

MOVING FROM OWING TO OWNING

Lessons learned from the Community Investment Trust's financial action class

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Financial Literacy at its core

Connecting community through knowledge

Owing to Owing is the Community Investment Trust's financial action course. It serves as a prerequisite that all CIT investors must take before making their first investment. The course covers a variety of topics related to financial wellness; including budgeting, setting financial goals, rebuilding credit, and types of savings and investments.

The CIT creates a learning community through its Owing to Owing financial action classes. This class values creating a support network of neighbors in learning financial knowledge, but also emphasizes a transition of mindset from 'owen' to 'owner.' The CIT's motives are to connect community members and empower class attendees to take action through financial knowledge.

Goals of Owing to Owing

Owing to Owing's aim is to break down barriers to investing for low- and middle- income community members. This eight-hour financial literacy class is required to educate potential CIT investors on how to make informed decisions regarding their personal finances, including investments.

Owing to Owing is an asset to the East Portland CIT because it:

- Educates community members on financial wellness and investment.
 - If the CIT operates as a stepping stool for investment, it is important to meet interested investors where they are by giving or reviewing basic-level financial knowledge.
- Creates a meeting place and a learning community so participants feel more connected to other CIT investors and the property.
 - This type of learning strengthens trust between neighbors that are interested in learning more about how to manage and grow their monetary resources.
- Provides an opportunity to guide investors through the sign-up process in person.
- Attracts the demographic that the CIT aims to access – lower-income renter populations.
- Serves as an opportunity for CIT staff and facilitators to answer any questions and to develop relationships with CIT investors.
- Empowers attendees to advocate for themselves in managing their finances.



Curriculum Overview

Session 1: Creating an Owner Mindset

- *What participants will learn:*
 - How to lower what you owe and increase what you own
- *What participants will do:*
 - Figure out your current wealth and compare with financial goals
 - Create a budget for savings and long term investment

Session 2: Getting in Line with your Goals

- *What participants will learn:*
 - Address the gap between financial goals and current net worth
 - Improve credit score
- *What participants will do:*
 - Take action on the gap between personal wealth and goals
 - Take action on credit report and improve credit

Session 3: Investment Options for matching your Goals

- *What participants will learn:*
 - How various investments work and their risks/benefits
- *What participants will do:*
 - Identify potential barriers for saving and investing
 - Create a plan to stay on track with financial goals

Session 4: Creating your Investment Plan

- *What participants will learn:*
 - How to select and purchase investments that fit financial goals
- *What participants will do:*
 - Evaluate the suitability of certain investment options
 - Create an investment plan to help achieve financial goals



“You will use financial guidelines and an Owner-Investor mindset to create short- and long-term goals to help you move from being an Ower to an Owner.” – Owing to Owing Curriculum, Session 1

Impressions of Owing to Owing from Class Participants

Feedback from Moving from Owing to Owing attendees in East Portland indicates participants value the diversity, knowledge, and establishment of community that the class offers.

Owing to Owing makes investing more accessible to neighbors who have never before been able to invest. In fact, 65% of CIT community shareholders are first-time investors who come from over 20 countries of origin - these numbers are no coincidence. A financial action course is the CIT's intentional way of ensuring that investors are representative of East Portland, the most ethnically diverse area in Oregon.

“That sense of ownership and community...just being able to see the changes and being invested... in all the senses of the word...in the community feels great.” Raul Reyes, CIT Investor

“The need to bring in more people, people that look like me is important. Because this country is heading in a different direction and we need more representation at all levels.” – Cindy Reyes, CIT Investor



Owing to Owing presents information with plain language that allows for understanding from participants no matter their personal backgrounds. Instead of getting lost in the details or overuse of jargon, Owing to Owing ensures that participants begin with a level playing field by creating a safe space for neighbors to learn, discuss, and ask questions about personal finance.

“I was able to hear financial information being delivered in a simplified way...I never heard that, put in a simple way for people to invest” Jennifer Breedlove, CIT Investor

Through interviewing current investors, the CIT found that the sense of community established in the classroom translated to participants feeling more connected to their communities in East Portland. During class, participants are encouraged to share their personal experiences and give each other advice to organize budgeting, credit, and investment plans.

Tiffany, a CIT investor, expressed her excitement over how the class was socially centered. She stated that Owing to Owing was an integral aspect of her decision to invest. “The chance to learn was just as important as [investing].”



Advantages of Owing to Owing’s model include the CIT offering a down-to-earth approach at teaching personal finance with relevant, real-world information. By requiring a financial literacy course, the Community Investment Trust directly serves Portland’s marginalized populations – immigrants, low-income individuals, and people of color – groups who have been affected by discrimination, gentrification, and displacement and would most benefit from the financial stability of owing shares in the CIT. In this course, community members get the tools they need to take financial action in improving their credit, developing skills to stick to a budget, and investing the resources they have to grow their wealth.

“At the time I was working very hard for very little. And the idea of making that money work for me, with the amount I had, that was great.” – Tiffany, CIT Investor

CONTACT

John W. Haines
Executive Director | Community Investment Trust
jhaines@mercycorps.org

Olena Borova
Implementation Manager | Community Investment Trust
oborova@mercycorps.org

About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
888.842.0842
mercycorps.org