



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR
FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Partnering for Financial Well-Being

Office of the President

Testimony of
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President and CEO,
National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE)

Before

The Committee on Financial Services
Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit
of the
United States House of Representatives

Regarding

**“Improving Financial Literacy: Working Together to Develop Private
Sector Coordination and Solutions”**

September 28, 2006

I am Ted Beck, President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Endowment for Financial Education® (NEFE®), located in Greenwood Village, Colorado. Mr. Chairman, and members of your Subcommittee, I commend you for scheduling this hearing and providing members of the financial literacy community the opportunity to share our experiences in coordinating private sector efforts to promote financial literacy, and to explore with you ways in which the Federal Government can help enhance the effectiveness of these efforts.

The National Endowment for Financial Education is perhaps the only national, privately operating foundation wholly dedicated to improving the financial well-being of all Americans. While NEFE may be a unique organization, it does not work alone to pursue its mission. In nearly every aspect of its work, NEFE forms partnerships and pursues collaborations with other entities, including nonprofit and for-profit organizations and government, to provide financial education to members of the public. Our partnerships have a common goal: to help Americans achieve long-term financial stability, thereby strengthening the fabric of families, communities, and the nation as a whole. A partnership approach, we believe, represents the most effective means of leveraging resources and talents to reach large numbers of Americans, while addressing the different educational needs of widely diverse segments of the public.

Introduction

My testimony today will be in three parts:

1. I will present NEFE's philosophy on financial literacy and explain how partnering and coordination are central to this philosophy.
2. I will share several examples of partnerships and collaborations in support of NEFE's financial education mission.
3. I will offer some brief comments regarding the role that the Federal Government can play both in fostering increased coordination and

collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of financial literacy programs and in making the public more aware of these programs.

Financial Literacy Philosophy

We at the National Endowment for Financial Education believe, Mr. Chairman, that the need for financial literacy now is greater than ever before. This is because the responsibility for financial security has been transferred, for the most part, from institutions to individual Americans. The burden of carrying such responsibility has been incurred within a relatively short time frame, causing concern, frustration, even fear, among members of the public.

Yet, we also believe that consumers, regardless of their education background or income level, are up to the task of assuming responsibility for their financial well-being—*if* they are given appropriate education, the necessary tools, and ongoing reinforcement.

We believe, as well, in the power of what we call “teachable moments,” when people are motivated by life circumstances to educate themselves toward the better management of their personal finances. A financial crisis may not necessarily move someone to change behavior, but intervention added to a crisis situation—a potential “teachable moment”—can help people break out of their current situation and move forward. We also believe that when one family manages its money wisely, it prospers; and when many do, the entire nation thrives.

NEFE puts its philosophy into action by providing, free of charge, resources to members of the public in support of increased financial literacy. In addition, we work to create among consumers a greater awareness of the importance of financial education,

thus increasing public demand for this education. While we strive to reach as many audiences as possible, we place particular emphasis on those who often are outside of mainstream financial services and are most at risk for experiencing significant financial difficulties: youth, low-income individuals and families, minority populations, and people facing special challenges due to illness or other life-changing events.

The Role of Partnering

Collaborating with partners who share our commitment to financial literacy enables us to create much more targeted, relevant materials and programs to reach varied audiences with what we refer to as “just-in-time” education. Collaborating with others also enables us to leverage our resources to reach as many groups and individuals as possible.

Partnering, in fact, is at the core of our identity. Why? Because even though NEFE has substantial resources, our mandate to educate the public about personal finance is so large that we know we cannot accomplish it by ourselves. We rely on partners to help advance our mission and extend our reach to Americans from all walks of life. The phrase “Partnering for Financial Well-Being,” is much more than a tagline on our letterhead. It is woven into the very fabric of our organization because we have experienced firsthand the power of partnering to produce significant outcomes. To date, NEFE has partnered on more than 100 financial literacy initiatives with other nonprofit and governmental entities. Through each of these collaborations, we have gained important insights into partnering, which we use continually to refine and manage the collaboration process. A list of our nonprofit collaborators is provided at the end of

this testimony. Later in this testimony, I will share a few specific examples to illustrate the value of partnering.

Our coordination with potential partners involves an open exchange of ideas and expectations as NEFE proposes a project, listens to the potential partner's feedback, considers alternatives, and arrives at a decision to move ahead with the partnership, sharing both the responsibility and the credit for the project. We document the scope of the project, timelines, costs, and who is responsible for each aspect of the project, from inception through delivery and evaluation. After agreeing to a project description, both parties sign a letter of understanding that addresses scope, duties, timeframes, and other issues significant to the project. The key to such partnering is a clear understanding of what both sides in the equation want and expect from the collaboration, as well as an understanding that the partnership is a commitment which must be taken seriously.

Through such coordination of effort, the ultimate beneficiary—the consumer—is assisted in meeting a financial challenge that, but for the partnership, might never have been identified and addressed.

In our vast and diverse society, no one entity—not NEFE, not the outstanding nonprofit groups we have collaborated with, not the many good corporate citizens we have met, not even the Federal Government—can single-handedly meet the public's universal need for financial education. The needs of individuals and families are far greater than any organization can tackle alone. Nor is it possible for one organization to be proficient in every aspect of the educational process. Collaborative partnerships can, and do, provide the solution to these challenges.

Examples of Partnerships and Collaborations in Financial Education

When organizations partner to reach out to those in need of financial education, a homeless family can see its way to owning a home, an individual recovering from debilitating illness can rebound from the related financial woes, or a young person can discover the benefits of saving to eventually reach a significant financial goal. By way of illustrating the synergy that comes from partnerships like these, I offer the following examples as just a few of the many successful collaborations between NEFE and its partners.

NEFE High School Financial Planning Program

A compelling example of the power of partnering and longstanding coordination is provided by the NEFE High School Financial Planning Program®, which is a collaboration among NEFE; the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES); and the Credit Union National Association, Inc. (CUNA), and America's Credit Unions. I'm pleased to say that as of two days ago, we've added Junior Achievement to this multi-organizational effort. Since the inception of the High School Program in 1985, over 4.5 million teens have benefited from financial education in nearly 60,000 schools throughout the U. S.

The goals of the High School Program are to reach young people at an optimum time, when they are developing financial habits that will shape their future, and to break the cycle of poor financial management that has plagued successive generations of Americans. The program is a six-unit curriculum that teaches the basics of money management, including information on the financial planning process, careers, budgeting, saving and investing, credit, and insurance. It is available at no cost to public and private

high schools nationwide. The program has been proven effective through an independent study by the University of Minnesota. NEFE actively coordinates the work of its partners in developing and revising content, training educators, and distributing the program to schools in all 50 states.

Public Awareness Campaign

In September 2005, NEFE launched the country's first large-scale financial literacy public awareness campaign—themed “Smart about Money”—to motivate consumers to improve their financial well-being and provide ways to put this goal into action. The campaign emphasizes the message that for all Americans, despite their age or stage in life, there is no better time than the present to gain control of their finances and “get smart about money.” As part of the campaign, NEFE sponsors a Web site, www.smartaboutmoney.org, which provides a variety of practical educational resources to help individuals overcome financial challenges they face every day, including critical life events such as losing a job, experiencing a serious illness, navigating a divorce, or surviving a natural disaster. The coordination and collaboration aspect of the campaign is exemplified in a resource center on the Web site that provides links to more than 200 different financial education materials contributed from approximately 50 other organizations and agencies on virtually every aspect of personal finance.

NEFE Collaborative Programs

Collaborations in financial education often mean tailoring specific “just-in-time” resources on a particular personal finance issue or challenge to the audience in immediate need of that information. By customizing and tailoring a message that reflects the hopes, desires, interests, life circumstances, and anxiety facing a particular group of Americans,

NEFE's collaborations have made financial education not only practical, but easily understood as people face crisis situations involving illness, disability, income insufficiency, housing, and other special situations.

For example, NEFE has for years worked with the American Red Cross on pioneering financial education for consumers related to disaster preparedness and disaster recovery. This material was created in cooperation with the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) Foundation and is available to all consumers through the American Red Cross in print and online.

In the health-care arena, NEFE developed a series of booklets with the American Cancer Society that address the financial challenges associated with what typically is a long-term and costly illness. Each booklet is calibrated to the different stages of cancer diagnosis and meets a high demand for this type of financial information from individuals and families served by American Cancer Society.

NEFE worked with the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence to help domestic violence victims move forward in life from a position of financial impoverishment and terror. This collaboration also included financial support from a national for-profit corporation.

A project with the American Indian College Fund led to a series of booklets for Native Americans facing the dual challenge of going to college and maintaining their cultural heritage. Titled *Develop Your Vision While Attending College*, the booklets feature graphics, vignettes, and themes drawn directly from Native American stories and life experiences to make the booklets' messages culturally relevant.

These are four examples of the types of targeted distribution and messaging to people facing unique financial challenges that make “just-in-time” financial education real and vital.

Strategic and Thought Leadership

NEFE sponsors conferences, think tanks, and symposia for the purpose of soliciting creative ideas and new perspectives on personal finance. These events gather and seek input from experts in the government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors, including professional and academic disciplines. The collaborations result in research reports, white papers, scholarly articles, monographs, and other published works, which are disseminated to the financial services, academic, and nonprofit communities as our foundation’s contribution to the existing body of knowledge in personal finance. In addition, the topics themselves may, at times, form the basis for new collaborative initiatives.

At least one such gathering has been held every year since 1999. These include:

- *The State of Financial Literacy in America: Evolutions and Revolutions (A Symposium)*
- *Financial Literacy in America: Individual Choices, National Consequences (A Symposium)*
- *Exploring Personal Financial Challenges and Opportunities Facing Latino Immigrants*
- *Closing the Gap Between Knowledge and Behavior: Turning Education Into Action*
- *Motivating Americans to Develop Constructive Financial Behaviors*
- *The Debt Cycle: Using Payday Loans to Make Ends Meet*
- *Financial Psychology and Life-Changing Events*

- *Long-Term Care: Our Next National Crisis?*
- *Financial Education in the Workplace*
- *Practical Applications of Life and Retirement Planning to Financial Planning*
- *Improving Family Financial Security: A Family Economics-Social Work Dialogue*
- *Retirement Planning in the 21st Century*
- *Frozen in the Headlights: The Dynamics of Women and Money*

Grant Making and Research

The NEFE Grants Program supports innovative research and research-based projects that infuse the advanced and powerful work being conducted by the financial education community within the disciplines of economics, neuroscience, sociology, psychology, marketing, finance, and others. Grant awards are given to organizations whose work can make a profound contribution, with unique and actionable application, to the field of financial literacy. Grants also are awarded to academic institutions to help build a body of knowledge in financial education, which can be applied by nonprofits, government, and other institutions.

As just one example of its grantmaking activities, NEFE funded a project undertaken by researchers at the University of Georgia that has resulted in the most significant evaluation tool yet to become available to the financial literacy community. The Financial Evaluation Toolkit provides a continuum measurement to demonstrate how far people progress when exposed to financial education. In addition, the toolkit's flexible design allows it to be customized for different organizations, audiences, and topics, and can be used on a national, regional, or local level. The toolkit will be released at the end

of this year and will be made available by NEFE, through its Web site, at no cost to financial educators nationwide.

In addition to administering its own grants program, NEFE has developed strategic partnerships with other organizations that share a similar philanthropic interest in the public's financial well-being. For example, NEFE manages a Financial Education Clearinghouse through a partnership with the philanthropic area of Ameriprise Financial, Inc. NEFE previously administered a grants program for the American Express Economic Independence Fund and currently administers a grants program for the National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) Investor Education Foundation. In addition, we will soon announce a new agreement to administer the grants program of the Foundation for Financial Planning.

Recommendations for Federal Government Involvement

Despite these efforts and accomplishments, much remains to be done if we are to reach the goal of a financially literate citizenry. Based on NEFE's experiences, I believe that we have made a strong case for the power of partnering. The Federal Government can build on that power in a significant way. Allow me to offer a few ideas for your consideration.

- ***Lead by example.*** Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of financial education offered in the workplace. The Federal Government manages the largest workforce in the country. Financial education already is being provided by many Federal agencies and the U.S. military, often in partnership with the private sector. By evaluating what works best, the Federal Government can better leverage efforts, expand reach, and improve outcomes. In addition, by sharing

these findings with the private sector, those programs, in turn, can take steps to improve their effectiveness.

- ***Coordinate and communicate a unified message.*** Financial education is fragmented. More communication and coordination needs to take place among all participants in the public and private sectors who have a stake in increasing the financial literacy of Americans. The Federal Government can play a pivotal role in helping to combine these separate efforts into a more holistic approach that will have a greater impact and reach more Americans. Holding hearings like the one today is an excellent start. Another idea: The Federal Government could solicit the input of financial literacy groups to agree on a few key personal finance messages, which the groups would commit to using consistently in all of their information dissemination.

Repetition works, and sending the same messages to the public over and over again, from different sources and through different channels, can eventually motivate people to change negative financial behavior into positive behavior. Messages to emphasize might include: how the financial choices individuals make today affect the attainment of their goals tomorrow; the value of saving; the importance of making sound investment decisions; the critical need to prepare financially for retirement; and the importance of financial education for the nation's youth. Whatever the messages, however, they must be clear and fit into the context of people's lives.

- ***Sponsor a broad-based public awareness campaign.*** The \$1.3 million NEFE "Smart about Money" campaign referenced on page 6 of this testimony has been

exceptionally well received by the public, generating over seven million hits to its related Web site in less than a year. Yet, Americans would be better served with an even more ambitious mass-market, multimedia effort in support of a national financial literacy initiative on the scale of the current “truth” campaign, developed through the Public Education Fund to discourage smoking among young people. Such a campaign, if appropriately funded, executed, and kept in front of the public for a sufficient period of time, could be highly effective in stimulating behavior change through action-oriented messages—spend wisely, save, plan and invest for the future—to counter-balance the commercial announcements to which Americans constantly are exposed.

- ***Build demand for existing programs.*** It is incumbent on those of us in the financial literacy community to work together to create demand for our programs and materials, as well as to avoid spending time, effort, and funds needlessly in recreating the many excellent programs and materials that already exist. The government also can seek ways to create interest in and demand for these resources through Federal outlets and other avenues. For example, the Federal Citizen Information Center is a popular resource for consumers, but the process of getting materials posted on the Center’s Web site is time-consuming and costly. Is there a way to streamline this process? As an alternative, consider creating a national clearinghouse of existing financial education programs that have been properly vetted and are either free or low in cost. (Though appropriate disclosures, this can be accomplished to avoid the implication of government endorsement.) Take advantage of existing consumer channels, such as the

www.mymoney.gov Web site, to help make consumers aware of such resources by linking to their sponsors' Web sites. Use public service messages to promote the clearinghouse.

In addition, when good ideas are generated at the Federal level, use the government's reach to spread the word about them to the public. The U.S. Department of Labor, for instance, recently released a report of its 2006 National Summit on Retirement Savings. The report, "Saving for Your Golden Years: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities," contains a wealth of excellent recommendations for improving the financial literacy and retirement security of low-income workers, small-business employees, new entrants to the workforce, and workers nearing retirement. As just one example, the report suggests using the annual Personal Earnings Benefit Statement, which every American already receives from the Social Security Administration, to raise awareness of the gap between projected Social Security income in retirement and the assets needed to adequately replace pre-retirement income levels. A flier, included with the statement, could help every working American calculate the gap for his or her particular situation and establish a monthly savings goal to close this gap, calibrated to the age of the individual. Other opportunities for educating Americans using this statement include providing information about the risks and rewards of taking Social Security benefits early; special considerations for women in light of their longer life expectancy; and how to realistically evaluate sources of income, other than Social Security, that will be available to the individual at

retirement. Such messages can be changed each year and made age-appropriate on each statement.

- ***Reach out to a diversity of organizations.*** Look for input and ideas by soliciting the creative thinking of a diverse range of financial literacy experts and organizations. Benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas by seeking the best thinking, resources, and support of as many contacts as possible. Consider creating task forces of experts in financial literacy to assist with—or at least advise on—facilitating more effective partnerships and increasing the public’s demand for financial education. To maintain momentum, consult with these experts on a regular basis, in person, by conference call, and through electronic means, such as bulletin boards and online discussion groups.
- ***Look for partners who can provide a continuum of financial literacy education.*** Having a student go through a financial education program in high school and/or providing an employee with a financial education seminar at the workplace is a start, but it is not enough. “Just-in-time” financial information must be available throughout life so that individuals can acquire knowledge and change behaviors during points in their lives when they are motivated to change, or must make an important financial decision. The Federal Government can foster this continuum of education by soliciting partners who are experts in the following stages and areas of life: K-12 education; college; the military; the workplace; special situations (health, natural disasters, single parents, etc.); pre-retirement; and retirement.

- ***Consider establishing a “Financial Literacy Corps.”*** Research has shown that one-on-one counseling provides the greatest potential to effect positive change in the management of one’s finances. To expand the number of individuals who can provide the “feet on the ground,” consider partnering with the private sector to establish a volunteer “Financial Literacy Corps.” The Corps could be housed under an appropriate U.S. department or Federal agency, such as the Corporation for National and Community Service. This corps of volunteers would mentor individuals and groups in personal financial literacy using existing materials and resources. Corps volunteers also would provide existing “train the trainer” programs to enable community organizations to teach personal finance basics to their constituencies. A model for such a program is the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), a Resource Partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration. SCORE provides free, expert, problem-solving assistance to small businesses. SCORE has 10,500 volunteers in nearly 400 chapter offices across the U.S., and has helped 7.5 million small business entrepreneurs since its founding in 1964.

Never has the mission of financial literacy education been more critical. In this era of volatile financial markets, job uncertainty, rising debt, and declining savings rates, the ability to manage personal finances is becoming as important as the ability to read and write. The financial stability of families—and, by extension, of communities and the nation itself—is at issue. By building strong partnerships toward the common goal of improving the financial literacy of all Americans, we can leverage existing resources, brainpower, and efforts to reach every American with the positive message that they have

the ability to successfully assume responsibility for their financial well-being. They *can* do it. Ultimately, when individual Americans achieve greater financial stability, the nation as a whole benefits from a stronger, more stable economy.

The success of a nationwide financial literacy effort requires a combination of determination, resources, and affiliations. If education is the heart of the financial literacy movement, then partnering and cooperation are its helping hand.

Thank you for the opportunity for us to come together today, and thank you for your invitation to provide this input. We are available to respond to additional questions and provide more information about our programs, initiatives, and efforts at your request.

National Endowment for Financial Education

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www.nefe.org

www.smartaboutmoney.org

www.ntrbonline.org

**Organizations Involved in NEFE Financial Literacy Initiatives
(projects undertaken from 01/98 through 08/06)**

<p>Credit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fannie Mae Foundation • National Foundation for Consumer Credit/ Financial Planning Association <p>Disasters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Red Cross (English/Spanish) • FEMA/American Red Cross (English/Spanish) • American Red Cross/ AICPA Foundation <p>General Financial Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Express Foundation • American Savings Education Council/EBRI • Foundation for Financial Planning <p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alzheimer's Association • American Cancer Society • American Foundation for Suicide Prevention • American Liver Foundation • American Stroke Association • Arthritis Foundation • Association of Retarded Citizens (The Arc) • Easter Seals • Epilepsy Foundation • National Down Syndrome Society/MassMutual Financial Group • National Kidney Foundation • National Marrow Donor Program/The Marrow Foundation • National Multiple Sclerosis Society/ Paralyzed Veterans of America 	<p>Health (cont'd)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PACER (Disability) • Paralyzed Veterans of America/National Spinal Cord Injury Association • Spina Bifida Association of America • United Cerebral Palsy <p>Human Services/Special Situations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AARP • American Foundation for Suicide Prevention • American Humane Association • Child Welfare League of America (Kinship Care Project) • Child Welfare League of America/Women's Prison Association/Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners • College Transition Network • Mothers Against Drunk Driving • NASD Foundation/ National Military Family Association • National Alliance to End Homelessness • National Association of Community Action Agencies • National Association of Service and Conservation Corps • National Coalition Against Domestic Violence • National Coalition Against Domestic Violence/Intuit • National Council on Problem Gambling • Personal Finance & Adoption Coalition • Prison Fellowship • RESOLVE (Infertility)
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Low Income

- Association for Enterprise Opportunity
- Alliance for National Renewal
- CFED/Fannie Mae Foundation
- Consumer Federation of America (America Saves)
- Dress for Success
- Enterprise Foundation
- Goodwill Industries International, Inc./Bank of America
- Habitat for Humanity International
- National Association of Service and Conservation Corps
- National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions
- National Fuel Funds Network
- RESCUE
- Salvation Army
- Share Our Strength (Operation Frontline)
- Volunteers of America
- Welfare to Work Partnership/Citigroup
- Women in Community Service/Bank of America
- Women Work!/Bank of America

Minority

- 100 Black Men of America/Bank of America
- American Indian College Fund
- First Nations Oweesta Corporation
- Hispanic Scholarship Fund
- International Association of Jewish Vocational Services/Bank of America
- Jewish Women International
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- NAACP/The Allstate Foundation
- National Black MBA Association, Inc.

Minority (cont'd)

- National Coalition of Asian Pacific American Community Development
- National Council of La Raza (English/Spanish)
- National Urban League
- Native American Community Development Corporation
- Opportunities Industrialized Centers of America
- United Negro College Fund
- United National Indian Tribal Youth, Inc.

Youth

- Annie E. Casey Foundation (Foster Care)
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of America/E*TRADE Bank
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America
- Boy Scouts of America
- Camp Fire USA
- Center for Youth as Resources
- Children's Scholarship Fund
- City Year
- College Access Network
- College Summit
- CUNA and America's Credit Unions
- Daniels Fund
- InCharge Education Foundation
- Idealist.org/Action Without Borders
- Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy
- Junior Achievement, Inc.
- Junior ROTC
- National Academy Foundation
- National Collegiate Athletic Association
- National Council for Community & Education Partnerships/ Gear Up

Youth (cont'd)

- National Youth Employment Coalition
- Schloarshop
- USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service
- Ventures Scholars
- Washington State Department of Financial Institutions
- Young Americans Education Foundation
- Youth Service America/ State Farm Companies Foundation
- Young Women's Christian Association
- YouthBuild U.S.A.

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