4-H Youth Development Signature Programs



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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College and Career Readiness

Employers say employees lack basic skills to be productive in the workforce. These programs help provide youth with the skills to succeed in school and excel in their future careers.

Welcome to the Real World

WTTRW is designed as a series of learning activities that culminate in a simulation experience in which youth choose a post-graduation path and make a series of related "real world" decisions.

Target grades 6- 12 | Suggested minimum duration: customizable

Ready4Work

Ready 4 Work is a workforce readiness program that teaches life skills necessary to increase the number of qualified applicants for the workforce in the United States. This curriculum will focus on how youth can build their resumes and cover letters, dressing for success, interviewing skills, career planning, social media etiquette, time management and more.

Target grades 7-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 -8 sessions of 10 or more youth

4-H Green Print College and Career Day

4-H Green Print: College and Career Day is an exploration program designed to help youth map out their future pathways after high school. Participants will engage in hands-on activities and conversations with professionals to discover career options, practice essential life skills, and learn what it takes to succeed in higher education and the workforce. Whether it's exploring majors, meeting industry leaders, or gaining tips for navigating college life, this program helps youth take the next step toward building their future.

Creative and Cultural Arts

These programs encourage youth to explore their creativity, discover new forms of self-expression, and build an appreciation for diverse cultures and artistic traditions. Participants gain confidence in their talents, develop problem-solving and collaboration skills, and learn how the arts can connect communities and celebrate individuality.

Art Lit to Go

Overview: Art-Lit to Go! brings stories to life through creativity, discovery, and hands-on fun! Designed for youth in kindergarten through third grade, this engaging curriculum blends interactive read-alouds with imaginative art experiences to build foundational skills in both visual arts and literacy.

Target grades K – 3rd

Free Little Art Galleries

Free Little Art Galleries bring creativity into the community by encouraging youth to share and exchange original artwork in small gallery spaces. This program inspires self-expression, community connection, and appreciation for the arts while giving young people an opportunity to showcase their talents and experience the joy of giving and receiving art.

Get Up and Dance

Get Up and Dance is a movement-based program that promotes health, confidence, and creativity through the power of dance. Youth explore different dance styles, learn new skills, and discover how physical activity can boost well-being and self-expression. The program encourages teamwork, perseverance, and fun while building lifelong healthy habits.

Target grades K-5 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions

Environment

Through the study of our environment, youth learn how humans and nature are connected and develop a respect and appreciation for nature.

Junior Solar Sprint

This curriculum developed by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Junior Solar Sprint (JSS) is a competitive program for 5th- to 8th-grade students to create a small solar-powered vehicle. Objectives of JSS are to create the fastest, most interesting, or best crafted vehicle. Skills in STEM are fostered when designing and constructing the vehicles, as well as principles of alternative fuels, engineering design, and aerodynamics.

Target grades 6- 12 | Suggested minimum duration: customizable

Ride-Right-Rally

This event is geared towards educating students about off road vehicle safety. Students will travel through stations focusing on ATV, mower, bicycle, power take off (PTO), and roll over protection system (ROPS) safety. Adams County Emergency Medical Services will wrap up the event with a demonstration on accident response and an Air Evac landing (weather permitting).

Target grades 6- 12 | Suggested minimum duration: customizable

Gardening, Agriculture, and Food Access

These signature programs will challenge youth to think critically and act innovatively to solve the agriculture and food access challenges their generation faces.

4-H Food Action Academy

A comprehensive 8-part curriculum to strengthen youth leadership skills through the design and implementation of service learning projects to create greater food access in their neighborhoods and communities. A collaborative project between Illinois 4-H, SNAP-Ed, and the Farm to School Network, this curriculum assists youth in evaluating the connection between food access and community health while providing them the resources they need to take effective action to create change.

Target grades: 8-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions

Junior Master Gardener

A 10-week unit of study that is hands-on and academically rich developed by the 4-H program at Texas A & M; Learn, Grow, Eat & GO! The curriculum marks the culmination of 5 years of research into the impact of the JMG program on children, schools, and families. It incorporates the best practices identified by the research and combines the interdisciplinary elements of nutrition, garden science, physical activity, food preparation, and fresh vegetable tastings to improve the health and wellness of children, families, and the school/learning community.

Target grades: Pre-K to 5 | Suggested minimum duration: 10 sessions

Agriculture Classroom Experiences

Help students understand where their food comes from and develop an appreciation for farmers, producers, and families involved in the farm-to-table process. This program will support various ag-based educational activities delivered in an in-school setting. Educators can select the academic content that best fits their locality in consultation with Extension and school-based educators in your Unit, or you can borrow from existing 4-H resources. Each program site will also receive a budget to help cover costs for the program

materials and curriculum which you determine will best suit your needs. Delivery to youth can be conducted by 4-H staff/volunteers with the assistance of Teen Teachers.

Target grades: 3-8 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions

Let’s Get Growing

The perfect beginning for, or update to, any gardening education program. Engaging youth in planning, designing, and implementing their own garden while fostering a love for plant science and an appreciation for their local environment. The Purdue Gardening Curriculum is designed with a wide range of audiences in mind and comes with a student workbook and teacher's guide aligned to Next Generation Science Standards. A selection of gardening tools is available upon request to support garden education programs upon request.

Target grades: 3-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions

Health and Wellness

These programs empower youth to learn about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity, gain skills in dealing with peer pressure and stress, improve their decision-making skills, and learn to create safe and affirming environments for others.

Mindful Me

This health & wellness program utilizes children's literature and hands-on activities to introduce youth to basic concepts in mindfulness practices with the goal of improving time and stress management, emotional regulation, developing a sense of self, managing goals, and mindful eating.

Target grades K - 2 but can be appropriate for older audiences as well

Health Rocks

Health Rocks! teaches youth life skills such as emotion management, stress management, and decision-making with the goal of reducing substance use. The interactive lessons and the power of youth/adult partnerships help instill in participants the confidence and communication skills necessary to develop internal strength to resist risky behaviors and establish healthy habits.

Target grades 3-10 | Suggested minimum duration: 10 hours

4-H Cooking 101

Learn about nutrition and healthy eating while developing basic food preparation skills through preparation of healthy snacks and simple meals.

Target grades: K-5 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions

Illinois Food Challenge

Learn food safety, food preparation, nutrition, and kitchen safety. Then participate in a culminating team food challenge event where youth plan, prepare, and present a dish.

Target grades 8-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 hours

Your Thoughts Matter

Understand what mental health means and its impact on those around us. Learn about different mental health disorders and identify strategies for self-help and helping others.

Target grades 8-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions/hours

Your Feelings Matter

Feelings can be confusing! Your Feelings Matter allows youth to explore what emotions are, how to express them, and how to react to them in a positive way.

Target grades 3-6 | Suggested minimum duration: 7sessions/hours

Leadership

Leadership programs give youth opportunities to strengthen their confidence, communication, and decision-making skills while learning how to work with and inspire others. Through hands-on experiences, youth practice responsibility, teamwork, and problem-solving, preparing them to be effective leaders in their schools, communities, and future careers.

Teen Teachers

Teen Teachers is a leadership development program where high school youth gain experience by teaching younger audiences important life skills. Through hands-on instruction, mentoring, and community outreach, participants strengthen their own communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities while making a positive impact on others. This program empowers teens to grow as leaders and role models in their schools and communities.

Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM)

A vital STEM workforce is needed to drive innovation in today's global world. These programs empower youth to be the scientists, engineers, inventors, and makers needed for an ever-growing STEM world.

Quads Away (Drones)

Help kids explore drone/unmanned aerial vehicle technology, and learn to safely operate a drone. Increase knowledge of unmanned aircraft systems and jobs related to this tech.

Target grades 5-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions

DIY Make & Build

Teach kids maker skills such as designing, modeling, rapid prototyping and building. Engage kids with projects where they create and build, while also increasing life and STEM skills.

Target grades 5-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions

Robotics

Discover the world of robotics as youth learn to build and program robots to accomplish various tasks. Participate in optional competition opportunities.

Target grades 5-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 hours

Embryology & Incubation

Through teacher training that builds educator capacity, groups of youth then learn about the incubation and embryology process as they hatch fertilized eggs over 21 days.

Target grades K-8 | Suggested minimum duration: 1 incubation/hatch cycle

eSports

Program participants will learn about the exciting field of competitive electronic sports, also known as esports, in this cutting edge project area. Learn about the PC and console gaming industries, the software and hardware involved, as well as the fields of competitive and professional gaming. Participants will have the opportunity to be a part of the group of youth that help take esports to the next level, and usher in a new era of 4-H projects!

Target grades 6-12 | Suggested minimum duration: 6 sessions