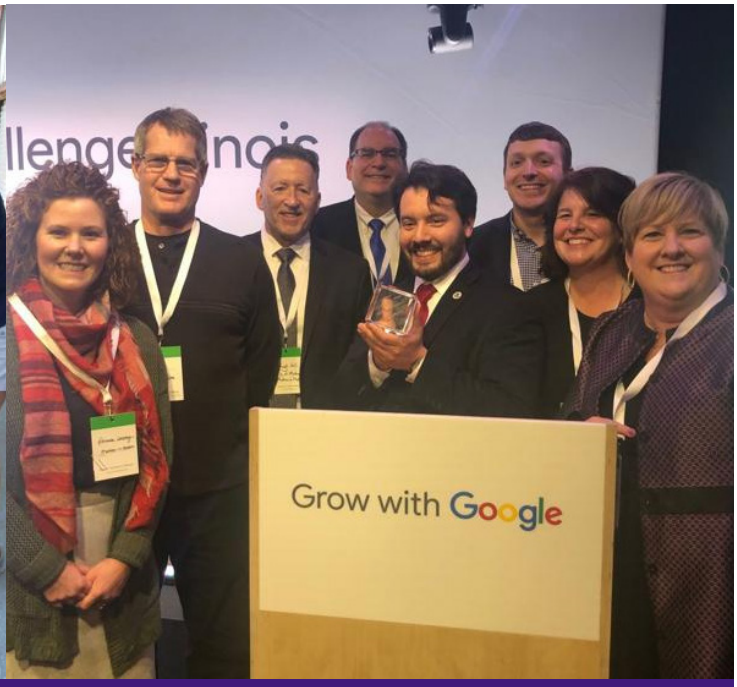

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

Making a Difference in Rural Illino

www.IIRA.org

MAPPING

the Future of Your Community

Frequently Asked Questions

Western Illinois University

Funding provided in whole or in part by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

IIRA Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

Frequently Asked Questions
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"Never doubt that a group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

Frequently Asked Questions

"What is the MAPPING the Future program?"

The MAPPING (Management and Planning Programs Involving Nonmetropolitan Groups) the Future of Your Community program is a strategic visioning, planning and doing process whereby local residents of rural communities create an action plan for creating the community they envision. The community identifies the goals, strategies and projects necessary to move the community forward as well as a plan for implementation.

The MAPPING program was created in 1991 at the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, located at Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois. With initial support from the Office of the Lt. Governor and the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, the MAPPING program was designed to help leaders in small rural communities improve their decision-making process for community and economic development. Since 1996, the support for this program has been transferred to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

"How is the MAPPING program structured?"

The MAPPING journey begins with the formation of a community steering committee. This committee is responsible for working with MAPPING staff to plan the program logistics, invite participants, conduct initial marketing, and so forth. MAPPING staff provide detailed, step-by-step guidance to facilitate the effective planning of the program.

The core of the MAPPING program is a series of five visioning sessions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How are we going to get there?
- Making it happen! (part 1)
- Making it happen! (part 2)

During this process, the participants identify high-priority goals for community & economic development, develop a workable action plan, and become organized to begin the implementation of projects. Once the initial MAPPING sessions have been completed, participants plan and host a community-wide town meeting. The town meeting is designed with the assistance of the MAPPING staff to give participants an opportunity to present their ideas, receive public comments, and invite additional volunteers to become involved.

Three to four weeks after the completion of the MAPPING program, communities participate in a "Maintaining the Momentum" session, to gauge their progress toward preparing for their town meeting and initial progress toward goals.

To increase the success of the MAPPING program, it is recommended that approximately five years after the completion of the MAPPING program, communities schedule a MAPPING update program. This program reviews the goals set forth in the original program, evaluates progress, and updates goals accordingly.

"How much time is needed?"

The MAPPING program itself is typically held in five, three-hour sessions over the course of 5-8 weeks. After the conclusion of the MAPPING program is when the real work of tackling the community's goals begins. MAPPING participants will join action teams and work toward implementing the goals they have set forth for themselves. This is designed to be an ongoing cycle of achieving and refocusing to generate continuous community improvement.

"What are the benefits of a community participating in the MAPPING program?"

By participating in the MAPPING program, communities clearly define their goals and set a road map to their desired future. Many rural communities are facing a myriad of challenges, including declining population, loss of manufacturers, and a declining tax base. By having a plan in place that has the support of community members and maximizes community strengths, rural communities are able to more effectively combat these challenges and make positive change in their communities.

"Who should participate in the MAPPING program?"

The MAPPING process should be as inclusive as possible, allowing anyone who believes they have a stake in the community to participate. Inclusivity ensures that the community will embrace the plan as theirs rather than something imposed upon them. To begin the visioning and planning process, a minimum of 25 participants is required. The success of the MAPPING program depends on this group representing a cross-section of constituent groups within the community. In addition, this group should be made up of leaders and volunteers throughout the community who will subsequently remain active in the process of implementing the action plan. Try to invite people who aren't currently maxed out - invite young people and those new to the community who might have the time and energy to get involved! The CEOs, presidents, and directors of local businesses and organizations might seem like the best representatives, but they might also not have the time to carry out the work.

"What is the cost for the MAPPING the Future programs?"

Other than time and motivation, there is no charge to individuals participating in the MAPPING sessions. There is, however, a community sponsorship fee that is based on the population of the community (based on Census data) and the distance from Macomb, Illinois. In order to take into consideration the different economic levels in communities, we offer a sponsorship fee reduction based on a community's median household income (based on Census data). For example, if your community's median household income is 20 percent less than the Illinois state average for median household income, we will reduce your sponsorship fee by that percentage.

Although many communities may request that their city fund the costs of the MAPPING program, this is strongly discouraged. Instead, we recommend that the steering committee raise donations toward the sponsorship fee through approaching local businesses, civic organizations, church groups, and the local utility company, in addition to a donation from the city. It is crucial to the success of the program that there be widespread knowledge of and investment in the program prior to its beginning.

Fees are set according to a formula based on community population, distance from Macomb, and median household income.

Population: The minimum base fee is $3,000 for communities with populations of 1,000 or less. For communities over 1,000, the base fee increases on a per capita rate as follows:

$0.50 per capita additional for populations between 1,000 - 9,999
$0.33 per capita additional for populations over 10,000

– Less any discount based on your median household income

+ Plus travel for six round trips from Macomb to your community at $0.67 per mile

"How many communities have participated in the MAPPING program?"

As of December, 2025, the MAPPING the Future of Your Community Program has been conducted in 157 rural Illinois communities in 69 different counties. Communities have ranged in size from 210 to 18,441 in population. In addition, numerous county programs MAPPING programs, update programs in previous MAPPING communities, and customized programs for organizations or specific community sectors have been completed.

"Can the MAPPING program be applied on the regional level?"

The MAPPING program is primarily implemented in rural communities; however, MAPPING staff can also design and facilitate programs for the county or regional level as well as for nonprofit organizations or specific sectors of the community such as health, education, or business. The MAPPING program is also willing to partner with other groups such as regional planning commissions, chambers of commerce and Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) organizations on specialized planning applications for comprehensive plans, Overall Economic Development Plans (OEDP) or other development initiatives.

"Is technical assistance available to MAPPING communities?"

To help MAPPING community participants sustain the efforts outlined in their action plan, the MAPPING staff, in collaboration with other IIRA units, provide a variety of follow-up services and technical assistance. The MAPPING program also sponsors workshops throughout the year on a variety of topics of interest to communities involved in redevelopment efforts.

IIRA units available to provide assistance to MAPPING communities include:

- **Peace Corps Fellows:** The Fellows Program in Community Development at Western Illinois University is a two-year graduate fellowship program for returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) and AmeriCorps (AC) alumni committed to pursuing a graduate degree with an emphasis on rural community and economic development. Fellows are enrolled as full-time AmeriCorps members assigned to community-based internships during the second year of the program.

  During their 11–month full-time internship, Fellows assist rural towns with the implementation of community projects, such as downtown revitalization, business retention and expansion, entrepreneurship development, tourism development, and community housing. Bringing a Peace Corps Fellow (PCF) in to coordinate the implementation of a community's MAPPING Action Plan enables a community to move forward with their plan more quickly and effectively. PCFs coordinate projects, mobilize people and resources, and implement community action plans. Recent examples of MAPPING/PCF communities/counties include: Durand (2014), Effingham County (2023), Erie (2021), Hillsboro (2016), Lanark (2015), Mattoon (2018 and 2021), Neoga (2015), Nokomis (2025), Pike County (2018, 2019, and 2020), Rushville (2015 and 2021), Savanna (2016), Shelby County (2015), Stockton (2017), and Sullivan (2019).

- **Illinois Small Business Development Center:** The Illinois Small Business Development Center provides confidential business counseling and training to help entrepreneurs start, grow, and sustain their businesses. Counseling appointments may be scheduled at various locations throughout a 12-county service area (Adams, Brown, Fulton, Hancock, Henderson, Knox, Mason, McDonough, Pike, Schuyler, Scott, and Warren).

- **Value Added Sustainable Development Center:** The Value-Added Sustainable Development Center (VASDC) extends IIRA's rural community development work to the sectors of agriculture, food, energy, and community sustainability. VASDC helps farmers, non-farm rural businesses, and community leaders excel by providing technical assistance and research on topics such as value-added agriculture, local food systems, rural grocery stores, small meat processing operations, and community-owned businesses. Program initiatives within VASDC include the Illinois Cooperative Development Center (ICDC), Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), Regional Food Economic Development (ReFED) Project, and Fresh Food Markets Program.

- **Rural Transit Assistance Center:** The Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) mission is to promote the safe and effective delivery of public transportation in rural areas and more efficiently use public and private resources. RTAC fulfills its mission through providing the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) for the State of Illinois. Administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), an RTAP exists in each state to provide training, technical assistance and research, and to promote public and specialized transportation in rural areas.

"What are examples of MAPPING outcomes and success stories?"

Results from MAPPING community visioning and planning projects have been impressive, spanning the range of economic and community development initiatives. Below are a few specific examples.

Hillsboro, pop. 6,207 (MAPPING 2015, 2019)

Project: 'Pawsboro' Dog Park

Year: Opened October 2019

Funding: Purina Grant for $1,000 and many local fundraisers. Total project cost $20,000.

Amenities: Two fenced enclosures for big and small dogs. Water and trash receptacles available.

Current Status: Fundraising to add and more features including a shelter.

More Info: https://www.facebook.com/imaginehillsboro

Rushville, pop. 3,229 (MAPPING 1991, 2001, '13, '20)

Project: Rushville Fitness and Community Center

Year: Opened November 2020

Funding: The facility was kick started with an anonymous donation of $2,000,000. Funds were also raised through memberships and fundraisers.

Amenities: Features an indoor pool, ball courts, children's play area, class space, and exercise equipment.

Current Status: Expanding membership, developing exercise classes, and promoting the facility.

More Info: https://www.rushvillefitness.com/

Pittsfield, pop. 4,375 (MAPPING 2018)

Project: Lake Pittsfield Disc Golf Course

Year: Opened October 2019

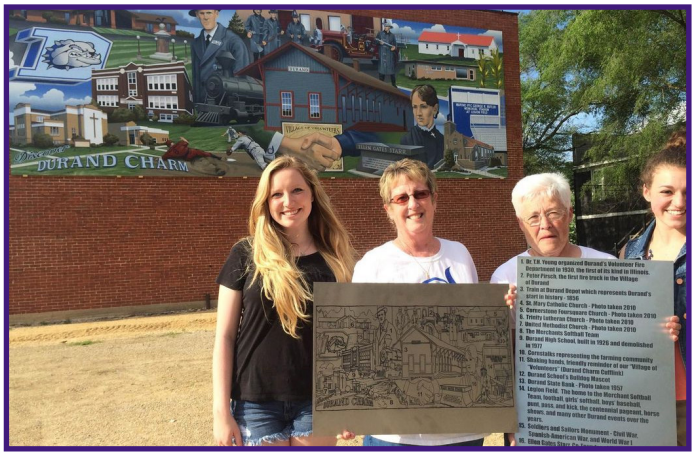
Funding: Received a grant for $15,000 from county hotel/motel tax proceeds**.** Volunteer labor kept the project price low.

Amenities: 18-hole course was laid out by a professional designer. They have hosted tournaments, learning opportunities, and started a golf league.

Current Status: Planning more tournaments and special events. Course has attracted visitors from around the region and even professional players.

More Info: https://picturepittsfield.com/

Durand, pop. 1,443 (MAPPING 2013, 2023)



Project: Historical Mural

Year: Painted in 2015

Funding: Raised $24,000 for the mural through donations from businesses and individuals.

Amenities: 16 x 44 foot mural painted by artist Matt Sharum features community history.

Current Status: Mural has become a town landmark and a popular place for photos.

More Info: https://durandcharm.com/

Mattoon, pop. 18,441 (MAPPING 1994, 2017)

Project: Elevate business and coworking space

Year: Opened September 2020

Funding: Received a Google Impact Challenge Grant as well as a People's Choice award for $325,000. Elevate was also awarded a $98,391 USDA Rural Business Development Grant. Rural King donated use of the building.

Amenities: Features a podcasting studio, 3-D printers, conference room, office space, mailboxes, kitchen, and 4-H Farmbot.

Current Status: Providing a variety of training and support for local entrepreneurs and telecommuters.

More Info: https://elevate217.org/

Dieterich, pop. 591 (MAPPING 1992, '96, '98, '11, '19)

Project: North Pointe Estates subdivision
Year: Initial lots were developed in 2004
Funding: Funds from Tax Increment Financing District were used to reduce the price of a lot from approximately $30,000 to $5,000.
Amenities: The 1/2 acre lots were shovel ready, centrally located, and close to schools. The original subdivision included 20 lots, but was expanded to 92 lots due to high demand.
Current Status: All 92 lots have sold. The subdivision has attracted many families to the area, turned the declining school enrollment around, and brings in $315,000 in real estate tax each year.
More Info: https://dieterichillinois.com/

Strasburg, pop. 603 (MAPPING 2007, 2017)

Project: TIF District
Year: Established 2009
Funding: They borrowed the $30,000 consulting fee from a local bank to be repaid from TIF income.
Amenities: The TIF district covers most of the downtown and has been a useful tool in attracting businesses and improving the area.
Current Status: The TIF district attracted a Marathon gas station to the downtown area as well as a 24-hour gym. This has increased tax revenue for the Village allowing for more improvements.
More Info: http://www.strasburgil.com/

Argenta, pop. 974 (MAPPING 2016)

Project: Argenta IceFest

Year: Annually since 2017

Funding: Sponsored by local and regional businesses.

Amenities: Ice sculptures, live ice carving demos, ice games, chili cookoff, vendor market, food stalls, wine tasting, and wagon rides.

Current Status: Planning ways to grow and expand this popular event in the future.

More Info: https://www.argentafest.org/ice-fest/

MAPPING Community Site List

Community	Pop.	Year
Abingdon	2,951	1996
Alpha	675	1996, 2005*
Altamont	2,216	2012
Annawan	884	1998
Arcola	2,927	2007
Argenta	913	2016
Arrowsmith	276	1994
Arthur	2,231	2002
Ashland	1,218	1997
Assumption	1,155	2016, 2022*
Astoria	929	1999
Athens	1,977	2004
Atlanta	1,669	1993
Auburn	4,574	1995
Beecher City	428	1998
Bement	1,484	2003
Bethany	1,255	1999
Bradford	676	1996, 2000*
Bushnell	2,718	2004, 2010*
Brooklyn	649	2024
Cambridge	2,086	1994
Canton	13,242	1998, 2002*
Carbon Cliff	1,846	1998
Carterville	5,848	1992
Carthage	2,490	1991, 2013, 2025*
Charleston	17,286	2023
Coal City	5,705	2024
Colchester	1,108	2004, 2005*
Colfax	996	1994
Colona	5,045	2012
Crescent City	552	1994
Creve Coeur	4,934	2016
Danvers	1,089	1993
Delavan	1,568	2006
Dieterich	890	1992, ‘96, ‘98, 2011, ‘19*
Divernon	1,139	1996
Downs	1,201	2018

Community	Pop.	Year
Durand	1,390	2013, 2023*
Dwight	4,032	2009
Elizabeth	694	2013, 2021*
Elkhart	450	2001
Erie	1,518	2018
Fairbury	3,633	1993
Fairfield	4,883	2019
Farmington	2,389	1996
Findlay	664	2011
Fisher	2,062	2006
Fulton	3,647	2014
Gardner	1,366	1993
Geneseo	6,539	2010
Gibson City	3,475	2025
Girard	1,785	2014
Grayville	1,550	1995
Greenup	1,365	2024
Greenville	7,083	1995
Havana	2,963	1996, 2005*
Henry	2,320	2003
Hillsboro	5,902	2015, 2019, 2025*
Hinckley	2,006	1999
Hoopeston	4,915	2002, 2007*
Hopedale	830	1993
Kewanee	12,509	2002, 2011*
Kingston	1,108	2001
Ladd	1,263	2002
LaHarpe	1,175	2015
Lanark	1,504	2014
LaSalle	9,582	2011
Lewistown	2,041	2012, 2024*
Lincoln	13,288	1992
Litchfield	6,605	2001, 2024*
Lovington	1,069	2025
Mt. Carroll	1,479	2015
Mt. Morris	2,861	1993
Mt. Sterling	2,006	1993
Mackinaw	1,879	1993

MAPPING Community Site List

Community	Pop.	Year
Manito	1,552	2012
Manlius	298	2007
Maquon	218	1997
Maroa	1,577	2000, 2012*
Marseilles	4,845	2002, 2009*
Martinsville	1,118	1996, 2012, 2017, 2025*
Mason City	2,077	2006
Mattoon	16,870	1994, 2017, 2022*
McLean	743	2010, 2023*
Mendota	7,061	1998, 2005*
Meredosia	826	1994
Metamora	3,904	2006
Millstadt	4,071	1994, 2008*
Minier	1,154	1993
Momence	3,117	1995
Monmouth	8,902	1993
Montrose	210	2024
Morrison	4,085	2007, 2019*
Murphysboro	7,093	1995
Nauvoo	950	2009, 2024*
Neoga	1,398	2013
New Boston	613	2005
Nokomis	2,142	2024
Oakwood	1,325	2023
Ogden	729	1997, 2022*
Oneida	696	2003
Oregon	3,604	2016
Pana	5,199	2016, 2021*
Paris	8,291	1995
Paxton	4,450	2023
Payson	1,025	2002
Petersburg	2,258	2011
Pittsfield	4,206	2018
Pleasant Hill	924	2003
Pleasant Plains	808	2008
Polo	2,291	2000
Pontiac	11,150	1994

Community	Pop.	Year
Princeville	1,636	1997
Rochelle	9,446	2019
Roodhouse	1,578	1993
Rushville	3,005	1991, 2001, 2013, 2020*
St. Elmo	1,254	2013
St. Joseph	3,810	1998, 2011*
San Jose	479	2005
Savanna	2,783	2003, 2013*
Saybrook	654	1994
Seneca	2,353	2002, 2009*
Sheffield	821	1998
Shelbyville	4,674	2011
Sheldon	965	1996
Sherman	4,673	2006
Spring Valley	5,582	1995
Stanford	600	2007
Stewardson	721	2010
Stockton	1,728	2014
Strasburg	531	2007, 2017*
Sullivan	4,413	2018
Sun River Terrace	455	1994
Table Grove	353	1994
Teutopolis	1,618	2020
Tiskilwa	740	1995
Toulon	1,193	1999
Walnut	1,311	2017
Washburn	1,032	1995
Watseka	4,679	1996, 1998*
Wenona	974	1993
West Peoria	4,263	2006
Williamsfield	575	1991, 2013, 2022*
Williamsville	1,425	1995
Winchester	1,574	1997, 2018*
Windsor	668	2011, 2022*
Woodhull	754	1996
Yates City	642	1996

** Indicates community has participated in a MAPPING update program.*

MAPPING County/Regional Site List

County/Counties	Pop.	Year
Calhoun County	4,437	2007
Cass County	13,042	2002
Central Illinois Regional Planning (Greene, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery Counties) County	106,752	2007
Effingham County	34,668	2022
Henderson County	6,387	2007

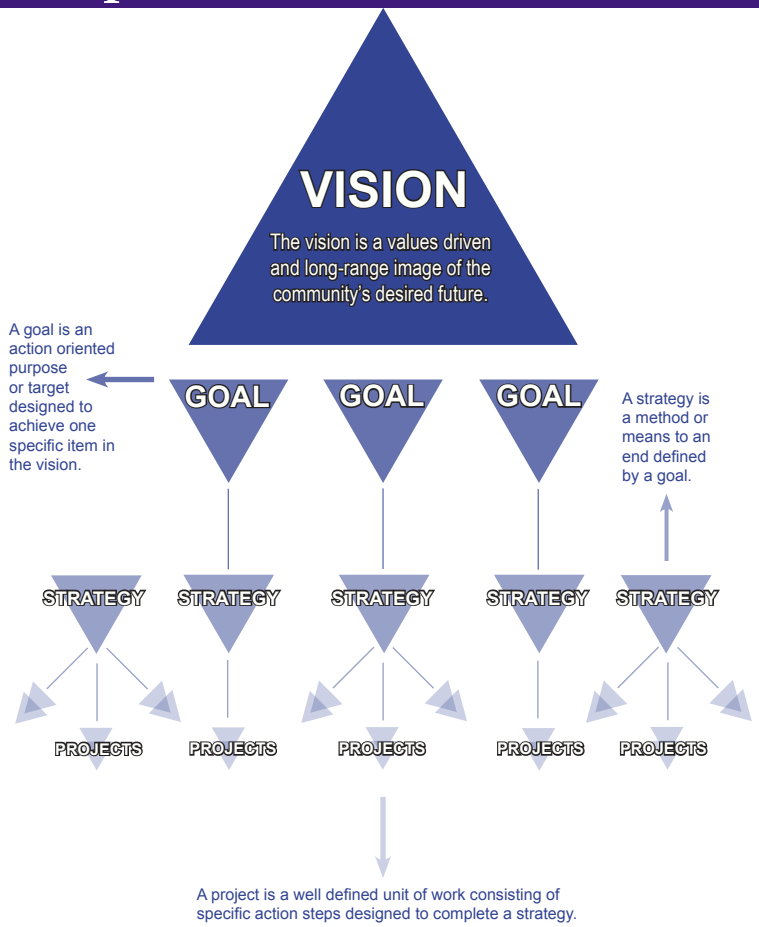
County/Counties	Pop.	Year
Jasper County	9,287	2020
Stark County	5,400	2009
Warren County	16,835	2002
Whiteside County	55,691	2001

Customized MAPPING Programs List

Entity	Year
Adams County Child Care Convening	2019
Carroll County Area Artisans & Craftsmen	2009
Dallas Rural Water District	2011
Downtown Le Roy	2011
Eagle View Community Health Systems	2016
Galesburg Regional Economic Development Assoc.	2013
Havana Area Business Community	2008
Havana Chamber of Commerce	2007
Macomb Area Economic Development Corporation	2008
McDonoough County Community Foundation	2023
Moss-Bradley Neighborhood Association	2007

Entity	Year
Prairie Tech Learning Center	2008
Princeton Main Street	2016
Rock Falls Community Development Corporation	2006
Savanna Chamber of Commerce	2006
Savanna Museum and Cultural Center	2016
Schuyler County Board	2009
Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone	2006
Western Illinois Museum	2011
Whiteside County Airport	2018

Components of an Action Plan



The MAPPING Cycle

Awarded "Outstanding Program 2005" in recognition of "superior programming that exemplifies and positively influences community development practice."

"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about"
– Margaret J. Wheatley

The MAPPING program facilitators:

Gisele Hamm, Program Director - Gisele earned a B.S. in Agricultural Business and a M.A. in Economics from Western Illinois University. She joined the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs in 2003 to manage a study of brownfields in Illinois municipalities. Gisele oversees the IIRA AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, as well as other technical assistance grant projects. Previously, she worked as a Rural Technology Specialist in the Rural Information Planning Project (RITPP). She has published several articles in national and state outlets on various community development issues and has made numerous presentations to state and national conventions. Gisele served as president for the Mid-Continent Regional Science Association in 2010-2011, and president for the Community Development Society International in 2015-2016.

Linda Lee Blaine, Program Coordinator - Linda Lee earned a B.A. in Spanish and completed the William O. Douglas Honors College at Central Washington University in 1998. She served in the Peace Corps in Kyrgyzstan from 1999 to 2001. She received an MBA through the Peace Corps Fellows Program in Community Development from Western Illinois University in 2004. Linda Lee manages the IIRA AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, in addition to co-facilitating the MAPPING program. Prior to joining the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Linda Lee worked as a Community and Economic Development Program Coordinator for the University of Illinois Extension.

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