Making a Difference: Plan East Tennessee (PlanET)

The Mission

Plan East Tennessee, or PlanET, began in 2010 as a regional partnership of communities building a shared direction for our future. PlanET comprises five counties, 16 cities, and four towns, all investing in one region. PlanET sought ideas about protecting our valuable resources and addressing our challenges regarding jobs, housing, transportation, a clean environment, and community health. UT’s role was to assist in the development of research, critical inquiry, and planning and design strategies that accommodate an anticipated population growth rate of 45 percent through 2040, while protecting our valuable resources and addressing challenges. PlanET’s mission was to initiate the creation of long-term solutions for investments in our region, helping define the next chapter in our rich history and leaving a legacy of optimism and opportunity for future generations.

A major outcome of the PlanET initiative was UT’s Smart Communities
Initiative, birthed with PlanET seed funding. The Smart Communities Initiative will give students hands-on experience as they tackle civic projects through a suite of UT courses all focused in one city, county, or special district per year. Projects to date include storm water mapping and analysis, streetscape improvements, greenway extensions and redevelopment of old industrial sites.

PlanET Video: UT Institute of Agriculture channel on YouTube

The Partners

The Plan East Tennessee (PlanET) Consortium includes individuals and organizations from five counties of the greater Knoxville area (Anderson, Union, Blount, Loudon, Knox) and 19 Cities (Knoxville, Maryville, Alcoa, Norris, Loudon, Lake City, Lenoir City, Farragut, Oak Ridge, Clinton, Luttrell, Greenback, Maynardville, Philadelphia, Plainview, Friendsville, Louisville, Oliver Springs, Townsend).

University of Tennessee partners include the College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service, the Haslam College of Business Administration Center for Business and Economic Research, the College of Engineering Center for Transportation Research, the College of Education, Health and Human Sciences’ Center for Public Health and Center for Physical Activity and Health, the College of Architecture and Design, the Office of the Provost UT Service Learning and the Smart Communities Initiative, and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Department of Food Science and Technology, and the College of Arts and Sciences Department of
Geography.

**Impact on UT**

PlanET represented a robust, sustainable relationship between project managers and consortium partners, providing direct opportunities for UT faculty and students to blend and apply the grassroots knowledge of the local citizenry. The partnerships bring expertise of the academic community to the issues of community building, such as housing, transportation, environment, health, and economic development. PlanET afforded students and faculty alike with the opportunity to apply and test cutting edge research and evaluation tools through planning, face-to-face and online data collection, including methodologies of large and small focus groups, surveys, interviews, etc., data and statistical analysis, and report development. A number of scholarly publications, creative activities and awards, as well as a major new service-learning program (the Smart Communities Initiative) have also resulted from this partnership.

![UT's Smart Communities Initiative](image)

**Impact on Community**

For a region that has never embraced a shared vision for the future, one of the most profound outcomes is the establishment of a committed coalition of leaders that will follow the plan through implementation.

Additional outcomes included: Fostered ongoing citizen involvement in planning for the region’s future, developed a regional “blueprint” to guide development over the next decades, and increased local capacity for dialogue and plan implementation. Other community impacts included demonstration projects at dozens of sites throughout the region to test ideas and the creation of an indicators website to share information and track the region’s progress towards a more prosperous future. Demonstration projects highlighted practices relevant to regional growth priorities that have been identified by community stakeholders. These projects were used to stimulate robust conversations amongst stakeholder groups.
Communities demonstrate greater understanding of the value that UT community programs contribute to livable, sustainable futures through physical planning and design. PlanET’s process resulted in a “blueprint” that will guide development over the next decades. The region has increased its local capacity for dialogue and plan implementation. The Smart Communities Initiative will continue the work of PlanET by partnering UT coursework with civic projects identified by participating municipalities and special district governments.

Related Stories

Service Learning in Smart Communities Gives Students Real World Experience

PlanET in the News

Contact

PlanET Homepage

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