

Your Money, Your Goals

SPECIAL MODULE ON MAKING REFERRALS: CREATING A STRONG
RESOURCES AND REFERRAL NETWORK



Consumer Financial
Protection Bureau

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Making referrals: Creating a strong resources and referral network

As a financial educator, you will play an important role in helping the individuals you are training access referrals. There may be both professionals and organizations within your community that are dedicated to providing financial education, and it's important to ensure that frontline staff know about these organizations.

Frontline staff can make a big difference in the lives of their clients by introducing them to financial empowerment and providing them with some new information and tools to help them solve specific money management challenges. But some of their clients may need more help—help case managers and other staff may not feel comfortable providing because it is technical or beyond what they feel comfortable addressing.

Because clients trust case managers, they may look to them for quality referrals on topics such as the following:

- “How do I fix my credit report? It has information that’s incorrect.”
- “How do I know if the school 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 a small loan to cover my bills until my next paycheck?”
- “Where should I bank? Everywhere I go the banks charge fees.”

This is where your resource and referral network will be important. This is something you will create for the people you train to use the *Your Money, Your Goals Toolkit*.

As a financial educator, you may already be part of a financial empowerment network. This can be a great starting place for assembling a resource network.

If you do not have a resource and referral network, common referral partners include: certified nonprofit credit counselors, independent loan specialists, free tax assistance sites sponsored by the IRS, other financial educators. Many of these referral partners may be found at nonprofit agencies and through local coalitions.

Building a resource and referral guide

How do you create a resource and referral guide? The first step is to check with the social service agencies in your community to see whether they have developed a financial empowerment referral guide. A good place to start is with the organization that administers your community's 211 Program. You may find that either the 211 administrator or a social service agency in your community has a referral guide. You may be able to use this guide as it has been developed or use it as the basis for a referral guide that is specifically focused on financial empowerment for your clients.

If you do feel like you need to add to an existing resource and referral guide or you have to create one from scratch, follow these steps:

Step 1: Figure out the areas in which you need a referral resource.

Use this list, which is included in the tool that follows, to get started:

- Cash flow budgeting
- Benefits screening
- Income tax preparation and filing
- Managing debt
- Dealing with debt collectors
- Understanding credit reports and scores

- Fixing errors on credit reports and scores
- Using financial services
- Protecting consumer rights
- Asset building

Step 2: Brainstorm a list of organizations, businesses, and individuals that you know that have expertise in these areas of financial empowerment.

Ask colleagues for their recommendations.

Step 3: Develop a list of criteria for evaluating a potential resource and referral partner.

For example, experience working with individuals with low- to moderate-income may be important to you. Another example of a criterion could be that the organization, business, or individual agrees to not promote their own business, including the products or services they sell.

Tool 1: Ensuring information is unbiased provides some specific criteria to consider when determining whether to include an organization, business, or individual on your referral list.

Step 4: Get and check references.

This is an important step if you are unfamiliar with an organization, business, or individual on your list. On resource and referral lists generated by others, you may find that many organizations indicate financial empowerment (financial literacy, financial education, financial counseling, or financial coaching) as an area of expertise. When you look into it, you may find that some of these organizations in fact have little experience or provide service intermittently—it's not one of their core competencies. By getting and checking references as you build your referral guide, you can ensure that staff will be confident in referring clients to partners that are fully prepared to provide service.

Step 5: Meet with potential referral partners.

Once you have screened them against your criteria and checked references, meet with them. Explain the reason you are building a resource and referral list. Try to get deeper understanding of the work they are doing and how your clients can be reliably served by them should a referral be appropriate. Identify one specific person (a key contact person) within organizations or businesses that you can contact when a referral is made.

Step 6: Make your list.

Include all relevant contact information including your key contact person. You may find that you have some individuals, businesses, or organizations that can provide multi-faceted assistance—they know cash flow budgeting and debt management. Use the tool that follows to develop your list.

Step 7: Update your list.

Because of staff turnover and organizational priorities that may shift, consider updating your list periodically. This will ensure you have the right information on your list and avoid the circumstance of inadequate or unreliable referrals.

Tool 1:

Ensuring information is unbiased

Referral partners in your community may include certified, nonprofit credit counselors, independent loan specialists, free volunteer tax assistance sites sponsored by the IRS, and financial education programs, among others. These referral partners are often found at nonprofit agencies.

It is important that your referral base of experts is able to provide unbiased as well as accurate and up-to-date information. One way to determine whether an individual, organization, or business is unbiased is that they agree to not try to sell products or services—that they are able to show your clients the upside and the downside of specific actions they take and the impact these actions have on their financial situations.

Ask yourself the following questions about a potential referral:

Question	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the individual, organization, or business earn revenue by selling financial products or services?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the individual, organization, or business require cash up front?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Has the individual, organization, or business had an action taken against it because of complaints from consumers reported to the Better Business Bureau, the state Attorney General's Office, state nonprofit association, or other entities as a source of consumer dissatisfaction?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the individual, organization, or business agree to provide general information only and refrain from marketing its financial products or services?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Can the individual, organization, or business provide references?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Do former or current clients report having been helped?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you had positive experiences working with this partner?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

If the answer to 1, 2 or 3 is “yes,” you may want to consider a different referral partner for your clients.

If the answer to 4, 5, 6, or 7 is “no,” you may want to consider a different referral partner for your clients.

Tool 2:

Resource and referral guide template

Use the template below to assemble a resources and referral guide for your community. In addition to the links found in the *Possible referral partner* column, visit the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website (<http://www.consumerfinance.gov>) to access a growing set of resources, including the site's *AskCFPB* and *Submit a Complaint* features.

Please be sure to include the statement that follows this chart when you develop and distribute this resource and referral list for your clients.

Financial empowerment resource and referral guide for:

(Insert name of your community)

Area of assistance	Possible referral partner	Contact information
Cash flow budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial education provider ▪ Housing counseling agency: http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/get-started/finding-the-right-program/Pages/default.aspx ▪ Community action agency: http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/ ▪ Nonprofit credit counseling organization: http://www.nfcc.org ▪ Tribal organization ▪ Other community-based nonprofit organization ▪ Community college 	
Benefits screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community action agency: http://www.communityactionpartnership.com ▪ Other community-based nonprofit organization ▪ Tribal organization ▪ Community college ▪ Local social services network ▪ Social Security Administration: http://www.ssa.gov and benefits management through <i>My Social Security</i> at http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount 	
Income tax preparation and filing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local VITA site: http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Find-a-Location-for-Free-Tax-Prep ▪ Public library ▪ Local social services network 	

<p>Managing debt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CFPB.gov, Know before you owe: http://www.consumerfinance.gov/knowbeforeyouowe ▪ CFPB.gov, Paying for college: http://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college ▪ CFPB.gov, Mortgage help: http://www.consumerfinance.gov/mortgagehelp ▪ Legal aid: http://www.lsc.gov, http://www.lawhelp.org ▪ Nonprofit credit counseling organization: http://www.nfcc.org ▪ Tribal organization ▪ Bank or credit union 	
<p>Dealing with debt collectors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal aid: http://www.lsc.gov, http://www.lawhelp.org ▪ Local pro-bono attorneys' network or county bar association legal referral services ▪ Nonprofit credit counseling organization: http://www.nfcc.org 	
<p>Understanding credit reports and scores</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial education provider ▪ Housing counseling agency: http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/get-started/finding-the-right-program/Pages/default.aspx ▪ Community action agency: http://www.communityactionpartnership.com ▪ Nonprofit credit counseling organization: http://www.nfcc.org ▪ Bank or credit union 	

<p>Fixing errors on credit reports and scores</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nonprofit credit counseling organization: http://www.nfcc.org ▪ Financial education provider ▪ Housing counseling agency: http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/get-started/finding-the-right-program/Pages/default.aspx ▪ Community action agency: http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/ ▪ Bank or credit union 	
<p>Using financial services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial education provider ▪ Housing counseling agency: http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/get-started/finding-the-right-program/Pages/default.aspx ▪ Community action agency: http://www.communityactionpartnership.com ▪ Nonprofit credit counseling organization: http://www.nfcc.org ▪ Individual development account provider: http://www.idaresources.org ▪ Local <i>Bank On</i>: http://joinbankon.org or <i>Alliance for Economic Inclusion</i> coalition ▪ Bank or credit union 	
<p>Protecting consumer rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal aid: http://www.lsc.gov, http://www.lawhelp.org ▪ State attorney general 	

<p>Asset building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial education provider ▪ Housing counseling agency: http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/get-started/finding-the-right-program/Pages/default.aspx ▪ Community action agency: http://www.communityactionpartnership.com ▪ Nonprofit credit counseling organization: http://www.nfcc.org ▪ Individual development account provider: http://www.idaresources.org/ ▪ Tribal organization ▪ Other community-based nonprofit organization 	
<p>Other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CFPB.gov, Information for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Students □ Older Americans □ Servicemembers and Veterans ▪ Social Security Administration: http://www.ssa.gov and benefits management through <i>My Social Security</i> at http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount 	

This resource list has been created by your local provider to be used in conjunction with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s Toolkit. The CFPB had no involvement in the creation of the local Resource List. The CFPB does not endorse the organizations or entities included on this Resource List nor does it make any representations about the capabilities or quality of services of the entities identified on the Resource List by the local provider. If you choose to pursue particular products or services, the CFPB is not responsible for any losses or other problems you may experience in connection with these products or services.

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