Financial Readiness & Banking Habits of Military Families

ARMED FORCES BANK

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Member FDIC EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

About Armed Forces Bank

Founded in 1907 as Army National Bank and headquartered in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Armed Forces Bank has proudly served active-duty, veterans, retirees, DOD, civilians, and their families in all 50 states and around the world for more than 115 years.

Armed Forces Bank has more than $1.4 billion in assets and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Dickinson Financial Corporation, a unique $4.8 billion banking franchise that serves clients nationwide through its retail and military banking subsidiaries. Armed Forces Bank's sister bank is Academy Bank, a retail bank in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Missouri, and Kansas.

Our bank supports clients through every stage of life, from active to retired, enlisted or officer. Our values align with theirs. **Because this is who we are.**

Purpose: As a family-owned bank, our mission is to provide a superior banking experience through fast, easy, and personal service that is welcoming to all.

Vision: Serving those who serve.

Mission: Providing the highest quality of service to those who have served, are serving, or are related to someone who serves because they deserve the best we have to offer. We bring our best every day and live the values of respect, duty, loyalty, service, integrity, and commitment in everything we do.

Values: With approximately 75% of our retail team affiliated with the military, our perspective is grounded in lived experience and a strong understanding of military life.

Introduction

For those who serve—and for the families who stand beside them—financial readiness is more than a personal goal. It is a mission-critical foundation that supports every other aspect of military life. Yet despite the discipline and resilience that define military culture, financial challenges remain a persistent reality for many service members, veterans, and military families.

The pressures are real and often unique: frequent relocations that disrupt income and delay homeownership, the psychological and financial weight of transitioning to civilian life, and an economic environment marked by rising costs, high interest rates, and income uncertainty.

This study explores the financial habits, challenges, and priorities of military-connected individuals across the United States—examining how they manage their money, what they value in a banking partner, and what support they need to build lasting financial security.

Demographics & Methodology

The survey was fielded online in February 2026 with 277 qualified respondents. Participation required a connection to military life. The most common respondents were those connected to active duty service (23.8%), followed by retired military (22.4%) and veterans (22%).

Financial Product Usage in Military Families

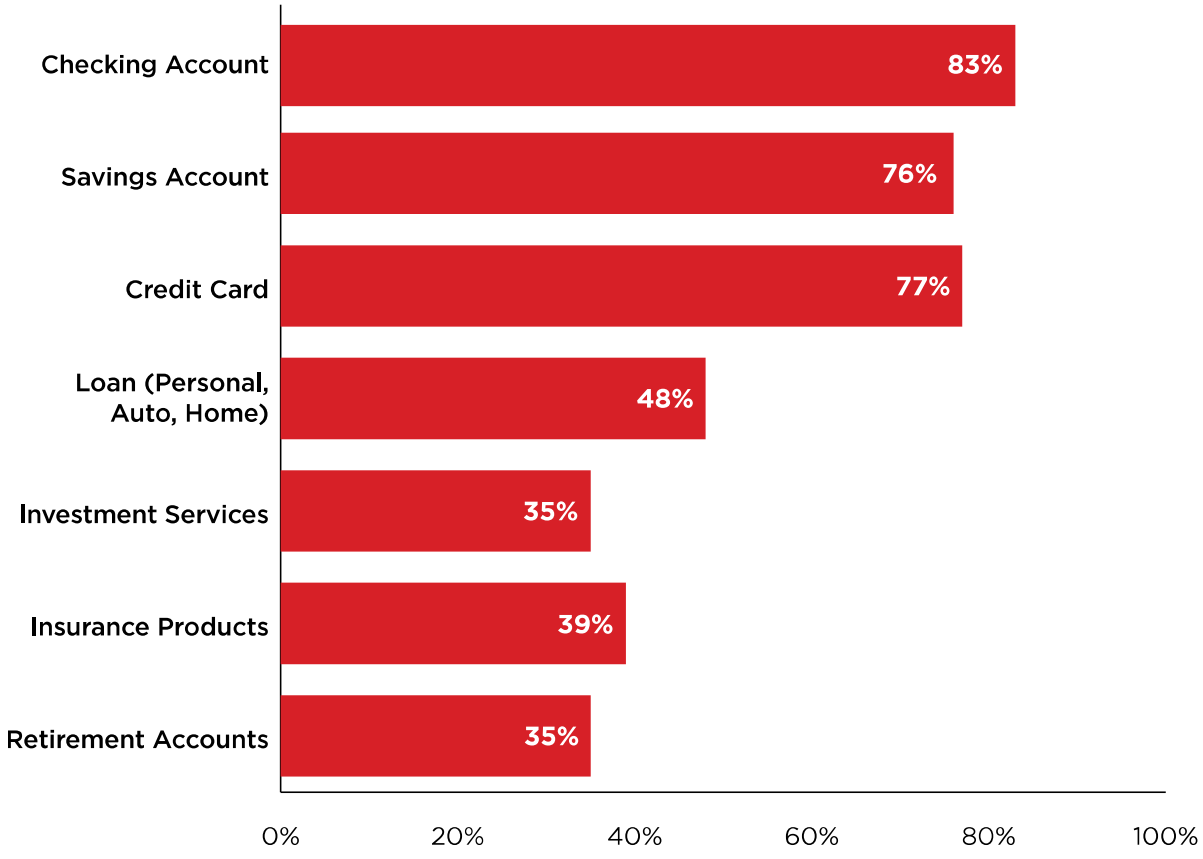
When it comes to financial products used by military families, the majority of respondents hold a checking account (83.4%). Credit cards (77.3%) and savings accounts (76.2%) are nearly as prevalent. Loans, including personal, auto, and home, are used by nearly half of respondents (48.4%).

However, usage drops considerably when it comes to wealth-building tools. Investment services (35.4%) and retirement accounts (34.7%) were the least commonly selected products, pointing to a meaningful gap between day-to-day money management and long-term financial planning.

For a community whose financial future often hinges on a successful transition out of military service, these numbers suggest that long-term planning remains underutilized—or simply out of reach.

Q: What financial products are you currently using? Select all that apply.

Answered: 277



These results reflect the percentage of respondents who selected each option, as they were invited to select all that applied to their situation, leading to a cumulative total exceeding 100%.

The Importance of Homeownership

For military families, owning a home is more than a financial goal—it represents stability in a life that is often full of change.

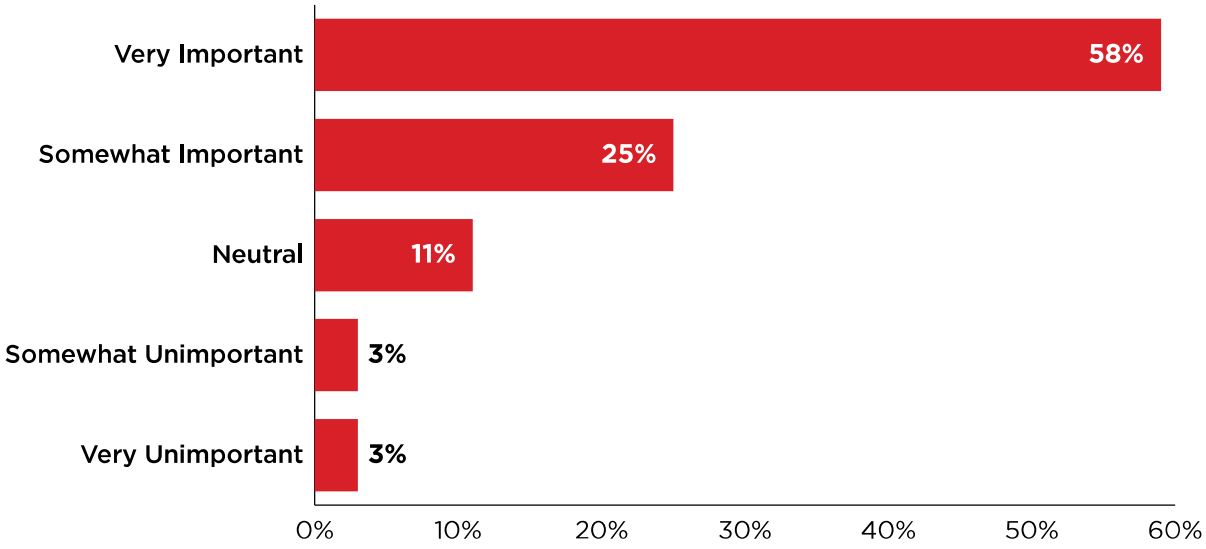
Maintaining the idea of permanence is challenging with limitations like relocations, deployments, and uncertain assignment timelines. Yet despite these structural barriers, our survey reveals that homeownership is still a shared priority for members of the military community.

More than 83% of survey respondents said homeownership is important to them—with more than half (58%) calling it "very important."

Despite the strong desire to own a home, the logistics can be confusing, and frequent PCS moves can complicate the decision to buy. However, only 6% of eligible service members/veterans are using their VA loan benefit, which is specifically designed to work with the military lifestyle. (VA News)

Q: How important is it for you to own a home?

Answered: 277



With no down payment requirement, no private mortgage insurance, and no limit on how many times it can be used, the VA loan travels with service members from one duty station to the next.

And because VA loans are assumable, homeowners can transfer the loan to a buyer when it's time to move on. This helps preserve the financial benefits they have built over time.

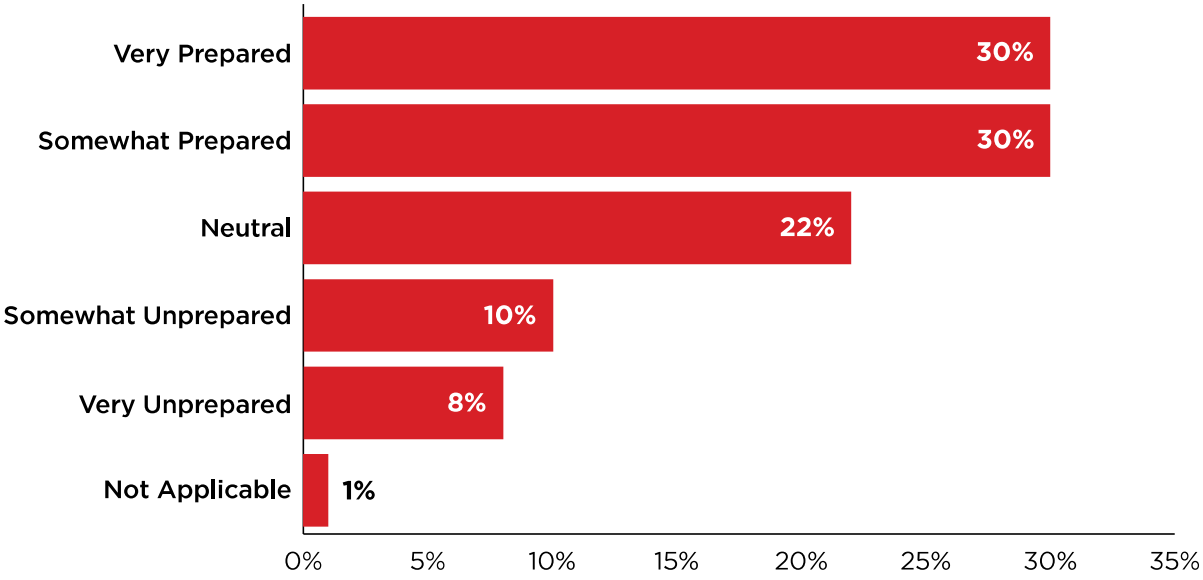
Financial Challenges Faced by Military Families

Despite the discipline and structure that military life instills, financial preparedness is *far from* universal. When asked to rate their own level of financial readiness, just under 60% of respondents described themselves as at least "somewhat prepared."

However, more than 21% were "neutral," and nearly 18% described themselves as "somewhat unprepared" or "very unprepared." This suggests that a significant portion of the military community feels uncertain about where they stand financially.

Q: How would you rate your current level of financial readiness (the state in which successful management of personal financial responsibilities supports your ability to perform your duties)?

Answered: 277



Due to rounding, the sum of individual percentages may not equal 100%.

When asked about their primary financial challenges, respondents painted a consistent picture: the cost of living is rising faster than income, saving money is becoming more difficult, and many feel underprepared in making informed financial decisions. These challenges are deeply interconnected—income pressures limit the ability to save, and a lack of financial knowledge makes it harder to manage debt or build long-term wealth.

Financial Challenges Faced by Military Families (cont.)

Inflation and rising costs dominate the conversation, followed closely by difficulty saving and insufficient income. High interest rates only compound the problem, and a persistent knowledge gap leaves many feeling unprepared to act—with respondents describing feelings of being "pretty ignorant" about their finances or simply "not knowing what to do next."

Q: What are the primary challenges you face with your current financial products or services? (Open-ended)

Challenge	Approximate Responses
Inflation / Rising Cost of Living	17
Difficulty Saving Money	16
Income Insufficiency	15
High Interest Rates	14
Lack of Financial Knowledge	13
Retirement & Investment Concerns	11
Customer Service / Digital Access Issues	11
Debt Management	10
Fees (Overdraft, ATM, Hidden)	7

Who Influences Financial Decisions—And What Matters Most in a Bank

Military families trust *people* over *platforms*. When it comes to making financial decisions, military-connected respondents lean heavily on the people around them.

Family ranks as the most influential source of financial guidance, followed by friends, financial advisors, and bankers. Media—including social media and news—ranks lower, suggesting the military community places greater weight on trusted personal relationships than on digital content.

Q: Please rank who influences your financial decisions from most to least.

Answered: 277

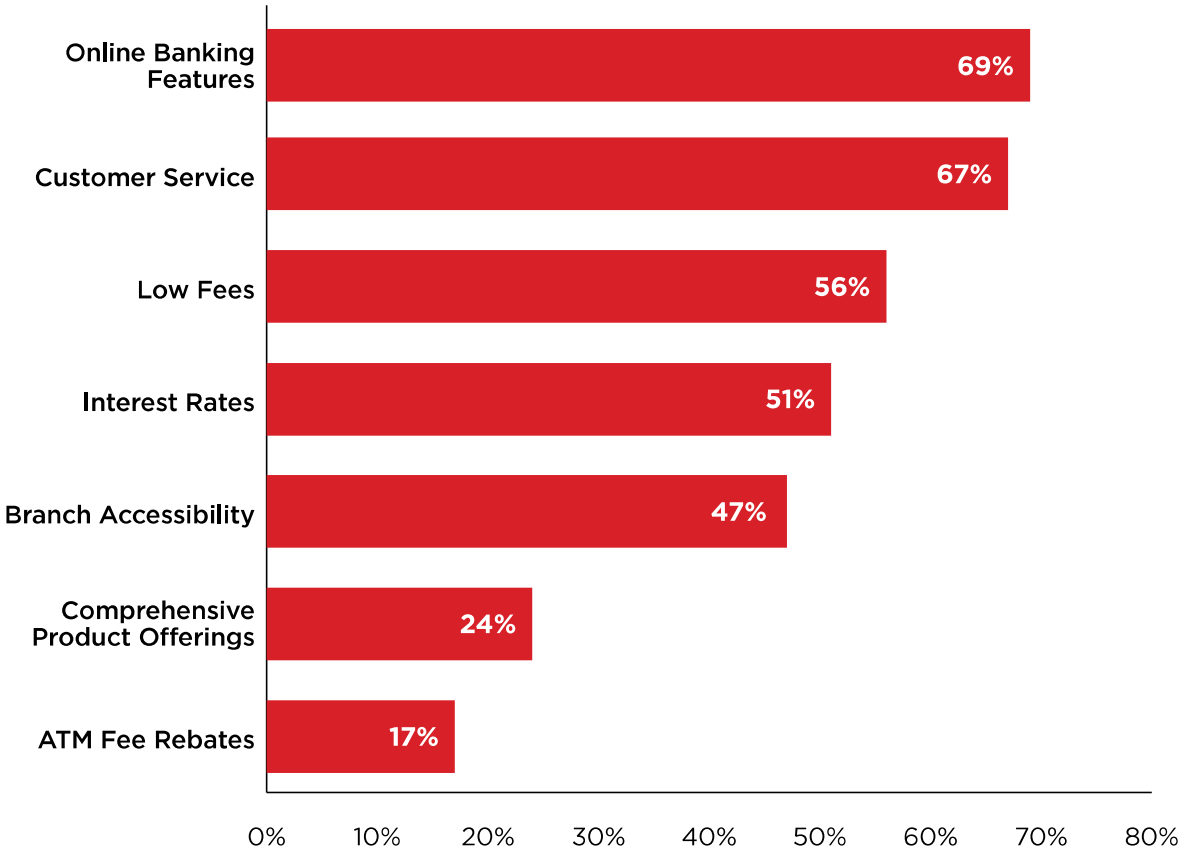
Influencer	Average Score (out of 8)
Family	6.38
Friends	5.58
Financial Advisor	5.13
Banker	4.51
Commanding Officer	4.12
Media (Social, News, etc.)	4.02
Colleagues	3.73
Other	2.53

Who Influences Financial Decisions—And What Matters Most in a Bank (cont.)

When asked what aspects of a banking service are most important, respondents prioritized online banking features and customer service above all else—followed closely by low fees and competitive interest rates. This combination reflects a desire for both digital convenience and human support.

Q: What aspects of a banking service are most important to you? Select all that apply.

Answered: 277



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How Military Service Shapes Financial Mindset

Military service leaves a lasting imprint on how people think about and manage money. When asked how their connection to military life has influenced their financial mindset and habits, respondents overwhelmingly pointed to positive traits—with discipline emerging as the single most cited influence.

Responses like "it built discipline in me," "taught me to be thrifty," and "a positive influence teaching us how to save and live frugally" capture a consistent theme: military service instills the character that is needed for financial success. Responsibility, planning, caution, and a savings-oriented mindset were also frequently cited.

Q: How do you think your relation to military service has influenced your financial mindset and habits? (Open-ended)

Theme	Approximate Responses
Discipline & Budgeting	18
Responsibility & Planning	11
Caution & Frugality	11
Savings Mindset	9
Negative / No Preparation	8
Lifestyle Adjustment & Financial Tradeoffs	4

But a meaningful minority told a different story. Some felt that the military left them financially unprepared, with one respondent noting that "military service did not prepare me at all for financial readiness, financial literacy, or long-term planning."

Others described the income transition as jarring. Adjusting from the predictability of military pay to the uncertainty of civilian employment can be a financial shock that "discipline" alone can't fix.

While military service undoubtedly builds the habits and character needed for financial success, it may not provide the formal financial education needed to act on them.

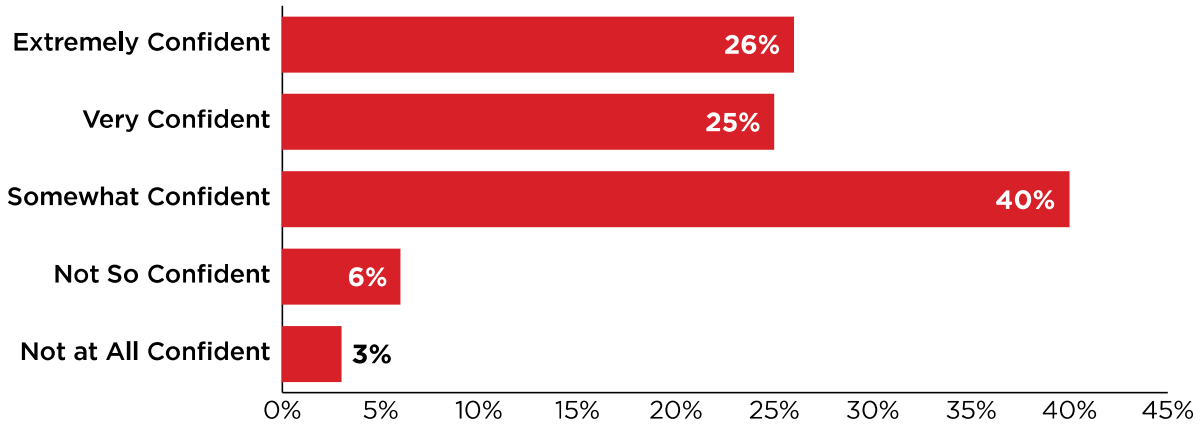
Financial Confidence Beyond the Military

Most military families feel fairly optimistic about their financial future, though there is still a level of uncertainty.

Transitioning out of the military is one of the most financially complex moments a service member can face. The predictable structure of military pay, housing allowances, and benefits gives way to a civilian economy that can feel unpredictable and unfamiliar. Our survey reveals a community that is cautiously—but not overwhelmingly—confident about what comes next.

Q: How confident do you feel about your financial future after transitioning out of the military (as a service member, veteran, or military family)?

Answered: 277



Just over half of respondents (51.6%) described themselves as "extremely" or "very confident" about their financial future after military service. But nearly 40% said they were only "somewhat confident." About 8.6% expressed low or no confidence at all.

In open-ended responses, participants identified the factors that most influenced their financial confidence post-service. Their answers fell into five themes:

- The economy and inflation
- Savings, investments, and retirement planning
- Income stability and the ability to find well-paying civilian employment
- Family support (or the absence of it)
- Financial knowledge and access to the right resources

For those who felt less certain, the most commonly cited concerns include the economy, job security, and the difficulty of the transition itself. Among those who expressed confidence, the pattern that emerged was a clear financial plan, a savings cushion, and a support system to lean on.

What Financial Stability Means to Military Families

For the military community, financial security is not about wealth. It's about family, peace of mind, and a life free from financial worry.

When asked what financial stability and security means to them personally, the same themes appear again and again.

Family comes first—by a wide margin. Responses like "financial stability for my family is everything," "my kids can grow up worry free," and "being able to provide for my family after I'm gone" reflect the deeply held sense of responsibility that defines this community.

Peace of mind comes next. Respondents described financial stability as the absence of stress, the confidence to face the future, and the freedom from constant worry about bills and basic needs.

"It means less worry." "It means peace of mind—a good future for my children." "Not having to fully rely on the government to survive."

Q: On a personal level, what does financial stability and security mean to you, as a former or current member of the military, or as a military family member? (Open-ended)

What Financial Security Means	Approximate Responses
Being Able to Provide for Family	24
Meeting Basic Needs / Paying Bills	17
Peace of Mind / Freedom from Stress	12
Homeownership	10
Savings & Emergency Funds	10
Retirement & Long-Term Security	8
Debt-Free Living	3
Health & Personal Safety	3

The Demand for Financial Education

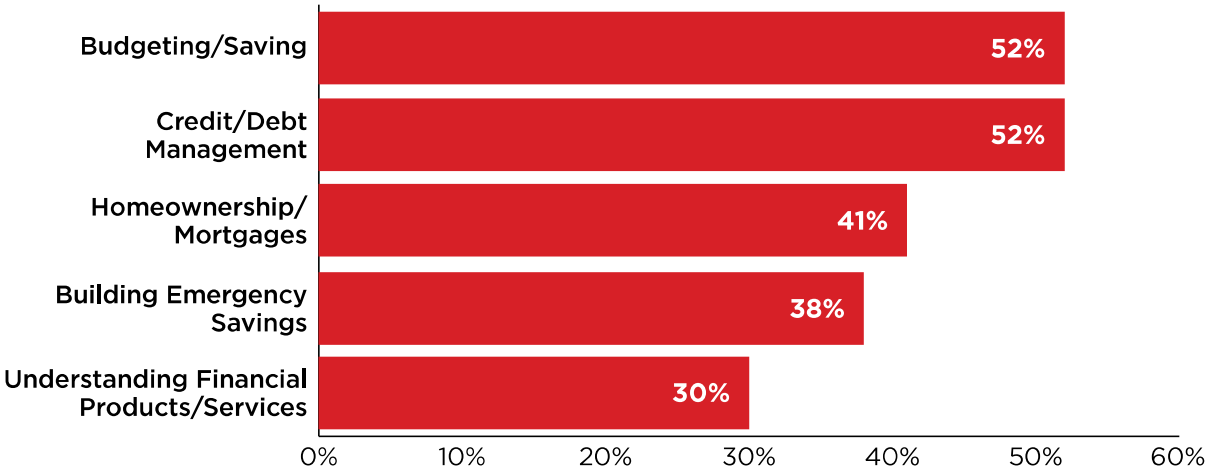
Military families know what they need—the challenge is finding someone to deliver it. Nearly 88% of respondents expressed interest in financial education in some form, signaling a community that is eager to learn and ready to engage.

The topics they most want to learn about reflect the challenges identified earlier in this report. Credit/debt management and budgeting/saving top the list—consistent with the financial pressures respondents described throughout this survey.

Homeownership or mortgages, building emergency savings, and understanding financial products and services follow behind as secondary priorities.

Q: What financial topics would you like to learn more about? Select all that apply.

Answered: 259



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When it comes to how they want to receive that education, online webinars/virtual events was the most popular choice (45.5%), followed closely by short videos/tutorials (42.8%). In-person seminars/workshops (36.7%), one-on-one financial coaching (32.2%), and articles/newsletters/blog posts (31.4%) were also popular. Only 12.5% of respondents indicated that they were not interested in financial education.

These results reinforce a theme that has appeared throughout this survey: when it comes to finance, military families want both *digital accessibility* and *human connection*.

Conclusion

The data from this survey tells a clear and consistent story. Military families are motivated, disciplined, and deeply committed to building a secure financial future—for themselves and for the people they love.

But motivation alone isn't enough. The challenges they face are real: rising costs, income uncertainty, complex transitions to civilian life, and persistent gaps in formal financial education.

What they want is not complicated. They are asking for someone to help them understand their options, access the right tools, and make informed decisions at every stage of their financial journey. They want digital convenience without sacrificing human connection. They want a banking partner who understands their world and is equipped to help them navigate it.

At Armed Forces Bank, we have spent more than 115 years earning that trust. We understand that financial security isn't just a personal goal; it represents stability, peace of mind, and long-term well-being.

> *"At Armed Forces Bank, military life isn't something we study—it's something many of our associates live. We listen closely and respond with better education and personal service shaped by real experience. This is our commitment, and this is who we are."*
>
> **– Paul Holewinski**
> CEO at Armed Forces Bank

We meet military families where they are—offering the products, education, and personal service that they need to build lasting financial security.

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