



# 2024 RAISE Texas Community Leaders Meeting



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In February, RAISE Texas gathered with about 30 leaders from the financial health and asset building field to identify trends, challenges, and innovations across the state along with potential policy and programmatic solutions. The goal of this convening was to inform leaders, share lessons learned, and identify ways in which RAISE Texas can support the field in 2024. This report provides a summary of what was shared, and ways for practitioners to engage with and learn more about the topics discussed.

## Advocacy in the 2025 Legislative Session

Representatives from Texas Appleseed presented on earned wage access (EWA) and the importance of securing consumer protections. There are two forms of EWA: employer-based products, such as Daily Pay, and app-based products that can be downloaded by anyone. In both cases, money is advanced to the consumer then debited from the next paycheck. There are many challenges with these unregulated products. They can charge a fee for each withdrawal, request a “tip” for early payment, withdraw funds from a consumer’s checking account before the paycheck is deposited and cause an overdraft, and charge subscriptions fees, making them a costly way to get money. Apps such as Zay Zoon offer consumers incentives to get their wages on a gift card, which can be enticing but is also restrictive.

Advocates have found that legislatures perceive EWAs positively when compared to traditional payday loans. Consumer advocates fear that this unregulated environment is similar to what fueled the growth of the payday loan industry many years ago. Regulating EWA now, rather than waiting until it becomes deeply entrenched, could help us avoid the challenges we face today with the payday loan industry.

A representative from AARP discussed solar-panel schemes, door-to-door sales, crypto ATMs, and romance schemes. The Texas Attorney General’s office has received over 2,000 complaints this year on solar panel scams alone. As with EWAs,



consumer education was identified as an immediate and urgent need. AARP’s Fraud Watch Network Helpline (877-908-3360) and examples of cross-community law enforcement task forces were identified as models to promote and replicate.

Strategies for now: Help your financial coaches promote awareness of these products and scams and their associated risks. Connect with RAISE Texas, AARP, or a local consumer protection attorney with legal aid services for staff training on how to identify and avoid scams. Create a desk aid of resources such as AARP’s fraud helpline where consumers can seek help or report fraud.

Strategies for later: Consider offering caregiver education or educating seniors. Collect stories of negative impact from clients who have used these products to prepare for public comment opportunities and for writing letters to legislators. Assess which agencies and organizations in your region should be engaged on these issues to promote awareness and provide consumer protections.

## Medical Debt Reform in Texas

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For many of our clients, medical debt is one of the greatest threats to their financial stability. Texas ranks 5th in the nation for medical debt, with the average medical debt per person at \$2,250, and 24.3% of adults aged 16-64 uninsured (compared to the US average of 12.1%). Furthermore, with a majority of our state's hospitals privately operated, 73% of medical debt collection lawsuits stem from for-profit hospitals. Medical billing is more aggressive in Texas and has fewer checks and balances, with the burden currently on the patient to navigate the system. Federal policy requires nonprofit hospitals to have a financial assistance policy, though clients need to know how to request it. There is bipartisan support for financial assistance programs and policies that protect patients from medical debt. One recent policy change requires healthcare providers to provide an itemized bill before pursuing debt collection. To view the full report on Medical Debt Reform, visit [raisetexas.org/services/medicaldebt/](https://raisetexas.org/services/medicaldebt/).

### Strategies for now:

Create tools and resources for consumer education on medical debt, and the resources and regulations that can support them. Increase financial coaches' understanding of financial assistance policies, health insurance navigation, tools to negotiate bills, and consumer rights with debt collection.

### Strategies for later:

Connect with partners such as the Texas Association of Health Plans to advocate for more consumer protections, strengthen financial assistance programs, and require annual reporting/data collection by hospitals with public disclosure. Collect stories from clients to share in advocacy letters and public comments.

## Expanding Financial Services through Employers

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Financial stability programs are increasingly looking at monetization of services as a means to sustain their programs. One strategy is to offer services through employers, which has yielded mixed results.

One nonprofit leader shared that competition from financial institutions seeking accounts presents a challenge for nonprofits who want to monetize financial coaching and similar services. When competing for a City contract, the nonprofit had to reduce their administrative fee to \$0 to be competitive with the financial institution.

Another program shared how matched savings and financial coaching tied to employment was used as a retention strategy for front-line workers. While the program led to stronger retention for participants in the near-term, it required a deep investment from the employer, including allowing the employees to stay on the clock while attending financial literacy classes. To learn more about financial wellness in the workplace, check out Banking Inclusion at Work by Commonwealth ([buildcommonwealth.org](https://buildcommonwealth.org)).

One VITA program shared how they partnered with a large service company to provide free tax preparation to their employees. They had a strong supporter in Human Resources and had co-branded promotions sent out with pay stubs. Onsite services were not well attended, and the company's bonus structure along with additional household income from spouses made many of the would-be customers ineligible for VITA.

### Elements to Consider:

- Secure a data sharing agreement to measure the ROI for the employer.
- Strong employer leadership buy-in is crucial, as is outreach and access.
- Make sure your target audience is truly eligible for your services and sees the value in access from their place of employment.
- Evaluate whether or not you can provide the right mix of services at the right price.
- Consider conducting a small pilot and collecting data to demonstrate impact before trying to negotiate an administrative fee or fee for service

## Fireside Chat with Funders

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Community leaders heard from two regional program officers about current trends in sector-related philanthropy. On a positive note, funders now have more trust in partners that effectively navigated the pandemic and are more open to offering multi-year investments and supporting general operating costs and capacity building. Funders are increasingly looking for investments that touch on more than one area of their strategic plan and have demonstrated outcomes, moving away from transactional investments to ecosystem investments, which for some may mean fewer but larger investments. Program officers also shared that they are open to collaborative proposals, where two or more organizations apply together for a collective impact or a statewide or regional organization applies for a multi-year project with subgrants for small place-based work. The community leaders shared about the challenges of being innovative, demonstrating proof of concept, and guaranteeing year-over-year growth, and the funders stated that a desire for demonstrated impact remains the most prominent consideration.

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*Excellent meeting! Looking forward to the next one.*

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## Financial Coaching

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A distinguished financial coaching panel shared current challenges and concerning trends they are seeing in 2024. Trends included employers using credit checks in the hiring process and young people coming of age and having poor credit, often due to their Social Security number being used by a family member. For example, one program was asked by the City to provide credit counseling to fire academy cadets who would not be eligible for employment due to poor credit.

The panel also discussed intergenerational challenges, such as grandparents or great-grandparents raising grandchildren and the impact on their financial stability and credit, as well as young adults feeling obligated to give parents or other family members money. Addressing these challenges requires cultural sensitivity and a trauma-informed care approach. One program shared how they provide clients with language to set boundaries with family members while still budgeting for reasonable support.

### Strategies for now:

Expand your staff training to include trauma-informed care and cultural sensitivity. Develop more technical knowledge and expertise on credit, debt, fraud, and strategies for supporting clients who have been impacted by a family member's credit abuse. Read Texas Appleseed's report, *Abuse by Credit: The Problem of Coerced Debt in Texas*. Watch for webinars from RAISE Texas on requested topics.

### Strategies for later:

Connect with other agencies and organizations whose clients need financial coaching support. Cultivate relationships with police and the District Attorney's office to address fraud, including familial fraud, with a holistic perspective.





## Nonprofit Staff Recruitment and Retention

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The ever-present challenge of recruiting and retaining staff in the nonprofit environment continues to impact financial stability programs. Theresia Intag, a former nonprofit executive and long-time human resources professional, shared low-cost and no-cost strategies, and community leaders shared strategies that have worked for their organizations.

### Recruitment

- Capitalize on social media such as LinkedIn, connect to as many people as you can, and share job postings there. This is a no-cost opportunity, as opposed to sites such as Indeed, that can cost hundreds of dollars per posting.
- Condense your hiring timeline. Many candidates are getting hired elsewhere before you can make an offer. It is critical to reduce the amount of time between the first interview and offer.

### Retention

- Ensure you have a strong onboarding process that covers all the systems, people, and procedures that employees will need to know to be successful.

- Provide meaningful performance feedback, frequently. One leader shared that they conduct quarterly feedback sessions and focus on leveling up by identifying incremental improvements.
- Provide professional development and coaching that aligns with an employee's current role as well as their career objectives.
- Offer flexibility. Working parents are not the only ones who value flexible scheduling and hybrid opportunities.
- Examine your complete benefits package. Can you offer a flex Friday once a month or other creative leave? Could you offer a wellness or technology stipend? Do you have retention bonuses in lieu of merit increases? Share the monetary value of employer paid benefits, professional development, and paid leave.
- Be clear about your career ladders and wage structure.
- Build community through social events, employee recognition, and employee engagement. Small nonprofits can partner to build community across their organizations.

## Summary

There was a universal need for more resources to promote awareness, train staff, and build support for advocacy issues. Practitioners are also interested in scalable programs for small dollar loans at 0-5% interest, and more conversations on how to move clients from financial stability to wealth. RAISE Texas collected an extensive list of future webinar and summit topics, expert speakers to engage, and open source curriculum needs. Many participants found value in discussing their challenges with a group of peers and sharing lessons learned.

Data was another recurring theme: what to collect, how to collect it, and how to measure impact and ROI. Leaders were also interested in data from other successful initiatives for case-making in their own regions and in advocacy efforts.

RAISE Texas will continue to collect and disseminate topic-specific tools and resources to support capacity building and awareness efforts, as well as share timely advocacy opportunities. Additional resources related to the topics discussed can be found at [raisetexas.org/events/CLM/](https://raisetexas.org/events/CLM/). We look forward to future convenings to inform our work and support our collective mission.



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*It is really rewarding to hear from others about similar struggles and wins. This was incredible. Thank you!*

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For a comprehensive guide to good job standards and how to implement them, visit [goodjobs.pacificcommunityventures.org](https://goodjobs.pacificcommunityventures.org).



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