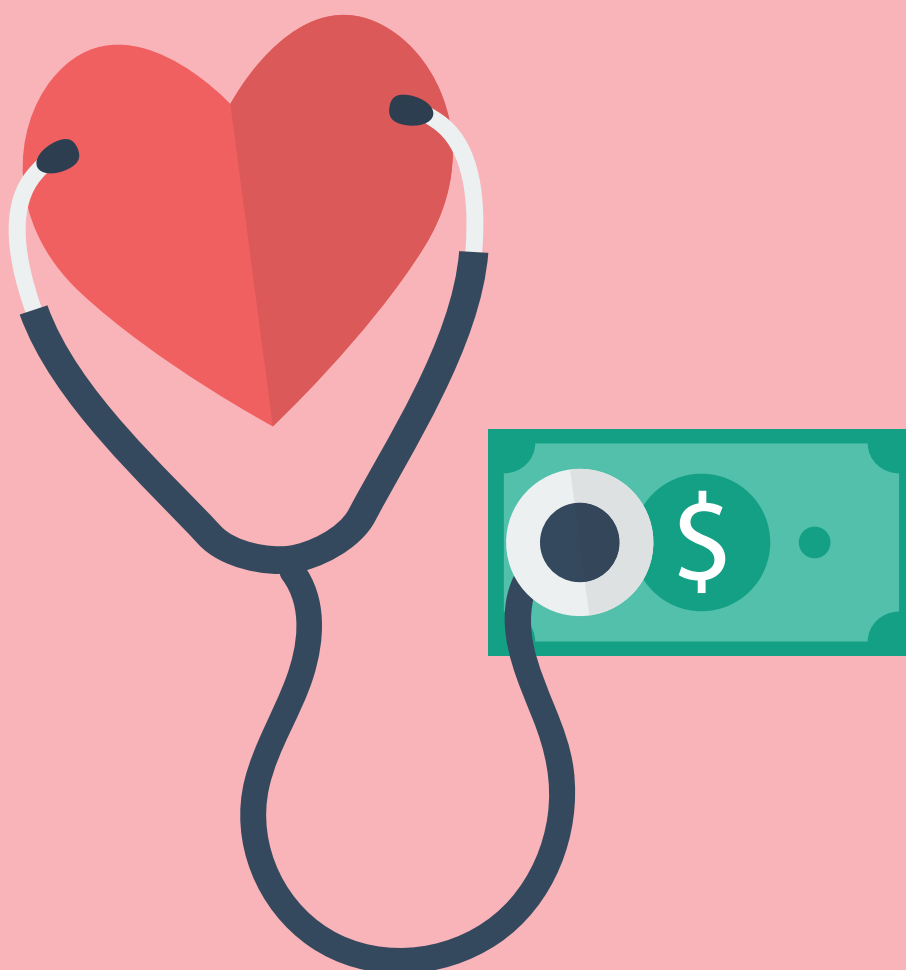


# HOW TO GET MEMBERS INTO BETTER FINANCIAL SHAPE



FOR MORE CREDIT UNION STRATEGY & PERFORMANCE VISIT

CREDITUNIONS.COM

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# WHAT I LEARNED FROM VOLUNTEERING WITH A FINANCIAL LITERACY ORGANIZATION

*Even with preparation, middle school students are surprised to see how tight real-life budgets can pull.*

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BY SAMANTHA CRISTOBAL

As part of its benefits package, Callahan & Associates offers employees eight hours of volunteer time off. I started at Callahan last year and was eager to take a day to learn about a financial literacy program available for DC-area youth and contribute to a cause about which credit unions, Callahan, and I, feel strongly.

I volunteered this Spring with Junior Achievement of Greater Washington, a financial literacy organization that works to bridge what students learn in the classroom with what they learn in their lives. According to the group's website: "We can make learning relevant to every student's future by infusing authenticity, business connectivity, and real role models into the everyday learning experience."

Specifically, I spent time with the JA Finance Park, a program that uses a classroom-style 14-lesson curriculum to teach financial literacy to middle school students. The curriculum is split into four sections: income; savings and investment; debit and credit; and budgeting. Once students complete the program, they put their classroom knowledge to the test in an interactive environment called "the park." I volunteered for this interactive portion by heading my own small class of students, helping them navigate through the park and offering financial advice.

## NO WALK THROUGH THE PARK

When students visit the park, they are randomly assigned different profiles. For example, a student might have to build a budget for a high school teacher that earns a salary of \$35,000 a year, who has \$20,000 in debt, and has a 2-year-old son.

Students start their journey in the park by taking out taxes from their salary and calculating their net monthly income. On the day I volunteered, many were shocked to discover how little they had left to spend after taxes.

Next, students allocate money into different savings buckets — retirement, emergency savings, and other savings. Instructors recommend students save at least 10% of their monthly income, and the students were even more shocked to see the effect that additional decrease had on their spending money.

Students must conduct research before building their budget, which means exploring the park to learn more about life's expenses. Then, they budget for their expenses based on their monthly household income and their character's profile, which includes details like number of children, spouse support, career, debt, and more.

The students I worked with started the simulation thinking shopping would be the most fun part of the day. However, they quickly realized it was the most stressful. If they prioritized items

### 3 Things I Learned

- Children do not exactly know the difference between a credit union and a bank but were infatuated with increasing their savings accounts and having debit cards. These are two avenues credit unions can use to increase membership in younger members.
- Teaching financial literacy in schools inspires students to work even harder to reach their dreams. Some students were upset to have profiles that didn't earn as much monthly income as their neighbor's, which spurred conversation about their dream occupations, and how they could work to get there.
- Budgeting. Is. Hard. I followed my students through the simulation and realized that I also would have had a tough time in their shoes at certain points throughout the day. The simulation gave each student an entire family to consider and having to think about others at such a young age is hard. I was surprised to see how thoughtful each student was when budgeting for their simulated future.

like furniture or clothing, they found that they had little to no money left to pay for a house or a car.

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#### THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS ... AND CREDIT UNIONS

Volunteers at JA Finance Park offer instruction throughout the day and advise students on their finances. Because of their preliminary lessons, the students know a lot about savings and budgeting, but they still have a lot of questions. For example, I saw that students were surprised when they had to budget for babysitting or for a spouse's transportation costs and found it difficult to give up luxury items like concert tickets or a king-sized bed in exchange for healthcare and groceries.

My class was stationed at the Apple Federal Credit Union (\$2.5B, Fairfax, VA) booth, which provided an information stop about mortgages and retirement savings. Besides helping my own class with their finance simulation, I offered insights on credit unions, credit scores, retirement savings, and mortgage loans to other students passing by our booth.

Credit unions can help inspire financial responsibility in their communities by sending volunteers to programs like JA Finance Park and creating similar programs on their own. BECU holds three or more annual financial literacy fairs for local high schools. [Read more about those here.](#) Earlier this year, Callahan contributor Sharon Simpson wrote about how she accidentally raised money-smart teens and how credit unions can support parents in doing the same. [Read that here.](#) Over the holidays last year, CreditUnions.com profiled two credit unions that use themed communications to keep members on the right spending track. [Read that piece here.](#) And last year, CreditUnions.com celebrated Financial Literacy Month — that's April,

by the way — with a roundup of inspiring stories from credit union land. [Read that here.](#) We did the same for 2018 — [read that one here.](#)

Many credit unions, like First Financial Credit Union (\$519.7M, Albuquerque, NM), link parents and children to the Kirby Kangaroo Club, an online program that encourages children to play games and learn about finances. Pennsylvania State Employees Credit Union (\$5.1B, Harrisburg, PA) offers suggestions on finance-themed board games that parents and children can play together. This is a wonderful way to show children what credit unions are all about and potentially grow future members.

As of September 2017, 22.4% of credit unions reported offering Financial Literacy workshops, and 37.5% offered some type of financial education program to members. Unfortunately, these fields are no longer available on the 5300 Call Report, but they have been increasing for years. I hope the trend continues even if we can't track it.

There are JA Finance Park locations across the country. If you want to get involved, start by visiting [myja.org/volunteers/signup](http://myja.org/volunteers/signup) and registering to volunteer. 🐨

*This article originally appeared on CreditUnions.com on April 25, 2018.*

# TURNING STUDENTS INTO SAVERS IN SIN CITY

*Silver State Schools' savings program has helped students in low-income schools tuck away more than \$250,000 in five years.*

BY ERIK PAYNE

When a financial management non-profit in Las Vegas had the idea to launch a savings program for area schools, it found the perfect partner in another local institution: Silver State Schools Credit Union (\$773.6M, Las Vegas, NV).

The non-profit, Andson, approached the cooperative in 2013 with the idea to create a program that builds on the in-classroom financial literacy lessons Andson already provides to young people. Because SSSCU is an education-based credit union, the partnership made sense.

"It felt like a natural fit," says CEO Scott Arkills.

## THE NEED

Las Vegas was hit hard by the Great Recession, and the local economy — which runs on the strength of tipped service workers — is still recovering.

### CU QUICK FACTS

**Silver State Schools  
Credit Union**

**LAS VEGAS, NV**

DATA AS OF 03.31.18

**\$773.6M**

ASSETS

**53,134**

MEMBERS

**8**

BRANCHES

**4.4%**

12-MO SHARE GROWTH

**14.0%**

12-MO LOAN GROWTH

**1.15%**

ROA

### STUDENTS PREPARING TO MAKE DEPOSITS AT DECKER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

Median household incomes lag behind state and national averages. Per 2016 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in Las Vegas was \$51,115. That trails the state's median of \$55,180 as well as the U.S. median of \$59,039. Additionally, the average credit scores of Las Vegas residents, 645, rank near the bottom nationally. The national average, as of 2016, was 673. People there also exhibit some of the lowest rates of financial security.

"There are a number of low-income pockets," Arkills says. "Because of that, we have a high number of low income schools."

“Instead of us giving another lesson, this is something we can do that applies what students are already learning.”

— REBECCA FREEMAN, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, SILVER STATE SCHOOLS CREDIT UNION

”

“Instead of us giving another lesson, this is something we can do that applies what students are already learning,” Freeman says.

Strategy is a process. That’s why Callahan & Associates has developed team learning experiences that help executives become more effective, make better strategic decisions, and ultimately thrive — together. [Learn more at Callahan.com/strategy](https://callahan.com/strategy).

ONE OF SSSCU’S NEWEST LOCATIONS IS DECKER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. PICTURED HERE ON THE BANK’S OPENING DAY, SSSCU’S BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR, JENNIFER BECKWITH, WORKS THE “TELLER LINE”.

Together, SSSCU and Andson developed the Piggy Bank program, which serves as a real-world complement to Andson’s weekly financial literacy course that covers the basics of personal finance, such as determining needs versus wants, setting savings goals, and learning how interest works.

Once a week in one of its five Piggy Bank schools, the “bank” opens for business. The program gives students in grades one through six deposit bags and deposit ledgers and encourages them to bring in any amount they can.

“It can be a nickel or twenty dollars or more,” says Rebecca Freeman, SSSCU’s associate vice president of marketing who oversees the program.

The program then deposits funds into participants’ own deposit-only accounts. When students enter sixth grade, they can open a real SSSCU membership account or withdraw their accumulated funds via a check.

## REACTION AND BEST PRACTICES

Thus far, the response has been strong. In January, SSSCU added two Piggy Bank schools to the fold, bringing its total to five, and continues to look for opportunities to increase funding and support.

The Piggy Bank program is primarily funded by the credit union’s partnership with Andson — schools do not pay to host the program — but SSSCU continually looks for grants to offset costs. For example, the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco provided a grant for the program in February 2018, says CEO Arkills.

JENNIFER BECKWITH PICTURED INSIDE THE PIGGY BANK BUS AT THE GRAND OPENING DAY OF DEERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PIGGY BANK.

»

“They are such advocates of providing financial literacy to their students. We don’t have to sell them. They are on fire for it.”

— SCOTT ARKILLS, CEO, SILVER STATE SCHOOLS CREDIT UNION

”

OPENING DAY FOR THE 2016-2017 SCHOOL YEAR AT  
BRACKEN STEAM ACADEMY, THE FIRST PIGGY BANK LOCATION  
AND THE SCHOOL WITH THE HIGHEST PARTICIPATION.

In January 2018, the regional transportation authority donated a retired bus, which SSSCU retrofitted, wrapped with branding, and deployed as a Piggy Bank on Wheels. The bus travels to participating schools to create an easy, mobile-enabled, central location for students to gather and deposit money. It also allows the credit union to offer the program in additional locations.

On the support side, SSSCU principal and teacher buy-in is essential before deploying the program.

“It’s the teachers and principals who remind students to get their deposits together each week,” Freeman says. “They have to be dedicated. It has to be top of mind.”

The first three schools at which SSSCU offered Piggy Bank shared the same principal, so support was not a problem. And the two new additions had been asking for the program for several years, says Freeman.

“They are such advocates of providing financial literacy to their students,” Arkills says. “We don’t have to sell them. They are on fire for it.”

It’s not difficult to see why there is such enthusiasm. Since 2013, students have saved more than \$250,000 through the Piggy Bank program.

GROUP SHOT OF ANDSON AND SSSCU EMPLOYEES AT THE 2016-2017 OPENING DAY OF PIGGY BANK AT BRACKEN STEAM ACADEMY.

But even as new opportunities arise, the credit union is conscious of overexpansion. For Arkills, the most fulfilling part of the program is watching a student’s mindset change. For example, at the start of the year they save for a video game. But their goals evolve as they become more literate and aware of their money. They start to save for college, a house, or a car. They grow more confident with their money.

Although the credit union ideally would provide that to students across its footprint, it understands the quality of the program looms large. Overextending the offering and losing its value is not an ideal outcome.

“We’d like it to be in every single school, help every student, but we want it to be sustainable,” Freeman says. “We don’t want to water down our offerings.” 🍷

*This article originally appeared on CreditUnions.com on May 21, 2018.*



# HOW TO EARN A MERIT BADGE IN FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

*A+ FCU partners with local Scout troops to teach young people how to take charge of their financial future.*

BY ERIK PAYNE

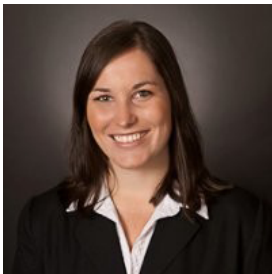
Eagle Scout is the highest designation available to participants of the Boy Scouts of America. Since its inception in 1912, more than 2.5 million young men have earned this rank.

To achieve the designation, scouts must earn 21 merit badges from a variety of available options; however, the program requires aspiring Eagle Scouts to earn 13 specific badges that range from cooking to first aid. One of the required merit badges, personal management, is notoriously difficult, says Kelsey Balcaitis, community education director at A+ Federal Credit Union (\$1.4B, Austin, TX).

“The requirements within it are complex and a lot of scout masters don’t know how to teach it,” she says.

In 2010, the Boy Scouts Capitol Area Council of Austin asked A+ to create a program to help Scouts earn their personal management badge. Today, the credit union has helped more than 600 boy scouts earn their merit badge and also offers a similar curriculum for area Girl Scouts.

In this Q&A, Balcaitis talks about Scout badge requirements, the value of promoting financial literacy to local youth, and best practices in program management.



Kelsey Balcaitis,  
Community Education Director,  
A+ FCU.

## WHY IS IT CHALLENGING FOR SCOUTS TO EARN THIS MERIT BADGE?

**KELSEY BALCAITIS:** The personal management badge has 10 requirements with multiple pieces under each requirement. The second requirement is the most intense. It requires scouts to maintain a budget for 13 weeks. In addition, they have to learn about smart spending, credit, savings and investing, time management, project management, and careers.

## HOW DOES A+ HELPS SCOUTS EARN THE BADGE?

**KB:** We have an online class. Scouts attend a series of six webinars across the 13 weeks they’re tracking their budget. After each webinar

## What Is The Requirement?

The second requirement for the personal management merit badge requires Boy Scouts to “prepare a budget reflecting your expected income (allowance, gifts, wages), expenses, and savings. Track and record your actual income, expenses, and savings for 13 consecutive weeks.”

we have an online classroom where scouts complete a post-event quiz and upload their budgets or other documents for the badge.

## TALK MORE ABOUT THE QUIZZES.

**KB:** Scouts must score 100% on each quiz to complete the badge requirement. At the end of the 13 weeks, we look at the grades and determine which of the Scouts have finished all the requirements. We send a letter to the Scout saying they’ve earned the badge, and they take that letter to their troop to get the badge.

TO HELP LOCAL BOY SCOUTS EARN THE PERSONAL MANAGEMENT BADGE, A+ FCU OFFERS SIX WEBINARS AND POST-EVENT QUIZZES ON WHICH PARTICIPANTS MUST SCORE 100%.

They need a certain grade, but we give them multiple chances and help them to get there. Since 2010, we’ve helped more than 600 scouts earn the badge. It’s become one of the most popular things we do.



“The requirements within it are complex and a lot of scout masters don’t know how to teach it.”

— KELSEY BALCAITIS, COMMUNITY EDUCATION DIRECTOR, A+ FCU

”

## HOW DID A+ GET INVOLVED WITH THE GIRL SCOUTS?

**KB:** The Girl Scouts came to us in 2015 to partner on a college and career program. They have a financial literacy patch, but it doesn’t have anything to do with college and career.

A+ CREATED A CUSTOM PATCH FOR AREA GIRL SCOUTS CALLED “INVESTING IN MY FUTURE,” TO HELP YOUNG GIRLS PLAN FOR COLLEGE AND BEYOND.

We created booklets that are available on the Girl Scouts of Central Texas website that girls can complete to earn a custom A+ patch called “Investing in my Future.” In the summer, we run one-day boot camps for Girl Scouts to learn about finances and complete an interactive spending and saving simulation. We’ve worked with 100 Girl Scouts so far.

## CU QUICK FACTS

**A+ FCU**  
AUSTIN, TX  
DATA AS OF 03.31.18  
**\$1.4B**  
ASSETS  
**144,898**  
MEMBERS  
**22**  
BRANCHES  
**6.2%**  
12-MO SHARE GROWTH  
**18.3%**  
12-MO LOAN GROWTH  
**1.33%**  
ROA

## WHY IS THE BOY SCOUT CURRICULUM ONLINE, WHEREAS GIRL SCOUTS RECEIVE MORE IN-PERSON EDUCATION?

**KB:** It’s easier to reach a wider range of Boy Scouts if the curriculum is online. We’re central to Austin, but we work with Scouts who are 50 miles or more outside the city. It would be challenging for them to drive into the city every few weeks to take a class like this. Putting it online allows us to serve outer Scout troops that might not have been able to make it in person. We can also increase the number of scouts per session, from 35-40 to 50-60.

We did try an online class for the Girl Scouts, but that didn’t work as well. One reason could

be that the patch isn’t required like the personal management badge is required to achieve Eagle Scout.

## WHAT’S THE VALUE OF PROMOTING FINANCIAL LITERACY TO LOCAL YOUTH?

**KB:** I liken it to physical health. When adults come in with financial issues, it’s financial triage. We’re there to figure out how to quickly stop the bleeding. Whereas with youth, it’s about wellness. We’re building up good habits. We’re teaching them to be smart with their money, what good debt versus bad debt is, and how to build their credit before they hurt it.

It’s better for our community and our credit union if we have financially savvy members. They are going to be the ones saving, borrowing responsibly, and paying back their loans in the years to come. Investing in youth financial education and youth financial literacy is critical for the success of the credit union.

## HAVE YOU RECEIVED ANY FEEDBACK AS TO THE VALUE OF THESE CLASSES AND BADGES?

**KB:** We have parents who tell us this has been the best badge they’ve participated in. They’ll listen along to the webinars, and they’ll tell us they learned something. That’s important because many of the parents don’t feel comfortable talking to their kids about it. We can help start a discussion and work through different financial topics.

Plus, the fact that we have a waitlist for our merit badge program and we fill up every single session every single time speaks to how people find it valuable.

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## WHAT LESSONS HAS A+ LEARNED FROM THIS?

**KB:** The best way to teach anything is to constantly look for ways to evolve your program. Just because your curriculum works one time doesn’t mean it’s going to work the same way forever. You have to be willing to make changes on the fly, understand who your audience is, and see the best way to teach them.

Offering classes online is an interesting way to go about it. Not having participants in front of you removes some of that ability. Do they understand the material? Do they need more explanation? We learned to explain things in multiple ways and encourage any and all questions. 🙌

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

*This article originally appeared on CreditUnions.com on May 14, 2018.*

# LIFE LESSONS FROM FINANCIAL EDUCATION

*Oregon State Credit Union shares how it works to improve the lives of America's consumers.*

BY MARC RAPPORT

In 1997, state lawmakers in Oregon removed financial education as a requirement for high school graduation. The move created what Oregon State Credit Union (\$1.2B, Corvallis, OR) identified as an opportunity, and mandate, to step up its financial education efforts. The credit union has had a full-time community education director since 2003, and its offerings have changed with the times. Likewise, its responsibility has spread to K-12 classrooms, adult education, and prison work as its FOM has expanded to now include 24 of the Beaver State's 36 counties.

Amanda Brenneman-Brown, a Certified Credit Union Financial Counselor, became community education director in 2015. Here, she and Laurie Roe, the credit union's vice president of organizational development, share their experiences in meeting that fifth of the Seven Cooperative Principles for Credit Unions: Education, Training, And Information.

TAX PREPARATION WAS AMONG THE LIFE LESSONS THAT OREGON STATE CREDIT UNION COMMUNITY EDUCATION DIRECTOR AMANDA BRENNEMAN-BROWN TAUGHT IN THIS VISIT TO WEST ALBANY HIGH SCHOOL LAST FALL.

## DESCRIBE THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF OREGON STATE CREDIT UNION'S FINANCIAL EDUCATION EFFORTS.

**LAURIE ROE:** Community Education is a department under Employee Development and consists of one full-time employee dedicated to serving members and non-members alike. The Employee Development department is housed underneath the chief operating officer.

## CU QUICK FACTS

**Oregon State  
Credit Union**

**CORVALLIS, OR**

DATA AS OF 12.31.17

**\$1.2B**

ASSETS

**108,199**

MEMBERS

**14**

BRANCHES

**8.1%**

12-MO SHARE GROWTH

**24.4%**

12-MO LOAN GROWTH

**0.92%**

ROA



## 10 Tips To Succeed In Financial Education

Oregon State Credit Union's community education director Amanda Brennenman-Brown and vice president of organizational development Laurie Roe offer best practices to provide financial education in a classroom setting.

- **Evaluate need.** Identify who the credit union wants to serve, assess their financial education needs and gaps, and decide where the credit union's efforts can provide sustaining support. Don't duplicate efforts that already exist in the community.
- **Evaluate capacity.** Can the credit union support a full-time educator or team, or will someone add education efforts to their plate? Even if an employee enjoys teaching financial education, if it competes with other duties, it's not sustainable long-term.
- **Start with the end in mind.** Build the role or department with sustainability and scalability in mind. New requests will come from people who have attended other classes — word of mouth is great, just be prepared to manage growth.
- **Don't burn out.** Set the program's scope and determine whether the credit union will customize on request. Also, set expectations for evening and weekend hours and travel. Note, for school programs, be mindful in scheduling other strategic projects or time allocation during the school year.
- **There's no need to re-create the wheel.** There are a lot of curriculum resources out there, so don't start from scratch to get things up and running.
- **Protect desk time.** This is an "out of the office" job, so set aside desk time for phone calls, emails, and meetings as well as paperwork and other office tasks. Desk time also helps maintain credit union connections and relationships.
- **Know the audience.** It's important to stay on top of your pop culture game. Hashtag jokes are going out of style and Star Wars is more popular with adults. Now, that's not to say to binge watch MTV, but know a little about the lives of your audience.
- **Make it real.** Personal finance comes to life when people meet others in the same boat, so share crazy personal finance stories. Make sure students know the classroom is a no-shame, no-judgment zone and that there's no shame in asking for help.
- **Invest in the program.** Provide educators with their own resources for education, training, and conferences, and more.
- **Choose wisely.** Make sure the program staff is right for the job. Not everyone is well suited to be an effective educator, community ambassador, or public speaker.

### WHAT IS THE CREDIT UNION'S COMMITMENT TO FINANCIAL EDUCATION?

**LR:** Education is a core value of Oregon State Credit Union. We employ a full-time representative, our community education director, to teach personal finance to people of all ages and walks of life as well as lead the educational outreach of our departments that provide business, investments, and real estate expertise. In addition to classroom-based teaching, the director also oversees our online financial education program that provides valuable, just-in-time information 24/7 at no charge without stepping foot into a class.

Amanda also manages a five-school sponsorship that makes online education modules available to students K-12 at sponsored schools. We know stronger personal finances can lead to stronger local and global economies.

The credit union also sponsors Junior Achievement, financial reality fairs, teacher grants, and college scholarships. Approximately 65% of our public relations philanthropic budget is directed to youth and education.

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### WHAT HAPPENED 20 YEARS AGO? AND HOW DID YOU RESPOND?

**LR:** In 1997, the Oregon legislature voted to remove personal finance as a graduation requirement for seniors in high school. Oregon State Credit Union identified a new role we could fill by giving access to this information at no cost to schools, non-profits, community groups, and other parties.

We created the position of community educator because we saw the need for someone to provide financial literacy tools to youth and adults in our communities. The position directly supports the fulfillment of our vision and demonstrates our core values in action.

Meanwhile, we use the data we collect regarding the positive impact of our programs to educate our state and congressional leaders in pursuit of reinstating financial education requirements in our schools.

### WHO ELSE PROVIDES FINANCIAL EDUCATION AT YOUR CREDIT UNION?

**LR:** Although it looks different from Amanda's role, all credit union employees who interact with our members provide financial education as they create financial solutions. Through the consultative service process, employees educate individuals on opportunities to improve their credit and products and services that can help them achieve their financial goals.

“It’s important to stay on top of your pop culture game. Now, that’s not to say binge watch MTV, but know a little about the lives of your audience.”

— AMANDA BRENNEMAN-BROWN, COMMUNITY EDUCATION DIRECTOR, OREGON STATE CREDIT UNION

”

### WHAT DO YOU DO IN SCHOOLS AND PRISONS?

**AMANDA BRENNEMAN-BROWN:** I teach a variety of topics at schools through lectures, games, Q&A sessions, and special events like financial reality fairs. For prisons, I trained all of the Department of Corrections transition coordinators to work with individuals who are about to be released. Their intake staff also works with individuals coming in, so inmates are getting education as they arrive and depart from incarceration.

### HOW DO THE MATERIALS DIFFER BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND PRISONS, AND WHAT LEVEL SCHOOLS ARE YOU WORKING IN?

**AB:** We teach in all grades K-12 and we use a lot of Junior Achievement as well as some in-house created curriculum that depends on what the teacher requests. The prison curriculum combines our in-house materials with what the Oregon Department of Corrections already had in place. We enhanced the department’s curriculum and created additional classes based on its needs.

I also teach at homeless shelters, housing authorities, drug courts, and other non-profit or community groups. Many of these groups request an eight-week series, which is a combination of curriculum from credit. org and in-house development.

### WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION DOES OREGON STATE CREDIT UNION PROVIDE FOR WOMEN?

**AB:** I’ve taught a group of women who wanted more information on how to best budget with an irregular income. I also get calls requesting financial counseling by women who are taking on financial responsibility for the first time whether through divorce, death, or just starting out on their own. The education for women in this stage of life is no different from the education I offer to others.

### WHAT DOES THE SCHEDULE, AND SETTING, FOR YOUR PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

**AB:** Most of our classes are by request, and the schedule stays full. The setting is typically a K-12 classroom or meeting room at a community organization. Also, our Investment Services team offers a variety of seminars — including some geared to women — and educates members and prospective members. We promote these via social media, the branches, and newsletters.

### HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE IMPACT OF WHAT YOU’RE DOING?

**AB:** We don’t measure most of the classes by a specific business-related metric, such as memberships opened or loans generated. But, for the prison education and the eight-week series classes we do measure the

amount of information learned and feeling of confidence with a nine-question pre- and post-event survey.

### HOW DO YOU PLAN TO GET THE MOST RETURN?

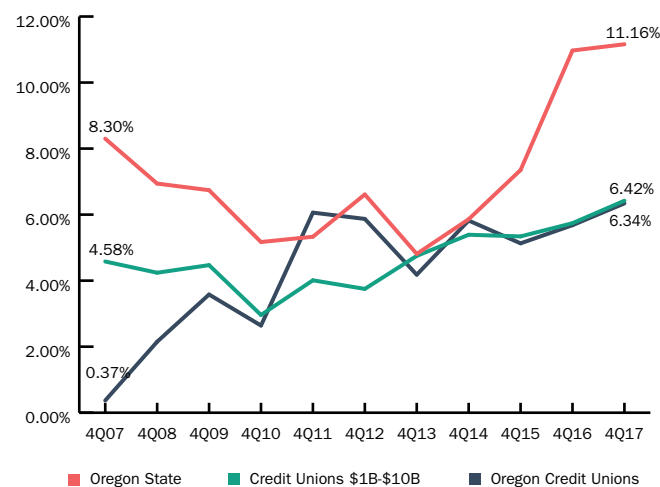
**AB:** The credit union does not expect or track any stated return on this investment; however, we do report the number of adults and youth served as well as the number of presentations delivered to our board of directors as a measure of outreach and those numbers have been recognized nationally several times over. Presentation counts include in-class instruction, financial reality fairs, Department of Correction classes, online financial education offerings, and one-on-one financial counseling.

### OREGON STATE CREDIT UNION’S MEMBERSHIP GROWTH HAS EXCEEDED OREGON CREDIT UNIONS AND SIMILARLY SIZED ONES. TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE THAT SUCCESS?

**LR:** We are a sustaining resource with member service as our strategic driver. Community education is one of many other factors that have contributed to our solid reputation in the state of Oregon and our market position in our field of membership.

### MEMBER GROWTH

FOR OREGON CREDIT UNIONS & CREDIT UNIONS \$1B- \$10B  
DATA AS OF 12.31.17



*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

*This article originally appeared on CreditUnions.com on May 14, 2018.*

# HOW VACU STRUCK VIDEO GOLD WITH A GUY IN FLANNEL

*The “Guy in Flannel” series is the latest in a creative venture into market engagement and financial literacy for Virginia Credit Union.*

BY MARC RAPPORT

For the past two years, Virginia Credit Union (\$3.5B, Richmond VA), has been spreading the message of financial literacy through a series of short videos that have become a linchpin of the credit union’s member and community engagement strategy.

The videos have launched a new career for writer/producer Danny Swanson, who has added internal training to his job description, and given other VACU staffers a chance to show off their acting chops.

Here, Jamie Lumpkin, marketing operations and strategy director at VACU, talks about the credit union’s adventures in video.



Jamie Lumpkin,  
Marketing Operations  
& Strategy Director,  
Virginia Credit Union

## WHAT OPPORTUNITY WAS VIRGINIA CREDIT UNION LOOKING FOR IN THESE VIDEOS?

**JAMIE LUMPKIN:** We were looking to engage more with our members through social channels. We were early adopters in social and have done a lot of contests and things over the years. The videos are a way to expand beyond that. They also are a way to partner with community businesses.

## WHAT CHALLENGES DO THESE VIDEOS ADDRESS?

**JL:** The videos take financial education out of the classroom and make it more approachable. Financial education is a core mission for Virginia Credit Union, but we can’t be at every event in the community or get every member to come to one of our seminars. These videos are fun, brief ways to reach out to different audiences.

## WHO CONCEPTUALIZES THE VIDEOS, WRITES THE SCRIPTS, AND PRODUCES THEM?

**JL:** Danny Swanson, our senior multimedia content producer, does all that and more for us. And he gets input from our financial education and marketing teams.

## HOW DID YOU DISCOVER YOU HAD THE TALENT ON STAFF TO MAKE SUCH VIDEOS?

**JL:** Danny joined us as a summer teller in 2007 when he was a student at Virginia Commonwealth University. He joined the contact center in 2010 and began producing team events and training videos for the contact center. That attracted our attention.

His manager let us borrow him from time to time until we could develop a full-time role for media production. We stole Danny in 2012. He’s now responsible for internal- and external-facing videos — some for employees, some for members, some for the whole community. He also develops interactive educational modules and manages our in-branch TV system.

## CU QUICK FACTS

**Virginia Credit Union**

**RICHMOND, VA**  
DATA AS OF 03.31.18

**\$3.5B**  
ASSETS

**267,891**  
MEMBERS

**18**  
BRANCHES

**4.6%**  
12-MO SHARE GROWTH

**6.9%**  
12-MO LOAN GROWTH

**0.68%**  
ROA



“Financial education is a core mission for Virginia Credit Union, but we can’t be at every event in the community or get every member to come to one of our seminars. These videos are fun, brief ways to reach out to different audiences.”

— JAMIE LUMPKIN, MARKETING OPERATIONS & STRATEGY DIRECTOR, VIRGINIA CREDIT UNION



#### **HOW LONG HAS VACU PRODUCED THESE VIDEOS? HOW OFTEN DO YOU RELEASE A NEW ONE?**

**JL:** We began in 2016 with “Fun Financial Facts Sipping Fancy Drinks” and tied that into a drink served at a local establishment. In 2017, we moved into “Fun Financial Facts Sampling Fancy Food” and then into the “Guy in Flannel” series we have going now. We try to do a couple a month.

#### **WHO IS THE GUY IN FLANNEL?**

**JL:** That’s Will Osborne, our marketing product manager. He has a background in advertising and marketing and is quite the sport. He lets us dress him up in flannel shirts and suits and put him in awkward situations, out in public filming, always with a straight face. He has a nice comedic touch and helps us put a human face on financial education.

#### **HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH TOPICS AND SUBJECTS TO TACKLE AND AT WHICH LOCATIONS TO FILM?**

**JL:** Danny typically develops topics with input from our financial education team. He then looks at quirky ways to tie back into that special drink or food item.

We’ve learned to engage upfront with businesses we think might like to work with us. We might notice they have large social followings or are new and trendy. We get better results when they donate gift cards, let us film there, and promote the videos, too, that sort of collaboration. It’s been an interesting journey in that regard. We have businesses come to us now sometimes. For example, a hair salon really wanted us to come out. It was a lot of fun.

VISIT VACU’S YOUTUBE CHANNEL TO WATCH FINANCIAL EDUCATION SPOTS, PRODUCT AND SERVICE PROMOTIONS, COMMUNITY SERVICE VIDEOS, THE GUY IN FLANNEL SERIES, AND MORE.

#### **WHERE DOES DANNY GET THE CAST FOR HIS VIDEOS?**

**JL:** A lot of times they’re from VACU. We’re fortunate to have a strangely talented group of people here. We cast a commercial recently that was all employees and our ad agency said it was insane that our people were as good as paid talent.

Danny can get people to do things they normally would never do in a workplace. He can get them to dance in accounting and on the executive team. He has great people skills and makes them feel comfortable.

#### **HOW DO THE VIDEOS FIT INTO VACU’S MULTIMEDIA STRATEGY, PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY, AND OVERALL MARKETING, ADVERTISING, AND BRANDING STRATEGY?**

**JL:** We tie videos and other multimedia efforts into our financial education objectives and our integrated marketing, advertising, and marketing strategies. We use them to promote financial education and literacy and drive awareness and community engagement with Virginia Credit Union.

#### **HOW DOES VACU DISTRIBUTE AND PROMOTE THE VIDEOS?**

**JL:** We use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Sometimes we include an opportunity to win a gift card at a featured restaurant, and the restaurant helps us push out the video and promote what we’re doing.

#### **YOUR ENTIRE ONLINE BRAND REPUTATION. ONE MANAGEMENT TOOL.**

Monitor social media accounts, branch reviews, search rankings, online listings, and more all through one easy-to-use tool. Find out how CUBrandMonitor from Callahan & Associates helps credit unions take charge of their online reputation. [REQUEST A BRAND AUDIT](#)

#### **HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE IMPACT OF THESE VIDEOS?**

**JL:** That’s a tough question. We’ve seen clicks, likes, and shares grow through the years, so that’s something tangible. But the videos are also about a larger awareness around financial education and VACU. That’s tough to measure.

Thirty-nine percent of VACU’s new members in 2017 were younger than 30, but our average member age is still 45. I guess that average age would be older without doing these things, but again, that’s hard to say. That’s everyone’s challenge.

#### **SO, WHAT’S NEXT?**

**JL:** Danny’s taking a break right now from actively making the videos, but he’s planning his next move. 🍷

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

*This article originally appeared on CreditUnions.com on April 9, 2018.*

# HOW FINANCIAL COUNSELING DAMPERS DELINQUENCIES

*A southern Louisiana credit union combines collections with counseling to improve loan performance as well as members' lives.*

BY MARC RAPPORT

Beleagued borrowers might be just numbers to big banks and collectors, but Total Choice Federal Credit Union (\$54.0M, Hahnville, LA) takes the measure of its members by looking them in the eye.

A new philosophy at the New Orleans-area financial cooperative combines financial counseling with aggressive collections and has resulted in sharply lower delinquencies as well as members who understand the benefits of financial wellness.

"To see the looks in their eyes, to see they are 'getting it,' that's the true reward," says Mary Vedros, CEO of Total Choice since late 2015.

When Vedros joined the credit union as COO in May 2013, she found delinquency rates across the loan portfolio high enough to threaten the credit union's viability. Perhaps that's no surprise given the credit union's approach to member service.

"The credit union's attitude toward lending and collections was just too lax," she says. "In a way, we were babying members and not holding them accountable to the lending contracts they signed."

So, Vedros beefed up the credit union's collections and financial counseling efforts.

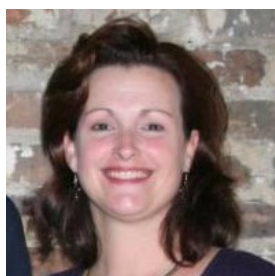
Hiring a "dynamic collection manager" and getting board support for active collections were critical first steps in the rapid descent of delinquencies that occurred none too soon for the small credit union.

"I knew if we didn't do something, ultimately our delinquent loans could become the death of us," Vedros says. "Once we started enforcing our rights and using a collections attorney, members started realizing we were serious."

Total Choice also got serious about showing members another way to approach finances.

It instituted a robust counseling program targeted at folks who have either been turned down for a loan or have fallen behind on payments.

Seven of the credit union's 18 employees are CUNA Certified Credit Union Financial Counselors. They focus on teaching money management skills, debt reduction, and how to avoid predatory lenders.



Mary Vedros,  
President/CEO,  
Total Choice FCU

## CU QUICK FACTS

**Total Choice FCU**  
HAHNVILLE, LA  
DATA AS OF 06.30.17

**\$54.0M**  
ASSETS

**6,415**  
MEMBERS

**3**  
BRANCHES

**3.6%**  
12-MO SHARE GROWTH

**8.4%**  
12-MO LOAN GROWTH

**0.40%**  
ROA



“It’s a true blessing to see members’ joy when their credit rating has improved and their financial life is more secure.”

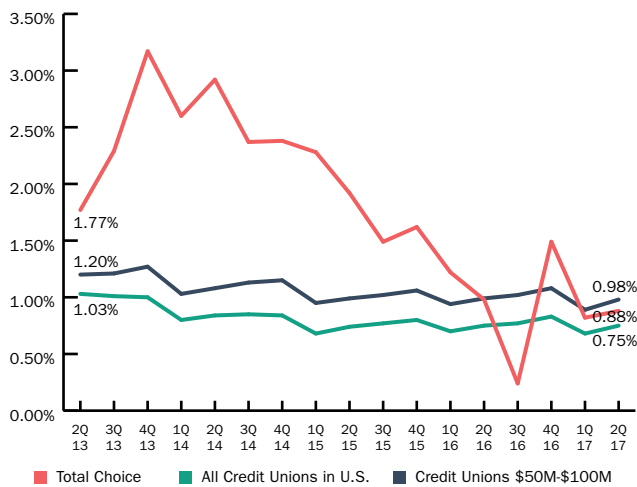
— MARY VEDROS, PRESIDENT/CEO, TOTAL CHOICE CREDIT UNION

”

## TOTAL DELINQUENCY

FOR U.S. CREDIT UNIONS | DATA AS OF 06.30.17

Loan delinquency at Total Choice had been consistently higher than average since it converted to a community charter in 2005. That trend has reversed.

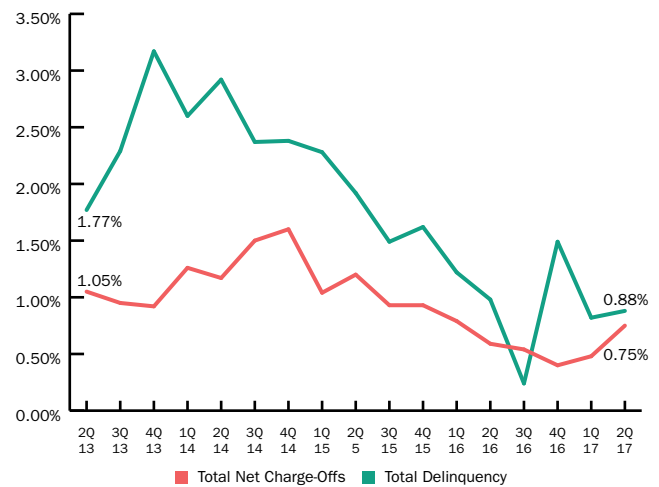


SOURCE: CALLAHAN & ASSOCIATES

## TOTAL DELINQUENCY/ NET CHARGE-OFFS

FOR U.S. CREDIT UNIONS | DATA AS OF 06.30.17

Total Choice's overall delinquency rate and net charge-offs alike have fallen sharply since the credit union began emphasizing collections and financial counseling in 2013.

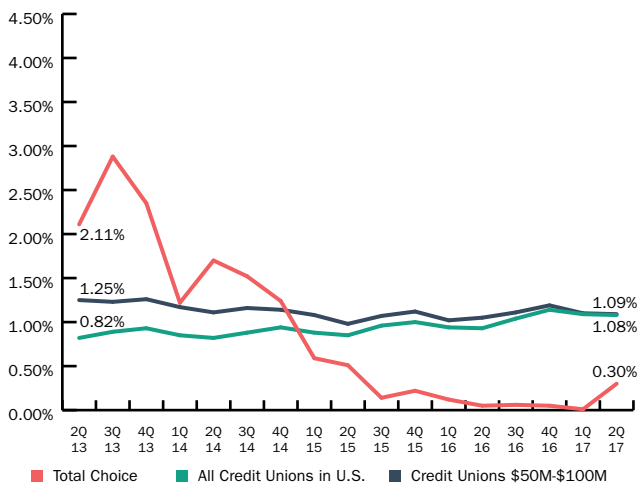


SOURCE: CALLAHAN & ASSOCIATES

## CREDIT CARD DELINQUENCY

FOR U.S. CREDIT UNIONS | DATA AS OF 06.30.17

Credit card delinquencies at First Choice have flat-lined as a result of the credit union's collections and counseling work.

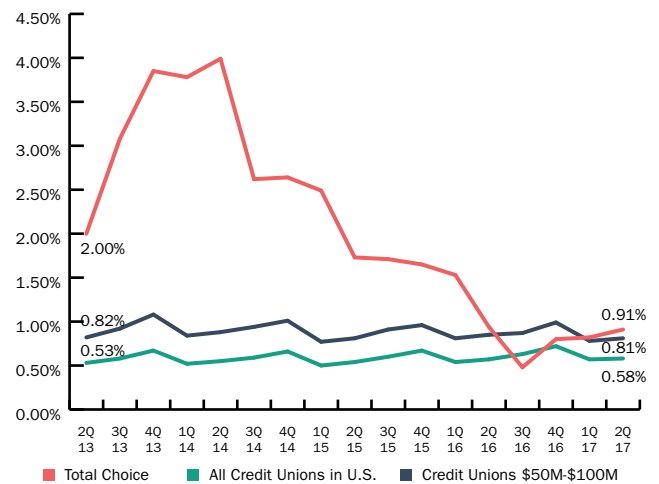


SOURCE: CALLAHAN & ASSOCIATES

## TOTAL AUTO LOAN DELINQUENCY

FOR U.S. CREDIT UNIONS | DATA AS OF 06.30.17

Total Choice's auto loan delinquencies plummeted soon after Mary Vedros became COO in 2013 and assembled a new collections team.



SOURCE: CALLAHAN & ASSOCIATES



“When you become a partner to help your members stay on track and become educated about finances and their own situations, you can only succeed.”

— MARY VEDROS, CEO, TOTAL CHOICE CREDIT UNION



Their stated goal is simple: Help members become responsible for their own financial lives.

The counseling process includes a budget analysis; developing a monthly plan for spending, paying bills, and saving; and follow-up sessions.

### An Outline For The Benefits Of Financial Counseling

Soon after Mary Vedros became COO of Total Choice FCU in 2013, the credit union adopted a financial counseling program that includes the following outline for specific uses and benefits of financial counseling:

- Enhances member loyalty to the credit union.
- Possibly reduces losses due to bankruptcy.
- Public relations tool that demonstrates goodwill.
- Offers a competitive edge over other financial institutions.
- Helps members improve credit worthiness.
- Assists members with in-depth workout plans.
- Creates a financially strong membership base, which in turn strengthens the credit union.

### USE DATA TO GUIDE YOUR STRATEGY

Benchmarking your delinquency against relevant peers shows whether a strategy like Total Choice's is needed at your credit union. Callahan's analytics software can help. [Learn More](#)

Counselors are not there to provide therapy focused on personal issues, the guidelines stress. Instead, according to the program's guidelines, the counselors can “demonstrate ways to make things better for the member” by:

- Teaching members how to control spending and reduce dependency on credit.
- Discussing ways to enjoy a fulfilling frugal life.
- Helping members to know the amount of credit they can afford.
- Helping members speed up debt reduction and cut interest expenses.
- Helping members resolve errors on credit reports.

The counselors meet with their clients approximately four months after the initial visit to review and revise. And the results are usually promising.

“I can think of only one case in which the member did not heed the advice of the counselor and got stuck in an upside-down car loan at a high rate,” Vedros says. “Unfortunately, I think he learned his lesson.”

The more typical ending is happier.

“It's a true blessing to see members' joy when their credit rating has improved and their financial life is more secure,” Vedros says.

As for her staff, they feel empowered to help more members when they see the results the members are working hard to achieve.

“When you become a partner to help your members stay on track and become educated about finances and their own situations, you can only succeed,” the Total Choice CEO says. 🧠

*This article originally appeared on CreditUnions.com on Aug. 21, 2017.*

# FINANCIAL WELLNESS IS A BIG IDEA

*Now's the time to double down on the credit union difference  
and spread financial wealth and wellness.*

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BY JAY JOHNSON

We, at Callahan & Associates, have extolled the importance of financial wellness for the last few years. It was my pick for one of the “Six Big Ideas for 2016” we highlighted on CreditUnions.com. There were 16 good reasons why. They’re still true today.

Fifteen of those reasons are the 15 credit unions Callahan is working with on a financial wellness initiative through its participation in the Credit Union Financial Services Limited Partnership (CUFSLP).

But the biggest reason is No. 16: Helping working American families achieve financial stability in their lives is the No. 1 way the credit union movement can show it is truly all about “people helping people.”

This year resolve to create more ways to build financial wellness, stability, and opportunity among the SEGs and communities you serve.

Credit unions have been doing great as an industry. Lending activity has never been higher, both in market share and raw numbers. Membership numbers and total assets have also gone through the roof.

Contrast that with this fact: 47% of Americans cannot cover a \$400 emergency expense without selling something or borrowing money, according to the Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2014 by the Federal Reserve. And fully three-fourths of Americans are living paycheck-to-paycheck.

There’s more, but you get the idea. Many Americans are living lives of unnerving financial uncertainty, often despite having good jobs with higher-than-average income. That’s where the idea of financial wellness comes in.

The Center for Financial Services Innovation — one of CUFSLP’s partners in the financial wellness initiative — puts it this way: “Financial health comes about when your daily systems help you build resilience and pursue opportunities.”

SOURCE: “FINANCIAL HEALTH IN AMERICA” BY CFSI.

“The realities behind the headlines about falling joblessness and booming markets—housing and financial—dictate that credit unions work harder to help our nation move toward greater financial wellness as a people, not just for a business here and a community there.”

— JAY JOHNSON, PARTNER, CALLAHAN & ASSOCIATES



Financial health is not just about how much money you make, and it's not just about how financially literate you are. Research and experience has long proven to credit union leaders that financial health is about behavior and a sense of security — how you spend your money and how comfortable you are with your ability to take care of yourself and your family.

In other words, it's about helping members attain a sustainable level of financial wellness. As not-for-profit cooperatives, credit unions alone are positioned to eschew the growth-for-growth's sake mentality and instead focus on business practices that keep the credit union sound as well as relevant to members for years to come.

“Disruption” is a buzzword right now, but credit unions have always been disruptive — after all, credit unions got their start when people of modest means joined forces to participate in the financial system and gain access to credit, financial stability, and economic opportunity. Credit unions know how to lend. They know how to compete on rates. They know how to be flexible with underwriting to do the most good without taking on undue risk.

The expansion of fields of membership and the flattening of the technology curve means credit unions can provide anything that big banks do and make it available to any American who takes advantage of the credit union difference. Plus, credit unions can do it better and cheaper because they serve member-owners, not investors looking for profit.

That's so last year, though. So, let's look ahead.

There are as many ways to do that as there are credit unions. Our CUFSLP partner CEOs told us their teams were immediately on board with the financial wellness initiative. To date, their own actions to support the initiative include free online and in-person financial assessments and education, sometimes offered alone and sometimes as part of a loan agreement.

Many credit unions are heavily involved in their small-business communities. Others are finding new ways to accommodate the saving and borrowing traditions of ethnic groups among their membership and potential memberships.

These are all great strides forward, but the realities behind the headlines about falling joblessness and booming markets — housing and financial — dictate that credit unions work harder to help our nation move toward greater financial wellness as a people, not just for a business here and a community there.

A rising tide lifts all boats, but someone has to make sure millions don't get left at the dock as the years roll on.

Please feel free to [contact me directly](#) to share your ideas about how to create, and sustain, financial health among your members. I'll also be happy to put you in touch with the right people at credit unions who might be doing the things you want to adopt or adapt. 🍷

*This article originally appeared on CreditUnions.com on Jan. 4, 2017.*