



Financial Opportunity Centers (FOC) are one-stop, neighborhood-based facilities that provide job services, financial counseling, fairly-priced financial products, free tax preparation, and screening for public benefits. Based on a concept developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, FOCs help families become more financially secure in three critical areas: increased wages, improved finances and access to public benefits.

Why Financial Opportunity Centers Are Needed

The working poor struggle from paycheck to paycheck trying to pay for food, housing, clothing, and other basic necessities. Families without savings who run out of money before the next check have few options beyond borrowing from a growing network of high-priced lenders. For a family earning low wages, one bad loan can set them back financially for years. Despite years of building and strengthening community-based employment centers, wages among participants in LISC-funded programs remain relatively low. LISC and others concluded that employment alone is not always enough to help low-income households achieve financial independence.

Financial Opportunity Centers Offer Families Several Significant advantages:

- Job services are available to all participants for as long as they need them. FOC sites offer job placement, job retention, re-placement, and career advancement assistance to all residents of the community, as well as their friends and family.
- One-on-one financial counseling is provided to all participants by full-time experts with extensive experience in money management. FOC counselors include former private sector bank branch managers, financial planners, and certified credit counselors.
- Fairly-priced financial products and services are made available through FOC partner banks and credit unions. Customized banking products reduce dependency on payday loans and other costly financial instruments.
- Free tax services increase family income by maximizing use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (worth up to \$4,300 annually for low-income families).
- State-of-the-art software screens participants for public benefits eligibility. FOC staff assess eligibility for benefits such as food stamps, health insurance for children, and fuel assistance; this information is then used to help participants apply for and access these resources.



How Financial Opportunity Centers Differ from Existing Programs



- The program measures success by changes in participant income, expenses, assets and liabilities over time.
- Each FOC is built on an existing hub of community activity. Trusted agencies with a history of exemplary service are the platforms for each FOC.
- At every FOC, employment and financial counselors are working in tandem to help participants maximize their chances of financial stability.

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BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES