

eXtension: A New Educational Resource for Credit Unions

by Debra Pankow and Erica Tobe

Cooperative Extension and credit unions have been working together in many ways for the past few years. Representatives from each organization have conducted NEFE® High School Financial Planning Program® joint teacher training sessions. Cooperative Extension staff have conducted educational sessions on personal finance topics for credit union members at credit unions nationwide. And staff from both organizations worked cooperatively to develop CUNA's Thrive by Five™ personal finance teaching materials for parents of preschoolers.

Now a new online information system called eXtension (pronounced E-extension) is in the testing phase of development. As designed, it will give credit unions and Cooperative Extension staff members the chance to further their partnership while improving members' knowledge about a wide variety of subjects.

Tapping expertise nationwide

The new online information system is:

- A portal to the nation's largest nonformal educational and information system. An interactive online learning resource, draws upon the eXtension collected knowledge of the more than 100 colleges and universities that comprise the nation's Land-Grant University System. This includes a group of 42 schools and colleges of family and consumer sciences.

- An around-the-clock everyday Internet resource designed to provide access to objective, research-based information solving real problems in real time.

- A virtual resource with dynamic content designed to provide customer-centered education, information, and interactive decision-making tools.

eXtension complements educational programs that Cooperative Extension delivers locally through its network of more than 3,000 offices. With Extension offices in every state and in most counties nationwide, eXtension will serve as an excellent resource for credit unions and their members. It will provide access to

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up-to-date, research-based education on numerous financial topics such as investing, budgeting, and credit. Credit unions will be able to use information from "Ask The Experts" and "Frequently Asked Questions" features in member newsletters or seminars.

How eXtension works

State and federal dollars initially funded eXtension, which will eventually benefit from additional resources from non-government partners. eXtension will be fully functional in late 2007. At that point, access to Cooperative Extension resources will be simply a matter of going online (see Resources box). Once at the eXtension site, users will select a topic. This will connect them to a group of

experts, known as a Community of Practice, who specialize in that area.

Currently eXtension focuses on some traditional agricultural topics, but financial security will be among the first wave of Communities of Practice planned for public release early in 2007. This topic was chosen to lead eXtension because of the wealth of existing online learning tools developed and widely used through the national Cooperative Extension initiative "Financial Security in Later Life."

Financial security, the ability to meet day-to-day expenses while saving and investing for tomorrow, is on the agendas of individuals, families, policy-makers, government, non-profit, and business leaders.

For more details about eXtension, visit the Web site. To learn about how you can work more closely with Cooperative Extension in your area, find your local Extension office online, or contact Erica Tobe, national liaison to the credit union movement. ■

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Resources

- Cooperative Extension local offices
csrees.usda.gov/Extension/index.html
- eXtension
about.extension.org/about
- "Financial Security in Later Life"
csrees.usda.gov/fsll