

Securing Service Member Financial Well-Being: Defense Department, Leaders and Service Provider Roles

What the DOD is doing

The Defense Department remains committed to supporting service members' financial well-being by providing comprehensive financial literacy education, financial counseling and referral to appropriate resources.

- The military services deliver comprehensive financial literacy education that includes [required training](#) across the military life cycle, aligned with standard learning objectives.
- The department reinforces and amplifies education and resources through multiple digital channels, including [the Office of Financial Readiness](#), [MilSpouse Money Mission](#)® and [Military OneSource](#).
- Educational content and [best practices](#) support actionable financial literacy concepts and behaviors while providing referrals to additional resources.

Financial literacy training and counseling enable service members and families to have knowledge and tools to make informed financial decisions and increase mission readiness and overall financial well-being.

The department continually assesses the financial well-being of the force to identify needs and adjust training and counseling services as needed.

- The annual Status of Forces Survey asks service members about their financial literacy and preparedness, and assesses the financial goals, habits and knowledge of the force.
- The DOD gathers feedback from financial counselors and other federal departments and agencies, along with the military aid societies and other interested parties, for analysis.
- The military services each have processes to monitor the financial well-being of their members, assess the effectiveness of their education and counseling programs, and inform changes to their financial readiness programs.

What commanders and leaders can do

Commanders and leaders at all levels can support the overall financial well-being of their service members and families by understanding the importance of financial well-being, engaging their service members and encouraging openness in seeking support.

- Understand the potential effects of financial well-being on your service members' personal lives and their ability to accomplish the mission.
- Learn to recognize indicators of potential threats to individual financial well-being. Indicators may be behavioral (e.g., living beyond one's means, a lack of skills or financial experiences, or never having a checking account before enlisting).

- Know that individuals may be reluctant to talk about their financial well-being or challenges out of fear or embarrassment, or appearing weak or uneducated.
- Realize that individuals who are experiencing financial challenges may be in that position due to no fault of their own. Even when we maintain all the right financial habits, like having an emergency fund, limiting debt and following a spending plan, bad things can happen to good people.

Engage your service members and assess their financial well-being as part of your overall assessment of your organization's well-being.

- Ask how they are doing. Talk with them about financial topics to further their understanding of financial readiness and how to avoid pitfalls. Gain insights into challenges they may face.
- Assess their level of financial education and provide training and access to counseling.
- Ensure they are aware counseling is also available as a proactive resource in building skills and behaviors to get ahead financially and not just catch up.
- Recognize that the fear and stigma of perceived adverse actions or embarrassment may keep individuals from seeking assistance.

Financial counseling is available to service members and families through a network of 700+ personal financial managers and counselors at installations worldwide and 24/7 through Military OneSource.

As you work to remove the stigma of discussing finances, encourage positive financial actions and acknowledge any steps towards progress.

- Creating measurable financial goals, such as paying off the lowest credit balance within the next six months, and taking steps to achieve them.
- Creating an emergency fund separate from savings that helps to absorb a financial shock, such as emergency travel, car or home repair.
- Following smart car-buying practices through self-directed learning, whether through a video, an article or a well-informed peer.

Encourage service members to seek out appropriate resources to further their financial well-being, and if needed, assistance in facing financial challenges.

- Establish a command climate that fosters resiliency and lets members know their chain of command is a resource to support them and assist in their financial well-being.
- Let service members know they are not alone. Since much of our everyday life involves financial transactions, financial challenges and stress are not uncommon. Seeking assistance through education or counseling is a sign of strength, not weakness.



A microlearning video, [Recognize Financial Distress](#) is available on the FINRED website.