



## I-Rural: Helping rural communities address tourism needs

Rural communities and rural community governments lack resources to develop planning on a host of issues. In one effort to help fill this resource gap, Illinois Extension’s Community and Economic Development team is collaborating with on-campus professors from the university’s Department of Recreation Sport and Tourism on a two-year project designed to help rural tourism communities, including Savanna in Carroll County, “examine the demand for rural tourism and assess rural tourists’ preferences (e.g., motivations, expectations, decision-making, and travel behaviors) so as to develop rural tourism experiences that match their expectations and preferences.” (Soulard et al. 2018; Zou, 2020).

The collaboration kicked off its work in Savanna in May 2021, when Extension organized a two-day site visit for Illinois professors working on the project, including a series of interviews with local stakeholders and community leaders. The team followed this up in July with a visioning session with community members held at the Savanna Museum and Cultural Center to explore Savanna’s strengths and improvement opportunities and to envision Savanna’s tourism future.

This work will be used to develop a survey targeting tourists in Illinois and surrounding states to understand their motivations and preferences. Finally, the team will report their findings to Savanna and the other communities in a series of webinars that include recommendations for tourism strategies.

The team’s work has been well received by Savanna’s residents. Participants are appreciative of the opportunity the visioning session presented, allowing them to have conversations with other community members with whom they might not otherwise have come into contact. From our perspective, this looks like a good example of the services and support that Extension can deliver to the communities of northwestern Illinois.



CED Educator Mike Delany chatting with Savanna Resident Ann Zink.



[go.illinois.edu/iRuralSavanna](https://go.illinois.edu/iRuralSavanna)



As COVID-19 continued to impact governments, businesses, and communities, Illinois Extension’s Local Government Education program increased its outreach aimed at economic investment and community vitality, workforce development, leadership, policy, equity, and resiliency. By partnering with state leadership and organizations in Illinois, the Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development team has provided outreach aimed to help local governments and residents build capacity to strengthen their communities and organizations and improve public services.



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## Statewide Webinar Reach



60  
Webinars in 2021



2,003  
Individuals Learned about Leadership, Public Service, and Community Involvement



1,094  
Individuals Learned about Meeting Needs of Diverse or Vulnerable Populations



3,955  
Individuals Reached in Economic and Financial Stability Webinars



1,043  
Reached in Economic Vitality and Community Resiliency Webinars

## Community-Driven Broadband Reach



1,228  
Community Leaders Educated on Broadband Expansion Opportunities



714  
Participants Educated on Obtaining Funding and Needs Assessment



416  
Individuals Reached on Broadband Project Management

*The University of Illinois Extension’s community and economic development team helps communities build capacity for creative and informed decision-making to enhance their quality of life.*