

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Idaho-LEADS program prepares 4-H youth with skills for work and life

AT A GLANCE

Idaho-LEADS is a prime example of how UI Extension 4-H Youth Development helps youth build critical-thinking, problem-solving and leadership skills that position them for success in the workplace.

The Situation

Today's high school graduates are widely seen as unprepared for success in work and life. According to the Kauffman Foundation's national survey, less than half of adults believe current students are even "somewhat" prepared for the workforce — compared to over 70% who say graduates from the 1950s and 1980s were ready. Employers consistently prioritize employability skills such as professionalism, work ethics, problem-solving, goal orientation, personal responsibility and perseverance — precisely the competencies Idaho Learn, Engage, Act, Develop Summit (I-LEADS) participants report developing at high rates through the program. By delivering hands-on, experiential learning in real-world settings, the I-LEADS program directly addresses the workforce readiness gap that employers and society identify as critical.

Our Response

The I-LEADS through University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program provides a high-quality program setting to prepare youth with workforce skills. The I-LEADS steering committee focuses on adult-youth partnerships, with youth and adults working to plan events and ensure successful participant experience. I-LEADS was held on Oct. 3-5, 2025,



One of the workshops explored the skills needed for veterinary technicians held at the College of Southern Idaho facility.

at the College of Southern Idaho campus in Twin Falls. The two-day and two-night event focused on career exploration and developing leadership and work readiness skills. Workshops topics included agricultural sciences, health and wellbeing, STEM and expressive arts. Participants toured Riverence, in Buhl, the largest farmed trout and steelhead operations in America and the Chobani plant in Twin Falls, the world's largest yogurt manufacturing plant.

Program Outcomes

Aligned with the National 4-H Beyond Ready initiative, I-LEADS equips youth with the skills and mindsets needed for success in work, life and postsecondary pathways. On a post-program survey, 55 of 75 youth reported high agreement that the program increased

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their skills in accepting responsibility, work readiness and career readiness. The survey asked youth to respond with their level of agreement to skills gained. Responses focused on the attribution “Because of this 4-H program, I...,” ensuring outcomes were directly tied to program impact. Table 1 shows the percentage of youth who agreed with the skills listed for each outcome area.

4-H continues to significantly contribute to youth development and developing essential work-life readiness skills. Youth report high levels of responsibility and engagement, confirming 4-H’s unique role in preparing young people to be beyond ready.

Table 1. 4-H Youth Outcomes (percent reporting outcomes were very or extremely true)

Work readiness	Career readiness	Responsibility and character
80% — know how to act professionally	60% — influenced my interest in agriscience or STEM	84% — work successfully towards a goal
89% — know that employers expect me to do a job well	68% — explored work/careers interests that might be a good fit	82% — accept responsibility for my actions
88% — work hard on things that are difficult	71% — this program helped me be ready for work/career	87% — try to make things right when I mess something up

The Future

I-LEADS continues to grow in both participation and influence. The program is hosted in a different region of Idaho each year to make it accessible to youth statewide and will take place at the College of Eastern Idaho in Idaho Falls in 2027.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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