



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

TUESDAY, MAY 2, 2023

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Justice Smyth

Tuscaloosa County Economic Development Authority

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**TUSCALOOSA AREA ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATE TO LAUNCH FUEL TUSCALOOSA,  
AN INNOVATE ALABAMA INITIATIVE AND TALENT PROGRAM**

***Tuscaloosa, Ala.*** - The Tuscaloosa area is one of nine Alabama communities selected for participation in the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama's (EDPA) talent retention and attraction program Fuel Alabama (FuelAL).

Through EDPA, and in partnership with Innovate Alabama, the local coalition made up of the Tuscaloosa County Economic Development Authority, Visit Tuscaloosa, the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, and the cities of Tuscaloosa and Northport, jointly announce their participation in a summer program which will offer interns professional development, service opportunities, and social events, designed to showcase what life is like in the community outside of the workplace.

"We know that young professionals are drawn to communities that have not only an abundance of amenities like restaurants, a thriving nightlife and music scene, and outdoor recreation, but also places that offer high quality jobs and opportunities to give back through service. Our aim is to expose the FuelAL participants to a side of Tuscaloosa County that they might not have experienced outside of a short radius of campus," said Kelsey Rush, president and CEO of Visit Tuscaloosa.

Understanding that tens of thousands of talented students graduate from Alabama's colleges and universities, this program is relevant and timely. Recent surveys indicate that two-thirds of in-state students, and only 20 percent of out-of-state students, remain in Alabama one year after graduation. The FuelAL program hopes to boost those figures by answering one simple question: "Why choose Alabama?"

The answer to that question might lie in a community's ability to highlight the opportunities that exist, perhaps unbeknownst to college students and recent graduates.

"My question would be 'Why not Tuscaloosa and West Alabama?' Students have already chosen to come here for their education. But there are a multitude of reasons – economically, professionally, and socially – that make Tuscaloosa/West Alabama an attractive place to call home and to start a career," said Donny Jones, executive vice president and chief workforce officer for the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama.

Interns participating in FuelAL will be provided with personal and professional resources which will allow them to experience Alabama in a new way. They will broaden their networks and socialize with peers through professional workshops, team-building exercises, and more.

"Many people may not know that Alabama has long been home to innovators. Everything from inventing the first operational windshield wipers to conducting the genomics research that is improving the human



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condition all over the world, it all happened, and is still happening, in Alabama,” said Justice Smyth, executive director of the Tuscaloosa County Economic Development Authority. “What we want to show is that Tuscaloosa is a place where opportunity exists for the next generation of innovators to dream big, play hard, and live comfortably.”

Students interested in participating in the Tuscaloosa program should submit their application at <https://tinyurl.com/FuelTuscALoosaInternship2023>. Applications will be accepted through May 31<sup>st</sup> and the kick-off celebration for those accepted will take place on Thursday, June 8, 2023. There is no cost requirement for participants.

Companies and individuals interested in serving as mentors for Fuel Tuscaloosa participants should complete the form found at <https://tinyurl.com/FuelTuscALoosaMentor2023>.

In addition to Tuscaloosa, FuelAL programming will also be hosted in Anniston, Auburn, Birmingham, Baldwin County, Dothan, Huntsville, Mobile, and Montgomery. EDPA will also host a Summer Summit to engage and fuel relationships among community-oriented young professionals. Interns who have participated in events in their community will be given the opportunity to sign up for a weekend with 40 fellow interns.

The first summit will be a weekend in Muscle Shoals, enjoying the outdoors, culture, and community in Northwest Alabama. Additional summits, which will engage students as they near graduation, will be held this fall, winter, and next spring.

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