

Research

The Role of Extension Service in Financial Literacy Programming: A Needs Assessment

Troy Anthony Anderson, Ed.D.
Deon Littles, Ed.D.
University of Maryland Extension

Abstract

This study examines the role of extension service in enhancing financial literacy programming within rural Calvert County, Maryland. By employing a mixed methods approach, the study assesses financial literacy needs among community stakeholders (n=160). The findings highlight significant gaps in basic financial knowledge, particularly budgeting and credit management. By integrating qualitative insights with quantitative data, the study underscores the potential for tailored financial programming, such as a “financial wellness series.” It further advocates for leveraging technology and interactivity among stakeholders to improve programs. Emphasizing the importance of ongoing evaluation, the study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to foster financial independence and resilience in rural communities.

Introduction

Financial literacy is increasingly recognized as a vital component of economic stability and personal well-being, particularly in rural communities like Calvert County, Maryland. As the financial economy evolves, individuals face complex decisions, involving budgeting and credit management (Nguyen, 2024). Therefore, comprehensive financial literacy programs are essential for equipping people with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate these challenges effectively (Lusardi et al., 2025). This is especially true for rural populations, where access to financial resources and educational opportunities may be limited. Addressing these challenges requires innovative solutions, such as offering a Cooperative Extension financial program.

According to Mull (2023), the Smith-Lever Act significantly broadened USDA's partnerships, establishing the Cooperative Extension Service in 4-H, Agriculture, and Home Economics (now Family & Consumer Sciences), fostering collaboration and growth in these fields. The University of Maryland Extension services deliver financial literacy programs in underserved communities comprising, single-parent families, minority groups, first-generation college youth, and the

elderly that have a pressing need for increased financial education due to a lack of resources, opportunities, and services. These programs can effectively reach community members by providing tailored content on budgeting, saving, and managing debt, which are critical skills for fostering economic resilience. The content addresses local needs, such as access to workshops on budgeting, savings, and resources for understanding credit and debt management, and personalized guidance on navigating financial systems for improved economic stability. Considering Maryland's demographic composition and unequal distribution of wealth, income, and services due to socioeconomic factors affecting low-income residents, extension services offer a potential solution to bridge the gap by fostering community resilience and economic self-sufficiency through financial education.

Rural communities like Calvert County face distinct challenges that impact financial literacy levels. These include geographic isolation, limited access to financial institutions, and fewer educational resources compared to urban areas (Lusardi et al., 2025). Additionally, demographic factors, such as lower educational attainment and income disparities, are prevalent. Research conducted by Gunarathna and Dias (2023) highlights significant financial literacy gaps among women, minorities, and individuals with lower education, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions. Despite these challenges, technological advancements present new opportunities for financial literacy. Digital platforms and mobile applications can deliver interactive learning experiences to broader audiences, making financial literacy more accessible (Ansar et al., 2023). For Calvert County residents, the use of basic technology for example access to internet, digital literacy and training, computers and tablets could enhance the reach and effectiveness of financial programming, ensuring that even the most remote residents gain access to vital financial skills.

The literature underscores the crucial role of financial literacy in empowering individuals to

make smart financial choices and highlights the possibility of behavior change through targeted educational interventions. However, there are challenges to ensuring the effectiveness and reach of these programs, particularly in rural settings (Willis, 2021). As a result, it is imperative to understand the specific context and challenges faced by rural communities like Calvert County in developing effective financial literacy programs. Additionally, by placing this study within a broader framework, we can better appreciate the role of extension services in promoting financial independence and resilience, ultimately contributing to a more financially literate society capable of navigating future economic challenges.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to assess and enhance financial literacy in Calvert County, Maryland by leveraging the resources and outreach of Cooperative Extension Services. By conducting a needs assessment, the study sought to identify the financial knowledge gaps and strengths among residents and organizations, with the aim of fostering a financially resilient rural community. This initiative supports the land-grant university mission by tailoring extension programming to meet the specific financial education needs of underserved populations in rural areas via the field of Family and Consumer Sciences.

Goal and Objectives

The overarching goal of this study is to develop and expand innovative financial literacy programs that address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by rural residents in Calvert County, ultimately strengthening their financial well-being and resilience. The objectives for the study include:

1. Conduct a financial needs assessment among residents, local agencies, and community organizations to identify gaps in financial knowledge, behaviors, and available resources.
2. Evaluate existing extension programming in financial literacy within the county to determine effectiveness, accessibility, and areas for enhancement.

3. Engage community stakeholders - including residents, educators, nonprofit leaders, and local government in structured discussions to understand their financial education priorities and challenges.
4. Develop data-driven, culturally relevant financial literacy programs that respond to the specific needs of rural populations.
5. Establish partnerships with local institutions (i.e., schools, libraries, health facilities) to broaden the reach of extension services.
6. Measure program outcomes related to knowledge gain, behavior change, and self-reported improvements in financial confidence and decision-making.
7. Create a scalable model that can be used to replicate successful programming in other rural communities across the state.

Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively assess the financial needs of families in Calvert County, Maryland. This dual approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of complex issues related to financial literacy among community members. The qualitative component focused on understanding participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with extension services. The qualitative analysis was grounded in two theoretical frameworks: Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism and Marx's Conflict Theory. These frameworks were chosen for their complementary ability to explore individual and systemic influences on financial literacy.

Based on the relationships among individuals within society, symbolic interactionism provided a lens for how participants interact and experiences extension programs that shapes their understanding of financial concepts. For example, during in-depth interviews, participants often described learning about budgeting through role-playing exercises and group discussions. These activities allowed participants to engage actively with financial scenarios such as case studies on financial pitfalls, debt management, handling finances in family, saving and spending habits, thereby constructing meaning and internalizing

financial concepts through social interaction. This approach highlighted how participants used symbols (i.e., money, budgets) to negotiate and understand their financial reality, underscoring the importance of interactive and experiential learning strategies to enhance programming (See Appendices: Figure 1).

Conflict theory was utilized to explore the socio-economic factors that influenced learning readiness and access to financial literacy. By examining the power dynamics and resource distribution within Calvert County, Maryland, this framework provided insights into the barriers faced by underserved groups. For instance, the study found that participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds expressed concerns about limited access to financial resources such as government benefits and assistance, community development, financial institutions and non-profit educational assistance. These findings were interpreted through the lens of conflict theory, which posits that economic disparities can hinder access to knowledge and perpetuate financial insecurity. The need for extension intervention to close the financial literacy gap among marginalized populations facing systemic disadvantages and inequitable treatment limiting access to opportunities, resources, and societal benefits is supported by conflict theory.

The study was reviewed and approved by the University of Maryland, Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that it adheres to ethical standards and protects the rights and welfare of participants. The IRB approval number is [IRB NetID 2048655-1], and the study complied with all applicable federal and institutional regulations regarding human subject research. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits, and their consent was obtained prior to participation. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Participants. The study employed purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of stakeholders by deliberately selecting individuals or groups that embody a wide range of perspectives and experiences relevant to the study's objectives. This process aided in capturing a more comprehensive understanding of the community's needs, leading to more effective and inclusive outcomes related to financial

literacy and extension services. The participant group consisted of 160 stakeholders from extension services, county agencies, university students, teachers and government offices (n=160). This diverse pool of participants enabled the study to explore the multifaceted roles of extension services in financial programming within the community (See Appendices: Table 1).

Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.

For this study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected stakeholders to gain insights into their experiences and perceptions of financial services (See Appendices: Table 2). The interviews highlighted varying community needs, challenges, and program impact. Conversely, the quantitative aspect of the study utilized structured surveys to collect data on participants' pre and post financial literacy levels, engagement with existing programs, and perceived barriers to financial wellness such as budgeting, managing expenses, saving, and managing debt. This quantitative data allowed for a comprehensive analysis of trends and patterns, which complemented the qualitative findings. Together, these methodological approaches facilitated a detailed understanding of the community's financial literacy needs, highlighting both strengths and areas for development within extension services. The results underscored the potential for tailored financial programming that addresses the diverse needs of Calvert County's population, ultimately contributing to enhanced financial independence and resilience.

Data Collection. A survey was conducted to inform the literature review and previous research findings. To ensure the survey's validity and reliability, it was peer-reviewed by other Extension Agents, enhancing its credibility and applicability. Recognizing the diverse linguistic needs of the community, the survey was made available in both English and Spanish, ensuring accessibility for a broader audience. The survey comprised 15 carefully structured questions, categorized into demographic inquiries and scaled items. These sections were crafted to capture a detailed understanding of participants' financial literacy levels, demographic characteristics, and overall experiences within extension services. The scaling items allowed respondents to express the degree of their agreement or experience, while the

demographic section gathered essential background information.

To select participants for the four (4) focus groups consisting of five (5) persons ($n=40$), a purposive sampling method was employed, which allowed for the inclusion of diverse voices in the data collection. The analysis for the completed questionnaires provided a full picture of the levels and interest of participants financial literacy. Data analysis collected from participants prioritized content using descriptive statistics and mean scores (See Appendices: Figure 2). Additionally, the interview results were used to identify preferred delivery methods by ranking them according to the percentage of participant preference (See Appendices: Figure 3).

Results

The study highlights a pressing demand for financial education among Calvert County residents, underscoring the critical role extension services can play in fostering financial literacy and encouraging behavioral change. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study gathered data to inform the development of responsive programming. The survey included Likert scale responses that were statistically analyzed to assess financial knowledge and preferences (see Appendices: Table 4). A notable eighty-one percent of participants expressed a clear need for basic financial literacy, indicating a substantial knowledge gap in key areas such as budgeting, saving, and understanding credit. Although most participants reported incomes above the federal poverty level, which in 2025 is approximately \$15,650 for an individual and \$31,150 for a family of four. Many still lacked fundamental budgeting skills. This disparity highlights that financial vulnerability can exist even in households not classified as impoverished by age, race, education, employment, and or income alone. These findings suggest a strong need for extension programs offering hands-on workshops in practical financial skills such as budgeting, expense tracking, and financial planning. Case studies and simulations can be gradually introduced to ease experiential learning in an effort to merge program delivery.

Findings

In-depth interviews and focus groups provided deeper, contextual insights into community perceptions and lived financial experiences. Several recurring themes emerged: (1) A need for monthly budgeting assistance and basic savings strategies, (2) Interest in youth financial literacy programs, (3) Requests for one-on-one, in-office consultations to better understand and improve credit scores, and (4) A desire for guidance in credit management, home ownership preparation, and debt reduction.

These findings underscore the community's desire for practical, accessible, and supportive financial education that aligns with real-life challenges for a variety of family structure and household sizes. The integration of quantitative data and qualitative insights supports the development of a comprehensive, community-informed curriculum. This curriculum will be tailored to the specific financial literacy needs of Calvert County residents and delivered through experiential and interactive methods via in-person, online, and hybrid formats. Potential initiatives include: (1) Youth financial literacy programs in partnership with schools and community centers, (2) Budgeting and credit management workshops for adults and families, and (3) Financial coaching and consultation sessions with local Extension Agents.

Connecting extension programs to community needs, dramatically improve economic stability that provides basic needs access and financial strength for future planning. On a broader scale, the study offers actionable insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and Extension leaders. As emphasized by Ansar, Klapper, and Singer (2023), community financial literacy is fundamental to economic security. Policymakers can use this data to advocate for increased funding and policy support for local extension financial education initiatives. Partnerships with local businesses, banks, credit unions, and nonprofit organizations can enhance programming by incorporating real-world financial tools and case studies. These collaborative efforts would not only broaden the scope of services but also ensure the sustainability and relevance of extension

programming. The results and findings from this study validate the high demand for financial literacy education in Calvert County, Maryland.

Summary & Discussion

The study examined the role of extension services in enhancing financial literacy programming within rural Calvert County emphasizing the benefits of educational programs offered by extension services. Lusardi et al. (2025) posits that engaging families in workshops and educational settings significantly helps them develop a financial mindset, crucial for their financial well-being. As a result, the findings from this study aligns with the existing literature highlighting the importance of financial literacy. While the study had many strengths, it also had a few limitations. The cross-sectional study showed a correlation between financial literacy and program success, it lacked the longitudinal data to establish causality, meaning further research is required to verify long-term effects. The diversity of perspectives in the community made quantifying individual needs challenging, suggesting that the study's snapshot may not fully capture evolving needs. And lastly, the rural geographic focus limits generalizability to urban or suburban areas where financial literacy needs differ.

To enhance impact, several recommendations are proposed. Policymakers can seek to advocate for integrating financial literacy competencies into core curricula for all school districts. Practitioners like Extension Agents should incorporate interactive content and digital advancements, such as mobile apps, to broaden program reach and effectiveness (Ansar, Klapper, & Singer, 2023). Additionally, conducting a needs assessment or utilizing a program evaluation design in rural settings can potentially offer insights into extension services' roles in program development. While rural contexts provide specific insights, urban research could reveal different outcomes if the study is replicated in a larger city driven by advanced technology.

Future research should explore the scalability of financial literacy programs across regions and demographic groups. Longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into sustained impacts on financial behaviors and decision-making between participants living beneath or above one's means. Examining the interplay between technology and traditional methods could further optimize program delivery with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). Ultimately, ongoing evaluation and adaptation of extension services are imperative to maintain relevance and effectiveness. While this study focused on Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agents delivering financial education, 4-H, Agriculture, and other extension services could also serve as a vehicle to provide financial literacy programs. Additionally, incorporating technology, and tailoring interventions to community needs, financial literacy can be fostered across communities, promoting wellness and stability amidst economic challenges. Through these efforts, extension services can play a pivotal role in promoting financial literacy and wellness.

Author Information

Correspondence concerning the article should be addressed to Troy Anthony Anderson, Ed.D., University of Maryland Extension, Calvert County, 30 Duke Street, Prince Frederick, MD, 20678; (410) 535-3662; tanders4@umd.edu.

References

- Ansar, S., Klapper, L., & Singer, D. (2023). The importance of financial education for the effective use of formal financial services. *Journal of Financial Literacy and Wellbeing*, 1(1), 28-46.
- Lusardi, A., Mitchell, O. S., Sconti, A., & Sticha, A. (2025). Understanding Financial Vulnerability among Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics in the United States.
- Gunarathna, H. P. D. W., & Dias, S. N. R. F. (2023, December). The impact of microfinance on poverty alleviation in Sri Lanka: Why does financial literacy matters?. In *6th Annual Research Symposium in Management 2023* (p. 189).
- Mull, C. D., Daniel, J. B., & Jordan, J. (2023). Where scholarship and practice meet: Perspectives from Cooperative Extension. In *Envisioning Public Scholarship for Our Time* (pp. 120-134). Routledge.
- Nguyen, T. T. T. (2024). Toward financial optimization: assessing the influence of budget process on effective accounting management. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 12(2), 116-132.
- Willis, L. E. (2021). Alternatives to financial education. In *The Routledge handbook of financial literacy* (pp. 274-292). Routledge.

Appendices

Figure 1: Participants' most effective learning strategies during programming.

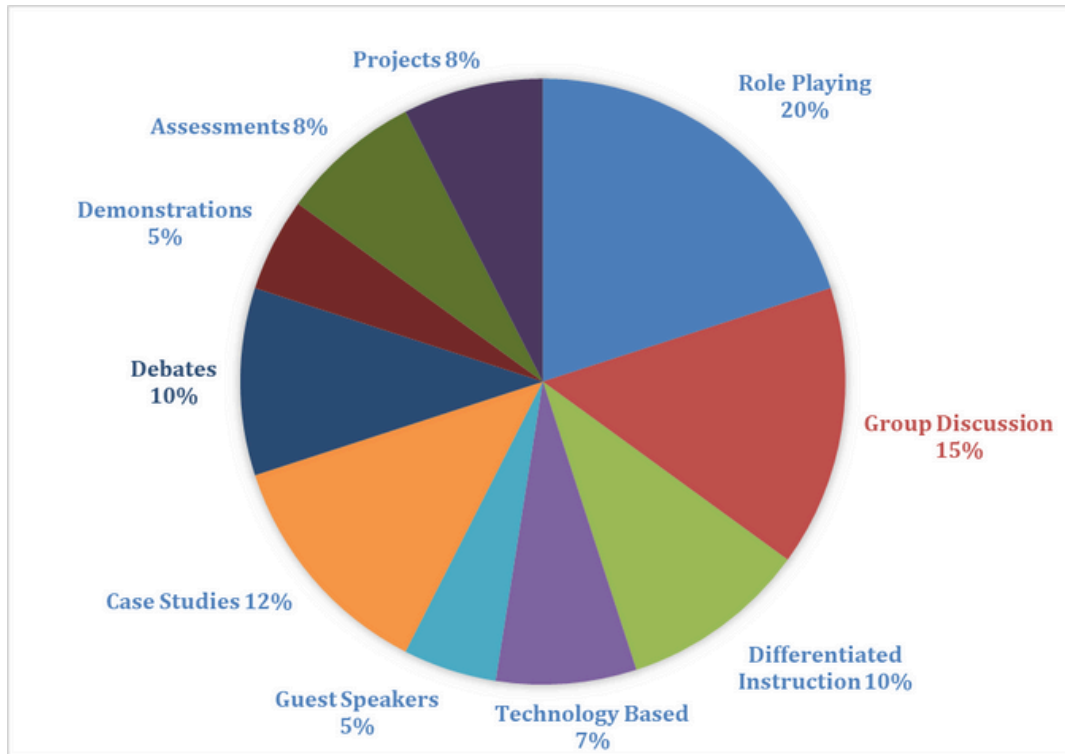
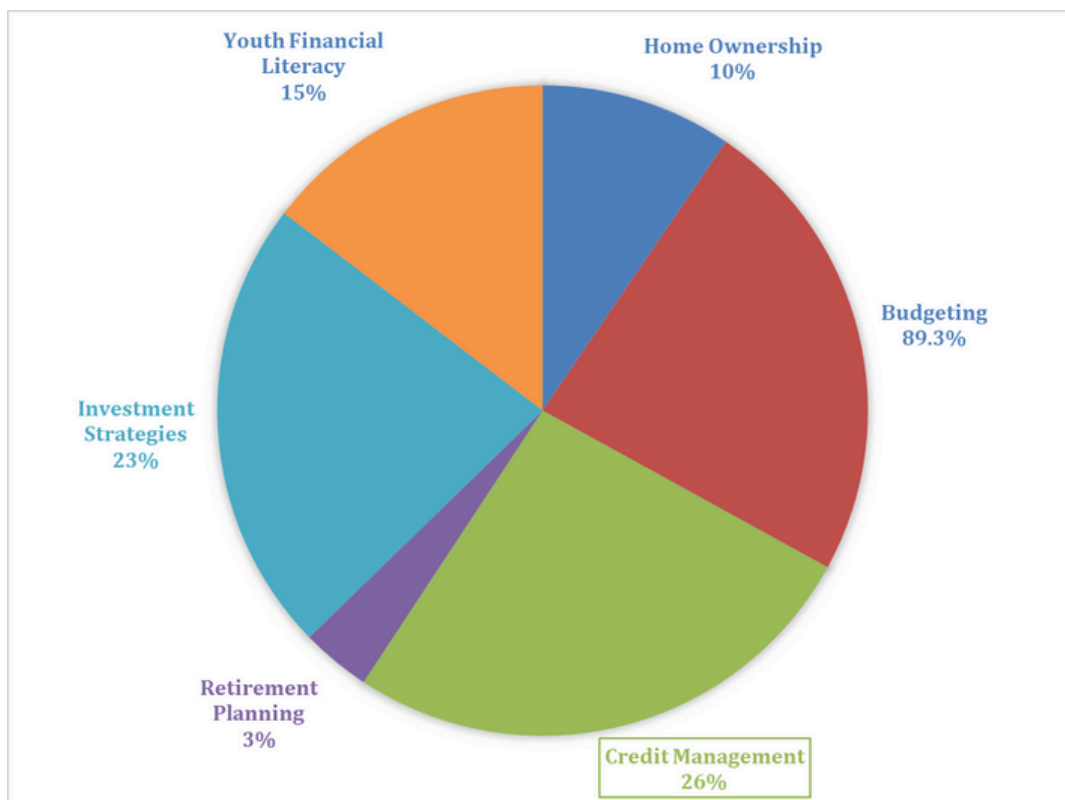
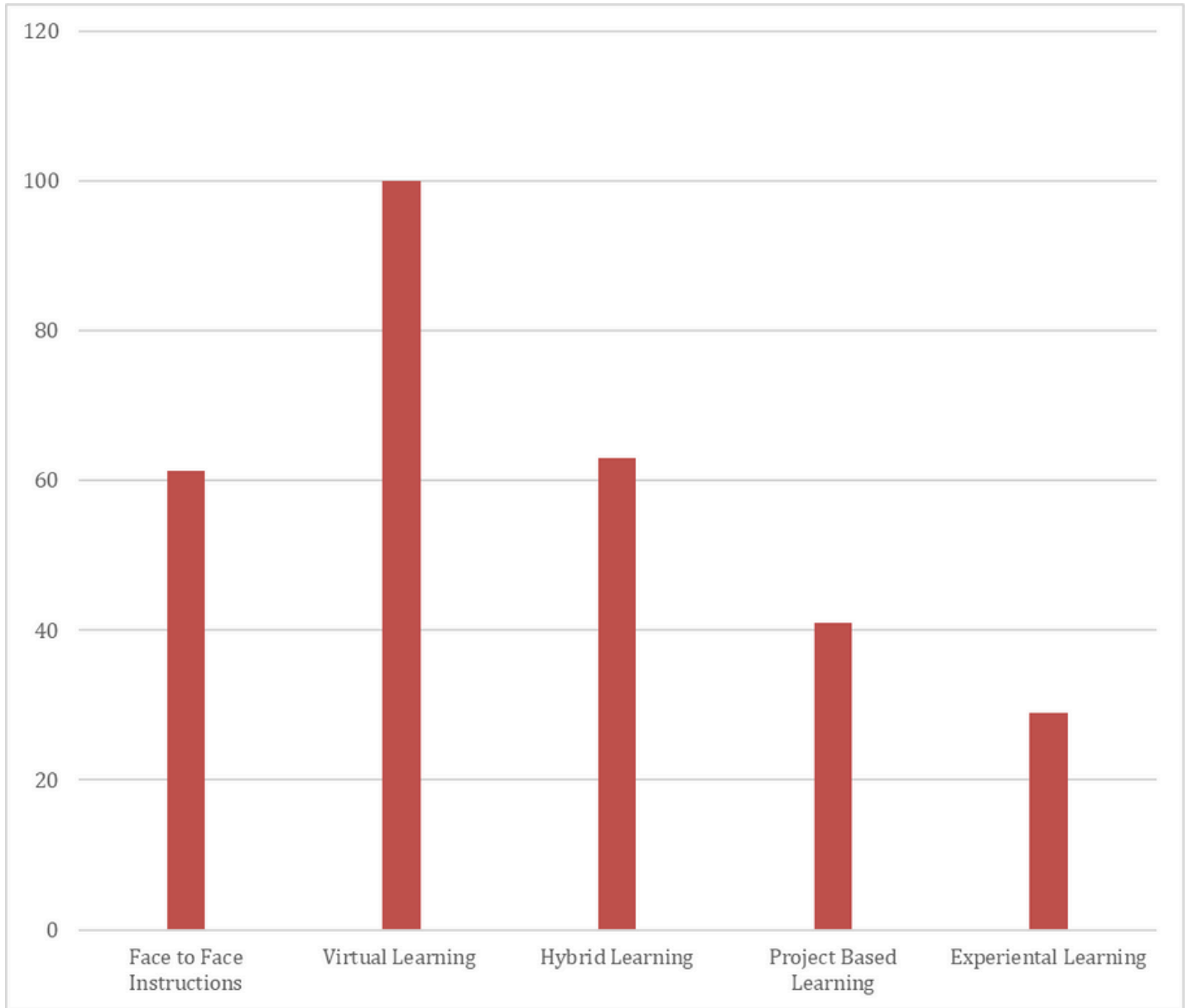


Figure 2: Fundamental financial topics of focus for participants.



Appendices

Figure 3: Preferred program delivery methods ranked by participants.



Appendices

Table 1: Survey Instrument (*Modified English version*)

Section 1: Characteristics		n=160	%
1	Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Choose not to identify 	58 102 -	36.3 63.7 -
2	Ethnicity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hispanic/ Latino • Non-Hispanic • Choose not to identify 	43 117 -	26.8 73.2 -
3	Race: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White/ Caucasian • Black/ African Americans • American Indian or Alaska Native • Asian • Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander • Some Other Race • Two or More Races • Choose not to identify 	81 47 1 10 1 15 5 -	50.6 29.4 0.6 6.2 0.6 9.4 3.2 -
4	Age Range: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18-24 • 25-34 • 35-44 • 45-54 • 55-64 • 65 or greater • Choose not to identify 	12 42 64 21 18 3 -	9.2 26.2 40.2 13.1 9.5 1.8 -
5	Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some High School • High School Diploma/GED • Some College • Community College/ AA • Four Year degree • Some post Graduate • MA/MS • Doctorate • Choose not to identify 	4 9 14 33 79 12 8 1 -	2.5 5.7 9 20.7 49 7.5 5 0.6 -

Appendices

6	Geographical Location: · Southern Calvert County · Northern Calvert County	77 83	48.2 51.8
7	Length of Employment: • 0-5 years • 6-10 years • 11-15 years • 16-20 years • 21+ years	69 47 32 8 4	43.2 29.3 20 5 2.5
8	Household Income Before Taxes: • Less than \$25,000 • \$25,000 to \$34,999 • \$35,000 to \$49,999 • \$50,000 to \$74,999 • \$75,000 to \$99,999 • \$100,000 to \$149,999 • \$150,000 to \$199,999 • \$200,000 or more	6 17 42 39 54 2 - -	3.7 10.7 26.3 24.3 33.7 1.3 - -
9	Total Household Members: • One • Two • Three • Four or more	33 23 26 78	20.6 14.3 16.4 48.7
10	Total Children Attending/Attended College: • None • One • Two • Three • Four or more	16 21 16 71 36	10 13.2 10 44.3 22.5

Appendices

Section 2: Financial Literacy		
6. How would you rate your level of financial literacy?		
<input type="radio"/> Very low	21	13.2
<input type="radio"/> Low	48	30
<input type="radio"/> Moderate	74	46.2
<input type="radio"/> High	17	10.6
<input type="radio"/> Very high	-	-
7. Do you have a personal or household budget?		
<input type="radio"/> Yes	43	26.8
<input type="radio"/> No	117	73.2
8. How often do you review your financial statements (bank statements, credit card bills, etc.)?		
<input type="radio"/> Never	9	5.6
<input type="radio"/> Rarely	41	25.6
<input type="radio"/> Sometimes	87	54.3
<input type="radio"/> Often	23	14.3
<input type="radio"/> Always	-	-
9. Do you have a savings plan for emergencies?		
<input type="radio"/> Yes	83	51.8
<input type="radio"/> No	77	48.2
Section 3: Program Engagement		
10. Have you participated in any financial education programs offered by Extension services?		
<input type="radio"/> Yes	86	53.7
<input type="radio"/> No	74	46.3
11. <u>If yes</u>, how would you rate the effectiveness of these programs in improving your financial literacy?		
<input type="radio"/> Not effective	-	-
<input type="radio"/> Slightly effective	-	-
<input type="radio"/> Moderately effective	3	1.8
<input type="radio"/> Very effective	34	21.2
<input type="radio"/> Extremely effective	49	30.6

Appendices

12. What types of financial education programs are you most interested in? (Select all that apply) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting <input type="checkbox"/> Credit management <input type="checkbox"/> Home ownership <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement planning <input type="checkbox"/> Investment strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Youth financial literacy 		
	143	89.3
	160	100
	58	36.2
	21	13.1
	138	86.2
	89	55.6
Section 4: Barriers to Financial Wellness		
13. What are the primary barriers you face in achieving financial wellness? (Select all that apply) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of financial knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient income <input type="checkbox"/> High cost of living <input type="checkbox"/> Debt obligations <input type="checkbox"/> Access to financial services <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) 		
	97	60.6
	142	88.7
	126	78.7
	87	54.3
	99	61.8
	23	14.3
14. How confident are you in your ability to make informed financial decisions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident at all <input type="checkbox"/> Slightly confident <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately confident <input type="checkbox"/> Very confident <input type="checkbox"/> Extremely confident 		
	39	24.5
	62	38.7
	44	27.5
	15	9.3
	-	-
15. What resources would help you improve your financial wellness? (Select all that apply) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Online financial tools and calculators <input type="checkbox"/> Financial workshops or seminars <input type="checkbox"/> One-on-one financial counseling <input type="checkbox"/> Access to financial literacy materials <input type="checkbox"/> Community support groups 		
	129	80.6
	95	59.3
	64	40
	97	60.6
	53	33.5

Thank you for completing this survey. Your feedback is invaluable in enhancing financial literacy services in our community.

Appendices

Table 2: Interview Instrument for Focus Groups

Interview Procedures

- **Interviewer Introduction:** Briefly introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the interview.
- **Confidentiality Assurance:** Assure the participant that their responses will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.
- **Consent:** Obtain verbal consent to proceed with the interview and to record the session, if applicable.

I am grateful for your time as you participate in this interview process. Today I want to discuss the needs, challenges, and opportunities for financial wellness across Calvert County. Any information shared today will assist me in developing specific financial programs within our community to address financial health and wealth concerns for residents. The interview is an opportunity for me to gather rich information and draw more detailed conclusions than other research methods, taking into consideration nonverbal cues, off-the-cuff reactions, and emotional responses. I will simultaneously be leading the interview and taking notes.

By the end of the interview, I hope to gain a better understanding of how you feel about the services offered here to teach people about finances. Some of the topics that we will discuss surround the organization, community program offerings, Extension services, and a rating scale about specific topics in financial wellness. The interview should take about 15-30 minutes of your time.

The information you share with me today will be used to improve current or develop new financial programs for members of our community. The information you provide may be shared with other people from our University, however your name will not be linked to your individual stories. All information will be kept confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to stop at any time. If you have any questions or do not understand what I am asking, please let me know.

As I mentioned earlier, the goal of this interview is to understand what you think about financial programming. There are no right or wrong answers so please answer the questions as honestly as possible as I am interested in your individual experiences. According to University policies, I must disclose and provide you with a copy of our informed consent statement. You can have a few minutes to peruse the document, and then we will review it together. Also, with your verbal consent, I would like to record this session to help me take notes of our conversation. Upon the transcription of our conversation, this recording will be deleted. Please let me know if you are not comfortable with being recorded.

—pause for questions—

Appendices

<p>Demographic Information</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your role in the community? 2. How long have you been involved with the community or Extension services? 3. Experience with Financial Programming 4. Can you describe your experience with financial programming offered by Extension services? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: What specific programs have you participated in or are aware of? 5. How did you first learn about these financial programs? 	
<p>Perceptions and Expectations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. What are your overall perceptions of the financial programming provided by the Extension services? 7. What expectations did you have before participating in these programs, and were they met? 8. What is the most effective way for you to learn and retain information? 	
<p>Needs and Challenges</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. What specific financial education needs do you believe are most pressing for your community? 10. What type of class delivery methods would encourage you to attend Extension programming? 11. What challenges have you or your community members faced in accessing or benefiting from financial programming? 	
<p>Program Impact</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. How have the financial programs impacted your financial literacy or behavior? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: Can you provide examples of any positive changes or improvements? 13. Have you noticed any broader community changes as a result of these programs? 	

Appendices

<p>Suggestions for Improvement</p> <p>14. What improvements or changes would you suggest for the financial programming offered by Extension services?</p> <p>15. How could technology be better utilized in delivering financial education?</p>	
<p>Additional Insights</p> <p>16. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or suggestions for the future of financial programming in your community?</p>	
<p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank the Participant: Express gratitude for their time and valuable insights. • Next Steps: Briefly inform them about the next steps in the research process and how their input will contribute to the study. 	

This interview instrument is designed to gather comprehensive and nuanced data from stakeholders, providing insights into their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding Extension services in Calvert County.

Appendices

Table 3: Shows a breakdown of results obtained from the participants' focus group for 4 groups of 5 participants.

Survey	Frequency					Mean
	5	4	3	2	1	
n=40	5	4	3	2	1	
1. Families are welcomed and valued when accessing Extension programs and services.	38	2	-	-	-	4.95
2. Each individual's beliefs and values are respected by the Extension Educator.	40	-	-	-	-	5
3. Extension activities are planned at various times of the day to involve a wide variety of participants.	4	5	-	11	20	2.05
4. Communication with families in the community is consistent.	8	7	1	9	15	2.6
5. Communication with families is in a language they can comprehend and/or translations are made available.	40	-	-	-	-	5
6. Families are involved in the decision-making process of the Extension education.	13	18	-	6	3	3.8
7. Families are encouraged to help with Extension outreach.	29	2	1	5	3	4.22
8. Families are encouraged to volunteer in Extension program delivery.	12	19	-	7	2	3.8
9. Families who volunteer in Extension programs and services are given training and recognition.	20	15	5	-	-	4.37
10. The Extension Educator recognizes barriers (social stratification, geographical location, communication and language) to participation and work to bridge these barriers.	32	7	1	-	-	4.77

Appendices

11. The Extension Educator provides information to families about services that can help with family needs (rental assistance, budgeting, goal setting, improving credit score, and estate planning).	29	6	5	-	-	4.6
12. Extension Educator and families work together on Extension initiatives.	10	2	-	10	18	2.4
13. Extension Educator and families are actively involved in program planning.	4	10	-	9	17	2.37

Appendices

Table 4: Likert Scale Summary of Results

The following table presents the results of a Likert scale survey conducted with 160 participants in Calvert County, Maryland. The survey was designed to assess various aspects of financial literacy and the effectiveness of Extension services in enhancing financial education. Participants responded to statements about their financial knowledge and behaviors on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean Score
I feel confident in my ability to create and manage a budget.	24	32	40	44	20	3.02
I understand how to read and interpret credit scores.	28	40	50	30	12	2.76
I am knowledgeable about different investment options.	36	42	48	26	8	2.54
I regularly save a portion of my income for future needs.	20	28	42	50	20	3.16
I am aware of the financial resources available in my community.	22	30	38	50	20	3.14
I believe financial education should be a part of school curricula.	8	12	20	60	60	3.98

Discussion of Findings

The survey results provide valuable insights into the financial literacy outlook of Calvert County residents. Notably, the mean scores indicate several key areas where financial education could be enhanced:

1. **Budgeting Confidence (Mean Score: 3.02):** While there is a moderate level of confidence in budgeting, nearly half the participants either disagreed or were neutral about their budgeting skills. This suggests a need for more focused workshops on budgeting to build financial confidence.
2. **Understanding Credit Scores (Mean Score: 2.76):** A significant portion of participants expressed a lack of understanding regarding credit scores, highlighting a critical area for improvement. Extension services could offer targeted sessions on credit management, helping individuals to better navigate credit-related decisions.
3. **Investment Knowledge (Mean Score: 2.54):** The lowest mean score was found in the area of investment knowledge, indicating that many participants feel unprepared to make informed investment decisions. This highlights an opportunity for Extension services to introduce educational programs focused on investment literacy.
4. **Savings Behavior (Mean Score: 3.16):** While the mean score for regular saving is slightly higher, there remains room for improvement. Encouraging a savings culture through workshops on financial planning and goal setting could enhance this aspect.
5. **Awareness of Community Resources (Mean Score: 3.14):** Participants showed a moderate awareness of available financial resources. Increasing outreach and communication efforts could help ensure all residents are informed about support services and opportunities.
6. **Support for Financial Education in Schools (Mean Score: 3.98):** There is strong support for integrating financial education into school curricula, reflecting a community-wide recognition of its importance. This could drive collaborative efforts between schools and Extension

services to develop comprehensive programs for youth.

Overall, these findings emphasize the need for targeted financial literacy interventions in Calvert County, Maryland. Some of the needs identified include improving understanding of credit scores and investment knowledge, as well as enhancing budgeting and savings skills. By focusing on these areas, Cooperative Extension Services can develop tailored programs that directly respond to the community's financial literacy gaps. Such programs could include workshops and seminars designed to demystify credit management, offering clear guidance on how to improve credit scores and make informed financial decisions. Additionally, initiatives aimed at boosting budgeting confidence and cultivating a savings culture could empower residents to achieve greater financial independence.

To optimize participation in financial literacy programs through extension services, it is essential to consider the preferred delivery methods that would encourage community engagement. Moreover, understanding the barriers faced by residents, such as limited access to reliable transportation or digital resources, can inform the design of inclusive and accessible programming. By addressing gaps in credit management and enhancing budgeting and saving skills, extension services can foster greater financial independence and resilience among community residents. Furthermore, the strong endorsement for school-based financial education suggests potential for long-term positive impacts on future generations.