

**California Consumers: Choices and Decisions  
A Community Outreach Program**

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This outreach program is a collaborative effort between California State University, Long Beach, Wells Fargo Bank, and several community agencies. The program reaches out to minority communities in an effort to provide information to them about budgeting, banking and credit. The pilot test found the results to be promising. Participants were interested in the information they received, and gave further suggestions for future workshops.

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### Introduction

The civil unrest that shook Los Angeles County following the Rodney King verdict in 1992 have provided a unique opportunity for researchers and academicians in the Southern California area. This ongoing study seeks to increase consumer awareness, knowledge and skills of low-income immigrant urban families in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. Solutions to consumer issues will strengthen and support families and neighborhoods for future generations. The first pilot tests of this program have been encouraging.

Past studies have found that lower income families rarely have a monthly budget. Furthermore, they seldom balance their checkbook if they have a checking account at all. For immigrant families, language barriers pose complications, making them vulnerable to fraud. The Project helps enable low income and immigrant consumers to improve their resource management skills by providing information regarding budgeting, use of banking services, expenditures and savings.

### Planning

The Project fosters a collaborative relationship between existing programs and services, linking education, private and public sectors. An Advisory Board which establishes partnerships with existing programs and services was convened. The Board discussed past experiences with similar programs, and made suggestions for the successful implementation of the current program.

Two neighborhoods were selected for

implementation of the project, one in Los Angeles County and one in Orange County. Spanish speaking students were hired and trained to serve as translators and facilitators of presentation materials and to conduct interviews in the community outreach effort.

Project directors and students attended (and continue to attend) ongoing community and neighborhood group meetings in the two target communities. Community members were surveyed to see what type of consumer information they desired to assist them in the decision making process. Based on the survey, 40 of the 62 respondents desired knowledge on how to set up a monthly family budget. Appropriate educational materials were adapted, translated, and organized into a lesson plan.

### Implementation

The first pilot program focused on planning a family budget. The presentation was given in both Spanish and English. Information tables were set up for attendees. Representatives from several corporations and agencies (with both Spanish and English speaking personnel) were present, including a local mortgage company, Southern California Edison, Southern California Gas Company, Consumer Credit Counselors of Orange County, and Community Development Council.

A pre- and post-test was administered to determine if attendees currently had a budget, bank account, and credit cards. Furthermore, the tests asked if the respondents would be willing to participate in future programs. The post-test asked for suggestions on future programs they would be interested in.

### Results

The results of the pre- and post-test are as follows. While the attendance was low (6 attendees), survey information collected was complete. The pre-test revealed that the majority of respondents did not have a budget or bank account, and only one respondent had a credit card.

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The post-test results found that respondents were interested in the topic and that they learned about monthly budgets, how to plan for purchases, and how to cut down on expenses. Respondents also reported that they would welcome future programs, and made suggestions as to the format they would desire. The majority of respondents stated they would like to have information in a brochure or booklet.

#### **Future Implications**

A need has been identified in the minority community. Preliminary surveys found that members were interested in learning about budgeting, banking, and credit. An increase in awareness of these issues would serve to help minority communities better manage their resources.

Future directions for the study are being discussed. Participation of project members continue in the targeted communities. Following from the pilot study and post-test results, several possible directions have been identified.

Possible future directions include: providing information tables at an existing meeting, opening a program to the general public and announce it through the utility companies' mailings, and having a program on fraud and scams which are prevalent in the communities. Further proposals will be developed to request additional funding to address these areas.