

Integrating Financial Coaching into Other Services: Lessons Learned from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Financial Coaching Initiative

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB's) [full report](#) on the Initiative provides more information about its design, the training and professional development requirements for coaches, and key findings from client data.

Introduction

In 2015, the CFPB started a pilot Financial Coaching Initiative that provided free one-on-one financial coaching to veterans and economically vulnerable consumers. The CFPB equipped coaches through comprehensive training and professional development opportunities that combined money management expertise with general coaching skills. Coaches provided clients with support, financial information, and tools to help them work towards their financial goals. Prior research, including [an evaluation led by the CFPB](#), indicates that coaching helps clients reach financial goals and improve their financial well-being.

During the Initiative, the CFPB embedded professional financial coaches into 60 host organizations across the country. The host organizations included government agencies and nonprofit organizations offering employment assistance, legal aid, or other social services. Outside the host organizations, the coaches established local referral networks to reach more clients. Over the Initiative's four years in operation, the coaches served **23,005 clients** who worked towards personal goals around budgeting and money management, credit and debt, savings, and other topics. The section below summarizes lessons learned from the Initiative.

Lessons Learned

1. *Financial coaching was successfully integrated into a diverse range of organizations.*

The diversity of the 60 organizations shows that financial coaching is a flexible approach that can be integrated into many different settings. Each host organization was unique in terms of the community where it was located, the target population it served, the set of services it offered, and other characteristics. Thus, integration—the ways coaches embedded themselves into their host organizations and the broader community—looked different at each organization.

Coaches' perceptions of successful integration depended on numerous factors. Coaches serving economically vulnerable consumers felt most comfortable when the host organization understood their role and valued them as an addition to the organization instead of a separate service. A common indicator of a well-integrated program, as described by coaches, was a strong referral system in which the host organization was already attracting people well-suited for and interested in financial coaching. Well-integrated coaches found that financial coaching was well understood among host organization staff and their services were valued.

2. *Outreach and marketing skills were critical to each coach's success.*

A key assumption in the Initiative's design was that host organization referrals would account for a large percentage of coaching clients. In practice, recruiting clients from the host organizations was more difficult than anticipated, with about half of clients ultimately coming from host organization referrals. Over time, through training and experience, coaches developed stronger outreach and marketing skills, both within their host organizations and in the larger community.

3. *Coaches needed both coaching skills and financial subject matter expertise.*

The CFPB required coaches to develop not only strong coaching skills, but in-depth financial content expertise. These requirements proved appropriate, as clients were interested in working in different ways with their coaches. Some clients were interested in obtaining specific pieces of information to address an immediate concern while others wanted to focus on working towards longer-term financial goals.

4. *Clients preferred to meet in-person for their first coaching session, but coaches used a variety of communication methods for subsequent meetings.*

In-person visits were most common for initial coaching sessions, but phone, email, text, and video communications made up a significant percentage of subsequent interactions. The use of these virtual methods has likely increased since the Initiative, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Coaches had to be comfortable with using a range of ways to communicate with clients, depending on each client's preferences and access to technology.

5. *Financial coaching is associated with increases in clients' financial capability.*

Financial coaching was associated with increases in clients' scores on a [financial capability scale](#), with 57 percent seeing their scores increase during coaching, 32 percent experiencing no change and 11 seeing a decrease. These associations do not prove causality since factors aside from coaching may also affect clients' scores. However, the CFPB's previous rigorous [evaluation of financial coaching](#) services found meaningful and statistically significant increases in clients' money management; objective financial health metrics like savings balances, debt levels, and credit scores; and subjective feelings of financial confidence and financial well-being.

6. *Working with a coach more than once is associated with better outcomes, but one-time meetings may be valuable for many clients.*

Clients' scores on a financial capability survey tended to increase the more they worked with a coach, though again this association may not be causal. At the same time, some clients were only interested in short-term or one-time coaching engagements. Data recorded by the coaches indicates that even one session can help clients take meaningful actions toward their financial goals and, in some cases, complete short-term goals.

CFPB Financial Coaching Resources

Reports about financial coaching

- [Financial Coaching Initiative: Results and Lessons Learned](#) provides more detail on the topics covered in this brief and other parts of the Initiative including its design, coaches' training, and client data.
- [Financial Coaching: A Strategy to Improve Financial Well-Being](#) describes the results of an earlier CFPB-led evaluation of financial coaching. The evaluation found that financial coaching resulted in improvements in money management, objective financial health metrics, and subjective feelings of financial confidence. [Implementing Financial Coaching: Implications for Practitioners](#) shares insights from the evaluation into how to implement financial coaching.
- [Financial Coaching: Advancing the field to better serve consumers](#) summarizes a CFPB-led Financial Coaching Symposium, including key takeaways and possible next steps for the field.

Resources for financial coaches and other practitioners to use with clients

- [Your Money, Your Goals](#) resources equip frontline staff and volunteers in social service organizations with the information and tools they need to provide financial empowerment services to the people they serve. Your Money, Your Goals includes
 - An in-depth [toolkit](#) with information and tools that help frontline staff, regardless of their expertise in financial issues, talk about money with the people they serve.
 - [Companion guides](#) focused on topics specific to Native communities, reentry, and people with disabilities.
 - [Interactive booklets](#) covering common financial stressors, including Want Credit to Work for You, Behind on Bills, Debt Getting in Your Way, and Building Your Savings.
 - [Videos to spark action](#) that introduce concepts from the toolkit. Frontline staff and volunteers can then follow up with tools or handouts tied directly to those concepts.
 - [Online resources](#) referenced in the Your Money, Your Goals materials are listed on a single page to make them easier to access and share.
- [Financial well-being resources](#) define financial well-being and include a toolkit about how to measure it, national survey findings on financial well-being, and more.

To explore more resources for financial coaches, visit consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/educator-tools.