



YOUR MONEY, YOUR GOALS

A financial empowerment toolkit for community volunteers

Introduction



Consumer Financial
Protection Bureau

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Table of contents

- INTRODUCTION PART 1: Volunteers and financial empowerment..... 2
 - What is financial empowerment?..... 2
 - The CFPB4
 - Financial empowerment can build financial stability.....4
 - Making referrals.....5
 - Using the toolkit 7
 - “But I only volunteer a few hours a week...”8
 - Tool 1: Top money conversations11
 - Tool 2: Financial empowerment checklist 13
 - Tool 3: Financial empowerment self-assessment for volunteers 17

- INTRODUCTION PART 2: Understanding the situation 27
 - Tool 1: My money picture29

- INTRODUCTION PART 3: Starting the money conversation 37
 - How should I bring up money topics?38
 - Discussing difficulties or problems42

- INTRODUCTION PART 4: Emotions, values, and culture: What’s behind our money choices?..... 45
 - Emotional influences on financial decisions.....45
 - Understanding personal values around money46
 - Cultural influences on financial decisions47
 - Use questions to understand what’s behind decisions49
 - Keeping personal values in check.....50

INTRODUCTION PART 1:

Volunteers and financial empowerment

Welcome to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's *Your Money Your Goals: A financial empowerment toolkit for community volunteers!*

If you're reading this, you are probably a community volunteer, or you work in an organization that engages volunteers to help serve its community. Across the United States, volunteers like you are providing financial or career coaching, mentoring youth aging out of foster care, offering lay counseling in a faith-based organization, or welcoming people at a food bank or Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site.

Many people feel overwhelmed by their financial situations, and they often don't know where to go for help. Volunteers are often in a unique position to provide that help. The people your organization serves already know you and trust you – and in many cases, they're already sharing financial and other personal information with staff or with you.

Financial empowerment

Empowerment is the process of increasing people's capacity to make choices and transform those choices into actions and desired results, according to the World Bank.

Financial empowerment is building the knowledge and ability of individuals to manage money and use financial services products that work for them.

What is financial empowerment?

How is “financial empowerment” different from financial education or financial literacy?

Financial education is a strategy that provides people with financial knowledge, skills, and resources so they can get, manage, and use their money to achieve their goals. Financial education builds an individual's knowledge, skills, and capacity to use resources and tools, including financial products and services. Financial education leads to financial literacy.

Financial empowerment includes financial education and financial literacy, but it focuses both on building people’s ability to manage money and use financial services and on providing access to products that work for them.

Financially empowered individuals are both informed and skilled. They know where to get help with their financial challenges and can access and choose financial products and services that meet their needs. This sense of empowerment can build confidence that they can effectively use their financial knowledge, skills, and resources to reach their goals.

If you feel knowledgeable about money and comfortable in your own approach to money management, credit, debt, and financial products, you can better help people face money issues that may be complicating their lives. As you work through each module of this toolkit, you’ll learn the information and how the tools work. As you try out the tools, you may find ways to use your own money to reach your goals more efficiently and effectively.

We designed *Your Money, Your Goals* to help you help the people you serve become financially empowered. Because it’s a toolkit, it is different from a financial education curriculum. A curriculum generally has a specific set of goals, and you usually work through most or all of the material in the order it’s presented.

This toolkit is a collection of important financial empowerment information and tools you can choose based on the current needs and goals of the people you serve. In other words, *the aim isn’t for you to cover all of the information and tools in the toolkit*. Instead, the aim is to help you identify and share the specific information and tools that are best suited to help people get started on reaching their goals and solving their financial challenges. And, when they want or need additional help, the toolkit’s aim is to help you refer them for financial counseling or coaching.

Community volunteer

In this toolkit, the term “community volunteer” is used to refer to anyone who volunteers with a community- or faith-based organization that serves low-income or economically vulnerable community members. *Your Money, Your Goals* will be especially useful for volunteers that coach, counsel, mentor, or work directly with economically vulnerable individuals and families.

The CFPB

CFPB is the abbreviation for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The CFPB works on behalf of consumers to make consumer financial products and services work for them – whether they are applying for a mortgage, choosing among credit cards, asking for their credit reports, or using those or any number of other consumer financial products and services, including bank accounts, prepaid cards, payday loans, and student loans.

This means ensuring that consumers get the information they need to make the financial decisions they believe are best for themselves and their families—that prices are clear up front, that risks are visible, and that no important information is buried in fine print.

The CFPB’s Office of Financial Empowerment developed this toolkit, because volunteers like you meet with thousands of people that need high quality, unbiased financial information and tools to help them better address financial issues. As you use this toolkit and other resources at www.consumerfinance.gov, you can help the people you serve become more financially empowered, reduce their financial stress, and manage their finances in ways that achieve their goals and dreams.

Financial empowerment can build financial stability

Sharing financial empowerment information and tools may feel different from the work you normally do as a volunteer. But, once you learn the contents of this toolkit, we believe it can become natural to integrate its information and tools into your volunteer work.

As a community volunteer, one of your responsibilities may be getting a sense of each person’s unique needs. If that’s the case, the toolkit starts with an assessment that can help you understand people’s goals and the financial situations they may be facing.

The *Your Money, Your Goals* toolkit brings together information, tools, and links to other resources you can use to help people begin to build skills in managing money, credit, debt, and financial products. Having all these resources in one place can make it easier for you to bring financial empowerment into your conversations with them.

The information and tools in the *Your Money, Your Goals* toolkit can help improve individuals' and families' financial stability by giving them a new understanding of financial concepts and financial tools they can apply to their own goals.

Depending on your volunteer role and the needs of the people you serve, you may be able to help them take the first steps to:

- Set goals and calculate how much money they need to save to reach these goals
- Save money
- Establish an emergency savings fund
- Access and use tax refunds
- Track the specific ways they are using their money
- Bring their cash flow budgets into balance
- Make a simple plan to pay down debt
- Get and review their credit reports
- Fix errors on their credit reports
- Evaluate financial products and services
- Recognize when their consumer rights may have been violated and know how to take action

Making referrals

You can make a big difference in people's lives by introducing them to financial empowerment and providing them with some basic information and tools to help them solve specific financial challenges.

The people you serve may look to you or to others in your organization for quality information and referrals on topics like these:

- “My credit report has information that's not accurate. How can I fix it?”

- “How can I know if the student loan I can get at the bank is better than one I can get at school?”
- “Should I borrow money from my credit card or take out a small loan to cover my bills until my next paycheck?”
- “My employer says I have to have direct deposit. Everywhere I go, the banks and credit unions seem to charge fees. How can I find the right account for me?”

But some people may need more help than you are equipped to provide or that is not available within your organization. This is where knowing how to use your organization’s resource and referral network will be important.

Your organization may be able to provide you with a list of websites and local organizations you may find helpful. Referral partners in your community may include certified non-profit credit counselors, certified housing counselors, financial counselors and coaches, free volunteer tax assistance sites sponsored by the IRS, and financial education programs. These referral partners are often found at non-profit agencies.

It is important that these individuals and organizations don’t try to sell products or services to people when they are seeking financial empowerment assistance.

Otherwise, there could be a conflict of interest—when the organization’s interests interfere with providing unbiased information and advice to clients. Partner organizations should objectively show workers the upside and the downside of specific actions they take and the impact these actions have on their financial situations.

Referral partners

Only refer people to organizations that:

- Have expertise in the area for which you are referring people to them
- Have the time and interest to meet with and assist them
- Are objective, which means they can show them the potential positive and negative consequences of specific actions
- Will not sell products or services in the context of helping them

If your organization doesn't have a local referral guide for these services, you can use CFPB's *Creating a referral guide* to help you get started.¹

Using the toolkit

The goal of the *Your Money, Your Goals* toolkit is to make it easier for volunteers, lay counselors and workers, mentors, and coaches to help the people they serve become more financially empowered.

The toolkit is divided into two parts:

- **The four-part Introduction is for *you*.** This information can help you prepare to use the toolkit.
- **Modules 1 through 9 include information on specific topics and tools people can use to put that information to work.** *Think of each module as a specific set of tools you can use depending on the situation.*

That's why you don't need to start with Module 1 and work all the way through the toolkit. For example, you may be helping a person who has just lost her job. Starting with *Setting goals* would likely not be useful to her. But if she doesn't have enough cash to cover basic living expenses, tips for managing cash flow and identifying new resources could be useful at this particular time.

You may be helping a person who wants to get out of debt. In this situation, it may be useful in the long run to talk with him about cash flow, but it may be better to start by helping him begin to build a plan to pay down debt.

Your work may not allow you to meet with a person very often – you may even meet with them just once. This toolkit can help you identify ways to start a conversation that opens the door for

Giving people tools

Giving people tools to take home to work on can be helpful. At home, they may have access to accurate information to complete the tools.

But don't send too many tools home with someone at once. Be sure to identify the topic and tools that will make the biggest difference at that specific time. You can always let them know how they can access other tools when they are ready.

¹ See www.consumerfinance.gov/your-money-your-goals.

you to make referrals to others in your community who may provide services like free tax preparation, financial education, counseling, or coaching.²

To make the best use of the toolkit we advise giving people one or two tools at a time. Getting all the tools at once – or even five tools at one time – is likely to be overwhelming for most people. A better approach is to identify one topic and the specific tools that will make the biggest difference for them at that time.

If you are planning to send tools home with someone, limit it to one or two that you have shown them how to use. If you give them too many tools at once, they may feel overwhelmed and not use any of them.

“But I only volunteer a few hours a week...”

One way to think about financial empowerment work is that it’s not a service you “add-on.” Instead, it’s something you can integrate into the work you’re already doing as a volunteer.

This doesn’t mean that it doesn’t require time on your part. While it requires time, that time will be front-loaded. In order to bring financial empowerment into what you do as a volunteer, you’ll have to spend time:

- Learning the toolkit content
- Becoming comfortable with the topics and the tools in the toolkit
- Thinking about ways to introduce financial empowerment into your work
- Potentially capturing the outcomes of financial empowerment for your organization

² See http://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/201407_cfpb_your-money-your-goals_implementation-guide.pdf for additional tips on identifying information to share based on your level of contact.

Integration

Integration of financial empowerment means identifying where and how you can weave financial empowerment information and tools into the work you are already doing.

Why is integration of financial empowerment such a promising strategy?³

- It builds on established relationships you may have with individuals you serve.
- People are busy—there is efficiency in addressing many issues in one stop.
- Financial and economic issues cut across situations and challenges. Adding financial empowerment to the other areas your volunteer work focuses on *may present a more holistic approach to working with the people you serve.*
- It provides opportunities for reinforcement during “natural” discussions.
- It is potentially more likely to reach hard to reach populations with unbiased financial empowerment information and tools.

This introductory section provides you with three tools to get you started. ***Tool 1: Top money conversations*** gives you talking points based on common money issues. This tool also gives you some guidance on where this information can be found in the toolkit.

Tool 2: Financial empowerment checklist provides you with a tracking template for recording which tools or information you have shared with a particular individual.

Tool 3: Financial empowerment self-assessment can help you develop an understanding of your own financial knowledge, skill, and confidence. As you will see in the answer keys, the questions asked in this assessment are directly related to modules in *Your Money, Your Goals*.

³ Giuffrida, Inger, Integrating Financial Education into the Work that You Do, April 2010.

Tool 1:

Top money conversations

Your Money, Your Goals covers a wide range of topics. These “top money conversations” cover some of the most important financial issues the people you serve may be facing.

Top Money Conversations

Do you have goals for yourself and your family? Are they goals you want to reach soon or in the next few years? How do you plan to reach them?

See *Module 1: Setting goals and planning for large purchases*. Use ***Tool 1: Goal-setting tool*** to help the person:

- Brainstorm a list of hopes, needs, wants, and dreams and determine whether they are short-term or long-term.
- Turn those hopes, needs, wants, and dreams into SMART goals.
- If the goal requires saving or setting money aside to pay down debt, figure out how much to save each week (or month) to reach the goal.
- Identify the first steps the person can take to get started, and when they'll be completed.

How do you handle unexpected expenses? Saving money now for unexpected expenses and emergencies can save you money later.

See *Module 2: Saving for emergencies, goals, and bills*. Use ***Tool 1: Savings plan*** to help someone make a plan to save money for goals, expected and unexpected expenses, and emergencies.

It sounds like you're having trouble coming up with the money for certain bills. Sometimes that's because the timing of your income doesn't match the timing of the bills. Would you like to take a look at a tool that can help you look at your “money-in” and “money-out” to try to get the timing to work better?

See *Module 5: Getting through the month*. Use either ***Tool 1: Cash flow budget*** or ***Tool 2: Cash flow calendar*** to help someone find ways to better match the timing of income and expenses so that he or she doesn't come up short. If they're interested in ways to cut spending, use the tools in ***Module 4: Paying bills and other expenses***.

Do you feel like you have too much debt? Did you know that there are rules debt collectors have to follow when they contact you?

See *Module 6: Dealing with debt*. Use ***Tool 1: Debt worksheet*** to help someone account for of his or her debt. This is an important first step toward managing and reducing debt. ***Tool 5: When debt collectors call*** includes information on the process and sample letters people can use to correspond with debt collectors.

Your credit history doesn't just determine whether you get a loan. It can also affect how much you pay for deposits on your cell phone and utilities, how much insurance costs, and even whether you can get the job you want. I've got some tools you can use if you're interested in getting your free credit report and checking to make sure it's accurate.

See *Module 7: Understanding credit reports and scores*. Use ***Tool 1: Getting your credit reports and scores***, along with ***Tool 2: Credit report review checklist***, to help someone identify mistakes on his or her credit report.

It sounds like you're having trouble getting an answer from the company about those extra charges on your account. You can submit a complaint to the CFPB and they'll forward it to the company and work to get a response for you.

If someone has a complaint about a financial product or service (bank accounts or services, credit cards or prepaid cards, mortgages, student loans, vehicle loans or leases, payday loans, consumer loans, debt collection, credit reporting, money transfers or virtual currency) **see *Module 9: Protecting your money*** for information on submitting a complaint to the CFPB. ***Tool 3*** includes step-by-step instructions on submitting an effective complaint.

This Tool is included in the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's toolkit. The CFPB has prepared this material as a resource for the public. This material is provided for educational and information purposes only. It is not a replacement for the guidance or advice of an accountant, certified financial advisor, or otherwise qualified professional. The CFPB is not responsible for the advice or actions of the individuals or entities from which you received the CFPB educational materials. The CFPB's educational efforts are limited to the materials that CFPB has prepared.

Tool 2:

Financial empowerment checklist

This financial empowerment checklist can help you identify the financial empowerment information and tools to share with the people you are helping. It can also help you keep track of the information you have shared, including any referrals you have made for them.

The checklist is organized by financial empowerment topic or module, followed by each tool associated with it. The question(s) following each module name can help you identify the financial empowerment problem addressed in the module and through the tools.

Remember, even if you meet with someone regularly, you won't cover all of the tools with them. Instead, find the right module or tools based on the person's most pressing financial challenge or the topic they're most interested in.

To use the checklist:

- Print a copy of the checklist for each person you are working with.
- When you have covered the topic or tool, put a check next to the tool or write in the date.
- Use the notes section if you are working with someone on an ongoing basis. Include information about your discussions, specific challenges, and whether you made a referral.
- If you use the tool to track discussions with an individual, be sure to follow your organization's rules regarding privacy and document storage.



Financial Empowerment Checklist

Name: _____

✓ or	Tool	Notes and referral information
------	------	--------------------------------

date		
Module 1: Setting goals and planning for large purchases— <i>Does the person have clear goals? Is the person satisfied with his or her financial situation?</i>		
	Goal-setting tool	
	Planning for life events and large purchases	
	Buying a car	
Module 2: Saving for emergencies, goals, and bills— <i>Does the person have money set aside for emergencies or unexpected expenses?</i>		
	Savings plan	
	Benefits and asset limits	
	Finding a safe place for savings	
Module 3: Tracking and managing income and benefits— <i>Does he or she track his/her income and know the options for receiving pay and benefits?</i>		
	Income and resource tracker	
	Ways to increase income and resources	
	Choosing how to receive income and benefits	
	Increasing your income through tax credits	
Module 4: Paying bills and other expenses— <i>Does he or she pay her bills on time each month? Does the person understand the financial products they use to pay bills and spend money?</i>		
	Spending tracker	
	Bill calendar	
	Choosing ways to pay bills	

	Strategies for cutting expenses	
	When cash is short: prioritizing bills and planning spending	
Module 5: Getting through the month— <i>Is the person able to make ends meet each month? Does the timing of income match the timing of bills and expenses?</i>		
	Cash flow budget	
	Cash flow calendar	
	Improving cash flow checklist	
Module 6: Dealing with debt— <i>Is the person able to manage his debts? Is he being contacted by debt collectors?</i>		
	Debt worksheet	
	Debt-to-income worksheet	
	Debt reduction strategies	
	Student loan debt	
	When debt collectors call	
Module 7: Understanding credit reports and scores— <i>Has the person ever requested and reviewed his or her credit report?</i>		
	Getting your credit reports and scores	
	Credit report review checklist	
	Improving credit reports and scores	
Module 8: Money services, cards, accounts, and loans: Finding what works for you — <i>Has an employer told the person that the company requires direct deposit? Is the person interested in finding lower cost financial products or services to help manage income and expenses?</i>		

	Know your options: Understanding what you need	
	Ask questions: Choosing where to get what you need	
	Money services and banking basics	
	Opening an account checklist	
	Remittances	
<p>Module 9: Protecting your money— <i>Has he or she had issues with a financial product or service? Does the person know about basic steps he can take to protect himself from scams, cons, fraud, and identity theft?</i></p>		
	Red flags	
	Protecting your identity	
	Submitting a complaint to the CFPB	
	Learning about consumer protection	

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This Tool may ask you to provide sensitive personal and financial information. The CFPB does not collect any information from you or the organization using this Tool. The CFPB is not responsible and has no control over how others may use the information that you provide to them about your personal or financial situation. The CFPB recommends that you do not include names or account numbers and that users follow their organization’s policies regarding retention, storage, and disposal of documents that contain personal information.

Tool 3:

Financial empowerment self-assessment for volunteers

Financial empowerment involves building the ability to use financial management knowledge, skills, and tools to access resources, products, and services to achieve their goals.

Since financial empowerment covers a wide range of topics, it can be hard to know where to start. Identifying what you know and don't know may be the best place to start. Using this approach, you may find that you know more than you think you do. You may also find some areas where you could benefit from a little more information or know-how.

As a community volunteer who helps your organization serve individuals and families, it's important for you to understand your own level of financial empowerment.

Use this three-part self-assessment to develop an understanding of your financial knowledge, skill, and confidence. As you will see in the answer keys, the questions asked in this assessment are directly related to modules in *Your Money, Your Goals*.

Financial empowerment self-assessment: Part 1

Answer each of the following questions by checking either the “true” or “false” column.

	True	False
1. Goals are not important to financial planning or budgets.		
2. To have enough money for emergencies you must save 3 to 6 months' worth of living expenses.		
3. A cash flow budget helps you track whether you will have enough cash to cover your bills from week to week.		
4. If you can't pay all of your bills and collectors are calling, the “squeaky wheel” that calls you the most should be paid first.		
5. The only way to receive the income you've earned from working is by receiving a paycheck.		
6. Credit is when you owe someone money.		
7. The amount of your monthly debt payments may impact your ability to access new credit.		
8. A poor credit history may keep you from getting an apartment, and in some states, insurance or even a job.		
9. The only cost of having a checking account is the monthly service fee.		
10. As a consumer, you have almost no rights when it comes to financial products.		

Financial empowerment self-assessment: Part 1 results

Number correct:	_____ out of 10
Topics to Learn More About:	



Financial empowerment self-assessment: Part 2

Use check marks to show which word or phrase (rating) best describes how you feel today.

Statement	Rating				
	<i>Does not apply</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Dis-agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
1. I have money set aside for emergencies and goals.					
2. I know how to claim state and federal tax credits.					
3. I am not worried about how much money I owe.					
4. I am confident about the information on my credit reports and my scores.					
5. I don't worry about being able to pay my bills and expenses.					
6. I understand how credit works.					
7. I know how to get incorrect items on my credit report fixed.					
8. I feel confident about helping people begin to manage some of their financial challenges.					
9. I know where people in my community can go for credit and debt counseling and for free tax filing assistance.					
10. I know where to get help if I have questions on financial topics or have an issue with a financial product or service.					

 **Financial empowerment self-assessment: Part 3**

Use check marks to show whether your answer to each question is “yes,” “no,” or “I don’t know.”

Question	Answer		
	Yes	No	<i>I don't know</i>
1. I have a savings or checking account at a bank or credit union, and make regular deposits and withdrawals.			
2. I have applied for, received, and used a credit card.			
3. I have applied for and received a loan for a car or a home.			
4. I have taken out a payday loan.			
5. I have requested my own credit report and reviewed it.			
6. I track my income and spending.			
7. I have taken a loan from a pawn shop.			
8. I have used a check cashing business.			
9. I have had a car or other type of personal property repossessed for nonpayment.			
10. I have received calls from debt collectors.			
11. I understand my rights and know what to do if I believe a financial services provider has tried to take advantage of me.			
12. I receive my pay via a method <i>other than</i> a paycheck. (Payroll card, direct deposit, or cash, for example.)			

✓ Financial empowerment self-assessment: Part 1 answer key

Here are the correct answers for Part 1 of the “**Financial Empowerment Self-Assessment.**”

If you did not answer the item correctly, see the toolkit module listed next to the answer for more information. Reading through the module indicated can help you understand the answer to the item and build your financial empowerment knowledge and confidence.

Questions	True	False	Module
1. Goals are not important to financial planning or budgets.		✗	Module 1
2. To have enough money for emergencies you must save 3 to 6 months' worth of living expenses.		✗	Module 2
3. A cash flow budget helps you track whether you will have enough cash to cover your bills from week to week.	✗		Module 5
4. If you can't pay all of your bills and collectors are calling, the “squeaky wheel” that calls you the most should be paid first.		✗	Module 4
5. The only way to receive the income you've earned from working is by receiving a paycheck.		✗	Module 3
6. Credit is when you owe someone money.		✗	Module 6
7. The amount of your monthly debt payments may impact your ability to access new credit.	✗		Module 6
8. A poor credit history may keep you from getting an apartment, and in some states, insurance, or even a job.	✗		Module 7
9. The only cost of having a checking account is the monthly service fee.		✗	Module 8
10. As a consumer, you have almost no rights when it comes to financial products.		✗	Module 9

✓ Financial empowerment self-assessment: Part 2 answer key

There are no right or wrong answers for Part 2. That's because the answers are your opinions about your own financial knowledge, feelings, and situation. Use the following chart to count up how many of each answer you had:

Rating	<i>Does not apply</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Total for each					
		Total of <i>strongly disagree</i> + <i>disagree</i> :		Total of <i>agree</i> + <i>strongly agree</i> :	

- If the total of *Agree* + *Strongly agree* is greater than the total of *Strongly disagree* + *Disagree*, you feel good about many aspects of your financial life.
 - List any that you rated as *Disagree* or *Strongly disagree* below and read the modules that relate to these areas in the *Your Money, Your Goals* toolkit to learn more.
- If the total of *Agree* + *Strongly agree* is less than the total of *Strongly disagree* + *Disagree*, you may be feeling stress about many aspects of your financial life.
 - Consider reviewing the entire toolkit and working through the worksheets on your own before you work with the people you serve.

Statement	If your rating is <i>Disagree</i> or <i>Strongly Disagree</i>, check out . . .
1. I have money set aside for emergencies and goals.	Modules 1 and 2
2. I know how to claim state and federal tax credits.	Modules 2 and 3
3. I am not worried about how much money I owe.	Modules 6 and 7
4. I am confident about the information on my credit reports and my scores.	Module 7
5. I don't worry about being able to pay my bills and expenses.	Modules 4 and 5
6. I understand how credit works.	Module 7
7. I know how to get incorrect items on my credit report fixed.	Module 7
8. I feel confident about helping people begin to manage some of their financial challenges.	Consider reviewing all of the content modules.
9. I know where people in my community can go for credit and debt counseling and for free tax filing assistance.	See the resources listed at the end of modules 6 and 7 and the supplemental guide for creating a strong financial empowerment resource and referral network.
10. I know where to get help if I have questions about financial topics or have an issue with a financial product or service.	See the resources listed at the end of modules 6 and 7 and the supplemental guide for creating a strong financial empowerment resource and referral network. Also see Module 9 to learn about submitting complaints to the CFPB.



Financial empowerment self-assessment: Part 3 answer key

There are no right or wrong answers for Part 3 because it helps you identify the financial products or services and situations you have had experience with. This is important because the people you're working with may have used products and services you haven't used or have experienced situations that you haven't. If you're not familiar with some of these topics, you may want to learn more about them. Use the modules in the second column to learn more. You may also find it helpful to review those modules even if you have experience with these situations, products, services, and providers.

Question	Modules of Interest
1. I have a savings or checking account at a bank or credit union, and make regular deposits and withdrawals.	Module 8
2. I have applied for, received, and used a credit card.	Modules 6 and 7
3. I have applied for and received a loan for a car or a home.	Modules 6, 7, and 8
4. I have taken out a payday loan.	Modules 6 and 8
5. I have requested my own credit report and reviewed it.	Module 7
6. I track my income and spending.	Module 3
7. I have taken a loan from a pawn shop.	Modules 6 and 8
8. I have used a check cashing business.	Modules 3 and 8
9. I have had a car or other type of personal property repossessed for nonpayment.	Modules 6 and 7
10. I have received calls from debt collectors.	Module 6
11. I understand my rights and know what to do if I believe a financial services provider has tried to take advantage of me.	Module 9

12. I receive my pay via a method *other than* a paycheck. (Payroll card, direct deposit, or cash, for example.)

Modules 3 and 8

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Resources

For additional resources, visit the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website:

<http://www.consumerfinance.gov/askCFPB>

If you have a consumer complaint, visit:

<http://www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint>

INTRODUCTION PART 2:

Understanding the situation

You may be wondering where you should start with someone you're helping. This goal and financial situation assessment may help you figure out a beginning point when you meet with someone.

When you feel the time is right, you can simply ask the person to complete the assessment. You can then match the answers with modules in the toolkit or share the “Quick Tips” as a starting point for assistance. If the organization for which you volunteer uses an intake form, it may be willing to consider adding some or all of these questions to it, too.

The assessment is simple and only has a few key questions, so you might decide to gather the information in a conversation. Reading the assessment and recording the answers may be useful if you're working with someone that has limited literacy levels, is an English language learner, or with whom a question and answer format would be more productive.

Introducing the assessment may be uncomfortable if you're not used to asking these types of questions. Part 3 of the Introduction provides tips on starting the conversation. You can say something like this as an introduction:

We know that many issues in running a household involve money. You know where you are and where you'd like to go, and we would like to provide you with information and tools to help you use your money to reach your goals. To

Assessment

Assessment gives you a picture of what is going on now so you can better target information and skill building opportunities for yourself or the people you serve. Assessment involves gathering information to understand conditions today as well as what someone knows, can do, or feels about a specific topic. This information is used to inform and plan for actions to change conditions, knowledge, abilities, behaviors, or beliefs.

get us started, we have this questionnaire, which you'll see covers several topics. Your answers will help us build a plan to get you the information and tools that are going to be most useful to you right now. We won't use the information you provide in any other way.

Remember, financial empowerment is a big topic. Knowing where to start can be hard, but using this assessment will help you identify what is going on with the person you're working with and provide him with the right information, tools, or referrals.

Using the assessment or using its questions as a conversation guide is optional, but using it can help you decide where to start in the toolkit. For example, if someone has a goal to buy a car or a home, you can target *Understanding credit reports and scores*, because learning how to improve his credit history may help him qualify for a lower cost loan. If you are working with someone that is unable to make ends meet, you can target *Getting through the month*.

This tool will help you match each person's goals and financial situation with specific modules and tools. It will also highlight circumstances where the person could benefit from a referral to a specialized counselor or an attorney.

Finally, be sure you can provide assurance of confidentiality and describe your system for keeping this information secure (e.g., a locked drawer in a file cabinet). If you keep a copy of the assessment, be sure you have a system for keeping the information completely confidential. As you proceed, be sure to follow your organization's policies when it comes to storing and handling people's personal information.

Tool 1:

My money picture

Where I am – and where I want to go

Please answer the following questions based on where you are today. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers can help us provide you with information and resources that can help you with the financial issues you care about.

If you could change one thing about your financial situation, what would it be?

Question	Response		
1. Do you have dreams for you or your children that require money to make them happen?	Yes	No	I don't know
2. Are you behind on rent, car payments, or your mortgage?	Yes	No	I don't know
3. Are you behind on utility payments?	Yes	No	I don't know
4. Can you count on having about the same amount of income every week?	Yes	No	I don't know
5. When unexpected expenses or emergencies happen, do you have some money set aside to cover them?	Yes	No	I don't know
6. Do your money, benefits, and other resources cover all of your bills and living expenses each month?	Yes	No	I don't know

7. Do you have student loans or other debts you're having trouble paying?	Yes	No	I don't know
8. Has your credit history made it hard to get a car, insurance, a phone, or a job?	Yes	No	I don't know
9. Do you have an account at a bank or credit union?	Yes	No	I don't know
10. Do you feel like you're spending too much to get your money and use it to pay bills?	Yes	No	I don't know
11. Have you had issues with a financial product or service like a bank account, loan, mortgage, debt collector, or credit report that you haven't been able to resolve?	Yes	No	I don't know

If you answered that you have dreams for yourself and your family, what are they?

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✓ My money picture key

Use the following chart to help you determine where to start the financial empowerment work with the people you serve.

Use the answers to the first and last questions as additional information to help you pinpoint the module and tool that will be most useful right now. If the person you're talking with is facing bills they can't pay today or this week, first help them address that situation. As you do, let them know that if they'd like, you or someone else can help them start working on ways to bring their income and expenses into balance.

Question	Response	Quick Tips
1. Do you have dreams for you or your children that require money to make them happen?	If <i>No</i> or <i>I don't know</i> , see Module 1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brainstorm a list of your hopes, wants, and dreams. ▪ Pick one and turn it into a goal with a timeframe. Make it specific and measurable. ▪ Figure out how much you need to save or set aside each week (or month) to reach your goals.
2. Are you behind on rent, car payments, or your mortgage?	<p>If <i>Yes</i>, call 211 or an emergency assistance center. For homeowners, call (888) 995-HOPE.</p> <p>See Module 4, <i>Tool 5: When Cash is Short</i></p>	<p>If "yes", call 211 or local emergency assistance center. By dialing 211, people in need of assistance are referred, and sometimes connected, to appropriate agencies and community organizations.</p> <p>For homeowners, call 888-995-HOPE or CFPB at (855) 411-CFPB (2372). You can find certified housing counselors on CFPB's website at http://www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor.</p>
3. Are you behind on utility payments?	If <i>Yes</i> , call 211 or local emergency assistance center.	

<p>4. Can you count on having about the same amount of income every week?</p>	<p>If <i>No</i>, Module 3 for information on tracking and managing variable income.</p> <p>Call 211 or local emergency assistance center.</p> <p>Make a referral to your local workforce opportunity center.</p>	
<p>5. When unexpected expenses or emergencies happen, do you have some money set aside to cover them?</p>	<p>If <i>No</i> or <i>I don't know</i>, see Modules 2 and 4.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Think about your last unexpected expense. How much did you have to spend the last time your car broke down or something unexpected happened? ▪ Keep track of everything you spend money on for a week. ▪ Review your spending and figure out whether you can make some changes. ▪ If you can, put aside a small amount each week. If you usually receive a tax refund, think about setting a goal for how much of it you want to save.

<p>6. Do your money, benefits, and other resources cover all your bills and living expenses?</p>	<p>If <i>No</i> or <i>I don't know</i>, see Modules 4 and 5.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write down your total income and benefits and when they come in – both your wages and any benefits you receive (like SNAP or rental assistance.) If your pay is irregular or changes from paycheck to paycheck, use the amount you receive in a week when you don't work extra hours. ▪ Write down your bills and the due dates. ▪ Write down your total expenses – Add all of your expenses and other uses of cash (including savings and debt repayment) for the week. ▪ If you have enough income and resources in a month to cover the bills, but your income arrives after the bills are due, reach out to the companies to see if it's possible to change the due date or make bi-weekly payments. ▪ Look for expenses you might be able to pay less for or temporarily cut back.
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<p>7. Do you have student loans or other debts you're having trouble paying?</p>	<p>If <i>Yes</i> or <i>I don't know</i>, see Modules 6 and 4.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make a list of your debts with the amount of your payments and when they are due. ▪ If you can't make a payment, call the business. Ask if they can change the due date, the payment plan, or the terms of the loan. ▪ If you want to reduce your debt, track your spending to see if you can make changes and increase your payments. ▪ Tools for student loan repayment options are available at www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college. ▪ If you need or would like help managing your debts, visit the National Foundation for Credit Counseling: at http://www.nfcc.org/ or find a housing counselor at www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor. ▪ If you would like to speak with an attorney about a lawsuit by a creditor or debt collector, information on finding a lawyer can be found at: http://www.consumerfinance.gov/askcfpb/1433/how-do-i-find-lawyer-or-attorney-represent-me-lawsuit-creditor-or-debt-collector.html.
<p>8. Has your credit history made it hard to get a car, insurance, a phone, or a job?</p>	<p>If <i>Yes</i> or <i>I don't know</i>, see Module 7.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pull your free annual credit report to find out what's on your credit record at https://www.annualcreditreport.com. ▪ If there are errors, contact credit reporting agencies to address them or visit https://www.consumerfinance.gov with questions. ▪ If you need help or would like help strengthening your credit, check out the information and resources listed in Module 7 that can link you to local credit or housing counselors.

<p>9. Do you have an account at a bank or credit union?</p>	<p>If <i>no</i> see Module 8.</p>	<p>If you don't have an account and want to open one, shop around and compare several banks or credit unions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask them questions about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Their hours and the services they offer (like online tools) ○ The fees they charge (monthly fees, overdraft fees, etc.) ○ The amount you need to open the account ○ Any other rules about the account ▪ If you want an account and have been turned down, ask the bank or credit union to tell you exactly why they are denying you an account. Review the report they give you and check for any errors.
<p>10. Do you feel like you're spending too much to get your money and use it to pay bills?</p>	<p>If <i>Yes</i> or <i>I don't know</i>, see Module 8.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Think about how you use financial services. Do you need to cash paychecks? Do you need to pay your bills? Do you want a safe place for your money? Does your employer or benefits provider require direct deposit? ▪ Ask yourself what's most important to you if you want these services. Are hours and location more important to you than things like customer service, available products, or fees? How important is safety and security to you?

<p>11. Have you had issues with a financial product or service like a bank account, loan, mortgage, debt collection, or credit report that you haven't been able to resolve?</p>	<p>If <i>No</i> or <i>I don't know</i>, see Module 9.</p>	<p>You can submit a complaint to CFPB at http://www.consumerfinance.gov/Complaint or call toll-free at (855) 411-CFPB (2372).</p>
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 **Resources**

For additional resources, visit the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website:
<http://www.consumerfinance.gov/askCFPB>

If you would like help managing your debt or rebuilding credit, visit the National Foundation for Credit Counseling:
<http://www.nfcc.org/>

Certified housing counselors can provide advice on budgeting, buying a home, renting, defaults, foreclosures, and credit issues:
www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor

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INTRODUCTION PART 3:

Starting the money conversation

Everyone has questions about money. Even the wealthiest people in the world may turn to someone when they have financial questions.

It can be difficult, though, to talk about money, even with people that you know well. It can feel uncomfortable to raise the topic of personal finance because it's so personal.

But you may already be talking with people about other personal issues or their goals. Talking about money can get easier if you **start the conversation at the right time in a way that acknowledges their personal goals**. By approaching financial issues in a non-judgmental way, you will build trust that can allow you to help them start to address their financial challenges.

Use the experiences that you've had in your own life or that friends and family have had to help you understand where the people you're working with are coming from. When people feel that you respect them and that they can trust you, they're usually more willing to open up and discuss financial topics that might otherwise make them feel uncomfortable.

Starting the conversation

If financial empowerment is not a part of your regular discussions, knowing when to bring up the topic can be a challenge at first. Ways to start the conversation include:

- Using the assessment tool during intake or check-in meetings
- Making the most of shorter discussions to introduce a tool or make a referral
- Following up with people when they bring up financial issues directly or indirectly

Financial empowerment opportunities in common situations

Here are a few examples of situations where the toolkit's information and tools and using your organization's referral network could strengthen the work that you are already doing as a volunteer.

- In working with a couple on strengthening their relationship, it becomes clear that different spending habits and attitudes are a source of conflict.
- An individual lands a new job, and she doesn't understand how direct deposit works and whether it is a good idea for her.
- Someone you are working with had his hours cut back at work. He knows he won't have enough cash next month to cover the bills and needs a strategy for prioritizing bills and paying them off.
- An individual just received a tax refund and would like to set it aside for emergencies but doesn't have a bank account.
- A woman who has just left an abusive relationship is concerned that her husband is making purchases in her name.
- Someone you are working with is new to this country and hopes to eventually buy a home. He doesn't understand how credit scores work and why they matter so much.

How should I bring up money topics?

Use the assessment tool

If you have a lot of contact with someone, one of the easiest ways to bring up money is to use the *My money picture* tool from *Introduction Part 2: Understanding the situation*. Going over this series of questions will give you a clearer picture of where the person stands and what information might be most useful. Remember, you can:

- Ask the person to complete the assessment either in your meeting or at home.

- Cover the questions in a conversation.
- Ask the person to answer only a few of the questions.

Make the most of short-term contacts

It's great to be able to build trust and discuss financial issues with the people you serve over the long term, but sometimes you just don't have that kind of time. You can work on empowering people financially during short-contact meetings, too. For example, if it's early in the year and you're winding up a brief meeting with someone you've just met, you could say:

You

I've been working on my taxes... not fun, but I think I'm getting a refund this year... Have you done yours yet?

George

No, not yet. I hate them. There are a lot of forms.

You

Have you ever tried a VITA site? They do your taxes for free. Have you not gotten a refund in the past? You may qualify for the EITC tax credit, which can be a lot of money back.

George

No, I always just go to the place in the mall, and sometimes I get a refund, but last year it was only like \$125.

You

Think about going to the VITA site - you can get your taxes done free. The IRS trains and certifies the volunteers, so they know what they are doing. Here, let me look up the one closest to your house. If you got a refund, what do you think you'd do with it?

George

I don't know. When I've gotten one in the past it just gets used up if you know what I mean.

You

That's okay. Have you thought about doing something different?

George

Well, every year we talk about trying to get ahead a bit. Take care of some bills, you know. Maybe set a little aside.

You

Good intentions! I know I have lots of good intentions. But I find that if I don't have a plan I don't follow through. Would you be interested in talking through some options or possible plans for your refund?

Respond when people initiate

Sometimes a person brings up a financial issue directly or indirectly. Here's an example of how it could sound if someone brings up a financial issue directly. Aaliyah, with whom you have regular and focused contact, says in one of your early meetings:

Aaliyah

My utilities are due, but I don't get my next paycheck for five days, so I'm broke! You know how it is. And, I'm going to be late with the electric again.

You

Oh no. I know being late means fees. Are you in danger of getting your electricity cut off?

Aaliyah

No, I don't think so. I've only been late one other time this year that I can think of...

You

Are you sure you'll have the money next week to cover this bill as well as other expenses you will have?

Aaliyah

Well, I wouldn't say I'm sure. When it comes to money who is really sure about anything. I mean I think if I plan with my money, I'll do all of this work and still end up broke and disappointed. You know, putting all that effort into something and it gets you nowhere.

You

Gosh, I get what you mean. But even though things don't work out exactly as planned, I've found plans with my money can help me make sure I get some of the big things like my car payment, rent, and utilities covered. There are a few tools I could show you if you might be just a little interested...

Aaliyah

Mmmm. Well you know how I feel about planning, but I guess I could take a look...

Here's an example of how it could sound if someone brings up a financial issue indirectly. For example, during a meeting you ask Aaliyah how her kids are doing, and she says:

Aaliyah

You know, they're good but we're feeling cramped at home now that they are bigger, and I'd really like to get them a yard to run around in, so we've been talking about moving.

You

That sounds like a great idea. I remember that we ran a credit report for you when we first started working together. I know that landlords often take a look at your credit...

Aaliyah

They do? I don't remember that happening before! What's on there?

You

Yes, most of the time they will look at your credit when choosing who to rent to. Why don't we take a look at your credit history together next time to make sure that everything looks right to you.

Discussing difficulties or problems

Many people have difficulty with credit or other financial products or services, and some may feel shame or embarrassment because of their situation. When you discuss these problems, first be empathetic. Then try to suggest or discuss in clear terms how to avoid a similar situation in the future. Explain how to get help from the CFPB and other federal, state, or local agencies if they can't resolve problems with the financial services provider.⁴

The CFPB has already handled over half a million consumer complaints about a wide range of consumer financial products and services. Based on these complaints and research, the CFPB takes action to stop practices that are unfair, deceptive, abusive, or otherwise violate the law. In many cases, the CFPB partners with other federal agencies and state officials to address these

⁴ See *Module 9: Protecting consumer rights* for information on submitting a complaint to the CFPB and other authorities. Or, you can submit a complaint on behalf of the person you're helping.

problems. Through enforcement actions, the CFPB can require companies to refund money to customers when their consumer rights have been violated.

If you submit a complaint to the CFPB, they will forward your complaint to the company and work to get a response. After they forward your complaint, the company has 15 days to respond to you and the CFPB. Companies are expected to close all but the most complicated complaints within 60 days. You'll be able to review the response and give feedback. If the CFPB finds that another agency would be better able to assist, they will forward your complaint and let you know.

CFPB also shares complaint data with state and federal agencies who oversee financial products and services, and publishes a database of non-personal complaint information so the public knows what kinds of complaints they receive and how companies respond.

You can submit a complaint:

Online: consumerfinance.gov/complaint

Toll-free phone: (855) 411-CFPB (2372), 8am-8pm EST, Monday - Friday

TTY/TDD phone: (855) 729-CFPB (2372)

Fax: (855) 237-2392

Mail:

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

PO Box 4503, Iowa City, IA 52244

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INTRODUCTION PART 4:

Emotions, values, and culture: What's behind our money choices?

Everyone has situations where they know what they “should” do but find themselves doing something else instead, especially when it comes to money. For example, you may have decided to save part of your tax refund to build an emergency fund. Instead, you use it to help a family member pay down his medical debt, because not helping a family member pay off as debt would go against the values you were raised with. Or you may use it to splurge on something you have wanted. You've been working hard and making this splurge for yourself or your family feels good.

Financial decisions, no matter how well intended, are never made in a vacuum. Many things influence both our short- and long-term financial decisions. This information focuses on three of the influences on financial decision-making: emotions, values, culture.

Emotional influences on financial decisions

When people talk about money, it's not just about the numbers. They are really discussing *what money means to them*. Attitudes and behaviors around money are wrapped up in feelings around security, failure, family, love, and status. It's important to listen carefully to the people you're helping to try to determine their emotional reactions to money and its meaning. Then you can integrate their emotions and feelings into your discussions about their finances.

Instead of just asking a person to give you the basic numbers, try asking questions about how he or she feels when you're discussing their finances. You could try questions like:

- “What does money mean to you?”
- “What is your first memory about money?”
- “What is the most difficult thing about money for you? For your family?”

Values

Core values are underlying principles that prioritize how people spend time and money. Values inform how we decide what is more important when alternatives compete for our time, energy, and—importantly—money.

Helping people become aware that financial decisions are influenced by emotions and past experiences may help them understand what drives some of their financial practices. It can also help you better understand their unique strengths and challenges.

Understanding personal values around money

Each of us has a unique set of values that shape how we prioritize what we do with our time, energy, and—importantly—money. Just in a single day, we may make many choices about “what is more important:”

- The enjoyment of eating out at a restaurant or the benefits of the less expensive option of eating at home.
- Spending time visiting an aging parent or using that time to watch a neighbor's children while she interviews for a job.
- Buying an expensive Christmas present for a nephew or buying a less expensive gift and saving what is left over.
- Paying for financial obligations such as child support and student loans before spending money for “wants.”

Think about the values that drove some of your recent decisions. Were you deciding between family obligations and investing in your career? Were you deciding between enjoying today and preparing for tomorrow?

Values run deep

When asked to examine why they hold the values that they hold today, many people find that those values are connected to the early, formative experiences of their lives. The formation of our values can run so deep that it is often difficult to figure out where they came from.

Your family, religious views, cultural background, experiences in childhood and later in life, and your own personal reflections on what is important can all contribute to the set of values that drive your choices. For example, in some cultures it is expected that family members help each other financially until all get ahead. Consider these stories:

- Hernan's parents worked multiple jobs and scrimped and saved throughout his childhood so that he could be the first in his family to go to college. Today, as an adult father of two, Hernan typically cashes in his vacation time. He'd rather put that money into the kids' college funds.
- Tina's father never made it to Europe. Toward the end of his life, he confided that he always regretted that fact. Lately, when Tina sees the Carpe Diem bumper sticker on her car each morning, she wonders if she'll ever save enough to travel. She's beginning to think she should just go now before it's too late.

What values are involved in each decision in the stories above? Which of your own values affect what you think of these situations and your thoughts on what each person should do?

Cultural influences on financial decisions

No decisions, including financial ones, are made in a vacuum. People make all of their decisions within the very powerful context of culture, including family, ethnicity, region, community, socio-economic status, generation, and religion. Each of these factors influences beliefs, values, and experiences about money and the way financial decisions are handled.

Cultural influences are heavily rooted in values. Consider the ways common American values—such as individualism, practicality, honesty, and hard work⁵—might influence people’s financial choices. Businesses, governments, and the media also influence values around money.

Differences in cultural values can affect financial behavior. For example, Western culture values individuality and personal well-being, which means it’s generally considered appropriate for each person to support themselves financially. In some other cultures, family members support each other financially throughout their lives. If they save money, it may go to a family member they believe needs it. If someone chooses to spend his extra income on his extended family or neighbors instead of saving it in an emergency fund, this doesn’t mean that he has bad financial habits. Instead, he is just making financial choices in a different cultural context than you may be familiar with.

It’s important to understand cultural influences without being judgmental. When you discuss financial goals and choices with people, seek to understand their values and cultural influences. This can help you help them reach their true goals in a way that makes them feel understood and respected. They might agree to a financial plan that makes rational sense and *know* that it’s what they have agreed to do, but this is often not enough to override their feelings or cultural context in the moment when decisions are made. Remember that while their priorities may seem counterproductive to you, within their own culture, they may feel completely appropriate.

Conflicts around culture and values

Sometimes, you may find that people are caught in the middle of cultural conflicts around money. Their family culture may value saving and avoiding debt. But their broader community may value material things like new cars or expensive clothes, which could require taking on debt to purchase. Or the culture in which they were raised might value caring financially for parents as they age, while their co-workers are not expected to take on that same responsibility.

At other times, these conflicts take place within a family. One spouse may have cultural influences or a family background that encourage them to save for their children’s education, while the other may feel that children should be responsible for their own educational expenses.

⁵ Kohl, L. Robert, *Values Americans Live By*, 1984. See http://www.claremontmckenna.edu/pages/faculty/alee/extra/American_values.html.

One parent may want to save the family's tax refund; the other will think that money should go towards things the family needs or simply wants now. These kinds of conflicts can lead to emotional decisions that may not look rational on the outside but make perfect sense given each person's background, values, and culture.

In these situations, where people may have their own conflicting emotions about money, it is important to remember that you have your own attitudes and feelings toward money – and they are probably different from the people you're working with. Be sure that you are not offering advice based solely on your own preferences.

Use questions to understand what's behind decisions

When discussing people's financial behavior, don't just accept their expressed wants at face value. Take time to ask questions that can help you discover their underlying attitudes, needs, goals, and roadblocks. Ask them questions like:

- “Who handles the finances in your family?”
- “How does your community of faith view money?”
- “How did your family handle finances when you were growing up? Did you discuss money openly?”
- “How do your friends view money? How do you think this may influence you?”
- “What do you want your children to learn about money? What do you think they are learning from you now?”

It's often difficult for people to open up about money, but taking the time to help them understand their values and attitudes about money can provide both you and the people you serve with new insights. These insights can help them make lasting and productive changes that help them reach their goals.

Once you understand the cultural factors that are guiding people's behavior, you can coach them toward financial choices that help them effectively manage their obligations *and* line up with their true values and desires.

This might mean that you help them figure out a compromise. For example, you might help them figure out how to take responsibility for their own financial obligations without asking them to abandon their commitment to help their extended family.

Keeping personal values in check

Our own values about money and financial issues may affect the way that we approach financial empowerment and our interactions with the people we serve. Our own values affect what we think of situations and our thoughts on the best course of action. It can sometimes be tempting to “set someone’s priorities straight,” or tell them what you would do in their situation.

Ultimately, however, this is not a successful strategy. **Information, advice, and other support will only “stick” when they are aligned with a person’s own deeply rooted beliefs and values.**

In fact, imposing one’s own values on someone else can be counterproductive:

- The person might feel judged and stop talking with you about money and financial decisions.
- The community volunteer and the person they’re serving miss an important opportunity to compare values and attitudes toward money and to consider how they are connected to financial outcomes.

Consider using some combination of the following strategies for keeping values in check:

Examine your own values. Being more aware of the values that you hold and understanding your experiences can help you to realize whether they are getting in the way of helping someone. Knowing what your values are and where they came from does not mean that you have to give up those values. It just means that—while you are acting as a source of support and information—you will be better able to take the other person’s point of view into account as you help them weigh the financial choices in their lives.

Ask “implication” questions. Rather than tell someone which is the “better” course of action, ask questions that help identify the risks and rewards of each choice:

- “If you continue on this path, what is the short-term gain and the long-term impact?”
- “Does this financial choice help you and your family get to where you want to go? Who in your life will be affected by this course of action and how?”

Then, stop and listen. Let the person tell you what is important to her.

Help people examine their values and how they drive their financial decisions.

Helping someone understand what drives his financial behavior is one of the most powerful outcomes you can achieve as a community volunteer. He can use that new insight to examine today’s financial decisions and potentially re-evaluate other behaviors. You can help people achieve those insights by asking about the reasons for and against different courses of action and prompt them to talk through why those reasons are important. When you spot what might be someone’s core value, say it and ask follow-up questions that define the value:

- “It sounds like being a source of support to your siblings is really important to you. Would you agree with that?”
- “Has that always been a core value of yours? What first made you feel this was so important?”
- “What makes helping your siblings important to you?”

Keeping your personal values in check doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t help people understand the consequences of their choices. Try to find a balance. On the one hand, you need to understand the person’s perspectives and values. On the other hand, volunteers who work with people at this level have a responsibility to make sure that they understand the real-life, long-term consequences of their decisions. Choices made today might limit options tomorrow for things like helping a family member in need, starting a family business, or saving for personal goals such as buying a car or a home.

Help people understand how new behaviors line up with their existing values. Once someone understands their core values and how they influence their financial choices, help them understand how a new or different financial behavior is in line with their existing values. Helping people identify the reward based on their own value set gives them much stronger footing as they try to change their behavior. People are much more likely to stick with new behaviors that they believe will benefit them when they are in line with their values than when they try to change just because they think they are “supposed” to.

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