

# Seven Steps to Implementing a Financial Well-being Program for Incarcerated Individuals

## 1 Be present in the community

These relationships are built on trust. Trust between the credit union and the institution; trust between program participants and the counselors. Having a mature community engagement strategy will open doors.

### Pro tip

Monitor your community for local non-profits already partnering within the justice system. There may be active programs you can support, complement and/or learn from

## 2 Take a chance, reach out

Regardless of incarceration, with over two-thirds of people in America considered financially unhealthy, programs are needed. Reach out to prisons and jails directly with a proposal – you may be surprised how open they are.

Many prisons, jails and treatment centers will have dedicated employees focused on re-entry programs. Build a relationship with these people; they are the key to your program's success.

## 3 Develop an adaptable curriculum

Financial services evolve, your curriculum should, too. Rather than invest in developing a broad curriculum, focus on core financial tenets:

- Cash Flow: income, saving, budgeting
- Credit: understanding values, understanding risks

Remember, you're there to educate, not advocate. Share relevant information on banks, credit unions and FinTechs – focus on the uses, values and risks of each.

## 4 Embrace and understand discomfort

On entering a restricted area, you are no longer in control. Learn the rules, understand the expectations and prepare yourself for the environment.

Ask questions, never assume. Can a booklet have staples? Can individuals be given markers? Can whiteboards be used? Rules may vary by institution.

## 5 Know your audience

Are you working with people about to re-enter the community or people about to start a long prison sentence? While the educational elements may be the same for both, the practical examples and reasoning should adapt.

Jails in particular may present you with a diverse class. Some people may be there for a few days, others may be waiting a long sentence. Use humanity and humility: don't talk about buying groceries to someone about to start a multi-year term.

## 6 Measure your progress

Develop a knowledge test and track participants' progress over time. This will help you refine your curriculum, provide the most value to participants, and demonstrate impact to the institution and credit union leadership.

Knowledge tests can be as detailed or as simple as you want them to be, but don't disillusion any individual before they even get started. Cover the basics, work up from there.

## 7 Know where your program starts and ends

Measurement is everything... most of the time. Privacy laws complicate or restrict tracking at the best of times, but it is more complex when working with incarcerated individuals.

Track what you can, while you can. Once a participant graduates from your program, trust the knowledge is put into practice. For those re-entering the community, ensure your credit union is visible and able to provide services to anyone, regardless of a criminal record.