

Equity ExpressSM Financial Education Workshops give participants the information and support they need to decrease household expenses, increase savings and reduce environmental impacts. They respond to two major crises of our time – economic and ecological – by increasing the wealth of asset-poor households through consumer choices that are both financially smart and promote sustainable living.



Expense reduction is an underutilized opportunity to increase discretionary income.

Equity Express, sponsored by the Center for Neighborhood Technology, teaches the basics of personal financial management with a special emphasis on expense reduction in energy, transportation, telecommunications, and food. Together, these expenses represent over 40% of the budget of typical low- and moderate-income families.

How it Works

The Equity Express curriculum includes six facilitated workshops that take place every other week. The sessions, typically with 15-20 participants, are designed to build connections between participants in order to reinforce changes in behavior. The facilitator models new behaviors for the class by personally participating in and reporting back on all the assignments, including: tracking expenses, creating savings actions, and using her own spending as an example for class discussion. Throughout the workshops, participants track their expenses and make specific commitments to decrease their household expenses, as well as their carbon footprint.

Trust is nurtured by acknowledging that money management is challenging for everyone; the facilitators encourage awareness of our personal and collective preconceptions about money in a class environment that is safe and confidential. Every class reinforces the message that this work is difficult; that forming new, healthy and prosperous habits requires time, support and long-term commitment.

The opening workshop provides an introduction to the basics of household financial management and climate change and sets the stage for the next four workshops, each of which focuses on one expense area: transportation, energy, telecommunications and food. The closing workshop reviews participants' progress in cutting costs, increasing savings and lowering carbon emissions. It presents strategies to help reinforce new behaviors.

Interested in an Equity Express Workshop?

CNT offers Equity Express workshops in two ways:

As the workshop **facilitator** and as the **trainer** in a train-the-trainer process for community organization staff and members so they can then offer the workshop.

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Visit on the web:

[www.cnt.org/tcd/
sustainable-prosperity](http://www.cnt.org/tcd/sustainable-prosperity)





Flickr User: Zecmerelda

Transportation

Participants map their own transportation patterns, then learn about the costs and benefits associated with a wide range of transportation options – from car use to car sharing, walking to cycling. Participants then review and share with the class their expense estimates for each transportation type based on their expense log. The session ends with commitments to try new ways of getting around that are healthy and save money.



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Energy

Participants learn to understand the information on their gas and electric bills, including the meaning of therms and kilowatt-hours and how different utility rates work. Participants brainstorm the various ways that their homes use energy and identify no- and low-cost opportunities to decrease energy consumption. They also learn how to access local energy assistance programs. The session ends with commitments to try new ways to decrease energy use and save money.



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Telecommunications

Participants examine the telecom services that they use, including cell phones, land lines, cable television and the Internet. They are encouraged to distinguish between the phone services that they really need and those that they want, and identify strategies to meet real needs affordably. Participants also examine their TV-watching habits and explore ways to save money on cable service. Finally, the workshop discusses the Internet as a resource for finding savings strategies and examples of websites that can help with money management, closing with commitments to action.



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Food

The food workshop focuses on how to eat well cost-effectively, rather than merely how to reduce food costs. The class opens with getting the most nourishment out of our food dollar, then moves to the environmental impacts of our food choices. Participants use their grocery receipts to categorize purchases and then determine whether they could be getting more value for their food dollar through menu planning, smarter buying, and less packaged food and takeout. Again, the workshop ends with action commitments.

- **Equity Express workshops are interactive and lively.** Participants are asked to reflect personally, as well as discuss their experiences in small groups and with the whole class to the extent that they are comfortable doing so. The workshops emphasize the value of the participants' own knowledge and experiences.
- **Equity Express workshops offer incentives for participation** that reinforce the program's goals of decreasing household expenses and increasing household assets, such as boxes of organic produce, transit passes, and gift cards to grocery and shoe stores.
- **Participants receive continual feedback on their progress** and how it compares with the rest of the class.