

Vermont Financial Literacy Working Group

Meeting Minutes

October 31, 2018

Vermont Financial Literacy Working Group Members Present:

Dylan Giambatista, Treasurer's Office
Stephanie Brackin, Department of Financial Regulation
Tracy Verge, Department of Labor
Maura O'Brien, Department of Human Resources
Seán Sheehan, Department of Vermont Health Access
Vincent Livoti, Department of Libraries
Lynette Kemp, Department of Taxes
Deborah Carroll, Department of Taxes
Martha Deiss, Agency of Education
Chris Curtis, Attorney General's Office
Heather Peacham, Chief Marketing Officer (by phone)
Mat Barewicz, Department of Labor (by phone)

Also Present:

Mary Niebling, Capstone Community Action
Sara Myers, Treasurer's Office

Minutes

Dylan Giambatista called the meeting to order at 10:06 am.

Members of the working group briefly introduced themselves. Dylan Giambatista introduced Financial Literacy Commission member and Capstone Community Action employee Mary Niebling. He then briefly introduced the working group report draft and acknowledged that the report lacked examples and attachments for findings. He advised the group to expect to receive writeups of their respective departments' efforts on financial literacy. He also expressed a desire to further acknowledge partnerships and collaboration already taking place. Dylan Giambatista then asked for commentary from the working group members.

Conversation took place regarding the language on page 2: "Low or no collaboration causes inefficiencies, may lead to duplication of work, and may impact the ability of state government to effectively reach citizens." The group generally agreed that the phrase "low or no collaboration" should be changed to "inconsistent collaboration" to better reflect the partnerships currently taking place among State agencies and departments. Conversation also took place around unifying state messaging to improve effectiveness and outcomes.

Deb Carroll suggested recognizing that while challenges with communication are a problem, bringing together the working group is a step toward remedying this problem. The group generally agreed that this would be beneficial to include.

Discussion turned to the upcoming open enrollment period at Vermont Health Connect. Stephanie Brackin noted that she had received messaging materials as a member of the state marketing group. Seán Sheehan offered to send the messaging materials to working group members. Maura O'Brien added that materials on open enrollment are available on HR Connect.

Maura O'Brien suggested that the use of the word "inefficiencies" may not properly describe the consequences of inconsistent collaboration in financial literacy initiatives.

Dylan Giambatista shifted the conversation to address findings on the availability and use of funds for financial literacy. He suggested that he will have further conversations with leadership on the subject matter and recognized that most funds available in state government are earmarked for specific purposes. He added that we could take an inventory of state law around this topic but acknowledged a desire to respect the spending decisions of other departments and agencies.

Mary Niebling inquired about the Financial Literacy Trust Fund.

Dylan Giambatista gave a brief overview of the creation and use of the Financial Literacy Trust Fund. He noted that the funds contained in the Trust Fund were available for implementing financial education programs and are not used to fund salaries or wages of employees. He then inquired about the use of settlement money.

Chris Curtis summarized that all settlements (penalties) go to the general fund where they are appropriated by the legislature and that restitutions go to consumers impacted by the cause of the settlement.

Stephanie Brackin discussed a fund which has been held by DFR for approximately 12 years. She noted that DFR is working to use money in this fund for consumer education on fraud, banking, and insurance. The fund is composed of donations from securities companies as stipulated in a settlement agreement as a result of an enforcement action.

Dylan Giambatista then moved to recommendation #1 relating to regular working group meetings.

Seán Sheehan voiced his agreement with the consensus reached at the previous meeting that a combination of quarterly full group meetings and more frequent sub-group meetings for special projects would be an appropriate balance.

Dylan Giambatista then moved to recommendation #2 relating to the development of a working-group contact list.

Heather Pelham suggested that the language specifying that this would take place on email was too prescriptive. She suggested a centralized tool such as SharePoint might be useful for the group's purposes.

Maura O'Brien agreed with Heather Pelham's assessment.

Stephanie Brackin raised the concern that not all departments and agencies are currently using SharePoint.

Seán Sheehan added that access to SharePoint sites can be modified to fit various needs.

Mary Niebling asked for clarification whether this centralized resource would be private or publicly facing.

Dylan Giambatista clarified that the centralized resource currently under discussion would be private and that another goal is to develop a publicly facing resource.

Dylan Giambatista then moved onto recommendation #3 relating to standardized educational materials. He noted that the Treasurer requested that more structure be built around these recommendations, and this one specifically. He alluded to a workplan that would be discussed later in the meeting.

Lynette Kemp inquired about an approval process for these educational materials.

Dylan Giambatista agreed that there would be a need for structure, perhaps a committee approval process. He noted the need for such as process to be quick and cheap.

Mary Niebling asked who the audience for these resources would be.

Dylan Giambatista noted that these resources would be externally facing and available to whomever wants or needs them. He inquired of Mary Niebling her thoughts on how helpful such materials would be in her work and drew a parallel to CFPB materials.

Mary Niebling voiced her hope that such materials would utilize or refer to community resources and service providers.

Vincent Livoti voiced his opinion that state level resources would be helpful. He highlighted that the restructuring of the CFPB might impact the services they are able to offer moving forward.

Dylan Giambatista added that the CFPB's outreach activities were being impacted by this restructuring and may have changed.

Maura O'Brien noted that Vermonters have a higher level of trust in local resources and may appreciate receiving resources tailored to the state.

Dylan Giambatista added the need for community involvement in this process.

Seán Sheehan segued into recommendation #4 relating to the development of an up-to-date online financial literacy resource. He suggested that a first step may be to share state, federal, and community resources. He added that pages could include dates of when they were last updated.

Stephanie Brackin confirmed that we were now discussing two different sets of resources: internal and external.

Seán Sheehan suggested that the content would be similar for internal and external resources, however, the delivery would be different.

The group considered whether it would be helpful to categorize the recommendations based on whether they were internal or external in nature.

Dylan Giambatista summarized the last meeting's discussion on website development and maintenance. He suggested that resources such as this are often housed by state financial regulators or treasurers.

Seán Sheehan inquired of Mary about the consistency of community organizations.

Mary Niebling informed the group that while employees of community resources change, the resources themselves are consistent.

Dylan Giambatista moved on to recommendation #5 relating to coordinated outreach efforts.

Mary Niebling discussed anticipating upcoming events, such as tax season, and planning for them ahead of time in coordinating outreach efforts.

The group discussed current outreach opportunities such as financial literacy day at the statehouse and the America Saves campaign.

Mary Niebling shared her view that these events are currently poorly coordinated.

Dylan Giambatista commented on increasing turnout to events taking place.

Maura O'Brien reminded the group that while turnout may not be as strong in some areas, it is important to cover all regions of the state. She suggested meeting people where they already are such as libraries and senior centers to drive turnout.

Vincent Livoti mentioned some challenges that exist with working with rural libraries, noting that some are seasonal or have limited hours of operation.

Tracy Verge added that the Department of Labor will be in the Northeast Kingdom for an event shortly.

Deborah Carroll suggested developing partnerships around events that departments are already participating in.

Seán Sheehan added that partnership could be logistically helpful in staffing long events.

Martha Deiss noted that the recommendations presented in the report draft do not address education. She discussed the role of schools in educating parents and families through students.

Dylan Giambatista agreed that the report would need to highlight the Agency of Education's work on financial literacy.

Maura O'Brien inquired of Martha Deiss about the use of email for communication with parents.

Martha Deiss described the variety of means of communications used including email, auto phone, and tangible materials, noting that not all parents have internet at home.

Vincent Livoti mentioned the use of the opensource resource LiveBinders.

Stephanie Brackin commented on the challenge of overwhelming parents with communications.

Chris Curtis discussed targeting populations where they are, such as using AHS and WIC waiting rooms, targeting reach-up families, and training counselors/case managers.

Seán Sheehan offered to follow up with Paul Dragon on this subject. He commented on consistency of resources at district offices.

Mary Niebling discussed Capstone's work training Reach Up officers during orientation. She also noted the pattern of low-income individuals using paid tax preparers due to the advantage of receiving some of their tax return immediately, albeit at a cost.

Tracy Verge mentioned that the Department of Labor trains case managers across the state on the CFPB's Your Money, Your Goals.

Chris Curtis suggested that he would like to see incentives for good money management, such as the voluntary use of vendor payments for housing costs. He suggested that the cost of such incentives may be offset by savings from prevented legal issues resolving late payments.

Dylan Giambatista agreed that regularly addressing policy ideas would be helpful.

Dylan Giambatista then passed around the workplan drafted by Stephanie Brackin.

Stephanie Brackin introduced the purpose of the workplan, citing the Treasurer's request that plans be developed to accomplish the recommendations put forward in the Report Draft.

Seán Sheehan noted that he thought the workplan includes the right content. He requested that performance measures and policy suggestions be included as standalone recommendations in the report.

The meeting adjourned at 11:32 am.