

ADAPTING CURRENT PRODUCTS AND SERVICES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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>> DeBRITTANY MITCHELL: Welcome, everyone. It will be just another minute.

(Pause.)

>> TANISHA WASHINGTON: Julisa, I can go ahead and introduce BCT. Good afternoon, folks. Thank you for taking the time to join us in this Access For All training discussion. My name is Tanisha Washington. I am the Deputy Program Manager for BCT Partners on this training series that we are providing in conjunction with the Department of Treasury and CDFI Fund. BCT is the prime contract holder, but we have the great fortune of having some really wonderful subject matter experts who are joining us today, including Jack Brummel, Charlie Hammerman, Danny Housley, and Susan Tachau.

Additionally, though he is not listed on the slide, we have Michael Swack on the line. Again, thank you, Treasury, for this very important program and for you guys for joining us.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Julisa, did you have anything to add?

>> JULISA CULLY: DeBrittany, you want to go?

>> DeBRITTANY MITCHELL: Hi, this is DeBrittany from the Institute for Community Inclusion. I'll walk you through a couple of steps in terms of how to use the Zoom platform. You should see a raised hand feature. If you would like to verbally contribute to the conversation at any time feel free to raise your hand and we can unmute you. In addition you also have the option to mute and unmute yourself.

This meeting is also being closed captioned. The captions are posted in the chat box. If you have any questions regarding

that, please feel free to contact me as well or chat me directly.

Again, my name is DeBrittany Mitchell. If you have any connectivity issues, please feel free to message me directly. Also I want to point out there is a phone number to connect to this meeting as well. If you have any trouble connecting via your computers.

Thanks. And without further ado, I would like to hand it back over to Jack.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Hi, everybody. Thanks for joining us today. We are going to start with the first subtopic which is the notion of considering increased flexibility in underwriting. And we are going to start with Danny. Danny, do you want to go ahead?

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: Yes. Good afternoon. Unless you're Jack. Then good morning.

Yes, when we look at really important things when you are including the disability community, is that flexibility. With us, that first point, allowing for higher debt to income ratios, that is something that we take into account. Also take into account the debt to income ratio for an individual with a disability could be very high and also fluctuate from month-to-month. Sometimes you may have extra prescriptions that you have to get, or extra equipment that may need to be purchased within a month. So we take that into account.

I know some places won't really even look at you if you have a debt to income ratio more than 50 percent. Some of our individuals here in Georgia have a higher debt to income ratio.

Also looking at an applicant, anything that is medical on their credit report is automatically excluded. We don't hold any of that against them.

Then we do things like our program here in Georgia, we have a deferment that a consumer can take advantage of. That way, if you get approved, you're making payments but you hit a rough patch. Maybe something flares up or you have extra expenses one month, we have three months of deferment built in to prevent somebody from falling behind or having something negative reported to their credit because they had an incident.

So that flexibility is really what allows us to work with and approve a lot of people. It is what allows people to get a majority of our loans are assistive technology loans. That's our primary focus in Georgia is making sure that we can get that assistive technology or those home modifications, or vehicle modifications for people. We have been able to serve many more people because of that flexibility in our underwriting.

(Cell phone.)

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: Sorry about that.

Yeah.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Thanks, Danny. Charlie, you were going to talk about increased flexibility in housing.

>> CHARLES HAMMERMAN: So, yes, on the housing side for anybody on the call that wants to understand how we approach it, the flexibility that we look at is multilayered. One is on from the standpoint of taking a look at the actual entity itself. So you may end up with some nontraditional entities that come as a borrower, whether it is families coming together to create a new legal entity. It to be an LLC or they even start to -- try to start a new not for profit. The borrowing entity, you may be flexible and understanding and in support of with the groups that come to you because they are trying something new. And if they are trying something new, that means they don't have a track record. If they would have had a track record they probably could have gotten conventional financing, especially since there's some form of collateral. As to the collateral itself as Danny mentioned, once values. Now, the way we looked at situations, especially with scattered site single family homes or one single family home is to sort of look at a situation of saying, well, a normal conventional financing with a bank could be 60, 70, even 80 percent loan to value. We have been willing to go as high as 90 percent, in some cases even a little higher on the basis that we are trying to give the borrower an opportunity to build up some equity over time. Then take them to a conventional financier and be able to do a longer term mortgage.

We do short-term, anything from one to five years. And that's the flexibility of what we try to do. Although what we will do is amortize out the loans longer with the hope that even as they approach the five-year period we are not looking for them to pay principal and interest during the 60-month term but rather trying to spread that out beyond the five years that we can then convert it into more conventional financing.

As with interest and principal, another discussion which is: Is there flexibility to match up and potentially provide interest only for a period of time? We have had some situations where we have done interest-only for six months to allow the project to sort of get started. We have some situations where we actually have taught the borrower how to put away a year's worth of interest so, therefore, they didn't have to worry about it from a fundraising perspective. Therefore, we were able to have it secure in terms of the first year and let them focus on growing the program or the housing or whatever was going on.

The flexibility from our standpoint has always been about approaching the borrower in an idiosyncratic way, not in a cookie cutter way. Obviously we have loan policies in terms of

where the parameters are, but within those parameters we have been incredibly flexible once the borrower shows up on our doorstep. Go ahead, Jack.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Thank you, Charlie. So we are going to segue from housing to Susan. And Susan, let's talk a little bit about home modifications, which is both something related to housing and assistive technology.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Thank you. So thank you, Jack. Similar to Danny, Pennsylvania's assistive technology foundation is an alternative financing program. So our target is helping people finance the assistive technology that they want.

Under that umbrella of assistive technology is home modifications. So we will extend loans from \$100 all the way up to 60,000. So the underwrite for the more extensive home modifications, which in general means that you are changing the structure of the home. Over 10,000 for the most part we treat that as a home equity loan. Going back to some of what Danny talked about, we do look at debt to income. We are reading credit reports. We are comfortable just looking at a debt to income that is at least 50 percent. Sometimes a little bit higher. But again, it depends on what someone is trying to do and why they are trying to do it. Because since our target audience, our people with disabilities and seniors, most people are making those home modifications so they are not institutionalized. And so that they can age in place.

So the aspect that they will repay us is very high compared to some of the credit card debt. So we have had these conversations, so that every one of our applicants knows about other possible funding resources. And we can layer that financing or help someone apply for one of the government grants. So what is there for our financing, people are, they have been vetted. We know what their story is. We know that we, like Danny, can tease out the medical debt.

The one thing that is fairly, we are not that flexible about is we do not want someone late on their mortgage or their rent. Because the bottom line is, we don't want someone to become homeless. We can continue to move forward the process of helping someone obtain a loan for home modification as long as they are current on their rent and their mortgage, and they have been cleared from bankruptcy for one year.

We will also similarly to Danny, if you run into trouble and that is certainly not something we expect when we are closing a loan, but our home equity loans will go out ten years. If you run into trouble, say you lost your job or look at what's happening now with the coronavirus and say you're an hourly worker, we will make up to three months at a time rescue payment

and tie that in at the end of your loan. We will issue a second promissory note.

In general, with home equity loans we prefer to secure those loans. But it is not always necessary. So recently we extended a loan for someone who needed an elevator. They have a newly acquired disability. They can no longer use the steps in their home. The elevator was not secured.

Right now we are hoping to extend a new roll-in shower bathroom modification, which is about 19,000, and not have that secured. In general, the home equity loans are secured. And we prefer also, if you are looking at this outline, we don't do much in the loan restructuring. So that would come up, and it is not listed right here, but it would come up sometimes with adapted vehicles where someone has gone to a vehicle vendor. They have been charged a great deal of interest out 15 years, and they realize that they are just going to be rolling over one known into a new product, into a new vehicle. We will make exceptions and we will refinance that.

My colleague Tracy is on the phone and Tracy, if you could let me know if I have kind of neglected to say something, that would be great.

Maybe you can't. Maybe you're on mute. But you can let me know and I'll fill you in. But those are kind of the basic parameters around for our program on home modifications going up to 60,000.

Again we try to make these loans as affordable as possible. So everything from 2,000 to 60,000 we are leveraging other bank money. We have contracts with those banks. So they are, quote, partnership loans. And we buy down that interest rate by 1 percent. So it's 3.75, the life of the loan, to make sure it is as affordable as possible.

Although our programs will lend to all people with disabilities and family members, or advocates for that assistive technology, we know through our data collection that the vast majority are low income. And so that means we are very committed to making this as affordable as possible. That's why we are there with 3.75. And we have paid our bank a 1 percent one-time only on the principal so that there is no deeper relationship building, like our borrowers are not sent credit cards. They are not sent other marketing materials. And we are all committed that they are never any fees that are attached to this applicant or this loan. Credit reports, we absorb those costs. There's no application fee. No origination fee. No closing cost fee. No document fee. When we say no fee, we mean no fee.

Those monies we raise through foundations, local foundations. But our goal here is to really help someone get

the home modifications they need and to build their credit, improve their credit.

Jack? It's back to you.

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: While we are waiting for Jack, this is Danny. I wanted to add a little something I neglected to mention earlier. Our program here in Georgia, we do direct lending. We don't partner with any credit unions or banks currently. That's why I didn't mention anything about rescue payments because for the ones that we do right now, it's all done in-house. We did in the previous iteration of our program, we did a lot of vehicles. So if somebody did run into trouble with that program, that was a partnership program with three credit unions. We would then issue rescue payments up to three months as well to make sure that that person didn't lose their vehicle. A lot of our folks that were in the van program, they were in very rural parts of Georgia and they really needed that accessible vehicle. So we wanted to make sure somebody didn't lose their connection to the community because of a missed payment or because of the temporary financial hardship.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Thanks, Danny. Before we leave this topic, I want to just mention a couple of points around small business lending. Some of you may be doing small business loans and when we turn to small business lending for people with disabilities, there is a couple of points. One is developing the relationship with benefit counselors. This is something that we have stressed in other conversations that we have had. It is particularly important if you are making loans or expecting contributions, equity from your small business borrower, particularly important to be cognizant of folks that may be receiving federal benefits and may have some limitations on the amount of money that they can have in savings. This is where working with benefit counselors in your lending process can be of value.

Further in business lending, sometimes working with people with disabilities, one of the things that they really need is assistive technology. So while it might not be considered part of a normal business loan, in instances where you've got a person with a disability who does need assistive technology, sort of broadening your consideration of what you will lend for will be important to the borrower with disability.

So we ran a little bit over on this topic because it is the introductory subtopic and it is real important.

I want to turn to any of the TA participants on the call and see if we've got any questions.

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: You can type something in or you can unmute and speak if you've got something to contribute or

something that you want clarification on in something that we've presented.

>> DeBRITTANY MITCHELL: This is DeBrittany, just as a verbal reminder, this session is being recorded. Thank you.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Thanks. We will have some period at the end of the presentations. We will have a period again for people to ask questions or contribute any thoughts that they have.

I'm going to move on to the next subtopic, which is offering unsecured loans. Susan touched on this a little bit already. And we will spend a little bit less time on this. But Susan, do you want to say a little bit more and we'll have Danny and turn it over to other participants?

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Sure. In our world, we have found -- our world being that of disability -- we have found that there are quite a few people who have disabilities who have no credit. And obviously many who have poor credit. So it is that transition age, for example, of people, young adults who have no credit and one of the realities of today's world is that you need credit in order to have a job or to rent an apt.

So we created a direct lending program that we also support by other monies, not just CDFI monies, although that's where we started off. And it is for 100 to 2,000. Again, really making it affordable for assistive technology. One hundred to 2,000, 0 percent interest, 0 fees. The Philadelphia foundation helps us to offset the cost. We are running the credit reports. All of those loans are unsecured. The reason is, A, this is stuff people really need. It is not like some programs where they are offering a credit building loan but it is for rent. Or a deposit to be able to be a tenant, but rather it really is for assistive technology.

So we intentionally are not putting a lien on a vehicle or a home. Those would be the only two things we possibly would imagine doing anything. So they are unsecured loans, 0 percent interest, zero fees. We run, since it is our money and we are going to be conservative, a lot of these people have no credit. We work with Corelogic CredCo. And we run and run all three credit score companies: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. And we found there can be 100 points differences in the credit scores. It happens frequently enough that the \$16.16 that it costs to get all three credit reports is well worth it to us because we want to know as much as we can about the applicant. So again, we start off small and we only allow one loan at a time. So the maximum repayment term is three years. So you are able to build your credit during that time because we are also reporting through the credit builders alliance back to those three credit bureaus.

And the loan is certainly better than putting it on a credit card which for some people in our population they are going to be getting those credit cards with 20 and 30 percent interest rates.

We also work with people on helping them learn how to save and save wisely so that whatever small loan they are getting from us, it's as affordable as possible. We are talking about other funding resources. We are helping people understand the ABLE program and setting up an ABLE account through our treasurer's office. We are doing one-on-one financial education which we will talk about in a few minutes.

I think by the time we are able to package this loan, people are well on their way to being able to purchase the assistive technology they want.

The other thing we do to safeguard, since there's so many people whose credit scores are not great in this loan product, is our check is made out to both the borrower and the vendor. If a vendor will not take a third-party check such as best buy or Apple, we send this check to the borrower who gives it over to the company. We make it out to the company but we send it to the borrower. We tell the borrower that we need that receipt so we are closing the loop.

If someone decides to change their mind, again they are taking out a loan. They have to repay it. Danny, I'm sure there's more I can say, but go ahead.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Let's turn to Danny. Danny, anything more to offer about offering unsecured loans?

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: In Georgia, all of our loans are unsecured. I mentioned the previous iteration of our program with the vehicles. Those were secured. But when we are looking at doing the smaller dollar loans for assistive technology, you know, the cost of trying to repossess something was far outweighed what the device was worth. And we didn't want to be the organization that is going in to take away somebody's stair lift and trap them in their home.

So with our program, yeah ...

(Laughter.)

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: Excuse me. Being able to work with the consumer that way to provide that, it is one of those things that builds up that trust. And we offered, about two years ago we started offering some even smaller dollar loans. Our usual assistive technology loan had to be used specifically for a modification or a piece of equipment. We started a small are credit builder program so if somebody wanted to take out something less than \$1,000, it would give them a fixed interest rate and they could have a little bit more flexibility with how they were using it.

A lot of folks we worked with, they started out in the credit builder program because they had a credit score of 0 or they had credit that had become damaged due to acquiring a disability. They would start with the credit builder program. We would cover things like budgeting. We did a lot of financial education with people in that program. That way they would start off with the smaller dollar amount and then as they were more comfortable and secure in their budget they were able to move to the larger loan or to move to a traditional financial institution for something like that.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good, good. It shows a lot of flexibility in the programs that you both operate.

I'm curious, Natalie, I think you're on the call and you run a lending program for assistive technology in Oklahoma. Can you tell us, do you also offer unsecured loans?

>> NATALIE: Yes, we do. All of our direct loans are unsecured.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: All of your direct loans are unsecured. You also make loan gather guarantees as well?

>> NATHANIEL: Right, we do loan guarantees with our partner bank. Depending on what the assistive technology is, those may or may not be secured.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. I'm just curious about other CDFIs on the call that have not been doing consumer lending. Does this cause anxiety or fear on your part? Is there anybody on the call that has been thinking about consumer lending but hasn't been doing it? You know, would worry about this?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Very good. Any other questions from our TA participants? Or comments?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Let's move on to the next subtopic. Here we are going to talk about how to mitigate the increased risk that might be found with making loans to people with disabilities. And how to mitigate it by building relationships with clients.

Charlie, you have some thoughts on this.

>> CHARLES HAMMERMAN: Yes, thanks, Jack. So again it is the nature of our business, we don't do consumer loans and we don't do SBA lending. My point being, we don't do a lot of volume. Our lending has been narrowed to the point where at any one point we will have 20, maybe the max would be 25 loans on the books at any one time. We have done two things internally which everyone is free to adopt if it works for them or if you have any questions we can tell you offline how we do it. But we've done a weekly pipeline call with our staff. As part of that pipeline call we've now created an additional sheet to look

at the portfolio that we do have, and we gave our lending team the job of checking in with them.

The minimum is at least once a month. Sometimes it may be more often. There's one loan that we would consider to be our highest risk loan even though collateral is not the issue. The collateral, we have very good collateral in the loan. It is a large loan. It is over \$3 million. It is a construction loan. And we actually created a weekly call with that borrower and made sure that their team and our team were on the phone once a week even if there were no updates, just to maintain the conversation and keep it consistent.

So from our perspective, that does mitigate risks in a very large way. We are a national CDFI as well. Traveling to each of the borrowers every single year is not the easiest thing to do. What we have done is put things on a rotation. If we go to see a third, a third, of a third over the course of three years, we'll get out there, see the actual projects, be with the people, but on the phone or conferencing like we are doing with this call, we definitely do something at least once a month. It also helps with regard to the reporting. So they obviously need to give us reporting on financials. We are sticklers in terms of social impact reporting from the borrowers. We fully make social impact reporting an event of default if they don't give it to us.

So this constant communication in between, let's say an annual checkup is very, very powerful for us. Back to you, Jack.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good, okay, thank you. Danny, do you have anything to add about building relationships as a way to mitigate risk?

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: Yes, absolutely. So with our program in Georgia, we do have multiple conversations with our consumers. Both through the application process as well as they are working their way through the loan. I always ensure that our folks feel comfortable giving us a call if they have any questions. And this portion about introducing clients to community supports they may be aware of, that's a lot of what I do when I work with somebody who is applying. Whether they are approved or not, I make sure they have a list of resources for both their independence, education, financial education, credit repair, lots of different things.

One of the things that reinforces my relationship with our consumers here in Georgia is that aside from just providing them a list of resources and phone numbers and what not, they tend to see me in the community. In one of our previous calls I reiterated how important it is to show up, be there, be seen. And I'm going to reiterate that again. That's one of the things

that helps us with mitigating a lot of risk because our consumers see me at meetings. They see me in the community at their local Center for Independent Living or events that are going on around the State. We do a lot of travel.

So having that connection, especially for folks that are in the more rural parts of Georgia, makes a huge difference. I have had a few folks that we had a little trouble with and we thought we were going to have to write off. And then they ended upcoming back in and making good on those loans because they had met me and they had talked to me and they knew, I always drive home that with our program here it is money that is being paid back goes right back out into the community. If you default on something, you are depriving somebody else with a disability in the state of using our program.

That really helps. Again with those conversations face-to-face, it makes a big difference.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good. All right, thanks, Danny. Susan we are running over. Do you have anything to adhere briefly?

>> SUSAN TACHAU: I do. I wanted to reiterate the importance of communication. We have about 14 touchpoints when we get someone's application to the end of that process. We have several bankers on the board of directors who were surprised by the 14 touchpoints. They thought that was excessive.

What that has done, we have created a relationship. That is how our program grows. We can afford to take risks. So in terms of your own budgeting and figuring out your operational expenses, knowing that it is, if you are really getting into this population and helping people who have not had access to credit before, it is not unique just to disability. I think it would be the same for if your target audience were new immigrants or something like that. It is developing the relationship, but that operational budget for underwriting has to be higher than if you were a traditional bank.

Secondly, we do a couple of other things. One is since we do have a combination of direct lending and partnership banks, with our partnership banks we get a weekly delinquency rate, report. One day and more, which means there are people that we know -- I don't know why they run their lives this way, but they do. They are always 15 or 16 days late. We actually don't worry about them until all of a sudden they are 20 days late or 25 days late. That's outside of their pattern. We can call them and find out what's going on. Then revert back to some of our other practices where if someone lost a job or is in the hospital we can give a rescue payment. The last thing we want is for someone to default. Certainly if it is a vehicle, we don't want that very important transportation mode to be lost.

I think that it is important to have, continue as Danny said, to go out into the community and let people know what it is that we do because CDFIs are still not well-known in our neck of the woods. They may be more familiar in other parts of the country, but we have a lot of CDFIs, a lot, relatively a lot of CDFIs in Pennsylvania that are for small business people. We have very few who are consumer lenders and very few who are facility lenders.

A lot of what we are trying to do is even build up the capacity for other CDFIs and other products so that they know that, look, our target audience is to give people a chance.

I think those are the important things. You know, in addition to all the other programs that Danny and I talked about.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good. Susan, the 14 touchpoints that you referenced, do you have a document that lists those?

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Well, we keep track internally of phone calls, emails, letters. Again, going back to something we talked about earlier, remember to always ask the format that someone prefers. I'm working with someone right now who is a teacher and she actually prefers to have a phone call during her lunch break. Or she will call once her husband gets home. So that may be at 7:30 at night. We are okay with that.

So we are keeping internal records because that absolutely affects our staffing and our staffing model and those expenses.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: But our default rate is really low.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Yeah, yeah, this relationship building is really important in this field. I think that a lot of assistive technology lenders certainly feel that.

Let's turn it over to our technical assistance recipient audience. Anybody have questions for us on these? Or comments about your practices?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. I'm going to -- just one second. Anna Magnusson in Iowa. I think that you have a program. I'm curious on whether or not you can unmute yourself and talk about the way that you deal with relationship building as a risk mitigation mechanism.

>> ANNA MAGNUSSON: Yes, this is Anna. Can you hear me? And thank you for -- oh! I dropped the phone, sorry.

I have with me Sophie Howell, our program assistant. One of the reasons we wanted to bring so if I on to the team is because they has experience working with customer relations on the bank. Like Susan talked about, it is meeting the individual based on their individual needs. We have many of our borrowers who have different work schedules and different needs and maybe they

don't want a phone call. They only want to be emailed. One of the things that Sophie and I have been talking about is developing relationships where we are not talking to them when the statements are due or there is a problem. Sophie and I talked about sending them birthday cards, anniversary cards of their loan and reaching out and communicating with them so that when there is a problem they are more likely to answer the phone or answer our emails.

What we want them to know, this is a relationship that is not just about the financial transaction which is of course important, but we are interested in their overall wellbeing.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Great. Good. Thanks, Anna. Anybody else?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Thanks. Let's move on to the concept of structuring financial capability services or financial education to meet the unique circumstances of people with disabilities.

Susan and Danny, I know you both have thoughts on this. Susan, do you want to start?

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Sure. We have two publications. The first one is we want to make sure that people know about funding resources and services in Pennsylvania. So if you are a person with a disability and you need services in order to go to work or remain in your own home or be active in the community.

We put together a book around assistive technology and we update it all the time. But of course, we have it accessible in hard print and on the -- in hard copy and on our website.

Secondly and most importantly for, I think, the people we are serving is we created our own financial education curriculum. And so it is called "sense and sensibility: A guide to money management."

You can download a copy that is accessible on our website. We also have hard copies. We are redoing our website study money.U.S. that will be ready in the fall. The purpose of having a financial education is that we acknowledge that everyone needs financial education and that it is pitiful in Pennsylvania -- I don't think we are alone -- that you can graduate high school without a single course in personal finance. So here you are coming to us and you need to borrow something and you don't know what we are referring to as do you, if you are receiving Supplemental Security Income, do you have other unearned income resources or are you working? And they have never heard of the work incentives or the ABLE program. So having done this for a number of years, our program is 21 years old. We created this book and we talk to everyone on a one to one basis, and ongoing if needed. And we provide training. So

that what we are really trying to do is get people to be able to make decisions on a day-to-day and on a month-to-month basis so that they can better afford, know what they are entering into, know the language. We found, we've learned that, for example, for some people the word promissory note is a new term. They are signing documents and didn't really even know that a promissory note meant they were repaying a loan.

There's all of that, but in the shortness of time I encourage people to go to our website PATF.U.S. and download our book. People can use it and make it their own.

We have some very specific Pennsylvania resources, but they are similar across the country. So that if you are working, we want people to go to Vitus sites so you can get the taxes done and get the refunds. All of that helps to develop that relationship and we are looking at making someone credit worthy. Okay! That was quick.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Thanks, Susan. I would just point out that as part of this project we plan on having a virtual resource bank. It will be accessible, I think, on a CDFI fund, on the CDFI fund website. Susan, we'll make sure to post -- we'll be posting a lot of material there. Susan, we will be posting hopefully your material here as well. Something that we referenced earlier, your money, your goals from the consumer financial protection bureau, that workbook or that resource does have a disabilities supplement which is very valuable. If you are doing work around financial education for people with disabilities, that's a good resource as well.

Danny, let's turn to you. In Georgia, you've got financial education. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: I do. I can be pretty brief with this.

With our financial education we did create something specific for the disability community. We based ours off of the money smart group.

>> (Speaker away from microphone.)

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: I thought I heard a question. Yes, we based it on the money smart curriculum and so we did four presentations that were required for anybody going through the credit builder program. So we had the basics of banks, the basics of credit, assistive technology acquisition, because that's one of our primary focus. And then financial health and avoiding scams, things of that nature.

So we put those together. Those are available on the website for our nonprofit partner, the center for financial independence and innovation. Those can be downloaded.

We put those on there so that people could review them afterwards. We do have some supplemental materials that we give out during the presentations. So with us, we like to give those

in person. Again it is about, you know, that personal connection so that they see either myself or the administrative person or the CFII come in and give those presentations and answer any questions that they have.

Tools for life also has an online resource called dollars and sense. Much like sense and sensibility, right?

So we have that so that people can go in and they can add resources. We try to keep it a living document so that individuals can edit things if something changes, if they see a resource that they think people will benefit from, they can add it.

We have a lot of state and national resources that are on there. That can be found at the tools for life website and I'll put that in the chat box as well. Because that is our financial education in a nutshell. I know we are over a few to some other areas, so that's all I'll contribute for that part.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Thank you. Just to emphasize the reason that this is important if you are adapting your products and services to meet the needs of people with disabilities, you will want to look at these other resources to make sure if you have current financial education or financial capability services, you adapt them as you begin to serve people with disabilities.

So I know I want to turn this over to our audience. I know that one of the lending programs in the nation is Anna Magnusson's in Iowa. There is a program that we think is pretty good. Anna, yours is like the Cadillac in the nation. You want to tell us a little bit about your program?

>> ANNA MAGNUSSON: So you are talking about our financial empowerment program?

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Yes.

>> ANNA MAGNUSSON: Well, that's very kind of you to say it's a Cadillac. We are getting it there. I would say it's probably a Subaru right now.

(Laughter.)

>> ANNA MAGNUSSON: But we are piloting this in March and this is much because of the feedback and information that we received from you, Jack, at the CDFI training in L.A., and Susan.

So we are going to link our financial empowerment program to our loan program. We are using a combination of the sense and sensibility curriculum, money smart, and also United Way's program, the women unit the program locally here in story county.

So it will be very customized based on what the individual needs as we do an assessment with them to figure out what is it exactly that they need to learn.

The one example that will I give quickly, a CFO has had a spinal cord injury. She probably doesn't need to know what is a spending plan. As Susan pointed out she probably will need to learn how to navigate through the ABLE accounts or any kind of disability benefit.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Thanks, Anna. And I think Natalie in Oklahoma, I think that you've got some financial education services as well. Is there anything about yours that you would like to share?

>> NATALIE: Yeah, ours is also based on the FDIC money smart. It is similar to what Anna said in terms of we provide information depending on what the applicant needs. Where they're at.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Thanks. Anybody else? Any other CDFIs that may be offering financial capability services? Anything you would like to share? Any questions you might have about how to go about modifying what you are currently doing?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: If not, okay. We will move on. The next subject is making sure that all the information you've got is accessible. And Danny, do you want to kick us off on that?

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: I do. So with this, accessibility is key when you are reaching out to the disability community.

So with us in the past our application was primarily paper. I came on board and we moved to a more electronic format. But we do provide information in a format that any individual requests.

So for our educational materials we've done braille. We do a lot of electronic format because that tends to work well for a lot of people, whether it is learning disability or vision or what have you.

So we do try to start with electronic and then we branch out from there. When we are having meetings, we try to make sure that they are captioned at a minimum. If ASL interpreters are requested, we accommodate that as well.

And we are looking at technologies that are going to help with making that more accessible. There are services where you can do very affordable remote captions and remote sign language interpreting. So that's, you know, often times when people think about accessibility with materials, the biggest area are people that do want that braille format. Anything that we do print that we give out we also make available online. We also use a minimum of 15-point font with anything that we distribute in person.

Again, it is about having that flexibility. Sometimes also if we're caught off guard, maybe a bag got left with some of the materials, we also introduce people to some of the assistive

technologies that can help in a pinch in the meantime until we can get them the format that they need. That is important, offering those alternatives.

That will build trust with an individual, within an organization that you may be working with. And it is just good practice to have that. So again, with us we start with electronic and then we go from there. Sometimes people, especially in the rural parts, we'll say we don't want electronic because they don't have Internet access. So then we'll do a thumb drive or we'll do whatever is going to help that person get the information that they need. So we try to remain flexible with it.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Thanks. I want to point out to people, our current plan is to have the final webinar on March 31st covering marketing an outreach and networking. And we will spend a little more time on accessibility in communications during that webinar.

Susan, you have something to add on accessibility?

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Right. One of the questions we always ask people is: What is the format? What accommodation does someone need?

Some people who have been around a while or are advocates, they will know exactly what we are asking and will fill it in. One of the things we learned to do is to give people additional options so that they know what we are asking is, if we are having a meeting, are you a wheelchair user? Do you have an attendant with you? Do you need something in large print or braille? Would you prefer a thumb drive? Things like that. Because often if you ask: Do you need it? People won't know kind of what you are talking about unless they are already kind of immersed in the disability field.

We also assume with any larger meeting just to go ahead and we bring or arrange to have there someone who is a certified American Sign Language interpreter as well as CART services. And as Danny said, there's also some assistive technology. So we will also, if we are working with someone we will ask do you have a caption call telephone, for example. So that whatever we are saying, if this is what someone wants, they can have it kind of realtime captioning on their phone. Otherwise there are other services like Relay Services where we can speak and then it is captioned for the other person on the other end of the phone.

So I think it is going back to what we said is to assume that many people will need communication in a different way than the way I need it, for example. Just to make sure that we always ask and to take time so that the interpreter can also fully describe what is going on. But if the recipient has a

question, you are allowing that person to have time to ask a question back to you.

I think that's also important. Then as we said, what Jack just mentioned, we make sure that all of our materials are accessible. That whatever we put up on our website is accessible. That it's 508 compliant, which means a screen reader can read it. So we will talk about that at other points.

We are coincidentally, we have people who are interested in large print. We are converting our sense and sensibility book, like 90 pages, it is going to be about 250 pages in large -- pages in large print. We have fewer requests for braille than we used to have. It is interesting on that trend. Maybe it's because there are other communication modalities that are preferred. But we always have our application in braille and in large print. Similarly to Danny, we have a lot of stuff online. We point people to our website because we have ensured that our website is fully accessible.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good.

>> I wanted to throw in one more point about the braille access. If you start with a good accessible electronic version, many people are now using portable Bluetooth braille displays that connect to their mobile devices. That way instead of having something printed in braille, they can carry that around in their bag. It is braille access without having to have it physically printed. That may be one reason that you don't get as many braille requests. We have seen that trend here in Georgia quite a bit.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Thanks. Let's turn it to the rest of our audience. And do people have any questions or anything to add about the accessibility in communication in terms of making sure that your products and services meet the needs of people with disabilities?

Questions or concerns?

>> Jack, I would say one thing, one additional thing CDFIs, like all businesses do, if you want to be inclusive in your products, I would just kind of bite the bullet and in your budget put a line item in your operations for accommodations (Susan.)

Just to assume that if you are really meeting the breadth of all people with disabilities, that there will be accommodation charges. So when we were working with one of our partner banks and one, someone we were working with who is deaf wanted to purchase a home. So it was much bigger than what we could possibly provide in our \$60,000 loan. We helped arrange for him to meet with this bank, who had never worked with someone who is Deaf. We provided the American Sign Language interpreter.

Now, it is true that a bank should also know where to find interpreters, certified interpreters. I really want to stress the importance of certification, especially if you are talking about money. So you all may remember years ago when you had the hurricane Sandy. Maybe it was on the east coast so I remember it distinctly. They had noncertified sign language interpreter who was making up words.

I would definitely go for a certification.

What we did is we introduced this bank to someone who was Deaf who had fabulous credit who wanted to buy a home. And by having this sign language interpreter there, they were able to kind of make that initial connection and then this gentleman was able to buy this home from this bank.

In your budget I would put in a line item around accommodations. That way you have the flexibility to either make something in braille or you're having a meeting and you have an interpreter there. You have CART services. But it has to be a conscious, has to be conscious. It cannot be an afterthought.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good point, Susan. I would say a lot of the alternative financing programs around the nation, I think, certainly consider accommodation as a line item in their budget every year. And people, CDFIs that are wanting to meet the needs of people with disabilities will also want to plan ahead for that.

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: I wanted to throw one more thing in there. You're talking about sign language interpreters. I mentioned previously video remote interpreting. That is something that you can use in a pinch. So that way if you do have a consumer that comes in that does use sign language, there are services like there's a website called sign glasses. They do a dollar 50 a minute live interpreting. It is an actual person. You can do captions or ASL that way.

And then there's other services like Purple again that they use interpreters that are certified and are actual people rather than trying to row lie on maybe -- rely on AI for captioning, something like that.

ASL has never been more accessible than it is now by using services like that.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Great. Any other comments or thoughts here before we move to the next topic?

>> JULISA CULLY: Jack, there is one comment in chat from -- sorry if I'm mispronouncing, Siobhan said we'll need recommendations on where to begin.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good, thanks, Siobhan.

Danny or Susan, do you want to take a stab at that, at this point? I think, Susan, I know you are working with Siobhan.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Right. But I think the easiest -- there are two things I would say. Danny, I would be interested also in your feedback.

One thing, it depends on what you want to do and how you want to funnel information. So we are funding all of our information to our website. So the first thing we want to do is make sure that our website and all of our attachments are fully accessible.

So going to a web developer who knows what are the WCAG standards are, making everything accessible, all of your PDFs are exhibit and I can tell you these companies, Appligent is who we use at \$30 a page, converts all of your Word documents and Power Points -- well, your PDFs into an accessible document.

So that would be the very first thing I would do is thinking about where you want to point people. Then making sure that that is fully accessible.

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: I'm sharing a link right now for folks that don't know where to begin, with getting accessible materials or if you do need something like live captions. This is the center for inclusive design and innovation housed at Georgia Tech. It is actually where the tools for life program is housed. They do provide services for electronic text remediation, live captions, adding audio description to videos, braille production, all kinds of good stuff.

I'll put that link up there. We will be talking about them a little bit in the webinar on accessible materials and marketing. But that is a resource that you can reach out to that can also look at things like websites and apps to make sure that they are meeting the standards for accessibility as well.

So that is one place to definitely explore if you do need more of that assistance with getting those things produced.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Thanks, Danny and thanks, Susan.

Let's move on to the final topic, including people with disabilities on your CDFI board or creating an Advisory Committee to help think through adaptations or products that are needed. Charlie, you want to kick us off on this?

>> CHARLES HAMMERMAN: Thanks, Jack. From this topic, this is something that we have been around. This is our 13th year of operation. We started, we right off the bat created a board. The way we did our board and committees, we divided it into a third. We have a 13-person board and including myself, we have 12 independent members. We divided a third, a third, a third. A third would be CDFI expertise. A third would be people with disabilities or having a family member with a disability.

A third were business people or just general people who are able to help us run the CDFI.

What would happen over the course of the last 13 years is if somebody were to drop out in one category, you replace them in that category. It never got overweighted one way or the other. Clearly there were nevertheless people who checked boxes in one or two different categories.

We made sure of our key and most important committees, loan committee and finance committee, that people with disabilities were recognized and included in participating on those committees as well.

As for candidates or where do you find people with disabilities? Or as I said, people who have family members with disabilities, that's a function of what we do all the time as well, which is we are always talking to people, keeping a list of prospective board members. So when the time arises, then you have already established a relationship and you encourage them to get involved.

There's a lot of debate as to whether the board of advisors are useful or not. We do not use a board of advisors. Managing a board of advisors is cumbersome, but that is not off the charts impossible to do. It is added work if you are running a CDFI. From that standpoint, we have been able because of that and why this is important, if you are going to go into this market and more importantly if you are going to apply for any of the funds from the CDFI fund, just some technical aspects to this. They are going to ask about your board's accountability. That's the phrase they use, towards your target market. If your target market generally is geographic or in different terms, it doesn't have to focus on disabilities, if you are going to apply for any money regarding the disability awards, you are going to have to discuss your board's connection to that work.

So that's the way we've approached it. Obviously if anyone has any questions, let me know. I'll give it back to Jack.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Thanks. Danny?

>> DANNY HOUSLEY: Sorry about that. Yeah, with the board of directors for the center for financial innovation, they follow the structure of a lot of groups, working with the disability community and 51 percent of that board have to be people with disabilities. This is a voluntary council for tools for life, the assistive technology program take we work together for their credit ABLE program in Georgia. That is one thing that sets us apart from some lenders. We make sure that we do have people that can provide feedback. But also helps to strengthen our connections with the community and to provide other avenues to pursue for funding and for other ways of developing the organization. And also provides a unique perspective. A lot of our folks with the CFII board, there are

people with disabilities and people who have a background in finance. So are getting that good mixed perspective there.

It is important that that is helpful with credibility as well. Rather than try to dictate how things are done, somebody with no experience in the community, you are not having that same buy-in. For me personally, I prefer a board to an Advisory Council. Unless the Advisory Council has some teeth in it to work for change in the organization or the program.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good. Thank you, Danny. Susan, what can you add?

>> SUSAN TACHAU: What I can add is, we also agree, I agree both with Charlie and Danny. We are a small organization. We don't have an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committees can be discounted. So we believe people with disabilities and immediate family members should be on the board to help direct the policies and for us, we are also as part of our mission, we do policy advocacy. People with disabilities can speak from their own experience or that of their colleagues and be very creative and help with boards where there are gaps. Right now, through this training process that we've had since New Orleans, we are developing a whole other product around housing because I have been able to work with the board and say look, here's this gap around trying to work in scattered site housing and provide home modifications for renters. So I think the board, they understand what we are talking about. You are going to create more flexibility in the underwriting and in the policies and procedures, that clearly the board approves. We are also undergoing an OCC-like audit right now. They ask very clearly how connected is our board with what, how we are carrying out our loan products. And having people with disabilities shows that there's a direct link.

Going back to what Charlie said, yes, in the CDFI application, remember -- I don't remember the exact number. Ten to 12, maybe fewer. Anyway, who is on your board of directors? And make that link with your target audience. So the target audience obviously with CDFIs are low income people. We have low income people and people with disabilities.

So we have people with disabilities who also may or may not be below income, but they have a connection to the low income community and can help us create those programs that best meet the need of individuals with disabilities.

I would go back to the connects and the relationships that we need. We all need relationships and kind of going back to some of the previous questions about how do you connect to the disability community. That can be part of the role of the board is introducing their networks to you as well as helping you

ensure that your products and services are flexible and meet those needs.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good. Okay.

I think we are reinforcing the point that was made earlier about participation of people with disabilities. Earlier in another community of practice call about the engagement of people with disabilities in your work.

I want to -- I think that all of us presenting today may have a bias towards people on the board. I think that's a good idea. But I also want to emphasize that there are different ways to do it. So your loan committee, if you are starting to make consumer loans, you might consider having loan committee members, if you don't have the board making all the loan decisions, you might consider having loan committee members be people with disabilities and have the loan committee as you're designing your products to serve people with disabilities, make sure you have representatives of the disability community on the group take is doing the deciding, making the loan decisions.

It depend on how you are structuring your board and your lending process, but our recommendation, you can tell, is that you get as much engagement in both the policy setting processes and the decision making on your ultimate recipients of your products, your loans. Get as much participation as you can from the disability community.

I want to turn it -- there are people on the call that may not have any people with disabilities that are currently a part of your board or lending processes. And there may be some that are. Let's hear from other people about either concerns or ways that you are dealing with this now.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Jack, I wanted to add one thing. And that is people may not be aware of who may have a disability in their community because again some disabilities are hidden disabilities.

But even though, if you will recall in the '50s you would always find the answer was: I couldn't find a woman who was qualified. So obviously that is nonsense. And the same, I believe, is true around disabilities. Well, I don't know people with disabilities or maybe you have a special category for disability versus lender versus whatever. I again think that's nonsense. Our first board President was a well-known finance person, a banker. He started up two banks. He had a spinal cord injury. We are not promoting you have a category of disability and then you have a category of someone who is well versed in the finance world. I think it's a question of networking and just like in the '50s you couldn't "find qualified women." you know, it's kind of working in that same direction.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good point, Susan. All right, anybody else?

Concerns about this subtopic? Or suggestions, further suggestions from people? Such as Natalie, your practice is in Oklahoma. Is it folks both on your board and your lending body?

>> NATALIE: Our board serves as our loan committee as well. And we are similar to the other organizations that we have a majority of people with disabilities on the board.

With a variety of different skill sets to offer.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Right. And I assume Anna, that's true for you as well?

>> ANNA MAGNUSSON: Well, unfortunately it is not. But with our vision and mission committee that helps inform our pilot programs we made sure that individuals with disabilities were represented. And we are doing what Susan said, that we are seeing more -- being more thoughtful and deliberate about how we do board recruitment.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good. Any concerns from folks that don't currently have folks with disabilities represented on their board or in their lending process?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Jack, I have a question. There are a couple of people on here that I know and one Philadelphia based. A question that may be coming up, how do you go about finding people with disabilities who are interested in CDFI work? I know that the Federal Reserve has many regional offices. One of them is here. They have an educational unit that then they have in their broad regions. There is a strong educational one here in Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Atlanta.

If people contact the Federal Reserve and look at their educational unit and say what's going on in the disability world, they are all very in tune to the disability world and disability lending. They could probably be a nice, good first stop as to an organization that people could reach out to and say, you know, we are kind of interested in moving into the disability space. Do you know where I could begin on that process?

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Good. Okay. Let's talk generally about any of the topics. Are there further questions for the subject matter experts? Or comments or concerns by the folks that are on the call?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: So subject matter experts, anything else that we didn't quite have time to address as we were going through the topic, Adapting Current Products and Services to

Meet the Needs of People with Disabilities? Anything there that any of the subject matter experts want to elaborate on?

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Siobahn, is there something else, since you have four or five of us on the phone, is there something else that you were thinking of, a question that you had?

(There is no response.)

>> -- make a recommendation for a vendor or what have you where we can get started? Because I know that that's the first step for us. I know that none of our stuff is accessible.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Your first phrase broke up. The vendor, like for a website? What kind of vendor?

>> SIOBHAN: Like a vendor for a website. I was wondering, what people who are familiar in this space would recommend as a first step for that? I think the resource that Danny provided is great. That was helpful. I think that will answer a lot of questions that I have in terms of accessibility.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay. Good.

>> SIOBHAN: Thank you.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Anyone else? We are about five minutes from our allotted time.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: Jack, there's one other thing. Just to answer the question that if you are looking at websites -- I think Danny's suggestion is a really good one. But one thing that you might just kind of incorporate is looking at the web content accessibility guidelines, WCAG. If you are looking at anybody doing website design, you want to make sure it's accessible. Do they have experience doing that? And that's kind of a code of if they say oh, we can make everything accessible. Then the next question is, what do you mean by that? If they mention some of this WCAG stuff and W3C, you know they have kind of a general idea of what you are trying to do. Those are those standards.

So you don't have to have a deep knowledge of it. You just need to know that first question or two.

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay, good. Anything else? Anything about underwriting?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: All right. I think we can end the call. Thank you for your participation today.

>> SUSAN TACHAU: And the next one?

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Yeah, thanks.

(Laughter.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: The next community of practice call is going to be next Tuesday. That's March 17th. It will be on fundraising. So we look forward to all of your participation in that conversation. Anything else for the good of the order?

(There is no response.)

>> JACK BRUMMEL: Okay, thank you all. Bye-bye.
(The webinar concluded at 3:30 p.m. EDT.)
(CART captioner signing off.)

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