Northwest Tennessee
REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

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Gov. Bill Haslam’s top priority is making Tennessee the No. 1 location in the Southeast for high-quality jobs. In April 2011, Governor Haslam released his Jobs4TN plan, which laid out four key strategies for achieving this ambitious goal: (1) prioritizing business development efforts in six key clusters in which the state has a competitive advantage; (2) reducing business regulation; (3) investing in innovation; and 4) establishing regional “jobs base camps” in each of nine regions across the state. One of those nine regions is Northwest Tennessee.

To develop a regional economic development plan for Northwest Tennessee, an independent consultant facilitated an initial meeting with ECD’s regional staff, local economic development leaders and regional resource providers, including the Northwest Tennessee Development District, West Tennessee Industrial Association, USDA Rural Development, TVA, local workforce investment board, regional utility distributors and representatives from the education and financial communities. Following this initial meeting, teams were developed and brainstorming sessions were held on each of four strategic areas: recruitment, existing business outreach, innovation and workforce development. To ensure alignment between each strategy and guard against gaps, each team reported to the full group multiple times, providing opportunities for the entire group to ask questions and make suggestions. After several meetings, the entire group reviewed and approved this plan’s basic strategies and priorities. Local economic development leaders assisted by writing county profiles and providing additional county data. A draft plan was then written and submitted to the entire group for review, and a conference call was held to enable edits and agree upon key measures, resources and timelines. The following plan is a result of this effort.

Located near the geographic center of the U.S. population, the Northwest Tennessee region is globally linked by a vibrant combination of road, rail, air and water infrastructure assets. Manufacturing facilities are present throughout the region, with 127 major employers with 100 employees or more. Healthcare continues to be a fast-growing segment of the economic base, and the region continues to be Tennessee’s breadbasket, with approximately 61.6% of the land in the region currently being used for agriculture. The region also possesses great natural assets including Kentucky and Reelfoot Lakes and numerous outdoor wildlife preserves and public parks.

It is also essential to map out the Northwest region’s higher education assets and develop partnerships that will meet workforce development needs as they arise. This requires the region to develop and deploy new Community Higher Education Centers (HEC) in areas of high
need and expand capabilities within existing HEC’s to deliver STEM training and Career Readiness Certificates in fields such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare and transportation/logistics. The Northwest Tennessee Regional Career Center provides an opportunity to develop a sustainable HEC model that could be replicated in other areas across the region should plant closures occur in the future.
**REGIONAL OVERVIEW**

Recruitment is an essential element to the regional strategy. The region must recruit industry to create high-quality jobs utilizing raw materials and natural resources that exist within the region and leveraging proximity to clustered industries which may benefit from the location of suppliers within the region. These materials and resources include agricultural products, minerals, spec buildings and suppliers/partners of existing business clusters within the region. Based on existing industry and natural resources within the region, target industries such as the automotive sector, food sector and alternative energy industries are deemed as opportunities for recruitment. Other targets include the manufacture of products using ball clay, gravel and silica in the manufacture of sanitary, tile and paint products.

However, recruitment alone will not create success. Continuous communication will occur directly with existing businesses to identify resources within the region that can be used to address the opportunities and challenges facing current employers. Strategies for existing business outreach focus upon a multi-step approach of initiating contact, developing relationships, maintaining those relationships, identifying needs and addressing issues effectively through a coordinated use of available resources. Specific deliverables include conducting annual visits with existing business as coordinated through local chambers; developing local affiliation meetings; and identifying regional industry clusters to determine opportunities to connect manufacturers with underutilized supply chain resources that may exist within the region.

Northwest Tennessee has a three-fold plan for innovation: Entrepreneurial Development, Agriculture/Natural Resource Development and Digital Factories. The region will support entrepreneurship primarily through the development of a business accelerator as part of ECD’s competitive process for entrepreneurial accelerators in each of the state’s nine regions. As part of this effort, Northwest Tennessee will leverage the intellectual and financial capital of experienced business leaders/mentors and private investors in the region in order to position the region as a hub of creativity and entrepreneurship.

Northwest Tennessee also aims to use the Governor’s INCITE initiative as an opportunity to leverage its unique assets in agriculture, natural resources and alternative energy. An agribusiness/alternative energy consortium composed of industry leaders, academic institutions and other leaders will support innovation in biofuels, biomass materials, water resources, food supply development and renewable energies, and facilitate technology transfer and commercialization in this sector. This specialization will maximize the region’s rich natural assets, distinguishing Northwest Tennessee from other regions. The region will also explore establishing Digital Factories as a source of stable employment for the next generation of workers. Currently Gibson County’s leadership is actively pursuing the Digital Factory approach that has been displayed effectively in other regions. If the model proves sustainable, it is highly likely that it can be replicated across the Northwest region and the State.

The Northwest Tennessee region, “Tennessee’s Northwest Passage,” is located near the geographic center of the U.S. population and is connected to the world by a robust mixture of road, rail, air and water corridors. Bordered on the east and west by the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers, Northwest Tennessee offers commercial navigation in Henry, Benton, Lake and Dyer counties. Commercial navigation is provided by way of the river ports at Hickman, Ky., New Johnsonville, Tenn., and Memphis, Tenn. The new $53 million Port of Cates Landing is now under construction in Lake County. All nine counties are located within 25 miles of an interstate. Current construction of I-69 will create significant transportation benefits in this region. Four sites in the Northwest Region are in the process of being approved as Foreign Trade Zones. The highway system includes a network of U.S. and State Highways with a variety of improvement projects underway to enhance their value to the region. Air transportation assets within the region include seven general aviation airports, two of which have runways approximately 5,000’ in length. The Everett-Stewart Regional Airport has recently expanded runway capabilities to 6,500’. Other commercial airline facilities are located nearby in Jackson, Paducah, Ky., Memphis and Nashville. Rail transportation is available in all counties with more than 352 miles of track in the region serviced by a variety of Class 1 freight transportation providers. Telecommunications availability and capacity vary by location within each county, however, each county has cellular phone service, broadband internet connectivity and access to fiber optic lines in specific locations within populated areas.

Details of the nine counties composing the Northwest region are below.
Benton County: Benton County is centrally located to the majority of the U.S. population and has access to ground and rail, and close proximity to multiple river ports. Benton County has a variety of recreation and tourism venues including Kentucky Lake, Patsy Cline Memorial and two state parks. There are two units of the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge within Benton County. Camden General Hospital serves the community healthcare needs.

Carroll County: Education is one of Carroll County’s strengths. McKenzie is home to Bethel University, one of the fastest growing universities in Tennessee, currently undergoing a $32 million expansion and renovation project. Bethel’s enrollment has grown from 600 students in 1998 to 2,480 total students in 2010, including 1,880 full-time and 528 part-time, with additional growth projected for 2012. McKenzie is also home to a Tennessee Technology Center.

Crockett County: Crockett County benefits from its close proximity to Jackson and the transportation benefits derived by proximity to I-40 (11 miles away), U.S. highways (such as Highway 412, which is near interstate quality and spans the length of the county), rail and nearby river ports. The Crockett County Higher Education Center is located in Bells, and there are many higher education opportunities within 20 minutes driving distance. The proximity to the Haywood County megasite creates future opportunity for clustered industry.

Dyer County: Located about 75 miles north of Memphis, Dyersburg/Dyer County is the regional hub of a 10-county area, including parts of Northwest Tennessee, Missouri and Arkansas. Dyer County has a diverse manufacturing sector, a large agribusiness base, a 225-bed regional hospital and a regional mall. The county has an excellent public education system, highlighted by Dyersburg State Community College and the Tennessee Technology Center at Newbern. Major transportation assets include an interstate highway bridge across the Mississippi River, the CN railroad, and proximity to the Port of Cates Landing.

Gibson County: Location, a robust transportation infrastructure and a pro-business environment position Gibson County for tremendous growth for both industrial and retail recruitment. The area offers rail systems with access to four Class 1 railroads as well as ground transportation via many state and U.S. highways, including proximity to I-40. There are numerous higher education offerings ranging from Dyersburg State Community College in Trenton to the Higher Education Center of Humboldt. Gibson County’s potential is enhanced through its proximity to the Haywood County megasite.

Henry County: Strategically located as a retail hub in northwest Tennessee, Henry County is home to Kentucky Lake, which creates a growing tourism economy in addition to the county’s recognized support of local business and industrial entrepreneurs. Paris, the county seat, boasts a flourishing downtown and arts events throughout the year. Cooperative city and county governments generate successful deals and quick answers to inquiries. The county has an excellent education system with opportunities for higher education available locally through the Tennessee Technology Center at Paris.

Lake County: Lake County is situated between the quiet mystique of Reelfoot Lake and the majestic vista of the Mississippi River. A large portion of Lake County comprises the Reelfoot Lake area and is primarily driven by tourism and agriculture. Lake County is located in the extreme northwest corner of Tennessee and is home to the $53 million Port of Cates Landing, a slack water public port located at one of the most strategic points along the Mississippi River that has loading and unloading capabilities for various raw and finished products with barges, rail and ground transportation.

Obion County: Obion County is a unique area that strikes a balance between agriculture, manufacturing and education. Committed to business and industry, Obion County is home to the Northwest Tennessee Regional Higher Education Center, a 28,000 square-foot industrial training facility for advanced manufacturing. Obion County is enriched with hunting and fishing at Reelfoot Lake and Discovery Park of America, which will open in 2013. Obion County is fully quadra modal with access to CN Railroad, Everett-Stewart Regional Airport, US Highway 51, future I-69 and the Port of Cates Landing.

Weakley County: Weakley County is a growing community with 35,021 citizens and is well positioned for future economic development with an excellent transportation network and
public deal-ready industrial sites and buildings. The county boasts an excellent education system highlighted by the University of Tennessee at Martin, which has 8,500 students and offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in business administration, agriculture, engineering, education, humanities and other disciplines.
assistance to the affected workers. There is a need for technology enhancements to support services based on the amount of square footage occupied.

Council has offered the former Obion County Industrial development will rely on best practices of other Digital Factories across the region. Successful model and (c) business relationships with enterprises willing to hire

Manufacturing Sector Analysis (AMSA). The Northwest and Department of Human Services Tennessee Rehabilitation and training center will house staff representing various

Develop Training Partnerships for the Northwest Tennessee

In and indirect jobs derived from companies engaged in indicate that there may be significant opportunities for "jobs base camps" in each of nine regions

Tennessee the No. 1 location in the Gov. Bill Haslam's top priority is making

Crockett

Carroll

Crockett

Dyer

Gibson

Henry

Lake

Obion

Weakley

NORTHWEST TENNESSEE AT A GLANCE

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<td>14.1%</td>
<td>115,440</td>
<td>16,210</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>$30,933</td>
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Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development
REGIONAL STRATEGIES

Northwest Tennessee has 100 existing properties with buildings suitable for manufacturing and warehousing. There are 35 greenfield sites within the region, and other sites exist that are capable of being improved to match product needs. There are 16 Certified Deal Ready Sites sized from 20 to 550 acres. There are 9 speculative buildings in the region ranging from 20,000 to 100,000 square feet each. There are industrial recruitment prospects active and in-play at many of these sites. The proximity of the megasite in Haywood County is a strategic advantage for clustered manufacturing opportunities as the site is developed. The various sites located across the Northwest region are differentiated by availability of resources that would lead to targeted marketing of specific industries. For example, the availability of ball clay and silica in Henry, Carroll and Weakley counties creates opportunities in the porcelain fixtures, paint, glass and ceramic tile markets, while the food industry may find areas within the region with abundant water supply from underground aquifers and fertile land attractive. All sites would be suitable for 2nd and 3rd tier automotive manufacturing. Clustered industry opportunities need to be explored to determine if it would be possible to develop support industries in specific sectors. Some counties have significant opportunities in the recreation and tourism industry as well as unique assets for creating retirement communities.

Based on this, the following strategies are recommended:

**Identify Target Sectors and Regional Assets:** Using resources available through TVA to identify existing industry clusters within the region and surrounding areas, ECD staff and regional partners will develop a list of target industries that may be a good match for leveraging the natural resources of the region. In addition, inventory lists of existing assets including available sites within the region will be created.

**Brand and Market the Region:** At this time, regional and local stakeholders have begun to meet and discuss promotion of the region. While a complete marketing plan has yet to be formalized, the plan will include developing a website that provides information for use by site selection consultants, ECD project managers and TVA target market specialists. The region will develop its own website to reinforce its brand and create a clear image of the advantages of Northwest Tennessee. In addition, a consortium of the Northwest Tennessee Development District, county chamber executives, economic development professionals and ECD’s regional staff will work with economic development partners to identify opportunities for trade shows and events (i.e., consultant events and receptions) supported by the Tennessee Economic Partnership. Finally, the Northwest Tennessee Development District will work with the regional partners to develop printed and digital marketing materials highlighting the region’s strengths.

**Host a Familiarization Tour for Key Economic Development Partners:** Local county mayors, the Northwest Tennessee Development District and ECD’s regional staff will organize a Familiarization Tour for state legislative members, ECD’s project managers and TVA’s target market specialists that would increase the visibility and awareness of opportunities in the region.

**Develop Site Consultant Relationships:** Regional and local economic development professionals will work to identify site selection consultants specializing in the region’s targeted industries and develop relationships with those consultants that would lead to familiarizing them with assets residing within the Northwest Tennessee region.

**Leverage Large Projects:** ECD staff and regional partners will develop long-term strategies for leveraging the completion of several large projects including the Port of Cates Landing, I-69, the Haywood County megasite and the certification of foreign trade zones in the region.

Regional partners involved in these efforts will include USDA Rural Development’s REDLG spec building financing program. TVA will assist with loan programs, identifying industry clusters and technical assistance. ECD’s regional staff will implement rural ECD incentives and change the tier status of counties recently impacted by plant closings. TDOT will work to streamline the Industrial Access Program and to complete I-69, as well as to plan and complete Highway 641 to Kentucky. The Northwest Tennessee Development District will continue to seek funding and grants for targeted industries. ECD’s regional staff and the development district will work to develop both digital and printed marketing materials to facilitate domestic and international marketing efforts. Local banks will also be engaged to partner in financing efforts to secure relocation and expansion projects.

**Existing Business Outreach**

This is one strategic area where approaches focused on
county-level involvement are critical to ensuring success. One of the performance measures used to evaluate local chamber executives is their ability to engage existing industry and retain and grow jobs within their individual communities.

The following strategies are recommended:

**Develop Relationships and Provide Solutions:** Each county will continue to communicate directly with its existing businesses to identify opportunities for improvement and utilize ECD, development district and other resource providers as necessary to address existing business opportunities and concerns. Strategies for existing business outreach include initiating contact, developing relationships, maintaining relationships, identifying needs and addressing issues effectively through a coordinated use of available resources.

**Identify and Develop Supplier Opportunities Within the Region:** Industry clustering and supply chain partnerships within regions or even with nearby regions or states create opportunities to connect manufacturers with underutilized supply chain resources that may exist within the region. During visits, local chamber officials will seek to understand these opportunities and search for opportunities within the region.

**Develop Relationships and Drive Engagement:** ECD’s regional staff will host annual events such as Industry Roundtables with state legislators and ECD officials to create opportunities to build relationships and enable industry to share issues impacting success that may be capable of being addressed at the state level.

**Innovation**

Northwest Tennessee will pursue an innovation strategy that utilizes the region’s natural resources, synergies with higher education and its proximity to larger markets.

The following strategies are recommended:

**Leverage Local Assets in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Energy:** Northwest Tennessee’s agrarian features are positioning the region to become a hub of innovation. The strategic location of the Port of Cates Landing on the Mississippi River opens the Northwest region to global transportation, distribution and manufacturing opportunities.

Northwest Tennessee will support the development of new products and the creation and recruitment of companies that leverage the region’s rich water, agricultural and natural resources.

The region will facilitate the establishment of a consortium of leaders in the agribusiness and energy sectors that will support these efforts and provide industry-specific resources and access to expertise in these particular fields. Such a specialization will distinguish Northwest Tennessee from other regions and help attract early-stage capital.

UT Martin, Bethel University and Dyersburg State – which house Northwest Tennessee’s most natural constituencies and assets for innovation – will partner with the agribusiness/energy consortium to spearhead these efforts. These organizations will build connections between the agricultural, finance, entrepreneurial, academic and relevant industrial communities in order to support research, development, technology transfer and commercialization in the agriculture and energy sector. Both Dyersburg State Community College (DSCC) and the University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM) already offer dual admission options (a 2 + 2 curriculum that provides students with a seamless transfer) to students in agri-business and agri-production (including biomass crops and biofuels). Northwest Tennessee’s innovation leadership will explore other potential partnerships with Memphis Bioworks Foundation and its agricultural division – AgBioworks – organizations already pursuing many of the same economy objectives throughout the Mississippi Delta region.

A recent study by the Memphs Bioworks Foundation projected the creation of nearly 50,000 direct and indirect jobs in the next two decades in the bioprocessing industry. If the region leverages its natural resources and agricultural expertise to develop the sustainable resources, foods, biofuels and bio-based materials that are of increasing global importance such high ambitions can be achieved.

**Pursue Digital Factories:** Leaders in other regions of the state have developed models for creating Digital Factories, which create job opportunities in rural areas. To date, these business models have enabled call center and technical support work, formerly performed overseas, to be secured in-state. This approach necessitates the creation of a local partnership that can develop (a) a site suitable for establishing office infrastructure; (b) educational partners to develop the workforce;
and (c) business relationships with enterprises willing to hire workers through the Digital Factory. The model is currently being explored in Gibson County in hopes that it can be replicated across the region as appropriate.

Regional partners will work to develop a team to monitor and research various approaches currently being used to establish Digital Factories. Based on the relationships developed in this process, regional partners will work diligently to create a business model that will support development and establishment of Digital Factories across the region. Successful model development will rely on best practices of other Digital Factories currently in use and identify the financial, technological and physical resources required. Based on these requirements, the region will work to develop partnerships that will meet these needs in a manner that could ensure Digital Factory replication in areas where manufacturing job opportunities may not currently exist.

**Workforce Development**

One of the major obstacles in meeting the long-term training needs of businesses is lack of capacity within the training and education system and lack of funding to implement new programs. The cornerstone of a service strategy moving forward is to open a satellite career and training center for the region, recruit partners and facilitate the creation of a sustainable model.

**Launch the Northwest Tennessee Regional Higher Education Center:** The Obion County Joint Economic Development Council has offered the former Obion County Industrial Training building as the location for the Northwest Tennessee Regional HEC. The building will be rent free, requiring only a minimal monthly fee to cover the cost of utilities and janitorial services based on the amount of square footage occupied. Since the building was formerly used for training, there is already classroom space and office space with furnishings. There is a need for technology enhancements to support innovative strategies for assisting dislocated workers and their families. The practically “move-in” ready building allows for partners to quickly accommodate the needs of workers. Additionally, due to the closeout of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant programs and potential cuts in the WIA formula funds, the LWIAs have an ample number of well-trained staff who are available to offer immediate assistance to the affected workers.

**Develop Training Partnerships for the Northwest Tennessee Regional Higher Education Center:** The comprehensive career and training center will house staff representing various partner agencies. This will include: the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWWD), which will provide basic labor exchange, unemployment insurance, Trade Adjustment Assistance (if applicable), and veterans services; the Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board (NTWB), which will provide core, intensive training services as established under the Workforce Investment Act; the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development Division of Adult Education (AE), which will provide basic education instruction and GED preparation; and Workforce Essentials Inc. (WE), operator of Tennessee’s TANF program known locally as Families First. Other partners who will be on-site in an as-needed-basis and also accept referrals include Dyersburg State Community College’s Tennessee Small Business Development Center (DSCC TSBDC); University of Tennessee at Martin’s Tennessee Small Business Development Center (UTM TSBDC) and Regional Entrepreneurship & Economic Development (REED) Center; Institute of Career Development (ICD); and Department of Human Services Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Union City (TRC), which provides specialized assistance to individuals with disabilities. Training providers who have tentatively agreed to offer classes on-site or by referral are Tennessee Technology Centers and Dyersburg State Community College. Other potential partners such as UT Martin have also indicated interest.

**Develop an HEC Model that is Sustainable and Repeatable:** The development of the Northwest Tennessee Regional HEC model is not unique; it has been utilized in various areas across Tennessee. The deployment of this HEC model should be of increasing value to the region. The development of a sustainable model is necessary to transform the workforce and create a valued asset that would support the strategies currently planned for recruitment and existing business.

**Develop Advanced Manufacturing Workforce Training:** In August 2011, LWIA 12, along with its multiple partners received the draft results of a 19-county regional Advanced Manufacturing Sector Analysis (AMSA). The Northwest Tennessee Employment Region is included in the AMSA. This report identifies companies, job titles, wage information, job openings and projected job growth in the sector. The analysis found that manufacturing jobs accounted for 18.9% of all jobs in LWIA 11 and 24.2% of all jobs in LWIA 12. The estimated
employment in advanced manufacturing is 32,544, or 14% of all employment in the 19-county region.

Local companies within the 19-county region were surveyed. The survey started with a list of 677 manufacturing companies but was then narrowed to a list of 79 companies who were believed to be involved in advanced manufacturing. 41 companies were found to actually be involved in advanced manufacturing and were surveyed for the AMSA. The results indicate that there may be significant opportunities for employment in areas of management, maintenance, transportation/materials moving, production and other direct and indirect jobs derived from companies engaged in advanced manufacturing.
Action Item #1: Launch and develop a model for sustaining the Northwest Tennessee Regional Higher Education Center in Obion County.

• Launch the Northwest Tennessee Regional Higher Education Center in Obion County.

• Develop a long-term sustainable model that can be deployed across the region in areas of need in 2013.

Action Item #2: Over the next two years, support the launch of a regional accelerator, regional business incubator and Digital Factory.

• Support the successful launch of a regional accelerator in the region by January 2012.

• Research requirements and develop model for Digital Factories to be deployed across the area in 2012.

• Develop relationships that will support a business incubator program.

Action Item #3: Develop and implement a targeted marketing campaign for Northwest Tennessee.

• Plan and implement a Familiarization Tour for ECD project managers and TVA target market specialists in 2012.

• Identify and develop relationships with key site selection consultants for targeted industries in 2012.

Action Item #4: Meet with the top 100 existing employers in the region.

• Meet with the top 100 existing employers in the region to determine how, if at all, state and local economic development organizations can help them expand and increase their competitiveness.

• Plan and host an Annual Industrial Roundtable using legislative resources to create and enhance relationships.
innovative strategies for assisting dislocated workers and their
already classroom space and office space with furnishings.
Since the building was formerly used for training, there is
forward is to open a satellite career and training center for the
ries currently in use and identify the financial, technological
research various approaches currently being used to establish
Tennessee. The deployment of this HEC model should be of
TSBDC) and Regional Entrepreneurship & Economic Develop-
ment of Labor and Workforce Development Division of Adult
Regional Higher Education Center
companies were found to actually be involved in advanced
The survey started with a list of 677 manufacturing companies
Regional utility distributors, and representa-
Wildlife preserves and public parks. The region also possesses great
transportation/logistics. The Northwest Tennessee Regional
need and expand capabilities within existing HEC's to deliver
sustaining the Northwest Tennessee Regional Higher
Recruitment
• Bethel University
• Connected Tennessee
• Delta Regional Authority
• Dyersburg State Community College
• Jackson State Community College
• Local Chambers of Commerce
• Local Utility Districts
• McKenzie Industrial Board
• Northwest Tennessee Development District
• Obion County Joint Economic Development Council
• Paris/Henry Economic Development Corporation
• Startup Tennessee
• Tennessee Career Centers
• Tennessee Department of Agriculture
• Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development
• Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation
• Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development
• Tennessee Department of Tourist Development
• Tennessee Department of Transportation
• Tennessee Small Business Development Centers
• Tennessee Technology Centers
• Tennessee Valley Authority
• University of Tennessee at Martin
• University of Tennessee Center of Industrial Services
• University of Tennessee Municipal Technical Advisory Service
• University of Tennessee County Technical Assistance Service
• U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development
• U.S. Economic Development Agency
• U.S. Small Business Administration
• Weakley County Economic Development Board
• West Tennessee Industrial Association
*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.