

## **A Workshop for Wiki Wizards and Wannabes**

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eXtension (pronounced ee-extension) provides a new paradigm for Cooperative Extension program delivery. eXtension uses current and emerging technology to transform Cooperative Extension materials and programs into a national information resource featuring interactive online learning tools. Consumers benefit from 24/7/365 access to current, unbiased, research-based information developed by Extension professionals. eXtension also offers users an array of information products and services including just-in-time information, self-paced learning lessons, and the opportunity to receive personalized feedback and answers to specific questions from Extension experts.

The Financial Security for All (FSA) program in eXtension evolved originally from the national Extension initiative, Financial Security in Later Life (FSLI). That initiative is Internet based (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fslI>) with resources available electronically to both educators and consumers. This effort laid the foundation for FSLI being selected for inclusion in the eXtension prototype launched in February, 2005.

Financial security, the ability to meet day-to-day expenses while saving and investing for the future, is a goal for many segments of the population, including youth and people currently struggling for financial stability. Thus the original design of FSLI was expanded to include these additional target audiences (Communities of Interest) and Financial Security for All became one of eight "pioneer" eXtension Communities of Practice (CoPs). The program was launched publically in February, 2007.

Extension specialists and educators are the backbone of CoPs, virtual teams of subject-matter specialists, who create eXtension content. The FSA CoP is comprised of over 200 state, regional, and county Extension professionals who communicate regularly via instant messaging, email lists, Web conferencing, and in collaborative work spaces.

During the past year, the FSA CoP has produced a variety of personal finance education "deliverables" for consumers. One of the most comprehensive is a collection of over 1,000 published frequently asked questions (FAQs) on a variety of topics (e.g., credit use, income taxes, insurance, investing, and retirement planning). In addition, the FSA CoP has eight interactive learning lessons and recently began offering quarterly online chats for consumers. The first public chat, in January 2008, was on the topic of financial record-keeping. In addition, CoP members answer consumer questions directly using eXtension's Ask the Expert (ATE) system.

eXtension uses Web-based wiki software as the collaborative workspace for its CoPs. "Wiki-wiki" is the Hawaiian word for quick. Wiki software enables users to quickly create web content. The wiki facilitates creation of many types of online content including informational pages, instructional modules, and answers to consumer questions. The eXtension wiki is also used for organizational purposes, such as FSA CoP Leadership Team meeting minutes and agendas. The wiki collaborative authoring environment offers numerous advantages over other traditional tools such as word processing software. For example, the Web-based wiki workspace is available at all times via the Internet. Registered users can easily and quickly make additions to, or edit, any page of wiki content. All previous versions of an edited wiki page are stored in memory allowing changes to be readily reviewed or even undone. The wiki also supports group communication and discussion, a useful tool for reviewing existing Extension materials and publications. For example, each FAQ is reviewed by four FSA CoP members, plus a professional copy editor.

In this session, leaders from the Financial Security for All CoP will describe eXtension and demonstrate the use of wiki software to create online content including featured web resources, interactive learning modules, and Frequently Asked Questions. They will also describe how the work of the CoP is organized around key words for personal finance topics. For additional information about Financial Security for All, visit the eXtension personal finance public web site: [http://www.extension.org/personal\\_finance](http://www.extension.org/personal_finance).

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