



DRAFT – Not yet approved by the commission.

Vermont Financial Literacy Commission

December 19, 2017

Vermont Financial Literacy Commission Members Present:

Beth Pearce, Co-Chair, Vermont State Treasurer
John Pelletier, Co-Chair, Champlain College
Courtney Poquette, Winooski High School
Mary Niebling, Capstone Community Action
Mark Perrin, State Board of Education
Sabina Haskell Vermont Student Assistance Corp.
Scott Murphy, Vermont Department of Libraries
Thomas Leavitt, Northfield Savings Bank
Yvonne Garand, Vermont State Employees Credit Union

Also Present:

Dylan Giambatista, Vermont State Treasurer's Office
Laura Koes, Capstone Community Action

CALL TO ORDER:

Ms. Pearce, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. The meeting was held in the Community Conference Room at VSAC, 10 E. Allen Street, Winooski.

Item 1: Approval of Meeting Minutes

Approval of the November 20, 2017 meeting minutes was postponed until the next meeting date.

Item 2: Set January and March 2018 Meeting Times

After a brief discussion on January and March 2018 meeting times, Ms. Pearce recommended that future meeting dates be addressed later in the session to provide adequate time for discussion. Commission members agreed.

Item 3: Drafting Group Presentation and Discussion of Draft

Ms. Pearce asked Mr. Giambatista to update the Commission on the drafting process that took place following the November meeting. Mr. Giambatista recounted that the Commission requested that he expand the infographic set enclosed in the report. He noted the updated graphics.

Mr. Giambatista shared that he participated in a drafting discussion with Ms. Haskell, Mr. Leavitt, Mr. Pelletier, and Ms. Tarr-Whelan. The December 8 meeting resulted in top recommendations listed on page 7 of the agenda materials. Mr. Giambatista further noted that the grid sheet found on pages 18 and 19 of the agenda materials needed further refinement.

Mr. Pelletier requested that when the report is complete, that it include the 2017 report as an attachment. Commission members agreed.

Ms. Niebling asked that the Commission focus its session on working through its 2018 adult recommendations.

Item 4: Review and Discussion of Draft Materials and Recommendations

Ms. Pearce suggested that the Commission work to finalize its top three recommendations and the grid document. A review of the top recommendations followed. Mr. Giambatista noted that the drafting group had discussed whether the America Saves program would be the right fit for recommendation #13 to be formed around.

Ms. Niebling indicated that Capstone Community Action was actively reviewing America Saves. She introduced Laura Koes, who will be leading the Vermont Saves initiative for Capstone Community Action.

Ms. Niebling and Ms. Koes provided an overview of how an American Saves program could be structured to encourage Vermonters to save money. It was noted that the program could potentially be expanded to include other financial wellness topics, such as credit management and personal finance concepts other than saving.

Ms. Pearce stated that she supported the concept and was receptive to utilizing an established program as a template. She indicated that the Treasurer's Office had researched America Saves and looked forward to partnering with community and financial partners to make a Vermont Saves program a success.

Ms. Niebling noted that Ms. Garand had also provided supportive feedback. Ms. Garand indicated her support and urged that additional personal finance concepts, such as credit management, be included in the program.

Mr. Pelletier suggested that there may be additional opportunities to expand the program. He indicated that other state financial literacy campaigns often convene a steering committee or group of stakeholders to oversee outreach and operations. Ms. Niebling agreed that a coalition effort would be important to ensuring Vermont Saves' success.

Ms. Pearce indicated that the State would welcome the opportunity to partner on Vermont Saves. Mr. Murphy agreed and added that the Vermont Department of Libraries would be interested to assist with outreach. He suggested public libraries would make ideal meeting spaces to convene savings and financial literacy events.

Ms. Koes gave examples of the tools and templates available through the America Saves platform. She noted that the format would provide a number of opportunities to reach Vermonters where they are accessible.

Ms. Niebling stated strong support for the "savers pledge" component of the campaign. She gave examples of the way pledge-driven campaigns, and similar components, could be useful to reach Vermonters in a variety of venues.

Ms. Poquette asked whether the data sourced through a "savers pledge" or other activities were aggregated. Ms. Niebling indicated that the program would allow for more opportunities to compile and analyze data.

Ms. Pearce noted that several State Treasurers had partnered with America Saves, including Tennessee and Wisconsin. She asked Mr. Giambatista to research and investigate how other State Treasurers have utilized and supplemented America Saves campaigns.

Mr. Giambatista asked whether Commission members were comfortable with the draft #3 bullet point. Ms. Niebling and Ms. Garand urged that the recommendation include a clear reference to Vermont Saves. Commission members agreed.

Ms. Pearce asked Mr. Giambatista to review the adult recommendations detailed within the grid document enclosed in the meeting agenda materials. Mr. Giambatista reviewed recommendation #9 and provided an update on the State Financial Literacy Working Group.

Ms. Niebling referenced recommendation #9 and noted that #10 was a broader topic that needed review. Ms. Pearce suggested moving progress to date from recommendation #10 to the requests for specific action under #9. Commission members agreed.

Ms. Niebling stated that recommendation #10 would benefit from including references to the success of workplace financial wellness campaigns, such as United Way's Working Bridges program. Ms. Pearce agreed, suggesting that recommendation # 10 include the Green Mountain Secure Retirement Plan, America Saves, Working Bridges, and development of an initiative whereby the State would annually identify and work with exceptional employers who promote financial wellness in the workplace. Commission members agreed.

Mr. Giambatista noted that Ms. Garand had helped develop the 2017 recommendations relating to credit management. He asked Ms. Garand if she had ideas for recommendation #11. Ms. Garand suggested that there may be a credit education campaign that could supplement or augment a Vermont Saves initiative.

Mr. Pelletier asked whether Vermont Saves could be developed to include creditworthiness and general credit management instruction. Mr. Levitt asked Ms. Niebling if America Saves has a credit development module. Ms. Niebling noted that there are existing credit development initiatives, but that many of these efforts consist of organizations working in coalitions, as opposed to providing resources for general use.

Ms. Pearce asked Ms. Garand to research potential programs to encourage credit management. Ms. Garand agreed to collaborate with Ms. Niebling to provide recommendations to Mr. Giambatista for inclusion in the 2018 report draft.

Ms. Haskell stated that the best way to link the importance of credit maintenance with overall financial wellness would be to include it with resources that describe saving and other personal finance concepts. Commission members agreed.

Ms. Niebling asked whether recommendation #13 was specific to the State working group or was intended to describe an apply to a broader, community-based effort. She noted that benefit cliffs and asset test were a prominent issue that prohibit many low-income and unbanked Vermonters from building assets.

Ms. Niebling indicated that she would follow up with the Agency of Human Services (AHS) to learn more about whether the Administration or General Assembly have developed plans to review whether asset tests and benefit cliffs deter Vermonters from building assets. Mr. Giambatista indicated the State working group was prepared to meet with AHS.

Ms. Poquette provided examples of challenges Vermonters face due to asset tests and benefit cliffs. The Commission discussed benefit cliffs and asset tests.

Ms. Pearce said she was open to making a recommendation around asset tests and benefit cliffs, but that any such recommendation should make clear that there are limited resources available to make policy changes with. Ms. Niebling stated that the changes she envisioned would not necessarily entail a cost, so much as a change to policies and procedures. Mr. Pelletier concurred with Ms. Niebling and suggested that the policy change would result in behavior changes.

Ms. Pearce noted that any analysis of benefit cliffs should be conducted by the General Assembly. Ms. Niebling agreed that the General Assembly should drive the policy change. The Commission agreed to amend the language in recommendation #13 to direct the General Assembly to conduct a comprehensive review.

Referencing recommendation #5, Ms. Haskell asked Mr. Pelletier whether he thought that the Vermont Universal Children's Higher Education Savings Account Program Fund Advisory Committee would reach a policy consensus that could be incorporated into the Commission's 2018 report. Mr. Pelletier shared that it seemed likely that the Commission would recommend additional flexibility to allow for pilot programs and other testing. Ms. Pearce asked Ms. Haskell and Mr. Pelletier to provide updated language for draft recommendation #5.

Mr. Giambatista asked if Commission members had any proposed changes to the infographics. Mr. Pelletier suggested several edits to the K-12 infographic. He agreed to work with Mr. Giambatista to modify them, as necessary.

Mr. Giambatista asked Ms. Poquette to provide an update on the final percentage of schools that require personal finance, and the number that offer electives. Mr. Poquette said she would work with Mr. Pelletier and Mr. Giambatista to finalize the percentages for the next draft.

Mr. Leavitt asked that the K-12 graphic be updated to eliminate a 2011 statistic. Mr. Pelletier agreed that the 2011 statistic should be modified. He suggested, instead, that the Commission use a statistic from the 2017 Champlain College Financial Literacy Report Card. The Commission agreed.

After concluding discussion about the draft infographics, Mr. Levitt asked for an update on K-12 standards, which are expected to be before the State Board of Education (BOE) in January and February. Mr. Perrin described the process. Ms. Poquette noted that January 17, 2018 was the next meeting time for the BOE. Mr. Perrin agreed to notify the Commission once the agenda is finalized.

Mr. Leavitt expressed optimism that the BOE's action could improve the State's financial literacy grade. He explained that, if action is taken, the measurable improvement would provide an opportunity to capitalize developing personal finance resources for educators.

Mr. Leavitt broadly described the Commission's progress to date, and identified opportunities to continue the momentum. He noted that the K-12 sector would benefit immediately by robust personal finance education standards. In the postsecondary space, Mr. Leavitt emphasized the importance of FAFSA competition initiatives. For adults, he stated that the Green Mountain Secure Retirement Plan and buildout of new resources would engage new populations with financial education.

Item 5: Finalize Top 3 Recommendations

The Commission had a general conversation about the top recommendations described on page 7 of the meeting agenda materials. Mr. Giambatista asked whether there were any substantive edits to draft recommendation #1. Mr. Pelletier suggested a minor edit to clarify that "personal economics" should read "personal finance-related education standards." The Commission agreed.

Mr. Giambatista asked Ms. Haskell if she had any edits to recommendation #2. Ms. Haskell indicated that she supports the recommendation as stated.

The Commission discussed recommendation #3 at length. It was determined that the recommendation should be modified to include both State and partner organizations. It was further agreed upon that the "Vermont Saves" campaign should be stated to clarify the Commission's intent to launch a financial health campaign.

Ms. Niebling asked whether recommendation #3 should include family, in addition to indicating that many Vermont adults have not participated in finance education in school, college, or at work. Mr. Pelletier clarified that the categories of school, college and work were selected to correspond to data collected by a Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) survey of Vermonters. Hearing this explanation, the Commission agreed that the recommendation worked as stated.

Ms. Pearce returned to agenda item 2 to set the January and March 2018 meeting times. Commission members agreed to meet at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, January 8. The Commission deferred setting a March meeting date until 2018.

Item 5: Public Comment

No public comment was given.

Item 6: Adjournment

Ms. Haskell made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Niebling seconded. Ms. Pearce adjourned the meeting at 3:49 p.m.