

## Allendale, South Carolina



	Allendale
Population (2000)	3,900
Municipal budget (2005)	\$6.5 million <sup>99</sup>
Per capita income (2000)	\$10,400
Median household income (2000)	\$16,600
Poverty rate (2000)	41%
Minority population (2000)	82%
Proximity to urban center	62 miles to Augusta, Ga.
Proximity to interstate highway	35 miles
Strategic approach	Leadership development
Time frame	1997-2007

After decades of high unemployment and crippling poverty, Allendale created a regional leadership institute to equip emerging leaders with the skills to reverse the community's fortunes. Allendale's post-war economy – built on pass-through tourism – was crushed in the 1960s when Interstate 95 was built 35 miles east of town. In 1997, the Chamber of Commerce, concerned with the deteriorating conditions in town, partnered with South Carolina's Downtown Development Association and state officials for a strategic planning exercise. A lack of leadership was identified as one of the region's most prominent issues. In response, public and private actors came together to create the Salkehatchie Leadership Institute in 1998. The institute has since trained nearly 2,000 leaders who have gone on to become elected officials or leaders in the field of community and economic development.

### The community and its history

Allendale, in rural southwestern South Carolina, was burned to the ground during the Civil War and rebuilt in 1873. Since the early 1900s, the town's economy has hinged on agriculture, especially soybean and cotton crops. The big boom for Allendale came in the 1940s and '50s when U.S. 301 was the main north-south highway along the eastern seaboard. Allendale was conveniently located at the midpoint between New York and south Florida, and travelers found Allendale to be the perfect stopping point on their trips to the beach. Throughout the post-war years, Allendale's streets bustled with restaurants, hotels and grocery stores.

<sup>99</sup>This budget figure is for the County of Allendale. Interview with Art Williams, Allendale County administrator, February 26, 2007.

*A small rural community in South Carolina creates a leadership institute to cultivate local leadership, generate grant funding and confront the racial divide.*

The town's character was changed forever in 1960 when Interstate 95 was planned for construction approximately 35 miles east of Allendale. Soon, travelers were using the new interstate to journey south and Allendale's tourism industry collapsed. Poverty levels and unemployment rose, and the region became known as one of the poorest and least educated in the state.

It was not until 1997 that a unified effort was made to improve these blighted conditions. Allendale's Chamber of Commerce initiated the development of a strategic plan for the county. Chamber official Anne Rice asked Ben Boozer from the South Carolina Downtown Development Association to lead the exercise. Boozer agreed and partnered with Walter Harris from the South Carolina Department of Commerce as well as Allendale's legislative representatives, state Rep. Wilbur Cave and state Sen. James Clyburn. Through the planning process, this group of officials and citizens recognized that Allendale had a severe leadership deficit.

## The strategy

Allendale's strategy was to play a primary role in creating a regional leadership development program. After identifying a lack of leaders in Allendale and the surrounding rural counties, Rice and several elected officials from Allendale identified the local branch campus of the University of South Carolina as a possible partner in creating a leadership program. Rice and Allendale's mayor approached administrators at USC-Salkehatchie, located in Allendale, about hosting a leadership course on campus. From this conversation, the Salkehatchie Leadership Institute was born.

The next step was to identify a long-term funding source for the institute. Rice, who became the first director of the institute, worked with Boozer to reconnect with local legislators about the possibility of state support for the center. For the next year, Clyburn and Cave lobbied for legislative support for the institute. In 1998, the Salkehatchie Leadership Institute was appropriated \$100,000 in the state's recurring budget.

The institute provides a series of leadership development programs for youths and adults. Through these programs, it prepares citizens to take the lead in economic and community development. All institute attendees start by learning about social and economic issues in their community. Once they have a deeper awareness of these issues, the institute helps attendees decide on a problem area to tackle in their community. Attendees are then connected to relevant boards and committees to begin seeking solutions.

Since developing these programs, the Salkehatchie Institute has trained more than 1,100 adults and 800 youths, who have become more engaged and educated citizens. Some of the adults, for instance, have gone on to hold elective office or have generated grant money for redevelopment in their home counties. The institute has helped to generate an estimated \$9

million in grant funding for the area. Through the institute, Allendale is creating leaders to sustain economic development over the long term.

### What are the lessons from this story?

***Leadership development is economic development.*** Allendale's strategy – to cultivate local leadership – resulted in a cadre of new and well-connected leaders, many of whom became influential in initiating local community and economic development efforts. In fact, the institute estimates that more than \$9 million in grant funding has been awarded to projects in Allendale because of the initiative of new local leaders. One former student alone raised more than \$1 million to fund a new county health services building in nearby Barnwell County. In many rural communities where leaders are few and far between, a capacity building strategy such as leadership development can be a viable strategy for long-term economic development.

***Leadership development can be a tool for bridging social divides.*** Developing new leaders in small towns is one way to begin dealing with difficult issues that may be standing in the way of development. The Salkehatchie Leadership Institute was an incubator for a diverse community development organization called Allendale County ALIVE. ALIVE initiated a local process to openly address race and seek community-wide solutions to issues. "Allendale is one of the few communities I've seen that hasn't been afraid to address racial issues and move forward together," said Bill Molnar, associate program director of Clemson University's Institute for Economic and Community Development.

***Local colleges are assets for small town community and economic development.*** The Salkehatchie Leadership Institute was created through a partnership of Allendale, neighboring towns, the state and the University of South Carolina. Housing the institute on a local campus was helpful, both in terms of securing funding for the program and access to professional expertise in the field of leadership development. Local leaders can look to local or regional higher education institutions to support their town's efforts to develop local leaders or create new businesses.

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