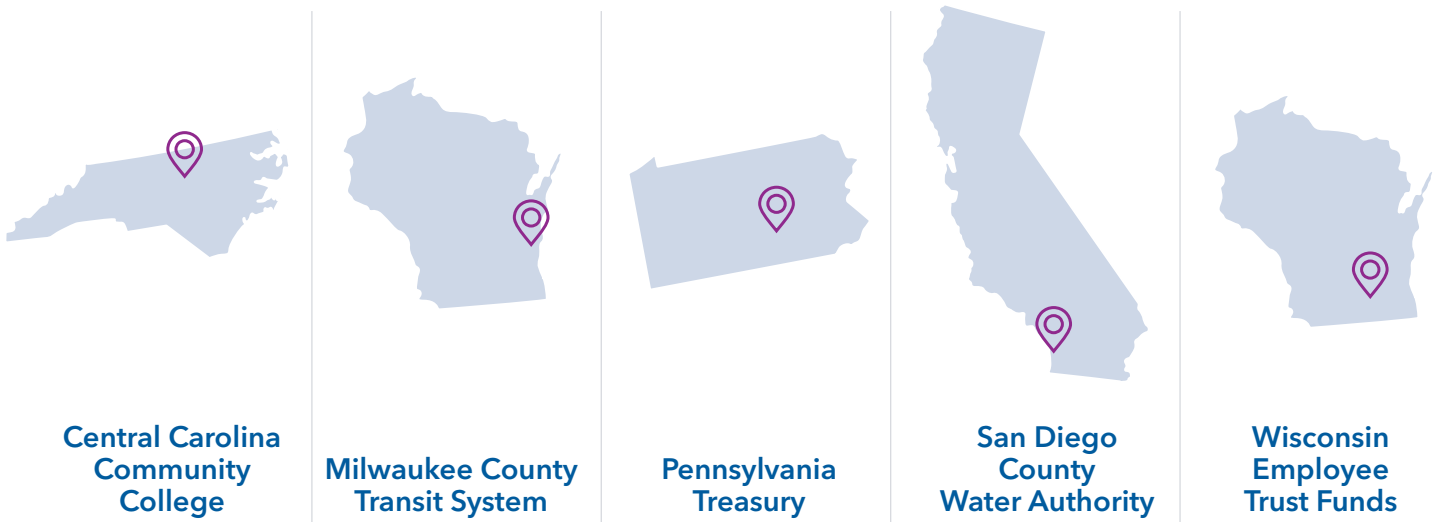


Case Studies of Innovative Public Sector Employee Financial Wellness Programs



In September 2020, [MissionSquare Research Institute](#) (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence) partnered with the [International Public Management Association for Human Resources](#) (IPMA-HR) and the [National Association of State Treasurers Foundation](#) (NASTF), with funding from the [Wells Fargo Foundation](#), to award a total of \$1.4 million in grants to establish or improve public employee financial wellness programs.

Over the past year, the 24 grantees, representing a broad array of state and local employers from 17 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, have been working to develop, implement, and evaluate these initiatives.

Executive summary

The five case studies that follow provide an in-depth analysis of each jurisdiction’s financial wellness program. Jurisdictions selected are diverse in government type (state, local, education), workforce size, geographic location, industry, workforce demographics, approach to implementation (high touch to high tech), innovation, and evaluation methods. Each case study includes information on:

- Jurisdiction background
- Program development
- Program implementation
- Program outcomes and evaluation
- Key takeaways, lessons learned, and future plans
- Additional information

These case studies provide **ideas, advice, and networking opportunities** for other state and local governments that have implemented or are considering developing an employee financial wellness program. To view fact sheets that provide highlights of all grantee programs, please visit <https://slge.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/financial-wellness-grant-fact-sheets.pdf>.

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Central Carolina Community College

Jurisdiction Background

Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) is a two-year, public North Carolina college serving Chatham, Harnett, and Lee counties. The college introduced the [CCCC Employee Financial Wellness Program](#) in 2020, using a “train the trainers” approach that built on the strengths of its business faculty and holding sessions during April as part of Financial Literacy Month.

CCCC has 15 campuses across the three counties, with an estimated full-time student enrollment of 4,289 (65% female; 54% White, 22% Hispanic, 16% Black [non-Hispanic], 6% other/unknown/multiple, 2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.8% American Indian/Alaskan Native). Chatham, Harnett, and Lee counties (two rural, one urban) encompass an area of 1,532 square miles with a population density of 178 people per square mile and a 13.3% poverty rate. The overall demographic composition of the three counties is 51.1% female; 63.2% White, Non-Hispanic; 18.8% Black, Non-Hispanic; 14.5% Hispanic; 2.8% two or more races; 1.7% Asian, Non-Hispanic; and 1.5% American Indian, Non-Hispanic.¹

Program Development

Through the Central Carolina Community College’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) vendor, human resources staff received a summary report of the general topics that were being queried, which provided some insight into employees’ interests and concerns. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, financial stress was high on that list. Since the college has in-house faculty that teach



A Star Trek theme carried through from promotional materials to cell phone holder “communicators.”



The wellness focus was reinforced with flyers, hand sanitizer, and masks.

¹ For the counties of Chatham, Harnett, and Lee, which house the college’s 15 campuses. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020.

business classes, this expression of financial stress led to some ad hoc trainings being offered by those faculty around 2018-2019. The financial wellness grant program was perceived as an opportunity to provide employees with a more formalized curriculum.

The CCCC Employee Financial Wellness Program was designed with full-time employees as the target audience (demographic below), although part-time employees also were welcome to participate.

Scope ²	Number	% By Gender	% By Race/Ethnicity	% By Job Classification
Total Active Employees	861	Female 56% Male 44%	American Indian 0.3% Asian or Pacific Islander 0.9% Black 16% Hispanic 3.3% White 79.5%	FT Faculty 17% PT Faculty 18% FT Staff 27% PT Staff 38%
Total Targeted By or Eligible For the Program (Full-time Faculty and Staff)	436	Female 63% Male 37%	American Indian 0.5% Asian or Pacific Islander 0.9% Black 17% Hispanic 2.5% White 79.1%	FT Faculty 39% FT Staff 61%

Program Implementation

The core of the new implementation was a “train the trainers” approach. Financial wellness training content was provided by a vendor which the college had worked with for other trainings in the past. The former vice president of student learning worked with human resources and administrative services to identify a cross-disciplinary team, with members who each brought their own expertise, to receive the training. This team consisted of a business administration faculty member; the lead faculty member in human resources; two staff from the human resources department; the director, career & employment training/ instructor for continuing education; and an administrative assistant from the Dean’s Office of Career and Technical Education, now employed as an HR coordinator.

The vendor provided the basic training for these six in-house facilitators as well as the slides and handouts to be made available to course participants. The inclusion of college faculty with instructional and subject-matter backgrounds helped to enrich the curriculum as these individuals contributed additional materials to share with employees.

The initial plan was to promote the financial wellness program through a health fair-style in-person event. Once COVID-19 made that impractical, the college pivoted to promotional flyers and offering incentive items to those who completed the courses.

Content was divided into four one-hour sessions during April 2020 as part of financial literacy month:

- Session 1:** Introduction to financial wellness
- Session 2:** Developing financial goals and a budget
Emergency funds
Identifying waste
- Session 3:** Credit, debt reduction, loans, and refinancing
Paying off high-interest debt
- Session 4:** Retirement and beyond: employer matching funds, contributions to retirement accounts, tax-advantaged accounts, and taxable brokerage accounts

The first of these sessions was held as part of a professional development day when classes were not in session, with employees having a choice of which virtual sessions to participate in that day. The remainder were held as “lunch and learn” sessions on regular workdays. The college also included its employee benefits staff person and its 401(k) plan representative among the presenters for the fourth day. Since college operations were primarily remote through August 2021, all the April 2020 sessions were held online via the college’s collaboration software.

² Employee data courtesy of CCCC.

Each workshop was conducted by a team of two of the trainers, either on Wednesdays or Fridays. A total of eight workshops were offered, with 60 individuals attending one or more of those sessions.

The program budget was about \$10,000, including vendor membership (one-time expense), training for six facilitators, incentives, supplies, and mailing.

Each facilitator was required to complete a seven-hour training course, after which they received a certificate as a financial wellness facilitator.

The college may continue to use, at no ongoing cost, the presentation slides and handouts used in presenting courses to the employees. The vendor membership fee and the individual facilitator trainings were one-time expenses, although if one of the trainers should leave the organization, the college may incur a cost to train a replacement.

The college's Center for Academic Excellence posted recordings of the courses to its employee-only collaboration site. Since employees are required to complete a certain amount of professional development each year, this enabled the college to track employees' participation and program completion.

For those who wished to take advantage of it, participating employees were provided a free one-on-one consultation with a **CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™** through the Foundation for Financial Wellness (the developers of the program with the National Wellness Institute). No personal financial information from employees (e.g., draft family budgets) was ever viewable by program facilitators or college administration, nor was the college informed of who or how many took advantage of this option.

Promotional items of masks, hand sanitizer, band-aids, stress balls, pens, and "Rx for Financial Wellness" bottles of jellybeans were mailed to all full-time employees to promote Financial Literacy Month and the April 2020 workshops. The financial wellness team/HR also made an initial attempt at in-person training for maintenance and custodial staff in July 2021. That effort, which included an offer to host an in-person lunch, was intended to reach those who may not have a work computer or may not have been able to participate from home. There was little interest in an in-person session at that time, but such options will continue to be evaluated as vaccination and case numbers change. In conjunction with the phase-out of the remote work arrangements in August 2021, employees were provided with a desktop cell phone holder along with further messaging around financial wellness.



Staff mailed program materials to all employees.



"Rx for Financial Wellness" was reinforced with jellybeans.

In addition to those items sent to all staff, those completing the program also received piggy banks and other promotional items.

At this time, program facilitators are discussing next steps with professional development staff with an eye toward small-group, in-person refresher trainings starting with Financial Literacy Month in April 2022.

One expansion of the program has been to students enrolling through the school's professional development classes. Intended for those who are unemployed or underemployed, these classes typically cover how to apply for jobs and create a resume. Since some of the faculty for those classes are the same ones serving as financial wellness facilitators, it's been a simple matter to combine the course content. The student services office also has recently reached out about making the financial wellness content available to low-income students, and that further expansion is still being explored.

Program Outcomes and Evaluation

Of the 436 full-time employees targeted by the program, so far 60 have participated in the online courses. On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), the program averaged a 4.7 satisfaction rating and all respondents indicated they would recommend the program to their coworkers.

In addition to sharing opinions of the program, employees offered suggestions for additional topics to cover, such as estate planning and insurance. Those are being evaluated as potential components of future training sessions.

To this point, there has been no data collected on changes in employee behaviors, such as creation of budgets or

emergency funds, or steps taken to reduce debt or increase savings. The institutional effectiveness department conducts employee surveys on a recurring and college-wide basis, and financial wellness may be a topic for future surveys.

The program coordinator noted that there was positive feedback to both the initial mailing and later promotion, with employees perceiving their employer's outreach as a form of recognition of the stresses they were facing and the program content as an attempt to help them make progress in reducing that stress.

Key Takeaways, Lessons Learned, and Future Plans

The program has been well received, both by administration and those participating in the courses, and it also is generating interest among other segments of the college, such as professional development and student services.



Train-the-trainers model proves effective

The most positive aspect of the program so far has been the way the train-the-trainers approach has brought together a cross-departmental team that is not only delivering the standard vendor content but also **finding ways to incorporate their own resources or expertise** into the curriculum.



Spread out the learning

With the benefit of hindsight, it may have been more effective to **spread the content out more**, rather than hosting all four workshops in a single month. An in-person approach to delivering course content might be used after employees are better acclimated to the return to in-person work.



Assess employees' baseline knowledge

In terms of advice for others, the program coordinator suggested that **organizers should not assume their employees are already well informed about their own benefits**, no matter how many written materials they've received on the subject. An in-depth discussion on how the retirement plan works fits very well within a larger discussion on debt, savings, and investments.

Having a large cohort of other grantee peer agencies implementing financial wellness initiatives at the same time also provided support and ideas applicable to small or large jurisdictions.

Additional Information

This case study was developed using content provided by Central Carolina Community College and a November 17, 2021 interview conducted by Gerald Young (MissionSquare Research Institute) with Trinity J. Faucett, EdS, IPMA-SCP, Director of Human Resources, Central Carolina Community College. For more information about CCCC's financial wellness program, please contact **Trinity Faucett** - tfaucett@ccc.edu or visit <https://www.cccc.edu/finwell>.



Milwaukee County Transit System

Jurisdiction Background

The financial wellness program of the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) provides a range of educational resources to the employees of the quasi-governmental instrumentality of Milwaukee County. MCTS serves a population of approximately 950,000 residents in this county located in the southeastern quadrant of the State of Wisconsin, which borders Lake Michigan. The overall demographic composition of Milwaukee County is 64.2% White, 27.2% Black or African American, 4.7% Asian, 2.8% two or more races, and 1% American Indian and Alaska Native.³

The mission of MCTS⁴ is to connect the community to jobs, education, and life with essential transit services. It works to achieve this mission with a fleet of 370 clean-diesel buses and a staff of 1,100 drivers, mechanics, and administrative personnel. MCTS provides nearly 29 million rides each year.

Program Development

MCTS launched its financial wellness program in January 2021 with a \$50,000 grant. This program is accessible to the 1,036 active employees, of which 38% are female, 59% are Black/African American, 31% are White, 5% are Hispanic, and 1% are American Indian/Alaska Native. In terms of employment status, the workforce is 88% non-exempt. The program is also available to retirees and the family members of staff.



As part of MCTS' innovative "What's POPPIN' with your future?" campaign, Employee Benefits Coordinator Tiara Cooper incentivizes MCTS employees with bags of popcorn to stop by and learn more about MCTS' financial wellness program.

³Demographic data courtesy of MCTS.

⁴"Who We Are," Milwaukee County Transit System, accessed January 13, 2022.

The financial wellness program was established to round out the wellness benefit offerings implemented by the MCTS Benefits Division of the Human Resources Department, including a previous health wellness program focused on nutrition, exercise, and mental health, among other topics. A hybrid approach was used to establish the program, drawing on both internal and external expertise. Three staff led the creation and launch of the program: the human resources director, employee benefits manager, and employee benefits coordinator. In addition to these internal staff, two vendors also were engaged: one a financial wellness programming and technology company⁵ that develops and offers online and telephonic financial wellness coaching, tools, and courses, and the other the administrative and recordkeeping provider⁶ of the MCTS 457 deferred compensation retirement plan, which offers wellness programming focused on short- and longer-term savings and budgeting.

Program Implementation

The Milwaukee County Transit System financial wellness program is centered around the following topics:

- Retirement planning
- Planning for college
- Student loan repayment strategies
- Holiday spending management
- Tax-advantaged benefits
- Protecting income and assets
- Managing debt
- Investment education for beginners
- Homeownership

This set of topics was identified, and continues to be added to, based on educational materials already available from the financial wellness coaching vendor, along with employee input collected through employee surveys and the MCTS employee assistance program.

For all of these program topics, online education tools, courses, and reference materials are available via an online platform. In addition, system employees and retirees, along with their family members, are able to schedule in-person or remote sessions with a money coach; these money coaches are staffed, salaried professionals with backgrounds as **CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™** professionals, certified public accountants, bankers, and/or investment specialists, among other related areas. The external financial wellness



MCTS' HR Department distributed Pop-Tarts to employees as part of its "What's POPPIN' with your future?" campaign to garner attention to its financial wellness program materials and resources.

vendor organizes and enables these engagements, which often involve an initial 10-question financial wellness assessment survey, the development of a 30-to-90-day action plan with follow-up from a money coach, and the establishment of a long-term financial roadmap.

The MCTS Benefits Division of the Human Resources Department takes the lead in promotion and marketing of the program through the use of posters and flyers in administrative and maintenance buildings, key areas where the bus drivers and mechanics are most likely to take note of this information. Themes such as "What's Poppin' With Your Future," were used to garner attention to these promotional materials with staff setting up tables and offering a variety of popped snacks. Internal websites are also used to promote the program, with the HR office's main phone line also being a point of contact.

Given the in-person nature of the type of work most MCTS employees conduct (750 drivers and 150 mechanics) and their non-standard schedules, much of the promotion of the financial wellness programming was conducted at central job locations, in an "offline" format. The COVID-19 pandemic did prevent the program's vendors from coming onsite. Also, for both the promotion of the program and its administration, it was important that there was always a nontechnical, in-person component, given the sizable portion of the MCTS workforce that does not regularly use computers.

⁵"My Secure Advantage," Milwaukee County Transit System, accessed January 13, 2022.

⁶"The MCTS 457 Plan," Milwaukee County Transit System, accessed January 13, 2022.

Program Outcomes and Evaluation

When starting the financial wellness program, individual employees are asked to take a survey to assess their level of understanding of financial wellness topics and concepts. As these employees go through the money coaching program, they are periodically asked to take follow-up surveys to track their financial literacy progress. HR staff also collect qualitative input on the program through employee surveys and informal focus groups. To date, an aggregate assessment of these data collection efforts has not been completed, but there are plans to formally

assess the program after one year (early 2022) and after five years of program implementation. While all aspects of the program's impact will be explored, there is particular interest in the impacts on actual retirement plan savings and homeownership.

HR staff have anecdotally learned of some participating employees successfully reducing their personal debt, increasing their retirement plan contributions, and being able to assess their financial situations more holistically.

Key Takeaways, Lessons Learned, and Future Plans

The implementation of the program since January 2021 has enabled the identification of several key takeaways and lessons learned that other jurisdictions interested in establishing similar financial wellness programs may want to consider.



Audience

HR staff consistently took a **"go to where they are approach."** Given the varied work schedules and in-person nature of the work conducted by the bus drivers and mechanics, organized around a central administrative and maintenance buildings, staff took a hands-on approach and set up informational tables and posters at employee work locations, in addition to standard home mailings and email blasts.



Creativity

MCTS staff were **creative in developing themes** to attract employees to the financial wellness program offerings. For example, the theme "What's Poppin' With Your Future" was matched with providing different pop snacks and interacting in-person with employees instead of solely through hanging posters or sending emails.



Flexibility

While the program will continue its money coaching, staff visits to bus stations, and the promotion of different ways to save for the future, the initial, anecdotal success of the program and initial **employee feedback have led the staff to make additions for the future.** Plans include developing a "Wellness Wednesdays" series, expanding the use of financial literacy tables (especially post-pandemic, with financial wellness vendor representatives in person), identifying wellness ambassadors among employees, and building out modules on planning for and managing dependents' student loans.

Additional Information

This case study was developed using content provided by Tiara Cooper, Employee Benefits Coordinator, and an interview conducted by Joshua Franzel (MissionSquare Research Institute) with Gretchen Foltz, Employee Benefits Manager. All of the information offered is accurate as of October 2021. For questions and additional information about the Milwaukee County Transit System financial wellness program, please contact **Tiara Cooper, Employee Benefits Coordinator** - tcooper@mcts.org.

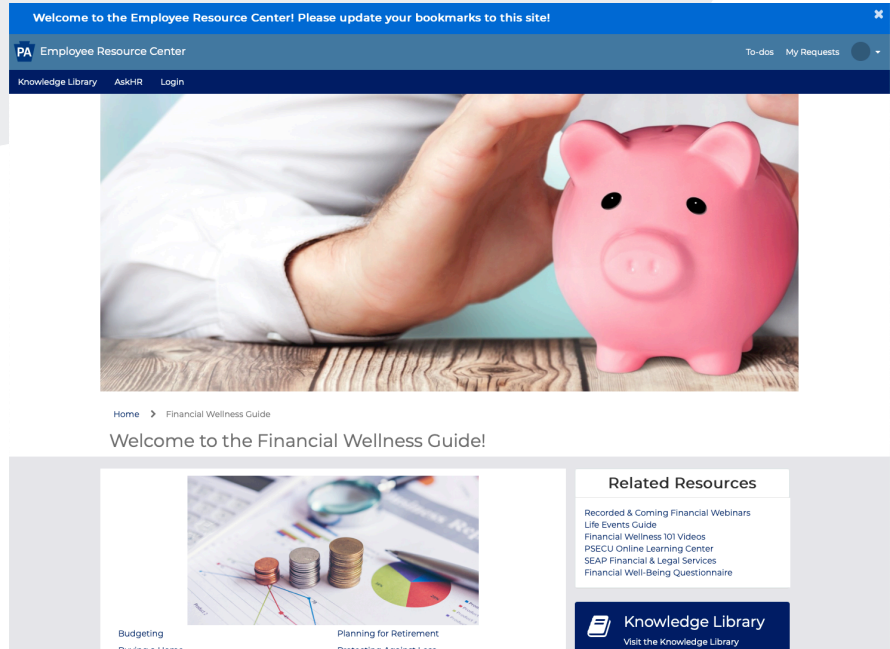


Pennsylvania Treasury

Jurisdiction Background

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is a state government serving 12,801,989 individuals (51% female; 82% White, 12% African American, 8% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 2% two or more races, 0.4% Native American and Alaska Native). Pennsylvania's land area is 44,743 square miles, with a population density of 284 people per square mile. The poverty rate in Pennsylvania is 12%.⁷

The Pennsylvania Treasury Department (PA Treasury) is one of three independent (or row) executive branch agencies that are not under the governor's jurisdiction; the other two are the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General (OAG) and the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General. Leadership for these three agencies are elected, rather than appointed by the governor.



Homepage of Pennsylvania's statewide Financial Wellness program for state government employees. PA Treasury utilized part of the grant funding it received to expand this existing program, and part of the funds to create Financial Readiness for Employee Development (FRED), a new financial wellness program for PA Treasury and OAG employees only.

Program Development

In September 2020, PA Treasury received a \$100,000 grant that enabled it to partner with the Pennsylvania Department of Banking and Securities, Pennsylvania Office of Administration (OA), and OAG to expand the existing statewide **Financial Wellness** program for state government employees, and to create **Financial Readiness for Employee Development (FRED)**, a new financial wellness program for PA Treasury and OAG employees only. It is worth noting that the successful preparation and implementation of the program spanned a transition in leadership at the main grant recipient agency, PA Treasury.

⁷"[Quick Facts, Pennsylvania](#)," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed January 13, 2022.

In total, 79,130⁸ active employees were eligible for the statewide Financial Wellness program, with 1,230 of those (PA Treasury and OAG employees) also eligible for FRED. The table below displays total employee numbers, demographics, and financial wellness programming eligibility. Webinars, videos, and financial and legal counseling also were made available to employees' immediate family members.

The statewide Financial Wellness Program was developed in 2019, as OA looked at current benefits offerings/gaps, and explored how to provide the next level of benefits. OA was aware of the research on the many benefits of financial wellness on employees and the different needs of employees at different life stages, and it sought to consolidate existing resources inexpensively. The program is hosted on a website by OA, and includes webinars, videos, and links to additional resources. OA was immediately interested when it saw the opportunity to

apply for the current financial wellness grant, especially as it created an opportunity to help employees at lower income brackets increase their savings. OA also realized that it could build on resources already developed.

While there was strong support to expand the financial wellness programming in general, the agencies did encounter and had to overcome several challenges, particularly in the FRED program development. These included having to replace a partner agency due to concerns about use of incentives, and restrictions on (or less support for) using work computers for the financial wellness programming. Additionally, it took time to identify a financial coaching vendor that would not recommend specific providers. In the end the financial counseling piece was established through the State Employee Assistance Program (SEAP), which already existed but to which not all independent agencies had previously subscribed for their employees.

Employee Type ⁹	Number	% By Gender	% By Race/Ethnicity	Program Eligibility
Active Employees Under The Governor's Jurisdiction	77,528	Female 41% Male 59%	White 84% African American 10% Hispanic 3% Asian 2% Two or more races 0.6% Undisclosed 0.4% Native American/Alaskan 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 0.1%	Financial Wellness
PA Treasury	333	Female 56% Male 44%	White 78% African American 10% Asian 6% Hispanic 5% Two or more races 0.6% Non-specified 0.3%	Financial Wellness and FRED
OAG	897	Female 47% Male 53%	White 87% African American 7% Hispanic 4% Asian 1% Two or more races 1%	Financial Wellness and FRED

⁸This includes Department of the Auditor General.

⁹Employee data courtesy of PATreasury.

Program Implementation

As mentioned previously, the grant went toward two financial wellness programs: a statewide Financial Wellness program, and FRED (for PA Treasury and OAG employees only). The grant enabled the statewide program to develop **eight videos on various financial education topics**; a postcard mailer announcing the webinars, videos, and website content; and 20 webinars on 11 financial wellness topics. PA Treasury- and OAG-specific programming included raffles for completion of pre- and post-surveys, the Split-to-Save program (encouraging employees to split their paycheck to increase savings) and financial and legal counseling; **mousepads for employees** at PA Treasury and OAG with information on the financial wellness website and financial and legal counseling; and PA Treasury participation in SEAP to access financial and legal consultations.

The programs were administered by PA Treasury, PA Department of Banking and Securities, OA, and OAG, and were offered via lunchtime webinars, videos, one-on-one counseling, raffles, and surveys. While videos were offered on demand, webinars were held twice a month (usually on the second Tuesday and third Thursday of each month), with recordings later available on demand. Financial and legal counseling were offered via phone. Program components were promoted via email, organizations’ intranet, electronic bulletin boards, departmental meetings, postcards, and mousepads.

To incentivize participation in FRED, employees who completed various program components were entered into raffle drawings for monetary prizes, issued via check. A full schedule of raffle prize offerings is displayed in the table below.



Watch: “Savings Strategies and Options: Financial Wellness Webinar”



Mousepad received by employees at PA Treasury and OAG, with information on the financial wellness website and financial and legal counseling.

Activity	Number of Potential Winners and Prize Amount	Time Frame
1. Pre-Survey	One-time drawing of 250 winners x \$25	Feb. 5 – March 5, 2021
2. Split-to-Save – sign up for split deposit to any savings account (bank, 529, ABLE) or increase existing (including Deferred Comp)	4 monthly drawings of 50 winners x \$50 each	Feb. 5 – May 31, 2021
3. SEAP Financial and Legal Counseling – completion of one session	4 monthly drawings of 50 winners x \$50 each	May 1 – August 31, 2021
4. Post-Survey	One-time drawing of 250 winners x \$60	August 1 – August 31, 2021

By using online and virtual solutions, all employees had equal access to programs. Postcards were mailed to employees' homes to ensure that those not in the office or without frequent email or intranet access (and their

family members) would be aware of the program. Online programs, including videos and webinars, included closed captioning for employees with a hearing impairment.



Postcard mailed to employees' homes to raise program awareness among those not in the office or without email/intranet access.

Program Outcomes and Evaluation

The Financial Wellness Program partners used a variety of tools to measure program outcomes.

For the statewide program, employee attendance and post-webinar feedback were captured for each webinar. Twenty webinar sessions were held with a total of 1,211 attendees. On average, 61 employees attended each session. Feedback received through the post-webinar surveys was overwhelmingly positive, with gratitude expressed for the opportunity to learn about these topics, and several people sharing recordings with their colleagues.

Traffic to the OA financial wellness website and video views also were tracked. As of October 2021, there were 6,830 total views of the financial wellness homepage and webinars page, and 517 views of the financial wellness videos.

For FRED (the PA Treasury- and OAG-specific program), a pre-survey and post-survey were conducted utilizing the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB) Financial Well-Being Scale; the scale was also made accessible to all state employees through OA's financial wellness website for personal assessment. Within FRED, 221 of PA Treasury and OAG post-survey respondents (63%) completed at least one program component. The average financial wellness score of employees was 60, above the U.S. average score of 54.

In addition, positive correlations were found between the following:

- Participation in FRED and increased split accounts and emergency savings
- Participation in monthly webinars and saving into an emergency savings account
- Financial counseling and splitting paycheck to a PA 529 account
- Visits to the OA financial wellness website and increasing emergency savings

There was also an increase in saving into an emergency savings account among those who took the pre-survey and the post-survey (from 12% to 20%), and across the board, more employees who participated in FRED saved from their paycheck than non-participants.

Long-term measurement plans include making the CFPB Financial Well-Being Scale available to employees one year after the post-survey. While there will no longer be a monetary incentive for participation, employees will be encouraged to perform self-assessments, with an emphasis on the importance of periodic financial wellness checkups, like those done for physical wellness. OA will also continue to monitor website traffic analytics and administer feedback surveys at the conclusion of all remaining webinars.

Key Takeaways, Lessons Learned, and Future Plans

The expansion of the statewide Financial Wellness Program and the creation of FRED have not only helped many Commonwealth of Pennsylvania employees improve their financial well-being, but also offer lessons learned and key takeaways for states and localities considering developing or expanding their own financial wellness programs. Three key themes that emerged follow:



Fostering collaboration and partnerships

Cross-agency and external partnerships were critical to the success of the financial wellness programs. Implementation was a state agency collaboration - not only between OA, PA Treasury, OAG, and the Department of Banking and Securities, but also other agencies conducting subject-matter webinars (e.g., PA Higher Education Assistance Agency, PA Housing Finance Agency, Insurance Department of PA, PA Emergency Management Agency), as well as external stakeholders affiliated with the Pennsylvania State Employees' Retirement System and the CFPB.

Many of the program partners had not really worked together before this effort. The grant enabled them to pull in large amounts of information and resources that an individual agency could not have done on its own. This project helped program staff learn a great deal about educating public employees and helped to reduce silos.

Pennsylvania also has a "State Agency Financial Exchange" (\$AFE) of more than 24 state agencies that meets approximately every two months to focus on financial capability for consumers and various state initiatives. The existence of this group has fostered collaboration for years prior to the current grant and will allow the program to continue moving forward.

Through the partnership of multiple agencies, program partners were able to expand the scope and number of educational programs offered to commonwealth employees and their families. The success of these partnerships has developed into a commitment to continue to offer monthly programming after the end of the grant period.



Strategizing to improve participation

Incentivizing participation in certain program components was a challenge on several fronts. Agencies under the governor's jurisdiction have a gift ban policy in place, which prevented providing incentives and promotional giveaways for financial wellness activities to all state employees. While PA Treasury, OAG, and Department of Auditor General do not have a complete ban, the issue of whether the agencies should offer incentives, the amount of those incentives, and the method of distributing them required close review and deliberation. Ultimately, concerns around gifts for public employees limited the amount of funding that could be allocated to incentives.

Next, while program partners were pleased with an average of 61 participants per webinar from a wide swath of state agencies (the largest session had 206 attendees), there was room for improvement on engagement with a target population of over 79,000. However, this was a time when many employees had more on their plates to keep state government running during the pandemic, and those who were working remotely may have had "Zoom overload." The on-demand videos and archived webinars will hopefully reach many more participants in the future.

Further, while participation in the pre-survey at PA Treasury and OAG was high, participation was lower than expected for the Split-to-Save and financial and legal counseling components, such that holding raffle drawings was not necessary - everyone who participated won.

Counseling participation, as reported, was particularly low (eight participants between the two agencies for all four months the raffles were offered), likely due in part to participants needing to self-report completion of counseling to HR (SEAP counseling services are confidential). Employees may not have wished to disclose their participation. Program partners continue to work on reducing stigma that workers may feel in utilizing the SEAP program, which is typically associated with mental health services.

Both PA Treasury and OAG also tried to increase participation by allowing use of work time (with supervisor approval) for program events. This helped with participation in the legal and financial counseling component.



Leveraging internal expertise

One of the key drivers of program success was **drawing on the wealth of expertise already in place** in Pennsylvania's state government. As the program partner agencies looked for webinar speakers, they soon realized that they already had experts across state agencies. All of the webinar speakers participated in-kind, except for the speaker on the topic of estate planning, and all of the presentations were free of sales pitches. It is important for other employers to understand that there are many in-house and external resources that already exist.

Regarding future plans, monthly webinars for all state employees will continue for the foreseeable future, with recordings made available for those who cannot attend live. Communications bureaus from across commonwealth agencies will continue to promote financial wellness and encourage employees to save for emergencies and their future through participation in existing programs (such as direct deposit into a separate savings accounts, PA 529 accounts, PA ABLE accounts, and deferred compensation plans) and to take advantage of financial and legal counseling through SEAP, although these behaviors will no longer be incentivized at PA Treasury and OAG.

Webinars will be sustainable through the generosity of state partners continuing to give their time and expertise, and through the regular \$AFE working group meetings mentioned above. OA will continue to update content on its financial wellness website and provide site maintenance.

Additional Information

This case study was developed using content provided by PA Treasury and its program partners, and through a December 3, 2021 video interview conducted by Rivka Liss-Levinson (MissionSquare Research Institute) with Tara Long, Director, Bureau of Employee Benefits, OA; Katie Beers, Assistant Director of Employment, Human Resources, PA Treasury; Julie Peachey, Deputy State Treasurer for Consumer Programs, PA Treasury; Anne DeCecco, Director of Keystone Scholars, PA Treasury; and Becky MacDicken, Outreach Specialist, Department of Banking and Securities.

For questions and additional information about financial wellness, please contact **Tara Long, Director of Employee Benefits, OA** - talong@pa.gov.

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San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA)

Jurisdiction Background

The San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) is a public agency that delivers a safe and reliable wholesale water supply to 24 retail water agencies, including cities, special districts, and a military base. San Diego County encompasses a geographic area of 4,300 square miles, and the local government serves 3.3 million people (49% female; 45% White - non-Hispanic, 34% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 5% Black or African American, 4% two or more races, 0.4% Other). Population density in the county is 793 people per square mile, and the poverty rate is 10.3%.¹⁰

In 2021, SDCWA introduced a new financial wellness program, **Enrich**, available to its 242 employees as well to the 16,000 employees of its 24 member agencies; employees' family members also were eligible to participate.



As a program promotional item, high-powered flashlights "shine a light on finances" and serve as a handy tool for water district employees who work outside the office.

Program Development

Prior to launching Enrich, SDCWA had an existing "lunch and learn" program through its employee assistance program (EAP) provider, most of which focused on physical or mental health, exercise, healthy eating, benefits, and other wellness topics. Occasionally, one of those sessions touched on financial topics, such as the CalPERS retirement plan or Medicare, but a cohesive approach to broader financial wellness or planning was not in place. In addition, what content existed was only available to SDCWA staff, not employees of the 24 member agencies around the county for which the authority is the wholesale water supplier.

Anecdotally, there was evidence of a need for education about budgeting and planning for emergency savings. Such a need might manifest itself at times of disruption - for example, when an employee is injured and needs to wait for disability payments to begin - but it also seemed that even some well-compensated staff essentially were living paycheck to paycheck.

¹⁰ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020.

In the interest of further strengthening the supportive network it shares with the individual water districts, SDCWA extended its outreach efforts and potential program participation to all of those districts’ employees as well (demographic details provided in the table below). Prior to this financial wellness initiative, it was rare to have this type of ongoing human resources collaboration.

The water authority and a local credit union had both been in contact with a few agencies that covered financial wellness content as curated by the [Association of Financial Educators](#) (AFE), a nonprofit educational bureau comprised of financial professionals that provides free educational workshops to organizations of all sizes and in all market sectors throughout North America. A cohesive program had not been developed, but when the state and local government grant program was announced, this vendor-based approach then became the basis of the SDCWA proposal. The grant enabled SDCWA to expand the financial wellness content of its programming and to build new vendor relationships, introduce new participation incentives, and initiate interagency outreach to water districts that are wholesale customers of SDCWA.

SDCWA opted to work with AFE and its network of subject matter experts for free, live webinar content and course facilitators and also to provide employees with a roadmap of relevant sessions. In addition, a contract was executed with a financial wellness software vendor to create a program landing page; to enable employees to complete a

financial checkup and participate in finance-related games and quizzes; and to provide employees a means to access recorded courses recommended to help them meet their financial goals. Within the newly expanded curriculum, topics included financial stress and how to talk about money within one’s family and with children.

Human Resources staff developed the program goals, events, newsletters, and other communications, used an email communications software to send related promotions, and used online survey software to gather data on topics of interest to employees and conduct pre- and post-course assessments. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all educational events were held online.

With the services contracted through the financial wellness vendor, such as the financial checkup, some employees were concerned that their personal financial information might be shared, either with their employer or with vendors looking to sell additional services. Addressing these concerns required additional education about the safeguards in place to prevent such disclosure.

The total budget for the program was about \$25,000, with funds designated primarily for vendor contracts or for employee incentives. Typically, the vendor’s fees would be assessed per eligible employee, but given the uncertain take-up among the non-signatory districts, the authority was able to negotiate a lower fee regardless of how many beyond their direct employees might participate.

Scope ¹¹	Number	% By Gender	% By Race/Ethnicity	% By Job Classification
Total Active Employees	242 at SDCWA; 16,000 including those at all member agencies	Female 39% Male 61%	White 58% Hispanic 25% Asian 10% African American 4% Two or more races 2% Declined to state 1%	Operations 40% General Employees 60%
Total Targeted by or Eligible for the Program (Full-Time Faculty and Staff)	16,000 employees, plus family members			

NOTE: Total of 16,000 employees includes the San Diego County Water Authority and all member agencies. Demographic percentages are for SDCWA staff only.

¹¹ Employee data courtesy of SDCWA.

Program Implementation

As discussed above, budgeting was a priority topic, along with such employee suggestions as retirement, Social Security, and “Investments 101.” Therefore, the initial offering in the lunch and learn series was a four-part financial basics course (financial wellness overview and building a budget; investment basics; planning for retirement and retirement risks; estate planning). The AFE facilitator for this session also offered employees one-on-one remote consultations.

Subsequent sessions focused on the following topics, with the session facilitator noted in parentheses:

- Saving for college/529 plans (529 plan provider)
- CalPERS (CA retirement) benefits basics (CalPERS)
- Planning for long-term care (AFE)
- Understanding Social Security (AFE)
- Raising money-savvy kids (EAP)
- Relationships and money (EAP)
- Understanding financial and spending behavior/getting out of debt (local credit union)
- 10 steps to financial freedom (credit union)

Hundreds of additional courses as well as interactive tools are available on demand through the contracted vendor’s platform. To this point all content has been provided in English, although the vendor’s platform does allow for language translation.

Course topics that generated the most interest included budgeting basics, saving for college, understanding spending behavior, and getting out of debt.

Program Outcomes and Evaluation

Data is being tracked on program attendance and registration, course completion, and employee satisfaction. For the AFE financial basics webinars, an average of 60 people participated in each session. Employee attitudes were also surveyed after each webinar, with an average of 95% satisfaction.

A total of 58 employees have registered for the financial wellness platform, 50 have completed the financial checkup, and 16 courses have been completed. Road shows continue with each of the member agencies’ human resources contacts and general managers, although

Due to COVID-19, 75% of the workforce at the San Diego County Water Authority and member agencies continue to work remotely. All educational programs are administered remotely through online platforms. Each of the remote educational sessions was provided during lunchtime. When feasible, SDCWA posted recordings of these sessions and presentation slides so that employees working in the field and family members could watch at any time. In addition to AFE and the selected financial wellness platform vendor, SDCWA also worked with its EAP provider and a local credit union to provide portions of the overall curriculum.

Staff promoted the program through email blasts and printed flyers shared with those who were still working onsite. Each of those included direct links to the vendor site, with the electronic communications enabling staff to track click rates, resend to non-openers, and customize follow-up. More importantly, outreach also included presentations at member agency monthly meetings for human resource contacts, public relation specialists, and general managers. This approach helped each member agency to take an ownership role in promoting the program to its own employees.

Incentives formed both a significant expense and a key means of promoting the program. Initial promotions included raffles for \$25 gift cards among those who attended the lunch and learns and a \$100 gift card to any who completed all four financial basics courses. Field workers, who make up roughly 35% of the workforce, were a key target audience; those who completed a post-program survey and financial literacy quiz received a flashlight, with 35 sent so far. These flashlights serve both as a convenient tool in the employees’ field work and as a reminder to “Shine a light on your finances.”

promotional efforts like the e-blasts have been limited to SDCWA employees, with each individual water district managing its own employee outreach.

Spouses and dependents are eligible to attend online sessions. To this point, those family members comprise just under 5% of attendees. But where household financial decision making is a collaborative effort, the availability of the training to that wider audience may pay significant dividends in terms of more effective budgeting and financial planning.

Pre- and post-program surveys conducted through the vendor platform show positive results with respect to stress levels and financial literacy. On a scale of 1 (least stressed) to 10 (most stressed), employees scores have improved from a 3 to a 2. Retirement was initially identified as the most significant cause of stress when thinking about their finances (69%), with respondents on the post-test citing the “economy” as their top financial concern (58%). Employees scores on a [FINRA Investor Education Foundation](#) financial knowledge assessment improved from 66% before the program to 71% afterward.

Employees’ informal feedback expresses appreciation for the opportunity to gain knowledge and insight on financial

topics that they knew they needed to learn about or others they hadn’t previously considered, such as financial planning for long-term care.

Moving forward, SDCWA will continue to assess educational session attendance and vendor platform engagement. Once more staff return to in-person work, evaluation may also expand to consider the impact of different incentives and program delivery methods (e.g., providing breakfast or lunch during educational sessions, more one-on-one in-person sessions). Program coordinators also will assess engagement levels at remote vs. in-person sessions - for instance, to compare the number of questions asked during in-person vs. online sessions.

Key Takeaways, Lessons Learned, and Future Plans

Employee input on topics of interest will continue to inform the development of course content. This will be of ongoing relevance as current waves of retirements may shift the overall workforce’s interests away from late-career to more early-career concerns.

Additional training from AFE will be provided both to offer more advanced content not covered in the financial basics course and then a refresher on the introductory material, both for existing staff and new hires. These basic and advanced courses may then alternate on a two-year cycle. The staff onboarding process also offers a convenient opportunity to acquaint new hires with the vendor platform.

A return to more in-person work is anticipated in 2022. Two approaches that were not possible when employees were working remotely were incorporation of financial wellness content into in-person health benefits fairs and staff meetings, with or without a catered meal. Both types of events have the potential to reach more field staff, as they do not typically have time to attend office-based meetings unless they are preplanned as part of their daily work schedules or are held during the start or end of their shifts.

In order to continue employee engagement, the vendor platform is currently being provided as part of a three-year contract. The survey software will remain available for program evaluation under the existing license agreement for program evaluation through July 2022.



Contracts and communication require time and effort

The two most significant challenges with the program setup were the time required to execute the initial contracts and the ongoing efforts required to spread the word about available resources, whether to field staff who could not attend lunchtime sessions or to all those employed in the 24 member agencies. As more data becomes available to demonstrate the difference the program makes in financial literacy, reduced financial stress, or improved savings for retirement, college, or emergency needs, **communication about the benefits to the employees** may become easier.

Within the member agencies, the pandemic-related workload among HR staff was often overwhelming. Where that was the case, communicating with other points of contact like public relations staff or general managers helped get the message out. Recalibrating outreach methods to the target audience and a more in-person workforce will remain important in 2022 and beyond.

Regardless of those challenges, both the positive employee feedback and the ability to build greater connections with the member agencies have validated the efforts to provide this financial wellness curriculum.



Incentivize employee participation

For other jurisdictions considering such an initiative, the program coordinator recommends incorporating **incentive prizes, raffles, certificates, and gamification to encourage employee participation**, as well as surveys on participant satisfaction and knowledge increase to demonstrate the value of the program. Staff also report a positive experience with the contractors and other organizations they worked with, the expertise they brought to the course content, and their effectiveness in a remote learning environment.



Learn from peers' experience

Peer support has also been of significant benefit, both when working with the other water districts on their specific implementation or when sharing their experiences with other grantees around the country who were working through vendor contracting, employee engagement, and creative problem solving.

Although SDCWA provided a small amount of financial wellness content in its prior lunch and learn offerings, this more formal framework holds the promise of ongoing financial benefits to its employees and the employees of the other area water districts.

Additional Information

This case study was developed using content provided by San Diego County Water Authority and through an interview conducted by Gerald Young (MissionSquare Research Institute) with Gretchen Spaniol, Special Projects Manager. For more information, please contact **Gretchen Spaniol** - gspaniol@sdcwa.org.

Wisconsin Department of Employee Trust Funds and Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions

Jurisdiction Background

The financial wellness program [Wisconsin Strong: Your Financial Security™](#) is a collaboration of two State of Wisconsin agencies, the Wisconsin Department of Employee Trust Funds (ETF) and Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI). Both serve this upper midwestern state of 5.8 million residents. The overall demographic composition of Wisconsin is 86% White, 6% Black or African American, 3% Asian, 2% two or more races, 2% some other race, and 0.9% American Indian and Alaska Native.¹²

The mission of the Wisconsin Department of Employee Trust Funds¹³ is to administer retirement, health, income continuation, long-term disability and other benefits to current and former public employees, retirees, and their beneficiaries. The Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions¹⁴ provides financial regulation and education to ensure the safety and soundness of Wisconsin financial institutions, protect Wisconsin residents that invest, and enhance the viability and accessibility of the state's business record-keeping system.

The program was selected by the Governor's Council on Financial Literacy and Capability to receive the Governor's Financial Literacy Award for 2021



Promotional material for Wisconsin Strong's Financial Fitness Challenge, a self-assessment and benchmarking of personal financial knowledge and health for employees and access to a free interactive online learning center.

¹² Demographic data courtesy of Wisconsin Department of Employee Trust Funds and Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions.

¹³ "About ETF," Wisconsin Department of Employee Trust Funds

¹⁴ "This is DFI," State of Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions, accessed January 13, 2022.

Program Development

In March 2021, ETF and DFI established the Wisconsin Strong: Your Financial Security™ program with a \$100,000 grant budget received by DFI. This program is accessible to 260,000 public employees (63% female) and 215,000 public retirees and their families. Of those in active service, 39.3% are teachers, 51.5% are general employees, 8.6% are public safety, and 0.6% are elected officials.

While Wisconsin Strong was a newly established program, it was able to leverage organizational experience and staff capacities from two past financial literacy efforts at ETF, one a campaign for female public employees (launched in 2015) and another financial fitness program for public employees and their families (2016-2018). Both these past initiatives received positive recognition from state leadership and in national media.

Program Implementation

The Wisconsin Strong: Your Financial Security™ program is organized around eight main components, as listed below:

1. Financial Fitness Challenge – This component provides a self-assessment and benchmarking of personal financial knowledge and health for employees and access to a free interactive online learning center with 200 online courses, over 300 videos, calculators, and activities for 2021. Improvements in aptitude, behavior, and confidence in concepts are measured through structured pre- and post-course quizzes. The topics offered were selected based on input from government agencies around the state, available offerings from the vendor, and reference to academic and practitioner textbooks on the subject.

2. Credit Union Financial Wellness Programming – ETF partnered with the second-largest credit union in Wisconsin to provide financial wellness education for Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) employees that covers topics including, but not limited to, Credit Reports and Scores, Foundations for Financial Wellness, Understanding Beneficiaries and Probate, Customizing Your Debt Plan, and Investment Basics. This content was offered via personalized online education portals, webinars, and one-on-one coaching.

A blended approach was used to establish Wisconsin Strong. From a staffing perspective, five staff (three from ETF and two from DFI) who had previous experience on past financial literacy initiatives were allocated to this program. These individuals included DFI's directors of financial literacy and financial capacity and ETF's communications officer, deferred compensation program director, and director of strategic engagement. The assignment of these employees to the project was central to the continued success of the program given their expertise, level of positions within their respective organizations, the time they were able to dedicate to the program components, and their personal interest in the topics covered. In addition to internal staff, two technology vendors were engaged to develop online financial fitness educational components and offer a student loan repayment tool and app.

3. Encouraging Employees to Increase Supplementary Savings – ETF partnered with the state's 457 supplemental deferred compensation plan (the Wisconsin Deferred Compensation Program or WDC) and its administrator to encourage public employee supplemental retirement savings through live and virtual presentations and an online suite of calculators and interactive tools.

4. Student Loan Debt Assistance – Starting in August 2021, Wisconsin Strong offers a one-year free membership to an app to help student loan borrowers better understand and manage their debt and potentially lower their payments with personalized information and advice related to public employee student loan forgiveness or a repayment plan.

5. 529 College Savings Program – Focused on families with children, Wisconsin Strong provides messaging on the benefits of saving for college, leveraging a 529 college savings plan at work through payroll deduction, and highlighting that 529 funds also can be used for job retraining and credential completion at technical and community colleges. The program also shares financial wellness articles from a knowledge library administered by the Wisconsin 529 plan.

6. ETF Benefits Education – Wisconsin Strong provides educational materials related to the WRS defined benefit pension, supplementary WDC retirement plan savings, disability insurance, group health and life insurance, and other employer-provided fringe benefit programs.

7. Emergency Savings Initiative – Wisconsin Strong partners with America Saves,¹⁵ a nonprofit focused on encouraging low- to moderate-income households to save money, reduce debt, and build wealth, to provide state public employers a program to encourage employees to build emergency savings. Related webinars are also provided to encourage and educate about savings.

8. Targeted Financial Wellness Education – In the summer of 2021, ETF launched Wisconsin Strong Women, an eight-week campaign to educate and engage women on specific challenges they face relating to finances and retirement.

For all program components, ETF and DFI take the lead in promotion and marketing, in coordination with other entities within the state that may have a direct responsibility for the topic (e.g., Wisconsin 529 College Savings Program). While a range of state governmental units and local governments assist in the distribution of announcements

and materials pertaining to the program, there are 51 public employers throughout the state that signed up as champions to take a larger, proactive role in these efforts.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all Wisconsin Strong program offerings were provided online. A multichannel communications plan was used to increase awareness and engagement, including a branded Wisconsin Strong website (etf.wi.gov/wi-strong) with educational materials, resources, and tools; mass and targeted email; social media via Twitter ([#WIStrongSecurity](https://twitter.com/WIStrongSecurity)) and LinkedIn; videos; and a toolkit for Wisconsin Strong champions.

Messages and graphics supported work-life events and milestones, the value of WRS benefits, financial security and wellness, empowerment, diversity, and financial inclusion.

The program also was endorsed by two State of Wisconsin governor's proclamations that encouraged residents to increase retirement security and financial literacy.

After completing the **Financial Fitness Challenge** self-assessment, State of Wisconsin Group Health Insurance Program participants received a special rewards code to apply toward earning their annual Well Wisconsin \$150 incentive.

Program Outcomes and Evaluation

A variety of inputs continue to be used to assess the usage and impact of the Wisconsin Strong components listed above, including employee/retiree participation in webinars; the number of financial health self-assessments completed; the number of online courses completed; the number of members that opened a 529 college savings account; the number that used the student loan repayment app; and employee satisfaction and changes in confidence, behavior, and aptitude. The program received assistance from experts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Financial Security in defining these and related evaluation metrics.

Overall, there were more than 18,300 participants in the Wisconsin Strong program, during the March through October 2021 period. This figure includes 5,703 employees

and 463 public employer representatives who attended Wisconsin Strong webinars, and 12,167 individuals who took the online Wisconsin Strong Financial Fitness Challenge, completing 10,555 financial health self-assessments and 14,045 interactive courses.



Wisconsin Strong and the 529 College Savings Program

Promotional material for the Wisconsin 529 College Savings Program.

¹⁵ "About Us," America Saves, accessed January 13, 2022.

In addition, a day dedicated to promoting the Wisconsin 529 College Savings Program led to 365 individuals establishing 401 new accounts totaling \$148,000. The student loan debt assistance app vendor garnered 105 app users who qualified for \$1.3 million in projected student loan forgiveness.

Within the Wisconsin Strong Financial Fitness Challenge platform, a user survey was administered to collect levels of satisfaction and engagement and changes in behavior based on participation in the Wisconsin Strong program. Results of the survey are as follows:

- 3.9 out of 5 was the average satisfaction rating of the program.
- 86% said the program fit easily within their workweek and personal life.
- 87% felt they were given the appropriate tools and resources for them to be engaged and successful with the program.
- 87% said they would recommend the program to their coworkers, friends, or family members.

Regarding some key financial literacy topics:

- 29% created or reviewed a budget or spending plan, with 26% planning to do so in the next six months.
- 27% created or reviewed a financial plan, with 26% planning to do so.
- 21% started or added money to an emergency fund, with 23% planning to do so.

Testimonials



“Luv it! Wonderful program.

Wish it would have come out 20 years ago. Courses are meaningful and helpful.”



“Got both me and my spouse

to methodically review our finances and make changes.”



“Excellent information in a simple and understandable format!”



“Easy to understand and navigate.

Quizzes reinforced learning.”



“I really enjoyed learning

about the similarities/differences in the confusing terms of IRA's, 403B's, 401K's, Roth IRA's, etc.”

Key Takeaways, Lessons Learned, and Future Plans

The implementation of the program since March 2021 has enabled ETF and DFI to identify several key takeaways and lessons learned that other jurisdictions interested in establishing similar financial wellness programs may want to consider.



Staffing

Starting up Wisconsin Strong would have been easier on staff if there was a dedicated program manager assigned to the effort, given the staff time needed for essential tasks such as contract reviews and approvals, technology evaluations and selections, and partnership development among public employers. ETF and DFI are currently considering organizational changes and restructuring to enable such a position to be created in the future.



Audience

It is important to keep an open mind about target audiences and their needs, tailoring program offerings accordingly to offer the right information to the right audience. The Wisconsin Strong staff were surprised that 50% of the 51 employers who signed up to be employer champions were school districts looking for more ways to engage their employees. Also, with user profile data from the Financial Fitness Challenge platform, it became clear more content and programming were needed around pensions and student loan repayment for early and mid-career employees.



Flexibility

One of the central themes that surfaced throughout the planning and execution of the program was the need to be flexible as staff and as an organization, overall. This includes changing plans to have a program that is both in-person and online; while programming has mainly been delivered online, due to the pandemic, it is important to lay the groundwork now to enable in-person convenings when possible. Also, as mentioned previously, recognizing that a dedicated program manager wasn't possible in the short term, all staff involved needed to be flexible in terms of their time and the tasks for which they took ownership.

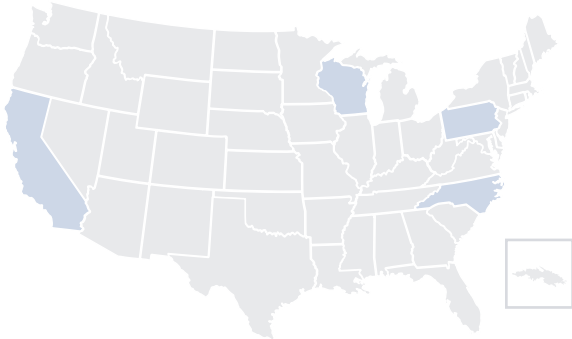
Additional Information


This case study was developed using content provided by the program and interviews conducted by Joshua Franzel (MissionSquare Research Institute) with David Mancl, Director, Office of Financial Literacy Executive Director, Governor's Council on Financial Literacy and Capability; Tarna Hunter, Director of Strategic Engagement and Government Relations - ETF; and Joe Saari President/CEO of the Financial Fitness Group. All of the information offered is accurate as of October 2021. For questions and additional information about Wisconsin Strong, please contact **Dave Mancl, Director, Office of Financial Literacy and Executive Director, Governor's Council on Financial Literacy and Capability** - david.mancl@dfi.wisconsin.gov

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The initiative is a collaboration among [MissionSquare Research Institute](#) (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence), the [International Public Management Association for Human Resources](#), the [National Association of State Treasurers Foundation](#), and [Wells Fargo Foundation](#).

Grant recipients were selected from a pool of applicants by an independent panel of experts. These materials are for informational purposes only and are not an endorsement of any financial wellness program. This information should not be considered investment, tax, or legal advice.



Along with viewing the PDF document with all five case studies, there is also an [interactive map](#),  where each case study is available for view and download.