

# Community partnership guidebook for libraries

How libraries can build relationships to create financial education  
programs for their communities



Consumer Financial  
Protection Bureau

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# Disclaimer

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# Table of contents

<b>Disclaimer .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of contents.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Financial well-being.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Community programs and events.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Partnership benefits .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Community partnerships and agreements .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5.1 Types of partnerships .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5.2 National, state and local partners .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5.3 Partnership processes and agreements.....</b>	<b>20</b>

# 1. Introduction

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is the nation's first federal agency focused solely on consumer financial protection. Created by the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, the Bureau's mission is to help consumer financial markets work for American consumers, responsible providers, and the economy as a whole, by:

- Making rules more effective
- Consistently and fairly enforcing those rules
- Empowering consumers to take more control over their economic lives

Enhancing financial literacy is an integral part of the Bureau's consumer financial protection function. This mandate is reflected in numerous provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act that charge the Bureau with researching, developing, promoting, and implementing financial literacy programs and activities. These include provisions directing the establishment of the Office of Financial Education, which is responsible for developing and implementing a strategy and a broad range of initiatives to provide individuals and families with opportunities to access information, education, tools, and services to make better informed financial decisions.

The recent economic downturn demonstrated that national financial stability can depend on the financial well-being of individuals and families. It also raised awareness about the complexity of both our financial marketplace and the decisions consumers must make to manage their finances effectively. Despite the availability of a wide range of information about managing money and about financial products and services, many consumers still struggle to make the financial decisions that serve their life goals.

The Bureau hears every day from people experiencing difficulty in their financial lives. They often express regret that they did not know more about the risks involved in particular financial decisions at the time they made those decisions. They also struggle with knowing where to turn

when they have financial questions or when they have an issue with a financial product or service.

By working with public libraries, we hope to make reliable, unbiased financial information and tools more available to consumers. People trust their local libraries. They know their libraries, and librarians know their communities. Our goal is to leverage that trust – and librarians’ skills in program development, research, and community outreach – to make public libraries a top-of-mind resource for consumers seeking information about their financial decisions.

CFPB partnered with nine public libraries of all sizes from across the United States.<sup>1</sup> We talked with library staff and managers about the resources and capabilities libraries have, the constraints they face, and the tools and resources they need to provide more financial education programs and information. With their help and input, we developed and are implementing five key strategies:

1. Help libraries identify and connect with partners in their communities
2. Provide librarians with a collection of financial education programs, resources and tools
3. Help provide marketing support for financial education in libraries
4. Provide training for library staff and managers
5. Build an online community for local financial education librarians

This guide is designed to address the first strategy, to help libraries identify and connect with individuals, businesses or other organizations in their communities they can work with to develop and provide financial education programs and resources to consumers.

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<sup>1</sup> Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, New York; Columbus Metropolitan Library, Ohio; Florence County Library System, Florence, South Carolina; Fresno County Public Library, Fresno, California; Georgetown County Library, Georgetown, South Carolina; Menominee Tribal College, Wisconsin; Orange County Library System, Orlando, Florida; Pelham Public Library, Pelham, Alabama; and San Francisco Public Library, California.

Librarians, like you, told us that partnerships matter. Since the 2008 economic downturn, many libraries have experienced reduced budgets and staff cuts. They said they depend on help from others in their communities to maintain and increase their services. Partners can provide instructors, programming, funding, or additional help for patrons seeking more help or expertise than the library can offer. With the need for such partnerships increasing, we learned that agreements about program collaborations are evolving from informal handshakes and verbal agreements to more formal, written agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). The intent of this book is to help guide libraries through the process of building and strengthening such community partnerships.

## 2. Financial well-being

Financial well-being involves:

- Being in control of one's finances
- Being prepared for unforeseen life events
- Being on track to meet financial goals
- Being able to make the choices that allow one to enjoy life

Anyone, regardless of income level and socioeconomic status, can seek to achieve and maintain financial well-being through regular fact finding, monitoring, decision making, and acting on decisions. Your patrons trust you. By providing quality information and referrals, you can help increase their financial knowledge, help them make better informed financial decisions, and enable them to more likely achieve financial well-being.

As a librarian, you can help community members recognize when to research financial information, where to start that research, and where to find reliable financial information. For example, if patrons are looking for information on how to buy a house, in addition to giving them information about that topic, you might want to also direct them to resources that help them establish a monthly budget, check their credit report, and compare mortgage loans. By focusing on affordability, credit worthiness, and comparison shopping, you are helping them evaluate their financial well-being, set reasonable expectations, and avoid the pressure of making a rushed decision after they find their dream house.

You're not expected to become a financial advisor, and your patrons may need more help than you feel qualified to provide. If so, knowing the resources available in your community can help you make better referrals. If the would-be homebuyers above start explaining that they have poor credit and want to know if they would qualify for a low-money down loan, for example, you may want to provide the phone number of a local Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-

certified counselor. You can find a link to search for local HUD housing counselors in the Community partnerships and agreements section of this Guidebook.



# 3. Community programs and events

When forming program ideas, consider the needs of your community, the resources and services available within your community, seasonal or special events that can be tied to financial education, and programs that have been successful in the past or when offered by other organizations or libraries.

Many librarians have shared that they face low participation levels when offering financial education programs that are perceived as boring, technical, complex, or stigmatizing (e.g., programs on bankruptcy, foreclosure, and rebuilding credit). Offering fun, engaging, and non-threatening financial education programs may generate higher participation. Fun and engaging financial program ideas may focus on tangible tasks, such as applying for student or business loans, identifying ways to save money for special events like a wedding or a holiday, or using mobile or online financial applications. You can also fold personal finance topics into other programs you are already conducting – in resume building workshops, employment fairs, or English as a second language courses, for example.

One library told us that offering prizes and incentives is one way to generate interest, especially among teens and youth. They also enjoy competitions, and there are a number of hands-on activities or games you could explore in the Library Resources section of our website, [consumerfinance.gov](http://consumerfinance.gov). Other ideas included hosting a savvy shopper contest or giving badges to those who attend financial programs and offering prizes or incentives to those who reach various participation levels.

Another option is to go outside the library and into the community to talk about financial well-being and the financial resources your library has to offer. Talk to local employers or employment or job training centers to see if you can offer a brief onsite discussion. Connect with local officials and businesses about hosting a financial fair, or offer programs within your local schools.

## 4. Partnership benefits

Community partnerships take time to establish, but they can offer many benefits.

Some librarians told us they are challenged by limited budgets, reduced numbers of staff, and limited staff time to plan, set up, and offer programs and events. Working with partners can mitigate these limitations, especially if they offer an established, unbiased program and can provide speakers. The cost of developing community events and programs can also be offset with multiple partners or program sponsors who contribute in-kind services, volunteers, or funds. Community banks, credit unions, credit counseling organizations, and non-profits all have been known to sponsor and fund local financial education events. Local groups, sponsors, and community members can also help with, and offset the costs for, the promotion and marketing of programs and events.

Libraries may also face the challenge of limited meeting space within the library or low program turnout because programs are scheduled during the work day or conflict with dinners or child care. Partnerships can help solve these issues too. For example, partnering with local employers and offering programs at job sites can eliminate transportation and child care barriers. Hosting several social service agencies on a regular schedule could also provide convenience to patrons, and an opportunity for example, to match story time for kids with a simultaneous short presentation for parents.

# 5. Community partnerships and agreements

Librarians told us that partnerships help them expand their reach in the community and offer a wider variety of programs, including financial education programs. But all programs and partnerships must support or be consistent with the library's mission and strategic goals, as well as meet the needs of the community and requirements of the library's governing body.

## 5.1 Types of partnerships

Partners can help libraries fulfill different needs. For instance, they can help libraries promote and advertise their programs or services. They can act as sponsors, providing direct funding or in-kind support such as offering prizes or refreshments. Or partners may provide their own programs, presenters, participants, or space for programs.

Librarians told us that they start thinking about partnerships as soon as they start developing a program. Different programs and different libraries will have different needs, they said, so it's helpful to develop a checklist of the resources you might need, and who might provide them. To get them started, the librarians said, they consider:

- The different types of partnerships their libraries have established in the past
- The types of partnership requests they've received
- The types of partnerships they might want to pursue

Use the *Program Planning Worksheet* below to help organize your thinking about the program and what potential partners could contribute.

# Program Planning Worksheet

Considerations	Comments
What is the purpose of this program?	
What are your goals for this program?	
How would patrons benefit from this program?	
Who is the ideal audience for this program? Be as specific as possible.	
Would the program require patrons to provide information, such as parental consent forms or other personal information? How would that information be used, or protected?	
How might the library benefit from offering this program through a partnership?	
What can city, county, state or federal agencies; nonprofit organizations; community service groups; or businesses contribute to this program?	

How long would this collaboration last? Would it be for a single program or event, or ongoing?

How might the potential partner benefit from working with the library on this program?

What is known about the credibility and reputation of the potential partner, its mission, and the quality of its services in the area considered for this program?

What is known about the conduct and reliability of the potential partner's staff?

How might the collaborations reflect on the library or impact the reputation of the library?

What will the library's roles and responsibilities be in connection with developing and/or delivering this program? Be specific.

What will the potential partners' role and responsibilities be in connection with developing and/or delivering this program? Be specific.

What potential issues may arise when working with this potential partner and how can the program or relationship be structured to address them?

What laws, rules, or regulations may apply to this program or partnership?

What terms may need to be established in a written or formal agreement?

Once needs and possible community partners have been identified, librarians said, it's easier to outline roles and responsibilities that can then be more fully described in partnership agreements.

Use the *Program Partner Outreach Form* below when you sit down or call others in your community to discuss their participation in your program. Going through the form step-by-step, will help you cover all the information about the program and get the information you'd need to give an attorney to draft a contract or memoranda of understanding, if needed or requested.

# Program Partner Outreach Form

## Program, project, or event details

Program  
Name:

Date(s):

Description:

Goal(s):

## Partner details

Organization name:

Mailing address:

City/State/Zip:

Contact person:

Title:

Email:

Phone:

Fax:

## Partner responsibilities

## Completion date or time frame

1.

2.

3.

4.

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### Library responsibilities

### Completion date or time frame

1.

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2.

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3.

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4.

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### Library and partner benefits

Describe or list the nature and value of the benefits each party receives from the partnership:

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### Program duration

\_\_\_ Duration of the program or event

Start date:

End date:

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\_\_\_ Ongoing

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## 5.2 National, state and local partners

Partner organizations can come in many forms, from large national organizations with local affiliates to statewide or local groups unique to your community. Many city, county, state, and tribal government agencies also would welcome the opportunity to talk to more citizens and spread the word about their services. Here are some organizations and ideas to consider as you begin your search for financial education partners.

### National organizations

Many large national organizations, like those listed below,<sup>2</sup> may have a presence in your area or offer programs and activities that maximize community resources and contacts for greater impact.

#### FDIC Money Smart

Money Smart is a comprehensive financial education curriculum designed to help low- and moderate-income individuals outside the financial mainstream enhance their financial skills and create positive banking relationships. The curriculum is available for groups or online. Train-the-trainer programs are available, and “Alliance Members” in your community can help get you started: [www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart](http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart).

#### HUD Approved Housing Counselors

Housing counselors throughout the country can provide advice on buying a home, renting, defaults, foreclosures, and credit issues. Many of these counseling agencies also provide training on budgeting, debt management, and improving credit. Use this link to find agencies near you: [www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor).

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<sup>2</sup> Inclusion of entities, products, or services in this Guidebook should not be considered an endorsement by the CFPB. There are many other possible entities that are not listed that may also be able to serve your needs.

## Money Smart Week

Operated by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Money Smart Week started in Chicago in 2002 and has grown to include more than 1,300 participating libraries across the United States. You can find a number of resources and review Money Smart Week partners at [www.moneysmartweek.org](http://www.moneysmartweek.org).

## National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC)

NFCC member agencies provide free and affordable financial counseling and educational services. Call 1-800-388-2227 to find a member agency and ask about educational services, or visit [www.nfcc.org](http://www.nfcc.org).

## SCORE

SCORE is a non-profit supported by the US Small Business Administration that offers in-person and online workshops and mentoring for entrepreneurs and small business owners. Local chapters can be found at [www.score.org](http://www.score.org).

## Smart Investing @ Your Library

Smart Investing @ Your Library is a grant-funded program developed collaboratively by the American Library Association and the FINRA Investor Education Foundation. The Smart Investing website includes resources and materials developed by participating libraries and their community partners. Visit [smartinvesting.ala.org](http://smartinvesting.ala.org).

## CFPB Resources

Librarians can access a number of free resources and tools from [consumerfinance.gov](http://consumerfinance.gov), including:

**Ask CFPB** contains hundreds of easy-to-read answers to common financial questions in English ([consumerfinance.gov/askcfpb](http://consumerfinance.gov/askcfpb)) and Spanish ([consumerfinance.gov/es](http://consumerfinance.gov/es)).

**Submit a complaint** if you or a patron have a complaint about a consumer financial product or service, go to [consumerfinance.gov/complaint](http://consumerfinance.gov/complaint) or call 855-411-CFPB (2372).

**Paying for college** is a set of tools and resources to help make decisions about financing college easier for future, current, or recently graduated college students. Visit [consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college](http://consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college).

**Money Smart for Older Adults** is an instructor-led curriculum developed jointly by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and CFPB on how to prevent elder financial exploitation. Visit [fdic.gov/consumers/moneysmart/olderadult.html](http://fdic.gov/consumers/moneysmart/olderadult.html).

## DollarWise: Mayors for Financial Literacy

*DollarWise: Mayors for Financial Literacy* is the official financial education and summer youth jobs initiative of the United States Conference of Mayors' Council on Metro Economies and the New American City. DollarWise Month is celebrated in April of each year. It is designed to provide communities with an opportunity to focus on the importance of personal and family financial literacy and to highlight ongoing, year-round financial education programs. Learn more about the DollarWise program at <http://www.bedollarwise.org/>.

## The United Way

The United Way has a goal to help 1.9 million working families — half the number of lower-income families who are financially unstable — on the road to economic independence. Find a local office to learn about personal finance programs offered in your area: [apps.unitedway.org/myuw](https://apps.unitedway.org/myuw).

## State and local partners

State and local partners also serve as a valuable resource because of the established connections they often have in the community.

**Partner with your city government.** Contact your city government to find out if your community already has a local financial literacy or financial capability body. These can be formalized councils or less formal groups that often include volunteers who want to improve the financial capability of the community. Typically, these volunteers are representatives from local government, education leaders, non-profit organizations, academia, private foundations and local business leaders.

**Contact your county's Cooperative Extension System office.** Your next call should be to your county's Cooperative Extension System office ([www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension)). The Cooperative Extension System is a nationwide, non-credit educational network. Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of local or regional offices. These offices are staffed by one or more experts who can lead courses in a variety of personal finance areas, as well as offer presentations for small business owners, or youth. You may also want to partner with schools, colleges, and universities that offer financial education extension programs.

**Search for resources in your area.** Next, consider the landscape of non-profit agencies and businesses in your community. Many non-profits, like local credit counseling agencies, Better Business Bureaus, law enforcement, civic organizations, and social service organizations may have programs or experts who would be willing to lend a hand or spread the word. Professionals like accountants, financial planners, and attorneys are also sometimes willing to do free clinics or workshops for local patrons. Business, economics, and family and consumer sciences professors may be willing to help create and host financial education programs.

**At the state level.** Consider possible partnerships with housing agencies, employment offices, state 529 college savings programs, and health and human services agencies.

You can find eldercare programs from state agencies on aging at the Administration on Aging's website, [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov).

State Attorneys General enforce state consumer protection laws. Their offices may offer programming resources and information. Find your state's attorneys general at [www.naag.org](http://www.naag.org).

Your state treasurer may also support local financial education efforts. You can locate your state treasurer's office at [www.nast.org](http://www.nast.org).

State banking and securities regulators oversee state chartered banks and securities sold within their borders, respectively. Sometimes these regulatory powers fall under a single government agency in a state. Regardless of how they're structured, state banking and securities regulators commonly support financial education programs and events in their states. You can find contact information for your state banking regulator at [www.csbs.org](http://www.csbs.org). You can also look up your state securities regulator at [www.nasaa.org](http://www.nasaa.org).

## 5.3 Partnership processes and agreements

Several librarians and managers told us that their libraries are starting to formalize their partnership vetting and agreement processes. Strategic partnership and outreach positions are springing up in larger systems and written memoranda of understanding are replacing informal phone calls and handshakes.

Special care is also needed if partners will advise patrons about money decisions. Not only do partners have to have appropriate expertise, but patron privacy also must be a concern. The libraries we worked with told us that they carefully evaluate partner organizations or individuals

and clearly define their roles and relationships. Most have used agreements to clearly define what aspects of the program the partner will provide and what aspects the library will provide.

The librarians also suggested that when developing formal processes and agreements, managers or staff should:

- Determine if there are rules and guidelines already in place that will apply to the program or the partnership, including those that are not formally documented.
- Consult with the library's general counsel or governing body so that you follow all applicable laws, policies, or other requirements.
- Determine if there are grants that could be impacted by partnerships with various organizations or businesses.
- Look at what other libraries are doing or search for association and state library agency guidance.

## Vetting partners

Some of the libraries we spoke with shared the following considerations when vetting partners and entering into agreements:

**A reflection of the library.** Your library's reputation is important, so make sure that you are partnering with others that have good standing within your community, that will be courteous and respectful to all, and that are knowledgeable and reliable. You may want to evaluate the organization's mission, operations, and the reputation and conduct of the organization, its administrators, and its staff.

General places to check the credibility of organizations include the Better Business Bureau, your state's Attorney General's office, and organizations that certify or provide background information on financial organizations (e.g., FINRA BrokerCheck®, Certified Financial Planner Board or Standards (CFP Board), or your state insurance regulator).

**Mutually beneficial.** Partnerships are based on mutual interests and goals. Consider what services or support the library can offer a potential partner as well as how the potential partner can help the library expand its programs and services.

**Shady offers.** If any offer seems too good to be true or if you get a partnership request solely based on what the library can do for the requestor, beware. Some people may want to use the opportunity to promote or sell a product or service, and might use deceptive practices. You might see this most often in email requests when a person or organization wants you to post its link on the library's website.

**The details.** If you've had a speaker show up without a prepared program, printed materials, or the proper equipment, you've learned the importance of discussing the details and following up. You may benefit from a prepared list of questions, a checklist, or a template that you use with all partners so that you ask the right questions and can capture the answers in your agreement.

**Unbiased information.** You don't want salespeople using the library's credibility to sell products or take advantage of vulnerable patrons. Librarians we spoke with told us unanimously that they do not permit companies that sell financial products or services to lead workshops, or have other direct contact with patrons. Sponsorships and other forms of support from these firms and professionals were common, however. The librarians said they focus on objectivity when choosing partners for workshops or presentations. Presentations cannot promote a specific provider, product, or brand. For these reasons, government agencies and non-profits are most commonly called upon to lead presentations. And giving the library the opportunity for prior approval for fliers, ads, learning materials and presentations is common, the librarians said.

**No names, please.** Some libraries said they will not allow the collection of attendee names or contact information, or let partners hand out business cards or other marketing materials. Another recommended practice was telling participants not to share their personal information with anyone, and to report anyone who tries to collect information or hand out marketing materials. One librarian spoke of an instance when a salesperson joined a program as a participant to make contacts at breaks and when the event was over.

**Formal or informal partnership?** Whether to enter into a written program agreement may depend on several factors, the librarians said. There may be the need for a written agreement if fees are involved or if special services are provided. Written agreements can ensure all partners are clear on and agree to their roles and responsibilities (e.g., time and resource commitments). Libraries also use written agreements to establish periodic evaluations of the program to determine whether to continue or modify the program or relationship.