

Unit 18 – Christian, Jersey, Macoupin and Montgomery Counties
Thursday, October 16, 2025
Macoupin County Extension Office, 60 Carlinville Plaza, Carlinville, IL

Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Connor Ashlock, Tiffany Blasa, Mark Dugger, Anna Fessler, Caiden Freeland, Cyndy Howard, Vicki Joiner, Chad Ruppert, Sara Marten (staff), Lisa Peterson (staff)

Call to Order – Vicki called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M.

Approval of Minutes – Minutes from June 12, 2025, were presented. With no additions or corrections proposed, a motion was made by Mark Dugger to approve the minutes and seconded by Connor Ashlock. Motion passed. Minutes approved.

Fiscal Reports – Fiscal reports were presented. Trust account expenditures and revenues for FY26 are aligning with usual amounts. The state match amount for this year has already been collected and transferred to the account. Self-supporting account is operating with a positive balance as of the end of September.

Unit Updates

STAFFING UPDATES – Sara shared that Cheralee Vohlken joined the unit as a 4-H Youth Development Coordinator. She will be housed in the Christian County office and will serve both Christian and Montgomery Counties. At this time, there are no open positions, and the unit is fully staffed.

SNAP-ED UPDATE – Sara shared that, since the last meeting, federal funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) was eliminated and became effective October 1, 2025. USDA released remaining surplus funds to keep staff and programming active through February 2026. Currently, the unit employs two SNAP-Ed staff. Both staff members are programming in the fall and will wrap up all SNAP-Ed programs before closure in February. The unit and state are still identifying possibilities to continue reaching some of our SNAP-eligible audiences, once the program ends.

Sara also shared that the SNAP-Ed budget included some funding to support facilities, administrative costs, and supplies. These amounts will need to be absorbed into the trust funds and/or additional local funds may need to be found.

Old Business

PLAN OF WORK DISCUSSION – Sara and Lisa Peterson discussed the needs assessment and plan of work process. Unit staff completed interviews with community partners throughout the summer. Educators came together to analyze results and review other data to determine some of the key needs within the unit. Priorities that came to the top of the list included workforce readiness and advancement, mental health and well-being, food access, connected adults and families, thriving natural resources and environments, and food safety. Sara and Lisa led a discussion with council members on their thoughts on the unit's needs. Members wanted more information on what the term 'connected adults and families' meant in regards to programming and educational sessions. This theme is more focused on increased engagement within communities and even increased volunteerism – seeing more people interact and participate within their communities. It was mentioned that while this might not always be a focus in programming, some of these themes are connected with others so the goals can be fulfilled by focusing in other themes, as well. Mental health was also discussed. Members felt like youth audiences are receiving a lot of mental health resources and training within the school system. It was mentioned that adults, especially parents, might still benefit from learning how to best identify warning signs and support those that are struggling with an illness. Workforce preparedness continues to be a need and was discussed for its focus on providing experiences that may help younger members of the workforce build up their resumes (i.e. they need so many years of experiences before getting a job, but need a way to build up those experiences so that they are eligible for the jobs they need or want.)

Sara and Lisa thanked the members for their input. The educator team will meet again, soon, to discuss the final focuses of the unit. The full plan of work will be reviewed during the December council meeting. If members have additional feedback or questions, please contact Sara.

New Business

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP – Sara reviewed the current membership and reminded those members with terms expiring this December. There are a lot of members turning over this year so Sara is encouraging outgoing members to identify a good replacement candidate and forward contact information so that she can reach out. There are a few members with their first term – of two – expiring. If any of these members would like removed from the council, please notify Sara. If not, you will automatically be renewed for your second and final term.

2026 COUNCIL MEETING DATES & FORMAT – The council is encouraged to come up with ways to increase in-person attendance and to continue to stay compliant with the Open Meetings Act. Sara discussed possible format changes of moving to a noon/lunch meeting, adjusting the day/month of current meetings, or increasing the number of meetings held in each county. Overall, the availability to provide a virtual component allows many members to participate that might not be able, if required to travel. Members agreed attending in their home counties is fairly easy, but travel across the full unit is difficult. Sara will send out additional an official poll to determine if a change in formatting/scheduling will help improve attendance in 2026.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS – Anna Fessler made a motion to postpone the election of officers until the December meeting. Mark Dugger seconded. Motion passed. Sara will send out a list of members eligible/returning to the council in 2026, since many have terms expiring this year, for consideration ahead of time.

STAFF PROGRAM REPORTS – Lisa Peterson (Nutrition & Wellness) gave a verbal report on past and current programs. Sara Marten shared reports on behalf of Jessica Jaffry (4-H), Andrew Holsinger (Horticulture), and Valerie Belusko (Community & Economic Development).

The next council meeting will take place on Thursday, December 18, 2025. The meeting will be hosted at the Montgomery County Extension Office.

With no further business, a motion was made by Anna Fessler to adjourn meeting and seconded by Cyndy Howard. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

APPROVED 12/18/2025