



2025

Governor's Financial Literacy Award Recipients

Awards Recognize Individuals & Organizations for Elevating the Financial Literacy, Capability, and Financial Inclusion of Wisconsin's Residents

Individual Category

Sophia Chen and Sophia Pientka, Middleton High School, Middleton

As high school students, Sophia and Sophia taught middle school students about financial literacy through their "Finance for Life" program. As a Middleton "Future Business Leaders of America" affiliated project, they developed "Finance for Life," which combines leadership and business skills developed through "Future Business Leaders of America" with a community-focused mission to expand financial education. The program teaches students how to create budgets, make smart spending choices, and see how compound interest helps money grow over time. This peer-to-peer model has reached over 450 students so far with the goal of reaching 1,000 this school year.

Brian Hellenbrand, McFarland High School, McFarland

As a teacher, Brian is one of the most innovative and caring teachers at McFarland High School. During his lessons, he consistently looks at how to get students up and moving and create new groups to engage his students. Some of the innovative activities he does in his classes are live action T-Accounts, Credit Musical Chairs, Accounting Monopoly, Sidewalk Chalk Accounts, team matching competitions, and more. Brian not only influences all his students in his Personal Finance class, which is typically 120 students per year, but he also influences his co-workers, peers, administrators, and the school's Business Education Partnership.

Prakash Koirala, Kamloops, Canada

As an author and educator, Prakash transforms financial learning through culturally sensitive comics and family values-based financial literacy workshops. Prakash has been collaborating with immigrant communities and local cultural hubs in Wisconsin, which provide space for his workshops and continue engagement with community members to monitor progress, challenges, and opportunities. More than 9,600 people were directly impacted, and they stay in touch for regular follow-up and money mindfulness activities.

Shernita Moates, BMO Bank N.A. Branch, Milwaukee

As a bank employee, Shernita remains a dedicated and forward-thinking leader in financial wellness whose work continues to strengthen both the “Match Savings Program” and the “Make Your Money Talk” initiative. She offered personalized guidance that helped over 300 individuals transition from alternative financial tools to stable, long-term banking relationships. Her clear, accessible approach allowed over 90 clients, who were unbanked or underbanked, to confidently establish accounts.

Paul Moga, Milwaukee Public School District, Milwaukee

As a school district employee, Paul founded the Milwaukee Public School District’s Department of Black and Latino Male Achievement and was key to integrating SecureFutures’ “Money Sense” program into its curriculum across multiple schools. “Money Sense” teaches teens money management essentials. Over 460 students participated in the program, helping to close the gap in access to financial education for historically under-resourced students.

Quentin Prince, Journey House, Milwaukee

As a financial educator and counselor, Quentin has spent nearly ten years teaching personal finance in Milwaukee public high schools, reaching more than 5,000 students, and giving many of them their first formal financial education experience. His work focuses on expanding access to financial knowledge for young people and families who have historically faced barriers to economic opportunity. Quentin teaches a first-time homebuyer curriculum for students, which is improving Black and Brown homeownership rates across Wisconsin.

Organization Category

Altra Federal Credit Union, Onalaska

Altra Federal Credit Union’s “Youth in Foster Care Financial Education Program” provides financial education, sole account ownership, resources, incentives, and mentorship to those in foster care and those who have recently aged out of the foster care system in the La Crosse area. By completing the program, participants receive a maximum of \$500 in a checking account. The course has proven to increase knowledge by over 15% on average when comparing pre- and post-test scores.

Black Men Coalition Foundation, Inc., Madison

The Black Men Coalition Foundation, Inc. is a Madison-based nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing stability, equity, and opportunity for underserved communities through housing, employment, transportation, education, and financial empowerment. In 2025, the foundation’s financial literacy program had 69 individuals, including 57 incarcerated residents and 12 community participants, graduate from the program with documented gains in financial literacy, confidence, and access.

Centro Hispano, Madison

As the leading nonprofit organization working with the Latinx population in Dane County, Wisconsin, Centro Hispano has a 41-year history of uplifting and strengthening local communities. One of the goals of Centro Hispano is to create culturally safe learning spaces where people feel seen, respected, and inspired to lead their own financial journeys. Being able to connect with their community in both Spanish and English allows them to bridge language gaps and ensure that financial education is truly inclusive. In June 2025, Centro's "Cultivating Wealth" program reached a total of 169 community members.

CEOs of Tomorrow, Madison

CEOs of Tomorrow has an innovative program where teens teaching other teens financial literacy. The program is called "Teen Ambassadors." They teach financial wellness topics such as budgeting, saving, and investing through fun workshops. Teen ambassadors are paid \$14 per hour to coach and teach others. Teens are required to have their own checking or savings account for direct deposit. They are also required to keep online time sheets and have additional leadership and development opportunities. Over 200 students have been impacted by this program, in addition to their entrepreneurship programming.

FVSBank, Fond du Lac

FVSBank is committed to advancing financial literacy and inclusion in its community. FVSBank developed and delivered a unique program at St. Katharine Drexel Homeless Shelter, specifically designed to empower individuals experiencing homelessness with practical financial knowledge. The program served over 40 participants directly, with additional impact extending to their families, amplifying the reach of the program beyond the shelter residents.

University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, Human Development and Relationships Institute, "Reentry Ready Focus on Finances," Oshkosh

The "Reentry Ready: Focus on Finances" curriculum is a personal finance series created specifically for incarcerated individuals to assist in making transitions from incarceration more successful. This eight-module course was created from an Oshkosh Correctional Institution request for personal finance resources that staff at Oshkosh Correctional Institution could use with inmates preparing for release. Over 150 incarcerated individuals at several Department of Corrections prisons and several county jail facilities participated in the program in 2025.

Riverworks Financial Clinic and The City of Milwaukee Financial Empowerment Center, Milwaukee

The Riverworks Financial Clinic, in partnership with the City of Milwaukee Financial Empowerment Center (FEC), delivers free professional one-on-one financial counseling to help residents build financial literacy, capability, and inclusion. Together, they provide an innovative, community-based model that meets Milwaukeeans where they are – financially and geographically – by embedding financial empowerment into housing, workforce, and

neighborhood development initiatives. In the past year, the partnership directly improved the financial well-being of thousands of Milwaukee residents.

Legacy Category

The legacy award is given to an organization, business, or individual whose purpose and heritage is ingrained in sustained financial literacy and capability efforts, and whose reputation in doing so is held in high regard in serving as a model for others in carrying on the work of supporting financial literacy and expanding opportunities through financial capability and financial inclusion. This lifetime recognition is intended to be conferred only once to recipients.

Michelle Reinen, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Madison

Michelle is a trusted leader at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and has been a member of the department's team for more than 30 years. Michelle has served as the administrator for the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection since June 2023. This division has broad and important responsibilities with staff working across the state. As the administrator, Michelle leads the Bureaus of Trade and Consumer Protection, Weights and Measures, and Business Trade Practices. As the leader of the state's consumer protection office, Michelle and her team's work impacts everyone who lives, works in, and visits Wisconsin. In September 2025, Michelle and her team launched new consumer protection outreach toolkits in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions and the Governor's Council on Financial Literacy and Capability. Michelle is passionate about consumer protection and financial literacy and has gone well beyond her job duties.

Mark Sain (posthumous), Milwaukee Public Schools Board, Milwaukee

Mark was a visionary leader whose commitment to financial education transformed opportunities for thousands of young people in Milwaukee and set a precedent for urban school districts nationwide. Mark served for eight years on the Milwaukee Public Schools Board, including three years as board chair. During his tenure, Mark championed initiatives that prioritized student success and equity, and he recognized early on that financial literacy was essential to preparing students for life beyond high school. His leadership and advocacy opened doors that made lasting change possible. Mark's influence extended far beyond policy. He was a tireless advocate for collaboration, ensuring that educators, community leaders, and organizations worked together to expand access to financial education. His belief in the power of knowledge and his dedication to students created opportunities that will endure for generations. Mark brokered the meeting that led to Milwaukee Public Schools requiring a personal financial literacy course to graduate, only the second urban school district in the country to do so.

Gina Sanchez-Juarez, La Casa de Esperanza Center for Financial Stability, Waukesha

As a nonprofit leader, Gina has been instrumental in bringing this work to life at La Casa de Esperanza. Under her leadership, the initiative grew into La Casa's Center for Financial Stability, a holistic model designed to empower low-to-moderate income individuals to increase their

income, build savings, and gain assets. Gina’s care and passion for her work fueled her to ensure that not only is the Center for Financial Stability at La Casa successful, but that it continues to grow beyond Waukesha to serve people across Wisconsin and strategically partner with other organizations to fill gaps throughout the state. This is the first time in La Casa’s 60-year history that they have served clients outside of Waukesha, and it is because of Gina.

Bank of Sun Prairie, Sun Prairie

The Bank of Sun Prairie has a strong history of advancing financial literacy and serving the broader community and within schools for years. In the last five years, the Bank of Sun Prairie launched over 50 online courses accessible to all for free. The bank opened a bank branch and financial education center in Sun Prairie West High School that employs high school students. They also partnered with Sun Prairie Area School District to provide “Elevate Wisconsin®: The Course to Financial Security” to all 1,800 teachers and staff to help with their financial literacy journey, and they provided the EVERFI program to all high school students. In addition, the Bank of Sun Prairie started a micro-lending program with the “Society of St. Vincent de Paul” in Madison – helping 32 people with 34 microloans totaling \$69,148 and opened 25 “Fresh Start Checking” accounts. The bank also developed and launched a financial training program with the “Shelter from the Storm Ministries,” a transitional living program for homeless single mothers and their minor children. They also provide financial education sessions for senior citizens throughout the year.

Community First Credit Union, Neenah

Community First Credit Union is a Wisconsin-based financial cooperative that supports long-term financial capability through inclusive education, one-on-one guidance, and tools that help members make informed decisions. The credit union innovates by tailoring financial literacy to individual needs, languages, age groups, and levels of knowledge, creating an accessible learning system that meets people where they are today. Community First Credit Union launched a multilingual financial education program for immigrant and refugee adults in partnership with the Winnebago Area Literacy Council and the Oshkosh Public Library. The credit union partnered with 26 schools across their region, supporting curriculum integration and classroom financial learning tailored to educator objectives. And to ensure learning leads to action, Community First Credit Union maintains a team of certified financial counselors at their branches, coaching community members through budgeting, debt management, spending control, and goal planning. Together, these programs form a connected pathway from awareness to financial empowerment, extending far beyond a single seminar or classroom visit.

First National Bank of River Falls, River Falls

Since its founding in 1904, the First National Bank of River Falls has made financial literacy and capability the cornerstone of its mission. For more than 120 years, the bank has served as far more than a community bank – it has been a trusted educator, advocate, and partner in improving the financial well-being of individuals across western Wisconsin. The bank’s reputation in financial education is unmatched. For over 20 consecutive years, the Wisconsin Bankers Foundation has recognized First National Bank of River Falls with the “Excellence in Financial

Education Award,” underscoring the bank’s deep-rooted, sustained, and high-quality commitment to its community. The bank’s financial education initiatives have reached thousands of individuals over the years, spanning youth, adults, and seniors, through its longstanding partnerships with local school districts, universities, libraries, police departments, and retirement communities. Over the course of its multi-decade commitment, First National Bank of River Falls has positively influenced thousands of Wisconsinites, earning a reputation as the region’s most reliable, consistent, and impactful provider of financial education.

Universities of Wisconsin Office of Business and Entrepreneurship, Madison

For nearly 50 years, the Office of Business and Entrepreneurship at the Universities of Wisconsin has provided statewide, life-changing financial education to entrepreneurs, small business owners, and innovation-driven startups. Through its four units – the Food Finance Institute, the Wisconsin Small Business Development Center Network, the Center for Technology Commercialization, and the Strategic Projects team – the Office of Business and Entrepreneurship has delivered comprehensive, research-based financial literacy programming that helps Wisconsin residents build financial capacity, navigate risk, secure capital, and create economically resilient businesses. As a result, the office’s clients acquired \$1.4 billion in capital investments for their ventures. Entrepreneurs started more than 2,700 new businesses. Over 900 financial literacy training sessions were held and attended by more than 14,600 individuals. Over 39,500 entrepreneurs received more than 200,000 hours of confidential, one-on-one consulting. More than 85% of the office’s clients would recommend the service to others because of the Office of Business and Entrepreneurship’s sustained impact, long-standing statewide reach, and proven ability to build financially stronger communities.