

Boone, DeKalb, and Ogle Counties | Plan of Work Summary (PY2026-PY2028)

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Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

This summary highlights Boone, DeKalb, and Ogle counties priorities and actions for the next three years, based on local needs identified through the unit's needs assessment and current capacity.

Community: Youth, Families, and Resilience

Needs assessment feedback showed strong support for 4-H youth development, a growing need to better engage families, and widespread concern about declining leadership involvement among younger generations. Community input also reinforced the importance of youth-led service and highlighted interest in civic engagement and disaster preparedness as key components of building resilient communities.

Economy: Workforce and Lifelong Learning

Focusing on strengthening the local economy by supporting workforce readiness, economic development, and—where possible—youth financial well-being. Community leaders, families, and employers emphasized the need to prepare the next generation with practical skills and workplace understanding, which will be addressed through leadership-focused efforts. Financial education is a recurring concern, especially for youth, though limited resources prevent elevating it as a core priority. Economic development remains a key focus as business and civic leaders work to attract residents and businesses, retain young people, and expand awareness of local career and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Environment: Natural Resources and Sustainability

To prioritize efforts that support healthy plants and landscapes and thriving natural resources, with Master Gardeners continuing core plant-health work and an increased emphasis on rain gardens. Community interest, strong partnerships, and available funding reinforce the focus on water and stormwater management, recognizing that healthy environments contribute directly to healthy people.

Food & Agriculture

To prioritize food access through a new grant-supported partnership with the Ogle County Health Department and collaboration with Unit 4. While food safety—especially food preservation—is a recurring community request, limited staffing prevents elevating it as a priority. The unit is strongly emphasizing food systems development, responding to local farmers' need for neutral guidance on regulations, supporting Ag components of 4-H and school programs, and aligning with statewide emergency-preparedness goals. This focus also supports youth career exploration in agriculture, and the unit is exploring hiring an Ag Educator to meet these needs.

Health & Well-being

To prioritize mental health and emotional well-being, especially for youth, reflecting consistent regional needs-assessment feedback and aligning with Extension's strengths in prevention, belonging, and skill development. Quality of life and aging remains a priority due to Ogle County funding requirements, supported through collaboration with Unit 4. Work on health disparities continues through CDC-funded initiatives and partnerships with the Ogle County Health Department.

Technology & Discovery

To prioritize digital access, recognizing that reliable high-speed internet is essential for community viability and future growth. Government and business leaders consistently identified broadband access as a critical need, and the unit is already collaborating with the state team to deliver related programming. Work in digital equity and digital literacy aligns with this focus and will continue to develop as part of efforts to close opportunity gaps and build local capacity.