

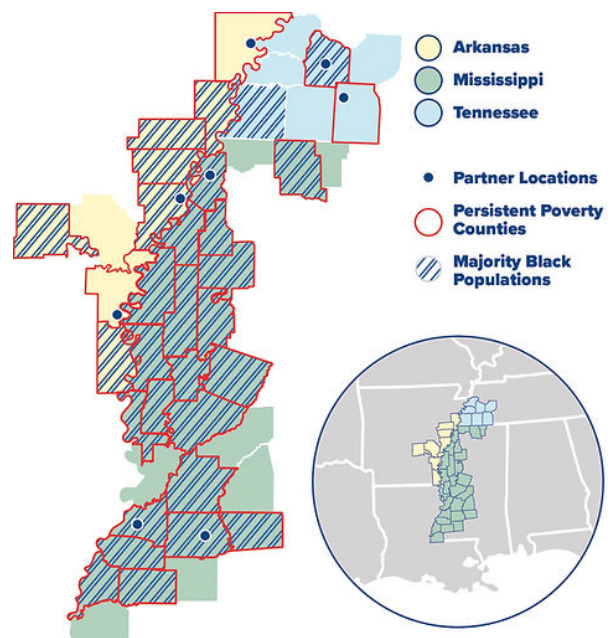
Case Study #1 – DRIVE: Enabling Regional Growth through Institutional Accountability

Background:

The University of Memphis is working to make the Mississippi Delta America's economic diversity engine. The region we serve (see map) is home to 25% of America's majority Black counties, and nearly every one of the counties we serve is designated as a persistent poverty county. Despite being home to 30% of the population for the three states and 30% of HBCU enrollment nationally, less than 9% of state Research and Development (R&D) funding and less than 18% of federal R&D funding is allocated to the region. The University has developed a philosophy for economic growth that centers on the idea that we are the University of Memphians, and for our institution and city to succeed, we need a place-based economic growth strategy accountable to the people in our region.

Economic growth is the only way to break this cycle of poverty, but with declining populations and a history of inequitable funding to rural and minority communities, our communities are left with only one avenue to realize the transformations that can chart new and optimistic paths for growth – federal grants. Federal grants are often challenging because they passively support the inequitable process which denies funding to these communities.

To win a grant, you must know how to write a grant. In the circumstances that our partner communities are in, they don't have the capacity to hire grant writers, nor the infrastructure to pursue grants. This means grants are most often not pursued, and in the few cases where won, keeping the award and meeting the performance requirements are difficult and often returned to sponsors because of administrative errors. Despite this challenge, the communities we work with have world-class assets that are competitive nationally. All that needs to be done is help address the administrative burden to unlock their potential and reverse downward growth trends.



Solution:

The University of Memphis is the only Carnegie R1 Research institution in the Mississippi Delta region we are uniquely positioned with an abundance of resources that enable the pursuit and delivery of federal grants. To address the systemic funding crisis that plagues our region, the University partnered with the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) and the Department of Labor (DoL) to conceive and launch the **Delta Revitalization through Innovation Vision and Equity (DRIVE)**. The partnership helped build a program responsive to DRA's observed challenges for the region, and DRA helped identify the communities. DRIVE is a first-of-its-kind program that wholistically addresses economic growth with rural mayors that breaks the cycle of poverty by building the infrastructure to pursue grants.

DRIVE creates a partnership between the University and rural communities to pursue federal awards. Eight communities have been supported - no community is larger than 10,000 people and all were in

persistent poverty, majority minority counties. Through a combination of professional development, joint proposal development, and expert review, the program has helped with application to federal calls for proposal, educated communities on using bonds for economic development, and provided every community with a strategic plan. These communities entered a two-year partnership with the University that provided the following:

- Embedded Community Partnership –the DRIVE team conducted workshops with stakeholders in each community. The proposed grants from the program needed to be place-based and centered on equitable growth for the whole community. Spending time in each community, the university, in partnership with community members, was able to identify strengths and weaknesses of each—this approach is essential to community-centered development.
- Grant Development Support – Beginning with a two-day workshop in Memphis and followed by multiple individual sessions and group bi-weekly writing sessions, each community was coached in the process of writing grants. Community members brought their knowledge of needs in their community and their network assets, and our team helped them in crafting these assets into grant narratives. The communities applied to federal grants including EDA, DRA, USDA, FEMA, DoL, as well as state agencies. Special sessions were included on topics such as hearing the perspective of reviewers of grant programs, deep dives on federal budget documents, inclusion of underrepresented individuals in the community, etc. More than \$3M in grant applications had been submitted by these communities and \$12M+ have been requested through state and federal procurement processes.
- A Whole Community Growth Partnership –In addition to grant development, DRIVE provided training on leveraging bonds and other financial instruments for economic growth, education on impact investing techniques, and strategic plans for each community and adopted as they were or modified by their community leadership.
- Exposure to Opportunity – Communities were provided an opportunity to meet with successful examples of small-town economic transformations to help visualize the trajectory of growth and steps needed to achieve desired outcomes.
- Opportunity Youth Engagement –We introduced a modification that centered on creating an engagement for opportunity youth. Opportunity Youth (age ~16-25 not enrolled in school or college) were often seen as unengaged. We introduced a program that helped these young people voice their concerns through a convening designed to help incorporate grant solutions and other funding mechanisms to meet their needs. And introduced, in a partnership with Hope Credit Union, an entrepreneurship program designed to help get these individuals banked and train them so they could pursue small business loans to help formalize startups.



Metric Outcomes:

We and our partner communities measure the success of DRIVE in two ways: quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative Success:

- \$15M in applications
- \$1M to date in funded proposals or dollars assigned
- 150 community partner organizations engaged

3 new programs launched as outcomes of effort

Qualitative Success:

While the metric successes are great measures of success, the shifting culture for the region is the greatest value. Multiple mayors have attributed hope for their community as a key outcome. These communities are for the first time feeling the possibility of transformational, positive change centered on sustainable, place-based economic development. Feedback from sessions like that shown here is an indicator of the overwhelming positivity that DRIVE has brought to the region.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience with the DRIVE program or any other suggestions for the team?

I enjoyed the meeting. It was very informative and helpful. I would like to see these types of meetings more often to see what kind of effect they are having on community leaders.

I am excited that the DRIVE team chose this community to improve. I ask that the team be transparent in their data collection and results.

Thank you for giving the community Hope. Eudora is not too far gone to save. It has the bones to be more for the people who live there and love their community.

Create a priority list for the community in order to help envision plan of action.

Very helpful

Stay in this area help us break down barriers in our communities

I have really high expectations for the success/impact of this initiative. My hope is that you are able to deliver and we are able to capitalize.

I look forward to the next meeting, which will be the second meeting to truly see if there is longevity in what is happening & not another "fly by night" group advancing themselves.

Very motivational and lots of new contacts made.

You're talking to the citizens of the city, seeing what they think is good about their home town. You have no input from the people passing the freeway exits on what might make them pull off and come take a look.

Links:

DRIVE Program - <https://www.driveequity.org/>