



Financial counseling and the [Financial Empowerment Center](#) (FEC) model has emerged as an important public service in local governments across the country to bring professional, one-on-one financial counseling to residents. As the model continues to expand, it is critical that clients in all FEC locations continue to receive high-quality services from appropriately trained, professional counselors. The FEC model's emphasis on professionalism through data-driven management and national FEC Training Standards has made a strong impression on clients, partner organizations, and municipal leaders.

Based on findings from our 2017 [evaluation](#) of five FECs across the county, field best practices on training and professionalization, and insights from our partners over more than a decade of model replication, we created the FEC Training Standards, a set of required training topics all FEC Counselors must complete to be eligible to serve FEC clients. In addition, the Training Standards detail the continuing education counselors complete for ongoing professional development.

The Standards delineate the breadth and depth of the financial content areas, counseling and coaching skills, practice and experiential learning, and socio-economic and cultural context setting necessary to serve the diverse needs and backgrounds of FEC clients. The Standards also include a Code of Ethics which ensures that Counselors are trained to offer responsible, professional, and ethical financial counseling, furthering the professional standards of the FEC model.

The Standards are broken down into six sections:

A. Context of Poverty, Cultural and Socio-Economic Factors: Introduces the socio-economic factors that cause and perpetuate poverty; demographic, linguistic, and cultural information about target populations; and how financial empowerment can build resident financial stability.

B. Financial Content: Covers key financial areas to give counselors a strong understanding and mastery of content, including:

- I. Money Management and Budgeting
- II. Basic Banking and Financial Transactions
- III. Credit Reports
- IV. Using Credit Wisely
- V. Consumer Rights – Debt Collection
- VI. Student Loans

- VII. Bankruptcy
- VIII. Planning for Retirement
- IX. Future Planning and Investments
- X. Home Ownership and Mortgages
- XI. Insurance and Public Benefits



C. Counseling and Coaching Skills:

I. Counseling and Coaching Techniques: Outlines the skills needed to work with clients as a counselor/coach, including: cultural competency; avoiding judgment; privacy, confidentiality, and ethical behavior; the role of the supervisor; and understanding the boundaries of financial counseling/coaching.

II. Negotiations: Counselors should be equipped with effective negotiation strategies, and understand the components of a successful negotiation, including: preparation; negotiating from a position of strength; leveraging consumer protection laws and regulations; communicating with the opposition; assessing and evaluating an offer of settlement; and summarizing and memorializing an agreement.

D. Practice and Experiential Learning: Engages counselors in participatory experiential learning opportunities prior to working with FEC clients to apply financial content knowledge, counseling and coaching practices, and database skills. This can consist of additional role-playing, shadowing or co-counseling during counseling sessions, and peer and expert observation and mentorship. At minimum, counselors are required to complete 20-30 hours of practice and observation before being eligible to serve FEC clients.

E. Continuing Education: Ensures that counselors stay up-to-date on best practices and any policy changes to maintain the quality of counseling services. To maintain their status as an FEC counselor, counselors must complete at least 30 hours of continuing education and professional development, including at least 1 hour related to ethics, each year and submit an annual log to their supervisor for verification and documentation.

F. Additional Trainings: Includes trainings on the FEC model, FECBOT database, Code of Ethics, local community partners, and localized topics including public benefits and consumer financial protection.

Counselors must also complete and pass a CFE Fund administered exam, focusing on financial content, counseling and coaching skills, and the FEC model and database. Additionally, local FEC management should organize trainings for the community and local government partners on FEC services and how to make referrals to the FEC.

**Want to learn more, or get your financial counselor training approved
for Financial Empowerment Center eligibility?**

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