

FINANCIAL COUNSELING KIT OF IDEAS



We embarked on this project to address the challenge of client retention in the field of financial empowerment. As an outcome of our Co-Design and ideation sessions, we co-created a large repository of ideas.

Place, Space
& Identity

Wayfinding

Supporting
Counselors

Finance as
Wellness

The ideas were organized based on four areas of opportunity that they address. Click through all four opportunity areas to read about each idea.



Financial Empowerment Center Live



Popup Financial Empowerment Center



Storytelling Events



Training Community Ambassador



Let clients see what's being recorded



Financial Empowerment Center Live

A symposium dinner with clients, counselors, and OFE

What

Invite a diverse group of current and former clients, counselors, OFE, and others to a live “symposium” dinner that is documented documentary-style.



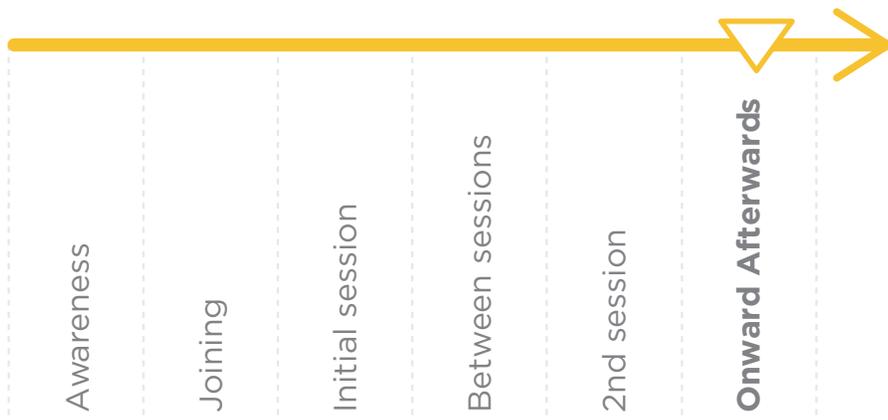
Why

Engage community and document conversations around Financial Empowerment Centers, documentation can serve as testimonials and way finding for current and future clients.

We can also combine this with the video shoot. Rather than one on one interviews, the conversational format helps show that Financial Empowerment Centers listen to and respond to the needs of community and clients.

When

Service Timeline



How



We ask questions such as: What does financial empowerment mean to you? How has the Financial Empowerment Centers improved your financial life?



Cheerleaders
by creating assets (quotes, images, videos, etc.) that can be shared online.



We can use conversation-starting cards inspired by Tankeapoteket, as we did during counselor training at 4 World Trade.

Popup Financial Empowerment Center

Financial Empowerment Center on the Go

What

How might we bring Financial Empowerment Centers to new spaces that meet clients where they are? This could be through pop up spaces and a mobile Financial Empowerment Centers truck that allows us to test different concepts.

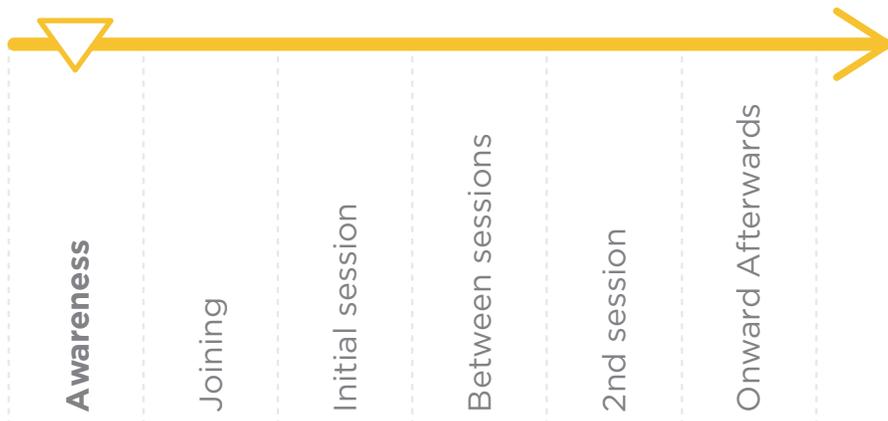


Why

Our research has shown the importance of providing a positive physical experience for Financial Empowerment Centers clients. This also connects to the design insight of meeting clients where they are. Due to limitations inherent in 3rd party partners' spaces, doing a popup or mobile Financial Empowerment Centers would give us more control over the experience of the spaces we are prototyping.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: Conduct a short-term pilot in an existing space such as a café or barbershop to test the idea of having Financial Empowerment Center counselors in more unconventional spaces.



Medium scale intervention: Prototype spatial and experiential elements that optimize for client comfort and provide amenities like child care. Or pilot a mobile Financial Empowerment Center truck that can drive and set up in different underserved neighborhoods.



Large scale intervention: Create an independent stand-alone permanent space that serves as an Financial Empowerment Center flagship space.

What

Organize programming to introduce Financial Empowerment Centers to neighbors, share stories from counselors and clients, and share former client testimonials.



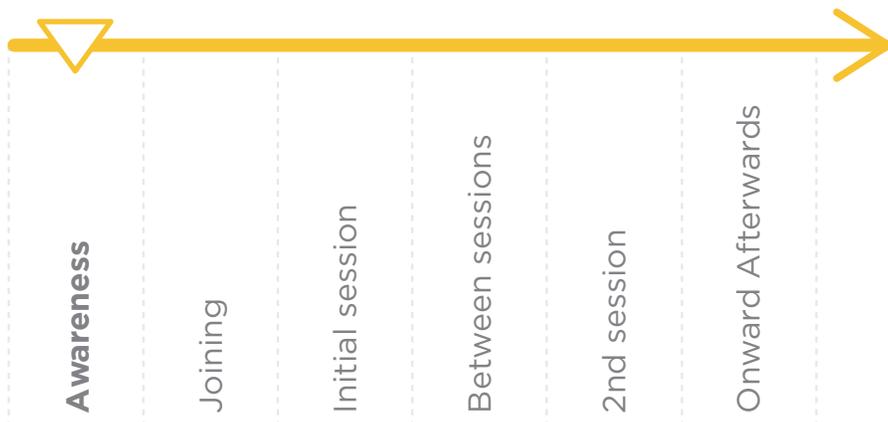
Why

More than marketing, storytelling events are meant to help shift the culture around discussing finances. For those sharing stories, it provides an opportunity for empowerment and shaping one's own narrative, helping to extend "stickiness" and impact of the Financial Empowerment Center service in people's lives.

For those hearing stories who don't yet have an Financial Empowerment Center experience, the events help engage and prepare them for a successful first engagement with an Financial Empowerment Center, enhancing the chances for commitment and repeat sessions.

When

Service Timeline



How



Community experience sharing

What

Organize trainings for peer mentors, educators, and community ambassadors to develop their skills and support one another. These events might be paired with storytelling events as well.

Why

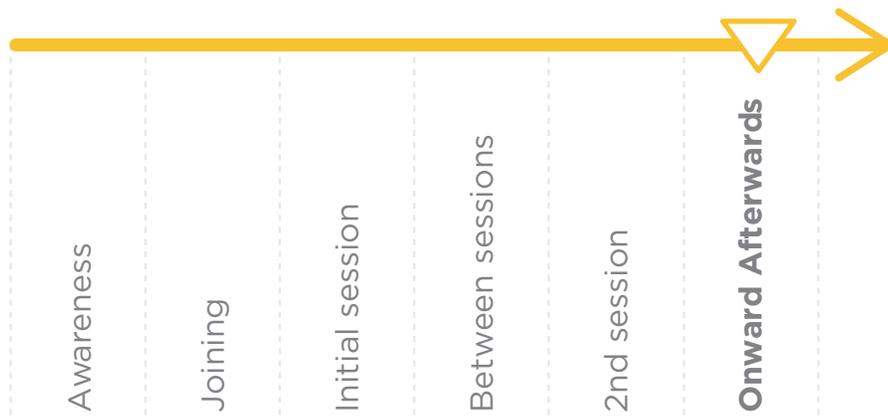
Counselors have mentioned repeatedly that one of the most effective referral channels for new clients is referrals from past or existing clients.

By hosting training events, we can empower community members as knowledgeable local residents, bolster the referral pipeline, and create additional community supports for clients once they've begun counseling.



When

Service Timeline



How



Medium scale intervention:

A dedicated, periodic training and shareback session for superstar clients, positive deviants, established community leaders (e.g., church, community board, neighborhood association folks), and aspiring community ambassadors.

Let clients see what's being recorded

What

Allow clients to see which pieces of their information are being recorded in ETO.

(This shouldn't necessarily extend to session notes.)



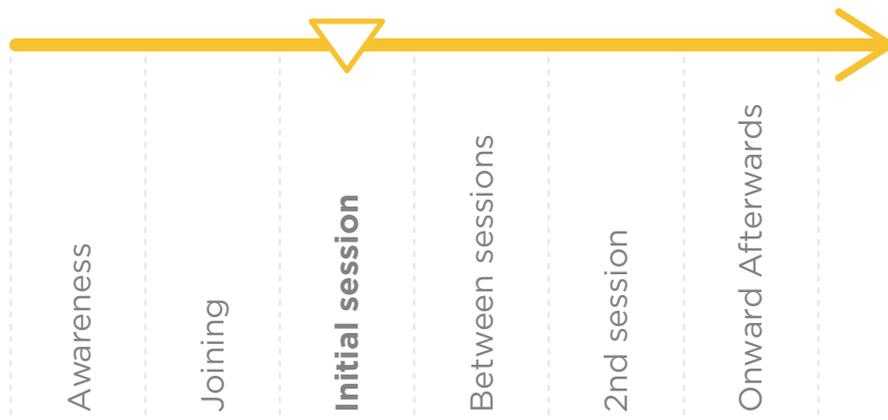
Why

Especially in an initial session, a measure of transparency helps to build trust between counselors and clients. Screens visible only to counselors can be alienating, and allowing clients to see what's being recorded is a way of balancing counselors' need to collect a fair amount of data in a session with the need to build rapport and illuminate the process for clients.

A frame of reference here is the screen that displays your receipt in the checkout line at the grocery store.

When

Service Timeline



How



Medium scale intervention:

A dedicated, periodic training and shareback session for superstar clients, positive deviants, established community leaders (e.g., church, community board, neighborhood association folks), and aspiring community ambassadors.



Video Orientation



Preview Financial Empowerment Center Space Experience



Showcase predefined action plans based on types of issues



Map of the journey from here to there for clients



3-Visit Punchcard



Folder/Binder/Kit for clients to organize their information



New extensible system of websites



What

This intervention could work well in both the Hub and on the new website.

The video will explain the work of the Financial Empowerment Centers and feature counselors from that site/Hub.

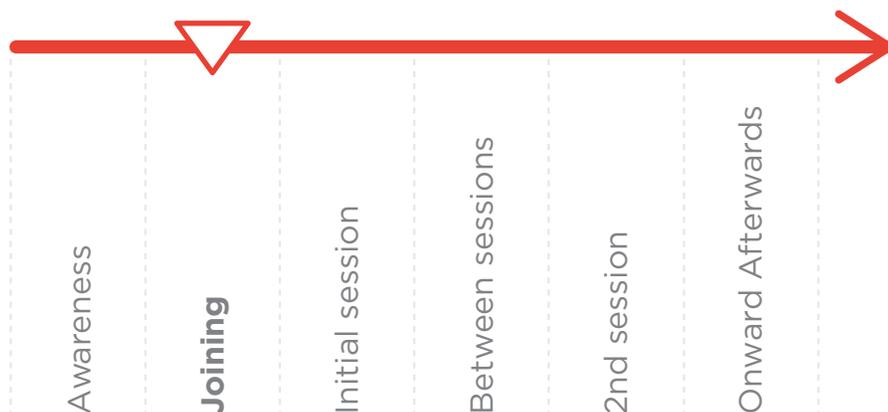


Why

A video offers helpful wayfinding for users of the Financial Empowerment Center service. It lets them know what to expect in their first session.

When

Service Timeline



How



Waiting area

It might be a good idea to play it in the waiting area, or we may want it to be available “on-demand” at self-service kiosks.



We may want to text a link to the video

to clients as a part of the initial appointment scheduling process.

Preview Financial Empowerment Center

Space Experience

What

Add Financial Empowerment Center location info to the new Financial Empowerment Center website. This info can include maps, very context-specific directions (“across the street from the Subway restaurant”) and perhaps include counselor profiles.



Why

We have identified wayfinding as an issue for some of the Financial Empowerment Center sites in 3rd party locations. Clients often have to enter buildings and go up elevators without explicit Financial Empowerment Center signage on the outside.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: Add simple photographs and written instructions on the existing Financial Empowerment Center site to help clients find their way.



Medium scale intervention: Send clients a text message or email with the wayfinding directions when they register.



Large scale intervention: Provide 360 degree “street view” online to help clients find their way.

Showcase predefined action plans

based on types of issues

What

Publish generalized action plans that are based on a given set of issues. These action plans can live on the Financial Empowerment Center website (under a “Your First Meeting” heading, perhaps?) as well as printed materials in the Financial Empowerment Center.



Why

We can help to anchor client expectations of the service by providing examples of the service in action. Top-line marketing messages ought to focus on the outputs (e.g., “I was able to build an emergency saving fund”) and outcomes (e.g., “I didn’t have to go into debt when my son had an asthma attack”), but, once clients are at or preparing to visit the Financial Empowerment Center, it’s helpful to preview the types of activities they will be undertaking.

Grouping indicative action plan steps in this way can help set clients’ about the number and flow of meetings they may need to address their individual issues.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: Create indicative activity flows for popular issues areas, such as identifying, verifying, and consolidating debts, or clearing up rent arrears.



Medium / Large scale intervention: Have the OFE data team examine past client data to identify clusters of milestones completed and outcomes realized that map to pre-identified issue areas. Then let create action plans and circulate to partners.

Map of the journey

From here to there for clients

What

Design a visual tool for clients to help them understand the elements of financial empowerment and the journey to get there. The financial equivalent to the food pyramid.

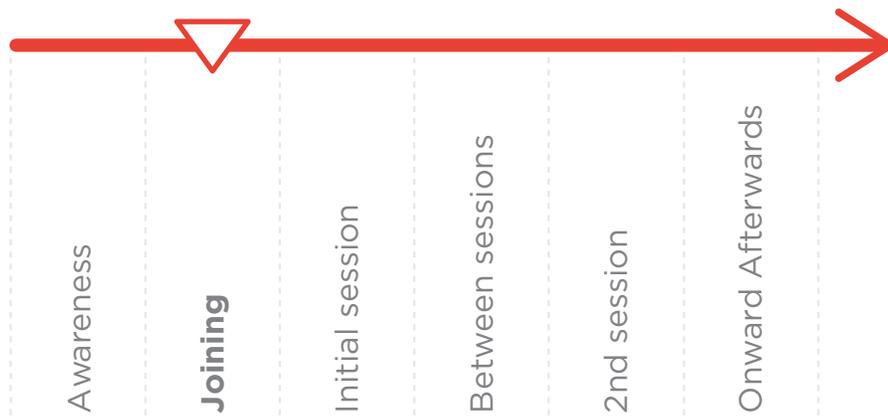


Why

Wayfinding. Clients need greater clarity in understanding how the steps that they take with counselors in individual sessions correspond to the resolution of the issues that they present.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: A sheet of paper with predefined fields for a client's presenting issue (one map per major issue), the client's self-articulated goal, and at least two intermediate steps along the way toward realizing this goal (undertaken in subsequent meetings).



Medium scale intervention: A printed binder/folder or "toolkit" to help clients organize and plan their finances, with links to online videos, calculators, or other resources.



Large scale intervention: A plan that lives online that allows clients to check in on their progress and see where they are in their journey. This map lives within the online interface [link] as well.

What

Design and distribute a physical “punchcard” (business card sized) with blanks for 3 visits. The card would also contain counselor contact information. At the end of 3 completed visits, provide some sort of incentive or deal for returning clients.



Why

Provides explicit signal (wayfinding) to clients that Financial Empowerment Center sessions are part of a “program” or “commitment” of at least 3 visits.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: Design and test a small physical printed card. (See attached sketch for illustration of idea)



Medium scale intervention: Negotiate partnership deals with banks, credit unions, brands, etc. to offer deals and specials for loyal Financial Empowerment Center clients.



Large scale intervention: Create a digital app equivalent of the membership card that syncs with deals and promotional specials.

Folder/Binder/Kit

For clients to organize their information

What

Produce accordion folders so that clients can keep track of their action plans, financial and legal documents, etc. These materials can be branded, and they can include site-specific (e.g., location, hours, phone number) and counselor information, punch cards, service roadmaps, and other tools.



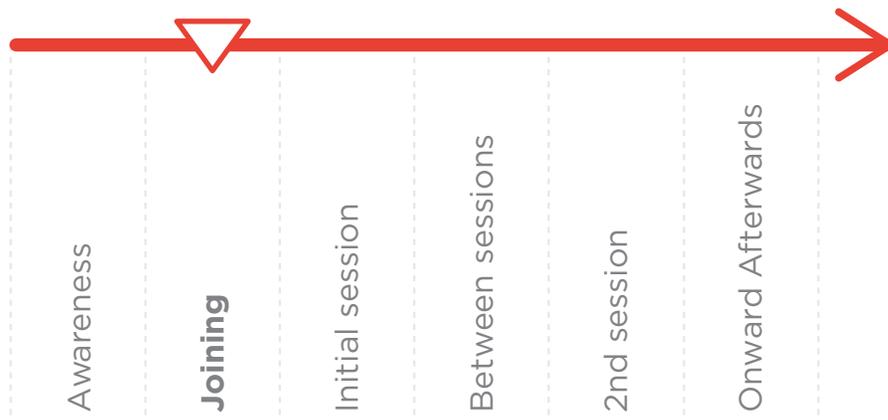
Why

We can make it easier for clients to be prepared for their sessions, and this increased level of preparation may help to decrease the high no-show rates.

Financial troubles can seem overwhelming, and the simple act of organizing information can help to reduce the clients' stress and increase autonomy.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: File folders.



Medium scale intervention: Durable, branded folios/accordion folders with internal organization.

New extensible system of websites

To explain the Financial Empowerment Center service

What

Create a new website for the Financial Empowerment Centers that explains their role and services. This site would have a rebranded service name (perhaps “Your Money;” “yourmoney.nyc”), streamlined visual branding, service descriptions, Financial Empowerment Center site locations, and counselor profiles.



Why

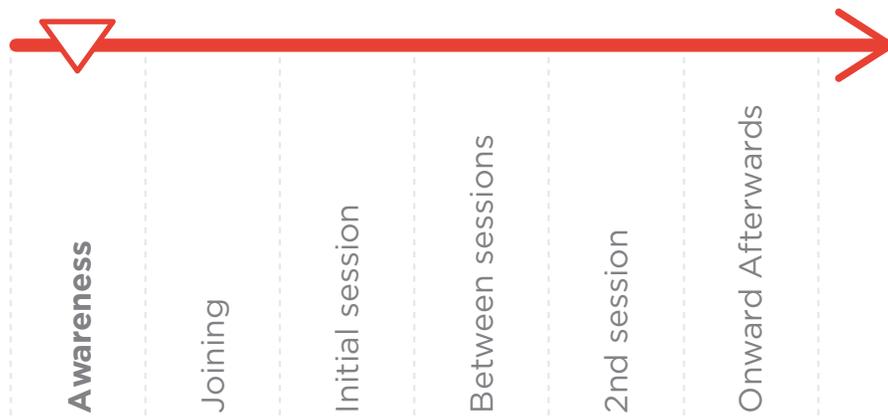
Allows for an extensible brand umbrella in two distinct ways:

- 1) Extends to other cities very neatly (e.g., yourmoney.philly, etc.)
- 2) “yourmoney” is more inclusive than “financial empowerment center”.

National portal that serves as a vehicle for attracting funding for Financial Empowerment Center’s work model at national level.

When

Service Timeline



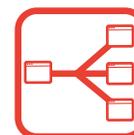
How



Small scale intervention: A NYC-oriented, largely static site that includes service descriptions, outcomes, and wayfinding (literal: maps, addresses, contact info for sites; figurative: what to expect, indicative action plans, FAQs, counselor profiles).



Medium scale intervention: A NYC-oriented site with additional interactive elements, such as a client self-scheduling.



Large scale intervention: A national portal for Financial Empowerment Centers everywhere that links to different .[city] domains that serves to highlight their work, share counselor and program practices behind-the-scenes.



Counselor Profiles



Online Chat/Forum for Financial Empowerment Center Counselors



Lapel Pin

What

Post photos and bios of Financial Empowerment Center counselors online.

Why

Provide context/wayfinding for clients before their first session.

Highlight counselors as protagonists in the service to build credibility/rapport with clients. “Humanize” what may be perceived as a “faceless” government service.



When

Service Timeline



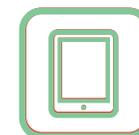
How



Small scale intervention: Gather photos and bios of current Financial Empowerment Center counselors. Add to current Financial Empowerment Center page on DCA site.



Medium scale intervention: Short “video headshot” introductions to present the counselors. Allow potential clients to see counselor availability and make appointments directly online.



Large scale intervention: “Tinder for Counselors” - provide functionality to match clients with counselors based on approach and personality. Create a ratings/ review system like Yelp for counselors.

Online Chat/Forum

For Financial Empowerment Center Counselors

What

Online forum/chat platform to connect Financial Empowerment Center counselors across vendors to share knowledge and to provide support for difficult situations.



Why

While counselors value having regular in-person trainings, an online platform to connect them would provide more on-going and real-time support to promote a sense of knowledge sharing and constant learning.

When

Service Timeline



How



Online Networks

What

Create a branded pin or name tag for Financial Empowerment Center counselors to wear while at work. Helps clients identify counselors. Helps foster sense of professional identity among counselors, signal brand affiliation without a uniform, and could balance the relative lack of control over the branding/ experience of physical spaces.



Why

The pin would be a small symbol of professional identity pride for Financial Empowerment Center counselors (Supporting Counselors) and provide a sense of visual branding and wayfinding for clients, especially in locations in which we do not have control over the decor or architecture of Financial Empowerment Center sites.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small / Medium scale intervention:

We could experiment with just a small subtle pin or we could also include the counselor's name, languages they speak, and/or a call to action such as "ask me about..."



Spending Journal



Curriculum for Kids in Financial Empowerment Centers



Streamline background information-gathering



Build in more scope for client feedback on services



Peer Mentorship Program

What

Current spending journal is bland/call to action is boring. It only asks for dollar amounts. Proposal to encourage clients to fill out spending journal with questions such as “This purchase made me feel...” “I bought this because...” or using a sticker system of previously mentioned icons to highlight purchases that align and don’t align with values.



Why

Spending decisions are a mixture of rational needs assessment, responses to external events, and expressions of emotional needs. Our observation has found that some clients have trouble remembering dollar amounts in their budget, so a journal would allow them to capture and save this information. We have also found that counselors are most effective at making budgetary interventions with their clients if they dig into the emotional and other motivations behind their spending habits.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: A new worksheet to incorporate quantitative (dollar amount) and qualitative (emotional trigger) data for client spending.



Large scale intervention: A web/mobile application that does what the small idea does, but with interactivity and reminders.

What

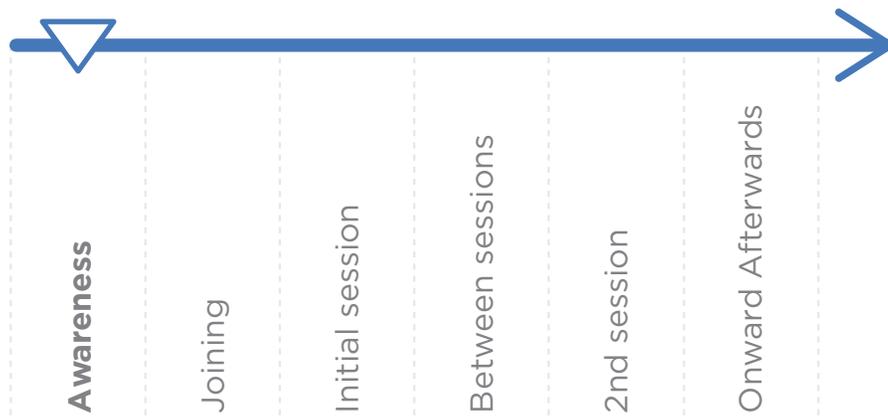
Start them young. Design Financial Empowerment Center-branded financial education curriculum aimed at students.

Why

Counselors have described their role as both education and problem solving for their clients. If we introduced concepts of financial literacy and empowerment at an earlier stage, could it serve as “preventative medicine” for financial problems down the line? Having Financial Empowerment Center branded curriculum also brings the Financial Empowerment Center brand to new and younger audiences, so they know where to turn in case they need help later.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small / Medium / Large scale intervention:

This idea could be prototyped with as little as a simple worksheet for kids to work on/color/ fill out when their parents go to an Financial Empowerment Center appointment (sort of like a children’s coloring menu at a restaurant). It could be expanded to a full downloadable curriculum or online/offline blended course.

Streamline background information-gathering

What

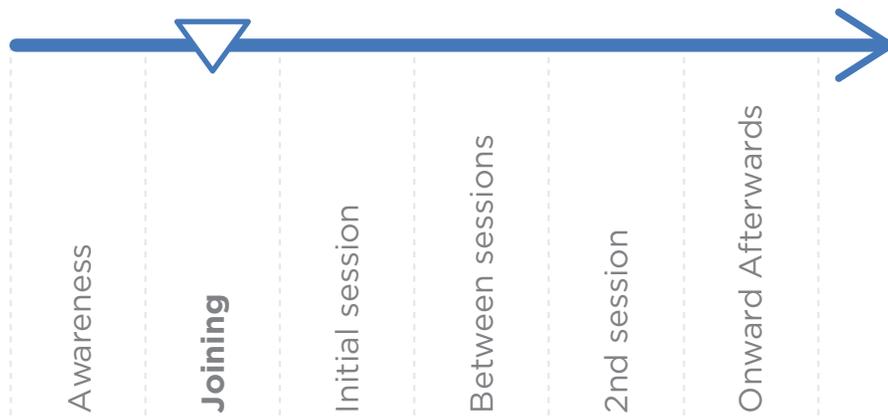
Collect intake data in the waiting rooms of the Financial Empowerment Centers, leaving more session time for work on clients' issues.

Why

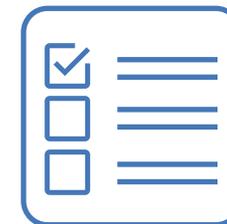
Roughly half of the initial session is spent on data collection, and this use of time risks eroding trust between counselors and clients because counselors may appear less interesting in resolving client issues, rather than focusing on addressing the issues presented by the clients.

When

Service Timeline



How



Collect client's information

What

What might a client communication channel look like to feed into programmatic understandings of neighborhood needs? What would a “listening mechanism” for community needs/engagement look like?

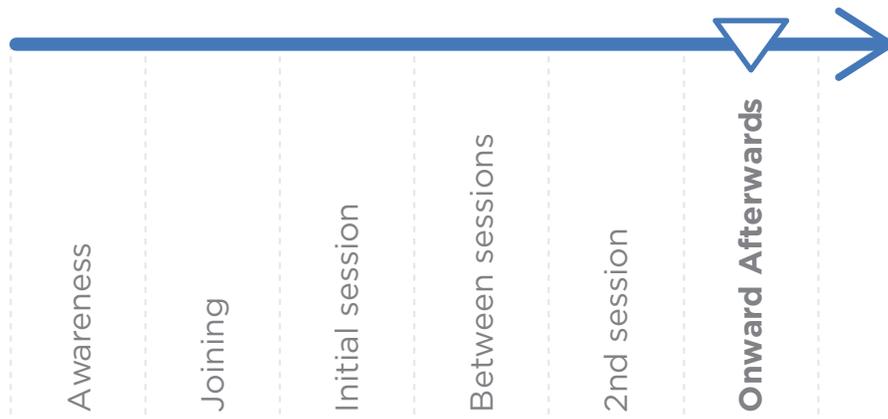


Why

Clients don't currently have many options for sharing their thoughts on their individual sessions or what they perceive as their community's needs.

When

Service Timeline



How



Small scale intervention: Comment cards?



Large scale intervention: Online feedback?

What

Develop peer-to-peer programming that allows Financial Empowerment Centers clients to support each other and share stories. Leverage social dynamics to parallel gym buddy-style accountability and camaraderie.

This idea intersects with community trainings, storytelling events, and group counseling.

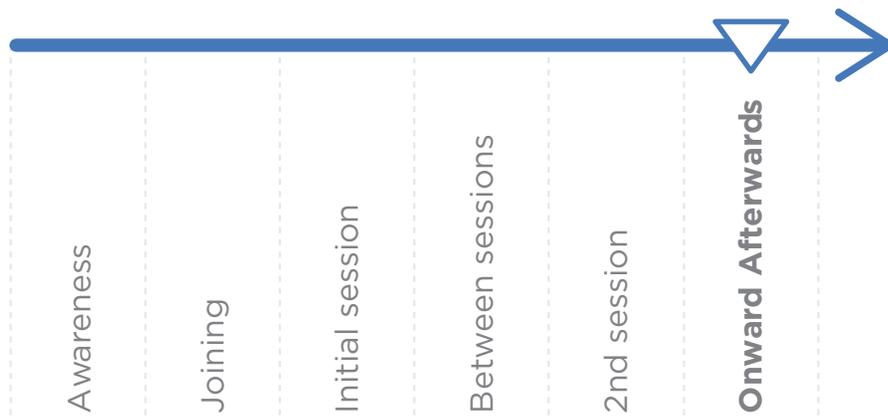


Why

We've seen a couple of examples of clients supporting one another through peer groups, family networks, and referrals. These social supports help to broaden and entrench motivation.

When

Service Timeline



How



Community Networks

Additional Ideas

1. More Libraries, Fewer Courthouses
2. Explore Feasibility of New Site Partners
3. Revisit “what counts” as a session
4. Implement consistent visual branding and guidelines for FEC site selection
5. Allow call center staff more flexible booking options
6. Neighborhood financial health indicators dashboard powered by ETO
7. Local Business Partnerships
8. Allow call-center staff to perform more information-gathering over the phone to permit more initial appointment time for client issues
9. SMS-based conversational interfaces for appointment scheduling
10. Virtual scheduling assistants for each counselor
11. Branding: Develop a six-word description of the FEC service
12. Rotating savings pool for clients working on asset-building
13. Budgeting tool that pulls in client spending, like Personal Capital or Mint
14. Add engagement milestones that counselors can use to track client interactions
15. Regular appointment reminders, especially in the time between scheduling the initial appointment and attending the session
16. SMS after initial visit to thank clients for attending and express excitement about working together
17. Vimeo channel for counselors with role-play scenarios and comment threads
18. Text messages alerts for appointments, homework reminders, etc.
19. Community-Based Content Strategy - Get Earned Social Media and Reviews from Clients



**DESIGNING
FOR FINANCIAL
EMPOWERMENT**