BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION:
A FIELD SCAN ON INTEGRATING FINANCIAL CAPABILITY AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

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Financial instability limits opportunity for individuals and has negative consequences for the financial health of neighborhoods and communities. Efforts to mitigate this instability by building households’ financial capability holds significant potential for improving overall financial security and increasing economic mobility. The integration of financial capability strategies seems especially well-suited for organizations providing affordable housing services for three main reasons. First, stable and affordable housing is essential for financial security. Second, homeownership is often the largest asset that many individuals have in their lifetimes and can be a significant way to build wealth. Third, the path to stable housing and/or homeownership often requires many steps that overlap and interact with other aspects of a household’s finances.

This report provides an overview of the ways in which seven diverse and innovative organizations have begun to integrate financial capability services into their affordable housing programs. It highlights commonalities and unique differences among organizations, and documents how their approach is influenced by the needs in their communities and by their mission. With a focus on the types of services that are provided and the strategies for implementation, this report is meant to inform practitioners that are engaging in the integration of these services.
Organization

CHN HOUSING PARTNERS, CLEVELAND, OHIO

Population Served
Low- and moderate-income families. In Cleveland, the median income for CHN residents is approximately $21,000 per year.

Mission
To build strong families and vibrant neighborhoods through quality affordable housing and strengthened financial stability.

Services Offered
Develop, own, and operate affordable rental housing including supportive housing, lease to purchase program, utility assistance, foreclosure prevention, tax preparation, financial coaching/counseling.

Approximate Number of Clients Served Per Year
30,000; 500 receive financial capability services

Key Program Element: Financial Coaching for Lease Purchase Residents
The CHN Housing Partners offers a Lease Purchase Program, a 15-year pathway to homeownership, whereby CHN residents rent for the first fifteen years and purchase the home in year sixteen for the remaining balance on the mortgage, resulting in significant equity for the homeowner. Residents who participate in the Lease Purchase Program are also eligible to receive financial coaching once every 45 days for the five-year period leading up to the resident becoming a homeowner to help prepare residents for this transition.

Key Program Element: Portfolios
In their financial coaching work with residents, CHN recognized that a significant barrier to success was that residents lacked a means to organize and track important information they needed for coaching sessions so they could continue to make progress towards their goals. In response, CHN now provides residents participating in this program with a leather three-ring binder “portfolio” as a gift. The binder provides an opportunity for residents to develop a collaborative relationship with the organization and have a tangible way to track their progress through the program and keep up with relevant documentation.
Organization
THE RESURRECTION PROJECT, CHICAGO, IL

Population Served
Low-income Latino families in South and Southwest Chicago and Western suburbs of Chicago.

Mission
To build relationships and challenge individuals to act on their faith and values by creating community ownership, building community wealth, and serving as stewards of community assets.

Services Offered
Through its three-pillar Community Resurrection Model, TRP addresses issues of chronic poverty and disinvestment, strengthening stakeholders and building healthy communities. The Community Resurrection Model integrates services across three pillar areas. Community Wealth Building programs create financial empowerment through financial education and one-on-one counseling with a focus on homeownership. In 2016, the organization launched a mortgage loan fund and became a CDFI in 2017. The Stewardship of Community Assets pillar includes TRP's work to transform underutilized land and abandoned buildings into modern, energy-efficient affordable housing (rental and for-sale) and community spaces. Community Ownership programs include leadership development, civic engagement, immigration legal services, youth safety, access to health care, and several education programs.

Approximate Number of Clients Served Per Year
The Resurrection Project serves more than 7,800 individuals and families annually. Of these, 1,200-1,500 receive financial capability services.

Key Program Element: Immigrant Services
The Resurrection Project provides a number of immigration-related services including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and citizenship workshops. Financial education classes and one-on-one financial coaching services are integrated into and offered at all of their immigration workshops. In addition, TRP works with Self-Help, a local community development credit union to provide DACA renewal and citizenship loans. This collaborative and holistic model combines financial education, financial coaching and access to a financial product to help participants achieve their goals.
Organizations
URBAN UPBOUND (UU), THE NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY (NYCHA), AND THE OFFICE OF FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT (OFE)

Population Served
The ResidentsCAN! Program targets residents of three public housing developments in the Bronx.

Mission
Urban Upbound (UU) is dedicated to breaking cycles of poverty in New York City public housing and other low-income neighborhoods. UU provides underserved youth and adults with the tools and resources needed to achieve economic prosperity and self-sufficiency through five comprehensive, integrated programs: employment services, financial counseling, income support services, community revitalization, and financial inclusion services anchored by the Urban Upbound Federal Credit Union.

Services Offered
The Residents Creating Assets and Networking (ResidentsCAN!) Program works in target public housing developments to provide financial coaching in addition to community events to encourage residents to learn more about financial capability approaches and to access tools for saving and paying down debt.

Approximate Number of Clients Served Per Year
The ResidentsCAN! program launched approximately a year ago, but is expected to serve roughly 800 clients through workshops, community events, and financial coaching.

Key Program Element: Resident Outreach
This innovative collaboration between three organizations - UU, NYCHA, and OFE - is testing a model where financial coaches conduct intensive outreach in the target public housing developments utilizing resident networks, social media, community events, and partner organizations. Participants are encouraged to join the EARN Starter Savings program to build an emergency fund. The organization is also coordinating with the NYC Housing Authority to refer residents to the program who may be eligible for a “special circumstances payment plan” to catch up on rental arrears. Financial coaches receive special training to understand public housing rent rules in order to tailor their coaching sessions to the specific context of public housing developments.
Organization
COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FUND (CEF),
CHAPEL HILL AND DURHAM, NC

Population Served
Individuals experiencing homelessness or housing and financial vulnerability.

Mission
To cultivate opportunities, assets, and communities that support the alleviation of homelessness and poverty.

Services Offered
Relationship-based support in the areas of housing, workforce development, health, and financial capability. Financial capability services include financial education classes, one-on-one coaching, access to banking services, and matched savings accounts.

Approximate Number of Clients Served Per Year
1,000

Key Program Element: Student Volunteer Support
CEF is a student-powered organization in Chapel Hill and Durham, NC. Staff members at CEF recruit and train college students at the University of North Carolina (UNC), Duke University, and other local universities to serve as advocates. Advocates walk alongside and offer relational support to individuals experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. An extensive training program is offered to the volunteers, including a semester-long course at both UNC and Duke. The course teaches students about the systems and structures that contribute to institutional racism and poverty as well as the more practical elements of the program, such as how to read a credit report or navigate the banking system. Student volunteers also have the opportunity to take on additional leadership roles, including supporting teams of advocates, researching community resources, or taking part in development. CEF is grounded in the unique relationships that are formed between the students and the program participants, and tailored to the unique goals of each individual served. Advocates support CEF members in gaining employment, securing housing, and building savings.
Organization
AHC GREATER BALTIMORE (AHC), BALTIMORE, MD

Population Served
Low- and moderate-income families in Baltimore (between 30% and 60% of Area Median Income).

Mission
To produce and preserve affordable housing in the Baltimore region for low- and moderate-income families and individuals. The organization also seeks to enhance the financial stability of its residents by offering asset building through its resident services program, which offers eviction prevention, case management, health and exercise classes, and other community building programs.

Services Offered
Develop, own, and operate affordable rental housing. Financial capability services include financial coaching, financial education workshops, access to financial tools and resources, eviction prevention, and job readiness. Also provide health-related and community building and engagement programs.

Approximate Number of Clients Served Per Year
Serve a total of 700 clients per year; approximately 100 of those clients receive financial capability services.

Key Program Element: Prepaid Cards
AHC Greater Baltimore offers prepaid cards to help their clients store and manage money. These prepaid cards serve as a critical tool for clients who are unbanked or underbanked by providing access to direct deposit, helping avoid expensive money order fees, and allowing clients to pay their bills online. Prepaid cards serve another important administrative function for the organization by providing a way for the asset building team to pay out cash incentives to their clients for several financial capability and workforce readiness-related action steps. These include setting up bill pay, signing up for direct deposit, using area free tax preparation services, developing a resume, and getting a job. Clients receive $25 each time they complete one of these action steps and funds are loaded directly onto their prepaid card.
Organization
MISSION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (MEDA), SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Population Served
Low- and moderate-income Latino families in the Mission District.

Mission
Rooted in the Mission District and focused on San Francisco, MEDA strengthens low-and moderate-income Latino families by promoting economic equity and social justice through asset building and community development.

Services Offered
Financial capability services including financial coaching, financial education classes, homeownership, tax preparation services, and ITIN application support. Also develop affordable rental housing, workforce development services, and small business development and services including a small business loan fund.

Approximate Number of Clients Served Per Year
MEDA serves a total of 7,000 per year in all asset building programs, and 1,000 clients underwent a financial assessment.

Key Program Element: Embedded Services
While MEDA provides an array of services, financial capability is embedded in every aspect of their work and provides the foundation from which all other services build. As such, individuals who reach out to MEDA for affordable housing, workforce development, or business development are provided with classes and one-on-one financial coaching tailored to help them achieve their goals. Additionally, MEDA increases outreach through the use of tablets that allow their clients to directly sign up family and friends.
Organization
FOUNDATION COMMUNITIES, AUSTIN, TX

Population Served
Households earning below $55,000 per year.

Mission
To provide affordable, attractive homes and free on-site support services for thousands of families, veterans, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Foundation Communities offers an innovative, proven model that empowers residents and neighbors to achieve educational success, financial stability, and healthier lifestyles. They own and operate 22 communities all over Austin and in North Texas.

Services Offered
Provide affordable rental housing and on-site supportive services for residents, including education and health services. Also provide free financial stability services for residents and eligible community members, including free tax preparation, health insurance enrollment, one-on-one financial coaching, financial education course, matched savings, financial aid application assistance, scholarship mentoring, and student support services.

Approximate Number of Clients Served Per Year
Nearly 30,000 community members are served per year, including more than 700 financial coaching recipients.

Key Program Element: Volunteer Coaches
Foundation Communities utilizes a robust volunteer model to deliver a range of financial capability services including financial coaching, VITA tax preparation, and college FAFSA application and scholarship mentoring. Their trained staff includes 90 volunteers dedicated to financial coaching, 600 dedicated to tax preparation and over 20 dedicated to college scholarship and grant application support.
A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY
Until recently, many strategies to improve money management and create financial stability focused on relaying information in the form of classroom-style, one-size-fits-all financial education. In response to the limited effectiveness of some financial education programs, researchers, funders, and other experts have emphasized the need to identify approaches that focus on systematic barriers, decision-making, and behavioral change. As the approaches have evolved over time, so has the language used to describe them. Standard definitions for terms such as financial capability, financial coaching, and financial counseling remain somewhat elusive, but efforts to change that are ongoing. The definitions below are meant to orient the reader to how these terms are used throughout this report. The next pages provide a deeper exploration of the similarities and differences between financial coaching and financial counseling.

FINANCIAL CAPABILITY
The capacity based on knowledge, skills, and access to manage financial resources effectively.¹ This term has gained attention and frequency of use within the asset building field in recent years. It moves beyond a narrow focus on individual knowledge to incorporate the importance of access to critical resources, the ability to plan for the future, and the capacity to make choices.

FINANCIAL COACHING
Financial coaching is an application of coaching techniques designed to develop a client’s capability to manage their own finances and sustain economic security in accordance with their self-defined goals. The coach helps the client set goals, define the short- and intermediate-term steps to achieve the goals, form specific intentions to implement steps toward those goals and then monitors the client and provides feedback on performance.²

FINANCIAL COUNSELING
Financial counseling is more often used by individuals managing a specific financial crisis and the solution is typically defined by the counselor. Compared to coaching, the engagement with the client is usually shorter and there is less follow up or ongoing engagement.³

³ Ibid.
Financial Counseling and Financial Coaching: Semantics or Something More?

One-on-one financial guidance is often referred to as financial counseling and/or financial coaching. While there is not a single criteria that distinguishes between these two approaches, generally there is agreement that they differ in the following ways:

- Financial counseling is geared towards crisis intervention and meant to help clients deal with a current, specific issue, while financial coaching is geared towards long-term behavior change.

- Financial counseling is more prescriptive in nature and practitioner-driven; financial coaching is based on client-driven goals and self-determined next steps.

- A financial counselor acts as an educator or advisor while a financial coach acts as facilitator and motivator. Thus, the financial counselor generally requires a greater level of financial expertise while the financial coach relies on interpersonal and motivational skills to be successful.

In the Asset Funders Network brief, Financial Coaching: An Asset Building Strategy, Michael Collins describes the difference between coaching and counseling this way:

“Unlike a counseling model, the coach does not have to be an expert on financial issues, but does need to have skills in active listening, motivational interviewing and performance monitoring... Typically a coach works with a client to zero in on a behavior or behaviors to improve upon. The focus is on performance gains driven by the goals of the client. Unlike a counselor who helps solve problems, the coach provides a structure for clients to develop their own solutions. In the long run, coaching helps people develop skills and behaviors they can improve upon independently.”

- Michael Collins, Financial Coaching: An Asset Building Strategy

Organizations profiled for this report typically referred to their programs as financial coaching or, in some cases, a hybrid of the coaching and counseling models. Most often, the individual needs of the clients determined their approach more than any specific industry-driven term. When describing the framework for their programs, the definition of coaching was most strongly correlated with a core philosophy of working from a client-driven perspective – working with them to achieve the client’s own financial goals. However, most of the organizations, particularly those serving clients in crisis, also provide financial information and guidance associated with counseling when it’s needed. This was particularly true when working with clients who had a goal of building or rebuilding their credit. Further exploration of this hybrid model would help to flesh out this important industry terminology and define different philosophical approaches that can impact training and program design.

While language may be secondary to services offered, it is important in other ways. Specifically, consideration should be given to clients’ perception of these terms as well as other industry terms (i.e. financial wellness expert). The terms “counselor,” “coach,” and “expert” may carry different associations for any given target audience. For instance, the term “counselor” might draw associations to someone who provides help to people in crisis, such as a social worker or psychologist while...
the term “coach” might be associated with someone who provides encouragement and guidance such as an athletic coach or a health coach. More research is needed to determine how potential recipients of these services perceive these terms and whether they have any influence over a participant’s willingness to take advantage of opportunities.

Insights from the Field: Does your program offer financial coaching or financial counseling?

“On a basic level, all of the [services] that we engage with are coaching - helping clients do an assessment of where they are, having them decide what their goals are from day one, and then providing the support, suggestions, and recommendations that can help them to reach those goals. They know that we will be checking in with them about the progress of those goals on a quarterly basis. But we are not ever dictating to them....We think of it more as a continuum, that these are the skills that are going to help you get on the right track and then over time you build onto that and transition into other things such as homeownership or a better career path for yourself... One of our values is to support people to have choice in their lives and that’s a framework that is very important to us.”

- MEDA

“I would say everything we do is coaching except when residents come in for help paying their rent or utilities (residents are required to meet with a financial coach before receiving emergency assistance). Since those residents are in crisis, our coaches use more of a counseling approach to help them find the resources they need to deal with the crisis. Our training for volunteer financial coaches includes how to understand the difference between people in crisis and those with a bit more stability, so that coaches know when counseling is more appropriate than the client-driven, goal-setting approach used in coaching.”

- Foundation Communities

“All of our Financial Wellness staff are really both counselors and coaches. It’s difficult to just do coaching when you are [preparing clients for homeownership] because you need to teach people what they need to do to reach their goal. We want to empower people to take ownership, but you also need to tell them, if you want to get a loan, this is exactly what you need to do. You need to determine when to wear the hat of a counselor and when to wear the hat of a coach.”

- Foundation Communities
Now for long-term clients, we might put on our coaching hat and say, okay it’s going to take a while, so you [the client] are driving this. The financial coach will help the client uncover their goals by asking questions. At the same time, we pull and review credit with our clients, and that looks a lot like counseling.”

— The Resurrection Project

I think it depends on the situation and what the resident needs at that time. If somebody is coming in in crisis, then we are going to take that from more of a counseling perspective because we are needing to help that individual address the immediate situation that they are in but then once they are out of that initial crisis, they can begin to think about what it is they want for themselves and for their families and we can help them set those goals and coach them to reach them.”

— AHC Greater Baltimore (calls program financial coaching)

“We do a combination. Our mantra is if you are not doing both, you are not doing it right. On the counseling side we…are doing specific things focusing on budgeting, credit items, and financial access to products to get a good picture of what is going on with the client. And then [once that baseline is set] we have the client set goals for themselves. We see coaching as the longer-term work, “hey, you set your goals, are you doing what you need to do to meet them.”

— CHN Housing Partners
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Financial Counseling</th>
<th>Financial Coaching</th>
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<td><strong>Area of Focus</strong></td>
<td>Covers broad spectrum of financial stability and wellness issues with heavy emphasis on credit, debt, and budgeting</td>
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<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
<td>geared towards crisis intervention and meant to help clients deal with a current, specific issue (typically 1-2 sessions)</td>
<td>based on client-driven goals; geared towards long term behavior change (typically 3+ sessions)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role of professional</strong></td>
<td>Acts as educator or advisor</td>
<td>Acts as facilitator and motivator</td>
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<td>Lots of overlap, blurred lines</td>
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Most organizations that serve low-income populations understand the significant impact of financial instability and its effects on clients’ ability to reach their goals. In response, some social service and non-profit organizations have begun to integrate financial capability approaches and services into their program offerings. These organizations seek to enhance client outcomes by improving the financial knowledge, skills, and behaviors of their clients. This increases the financial stability of clients and enables organizations to more effectively carry out their core missions.

Organizations and entities ranging from the US military and municipalities such as New York City to considerably smaller organizations that provide domestic violence prevention, prisoner re-entry, workforce development and affordable housing services, have all taken steps to incorporate financial capability into their program offerings.

Regardless of the specific services they may be seeking, by the time clients walk through the door of a community-based organization, they are overwhelmingly likely to share the experience of financial insecurity.”

- Prosperity Now (formerly CFED), Building Financial Capability: A Planning Guide for Integrated Services

The National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) coined the term “housing plus services” to refer to permanent housing that incorporates services into the operation of housing. Among the many efforts to link housing to extra-residential purposes, the effort to use housing as a platform for improving residents’ financial capability is perhaps the most natural fit. For example, first-time homeowners with adequate emergency savings can potentially weather the large, unexpected expenses that inevitably arise for new homeowners, such as broken appliances or water heaters. Similarly, families who are stably housed may be able to access resources to improve their financial wellbeing, such as transportation, affordable childcare, and other supportive services. As the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) states, “affordable and stable housing has been linked with improving health, education, and economic outcomes for families and children. Stable housing is both a foundation for wellbeing as well as a platform for connecting people to services and resources. When housing is stable and affordable, families can spend more time and resources on medical care, nutritious food, transportation to and from work, and quality day care services.”

The benefits of improving residents’ financial capability are felt beyond residents’ lives. Researchers note that housing providers have a vested interest in residents’ improved financial capability, since residents’ financial wellbeing can have a direct effect on providers’ long-term viability: late-payments and non-payments increase collection costs and reduce revenue. Moreover, when these things lead to eviction, providers bear those costs as well.

While some organizations mentioned reduced late housing payments and other program-related costs, the overwhelming goal shared by all of the organizations was to help the families they serve to succeed, both in achieving long-term sustainable housing and long-term financial stability. Many organizations reported that they designed their services to coordinate with and respond to existing program priorities, client needs, funding opportunities, and even macro-economic forces. In most cases, the design of the programs and services grew or changed over time to accommodate one or more of these factors.

What follows is a list of four commonly used strategies that organizations used to incorporate financial capability services:

1. **INTEGRATION INTO EXISTING SERVICES**

For existing affordable housing providers that are responding to a need(s) in their communities,
integrating financial capability can take the form of adding on specific services to their already-existing menu. For example, the CHN Housing Partners began to incorporate financial capability supports by offering emergency rental assistance to their residents and expanding their program to meet the changing needs of their clients and the economy.

"At first we were doing rental assistance, which was crisis counseling. We began to see the need for more preventative measures.... On the other side of things, we were also preparing our residents for purchase.... The first few years that we were engaged in this, in the mid-90’s, it went swimmingly well. Once the financial crisis hit, it became much more difficult for our residents to qualify for a mortgage. We had to figure out what else do we have to do to prepare our residents for homeownership.”

– CHN Housing Partners

2. CORE COMPONENT OF THEIR MODEL

For a growing number of organizations, financial capability is at the core of the organizational vision and structure and provides the foundation from which all other services flow. At MEDA, a community development organization that provides affordable housing as well as business and workforce development, financial capability is embedded into all of their programming and provides a foundation for all of their services.

"Financial capability was first. We started doing financial capability in a pretty structured way about six years ago. The affordable housing work is about 2-3 years old... Our [financial capability work] is embedded in every single program that we have. So if somebody comes into a workforce program, looking for a job, they would work with one coach, who would do their workforce plan but would also provide them financial coaching and do their financial action plan. With housing it works the same way.... We feel that that is the value-add of coming to MEDA. Obviously, there are a lot of programs that provide housing and workforce development, but our program model and our philosophy is that financial capability is really at the core of everything that we are doing.”

– MEDA

Similarly, the Community Empowerment Fund, an organization serving individuals experiencing homelessness in Chapel Hill and Durham, North Carolina, began by providing microloans to participants looking to transition into stable housing and expanded their services to include savings, employment, health support, and housing placement.

"We started as a microloan program and then we adapted quickly to focus more on savings and relationships. We changed our model within six months of starting and learned a lot in the process. Since homelessness is intersectional and touches on many elements
of a person’s life, so we have adapted to address those issues as well (employment, health, etc.) and financial services is woven throughout.”

- Community Empowerment Fund

3. SERVICES EXCLUSIVELY FOR HOUSING RESIDENTS

For some of the organizations, financial capability programs were developed as a supportive service to assist the residents of the rentals or homeownership units developed and managed by the organization. For example, AHC Greater Baltimore provides onsite financial coaching and other asset building services such as job readiness skills to approximately 100 individuals per year, all of whom are residents of their affordable rental units. Their supportive programming is designed to meet the specific goals and to support the needs of their affordable rental housing residents.

“Our mission is to produce and preserve affordable housing in the region [and] we seek to enhance the financial stability of our residents through our asset building program. We also offer other resident services such as eviction prevention, case management, health and exercise classes, and community building. So resident services are an integral part of our overall program of services that we offer to our residents at... most of the communities that we own and manage.”

- AHC Greater Baltimore

4. SERVICES TO A BROADER COMMUNITY

Some organizations offer financial capability to eligible members of their community as well as residents of their affordable housing programs. For example, Foundation Communities in Austin, Texas operates two Community Financial Centers that provide financial coaching, income tax preparation, and other financial services to thousands of people per year, only a small percentage of whom are residents of their rental housing program. The rest are members of the community interested in enhancing their financial stability or wellness.

“We serve nearly 30,000 people each year, and only a fraction of those are residents [of our affordable housing properties]. Our first financial program was matched savings, which we began offering nearly 20 years ago through the American Dream Demonstration and SEED Demonstration projects. Around 14 years ago we expanded to provide free tax preparation through VITA. A few years later we began providing financial aid application assistance and launched our financial coaching program. When the Affordable Care Act was passed, we launched our Insure Central Texas program to help community members navigate the marketplace and access health insurance. All of these services are currently provided at our Community Financial Centers.”

- Foundation Communities
Financial capability services can take many forms and can be implemented using multiple implementation strategies. However, the range of financial capability services offered by the organizations profiled here generally fall into the following categories.

> **Financial education**, typically delivered in the form of topic-specific workshops or seminars and often used as a tool to introduce residents and clients to other services offered by the organization.

> **Access to affordable banking products and financial services**, including referrals to banks and credit unions that offer traditional checking, savings, and credit building products as well as VITA tax preparation services.

> **Access to local, state and federal benefits**, including food stamps, tax credits, disability payments, and matched savings accounts or Individual Development Accounts (IDAs).

> **One-on-one financial guidance**, typically offered within a framework of financial counseling and/or financial coaching where trained staff or volunteers work one-on-one with clients to help them improve their credit, increase savings, reduce debt, or meet other financial goals.

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**FINANCIAL EDUCATION**

Many of the organizations offer some form of financial education to their clients and residents. In most cases, these services were delivered in small group workshops or seminars. Typically, these workshops focused on a single issue such as “Budgeting” or “Your credit report” or “How to buy a car,” as opposed to a more generalized approach to money management. Those organizations with home buying programs also worked with home buyers to provide HUD-certified First-Time Home Buyer classes. Research supports the greater effectiveness of limiting financial education sessions to a specific topic rather than covering a broad array of financial issues, as well as selecting a single issue that is currently relevant to the participant for greater impact. This is often referred to as “just in time” financial education. Some organizations did offer a more broad-based curriculum (e.g. Money Management or Financial Capability).

Often, the workshops or seminars, whether they covered a specific topic or provided a broader summary of financial wellness topics, were provided as an introduction to an organization’s other, more comprehensive and individualized financial capability services. In fact, many organizations reported that they primarily used these group-based information sessions to create interest in and/or prepare participants for one-on-one coaching or counseling services. In other words, the financial education was used to set a foundation for the higher touch one-on-one services.
Prepaid Cards: A banking tool for clients and a delivery device for program incentives at AHC Greater Baltimore

The AHC Greater Baltimore is a non-profit affordable housing developer with nearly 2,000 rental units located in the greater Baltimore area. When the resident services team at AHC Greater Baltimore realized that nearly 90% of the rent payments from their affordable housing units were being paid with money orders, that threw up a red flag. Staff were motivated to try and find ways to provide access to safer banking products for their clients. “We assumed initially that nobody had bank accounts. It turns out that a lot of them do have accounts but they are not really using them in the way that many of us use them -- for those daily transactions. So many of these folks are underbanked,” said Allison Pendle Jones, Assistant Director, Resident Services. To help their unbanked and underbanked clients, Pendle Jones turned to a prepaid card. “Because of the high number of people who don’t have bank accounts or weren’t using them, we felt strongly that prepaid cards had a role to play in helping our clients make steps towards financial capability and stability in the banking area. “Prepaid cards offer a simple tool to house and manage clients’ money, providing access to direct deposit, helping avoid expensive money order fees, and allowing client’s a way to pay their bills online.”

Prepaid cards serve another important administrative function for the organization. The AHC Greater Baltimore program offers cash incentives to their clients for several financial capability and workforce readiness-related action steps including setting up bill pay, signing up for direct deposit, using free tax prep sites through the city, developing a resume, and getting a job. Clients receive $25 each time they complete one of these action steps. The resident services team uses the prepaid cards to deliver these cash incentive payments for these actions. The staff can issue the prepaid cards to the clients when they meet with them. “We have a prepaid card partner that we have formed a relationship with. We have one card set up to put our program [incentive] funds on and then we just enroll the resident with a card and do card-to-card transfers. The card that we use is the Trans Card, Xpress card. We chose them because their terms were great and they were able to give us instant-issue cards, which is great. I have a supply of blank cards that I can use to enroll clients and activate it right away while I am meeting with them.”

But the Greater Baltimore AHC prepaid cards aren’t issued in a vacuum. The resident services team educates their clients on the best use of the cards, “That’s the reason that financial coaching and counseling is so important because we are not just saying here is a card, go use it. We can provide guidance on the best way to use the prepaid cards - use these ATMS [to avoid fees], enroll in direct deposit, use online bill pay.”

“It’s been very helpful as a tool that residents can use as a banking product for those that either aren’t able to or choose not to work with a traditional financial institution.”
Insights from the Field: Does your program offer financial education?

“Everyone starts with the full financial capability curriculum which is a one-time, in-person, two-hour workshop. And then they get matched with an individual coach... That is intentional. We really find that people get the most out of one-on-one sessions. We think that the mode of a workshop is great for introductions and maybe planting a few seeds about the core issues, but, beyond that, the rest just gets lost on people and so we really try to move to one-on-one.”

- MEDA

“We do a few workshops but financial coaching, one-on-one work and access to financial tools and resources is the primary focus.”

- AHC Greater Baltimore

“We recently launched a financial capability academy, a six-week course that brings everything together. We have had good success with that. We were afraid people wouldn’t commit to six weeks, but they do. We are now taking it further and building out a long-term financial planning curriculum. This will include pre-retirement, post-retirement, insurance and end-of-life planning.”

- The Resurrection Project

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE BANKING PRODUCTS & FINANCIAL SERVICES

Each organization we profile helps their residents and clients gain access to traditional banking products, including checking and savings accounts. Most report working with clients that are unbanked or underbanked. Often, these organizations have relationships with local banks and credit unions and are familiar with the financial products that provide beneficial terms (i.e., low fees and/or low or no minimum balances) for their clients or help them build credit.

Financial products and services offered by housing organizations include the following:

- Checking accounts
- Prepaid cards
- Savings accounts
- Credit building products (credit builder loans, secured credit cards)
- Lending circles
- Matched savings programs
- Mortgages and down payment assistance programs
- Tax preparation services (VITA)

For most of the organizations, the goal of helping their clients gain access to traditional financial products involved referring clients to local banks and credit unions. Programs placed an emphasis on referring to financial services providers that offered the most valuable products for their customers and most said they referred to more than one financial institution. A few of the organizations provided in-house financial products, such as mortgage or small business loans to serve clients unable to access more traditional forms of credit in the market. One organization was in the process of becoming a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), a financial institution dedicated to providing affordable financial products to communities in need and underserved populations.

Many of the organizations that we interviewed had robust Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs, offered to the larger community.
as well as residents and clients. At Foundation Communities, their Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program represents a significant piece of their financial capability offerings through which approximately 20,000 tax clients are served each year. In some cases, the VITA programs acted as a vehicle to introduce community members to other financial capability services offered by the organization.

As described earlier, AHC Greater Baltimore helps their unbanked and underbanked clients by offering them prepaid cards. The cards offer their clients a simple way to manage their finances, without having to go to a bank or credit union. They also use the prepaid cards to deliver financial incentives to their clients.

For many of the organizations we spoke to, although they were currently helping clients engage with financial institutions and gain access to more affordable products, many reported a need for more and better products that were best suited to their clients’ needs. Among the desired products listed were better savings products with low minimum balance requirements, and bridge products to assist primarily unbanked clients to move to more traditional banking such as paid debit cards paired with savings accounts. Products focused on longer term investments were also mentioned as an area of unmet need.

**ACCESS TO BENEFITS**

Many of the organizations connected clients with federal, state, and other benefits including food stamps, tax credits, and disability payments. For example, Urban Upbound, an organization that works directly with New York City Housing Authority residents mentioned that their staff work with a great number of their clients who face difficulties such as ID theft, loss of childcare, or the need to obtain an ITIN number. These are critical issues in helping clients reach financial stability and may be overlooked in standard training programs and program assessments.

**ONE-ON-ONE FINANCIAL GUIDANCE**

All of the organizations provide some form of one-on-one financial guidance to their clients. For most programs, this service was at the heart of their financial capability offerings. Organizations reported that meeting one-on-one with their clients allowed providers to individualize their financial wellness offerings and strengthen long-term relationships. Many of those interviewed suggested that while providing basic financial education and connecting clients with banking products was important, the relationships developed with the financial coaches or counselors was the driving element in creating lasting behavior change for their clients.

It is important to note that these services are often interconnected and overlapping. For example, a client wishing to purchase a home might attend a workshop for first-time home buyers. At that workshop, she might have the opportunity to sign up to work with a financial coach to make a plan of action to help her achieve her goal of becoming a homeowner. During their first coaching session together, the financial coach might make a referral to local credit union that offers credit building products as well as a matched savings account being offered by the city for first-time home buyers. These categories are not mutually exclusive and often work hand-in-hand to help clients achieve greater degrees of financial stability and wellness.

Some providers offer financial capability services as part of a larger suite of supportive services. Other supportive services offered by the housing organizations include: eviction prevention, emergency rental and/or utility assistance, job readiness skills and placement, college application assistance, immigration services, health and exercise-related activities and support, and community building and organizing.

The most common supportive services offered are emergency rent and utility assistance and job readiness training, both of which are integral to financial and housing stability. The supportive services are driven by two factors: the specific needs of the respective communities served and the core mission of each
organization. Often, those with missions beyond providing affordable housing offer a wider array of services. For example, organizations that serve largely immigrant populations offer affordable housing, financial capability, and immigration services, including citizenship workshops and access to loans to assist with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) applications for their clients. In another example of an organization that built their program to meet the needs of their clients, Community Empowerment Fund started out as a University of North Carolina student-run financial services organization that provided small loans to help people transition out of homelessness. Their program quickly evolved to address the needs of the clients:

“When we were offering micro-loans, we learned quickly that there is a significant issue for the individuals facing housing instability and their access to safe, convenient, and affordable ways to save their money. Members - instead of bringing a $15 loan payment - were bringing their entire paychecks and asking a student Advocate to hold into it for them. The loan itself was useful, but could only be so effective if Members didn’t have access to financial services to help them reach their bigger goals. All Members cited their relationships with student Advocates as the greatest benefit of being involved in the program and as CEF’s strongest asset. Members also needed support to navigate all sorts of social services and actually get resources for which they were eligible. Based on this, we pivoted towards those two anchor components.”

– Community Empowerment Fund
Organizations must consider multiple factors when integrating financial capability services into their housing programs. These range from broad and high-level questions regarding the fit within the organization mission to narrow and focused questions regarding the mechanics of the integration process itself. This section highlights some of the key considerations that emerged most commonly among these organizations included in this report.

**USE OF CLIENT-FACING TECHNOLOGY**

None of the organizations interviewed considered the client-facing technologies available in the marketplace such as EverFi, My Budget Coach, Moneythink, or Khan Academy to be integral to their program offerings. Most reported not using them at all. A few reported that they recommend Mint, the online money management tool that lets you import your bank account information and review your monthly spending and budget goals, to their more tech-savvy clients. Other also recommend recommended Credit Karma, an online credit score and credit report provider, and one organization reported that many of their clients use the financial tracking tools made available by their own bank. However, use of these client-facing technologies is limited, perhaps due in part to a lack of access and a discomfort with technology.

While use of existing client-facing technology tools is limited, Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA), is in the process of developing their own apps to support their financial capability work. Lucy Arellano, Director of Asset Building Programs at MEDA described the application they are developing to support their services:

“Ours is called MEDA Pulse. It’s still in development, but the intention of this app is to supplement the financial coaching experience to make it more efficient – things that can be done through the app rather than in-person or by phone [intake, etc.]. Also, we want to help clients stay on their goals. We hope...”

**STAFFING, TRAINING, & PROGRAM PARTNERS**

The organizations interviewed for this project had a variety of staffing models including in-house paid staff, trained volunteers, as well as collaborating with a third party to deliver services.

1. **Paid Staff**

Many organizations delivered financial capability services by hiring paid staff members. In most cases, these staff members were designated specifically to asset-building or financial capability-related activities and were trained to provide these services. Each organization that we interviewed had a unique training program, typically involving some form of internal training, along with externally offered professional education and certification programs. Some required staff to become certified through a specific program, while others used external programs for continuing education and professional development opportunities, often driven by staff interests.

By far, the external training program mentioned most frequently was NeighborWorks. NeighborWorks Center for Homeownership Education and Counseling (NCHEC) offers six certifications including...
Two Organizations with Volunteer Coaching Models

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

Foundations Communities in Austin, Texas operates using volunteers to deliver most of their direct financial capability work including financial coaching, tax prep services, scholarship mentoring, and health insurance enrollment. Kori Hattemer wasn’t convinced of the coaching model when she first came on board as the Director of Financial Programs. “I was unsure of the volunteer coaching model when I first started at Foundation Communities in 2016, but the team here has built a really strong volunteer coaching program. Our volunteers are passionate and committed to the work, and they come from diverse backgrounds. Our staff does a wonderful job recruiting, training, and supporting them in their efforts to help clients reach their financial goals.” Foundations Communities has 90 volunteers focused on financial coaching and about 600 that work on tax preparation at the VITA tax site. In 2016, they served more than 700 clients, and they are on track to serve 750 clients in 2017.

One important aspect of this model is that it still requires staff resources to run. The organization reports that: “We have a full-time staff person who oversee the Financial Coaching Program and a Volunteer Coordinator who dedicates about half her time to the program. Additionally, we have Client Navigators at our 2 Community Financial Centers who greet clients and coaches when they arrive and ensure they have everything they need. Client Navigators also manage the appointment scheduling system and help with data entry.” They stress the need for a robust training and coordination process, and the importance of devoting staff time to these tasks. Ultimately, this effort has paid off for Foundation Communities in the form of low volunteer turnover and the increased capacity.

UNIVERSITY STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

The Community Empowerment Fund (CEF) in Chapel Hill and Durham, NC is a student-powered organization. Staff members at CEF recruit and train local college students at the University of North Carolina, Duke University, and other local colleges and universities to serve as advocates to individuals experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. An extensive training program is offered to the volunteers including a semester-long course at both UNC and Duke. CEF worked with both universities to develop the course around the core issues facing their clients and how those might be addressed. Maggie West describes how they came to partner with the universities in this way:

“CEF Advocates from Duke University proposed the course and found a Duke faculty member to serve as an advisor to the class. The student leaders worked together with the advisor and our staff to design and implement a student-instructed service-learning. Since then, we have held this course every semester. Based on this curriculum and model, we created a class at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partnership with the School of Social Work. The training is contextualized and build understanding of institutional racism and structural injustices within financial and housing systems. It also teaches Advocates the more practical elements, such as how to read a credit report. The course covers both theory and direct-practice.”

The organization is grounded in the unique relationships that are formed between the students and the program participants and tailored to the unique goals of each individual served. Like Foundation Communities, CEF places a heavy emphasis on training their volunteers to help them be effective advocates. When asked how the organization deals with the inevitable high turnover driven by student volunteers graduating, Maggie replied,

“We are constantly training students, which can be a lot of work, but has unique advantages because of their energy and adaptability. We’ve also heavily invested in technology, and build institutional knowledge about community resources and best practices into those technology-based tools. We have created and maintain a community-wide resource database with more than 500 entries. It is searchable and embedded into over 50 of our coaching modules! These modules are designed to be interactive, dynamically rendering modules that Advocates and Members work through together in our one-on-one financial coaching program. Students bring their laptop computers with them to the appointments. I would say that our organization has effectively adapted to the reality of turnover among student volunteers, and out of necessity, created robust tools to support this structure.”
Three Organizations in Partnership

COLLABORATION AMONG PARTNERS IN NEW YORK CITY
When the Department of Consumer Affairs Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) received a grant from JPMorgan Chase & Co. to provide a new financial counseling model to residents in developments managed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), they chose to partner with a local community organization called Urban Upbound, a longtime partner to NYCHA with a record of success. Staff from Urban Upbound, building on a long history of partnership, receive special training to understand public housing rent rules so as to tailor coaching sessions to the specific context. Together, the three organizations developed an approach that includes extensive outreach in the public housing developments. This strategy is characterized by the use of informal resident networks and the use of social media and community events. Another element of this approach is a focus on savings. As Urban Upbound provides on-site financial counseling and develops peer and community-led supports, it encourages participants to join the EARN Starter Savings program to build an emergency fund. For residents who are behind on payments, coaches provide referrals to NYCHA. At NYCHA, the residents can access “special circumstances payment plans” to catch up on rental arrears.
Financial Capability that is designed specifically for financial coaches, financial and housing counselors and program managers. NeighborWorks offers flexible training options in several regions throughout the country each year and has been a leader in helping housing organizations integrate financial counseling and coaching into their programming, which may account for their heavy representation among those we interviewed. Other training programs and certifications mentioned included those offered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Unidos US (formerly the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)), SparkPoint, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), and Prosperity Now (formerly Corporation for Enterprise Development or CFED).

2. Trained Volunteers

When it comes to financial coaching, the question of scalability arises. By definition, the fundamental one-on-one approach requires significant resource allocation. One route that organizations have taken to help reduce costs and increase the number of clients served is to use the powerful resource of community volunteers. Necessarily, those organizations that operated using volunteers had a much heavier emphasis on their training programs since volunteers must be trained in all aspects of their volunteer positions and organizations must be prepared for a heavier turnover rate when operating with volunteers. Additionally, volunteer programs still require a commitment of staff time to recruit, train, and provide oversight. Nevertheless, some organizations report that volunteer programs enable them to do more with less (see case studies for examples).

3. Partner Organizations

In lieu of developing internal capacity, many providers choose to partner with outside organizations to deliver financial counseling and coaching services to their clients. Leveraging the experience and resources of these outside groups can be an effective strategy for affordable housing organizations who lack expertise with these services. Additionally, these partners often have well-established relationships with community members.

INTERNAL BUY-IN

As with any new program initiative, establishing buy-in from key stakeholders, including program managers, staff, and board members, is critical to success. Though many of the organization reported significant support from the leadership, many shared that they encountered challenges with buy-in at the staff level. The examples below illustrate the importance of developing inter-departmental buy-in by sharing the benefits of the programming and establishing clear lines of communication early on between staff that provide financial capability services and those who work in other areas.

Insights from the Field: Are there particular challenges you had to overcome to convince key stakeholders of the benefits of these offerings?

“That is an ongoing issue for resident services,...it would seem that they are innately opposed to one another, especially with eviction prevention. So working together is really important. We are very intentional when we set up the referral process, we make sure that everyone understands what, why, and how so that the roles and the goals are clear.”

– AHC Greater Baltimore

“Surprisingly, the buy-in challenges that we faced were at the direct staff level. And we really had to work hard at figuring out what the barriers were for some of the staff to buy into it. I think the themes that have emerged are the [increase in]
workload, and taking on a whole new way of doing things. If staff don’t feel confident in their ability to provide strong financial coaching to clients, they may shy away from it. It took us a long time to hit some pain points and identify some clear examples of how clients were in a bind that could have been potentially been avoided through financial capability work.”

– MEDA

Initially, there were inter-departmental challenges. It was tough to work with another department that had a different culture. For example, with property management they only met with people for lease renewals between 8:30 and 2:30, no exceptions. So people had to take off work to come in and renew their lease and they are forced to do it twice a year. And it was very difficult to coordinate our financial counseling meetings at the same time because they were on their lunch breaks so it was tough to coordinate. [By contrast], we are open from 9-8 and on Saturdays.”

– CHN Housing Partners

MEASURING IMPACT

Measuring program results is necessary for reinforcing participant success, for program modification, for identifying and developing program factors that lead to real change, and eliminating those that do not. Tracking program results is also crucial if financial capability programs are going to be brought to scale. Data that provide evidence of success can encourage other to adopt programs and help convince policymakers to support programs that unite housing and financial capability. However it comes, support will only follow if financial capability programs can provide evidence of their impact.

Documenting progress in financial capability and financial stability and wellness is, however, a challenging prospect for most organizations. Not only can it be difficult to access and collect data, it also takes time to track progress, which can sometimes take years and can also occur in non-linear ways. There is also the question of which measurements provide the most relevant data to decipher the impact programs are having on participants. Should an organization track the number of financial coaching sessions attended, or should they track actions steps taken by the client, a change in credit score, amount of debt, number of new accounts open, or more qualitative measurements of how a client feels about their financial situation? How does one weigh these measurements when assessing the value of a program or a particular aspect of a program? How does all of this fit in with client workflow and how will staff collect all of this data and still be present for their clients?

We track lots of outputs, including the number of sessions that clients complete, the average number of sessions completed by all clients, appointment cancellation rates, and client satisfaction. If everything we are doing is driven by clients and their goal-setting, then I want to be able to track whether or not they achieve those goals. So if they set a savings goal then we would want to track their savings. If they set a credit goal then we would want to track their credit score. If they set a debt goal, then we would want to track debt reduction. Across the board, I want to better measure completion of financial goals to ensure clients are getting the support they need and making measurable progress.”

– Foundation Communities

Overall, the output and outcome measurements were different for each organization, though there were points of agreement. Each organization agreed on the increasing importance of data collection and documenting outcomes while acknowledging the difficulties of creating a viable system to do so.

“People have been fairly happy with how we track our data and analyze our data. We listen to our funders. Three years ago one of our largest funders said we are not funding you anymore because you can’t tell us how many people access more than one program. Big eye opening for us. Funders are asking more from us. We need to do better with our data collection. So we began to do it better, track more, give more info. I don’t know if this will be the long-term model that everyone will be able to follow. But I know that we are learning a lot and our funders are learning with us.”

– CHN Housing Partners
Frequently Used Measures

Currently, client and program outcomes are generally measured using a combination of financial, behavioral, and alternative measures. We discuss each in turn before proceeding to a discussion about data management systems.

Financial Measurements

Hard financial measurements might include baseline measurements and changes to the following data points:

- Credit score
- Savings
- Debt
- Net Income
- Net Worth
- Living within means/budgeting
- Bill payment

Most of the organizations tracked some combination of these data points. A few did not track credit score, citing the difficulty of doing so with any regularity. Several reported they track each of these data points. CHN Housing Partners explains their data collection process this way:

“Every time they come in, we ask for them to bring in documents. Household info for lease renewal, income documents, credit report, track individual credit score, individual trade lines so we know which accounts are open, are they in collection, installment loans so we can add them to the budget. We really look at things that we can pull from hard data sources - that is objective information so we have less subjective information. And then we use that information to put them on certain scales, such as a self-sufficiency scale. [We track this information] over time including the number of trade lines, amount of debt, and credit score. The only anecdotal info we collect is savings amount, sometimes [because that has been kept] in a mattress.”

This type of data can be difficult to obtain and documentation that includes these data points such as pay stubs, bills, and bank statements can be cumbersome for some clients to prepare in advance of a meeting and self-reported data can be unreliable. Nevertheless, developing the systems and intake processes to allow an organization to track hard data over time can yield important program outcome measurements that provide valuable insights into the progress of participants.

Behavioral and Attitude-Based Measurements

Behavioral and attitude-based measurements are designed to measure a client’s confidence and attitudes about their finances. These measures can supplement the reporting of quantitative outputs and outcomes with qualitative, self-reported data that can help organizations report their impact over time. Even more, these tools can provide information about clients’ perceptions and their confidence in key areas of their financial lives.

The following scoring mechanisms are commonly used among financial capability organizations.

- **Financial Capability Scale (FCS):** Developed by the Center for Financial Security at the University of Wisconsin, the Financial Capability Scale is a set of subjective questions for financial coaching, counseling and education clients designed to measure the self-reported financial behaviors, feelings and perceptions of program participants that allows organizations to measure a participants’ progress over time. Constructs measured include budgeting and planning, goal focused financial behavior, recognition of self-control failures, the capacity to avoid economic hardships, and the tendency towards planning and paying attention.
> **CFPB Financial Well-Being Scale:** The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) Financial Well-Being Scale is a scale designed to compare an individual's financial well-being over time as well as to compare one person's financial well-being to the next. The scale consists of 10 questions (also offer an abbreviated 5-item scale) and a scoring method and according to the CFPB, “is designed to allow practitioners and researchers to accurately and consistently quantify, and therefore observe, something that is not directly observable—the extent to which someone's financial situation and the financial capability that they have developed provide them with security and freedom of choice.”

**Program-Based Measurements**

In addition to the qualitative and quantitative financial measurements, some organizations collect other important information related to their program offerings to help track outcomes for their clients and program success. These include program-related data such as the number of sessions attended, action steps taken by the participant, number of months stably housed, employment status, and attainment of new benefits such as food stamps or social security income. One representative of Urban Upbound described a vision for designing a data collection process for their on-site collaboration with the New York City Housing Authority this way,

> “With this new program we wanted to change the way we track outcomes. There are so many measures outside the traditional list of financial wellness measurements that still relate to someone’s finances. For example, identify theft is so laborious. It takes months or years to deal with, and you can’t really show that in numbers [through traditional outcome measurements]. Maybe you’re not improving someone’s credit score, but you’re getting them benefits to help them stay afloat every month, but these things are not always going to be represented in standard industry metrics.”

**Systems for Tracking Data and Outcomes**

Once an organization decides what to track, they must also decide how to collect, store, analyze, and report that data. Organizing data for the first time, integrating existing data into new systems, and merging multiple data tracking systems are all challenging tasks. Adding another layer of complexity, different types of data are often tracked separately by different teams.

Nevertheless, organizations recognize the importance of working through these challenges to develop a system that allows for data collection, impact reporting, and organizational learning. Coordinating and merging data allows organizations to target financial capability services to specific clients and to track the impact of specific services over time.

Increasingly, organizations look to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to organize their data. Tools such as NeighborWorks’ Counselor Max and The Financial Clinic’s Change Machine are online platforms that have been developed specifically for financial coaches. While many organizations use one or more of these systems, some also invest in even more customized databases designed to serve their program needs. Often, these databases utilize a Salesforce platform and most are developed for organizations by hired software experts who assist with design and implementation.
The integration of financial capability services into housing programs can enhance outcomes for individuals through a more holistic approach that equips them with the skills, knowledge, and access to products that can better address the multiple dimensions of their financial lives. Additionally, housing organizations benefit from the increased financial stability of their residents through more consistent rent and bill payments.

While housing providers around the country have been implementing financial capability services in recent years, little is known about the variety of approaches that organizations are using and the key lessons learned to date. This report highlights innovative and unique examples for how this integration can occur, what types of financial capability services organizations are providing, and how they measure outcomes. The goal is to inform practitioners and other stakeholders regarding the benefits and challenges, and highlight program elements for organizations that are considering this type of service integration. Despite the mention of challenges along the way, all of the organizations profiled in this report described the multiple ways in which financial capability positively impacts their residents and the ways that it naturally overlaps and intersects with their housing services, as the example below suggests.

“We have seen, time and time again, how critical the financial stability services are to sustaining any other outcome that we are trying to achieve with our members. Whether that is moving out of the shelter or getting a job, financial capability is crucial to every piece of what CEF Members are striving towards, and influences whether people can ultimately reach their goals. We have also seen that when financial capability isn’t there in a meaningful way, it can really throw a stable outcome into flux.”

-Community Empowerment Fund