



NFEC evaluation insights

All sites

September 2021



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Evaluation overview

National Financial Empowerment Champions project

Project goal:

To improve the financial well-being of one million Canadians living on low incomes.



NFEC Partners:

- e4c
- Family Services of Greater Vancouver
- Momentum
- SEED Winnipeg and Community Financial Counselling Services
- Union des consommateurs

Evaluation overview

NFEC partners and evaluated programs

Family Services of Greater Vancouver:

Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV) is a large not for profit agency that works to inspire and support community members who need help to reach their full potential: children are nurtured, youth find optimism, adults feel empowered, and parents make choices that build strong families. Since 1928, FSGV has been helping families through challenging times.

Program:

FSGV offers free RESP education and one-on-one financial coaching support for parents, families, and caregivers living in Metro Vancouver. RESP support services include group information sessions, one-on-one support for parents and families about how to open RESPs and one-on-one financial coaching.

Evaluation overview

NFEC partners and evaluated programs

Momentum:

Momentum is a community economic development organization operating in Calgary since 1991. Momentum partners with people living on low incomes to build their assets through programs in financial literacy, business development and skills training. Momentum also works at the systems level to improve conditions for all Albertans through partnerships, capacity building, policy development and advocacy.

Program:

Momentum's Savings Circle is a scheduled, class-based program where a cohort of participants attend 10 workshops over the course of six months. During these six months, participants save \$5 to \$50 each month. Momentum then matches each participant's monthly savings by a factor of 3. Matched savings programs support participants in learning financial literacy skills and build a habit of saving.

Evaluation overview

NFEC partners and evaluated programs

SEED Winnipeg:

Supporting Employment and Economic Development (SEED) Winnipeg Inc. is a community economic development organization established to reduce poverty in Winnipeg. SEED Winnipeg is dedicated to building strong communities and increasing opportunities for people through financial empowerment programs and services.

Program:

SEED Winnipeg's Access to Benefits (A to B) program helps participants living on low incomes get information and one-on-one support about benefits (including the Disability Tax Credit, Canada Child Tax Benefit, GST Credit, RentAssist), as well as support getting ID, opening a bank account, filing income tax returns, and applying for benefits.

Evaluation overview

NFEC partners and evaluated programs

Community Financial Counselling Services:

Community Financial Counselling Services (CFCS) is a non-profit credit counselling agency that provides financial counselling and debt management services. In addition, CFCS provides free income tax preparation services, advocates for fair practices in lending, debt repayment and financial services, provides education and financial literacy programs, and addresses the needs of more vulnerable and high-risk populations (including seniors, persons living on low incomes, persons living with a disability and persons with problem gambling behaviour).

Program:

CFCS' one-on-one financial counselling is one of several financial empowerment programs they offer, alongside their financial literacy workshops, tax filing and benefits access assistance programs, and support opening RESPs and accessing basic banking. The program takes a strength-based client centered approach to counselling, where counsellors consider the individual's or family's entire socioeconomic circumstances.

Evaluation overview

NFEC partners and evaluated programs

Union des consommateurs:

Union des consommateurs (UC) is a non-profit organization whose membership is comprised of consumer advocacy groups. UC's mission is to represent and defend the rights of consumers, with particular emphasis on the interests of low-income households. UC's activities are based on the values of solidarity, equity and social justice, as well as the objective of enhancing consumers' living conditions in economic, social, political and environmental terms. UC worked in partnership with 10 consumer advocacy groups (ACEFs) to achieve its goals for the NFEC project.

Program:

The ACEFs provide financial literacy training and budget counselling to both individuals and groups. ACEFs also work with larger systems to provide financial empowerment supports to their stakeholders. An example is the development of a financial literacy curriculum and in-person training for social workers and other stakeholders.

Evaluation overview

NFEC project

- NFEC partner organizations provide an array of financial empowerment (FE) services and interventions included under the scope of this project:

- Financial literacy education
- One-to-one supports in the form of financial coaching, counselling or problem-solving
- Support to open RESPs and access the Canada Learning Bond (CLB)



- Assistance tax filing and accessing income-boosting government benefits
- Support to access basic banking services and set up direct deposit
- Matched savings programs

Evaluation objectives

FE interventions

- How are FE programs designed and delivered?
- How do the FE programs meet participant needs?
- What are participants' experiences and outcomes from the FE program?



Leveraged funding model

- What is the impact of the leveraged funding model on NFECs' ability to raise sustainable funds?



Prosper Canada's intermediary role

- How did Prosper Canada function as an effective intermediary organization?



Evaluation methods



Participant Surveys

- Pre and Post surveys
- Open-ended questions

Participant Focus Groups

- Two per year, starting in 2019



Staff Interviews

- Focus groups with coaches and frontline staff
- Key informant interviews with program managers



Administrative Data

- Client demographics
- Key performance indicators
- Program outcome data



Program design and delivery

- How is the FE intervention being delivered?
- What are the different models of delivery across NFECs?
- What resources do NFECs need to successfully deliver and integrate interventions into service delivery?
- How does the intervention fit into other FE programs delivered at the NFEC?

FE interventions

- The evaluation looked at one intervention at each NFEC.
- FE interventions were chosen through consultation between NFECs and Prosper Canada to determine which interventions would most benefit from a client outcome evaluation.
- The interventions fall under three intervention types:

One-to-one coaching/counselling

- Budget counselling at Union des consommateurs (UC)
- Financial counselling at Community Financial Counselling Services (CFCS)
- Financial coaching at Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV)

Tax filing and benefits support

- Access to Benefits at SEED Winnipeg

Matched savings

- Savings Circle at Momentum

One-to-one coaching/counselling

Program description



UC: Budget counselling

- Counselling provided after attending a preliminary financial literacy workshop
- Initial focus on budget creation
- Also addresses crisis issues like eviction and job loss

CFCS: Financial counselling

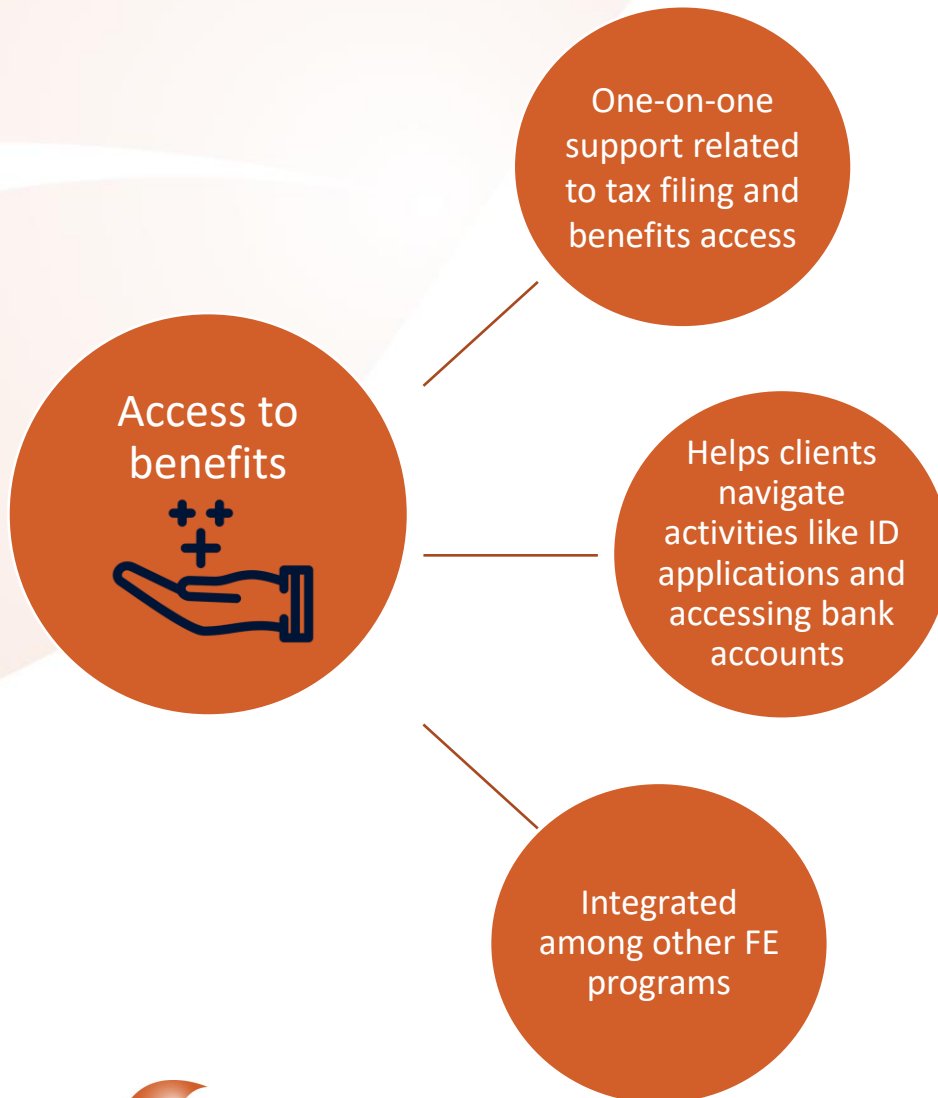
- Follows a strengths-based, client-centred approach
- First session includes a detailed cost of living breakdown and explores tax filing needs and benefits eligibility

FSGV: Financial coaching

- Occurs alongside financial education workshops
- Participants attend up to 3 sessions

Access to benefits

Program description



SEED Winnipeg

- A first-step program for community members with multiple barriers to financial inclusion
- Clients assessed by staff at intake to determine which problems to solve and in what order
- Service is designed to walk alongside clients and help them achieve their own objectives rather than prescriptive goals

Matched savings

Program description

Savings Circle



Over 6 months, clients attend 10 workshops on personal finance topics

Clients deposit savings over these 6 months, matched x 3 by Momentum

Participants have a two-month cash-out window to purchase an approved asset

Momentum

- A scheduled, class-based program where a cohort of participants attend 10 workshops over 6 months
- During these 6 months, participants save between \$5 and \$50 per month, which Momentum matches times three once participants graduate from the program
- During savings months, participants work closely with the program facilitator to determine how they plan on using their savings

Barriers and challenges to delivery

Program staff

NFEC's program staff identified several barriers and challenges to FE program delivery during focus groups, including:

- **Time and resources for sufficient training**, as much of the training occurs on the job or during service delivery. Additional training for services like tax filing can take considerable time.
- Peripheral FE work, including **intake processes, research, evaluation, referrals, and following up with participants**, which impacts staff's capacity to serve more clients.
- **The complex lives of clients**, leading to financial situations that are multifaceted and require greater support.



Data source: Staff focus groups

Barriers and challenges to delivery

Program staff

NFEC's program staff identified several barriers and challenges to FE program delivery during focus groups, including:

- **Client retention** and capacity issues regarding consistent follow-up.
- **Compassion fatigue** and vicarious stress from helping clients in dire situations.
- **Navigating complex service systems** as some participants have touchpoints with multiple service providers and government agencies.



Data source: Staff focus groups

Barriers and challenges to delivery

How barriers may be impacted by social distancing restrictions

Technological barriers could become more difficult to overcome, particularly for those living on a low income or older adults.

Helping clients navigate referrals to access other services (such as low-cost dental work) may not be as possible in the short-term.

Updating and modernizing the asset list for matched savings programs may become a more pressing need as social distancing measures create new challenges for participants.

Building a welcoming atmosphere and facilitating connections with participants may be more difficult when you can't bring groups of people together.



Data source: Staff and client focus groups

Client demographics

- Who are the clients that participate in the FE programs?

Demographic breakdown of clients

Overview of client base

2987 Participants

- We collected many of the same demographic characteristics of participants in each NFEC's signature program.
- However, because NFECs deliver the interventions differently, the number of participants included in the evaluations vary.
- For example, Momentum's Savings Circle is cohort-based, putting a limit on how many participants can be evaluated.
- For this reason, it is best to compare demographics across sites instead of combined.

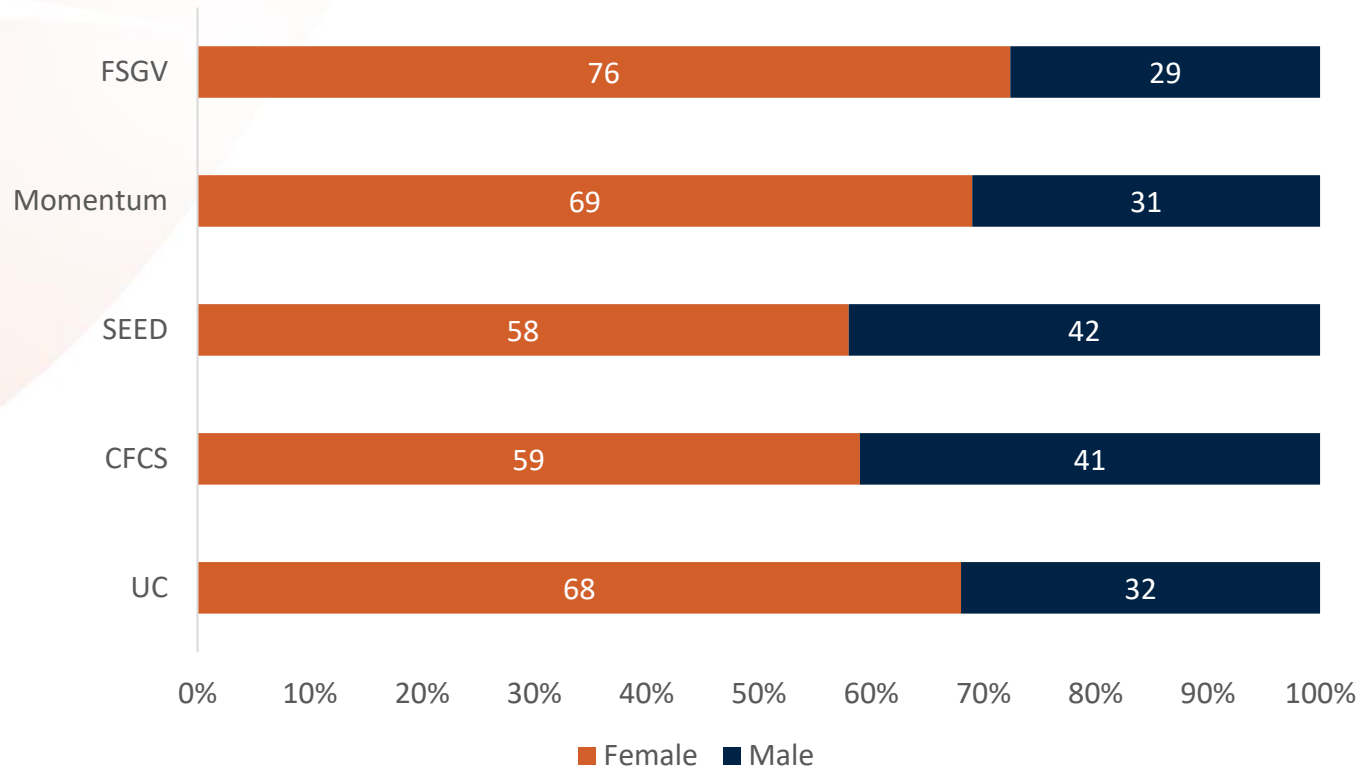
NFEC	# of participants
UC	156
CFCS	535
SEED	2007
Momentum	85
FSGV	204
Total	2987

Data source: Demographic surveys

Most FE intervention participants were women.

FSGV had the highest proportion of female participants at 76 per cent.

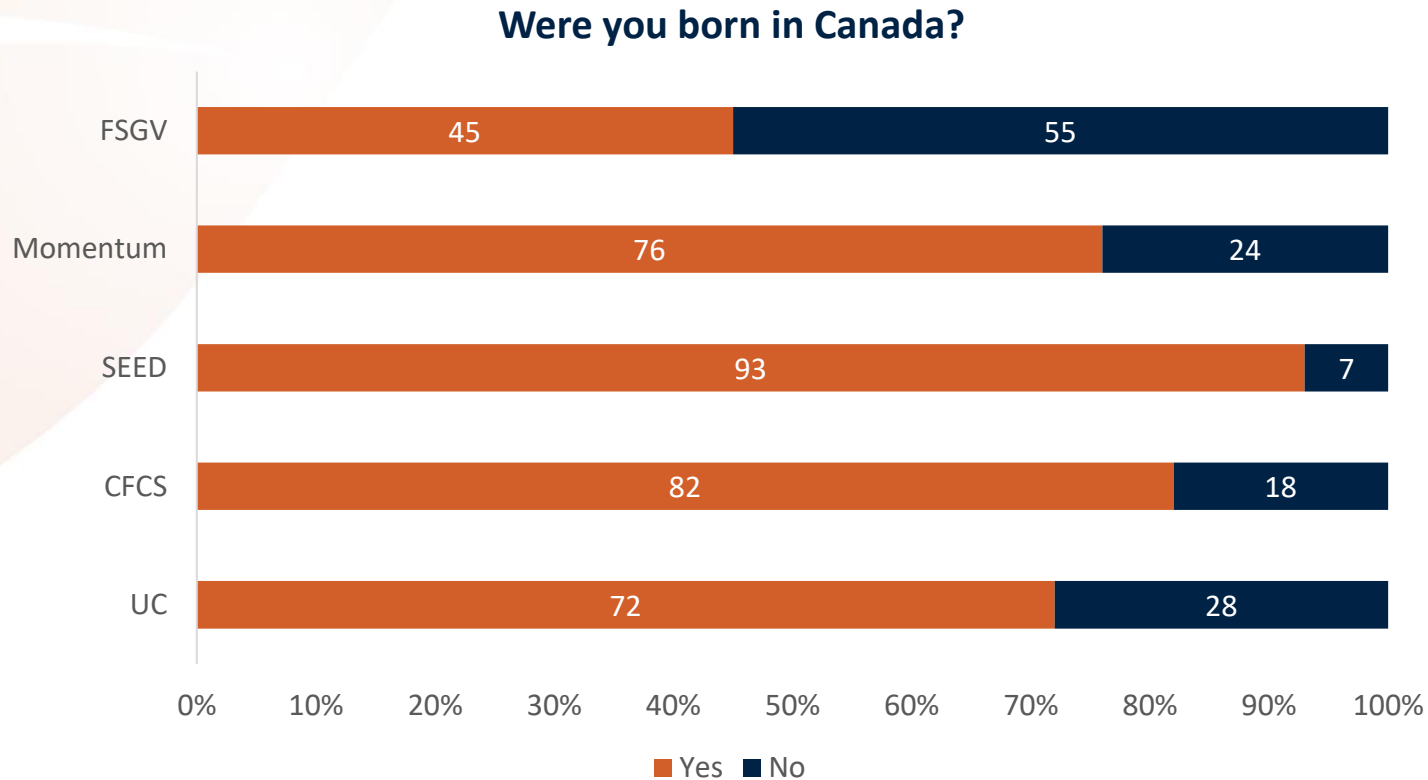
FE intervention participants by gender



Data source: Demographic surveys (n=2800)

Most FE intervention participants were born in Canada.

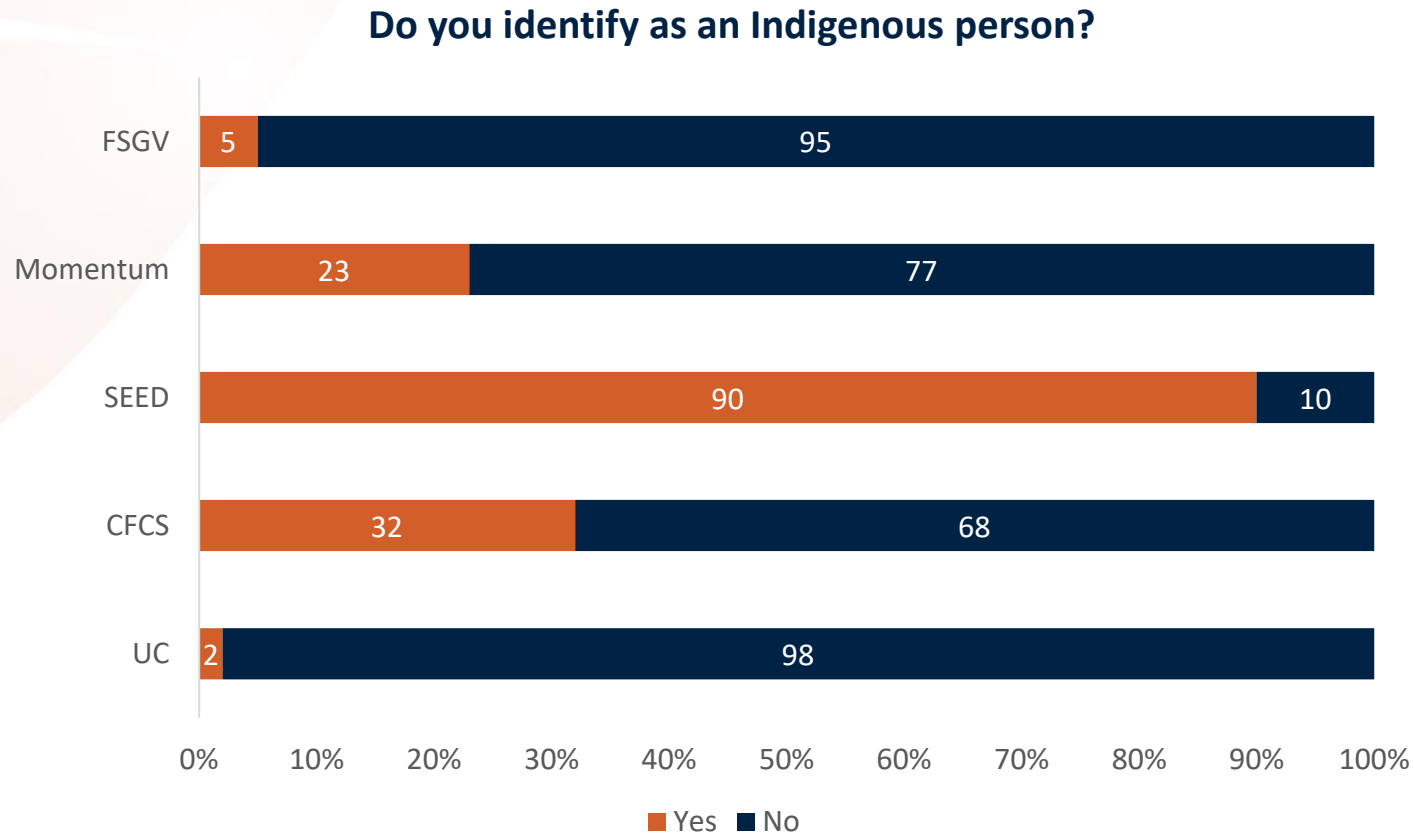
Financial coaching at FSGV was the exception, where immigrants and newcomers made up 53 per cent of clients.



Data source: Demographic surveys (n=2964)

NFECs in Winnipeg served the greatest proportion of Indigenous participants.

Among SEED's Access to Benefits participants who answered this question, 90 per cent identified as Indigenous.

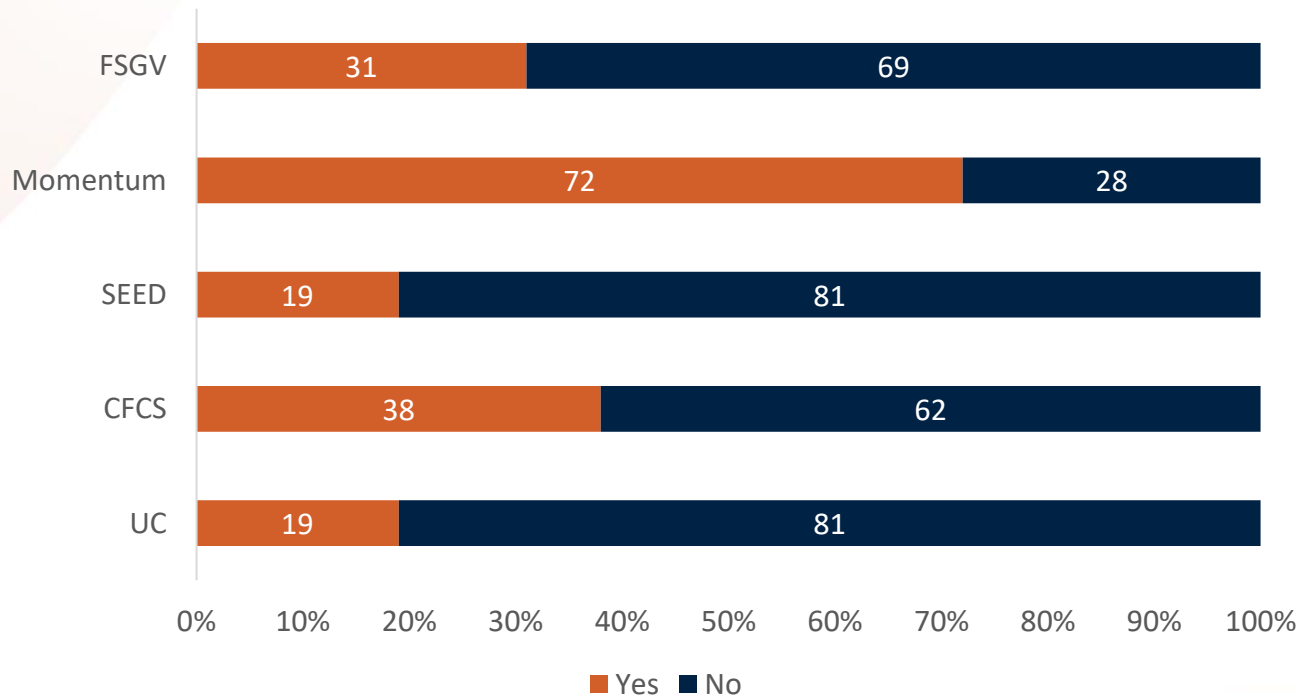


Data source: Demographic surveys (n=2251)

FE interventions are reaching participants with disabilities.

Savings Circle at Momentum had the highest proportion of participants living with a disability at 72 per cent. Many of these participants received Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH).

Are you an individual living with a disability?

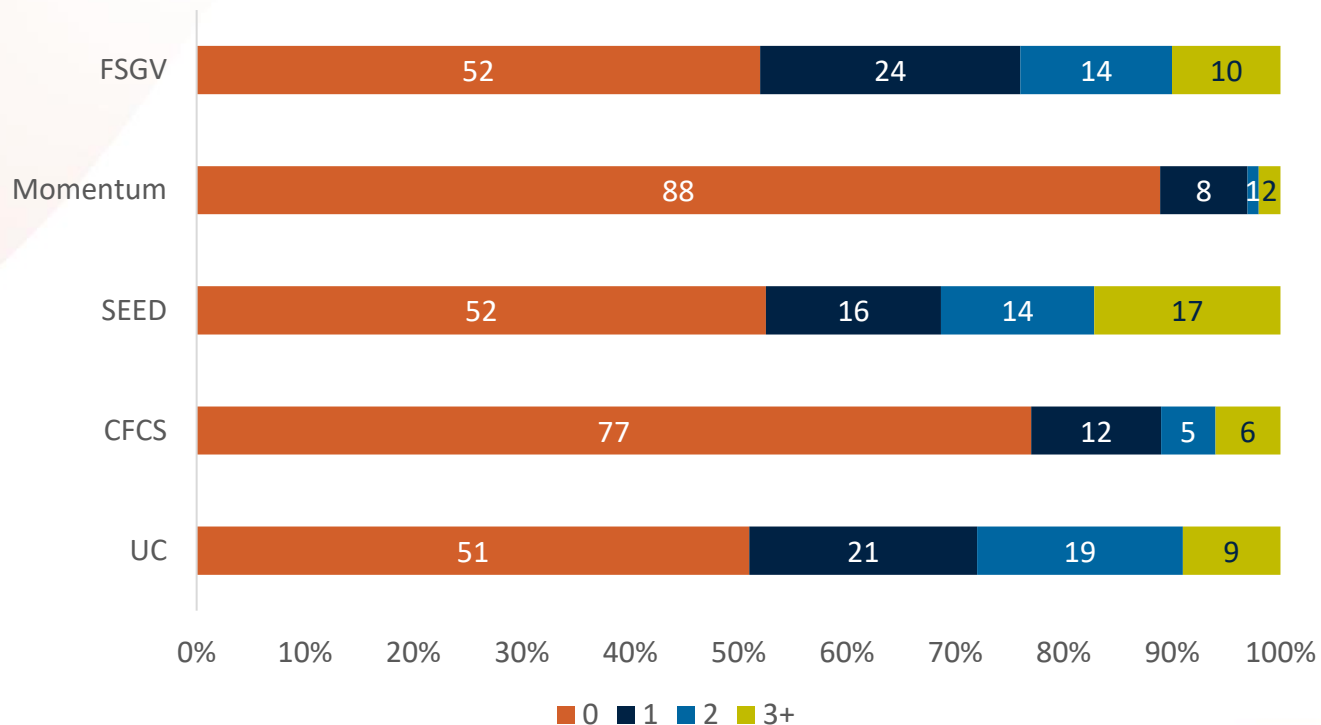


Data source: Demographic surveys (n=2886)

Most FE intervention participants had no dependents, and it was rare for participants to have more than one dependent.

Age of participants and custody issues both play a role in participants caring for dependents.

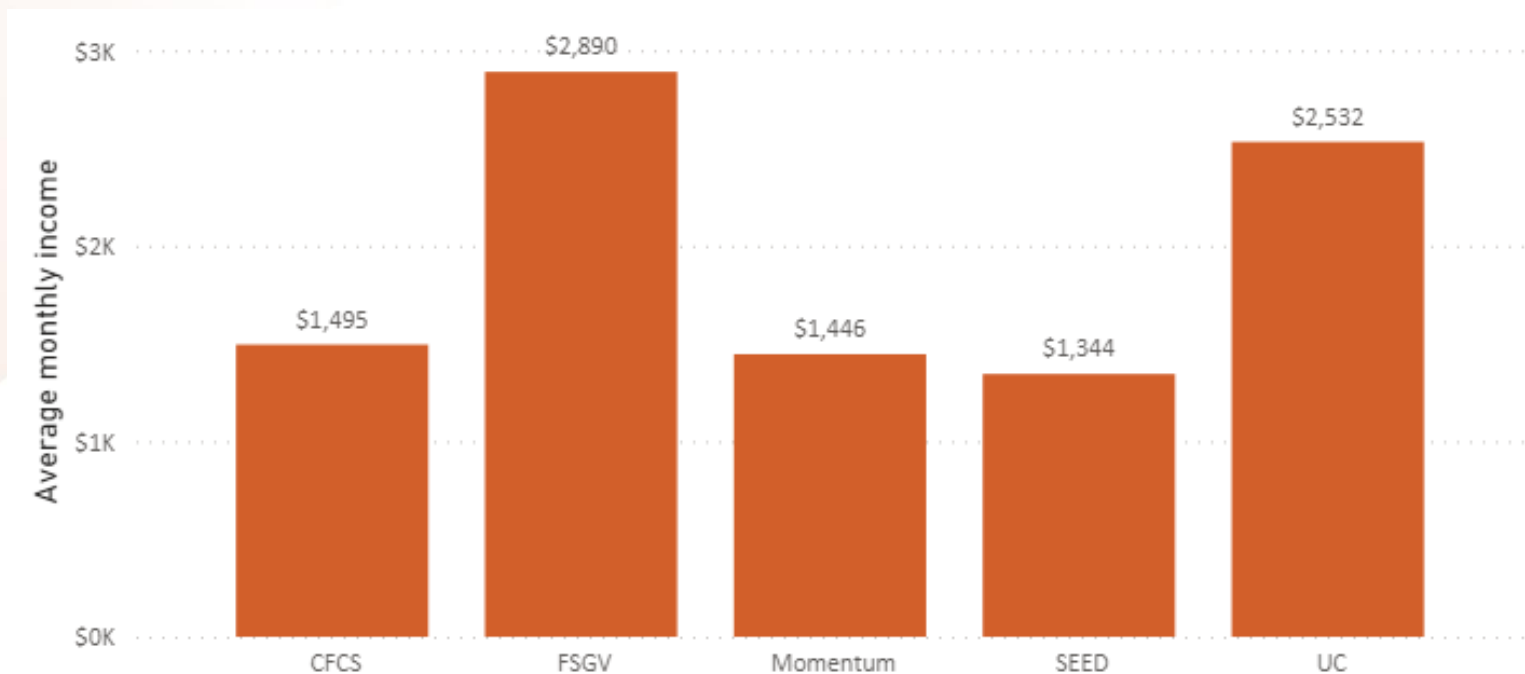
How many children under 18 live with you?



Data source: Demographic surveys (n=1746)

The average monthly income of signature program participants was highest at FSGV and lowest at SEED.

Employment opportunities, provincial benefit supports, and NFEC client bases all play a role in participant income levels.

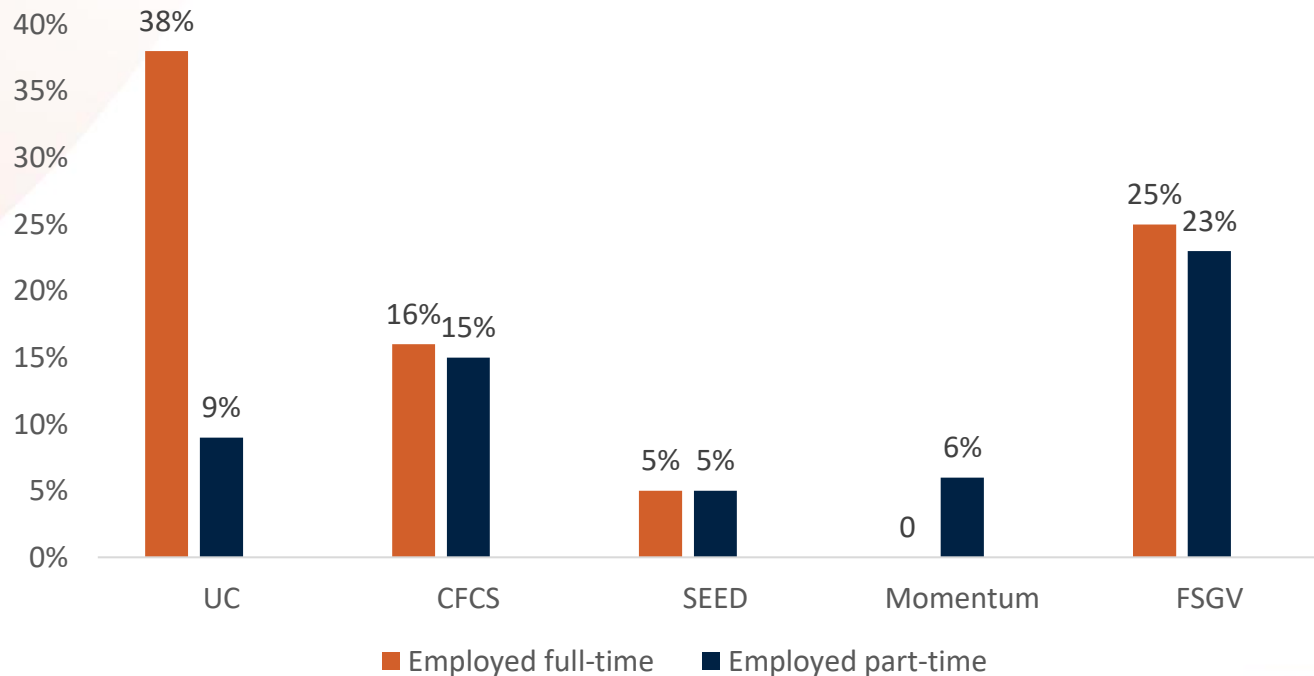


Data source: Demographic surveys (n=2966)

Only a portion of FE intervention participants indicated full-time or part-time employment as a source of income.

This means that a large portion of participants receive income through income assistance, government benefits, CPP/OAS, or less consistent sources like casual labour.

Participants with employment income



Data source: Demographic surveys (n=2330)

Demographic breakdown of clients

Lessons learned



- Many **NFEC clients live on fixed incomes and this impacts the kinds of support they need**. The focus of counselling/coaching sessions or access to benefit activities will differ for participants on income assistance versus those who are employed.
- Underserved demographic groups like Indigenous people, people with disabilities, newcomers, and men may require **targeted community outreach or changes to program design** to increase their participation in FE programs.
- While most NFECs did not collect race or ethnicity data, focus groups with staff and clients indicated **the need for services that are culturally specific and relevant**. This may include providing supports in languages besides English and French, family-based interventions to improve clients' application of solutions, or savings goals purchases for culturally significant purchases.

Intervention outcomes

- What are the financial needs of clients and how are they being met?
- What are the possible outcomes of the FE intervention?
- What are the participants' overall experiences receiving the intervention?
- What has resulted for clients by participating in the program?

Visit objectives and reasons for participating

- Across all NFECs, qualitative survey responses from clients indicated similar financial needs:



Help managing debt



Increasing financial knowledge



Help establishing a budget

“I participated because I wanted to learn how to better respect money and learn to budget the money I do have and start to save.”

“I needed help digging and getting information...good and accurate information.”

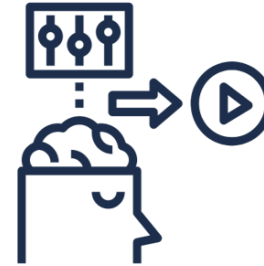
« Je croule sous les dettes, je cherche des solutions. En partie, j’aurai une grille budgétaire fiable pour gérer mon budget. »

Data source: Pre/Post-assessment surveys and administrative data

Intervention outcomes

Participant outcomes: One-to-one counselling

- Clients across the NFECs' one-to-one counselling programs demonstrated increases in financial knowledge, confidence, and sense of control after at least 3 sessions.
- In particular, clients noted positive changes in their financial behaviours (like spending and use of credit) and budgeting habits.
- Creating plans to repay debt and filing taxes were also common outcomes for clients in financial counselling programs.



Data source: Pre/Post-assessment surveys and focus groups

Intervention outcomes

Lessons learned: One-to-one counselling



- For participants who attend more than one session, the NFECs' **counselling programs are well-designed to meet their needs and achieve their goals** within several sessions.
- The changes participants make in financial behaviour **may appear minor but are significant in the larger context of their lives.** For some clients, this is the first time they have paid portions of their debt or successfully followed a budget.
- Financial counselling can provide **support for other important financial activities**, like tax-filing, even when these are not the participant's reason for attending.

Intervention outcomes

Participant outcomes: Access to benefits

- Through SEED's administrative data, we were able to track various outcomes for Access to Benefits participants.
- Outcome data suggests that most participants sought support for tax filing, bank account set up and ID access, with only a small proportion requesting support to complete applications for government benefits.
 - 72 per cent of all participant outcomes involved filing income tax returns, followed by 39 per cent for outcomes like opening a bank account or getting an ID.



Data source: Administrative data

Intervention outcomes

Lessons learned: Access to benefits



- **Most participants need support with activities other than benefit applications.** More participants needed help filing taxes, setting up a bank account, and getting ID than those who were applying for benefits.
- These activities may take several tries before participants successfully complete them. For this reason, **repeated activities should be factored into program design** and resource allocation.
- Activities often involve multiple system players including financial institutions, government agencies, and other social services. **Navigating these service systems is a major support** offered by the access to benefits program.

Intervention outcomes

Participant outcomes: Matched savings

- Through Momentum's administrative data, we were able to track clients' savings goals and the assets they purchased with their matched savings after graduating the program.
- Seventy-two per cent of clients set a savings goal within the first month, with the most common goals being a TFSA/resiliency fund, a computer, and a household good. These goals were also the most common asset purchases.
- In addition to improved saving and budgeting habits, clients noted an increase in confidence and new friendships built through Savings Circle's cohort structure.



Data source: Pre/Post-assessment surveys and administrative data

Intervention outcomes

Lessons learned: Matched savings



- Assisting participants in setting up a savings goal early increases their engagement in the program, but **flexibility in goal-setting is crucial** as many participants made asset purchases that did not match their goals.
- Cohort-based FE programs like matched savings **increase social support among participants** by facilitating peer-to-peer relationships and new connections.
- Participants seem well-aware of the need to save prior to the program and see matched savings **as an opportunity to practice new financial habits** in a context that can hold them accountable.

Financial stress and well-being

- We asked clients to rate their level of financial stress before attending FE programs and after three sessions or three months, whichever came first.
- Overall, clients indicated a decrease in their levels of financial stress in this time frame. However, few clients said they experience no financial stress at all.
- Momentum's Savings Circle participants also completed the CFPB Financial Well-Being Scale – a tool that tracks an individual's financial control, their capacity to handle financial shocks, and their ability to meet financial goals (from 0-100).
 - Participants saw an average increase of seven points over the course of the program.



Data source: Pre/Post-assessment surveys and focus groups

Participant experiences

“I’ve got more confidence in the process, like yes actually, I do have tools to manage it, I can refine those tools to manage and I’m going to be okay.”

“I’m almost at a point where I – I wouldn’t say I’ve lost all fear for sure, that’s pretty crazy, but I am not afraid of my finances in the future now. And that was not the case before.”

« J’ai une meilleure vue de l’ensemble de mes dépenses, je sais mieux où est mon argent, je vois plus clairement »

Data source: Pre/Post-assessment surveys and focus groups

Leveraged funding model

- How successful are NFECs in securing leveraged funding?
- What has resulted from the leveraged funding model?

Leveraged funding model

Insights

Through interviews with program leaders and executive staff at NFECs, some consistent themes emerged related to the leveraged funding model:

- Funding is *sustainable but unpredictable* and does not cover all FE programming needs. Internal capacity for fundraising is a consistent challenge across partners.
- The leveraged funding model attracts funders because it *demonstrates credibility, stability, and confidence* in FE programs and services.
- Macroeconomic factors – both national and regional – have a *direct impact on the demand for and interest in* financial empowerment services.



Data source: Key informant interviews with NFEC staff

Prosper Canada's intermediary role

Insights

NFECs provided valuable feedback in interviews and focus groups regarding Prosper Canada's role as an intermediary organization. Staff across NFECs said that Prosper Canada can support partner organizations and the FE field by:

- Sharing research that appeals to funders
- Leveraging national media attention
- Functioning as an intermediary linking partners to government
- Building a narrative behind financial empowerment
- Functioning as a steward of FE organizations and programs across Canada

Data source: Key informant interviews and focus groups with NFEC staff

Key takeaways and remaining questions

Overall insights

Key takeaways and remaining questions



- NFECs have a strong understanding of their client base and **design their programs to meet the needs of these participants.**
- **Client retention is a challenge across FE service providers** linked to multiple factors, including resource limitations for follow-up and barriers in participants' lives like busy schedules, lack of transportation/childcare, and immediate crises like eviction or job loss.
- Geography, service delivery in languages besides English/French, referral networks with newcomer agencies, and **targeted outreach to underserved communities** all play a role in engaging clients with lower participation rates in FE services.

Overall insights

Key takeaways and remaining questions



- The changes participants make in financial behaviour **may appear minor but are significant in the larger context of their lives.** For some clients, this is the first time they have paid portions of their debt or successfully followed a budget.
- **Most participants need support with activities prior to applying for benefits.** More participants needed help filing taxes, setting up a bank account, and getting ID than those who were ready to apply for benefits.
- Cohort-based FE programs like matched savings **increase social support among participants** by facilitating peer-to-peer relationships and new connections.

Overall insights

Key takeaways and remaining questions

- Investing in evaluation and data collection is a resource-intensive process but can benefit program design and delivery. Further investigations should consider **how FE programs can integrate evaluation into service delivery so that these processes are valuable to both staff and participants**. How can evaluation tools help participants meaningfully reflect on their financial situations?
- More research is needed on **the possible FE outcomes for participants who have experienced homelessness or past involvement with the justice system**. How can we develop FE outcomes that take participants' starting points into consideration?

