infrastructure and other community infrastructure (including water, sewer, and telecommunications) are in place to create more “prospect-ready” sites in all regions of Alabama – particularly in “rural, underserved regions”.
- Other economic development drivers cited in **Accelerate Alabama** include support for rural development. “Alabama’s Black Belt and certain other areas of the state,” the plan notes, “include some of the poorest and most rural counties in the United States”. The plan proposes a Rural Infrastructure or Development Fund for the most distressed areas, to fund infrastructure projects that would enhance economic growth and development.

DRA Foundational Goal 3: Facilitate capacity building within Delta communities

The governor's **Great State 2019** plan calls for increasing capacity in rural Alabama primarily by improving access to health care. It calls for incentives for health care professionals to locate and remain in distressed rural communities. It would increase the number of medical residency programs throughout the state. Finally, it focuses on improved broadband access to increase the use of telemedicine in rural areas.

Accelerate Alabama's economic development driver of Renewal proposes a statewide expansion of research and development capacity, working with universities throughout Alabama. Other portions of **Accelerate Alabama** emphasize support for rural development – through state agencies such as the Office of Rural Development and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs' Resources for Economic Assistance Programs (REAP). Finally, the plan proposes greater support for “downtown redevelopment programs and other community development initiatives.”

Delta Regional Authority RDP III Priority Area Goal: Small Business and Entrepreneurship

The alignment discussion in this section has covered the DRA's three foundational goals, as well as three of RDP III's four priority area goals (workforce development, basic public infrastructure, and transportation infrastructure). The DRA priority area goal not yet addressed is small business and entrepreneurship. Alabama's goals and strategies align with this DRA priority goal as follows:

- **Accelerate Alabama** has a primary goal to “foster entrepreneurship and small business development”. Two tactics supporting this goal are 1) to encourage the development and implementation of entrepreneurship programs at the middle school and high school levels; and 2) to improve financial support to small and start-up businesses by encouraging private sector investment in early-stage companies. One method to achieve the latter is through a proposed Angel Investment Tax Credit Program.
- Governor Bentley's **Great State 2019** also includes a main goal of “supporting small business development and success.” Strategies supporting this goal include a more prominent role for the Alabama Small Business Commission and Advisory Committee, and development of online small business tools such as Atlas Alabama, a comprehensive guide to small business services available throughout the state.

Section D:

State Resources: Best Practices, Case Studies, Tools and Models for Economic Development

Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT) - A division of the Alabama Department of Commerce, AIDT promotes economic growth through customized workforce training. AIDT's expertise in recruitment and pre-employment training not only grows current businesses but also attracts new industries and countless jobs to the state. Offered at no cost to employers and trainees, this service puts companies first, finding the right talent and preparing each individual to excel in their job. There are six divisions of the AIDT program including the;

- Huntsville Center, which fulfills the training needs of automotive suppliers and other industries within the Northern Alabama Region.
- Alabama Robotics Technology Park, which is a collaboration between the state of Alabama, Calhoun Community College, Alabama Industrial Development Training, and robotics industry leaders across the nation.
- Forest Products Development Center (FPDC) which works with industry, government, academia, and granting institutions to find solutions to barriers that hinder product performance or prevent product entry for sustainably green biomaterials from our natural resources, with the end goal of assisting local industry.
- The Mobile Center, fulfilling the training needs of aviation, chemical, telecommunications and other South Alabama industries.
- The AIDT Maritime Training Center in Mobile, which was designed specifically to meet the growing demand for maritime industry related training in Alabama.
- And the Entertainment Media Production and Crew Training (EMPACT) program, AIDT's training program specifically to drive and build the crew base for the television and film industry in Alabama.

<http://www.aidt.edu/>

Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise, 'ACRE', was originally founded in 2002 as part of the Alabama Rural Initiative of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. A model for addressing poverty in economic development in one of the poorest areas of the nation, ACRE is located in Lowndes County, Alabama. According to the 2000 census, the per capita income for the county was \$12,457. Approximately 26.60% of the families and 31.40% of the population live below the poverty line.

- ACRE provides technical assistance to towns, nonprofits, corporations, and entrepreneurs. In 2002, the staff of ACRE under the Alabama Rural Initiative wrote the grant that led to the development of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Lowndes County. Funded by the Economic Development Administration of the United States Department of Commerce, the CEDS was essential in securing \$4.2 million for the development of infrastructure in two industrial parks. The parks, located in Fort Deposit, Alabama, the county's largest city, and the Tyson location, near Hayneville, now house two tier one suppliers to Hyundai. ACRE is currently assisting the Town of White Hall in developing its infrastructure to facilitate economic growth.
- A key focus of ACRE's programmatic thrust is Financial Literacy Education. The lack of financial education creates problems that cross cultural and socio-economic lines, impacting quality of life for all families. ACRE will expand financial literacy through the experience gained from previous efforts. HSBC, the former sponsor of the Alabama Rural Initiative, ACRE's predecessor, launched its Financial Literacy Program in Lowndes County, Alabama in 2002. ACRE's staff members Catherine Coleman Flowers, Linda Hinson, and Avis McGhee assisted in the development of the curriculum.

Since the program's inception, ACRE has trained over 530 participants or approximately seven percent of the population of Lowndes County between the ages of 18-64. The program has been expanded across the United States by HSBC. To further enhance Financial Literacy in Alabama, ACRE will establish the Alabama Institute for Financial Literacy. The outreach of the program will be to K-12 and adults through partnerships with businesses, school systems, churches, nonprofits, clubs, and state and local governments.

- While a part of the Alabama Rural Initiative, ACRE was appropriated a Congressional earmark sponsored by United States Senator Richard Shelby, and supported by the entire Alabama delegation. This appropriation will be disbursed as a grant administered by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency to demonstrate the use of affordable alternative or new technologies in an effort to address the inadequate disposal of raw sewage in Lowndes County.

Partnering with various local and national entities, the project will educate regulators; demonstrate certain unique features; advance state-of-the art decentralized wastewater management practices; change the community's approach to traditional wastewater options; and provide tools and documentation that can be replicated.

- ACRE teams with public and private partners to create economic opportunities for low income and underprivileged communities. ACRE has proposed developing a mixed income single family home community in White Hall,

Alabama situated along the historic Selma to Montgomery March Trail. ACRE seeks to partner with smart growth advocates to develop green housing that incorporates the use of renewable energy sources that can serve as a model for other rural communities.

<http://acrecdc.com/>

The Alabama Rural Development Office has many statewide initiatives. Established on January 26, 2011, by Executive Order Number Five through Governor Robert Bentley, the purpose of the Alabama Rural Development Office is to improve and advance education, healthcare, and economic development in the rural areas of Alabama.

- KidCheck is an award-winning K-12 school-based program that provides annual comprehensive health screenings for K-12 school children in participating Alabama school systems. Since its inception, KidCheck partners with over 20 two-year and four-year college nursing schools across Alabama to provide health screenings to over 21,000 children each year. In the Black Belt, KidCheck Plus currently holds 18 screening events each year that serve over 2,700 kids annually. The program identifies undiagnosed and unmet medical concerns for students in preschool through 12th grades in underserved areas. It coordinates necessary care to improve each child's well-being.
- The Alabama Partnership for TeleHealth, Inc. (APT) is a charitable nonprofit corporation formed as the result of a telemedicine initiative of the Rural Development Office in partnership with The Georgia Partnership for TeleHealth. This is a new agency in Alabama with a focus on increasing access to healthcare through the innovative use of technology. The Alabama TeleHealth Program strives to serve the citizens of Alabama by promoting and supporting new and existing TeleHealth programs across the state.
- The Birmingham School of Education has been awarded a seven-year, \$49 million grant to increase the number of low-income students prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The U. S. Department of Education's Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Grant provides funding to states to enhance services for students, parents and teachers at high-poverty middle and high schools. The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) will be the hub of GEAR UP Alabama, which will impact about 10,448 students from 18 school districts and 53 schools in Alabama's Black Belt.

<http://blackbeltaction.alabama.gov/About/Pages/default.aspx>

Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center (BBTCAC) – located in one of the country's poorest regions in the rural Alabama Delta, Black Belt Treasures is a shining example of utilizing a region's unique cultural assets to create a heritage tourism destination. Located in the city of Camden in Wilcox County, Black Belt Treasures opened in 2005 as an outgrowth of a cooperative tourism initiative of the Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission, Ala-Tom RC&D, and the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development.



Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organized to stimulate the economy in Alabama's Black Belt region through the promotion and sale of fine arts and heritage crafts. It also provides arts education opportunities. Since beginning with 75 artists, the center now represents more than 450 painters, sculptors, potters, basket-weavers, quilters, woodworkers, and other talented crafts people. The center now operates two galleries in the region, which have been visited by travelers from all 50 states and 26 foreign countries.

BBTCAC aims to be the centerpiece of an arts economy revitalization, encouraging both residents and visitors to experience arts, culture, and place. The center partners with schools, community arts organizations and other non-profits to deliver educational programming, workshops, and artist demonstrations to raise awareness of the Black Belt Region's great artistic culture and heritage with a broader sector of the population.

<http://www.blackbelttreasures.com/>