Thinking Money for Kids Program Kits

Summative Evaluation Report

April 1, 2026

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Junction Library (Perry County District)

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Executive Summary

In 2007, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority Investor Education Foundation (FINRA Foundation) and the American Library Association's Public Programs Office (ALA PPO) embarked on a partnership to help public libraries build capacity for advancing financial capabilities in their communities. After designing and distributing two traveling exhibitions for children, caregivers, and educators, in 2023, ALA PPO and the FINRA Foundation developed a Thinking Money for Kids (TM4K) resource kit for libraries that lacked the space, capacity, or expertise to host a financial education exhibit.

Three hundred libraries received these kits. Over a 16-month period, they were incorporated into financial education programs and adapted to meet patron needs. To ascertain the program's impacts, we analyzed data from library applications, reports, focus groups, and conversations on ALA Connect.

The results of our evaluation show that the project filled a critical gap in libraries' financial education programming capacities. Prior to this project, relatively few participating libraries had offered programs focused on money. Describing the kits as "*really beneficial*" and "*a godsend*," staff said that their ability to teach financial concepts in a "*fun and educational*" way had been significantly enhanced. In addition to their "*very user friendly*" nature, libraries appreciated how the kits included a set of support materials, finding that the instructional videos, scripts, and other resources helped staff "*feel more confident and prepared before running the program*." Beyond this, libraries felt that the kits had made staff "*better able to assist patrons with their financial literacy questions*" on a day-to-day basis.

Libraries' experiences implementing financial literacy programs were altogether positive. They reported that children "*really had a great time*" playing the games, and found that parents "*absolutely loved*" their programs. In addition to "*having a lot of fun*," staff across sites agreed that the games boosted children's financial literacies—whether it be understanding "*the importance of budgeting and avoiding overspending*," having a deeper appreciation for "*how much planning certain things involve*," or improving their math skills while "*looking for deals on how to keep money*." Along with these learning gains, libraries also observed children acquiring a number of important transferable skills—most notably, teamwork and creativity. Through the "*thoughtful decisions*" children made while playing the games, staff across sites found that the kits were helping inculcate more responsible behaviors around money. Parents also "*really appreciated*" the financial perspectives the games imparted, saying that it was a "*huge blessing*" for libraries to offer a form of financial education that went beyond "*something projected on a screen with worksheets*."

On account of their positive experiences, libraries said they were planning to integrate financial education into their day-to-day programming efforts. Filled with confidence that they could "*make this happen*," many were looking forward to continuing to teach financial education concepts to all manner of patrons. As one staff member put it, TM4K made libraries "*better prepared, better equipped, and more confident in our ability to make financial learning accessible, enjoyable, and impactful for the children and families in our community*."

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Introduction

Studies show that high levels of financial knowledge contribute to financial wellbeing (Taft et al., 2013; Agrisani et al., 2020), but rates of financial literacy vary significantly across the US. In recognition of this, in 2007, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority Investor Education Foundation (FINRA Foundation) and the American Library Association's Public Programs Office (ALA PPO) embarked on a partnership to help public libraries build capacity for advancing financial capabilities in their communities. After creating two traveling exhibitions aimed at increasing the financial literacy of children, caregivers, and educators, in 2023, ALA PPO and the FINRA Foundation developed a Thinking Money for Kids (TM4K) financial resource kit for libraries that lacked the space, capacity, or expertise to host a financial education exhibit. The kits were awarded to select libraries through an application process, and included five key in-person programs:

1. *Penny Pinchers' Party*
2. *Piggy Bank Theater*
3. *Pet Cents*
4. *Currency Conga*
5. *Making Mooo-lah*

Along with these programs, the kits contained a mix of additional TM4K assets, including Playaway Launchpad devices loaded with custom TM4K digital games and staff training materials. Aiming to convey basic financial education concepts to children, the goals of these kits were to:

- Increase the capacity of public libraries to deliver turn-key financial education experiences for children;
- Introduce children to foundational financial literacy concepts through engaging, multi-modal learning experiences; *and*
- Help library workers acquire the tools and confidence to make financial education available to children in their communities.

A total of 300 public libraries participated in the program. Including institutions of varying types, sizes, locations, service areas, and experiences with children's programming, the cohort reflects the broader diversity of the American library world. Libraries from all 50 states participated in the program, along with one in the Northern Mariana Islands. Public libraries with single and multiple branches participated, as did three Tribal libraries. Of the 300 libraries, 35 received an additional Spanish-language version of the kit.

In terms of their service areas and geographical locations, program participants were similarly representative of the broader library landscape. More than a quarter (27.5 percent) served communities of under 5,000 residents, and just over one half (50.9 percent) identified as rural libraries. The remainder identified as urban or suburban (or some combination of city/suburb or suburb/rural), and their service populations varied considerably: nearly one quarter (22.7 percent) of participants had service populations between 10 and 25,000, while another quarter (23.4 percent) served communities of between 25 and 150,000 residents. While fewer libraries in major urban centers participated, 30 (10.3 percent) of those that did had service areas encompassing over 150,000 residents.

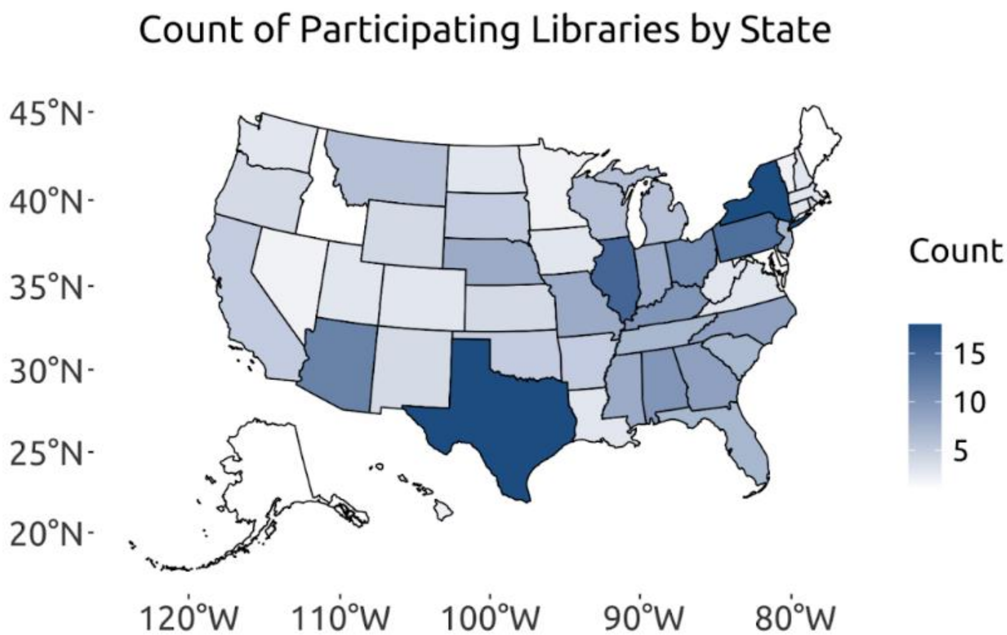

Figure 1. Map of Project Participants by State

Note. Libraries from all 50 states participated in TM4K, so even those that appear in white hosted programs.

All but one library said they host in-person programs for children (defined as those between three and 12 years of age), with most (85.6 percent) saying they do so either once a week (18.9 percent), multiple times per week (50.5 percent), or every day (16.2 percent). A significant majority (60.5 percent) also said they host programs on site at schools at least once a quarter, and 40.8 percent indicated that they also host school groups at the library on at least a monthly basis. When asked if they had offered a financial education program in the past five years, over half (53.6 percent) said either “no” (44.3 percent) or that they were unsure (9.3 percent).

FableVision Studios was responsible for designing the kit and its components. Knology worked with FableVision, ALA PPO, and the FINRA Foundation to test early versions of the activities. In Fall 2023, three libraries received prototype versions of the kit, and Knology conducted a 90-minute virtual discussion with library directors and two to five additional staff members at each site (Norlander & Attaway, 2023). During the discussions, participants evaluated each game’s usability, design, materials, learning potential, and age appropriateness, and also suggested possible adaptations or modifications. They also shared feedback on staffing needs, program formats, shipping, storage, and site configuration. Knology synthesized the input from all focus groups, and the games were subsequently revised and finalized.

Over the 16-month implementation period, the 300 libraries incorporated the kits into financial education programming. As they gained experience utilizing the five games, many libraries modified them to better meet patrons needs. Sometimes modifications were made to simplify gameplay—for example, changing instructions so that only one purchase could be made at a time during *Pet Cents*. In cases where younger children would have had difficulties keeping track of a budget, older players (or caregivers and volunteers) were sometimes asked to check their arithmetic. To promote engagement with *Piggy Bank Theater*, one library decided to break the program into smaller sections, spreading it out over a three-week period and supplementing it with additional activities.

At other times, modifications were made to better align the games with libraries' programming audiences or schedules. To fit into longer program slots, staff at one library built additional themed activities into the games. After hearing from "*parents with teenagers wishing there was a game for teens*," staff at another library created a plan for adapting *Making Mooo-lah* to this audience, adding in "*more realistic costs*" and "*more difficult math to try to include any teens who could benefit*." Another library adapted *Penny Pinchers Party* for a group of adults with developmental disabilities, using the game as a way to teach them how to budget for holiday gift shopping. When bringing *Pet Cents* to a group of 54 students at a local elementary school, staff at another library modified this game by adding a PowerPoint presentation created with the cards and materials available at the TM4K website.

Since the formal distribution of these kits, Knology has continued to serve as the program's external evaluator. To ascertain the program's impacts, we employed a mixed methods assessment strategy[1], combining data from library applications, reports, focus groups, and conversations on ALA Connect. Following our earlier evaluations of Thinking Money (Norlander et al., 2018) and Thinking Money for Kids (Norlander et al., 2023), this report presents the results of our evaluation of the project's most recent iteration, detailing key successes and reflecting on how effectively program outcomes aligned with project goals.

[1] See the appendices to this report for a full discussion of our evaluative process.

Results

Libraries had positive experiences with the TM4K Program Kits. Across implementation sites, staff said the program bridged a critical gap in early childhood education by introducing concepts like budgeting, insurance, and resource management in fun, age-appropriate ways. While some adaptations were needed (and, in fact, encouraged by the FINRA Foundation and ALA PPO) to implement the games successfully with various audiences, staff appreciated the games' practical, visually appealing design and felt empowered to incorporate them into future educational experiences for children and families.

The following discussion illustrates the program's success in meeting each of its three goals.

Goal 1: Increase the capacity of libraries to deliver turn-key financial education experiences for children

Prior to receiving their kits, many participating libraries indicated that they had little to no experience providing financial education experiences for children. One library said they had "*zero resources for financial literacy*," while at another, staff said they had "*never offered a financial literacy program before*." A third library said that outside of a "Lemonade Day" kit that was "*more about buying and selling than managing money responsibly*," they "*hadn't been teaching financial literacy to children in any way*" before becoming part of TM4K.

Given this, for many libraries, the kits filled a critical resource gap. Across sites, staff were "*super excited*" to receive their kits, and praised the signs, props, games, and other materials for being "*beautiful*" and "*very well made*." Many talked about how the kits have been incorporated into their day-to-day programming operations. Calling them "*time savers for my small staff*," one library worker said that they generally use the kits as pop-up programs—that is, "*when a kids' group comes to the library at a time when we haven't scheduled anything*." At another library, staff said the kits "*have been a godsend*," adding that they receive "*positive feedback*" from families whenever the kits are used.

Libraries' use of the kits has been greatly facilitated by the fact that these can be used "*without a lot of preparation*"—requiring neither training, the addition of extra materials, or extensive setup time. As the violin plots[2] below demonstrate, libraries found the kits "*very user friendly*," "*extremely accessible*," and "*well thought out*," agreeing that they contained everything needed to host programs. The fact that they came with "*easy to understand*" instructions, mobile containers, and ready-made scripts meant that anyone—including

[2] This type of plot shows the range and distribution of all rating values (on the vertical axis) for each game (horizontal axis). Wider sections indicate more frequent ratings for that value, and narrower sections indicate few ratings for that value. The small black horizontal line within each shape represents the median, or most commonly reported, rating value. The white bar in the middle of some shapes represents the interquartile range, 25–75 percent of all responses. When the range of responses is limited, the median and interquartile range may be the same value.

volunteers—could facilitate programs with the kits. "*It couldn't be easier*," one library worker shared. "*It's been really beneficial*," another said of the kits, adding that "*I never would have thought to put all of these different resources together on my own. I would have no idea where to even have started with that*."

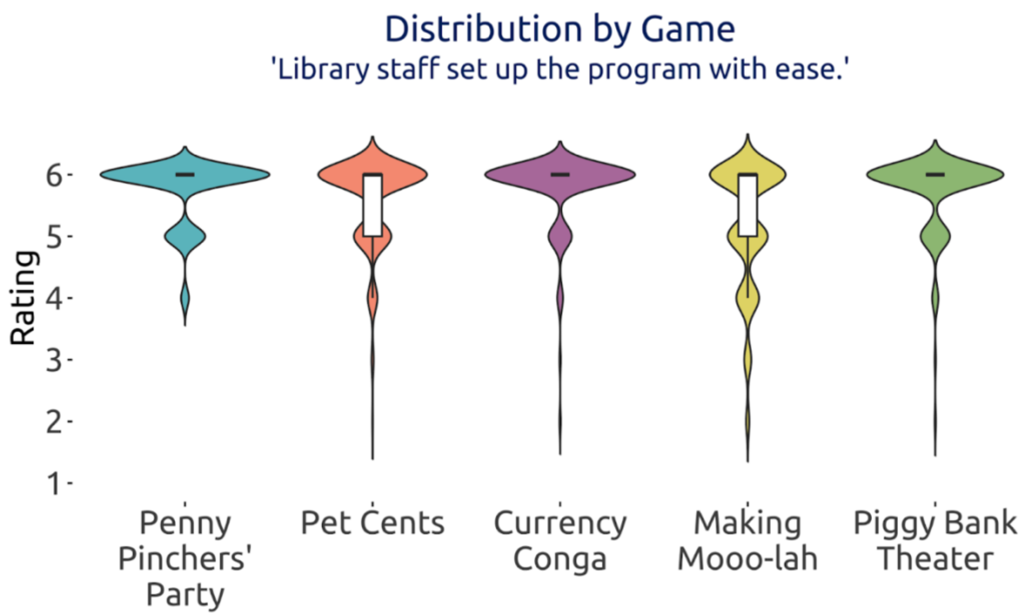

Figure 2. Staff Ratings of Game Set-Up

Note. Distribution of rating values by game for the item "Library staff set up the program with ease" where 1 = "Disagree Strongly" and 6 = "Agree Strongly."

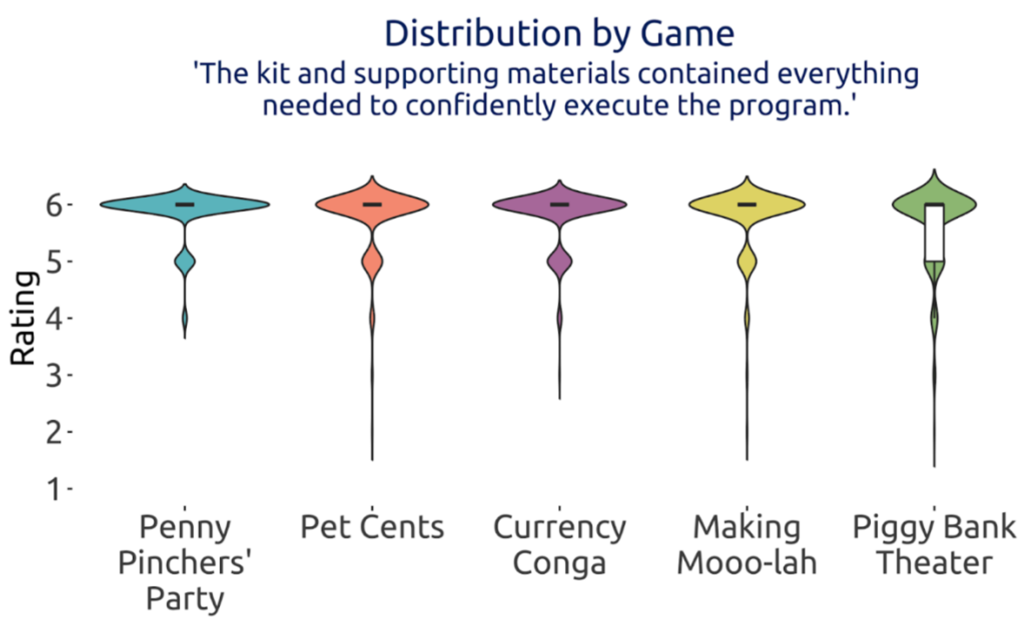

Figure 3. Staff Ratings of Kit and Supporting Materials

Note. Distribution of rating values by game for the item "The kit and supporting materials contained everything needed to confidently execute the program" where 1 = "Disagree Strongly" and 6 = "Agree Strongly."

The inclusion of training materials has also facilitated libraries' use of the kits. Across sites, staff agreed that the instructional videos and scripts helped familiarize them with the games and provided valuable tips on "*how to present them*." A staff member at one library praised how "*detailed and concise*" the videos were, appreciating the fact that they offered "*step-by-step demonstrations*" of each game. Along with the other support materials, this person said that the videos were useful in terms of providing "*more ideas on different game options or extensions*." At another library, a staff member said that they "*watched those videos over and over again.*" Along with the scripts, this resource taught them "*how to be a facilitator*." Echoing this point, staff at a third library said that the videos "*made it easy for everyone to feel more confident and prepared before running the programs*."

In addition to incorporating the five games into financial education programs, libraries also made use of the Playaway Launchpads, putting them into circulation for at-home use. Though it was not required, just over 50 percent of participating libraries said they also used the Launchpads in programming. Usage varied significantly across sites, but among 285 survey respondents, the Launchpads were circulated an average of 51 times. Libraries reported that they were quite popular with patrons, as comments like "*our Launchpads are circulating really well*," "*looks like they're all currently checked out*," and "*we have to charge them at the front desk because they're getting used so much*" suggest.

As all of this indicates that the kits have increased library capacities for delivering turn-key financial experiences for children. Reflecting on this, one librarian shared the following testimonial:

> *Participating in TM4K has significantly enhanced our library's capacity to deliver high-quality, engaging financial education for children and their families. The program's thoughtfully designed materials and training made it easy for our staff to offer financial literacy programs that are both educational and fun. The kit's ready-to-use games and activities—clearly developed with input from educators experienced in working with children—were especially valuable. They allowed us to present complex financial concepts like saving, spending, sharing, and budgeting in ways that felt approachable and meaningful to kids.*

Feedback from community members provides further evidence that the kits have helped libraries build new programming capacities. At one library, a parent reflected on how the kit helped staff go beyond their expectations of what financial education programs consist of. Upon bringing their children to a program called *Money Games*, this individual suspected that "*maybe we'd have something projected on a screen with worksheets for the kids*." But upon walking in and seeing all the games, "*she was very impressed*." "*She thanked us repeatedly for the program*," staff shared, highlighting how this parent commented on "*the high quality of the games, how well suited for children they were, and how interactive they were*."

Another librarian said that the program had "*changed the way our library is seen within the city*." Through participation, the library now has four staff members who can "*teach children about money in two languages using fun, game-based activities*." Highlighting the broader impacts of this development, the library shared how

> *We're now recognized as a real partner in fighting poverty. We've started working with other city Community Service departments to join the Community Action Program (CAP). They asked us to develop similar programs for teens.*

Goal 2: Introduce children to foundational financial literacy concepts through engaging, multi-modal learning experiences

Libraries praised the interactive, multi-modal nature of the games, finding that they helped create highly engaging, positive experiences where children were "*learning without knowing they're learning*." Staff observed children repeatedly playing the games and becoming highly invested in the different scenarios (as can be seen in Figure 4 below). One staff member said that *Pet Cents* had "*gone viral*" around school because children were talking about it so much. Another shared that *Currency Conga* "*was a hit*," saying that the game "*kept their energy up while reinforcing money concepts in a fun, active way*." "*They all took it pretty seriously*," another said of their experience with *Making Mooo-lah*, "*but really had a great time*."

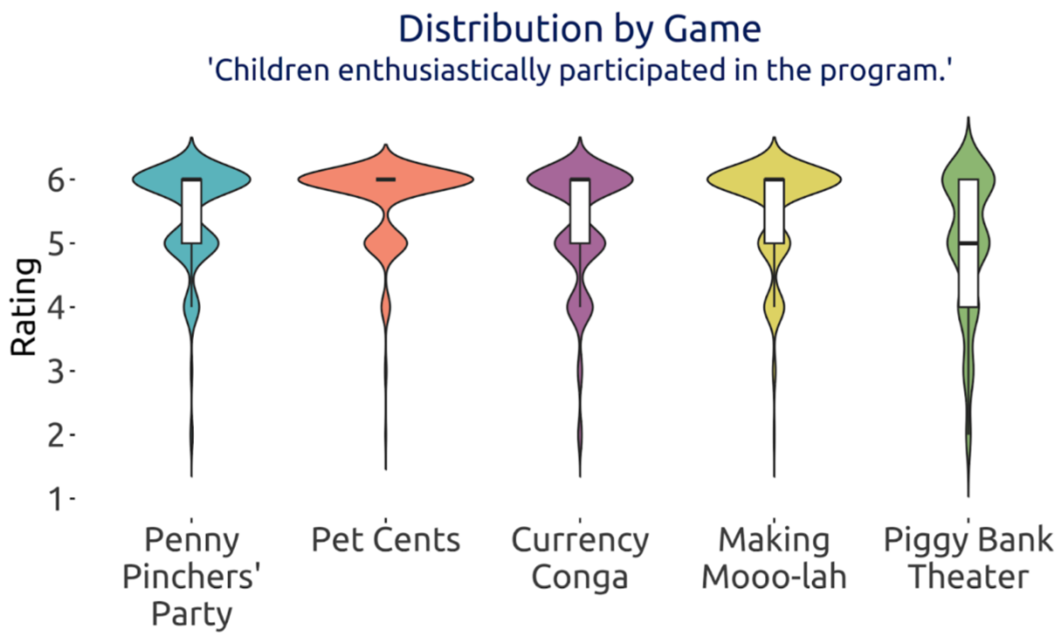

Figure 4. Staff Ratings of Children's Participation

Note. Distribution of rating values by game for the item "Children enthusiastically participated in the program" where 1 = "Disagree Strongly" and 6 = "Agree Strongly."

Comments from caregivers also underscore the enjoyment and learning these games are fostering. "*Our parents are absolutely LOVING the program*," one librarian shared, adding that they had received "*so many positive remarks about what their kids are learning*." Highlighting the "*really positive remarks*" they had received, staff at another library shared a comment from a mother who told them that "*it's a huge blessing that you offer this kind of education here*." According to this person, while money is discussed in school, "*the topic is covered quickly and without any follow-up conversations or references to try and help the kid make connections with money and their own lives*." By contrast, the kits are encouraging a more systematic engagement with financial concepts. As an example, staff at one library said that "*everyone had a lot of fun*" playing *Penny Pinchers' Party*, describing how "*parents really appreciated the perspective on spending and saving the game gave their kids*." Figure 5 below provides quantitative confirmation of the favorable response each game met with.

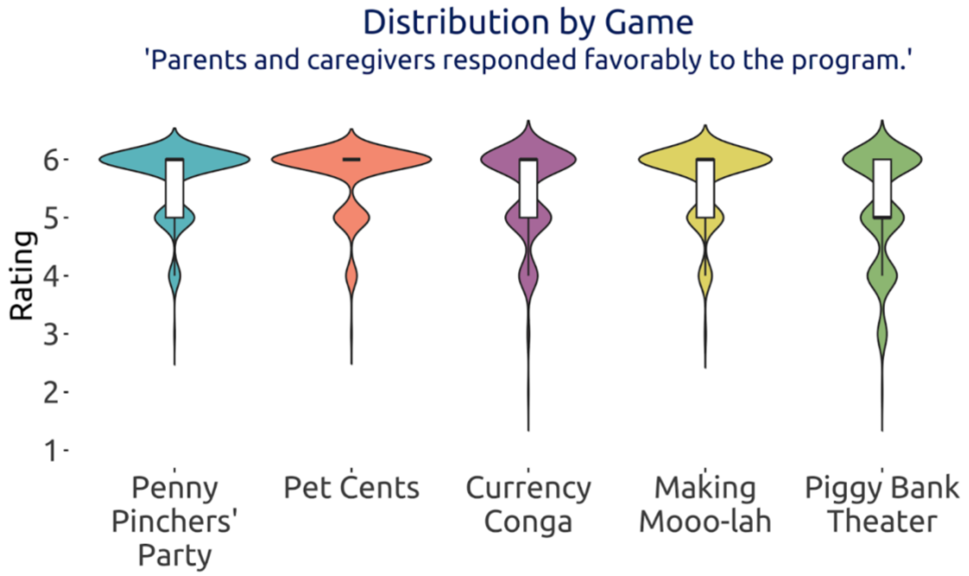

Figure 5. Staff Ratings of Parent / Caregiver Responses

Note. Distribution of rating values by game for the item "Parents and caregivers responded favorably to the program" where 1 = "Disagree Strongly" and 6 = "Agree Strongly."

Some staff observed that the games were an "*eye opener*" in terms of revealing "*how far behind some students are*." Yet while playing, libraries observed children making "*thoughtful decisions*" about money in many different contexts. Across sites, libraries observed positive learning experiences related to budgeting, saving and spending money responsibly, running a business, and other aspects of financial well-being. Individual ratings for each game's contribution to children's financial knowledge are depicted in Figure 6 below.

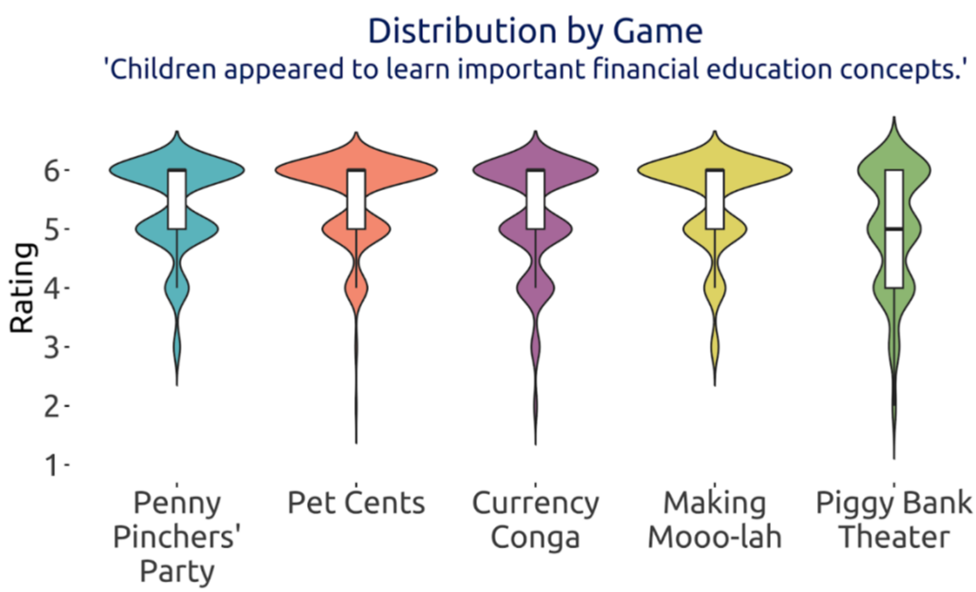

Figure 6. Staff Ratings of Children's Learning

Note. Distribution of rating values by game for the item "Children appeared to learn important financial education concepts" where 1 = "Disagree Strongly" and 6 = "Agree Strongly."

Budgeting

During implementation, staff observed children actively learning about "*the importance of budgeting and avoiding overspending when making purchases*." Many cited the particular value of *Penny Pinchers' Party* here. While some thought it might help to have an introductory discussion on how budgeting works before playing, libraries agreed that this game imparted valuable knowledge. "*Having a limited budget*," one staff member shared, "*really made them think about what they really wanted*." At another library, staff decided to host the party that participants had planned during the game in real life. Doing this revealed how knowledge gained during the game had translated into real-life behaviors. As one library worker shared:

> *It was great for them that they got to see it after they were done. And I mean, sometimes they would say, "Oh, we should have picked better snacks. We were trying to do it on a budget." Instead of getting Doritos, for example, they got, you know, an off-brand of nachos, and so they got to see how that played out.*

Budgeting was also a component of *Pet Cents*. Shortly after using this game during an after-school program, a library worker received a call from a mother whose children had attended with their father. "*I've never seen my kids come home so excited from a library program*," she said, adding that the game was "*really special*" and had taught their children how to budget, and that "*they would need to get jobs if they wanted a pet*."

Planning and Responsibility

Staff also spoke about how the games taught children how to save and spend money responsibly. Many said that children came away from their experiences with a deeper appreciation for "*how much planning certain things involve*." By simulating the experience of visiting the vet, buying food, and purchasing pet supplies on a strict budget, *Pet Cents* demonstrated the continuous, sometimes hidden costs of keeping animals happy and healthy. One library worker shared the following feedback on their use of this game:

> *We have had parents come up and thank us for making their kids think twice about getting a pet when they realize how much money and responsibility it requires. We have also had kids decide to help with their family pet more once they start to ponder how much work, time, and money go into owning a pet.*

Along similar lines, libraries said that *Making Mooo-lah* taught children "*what it is like to be an adult (paydays, taxes, making decisions, taking calculated risks, and preparing for the unexpected) in an incredibly fun way*." Many pointed to how this game demonstrated the importance of insurance for unexpected events. At one library, staff said they "*really enjoyed seeing the older children explain to the younger ones why insurance should be the first purchase*." When a group of 8–10-year-old players decided this would be "*the smartest thing to buy first*," staff at another library said they were "*amazed at how responsible some children choose to be*."

Libraries also said that *Making Mooo-lah* illustrated some of the challenges involved in running a business. "*Students were very surprised to learn that the wrong decisions could cost them their farm*," one staff person said. At times, these surprises opened the door to additional learning. For example, while playing *Making Mooo-lah*, a child at one library stood up at one point to insist that everyone purchase insurance. In response, a staff member asked, *"How many of you know what insurance is?"* When this child was the only one who raised their hand, staff initiated a conversation on this topic.

Recognizing Coins

Libraries found that *Currency Conga* was helpful in teaching children how to recognize and understand the value of different coins. While playing, they realized that many children were "*not as familiar with coins*" as they expected and "*struggled to identify various forms of currency*." But after playing, some noted improvements in children's abilities to distinguish different types of coins. "*A couple weeks after Currency Conga*," staff at one library reported, "*a patron told me she was amazed how much her granddaughters had retained from the currency identification skills learned during the program*." "*They clearly knew their coins now*," this patron added.

Arithmetic

While playing, staff frequently observed children performing basic arithmetic. During *Penny Pinchers' Party*, staff at one library shared, "*kids were adding and subtracting and looking for deals on how to keep money*." *Pet Cents* also prompted these skills, and because keeping track of the math in this game was sometimes challenging for younger participants, libraries often paired these players with older children who could count—creating a collaborative learning moment by having groups work through calculations together.

Often, children were so engaged with the games that they "*didn't realize*" they were doing math. As staff at one library put it: "*Parents loved that kids were doing math that was fun and didn't feel like a lesson*." At another library, staff spoke of two children who returned again and again to play a game, noting that "*their mom was so excited to see them using their money math skills they had been working on*."

Additional Lessons

In addition to improving their financial knowledge and abilities, staff observed children developing a number of more general transferable skills. Among these were teamwork and collaboration. Recounting an implementation of *Penny Pinchers' Party*, one library worker explained how the game prompted some children's "*first experiences with collaborative group work*." "*It was more than just sharing*," they explained: "*kids had to listen to each other, make decisions together, and explain their choices*." "*That kind of teamwork is a new and developing skill for a lot of this age group*," they added, "*and it was really rewarding to see them navigating it so thoughtfully*."

Others spoke to how this game showcased the value of creativity. After finishing *Penny Pinchers' Party*, staff at one library initiated a discussion about the themes and items children chose. This conversation prompted recognition of the fact that children can be creative with their purchases—that "*there are many options always available to them that are low or cost or free, and that they can always make things work without much of a budget*." On a related note, staff at another library shared how *Making Mooo-lah* taught children that seemingly un-economic choices can sometimes bring financial benefits. "*Some of the buys that seemed frivolous actually ended up being useful*," staff shared, adding that this "*surprising*" finding "*made them think about how you have to have recreation, not just all work*."

Goal 3: Help library workers acquire the tools and confidence to make financial education available to children in their communities

Across sites, library workers reported that their experiences had equipped them with the necessary tools and confidence to create financial education programs for children.

At a library that had "*never offered a financial literacy program before*," one person called the project "*a big deal for us*," saying that the experience gave staff a newfound ability to teach financial concepts. Prior to participating in the program, a staff member at another library said, they would not have listed financial literacy "*as one of my fortes*." But because of TM4K, they now felt "*a lot more confident in being able to ask the kids questions and talk to parents*" about various financial topics. This library worker also took it upon themselves to "*read some financial literacy books to make sure my kids are better prepared for life*."

Elaborating on the knowledge and skills they had acquired through participation, staff at one library offered the following observation:

> *[Our library] is better prepared to deliver financial education programs in the future because the TM4K program provided us the opportunity to talk with families & teachers in a natural way during and after [implementation]. We presented the TM4K programs at our libraries and local afterschool events to hear what they enjoyed (or didn't), where they need further assistance, and how our library can bridge gaps. As a staff, we gained the confidence to create youth-friendly financial education programs that are as engaging as they are educational.*

Figure 7 below illustrates the significant gains in confidence libraries experienced as a result of participating in TM4K.

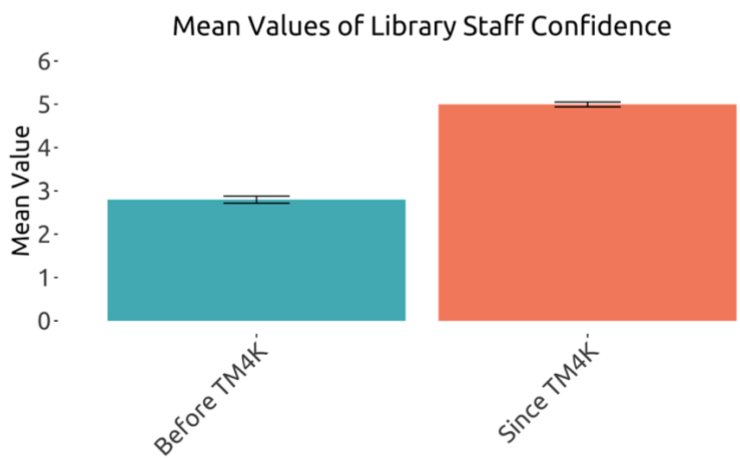

Figure 7. Changes in Staff Confidence

Note. Respondents answered two questions: "How confident was your library staff in offering financial education programs for children before receiving the Thinking Money for Kids Program Kit?" where responses ranged from 1 (Not at all Confident) to 6 (Very Confident), with an average response of 2.8 (SD = 1.39), followed by the same question but "since" receiving the Thinking Money for Kids Program Kit, with an average response of 5.0 (SD = .93).

When speaking to how TM4K had given them the tools and confidence to offer financial education programs, many library workers pointed to the support materials that were part of their kits. One said that the organization and formatting of the kit was "*ideal*," adding that the design of these materials could help anyone "*approach financial literacy programming without feeling overwhelmed or intimidated, but with the confidence they can make this happen in their library*." Libraries also said that using the kits had boosted their confidence in teaching financial literacy concepts outside of programming contexts. "*My staff feels better able to assist patrons with their financial literacy questions and can help them locate additional materials*," one library worker shared.

As they became more confident using the kits, many libraries made modifications aimed at better aligning games with patron interests and needs. As a variation on *Piggy Bank Theater*, staff at a library who used this with a group of elementary school students said they had participants "*act out the stories for each other*," using the online script. "*They had a great time with it*," the library shared, adding that they were planning to recruit some of these students to "*present this to younger children*" as well. Another library ran the same program as a bilingual program, adapting it to a storytime setting and adding more interactive features. As staff explained:

> *We placed a piggy bank and a tray with money in the middle, so whenever a character saved money in the story, children could come up, put money inside the piggy bank, and give it a shake…At the end, we distributed piggy bank boxes for the families to fold and decorate.*

This approach to *Piggy Bank Theater* made the program "*a blast*." As staff shared, "*It was the most successful bilingual educational and entertainment program to date!*"

Given the overwhelmingly positive nature of their experiences, many libraries were planning to make financial education a more regular part of their programming schedules. "*I feel thrilled and prepared to continue to share financial literacy with my patrons and school districts moving forward*," one library worker said. At another library, a staff member said they "*definitely feel much more confident about this kind of programming going forward*," adding that they "*plan to use it more in the future*." Highlighting these beneficial impacts, one library worker offered the following testimonial:

> *Through Thinking Money for Kids, our library is now better prepared, better equipped, and more confident in our ability to make financial learning accessible, enjoyable, and impactful for the children and families in our community.*

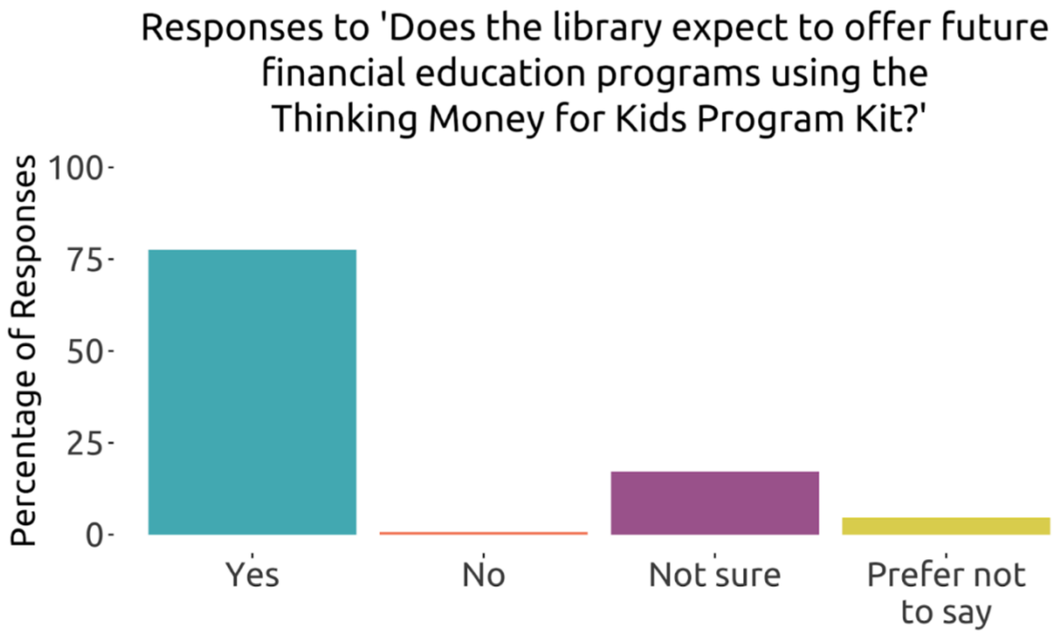

Figure 8. Staff Plans for Further Use of TM4K Program Kits

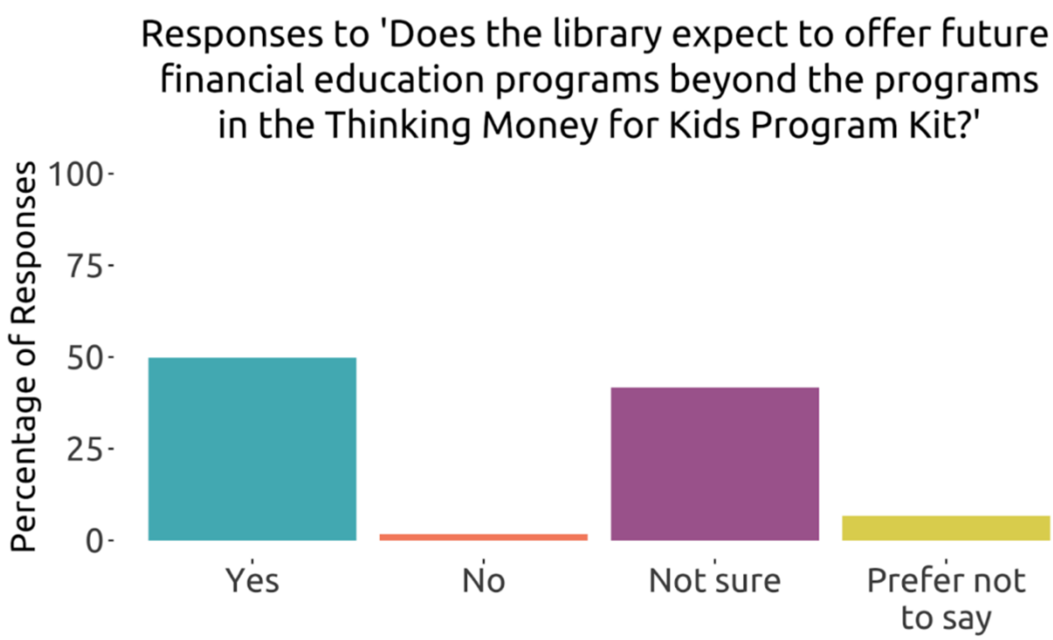

Figure 9. Staff Plans for Offering Programs Beyond Those in the Resource Kit

Conclusion & Recommendations

The results of our evaluation show that TM4K accomplished each of its goals. Across implementation sites, staff and parents agreed that the kits had increased library capacities for providing children with high-quality, turn-key financial education experiences. In addition to finding the games engaging and enjoyable, children improved their knowledge of a variety of key financial concepts, including budgeting, saving and spending, and planning. Along with these learning gains, they also enhanced their teamwork and creative thinking skills. On account of their positive experiences with the program, participating libraries said they had acquired both the tools and confidence required to host fun and educational programs on various financial topics, and indicated that they would be building on their efforts to make financial literacy a more regular part of their programming schedules. As all of this indicates, the project filled a critical resource gap in libraries' programming capacities and offered a model for how libraries can position themselves as sites of financial learning across the US.

To promote the further development of libraries' programming capacities, our evaluation points to a number of recommendations to guide their partnerships with financial education organizations. These include:

- Continue to involve libraries in the development process, while also bringing children (especially older youth, when relevant) into game and activity co-design;
- Continue to ensure that programs correlate with patrons' real-life experiences and include culturally relevant examples;
- Continue building as many interactive elements into programs as possible, as children learn best when activities give them an opportunity to move and play; *and*
- Continue incorporating flexibility and adaptability into the game design process, as activities that are easily modifiable will maximize their potential use among different patron groups.

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Thinking Money for Kids Program Kits

Summative Evaluation Report: Appendices

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Overview

In 2007, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority Investor Education Foundation (FINRA Foundation) and the American Library Association's Public Programs Office (ALA PPO) embarked on a partnership to help public libraries build capacity for advancing financial capabilities in their communities. After designing and distributing two traveling exhibitions aimed at increasing the financial literacy of children, caregivers, and educators, in 2023, ALA PPO and the FINRA Foundation developed a financial resource kit for libraries that lacked the space, capacity, or expertise to host a financial education exhibit.

The kits were awarded to 300 select libraries through an application process, and the goals of these kits were to:

- Increase the capacity of public [and school] libraries to deliver turn-key financial education experiences for children.
- Introduce children to foundational financial literacy concepts through engaging, multi-model learning experiences.
- Help library workers acquire the tools and confidence to make financial education available to children in their communities.

This document contains two appendices:

Appendix A contains an overview of the five games included in the Thinking Money for Kids (TM4K) program kit.

Appendix B details the evaluative methods Knology used to assess the extent to which TM4K achieved the three aforementioned objectives.

Table of Contents

Appendix A

Development of the TM4K program kits began in 2023. Introducing audiences to important financial concepts such as budgeting, planning, saving, and responsible spending, the kits included five games aimed at showing children how to make smart choices with their money. These were:

- ***Penny Pinchers' Party***: In this game, participants are given $100 and asked to plan a party that keeps their expenses within budget. During each turn, players select items for their parties from a warehouse, and after five turns, they share their plans and explain their choices. In addition to learning about budgets and why they are useful, this game helps children understand basic business relationships (customer / provider) and the fact that value and cost are different concepts.
- ***Piggy Bank Theater***: A story about three young characters who built their childhood interests into successful careers, this game teaches the importance of balancing earning, spending, and saving. Whenever a character performs any of these three actions, participants are encouraged to identify them with the words "earn," "spend," and "save."
- ***Pet Cents***: Teaching children about the financial responsibilities that come with pet ownership, this game asks players to adopt a pet and engage in various transactions—spending and receiving money (including transactions related to unexpected events) in ways that meet their pet's needs. Along the way, players learn about budgets, how to cope with different financial needs, and think about what it means to be financially responsible.
- ***Currency Conga***: Aimed at improving currency recognition and money math skills, this game has players flick a spinner and vie for space on a vinyl mat as they identify different coins and bills. A collaborative activity involving movement, addition, and subtraction, the game includes two different playing options—one for younger children and one for older youth.
- ***Making Mooo-lah***: A collaborative simulation, this game asks players to work together to manage a farm. During each turn, players roll a die and move across a life-sized game board that includes spaces for making purchases, selling crops, or responding to unexpected events. The goal is to turn a profit in 12 months after starting with $200. Along the way, players learn how to differentiate needs from wants, about risk management, and ways to work together to manage profits and losses.

Appendix B

Evaluation Process Overview

To ascertain the program's impacts, we examined the experiences of these libraries through a mixed methods strategy, combining data from library applications, reports, focus groups, and conversations on ALA Connect. The following discussion provides additional details about our evaluation process.

Data Collection

Library Applications & Reports

To participate in the program, libraries submitted an initial application. Those chosen to participate also submitted a final report.

To work with application data, Knology first created a spreadsheet containing information from all 300 libraries. Responses to each application question were sorted into individual columns and included information about their locations, service areas, staffing, programming, and other relevant topics. Applicants were also given an opportunity to write in additional information about their operations, needs, and goals. A similar process was used to collect and sort data from libraries' final reports.

Focus Groups

Eight library workers participated in two separate hour-long focus groups regarding TM4K in October 2025. Focus groups were held over videoconference, conducted by the same researcher, and transcribed by an AI tool. Library workers came from suburban Nebraska, rural South Carolina, suburban New York, urban New York, rural Wisconsin, rural Minnesota, suburban Wisconsin, and rural Alabama.

Forum Posts

The ALA Connect platform hosted a members-only, community of practice, group forum for libraries participating in the TM4K Program, facilitated by the ALA PPO. The 345 members could post and reply to messages on the forum beginning in February 2024. The contents of the forum were exported to a spreadsheet for documentation and analysis.

Data Analysis

Library Applications & Reports

When working with application files, we first cleaned this data by removing duplicate entries. Response frequencies were then tabulated for library type, population size, community type, number of full-time employees, and programming (including programs conducted on and off site, those designed specifically for children, and those focused on money). Descriptive statistics and visualizations of these statistics for key questions were also generated from the cleaned survey data. After calculating the number of libraries in each state, we also created a choropleth map—a tool that is effective for visualizing variability across different geographical regions.

Similar methods were used to analyze data from libraries' final reports. To allow for a quantitative, aggregate assessment of libraries' experiences with TM4K, we created a spreadsheet and copied information from each library's report into a separate column. This included the five survey items that libraries responded to on a scale from one ("Strongly Disagree") to six ("Strongly Agree"):

1. "Library staff set up the program with ease."
2. "The kit and supporting materials contained everything needed to execute the program."
3. "Children enthusiastically participated in the program."
4. "Children appeared to learn important financial education concepts."
5. "Parents and caregivers responded favorably to the program."

The spreadsheet also contained the additional comments libraries shared on each program, along with responses to questions about library capacities, staff confidence, and participants' future plans for using the kits. After cleaning, the final dataset included 285 responses.

Focus Groups

One researcher reviewed the focus group transcripts for comments related to the project themes. Common topics within the themes were noted.

Forum Posts

To analyze the forum posts, a researcher initially used the titles of forum threads to select those that seemed likely to contain library workers' experiences of implementing the program. Excluded threads covered topics such as personal introductions, logistics and timeline for receiving the kits, and sharing other financial education resources. After an initial reading, 12 threads composed of 225 posts were selected for coding. Duplicate posts and posts from project staff were excluded from coding, resulting in a set of 184 posts related to implementing the TM4K Program. Forum posts were coded for whether they addressed the project goals, positive or negative experiences of the library staff or program participants, and whether the post contained suggestions or described adaptations used to implement the games in non-exclusive categories.

The forum posts were strikingly positive, with 121 (65.7 percent) of the posts reflecting positive experiences of library staff or program participants.

Although the forum prompts did not directly solicit responses related to the project goals, many posts addressed them. We summarized the key themes of the forum posts relating to each program goal, with illustrative quotes from library workers who implemented the program. Quotes were lightly edited for readability.

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