

# Northwest WEEKLY

## Portland-based nonprofit expands its financial education forum series

By [May O'Mahoney](#) *Tue, Jan 12, 2016*

Financial Beginnings is expanding its series of free financial education forums in the new year and has launched a new partnership with Albina Community Bank, Portland.

Financial Beginnings, a Portland-based nonprofit that has provided no-cost financial education to more than 80,000 youth and adults in the Pacific Northwest, is expanding its series of free financial education forums in the new year. It also has launched a new partnership with Albina Community Bank, Portland.

Starting this week, the nonprofit is offering their new forum “Financing College” in both English and Spanish. The English-language session will be held Tuesday, Jan. 12 and the Spanish-language session will be held Wednesday, Jan. 13.

“The ability to finance and pursue college is essential to bridging the professional and social gaps between low- and high-income youth,” said Kristen Grauer, marketing and developmental specialist for Financial Beginnings. “Today, college is inaccessible to low-income youth at an incredibly disproportionate rate to their high-income counterparts. Only 10 percent of individuals from low-income families complete an undergraduate degree, compared to 50 percent of high-income individuals (Pew, 2014). Financial Beginnings makes a concerted effort to reach low-income and at-risk populations, opening up college and career pathways for young people that are critical to their long-term economic success and overall quality of life.”

Last year, Financial Beginnings launched Pathways, a program geared specifically towards helping students transition from high school to college — and beyond — to make informed choices about their finances. Since it launched, Financial Beginnings has experienced an increasingly high demand for the Pathways program among schools and community groups that predominately serve Spanish-speakers.

“In response to these program requests, we have sought to increase opportunities for [Spanish-speaking] individuals and families to learn about financing college,” Grauer said. “Last year we developed a formal partnership with the Hillsboro School District to better reach Spanish-speaking parents and their children. We provided two free public events at Hillsboro High School to educate families about financing college, accessing student aid, and other relevant information about education-related finances. About 80 adults attended the standing-room-only event.”

“Barriers to post-secondary education affect Hispanic individuals at a disproportionate rate,” Grauer added. “The FDIC estimates that twenty percent of Hispanic households remain ‘unbanked’ with many more classified as ‘underbanked.’ This, along with cultural and language barriers, can make it difficult for an individual to access important services such as higher education.”

Starting in March, Financial Beginnings will also offer two forums that are part of the nonprofit’s “Unraveling the Mysteries of Your Money” series. Free and open to the general public, “What to Brace for in the Ever-Evolving Economy” will be held on Wednesday, March 2, with “Life After College, Debt...Debt...Debt” to be held at a later date in partnership with Portland State University.

Along with its expansion of education forums, Financial Beginnings has also developed a new partnership with Albina Community Bank, Portland.

“We’ve been familiar with Financial Beginnings and the work they do for some time,” said Cheryl Cebula, president and chief executive officer of Albina Community Bank. “Our market manager, [Mary Edmeades], met the program manager for Financial Beginnings at the Neighborhood Partnerships Conference in October. Through conversation, they found we had a similar interest and focus in certain communities and determined that working together would indeed be a good partnership. Many of the schools and communities they support are communities that Albina is interested in working with as well.”

“Access to financial education is a key area of focus for Albina,” Cebula added. “Formal financial education programs are not frequently offered, and unless fiscal responsibility conversations are happening at home, it is rare that young people have access to correct information to make wise decisions about their financial futures. We are excited to have a partnership developing with this organization.”

“[Albina Community Bank] has expressed great enthusiasm for engaging with Financial Beginnings’ students and community members,” Grauer said. “Thanks to their support, we will be able to award one lucky attendee of our January 12th forum with a gift card to support college-related expenses. We look forward to continued partnership with Albina in the future.”