

insights

Magazine



Expanding Credit Unions' Reach in Hispanic Communities

Juntos Avanzamos: Pacific Northwest Chapter

CEO Spotlight: Seattle Credit Union

Honduran Cooperativa Joins Inclusiv

Three Cooperativas Join FHLBNY

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INCLUSIV WELCOMES NEW JUNTOS AVANZAMOS CREDIT UNIONS

This year, we welcomed a diverse group of credit unions headquartered in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Oregon, and Minnesota, substantially expanding the reach of the Juntos Avanzamos Network. Together, these credit unions serve 328,117 members and manage \$6,197,084,287 in community-owned assets. With their addition, the Juntos Avanzamos Network now includes 163 credit unions serving communities across 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Welcome to Juntos Avanzamos!

Everence is a christian-based Credit union headquartered in Pennsylvania serving members nationwide.



Lancaster, Pennsylvania
Assets: \$450,075,796
Members: 24,738

Headquartered in Lancaster, PA, **Everence Federal Credit Union** is a faith-based credit union that serves members nationwide. It is building on a strong foundation of service to Hispanic and immigrant communities, expanding equitable access to financial opportunity through intentional, community-centered initiatives. Through its inclusive lending program, which has provided more than \$19 million in loans to help members build credit, purchase vehicles, grow businesses, and achieve homeownership, as well as its bilingual branches, Spanish-language resources, and culturally responsive member services, Everence has demonstrated a deep commitment to reducing barriers and fostering financial inclusion for all communities. As part of its dedicated Juntos Avanzamos Innovation Team, the credit union is expanding Spanish-language financial education, enhancing staff training, improving community outreach, and establishing more consistent practices across the organization. Guided by a vision of trust, dignity, and long-term financial empowerment, Everence FCU is making meaningful investments that reflect the needs of the communities it serves.

First Alliance Credit Union is strengthening its commitment to Hispanic and immigrant communities through equitable, culturally responsive financial services and a long-term vision for inclusive leadership. With Hispanic members representing more than 11% of its membership and continuing to grow, the credit union has invested in bilingual staff, culturally responsive outreach, and innovative programs like First Start/Fresh Start, which help individuals new to the country, new to credit, or rebuilding financially establish a path toward economic stability. Guided by its strategic focus on financial inclusion and community development, for members who live and work in Southeast Minnesota, First Alliance is also creating new opportunities for Hispanic voices to shape its future through community co-design, the development of a Community Advisory Council, and intentional efforts to build more representative governance. These initiatives reflect a deep commitment to fostering trust, expanding access, and empowering Hispanic families for generations to come.



Rochester, Minnesota
Assets: \$335,001,469
Members: 21,663





Oregon City, Oregon
Assets \$3,240,816,749
Members: 179,805

Rivermark Community Credit Union, which serves members living or working across eleven Oregon counties and the entire state of Washington is advancing financial inclusion by creating equitable, culturally responsive opportunities for Hispanic and immigrant communities across Oregon and Washington. Guided by a strategic Spanish Language Initiative and informed by member feedback, community advisory groups, and employee insights, Rivermark continues to expand bilingual services, translate key member resources, and strengthen staff training to better meet the needs of a growing Hispanic membership. The credit union's commitment extends beyond its branches through meaningful partnerships with Hispanic serving organizations, support for community development initiatives, and employee programs that foster belonging and cultural understanding.

Self-Help Credit Union is united by a mission to create and protect ownership and economic opportunity for all. Self Help Credit Union earned the Juntos Avanzamos designation through its longstanding commitment to expanding financial inclusion for Hispanic and immigrant communities. Operating within an integrated national system, the credit union provides bilingual, culturally competent services and offers inclusive products such as inclusive mortgages and consumer loans, credit-builder loans, citizenship loans, and flexible underwriting that considers nontraditional credit histories and income sources. Self-Help also partners with a broad network of Latino- and immigrant-serving organizations to deliver financial education, homeownership support, and small business resources, while embedding Spanish-language access across every stage of the member experience. Together, these efforts reflect a scalable, mission-driven model that removes barriers to financial opportunity and promotes long-term economic mobility. //



Durham, North Carolina
Assets: \$2,171,190.273
Members: 101,911





PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

STRONGER TOGETHER: HOW THE JUNTOS AVANZAMOS/NLCUP CHAPTER IS ADVANCING FINANCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Built on friendship, trust, and a shared commitment to service, the Pacific Northwest Chapter demonstrates how collaboration among credit unions can expand opportunity for Hispanic and immigrant communities.

Long before the Inclusiv-Juntos Avanzamos/NLCUP Pacific Northwest Chapter (PNW) held its first meeting, its members were already working together. Across the Pacific Northwest, Latino professionals from different credit unions had built an informal network, calling one another for advice, sharing resources, and helping solve challenges in serving Hispanic and immigrant members. They understood that while they represented different institutions, they shared the same mission.

"We already had our little group," said Mary Navarrete. "If someone needed help, we were there for each other. The chapter simply made it official." That spirit of cooperation has become the foundation of one of the strongest Juntos Avanzamos Chapters in the country, bringing together leaders from Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

For Navarrete, community has always come first. She entered the credit union movement unexpectedly after a friend invited her to a Point West Credit Union holiday party. At the time, she worked in retail and knew little about credit unions. What convinced her to make the career change was not a job description. It was the organization's honesty.

"They told me, 'We do not know how to serve the Latino community the way we want to. We need Latino leaders to help us do it.'"

She accepted a teller position, eventually moving into lending before discovering her passion for community outreach. Nearly twenty years later, she now leads outreach and marketing efforts while helping shape the credit union's strategy for serving historically underserved communities.

"I found my purpose," she said.

That same sense of purpose led her to the PNW Chapter. When the opportunity arose to formally organize a Chapter, Navarrete admits she hesitated. Her schedule was already filled with partnerships involving community organizations. Then colleagues encouraged her to take on the challenges.

The professionals who would become the chapter's founding members already trusted one another. Formalizing the network would create opportunities for more credit unions to participate, share ideas, strengthen connections, and support the development of Latino leaders and allies across the region.

Today, the chapter serves as both a professional network and a source of personal support. Members exchange outreach strategies, discuss challenges facing immigrant families, celebrate one another's successes, and provide encouragement during difficult moments.

"We have cried together, celebrated together, and supported each other," Navarrete said. "I am incredibly proud to be part of this team."

As Juntos Avanzamos continues to grow, Navarrete hopes other leaders will see that building a chapter does not require a large budget or perfect circumstances. It starts with people who are willing to come together around a shared purpose.

"You don't need money," she said. "You just need the right people who truly want to make a difference and is willing to share with others so that difference can continue to grow."

The PNW Chapter began with a handful of colleagues who believed they could accomplish more together than they ever could alone. Today, it stands as a model for what is possible when credit union leaders invest in one another, strengthen relationships, and keep their communities at the center of everything they do. //

Chapter members:

Mary Navarrete

Chapter President Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Impact, Point West CU

Darla Kolbas

Vice President/ Vice President of Lending Peninsula Credit Union

Elizabeth Escobar

Secretary | Chief Business Officer, Express Credit Union

Erica Flores

Branch Manager, Rivermark Community Credit Union

Kenia Calderon-Ceron

SVP of Impact and Growth, Seattle Credit Union

Chelsia Neto

CDFI Coordinator, Connections Credit Union

Marisol Manselle

VP of Member Services, Embold Credit Union

Marcos Gautam Flores

Financial Resource Manager, Unitus Community Credit Union

Norm Dufton

SVP of Indirect Lending, Wauna Credit Union

Heather Snyder

AVP of Marketing & Community Development, Fibre Federal Credit Union

● OTHER PAGE: Members of the Pacific Northwest Chapter

with
Michael Cruz
of Seattle Credit Union

CEO SPOTLIGHT

Seattle Credit Union is a CDFI and Inclusiv member credit union headquartered in Seattle, Washington. They have been a Juntos Avanzamos designated credit union for almost a decade and have been at the forefront of financial inclusion for Hispanic communities.

Earlier this year, Richard Romero, its former CEO, announced his retirement after a distinguished credit union career, passing the torch to Michael Cruz, who is now leading the organization as interim CEO and is building on its longstanding commitment to advancing financial inclusion, expanding access to affordable financial services, and strengthening the communities it serves.

1) You have recently stepped into the role of CEO at Seattle Credit Union. What has this transition been like for you, and what personal values are guiding your leadership?

I stepped in as Interim President and CEO with two mandates: stability and momentum. About a hundred days in, both are holding. The support from the Board and from our team has been incredible, and I do not

take it for granted.

If you ask me to name the value I hold above the others, it is prosperity. I believe every family deserves the opportunity to build it. The reality is that prosperity is rarely handed to people. It is earned through risk. Risk is the price of prosperity. I learned that from my parents.

My mother and father used to tell me, “Póngase las pilas, hijo.” They built their version of prosperity, and they paid for it in full with risk.

I found the same lesson waiting for me at work. Seattle Credit Union has been here since 1933, started by a small group of city workers who pooled their money because the banks would not serve them. No one guaranteed the outcome. Ninety-three years later we are still here, still lending in the same city, still owned by the people we serve. I am a steward of the mission, and the mission has never been a cautious one. My obligation is to keep it that way.



“Risk is the Price
of Prosperity”

— Michael Cruz



2) Seattle Credit Union has been a Juntos Avanzamos-designated credit union for many years. As its new CEO, what does that designation mean to you personally, and how do you hope to build on that legacy?

Juntos Avanzamos means “together we advance”. I sometimes like to add a complementary line to it. Juntos nos arriesgamos or “together, we take risks.” Not because risk is the goal. Opportunity is the goal. Risk is simply the price we often pay to create opportunity.

The Latino community in this country has already paid the price of risk. People left everything they knew, crossed distances most of us cannot picture, and started over in a language they did not speak. By the time a family walks into one of our branches, they have taken a larger risk than any lending decision we will ever make about them. Underwriting them is not the brave part of the transaction.

The designation carries that dimension for me. It is not a grant cycle and it is not a campaign. Grant cycles end. Campaigns end. Our commitment is to put the credit union behind a community, and to hold the position when it is hard.

Our Inclusive mortgage work is the clearest example. We did not pull back when the environment got harder. We kept lending. Homeownership is the most durable

wealth-building tool most families will ever touch, and we intend to keep that door open.

3) Every leader has experiences that shape the way they serve others. Was there a moment in your life or career that reinforced your belief that financial inclusion can truly change lives?

In the 1990s, my parents bought a house. A Spanish-speaking loan representative walked them through a process they had never seen before, and someone at that institution approved a file that probably did not look like the other files on the desk that week.

I think about the decision often. I do not know who made it. They probably did not consider it a significant morning at work. But the approval moved my family out of South Central and changed the story arc of my family forever.

Years later, I learned what the same decision looks like from the other side. It looks like a line in a concentration report. It looks like an exception that has to be documented and defended. Financial inclusion is not an abstraction to me. It is a house in Los Angeles and a family that secured a different future because someone sat down and explained the paperwork in their language.



OTHER PAGE: Michael Cruz speaking at a panel during Inclusiv Conference 2026 in Portland, OR.



LEFT: Seattle Credit Union branch.

4) Trust is at the heart of serving immigrant and Hispanic communities. In your view, how does a credit union earn that trust, and keep it?

Earning trust starts with intentional work. Speak the language. Understand the customs. Hire people who have lived experiences. Be present in the neighborhood before you need anything from it. Keeping trust comes down to consistency. Any institution can show up in a good year. Members remember the community partners that were still there when the economy turned and the politics got loud.

Seattle's immigrant communities are enormously diverse. Latino, East African, Southeast Asian, Eastern European, each pursuing a distinct version of prosperity in the same city. They share a need to know the institution holding their money will not disappear on them.

When I talk to our members at our branches, I tend to reassure them with a phrase: "A sus órdenes." At your service.

5) Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to celebrate resilience, culture, and community. What message would you like Hispanic families and young Latino professionals to hear from you today?

To the young Latino professionals: your inheritance is not caution. Someone in your family took an enormous risk so you could be in the position you are in now, and honoring it is not the same as playing it safe. Be proud of where you come from and use it. Bilingual fluency, comfort operating between two cultures, and the expectations you carry from home are all professional inventory. Too

many of us treat it as something to manage rather than something to deploy.

To the families: this country still holds real opportunity, even in a hard season. Stay flexible. Stay informed. Take the risks that build something and find institutions willing to stand next to you while you take them.

6) Looking ahead, what impact do you hope the Seattle Credit Union will have on the communities it serves over the next five years?

One word: prosperity.

Over five years I want us positioned so a member can start with a first checking account and stay with us through a first car, a first home, a first business, and the first transfer of wealth to the next generation. I want us woven deeply enough into the civic and economic life of this city that our absence would be felt immediately. Not as a sponsor whose logo appears on things but as community infrastructure.

7) If you could describe the meaning of Juntos Avanzamos in just a few sentences, what would you say?

Juntos Avanzamos means no one advances alone.

It also means no one takes the risk alone. Our members' progress and our institution's progress are the same measurement taken from two directions. When a member buys a home, we get stronger. When we get stronger, more members buy homes.

Together, we advance. Together we take the risks in pursuit of opportunity. Together we prosper. //



COOPERATIVA SPOTLIGHT

COOPERATIVA SAGRADA FAMILIA JOINS INCLUSIV AND BECOMES ITS FIRST INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATE MEMBER

For many Hondurans living in the United States, migration is closely tied to a dream back home: building a house for their family, starting a business, or creating something lasting for the day they return. Cooperativa Sagrada Familia believes credit unions can help turn those aspirations into reality, and that doing so requires cooperation across borders.

That vision is taking a significant step forward as Cooperativa Sagrada Familia becomes Inclusiv's first international member, creating new opportunities to connect the cooperative movement in Honduras with credit unions serving immigrant communities in the United States.

"It is an important step, and it fills us with

satisfaction," said Lic. Juan Rafael Flores, President of the Board of Directors of Cooperativa Sagrada Familia. "As a cooperative, what we seek is cooperation."

Cooperativa Sagrada Familia's roots stretch back more than half a century. Formally established in 1969 with 52 members, the cooperative grew from a mission centered on serving people with limited economic resources. Today, Sagrada Familia has the largest membership of any cooperative in Honduras, a distinction it attributes to continuous innovation, trust and their focus on social responsibility.

For Flores, however, size is less important than what that reach can make possible.

OTHER PAGE: Sagrada Familia members at North Jersey Federal Credit Union after signing an MOU.

THIS PAGE Members of Sagrada Familia during a visit to Inclusiv Headquarters in August.

“We have always maintained the vision of our founders, which is helping the poor,” he said. “That is what makes us different.”

That commitment extends beyond Sagrada Familia’s membership. Flores points to the cooperative’s work bringing health services to remote communities such as Puerto Lempira, in Honduras’ La Mosquitia region, where geographic isolation makes access to essential services particularly challenging.

Sagrada Familia also operates a branch there, demonstrating how financial inclusion can reach communities far beyond major urban centers.

The cooperative’s next frontier extends beyond Honduras itself. For Hondurans who migrate to the United States, their financial lives rarely stop at the border. Income earned in one country often supports families in another, while long term goals remain firmly connected to home.

“The dream we hear most often is, ‘I want to build a house for my family,’” Flores said. “Others tell us, ‘I want to build a house for when I return.’”

Sagrada Familia sees partnerships between cooperatives in Honduras and the United States as a way to help families move beyond simply transferring money toward building assets. That could mean financing a home in Honduras or providing capital that allows relatives to start or expand a business.

Technology is making that connection increasingly possible. Digital services allow members abroad to stay connected to their accounts in Honduras, monitor savings and conduct transactions in real time. But Flores believes technology alone is not enough. Trust remains essential, particularly for immigrants who may feel apprehensive about engaging with unfamiliar financial institutions in the United States.

His message to Hondurans abroad is simple: their cooperative still knows them.

“We are thinking about them,” Flores said. “Even



though they are outside Honduras’ borders, they are still Hondurans. We know their language; we know their needs and the needs of their families. We want to be present so we can continue growing together.”

That philosophy also shapes how Sagrada Familia views the wider cooperative movement. Rather than seeing other cooperatives simply as competitors, Flores describes an ecosystem in which institutions learn from and strengthen one another. Smaller Honduran cooperatives have adopted Sagrada Familia’s products and processes, and some have grown with its support.

Joining Inclusiv brings that cooperative philosophy into a new international context. For Flores, the opportunity is bigger than one institution. He hopes Sagrada Familia’s step will encourage other Honduran cooperatives to build relationships with credit unions, expanding the number of migrant families that can access trusted financial services on both sides of the border.

Ultimately, the partnership reflects an idea at the heart of the cooperative movement: membership and community do not have to end at a national boundary.

“Regardless of the nation where they now reside,” Flores said, “they can always feel that they are cooperativistas.” For thousands of Honduran families whose lives already span two countries, that sense of belonging could help make their dreams span borders, too. //

A professional portrait of Chelsia Neto, a Black woman with dark, wavy hair, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a dark blue blazer over a white top. Her right hand is resting near her chin, showing a diamond ring and a gold watch with a black face. Her left hand is resting on her lap, showing a large diamond ring. The background is a solid light gray.

EMERGING LEADER

CHELZIA NETO

**CDFI Coordinator,
Connections Credit Union**

For Chelsia Neto, leadership has never been about titles. It has always been about creating opportunities for others. As CDFI Coordinator at Connections Credit Union in Idaho, she helps advance financial inclusion through the credit union's Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) strategy and its Juntos Avanzamos initiatives.

"Leadership does not begin with a title. It is shaped by the experiences that challenge us, the people who believe in us, and the opportunities that teach us how to use what we have learned to serve others."

Originally from Luanda, Angola, Neto's journey has taken her across continents and cultures. At 17, she left home on a scholarship to attend United World College in Eswatini, where she adapted to a new language, culture, and way of life. The experience taught her resilience, discipline, and a lesson that continues to guide her: "Growth often requires stepping into spaces where you do not have all the answers and continuing forward anyway."

Long before entering the credit union movement, Neto founded the Chelsia Denise Master Center, a tutoring and mentorship organization that expanded educational opportunities in her community. That experience cemented her belief that leadership is about recognizing a need, taking initiative, and creating pathways for others to succeed.

When she joined Connections Credit Union, Neto found a mission that reflected those same values. Drawn to the cooperative philosophy of People Helping People, she discovered a model where purpose and financial performance work together to strengthen communities. The credit union movement broadened her perspective on service, inspiring her to think beyond helping one person at a time and instead focus on building partnerships, improving systems, and creating lasting opportunities for entire communities. She believes the mission comes to life by listening first, understanding community needs, and bringing people together around shared solutions.

"Financial empowerment is about making sure that people do not have to navigate these systems alone," she says. "It is about listening first, building trust, and helping people access the knowledge, resources, and opportunities they need to build a stronger financial future."

That mission is deeply personal. As a first-generation college student from an underserved background, Neto understands the importance of mentors and opportunities that can change the trajectory of a life. Those experiences continue to shape her commitment to serving Hispanic and underserved communities.

Her dedication to community impact has also earned professional recognition. Among her proudest accomplishments is being named one of the Idaho Business Review's 40 Under 40. Yet she views the honor not as an individual achievement, but as a reflection of the colleagues, mentors, and community partners who invested in her growth. The recognition reinforced a lesson she carries into every aspect of her leadership:

"Leadership is not about being celebrated. It is about how you use the opportunities and trust you are given."

One experience, however, reminds her more than any award why this work matters. After meeting a recent immigrant during a financial education workshop, Neto stayed in touch for more than a year as he worked to overcome transportation, language, and financial barriers. When he finally opened his first credit union account, he explained why he had waited:

"Because when I had nothing, you made me feel recognized. You built trust. I want to begin my financial life with your organization."

For Neto, moments like these make the mission come to life.

Reflecting on the strength of the Juntos Avanzamos network, she says:

"What makes this network so special to me is that people do not just share resources; they share encouragement, hope, and even a smile when you need it most. They remind you that you are not alone in this work. Every time I have felt discouraged or lost hope along the way, someone from this network has reminded me why the work matters and encouraged me to keep moving forward." //



SMALL BUSINESS FEATURE

INCLUSIV BUSINESS FORWARD GROWS ITS REACH WITH FOUR PARTICIPATING CREDIT UNIONS

This summer, Inclusiv welcomed Rochester-based Genesee Co-op Federal Credit Union as the fourth New York credit union to participate as a lender in Inclusiv Business Forward. Launched by Inclusiv in 2025, Business Forward is a small business initiative designed to increase access to affordable capital for New York entrepreneurs through credit unions.



Genesee Co-op joins Brooklyn Cooperative Federal Credit Union, Cooperative Federal Credit Union, and Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union as participating Business Forward lenders. All four credit unions are Juntos Avanzamos-designated, reflecting their commitment to serving Latino, immigrant, and multicultural communities. Together, they bring Business Forward's lending reach to entrepreneurs across both upstate and downstate New York.

Through Business Forward, participating credit unions are prepared to deploy loans ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000 to eligible small businesses, while pairing borrowers with dedicated support throughout the lending process. This combination of flexible capital and hands-on support is especially important for entrepreneurs who may face barriers to accessing traditional financing.

Small businesses are the backbone of New York's neighborhoods, helping preserve local culture, create jobs, and build community wealth. Yet for many entrepreneurs—particularly those from low-income, immigrant, and historically underserved communities—access to affordable capital remains one of the biggest barriers to growth.

Business Forward was created to help address this gap. The commitment of Juntos Avanzamos-designated credit unions is central to the Business Forward's goals. These credit unions have demonstrated a deep commitment to breaking down financial barriers and building trust within the Latino, immigrant, and multicultural communities they serve.

The initiative is made possible through a \$5 million investment from New York State Empire State Development through the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI).

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OTHER PAGE: Genesee Co-op Branch.

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ABOVE: Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union branch.

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“Rochester’s small businesses are essential to a strong local economy, yet many entrepreneurs continue to face barriers to accessing affordable capital. Through our partnership with Business Forward, we’re proud to help connect small business owners with the financing, resources, and community support they need to grow their businesses and build wealth.”

— Dan Apfel,
CEO of Genesee Federal Credit Union



Brooklyn Cooperative Federal Credit Union

Since its founding in 2001, Brooklyn Cooperative Federal Credit Union has been known for the affordability, flexibility and comprehensiveness of its account services, as well as an innovative approach to technical assistance. As a community development credit union (CDCU) and Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), serving communities neglected by mainstream banking institutions is central to the Brooklyn Coop mission.

Since joining as the first participating credit union last year, Brooklyn Coop's work with Business Forward is already expanding its impact, providing Brooklyn entrepreneurs with access to safe, affordable lending resources. "Meeting the capital needs of local small businesses has always been among Brooklyn Coop's highest priorities. Not only do small businesses create income and jobs; but they are also instrumental in creating generational wealth," said Brooklyn Coop CEO Samira Rajan.

For Maria Blair Serrano, owner of Sanctuary Salon in Brooklyn, the financial support through Business Forward came at exactly the right moment, giving her the financial foundation to scale Sanctuary from a 4-chair to a 10-chair salon, complete with two private spaces and a backyard where community events will be hosted throughout the year. Brooklyn Cooperative didn't just offer financing; they offered partnership.



Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union

Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union has already been successful in closing loans through Business Forward.

Since its founding in 1986, LES People's Federal Credit Union has been providing affordable financial services and promoting economic empowerment in underserved communities in New York City. The credit union has been a lifeline for individuals and small businesses in the Lower East Side, Harlem, Staten Island's North Shore and the Bronx.

Rosa Garcia, owner of Roxy Hair Studio, is grateful to have been approved for a loan through Business Forward, to renovate her business which has been operating for 10 years in lower Manhattan. She shared: "[Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union] has supported me a lot. They have opened the doors to me, and I will always be grateful for that."

With LESPFUCU's longstanding commitment to financial inclusion through offering personal and business loans, savings accounts, and financial education, it is a natural fit for Business Forward's mission.

"We are honored to participate in Inclusiv's Business Forward program and sincerely grateful for the opportunity to continue supporting our local businesses with affordable financial products," said Francisca Fabian, Chief Lending Officer of the Lower East Side People's



LEFT: Andrea Pitter (in white), owner of Pantora Bridal, received a Business Forward loan through Brooklyn Coop.

RIGHT: Rosa Garcia, owner of Roxy Hair Studio, received a Business Forward loan through LESPFCU.

Federal Credit Union. “Being part of a program that helps businesses access the funding they need to grow and thrive is incredibly rewarding. We are proud to contribute to our communities and are dedicated to empowerment, shared resources, and lasting progress.



Cooperative Federal Credit Union

Based in Syracuse, and currently serving 4,100 members, the Cooperative Federal Credit Union is deeply focused on creating pathways to economic opportunities for individuals, families, and businesses. Serving small and micro businesses has been a cornerstone of Cooperative Federal's mission for more than 40 years. Offering tailored services of auto loans, homeownership, online banking, skip pay, credit cards, and emergency & small dollar loans, it is a prime example of how credit unions can be powerful engines for local financing and economic growth.

This makes Cooperative Federal an exciting addition to the Business Forward program, as it provides support throughout Central New York in accessing capital and technical support to fuel long-term success.

“Economic growth in the Syracuse region is bringing a wave of opportunity to local businesses, but small and micro businesses need greater access to capital to be part of that growth,” said Cooperative Federal CEO Christina Sauve. “Through Business Forward, we’re excited to double down on supporting our community.



Genesee Cooperative Federal Credit Union

The newest Business Forward participant, Genesee Cooperative Federal Credit Union, was founded in 1982 to serve low-income individuals who were initially rejected by other banks. With a tailored approach to addressing

personal, business, and community needs, Genesee Coop has consistently focused on helping small businesses launch, grow, and build wealth.

Its addition to the Business Forward network extends the program's reach across Rochester, the third largest urban center in New York State after Buffalo and New York City. It reinforces Inclusiv's commitment to building a robust ecosystem of community-based lenders dedicated to small business success.

“Rochester's small businesses are essential to a strong local economy, yet many entrepreneurs continue to face barriers to accessing affordable capital,” said Dan Apfel, CEO of Genesee Federal Credit Union. “Through our partnership with Business Forward, we're proud to help connect small business owners with the financing, resources, and community support they need to grow their businesses and build wealth.”



Building a More Inclusive Economy

Business Forward, powered by these four Juntos Avanzamos designated credit unions aim higher than providing traditional lending. Its mission-driven, collaborative nature ensures that small business owners—even those who have faced barriers to accessing capital for growth—have flexible access to financing options.

Inclusiv is proud to further advance the power of mission-driven community finance to support business growth and strengthen communities. While Business Forward is currently operating as a New York-based initiative, it is serving as a blueprint for other states looking to deploy SSBCI funding to deliver capital and technical assistance that supports small business stability, growth, and success. Over the long term, Inclusiv Business Forward aims to grow both the community impact and lending capacity of CDFI and mission-driven credit unions. //

THE CLEAN ENERGY CREDIT UNION IS MAKING “PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE” MORE INTENTIONAL

Author: Garrett Chappell for Clean Energy Credit Union

Most credit unions align their mission with the same motto we have used for decades: “People Helping People”. That phrase has gotten us far, and as with many mottos, it can be reductive. When credit unions evaluate our work with an equity lens, we begin to ask questions like: “Which people are we actually helping?” or “Do some people need more help than others right now?” When we work with this intention, we find that there are opportunities to focus our scope, serve the lived needs of our members, and have a more meaningful impact.

Clean Energy Credit Union uses that equity lens to understand the intersection of the crisis of rising utility bills, its impact on our members, and how we as a green lender can support greater energy and financial independence. Of course, the pain of rising utility bills affects the majority of Americans, but these rate hikes reinforce an especially heavy financial burden on low-income and working-class communities, which include many Latino households. Many urban and suburban Latino families, for example, end up paying higher energy costs than their neighbors in more affluent surrounding



TOP: Clean Energy Credit Union staff.

MIDDLE: Homeowner installed solar panels with the support of the credit union.

BOTTOM: Garret Chappell, Membership Growth & Development Officer.



neighborhoods. Renewable energy investments can make a major difference, helping these families become more financially resilient. But high upfront costs and exclusionary lending practices too often prove to be a significant barrier to getting clean energy upgrades that could improve their financial health.

Our answer to this problem was simple: let's be specific with where we target our support. We developed our Clean Energy for All program to better focus our efforts, expand clean energy financing, and break down the financial barriers associated with "going green". Through this program, we have sought to ensure that the benefits of solar panels, energy-efficient equipment, and electric transportation are available to economically disadvantaged and low-income borrowers, allowing them greater financial stability and independence.

To date, our Clean Energy for All program has seen a 0.15% delinquency rate, in comparison to the larger credit union trends of 0.85%. Clean Energy CU CEO Terri Mickelsen connects this success to the reality that for these borrowers, "Access is often a bigger barrier than risk. Many borrowers don't lack the ability to repay; they lack access to products designed for their circumstances." Sometimes, simply opening the door is enough to make a difference in a borrower's life.

The financial benefits to going solar were quickly realized by Clean Energy CU member Issac Pacheco, who saw "an immediate reduction in energy bills, and interest from my neighbors about how they could install similar systems." When it came time to sell his house, Issac also noted that "the solar panels were a major [attraction] for the new buyer." It was the positive experience with his first solar array that led him to install an even larger system at his next home, further shielding his family from rising energy costs.

Mission and performance can coexist; credit unions have proved that for decades. Right now, it is worth stepping back as an industry to look at the intention of our missions and align our work to be conscious of and responsive to reality. By focusing our gaze, we have been able to impact the lives of economically disadvantaged borrowers across the country, including many of our Latino members, while also advancing our mission to bring affordable, clean energy to all communities. "People Helping People" should always be intentional; it is that spirit of intentionality that motivates our team to keep meeting people where they are and matching their needs, and it is in that same spirit that significant opportunities lie for the greater credit union industry. //

FROM TRUST TO OPPORTUNITY: HOW CONSULATES AND JUNTOS AVANZAMOS CREDIT UNIONS CREATE VALUE TOGETHER

Author: Manuel Lopez-España,
Senior Fellow Inclusiv

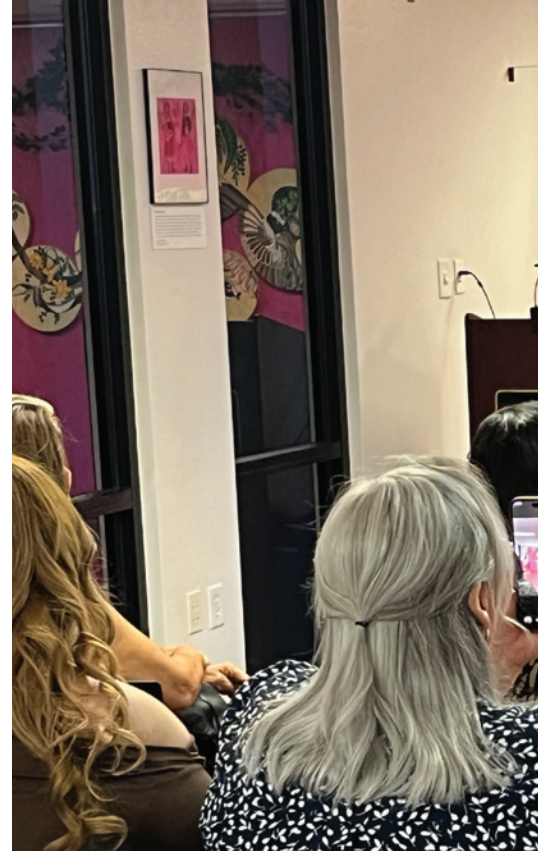
A Latina entrepreneur was around 60 years old when she began transforming her childcare business. She had been licensed since 2012 but described the business as “barely getting by.” Reading and writing were difficult for her, and she started with almost no experience using a computer, email, or Zoom.

Through a women’s entrepreneurship program offered through her local consulate, the small business owner of Mexican heritage gradually built new technology, financial, and business skills. She was also able to establish a banking relationship better suited to her business, a process that took nearly six months. When she finally did, she said, “now everything is in order.” A year later, her small business reported more than \$100,000 in annual revenue.

This story reminds us of something important: no single organization made this happen.

The consulate provided a trusted space. The women’s entrepreneurship program provided guidance and continuity. And a Juntos Avanzamos credit union provided the financial relationship her business needed. Inclusiv connects those capabilities so the institutions providing them can work together, learn from the experience, and bring the model to other communities. Although the collaboration operates through Mexican consulates, its programs and services are open to the entire community, regardless of nationality.

This work builds on more than a decade of collaboration with the Mexican consular network, from Financial Empowerment in New York to Juntos Avanzamos and today’s expansion to





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TOP: Jennifer Oliver, CEO of Rize Credit Union, addresses participants in the Women's Entrepreneurship Program at the Consulate of Mexico in Las Vegas.

MIDDLE: Ventura County Credit Union and Premier America Credit Union teams join Ambassador Ricardo Santana in recognizing participants in the Women's Entrepreneurship Program at the Consulate of Mexico in Oxnard.

Rick Weber, CEO of OceanAir Federal Credit Union, and Cathie Mahon, CEO of Inclusiv, join Ambassador Ricardo Santana and senior team members for a conversation with participants in the Women's Entrepreneurship Program at the Consulate of Mexico in Oxnard.

BOTTOM: Rudy Pereira, CEO of Premier America Credit Union, with Ambassador Ricardo Santana, local officials, and participants during a recognition and networking event celebrating women entrepreneurs at the Consulate of Mexico in Oxnard.



“When a banking solution isn’t enough, human connections make a difference.”



new credit unions and consulates. It now includes agreements with five consulates and the participation of OceanAir Federal Credit Union, Premier America Credit Union, Rize Credit Union, and Ventura County Credit Union.

Recent results offer a glimpse of what collaboration between consulates, credit unions, and Inclusiv can make possible.” In Los Angeles, San Diego, and Las Vegas—markets currently supported by one of the participating credit unions—more than 2,600 people benefitted from the financial empowerment, entrepreneurship, and free tax preparation services offered through this collaboration in a single month. During the 2026 tax season, 332 tax returns for families and small businesses were prepared, generating more than \$360,000 in refunds and tax credits.

These results also help the credit union's movement, and its partners think more broadly about the value we are creating: SERVE. GROW. DEMONSTRATE.

Serve means expanding access, knowledge, and economic opportunities. Grow means turning trust and referrals into members, accounts, deposits, credit, and long-term financial relationships. Demonstrate means turning stories and results into evidence of the value of the cooperative model.

But the results are also teaching us where we can do better. The collaboration allows us to see

where people encounter barriers—documentation, technology, follow-up, or onboarding—and share those lessons with credit unions to improve processes, reduce friction, and turn more opportunities into financial relationships.

Taken together, the value for each stakeholder begins to come into focus. For communities: greater access to knowledge, services, and opportunities to prosper. For credit unions: trust-based access, insights to improve processes, and opportunities to grow membership and financial relationships. For the cooperative movement: evidence that demonstrates its public value and strengthens the case with policymakers and legislators for protecting the cooperative model and its tax-exempt status.

Stories like entrepreneurs do not happen by chance. They require trust, guidance, and institutions willing to work—and invest—together.

And the opportunity ahead is even greater. This year, nearly 100 women will graduate from entrepreneurship programs developed with our consular partners. Each will have her own story, her own challenges, and her own opportunities. Our job is to help open the way.

Because perhaps the best measure of this collaboration is not only how much we accomplish each part, but how much value we can create together. //





OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY: PUERTO RICO COOPERATIVAS JOIN THE FEDERAL HOME LOAN BANK OF NEW YORK

For decades, Puerto Rico cooperativas have grown alongside the U.S. credit union movement while remaining distinct, creating financial products and services tailored to the needs of their communities. Although they are part of the U.S. financial system, differences in regulation, language, and Puerto Rico's public deposit insurance framework historically prevented them from accessing opportunities available to federally insured credit unions and banks. Years of coordinated advocacy by Inclusiv, and COSSEC led to the announcement earlier this year that the first three cooperativas, Cooperativa Sagrada Familia, Camuy Cooperativa, and Larcoop, had been admitted to the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York (FHLBNY). Their admission marks a historic breakthrough and creates new opportunities to expand affordable housing for the more than 1.2 million members the cooperative system serves.

Following Hurricane María, Cooperativa Sagrada Familia began looking beyond traditional funding sources to meet the evolving needs of its members. Executive President Eddie Alicea recognized that access to the FHLBNY could bring new resources to the communities his cooperative serves.

"It is not about becoming a member of the Federal Home Loan Bank," Alicea said. "It is about using its services for the benefit of our members."

For years, Alicea pursued membership, submitting applications, and meeting with FHLBNY representatives. As a member of Inclusiv's Board of Directors, he helped elevate the issue and laid out the groundwork for the coordinated advocacy effort led by Inclusiv and COSSEC, with the support of the cooperativas. That advocacy ultimately led the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) to issue a regulatory interpretation clarifying the eligibility of cooperativas



❖

OTHER PAGE: The day La Sagrada Familia submitted its official application to the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York (FHLBNY).

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THIS PAGE: Eddie W. Alicea Sáez, CEO of Cooperativa La Sagrada Familia, Mabel Jiménez Miranda, executive president of COSSEC.

for membership in the Federal Home Loan Bank System.

Larcoop Executive President Carlos De Jesús also played a key role, serving as a representative on the COSSEC Board, he worked alongside COSSEC Executive Director Mabel Jiménez to educate FHLBNY leadership about Puerto Rico's cooperative system, highlighting its strong financial oversight and community impact. Camuy Cooperativa Executive President and former Inclusiv board member Michele Franqui also participated in the advocacy effort. She joined a delegation of cooperative leaders and COSSEC representatives, including Aurelio Arroyo, Inclusiv Board member and CEO of Cooperativa Jesús Obrero, Miguel Colón, Inclusiv Board member and CEO of CRH Coop, and Carlos De Jesús of Larcoop, that traveled to FHLBNY headquarters to present on Puerto Rico's cooperative system, its regulatory framework, financial strength, and community impact.

“One of the main reasons we pursued membership is because it gives us another tool to better serve our members,” De Jesús said.
“Access to additional liquidity and housing programs allows us to respond more effectively to our members’ needs while strengthening our long-term financial resilience.”.



“Camuy Cooperativa is proud to be among the first cohort of cooperativas to become members of the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York. This membership, and the tools and resources it provides, will enable us and fellow cooperativas to expand our homeownership initiatives for the benefit of the communities we serve,” Franqui said.

Today, Alicea, De Jesús, and Franqui Baquero encourage other Puerto Rico cooperativas to pursue FHLBNY membership as a way to expand their impact on affordable housing and community development. Membership provides access to liquidity that strengthens lending capacity, nonprofit grants, and community development initiatives. For communities, these resources can translate into down payment assistance and greater access to the dream of owning a home.

As additional cooperativas pursue membership, the benefits will be measured not by the announcement itself, but by the families who achieve homeownership, the communities strengthened through new investment, and the opportunities created for future generations. //



DISCOVERING NLCUP WAS A DEFINITIVE TURNING POINT IN MY CAREER

Before discovering this community, I rarely saw my own background reflected in the broader financial services landscape. Witnessing a powerful network of Hispanic leaders thriving in executive roles completely shifted my perspective and instilled a profound sense of pride.

Determined to grow, I fully immersed myself in NLCUP's professional ecosystem. I progressed through both the Ejecutivos in the Making and board governance programs, and today, I am proud to give back to this community by serving as a mentor in their Mentorship program. The NLCUP network provided the leadership toolkit and confidence I needed to elevate my voice and step into greater responsibilities within my own organization.

Beyond professional development, NLCUP offers a deep sense of cultural alignment. I have built lasting bonds with incredible peers who, like me, were raised by immigrant parents. Together, we share familiar

cultural journeys, break institutional barriers, and form an unbreakable support system.

The impact of this community extends far beyond my personal advancement; it directly benefits the members we serve. Utilizing strategic insights gained at the NLCUP 2026 Conference, I successfully advocated for policy changes at my credit union to better support and expand access for non-U.S. citizen borrowers. NLCUP did not just change my professional life - it empowered me to drive meaningful financial inclusion. //

LEFT: Victor Gonzalez, VP, NC-SECU.

MIDDLE: Panel during the 2026 NLCUP Conference in Long Beach, California.

RIGHT: Emmy Alanis, Financial Service Representative, Alcon Employees FCU.



ATTENDING THE 2026 NLCUP CONFERENCE OPENED MY EYES IN WAYS I NEVER EXPECTED

As someone who is relatively new to the credit union industry, there is still so much for me to learn, experience, and understand. Our president, Kiki Shollar, is always encouraging us to expand our horizons, and whenever we express interest in something new, she gives us the confidence and support to pursue it. When the opportunity to apply for the 2026 NLCUP Conference Scholarship arose, she encouraged me to take that step so I could meet and connect with credit union professionals from across the country.

I was initially nervous about applying because it would be my first conference and even my first time flying, which, honestly, was a little terrifying. Looking back, I am incredibly grateful that I pushed through those fears and embraced the opportunity.

Attending the conference opened my eyes in ways I never expected. Meeting people from all areas of the credit union industry and from a variety of positions was an amazing experience. From frontline staff and

loan officers to CEOs, everyone had valuable insights and experiences to share. I was inspired by the stories of both success and challenges that credit unions and their communities are facing today.

What stood out most was the optimism and determination shared by attendees. Rather than being discouraged by challenges, people were motivated to find solutions and continue making a positive impact. Their passion and commitment were inspiring, and it reinforced the cooperative spirit that makes the credit union movement so unique.

This was an incredible opportunity, and I am grateful to have been part of it. I left the conference feeling inspired, energized, and ready to continue growing both personally and professionally. Events like the NLCUP Conference are important because they remind us that, despite our different roles and locations, we are all working toward the same goal and supporting one another along the way. //



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