ProsperityME empowers, through education and counseling, members of refugee and immigrant communities to invest in themselves to build financial stability, careers, business, and wealth.
Our Long-Time Sponsors & Funders

Hannaford

diversified communications

Elmina B. Sewall Foundation

Norway Savings Bank

Berry Dunn Assurance, Tax, Consulting

CLARK Insurance

Maine Community Foundation Broad Reach Fund

SAM L. COHEN Foundation

BANK OF AMERICA

CASCO Federal Credit Union

L.L. Bean

de Beaumont Foundation
We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Cartridge World for providing our office with free supplies since 2009. Your generosity has enabled our growth!
From Our Executive Director

We don’t say, "no." We say, "how?"

The last two years have been troubling for many immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Family reunions have been a challenge because of what is happening in Washington D.C, and the road ahead for immigrants continues to be uncertain—many are scared and frightened. We have appreciated how the Portland region and the state of Maine stands by its basic values to promote and achieve immigrant integration in all aspects of American life.

ProsperityME is a unique, small, non-profit organization with a multicultural staff, volunteers, and the support of many local businesses, individuals and foundations. We work very, very hard to provide immigrants with the essential tools and understanding of the American financial system. We are very proud of our programs and the success that our clients have achieved.

As we celebrate the beginning of our 11th year providing services to immigrants, we want to say thank you to all our supporters. Our vision from day we opened our door remains the same even now, “That all of Maine’s refugees, immigrants, and their families and communities reach financial stability and improve their quality of life.”

Ten years has gone by, it seems like yesterday when we started Community Financial Literacy, now ProsperityME. We continue to impact the lives of New Mainers. In our IDA partnership with CEI we have helped more than 200 participants invest close to $1.2 million. These investments are worth close to $1.8 million in assets. We have served nearly 4,000 students and helped to increase their financial literacy knowledge as they build financial stability.

ProsperityME has grown in many ways in the last decade, we expanded our services from financial literacy to financial stability. This includes financial counseling, coaching, supporting higher education through scholarship, housing through security rent deposits in partnership with Infinity Federal Credit Union, career development and small business management. We've also re-branded our organization, built a new website, expanded our services to Lewiston and most recently relocated our main Portland office to 62 Elm Street. This new space will help us offer our programs more efficiently.

We will continue our core focus on Financial Literacy, yet we will expand our programming to have a bigger impact on young immigrants through educational scholarships thus building Maine’s future workforce. On behalf of ProsperityME and the communities we serve, we thank you for your support as partners, sponsors, volunteers, staff, board members and friends.

Warm regards, Claude Rwaganje
Our History: Financial Literacy for the Community

ProsperityME was founded as “Community Financial Literacy” in 2008 by Claude Rwaganje, an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to meet the urgent need for financial literacy among Southern Maine’s refugee and immigrant communities.

In 2007 Claude Rwaganje conducted an informal survey to gauge levels of financial literacy in his community. He found that few of those surveyed knew anything about building credit, savings, investment, retirement plans, saving for children’s education, or buying a house. Few people knew the importance of a credit report, and none understood the idea of an emergency fund.

2007 statistics
- **21.4%** of foreign-born families in Maine were below 100 percent of the poverty-level compared to **14%** of the US-born population.
- **23%** of the foreign-born families in Maine were in poverty compared to **16.7%** of the US-born population.
- Roughly **40%** of Maine households of color experience poverty, almost **four times** the rate of white households.

2017 statistics
- **20.4%** of foreign-born families in Maine are below 100 percent of the poverty-level compared to **12.6%** of the US-born population.
- **15.3%** of foreign-born families in Maine are in poverty compared to **8.1%** of the native population.
- Households of color in Maine are more than **twice as likely** to experience poverty, and **8 times as likely** to be under-banked.

The following year, Claude began holding financial literacy classes in a church basement and founded “Community Financial Literacy.” Over the next decade, we reached more than 4,000 people—helping individuals and families save hundreds of dollars toward specific assets including homeownership, small business startup and support for higher education costs. We now employ six full-time staff and have offices in Portland and Lewiston.

"With a class of educated, talented, and eager individuals unable to achieve their full potential, Portland was an area in desperate need of a driving force to empower immigrant communities."

-Claude Rwaganje
Building a Prosperous Community

As CFL approached its sixth year, it became clear that financial literacy alone was not enough. Immigrant communities faced additional barriers to building wealth; many worked multiple jobs, yet struggled to save money for large purchases, to secure transportation or safe housing, or to pay for their own or children’s’ education.

Financial literacy was the foundation, but we needed to take a more holistic approach to building lasting personal prosperity.

A full review of our programming was undertaken and we found that our scope of service had expanded far beyond the financial literacy classes launched in 2008. After our 2018 review, we changed our name to ProsperityME to reflect our expanded programming and renewed vision.

“Ten years ago, Claude had a vision that all of Maine’s immigrants and refugees, their families, and communities could reach financial stability and improve their quality of life. The vision was great, but its mission—to teach financial literacy—was too narrow. We came to realize that financial literacy alone was not sufficient to help people and families become more prosperous. Over time we built the robust curriculum and service offerings now under our umbrella.”

– Clement Yombe

ProsperityME reflects a broader scope of services that the organization now provides to immigrants, refugees, and asylees.

- Financial Education, Counseling & Coaching
- Career and workforce development
- Savings-match program in partnership with CEI
- Job skills training with Portland Adult Education
- Scholarship fund for asylum seekers in partnership with SMCC, CMCC, and USM
- Housing Support through notes for security deposits in partnership with Infinity Credit Union
- Small Business startup & management
With the help of Avesta Housing, we were able to relocate from a small, hard-to-get-to office in the Riverton Community Center to a modern office space in downtown Portland. We have since opened an office and learning center at 37 Park Street in the Lewiston and grown to an expanded professional office at 62 Elm Street, in the heart of Portland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008-2018 ACCOMPLISHMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4,000 Immigrants/Asylees/Refugees served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>850 One-on-one financial and college planning participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 Individual Development Account participants had savings and matching totaling $1,200,000 toward assets purchased with a value of $1,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>223 Financial courses and workshops offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86 Housing support through security deposit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we have grown as an organization, we have made significant advances; streamlining our services and business processes so that we are more effective and allowing us to maximize our community impact. New literacy booklets and an online presence are just two of the ways ProsperityME has taken steps to become more efficient.

Congratulations to ProsperityME for ten years of growth and success! Portland Financial Planning Group LLC, supporters since 2009.
ProsperityME Programs

Four programming areas of ProsperityME create a solid foundation of financial understanding for our clients so that they can build wealth and prosper.

All financial literacy courses consist of 5 or 6 sessions. Attendance at all scheduled classes is required to receive a certificate of completion. Many students who typically attend the financial literacy courses have not yet obtained employment, so they will follow up with individual counseling once employment is secured.

A snapshot of our core programs:

- **Financial Literacy Courses, Workshops and Counseling**
  - Basic Money Management in America
  - Saving to Build Wealth
  - Overdraft Protection
  - Introduction to Taxation
  - Wages and Public Benefits
  - Individualized Financial Counseling sponsored by Maine State Housing Authority
  - Individual Development Accounts

- **Housing Assistance**
  - Supporting Immigrant Tenants Program in partnership with Infinity Federal Credit Union
  - Housing Classes

- **Career and Business Development**
  - Career Development Planning
  - Job Skills Program in partnership with PAE
  - Small business support counseling

- **Higher Education**
  - College Access Counseling in Partnership with FAME 2014 - 2016
  - College Scholarships 2018 - present
Financial Literacy Courses and Counseling

**Basic Money Management in America**
This course provides a solid foundation for understanding the American financial system. Students learn how to set financial goals and develop good spending habits, how to choose the best type of bank account for their needs, how to create and follow a budget, and good habits for building savings and credit. This course is offered in-person at either our Portland or Lewiston locations, or online through our website.

**Saving to Build Wealth**
A continuation of the Basic Money Management course, Saving to Build Wealth offers tips on how to manage multiple bank accounts, save for college and open a 529 College Savings Plan, begin investing, and plan for retirement. By the end of this course, students will have a clear plan for home-ownership, saving for higher education, and saving for retirement.

**Overdraft Protection**
Students learn how to mitigate the additional costs of the symptoms of poverty, such as high interest rates due to lack of credit, reliance on lower quality goods, being targeted by financial scams, and unforeseen financial fees. This workshop gives students the tools to keep up with different rules of banking in the American system.

**Introduction to Taxes**
This workshop offers students step-by-step instruction on filling out their various tax forms. Students learn overviews of individual federal income taxation, state income taxation, and employment taxation. It also provides resources to the community to help file taxes.

**Wages and Public Benefits**
When newly arrived immigrants gain employment for the first time in the US, they must understand the process of transitioning from dependency on public benefits to wage income. This ProsperityME workshop gives important overview of every available public benefit program and the relevant eligibility requirements. Students will also learn ways to maximize their income as they transition from welfare to self-sufficiency.

**Individualized Financial Counseling**
We provide support to New Mainers by addressing specific concerns regarding forms for scholarships or college applications, verifying correct filing of taxes, reacting to sudden expenses, and responding to credit problems, debt, and financial disputes. Clients are able to **attend as many sessions as needed free of charge**. Cross-referrals are provided between all of ProsperityME’s services.
Housing Assistance

Housing Assistance Class

Having a home and achieving financial stability go hand-in-hand, but finding and renting an affordable place to live can seem bewildering to newly arrived refugees and immigrants. ProsperityME volunteers and coursework convey fundamental concepts of leasing; filling out applications for an apartment, securing funding for a down-payment or security deposit, knowing how to be a good tenant and neighbor, and understanding the legal rights of tenants in the United States. In 2018, we helped eleven families secure housing through our SIT program.

Supporting Immigrant Tenants (SIT)

In partnership with Infinity Federal Credit Union, the SIT program makes short-term interest-free security deposit notes available to new arrivals who lack sufficient funding for permanent housing. The SIT program specifically addresses the needs of asylum-seekers in Maine, who face a legal barrier to employment and earning wages during the six-month period after their asylum applications are filed. While public assistance programs may cover the cost of rent in certain instances, the tenant must first produce the funds necessary to pay the security deposit. Payments on notes are not to be made until after a ten-month period, thus allowing the borrower time to receive work authorization, find employment, and accumulate savings. Borrowers in this program are required to enroll in ProsperityME’s How To Be A Successful Tenant Course to ensure that they understand how to build a positive credit record with the SIT loan.
Individual Development Accounts (IDA)

ProsperityME has partnered with Coastal Enterprises, Inc. and Avesta Housing to provide a federal grant-funded savings matching program to eligible immigrants. Applicants who qualify for the program earn $1 for every dollar they save, up to $4,000 (for a total of $8,000). These funds must be used for funding higher education, starting a small business, homeownership, or buying a vehicle to get to work. Prior completion of Basic Money Management is required.

Through the IDA program, we were able to assist 200 participants and have their funds matched, totaling $1.2M in savings, for a grand total value of $1.8M worth of assets back into the Maine economy.

Career Planning and Job Skills Programs

Beyond providing our students with essential starting capital, we recognize the value and power that comes from having a job and independence. In the past 10 years, ProsperityME has worked tirelessly to provide clients with skills training and other resources to secure financial stability.

ProsperityME provides courses on how to match clients' strengths and skills to the right job and career, write a resume and cover letter, perform online job searches, and shine during an interview all while meeting U.S. employers' expectations. During the courses, students will practice filling out employment paperwork and learn to properly pay employment taxes. Our Job Skills program is offered in conjunction with PAE. In this program we have trained hundreds of individuals and helped them secure employment.

Small Business Support Counseling

ProsperityME believes that sustainable growth can be achieved by supporting refugees and immigrants in their efforts to start and help them manage new small businesses. Lack of previous business experience, insufficient knowledge of lending options, and limited access to local and regional networking opportunities have the potential of stifling long-term economic growth. ProsperityME advises immigrants who would like to start or run a business with the help of business counselors. Clients will receive help deciding on an appropriate business location, choosing a financial structure and bank account, applying for a small business loan, filing taxes as an employer, and understanding U.S. standards for human resource regulations and customer service.
Higher Education

College Access Counseling Services (CAC)

Between 2014 and 2016, ProsperityME (then CFL) partnered with the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) to provide assistance to our clients with college applications, filling out the FAFSA, comparing financial aid packages, locating potential scholarships, and connecting to FAME’s NextGen Program. The program ensured practical understanding of the difference between loans and grants, as well as the various requirements for different repayment plans. Clients received individualized support from a financial counselor.

PROSPER College Scholarships

In 2018, we decided to move to a more holistic approach to supporting higher education for our clients. ProsperityME now provides scholarships to asylum seekers who are not otherwise eligible for federal financial student aid, thus the PROSPER scholarship was born. We have partnered with Southern Maine Community College and Central Maine Community College to make full-tuition scholarships available for eligible, accepted students. Since 2018, the scholarships are awarded annually each spring. Recipients are often young adults who were unable to obtain a college education in their home country due to conflict, war, or other difficult hurdles or circumstances. Providing an annual full-tuition scholarship to these students will address one of the most significant financial barriers to Maine’s most capable immigrant individuals. In 2018, we awarded three PROSPER scholarships and in 2019, we are awarding eleven PROSPER scholarships.
In 2008, Founder and Executive Director Claude Rwaganje began reaching out to community leaders and potential partners. At this key moment, Portland Adult Education Director Rob Wood offered financial support for Claude’s ambitious new project in the form of a $3,000 grant. With this support, Claude was able to start his dream of helping all immigrants in Maine achieve financial stability. Portland Adult crucial support in the form of classrooms and access to clients during ProsperityME's initial stages of development, they have remained one of our most loyal and important partners. Over the years, even as ProsperityME expanded its mission beyond exclusively focusing on financial literacy programs Portland Adult Education remained an essential source of outreach support. Between 2009 and 2019, ProsperityME instructors have conducted countless courses in financial literacy on the premises of Portland Adult Education. Moreover, Portland Adult Education and ProsperityME have a longstanding financial partnership, dating back to our initial years of operation. Just as ProsperityME's partnership with Portland Adult Education helped us develop programs and community trust in Portland, Lewiston Adult Education likewise offered vital support for our expansion into the Lewiston-Auburn community. Lewiston Adult Education's enlistment of ProsperityME instructors has expanded our accessibility to include course offerings and programming to immigrants across a much larger footprint.

From direct financial contributions to cooperation on a wide range of programs, Portland Adult Education and Lewiston Adult Education have provided crucial support for our community outreach and development.
Our Partners

Over the past ten years, we have worked with a variety of community partners to expand the range of our core services and to support the creation of new programs.

Coastal Enterprises Inc.

Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) is a mission-driven lender and investor that combines financing, advising services, and policy leadership to help create economically and environmentally healthy communities in which all people, especially those with low incomes, can reach their full potential. CEI has been an essential partner of ProsperityME since 2012 when the two nonprofits started working together on the IDA program.

Infinity Federal Credit Union

Infinity Federal Credit Union has supported ProsperityME through financial sponsorship since 2017. Most recently, they have provided key support for one of our most successful and meaningful programs, the Supporting the Immigrant Tenants (SIT) note. The SIT program allows our clients to get essential access to a short-term no-interest note for housing security deposits.

Maine State Housing Authority

Since 2010, Maine State Housing Authority has supported the efforts of ProsperityME by connecting our staff and services to clients in need. Partnership with Maine Housing has been crucial for the successful evolution of our programming, and it has facilitated the pathway to financial success for many of Maine’s immigrants and refugees. Maine State Housing is an important sponsor of our Financial Counseling, some financial education and our counselors' training.
Cultivating Community

ProsperityME Program Director Clement Yombe provides workshops on how to manage finances for farmers and most recently the new Lewiston farming cooperative called "New Roots Cooperative Farm." The course takes place in early Spring and focuses on Income and Expenses, Basic Business Management, and Bookkeeping. New Roots Cooperative Farm is a New American farm in Lewiston selling produce throughout Southern Maine via farm stands, CSA’s, farmers markets, and wholesale markets. New Roots has been extremely successful since they have expanded to a 30-acre farm in 2018.

Catholic Charities of Maine
Refugee and Immigration Services (CCMRIS)

CCMRIS provides a variety of case management services to newly resettled refugees in Maine. With the support of numerous other agencies, the Cultural Orientation Program was designed to provide newcomers to Portland with an outline of living in Maine. ProsperityME contributes to the Cultural Orientation Program by offering an introductory financial literacy course so that program participants can be informed on the complexity of the American financial system. This will allow them to avoid scams, fraud and predatory lenders upon their arrival to the United States.

Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC)

In recent years, ProsperityME has found a key partner in the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). MIRC has facilitated ProsperityME's community outreach and programming collaboration, thereby providing valuable networking and leadership opportunities with other Portland-based nonprofits.

Avesta Housing

Avesta Housing is one of the country’s most innovative and respected leaders in affordable housing. As a nonprofit, Avesta Housing manages more than 2,200 apartments and a range of publicly subsidized rentals and home-ownership programs. Avesta has contributed to ProsperityME’s success since 2012 through exposure to new clients, providing an affordable office space in downtown Portland, in addition to financial support. In 2012, Avesta also partnered with ProsperityME and CEI on the expansion of the IDA matching-savings grants to encourage home-ownership.
ProsperityME prides itself on having a positive impact on Portland's economy by supporting immigrant-run businesses and investments. We strive to maintain the same vision, level of personal connections, and dedication to hard work since the inception of our organization.

An asylum seeker named Micha had recently given birth to her beautiful daughter in Ohio. Unfortunately, Micha did not have medical insurance to cover the cost, so she owed $17,000 in debt. After taking ProsperityME's "Basic Money Management" class, Micha realized that past due balance on her medical bill would have negative impact on her credit report.

After a few sessions with Micha, Clemente, our Financial Counselor, helped Micha apply for financial assistance. At the time, she was unemployed and an asylum seeker, so it was very difficult to convince the hospital to take her case. Together, they called and sent letters and eventually the hospital agreed to reduce her bill to $4,000. Clemente then helped Micha commit to and sign a repayment plan. Micha made her payments regularly and we're pleased to say that she has now finished paying off her debt. She credits ProsperityME for educating and advising her on how to best manage her debt.

Antera, from Guatemala, came to us in 2012 needing help managing her debt. We didn’t know where to start with her financial counseling session; she was living on credit cards and had many past due bills. In less than 12 months, she worked hard to overcome her financial burden. In March 2016, Antera returned to our office, not to seek additional support but to express appreciation for the help she received from us.

She said, “I don’t know what would have happened if it wasn’t for your help. I am now almost debt-free and have left my housekeeping job. I am a self-employed business-owner and I can afford to take 5 weeks' vacation.”

"I was able to save $4,000, which was matched with another $4,000 through an IDA program. This allowed me to purchase my first car. Now I have transportation means to go to work, take my children and myself to all my medical appointments as well as go grocery shopping."

- Marie Francine, 2015 Financial Literacy student
"My expectation was to be able to make a budget for my home and to balance my check-book...I got a lot more out of this than that. I set up four accounts with cPort credit union; a regular share account, shared draft account which is a savings, a money market account for emergency funds, and an IRA. And I did this all with very little money. I knew where to go, what questions to ask because of all of you."
- Eileen Foley, 2012

"The class was great. It was multicultural and interactive. Everyone was sharing their perspectives and the teacher was very open. The class is crucial for refugees and immigrants because it educates them in money management in America. It also opens their minds to think beyond just survival; since a new start can be very hard and intimidating. It motivates them to surpass their limits."
- Daniella Makuraza, 2014 Financial Literacy student

"My expectation was to be able to make a budget for my home and to balance my check-book...I got a lot more out of this than that. I set up four accounts with cPort credit union; a regular share account, shared draft account which is a savings, a money market account for emergency funds, and an IRA. And I did this all with very little money. I knew where to go, what questions to ask because of all of you."
- Eileen Foley, 2012

"Personally, I learned through two courses that I attended, Basic Money Management and Saving to Build Wealth. Financial issues were not my career and I was confused by some economic terms, but now I am satisfied of what I have gotten...We can't wait to practice. Now we are knocking on our American dreams."
- Jean de Dieu Karera, Financial Literacy student

Adelle came to the U.S. in 2014 as she fled civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Then 23 years old, she had aged out of high school and enrolled in Portland Adult Education, where she graduated in the spring of 2015. Her desire to further her education was met with a significant obstacle because asylum seekers are not eligible for federal financial aid and she lacked money to pay for college. Our College Access Counselor helped Adelle find less traditional scholarships available to asylees. Adelle applied for and was granted two scholarships totaling $6,000. Currently enrolled in Pre-Med classes at SMCC, she aspires to become a doctor and continue living in the Portland area.

Carmen, a single mother from Rwanda who is seeking asylum in the U.S., recently came to our office with her young daughter. When asked how she learned about ProsperityME, she replied, “I was riding in an Uber and asked the driver where I could find a place to live with my three kids because I was desperate. The driver asked me if I had been to ProsperityME. When I said no, he gave me the telephone number and told me to ask for help. That's how I learned about this organization.” We helped Carmen with a short-term note for a security deposit through our SIT program, and today, she has an apartment to call home with her three children.

Mahdi, a 2018 scholarship recipient, had sought admission to Southern Maine Community College in 2017 and registered for four classes. However, when he received his tuition bill, he could not afford the tuition and was forced to withdraw. When asked how he felt to be a recipient of the scholarship, he replied, "This is a dream that I have been waiting for, without knowing where and when it would come."
- Mahdi Farah, 2018 Scholarship Recipient
Thank You Volunteers

Community has always played a large role in this organization, so much so that it once was the centerpiece to our name. Without a community so willing to support ProsperityME with donations, time, and passion, the organization wouldn’t be half of what it is today.

Volunteers have dedicated effort and countless hours, helping ProsperityME achieve its mission, one that wouldn’t be achievable without their help over the past 10 years.

Special thanks to our Board of Directors, Committee members, students from Bowdoin College, USM and Bates College, SIT members, Program Committee members and Scholarship Committee members.

“What impresses me the most about [ProsperityME] is the breadth and scope of the strategic vision. Claude and Clement teach an ever rotating schedule of classes, and at the same time delve in deep with individual counseling. In 2015, I helped create a tax curriculum with [ProsperityME] and was able to co-teach the class with Claude. I can honestly say it was the most significant experience in my 3 years at USM – I’ll be gearing up to help more with [ProsperityME] and tax education in the future.”

- Dana Wentworth, Finance Volunteer

“This is something that is very needed and brought us face-to-face with difficulties in finding affordable housing. If you don’t have a settled place to live, it’s hard to work on all of the other things you need in order to get going. Housing stands as a foundation.”

- Sue Rudalevige, SIT volunteer

“Before volunteering for ProsperityME, I took for granted my own understanding of what I considered to be easy, everyday experiences, like opening a bank account. Through my day with ProsperityME, I learned just how vital and important it is to increase availability to such information for those who may not have previous access to or experience with it.”

- Lexi Gray, volunteer in 2017

“[ProsperityME] is a vibrant place where exciting things are happening, a place where I can make a contribution while learning a new skill. The multicultural staff and clients are dedicated and passionate about improving lives and building a strong immigrant community in Portland. I really enjoy meeting the clients and many of them let me practice my French language skills with them. It feels great to contribute to an organization that is building capacity and helping integrate new Mainers into our community.”

- Soxna Dice, volunteer in 2013

Volunteers have always played a large role in this organization, so much so that it once was the centerpiece to our name. Without a community so willing to support ProsperityME with donations, time, and passion, the organization wouldn’t be half of what it is today.

Special thanks to our Board of Directors, Committee members, students from Bowdoin College, USM and Bates College, SIT members, Program Committee members and Scholarship Committee members.

“What impresses me the most about [ProsperityME] is the breadth and scope of the strategic vision. Claude and Clement teach an ever rotating schedule of classes, and at the same time delve in deep with individual counseling. In 2015, I helped create a tax curriculum with [ProsperityME] and was able to co-teach the class with Claude. I can honestly say it was the most significant experience in my 3 years at USM – I’ll be gearing up to help more with [ProsperityME] and tax education in the future.”

- Dana Wentworth, Finance Volunteer

“This is something that is very needed and brought us face-to-face with difficulties in finding affordable housing. If you don’t have a settled place to live, it’s hard to work on all of the other things you need in order to get going. Housing stands as a foundation.”

- Sue Rudalevige, SIT volunteer

“Before volunteering for ProsperityME, I took for granted my own understanding of what I considered to be easy, everyday experiences, like opening a bank account. Through my day with ProsperityME, I learned just how vital and important it is to increase availability to such information for those who may not have previous access to or experience with it.”

- Lexi Gray, volunteer in 2017

“[ProsperityME] is a vibrant place where exciting things are happening, a place where I can make a contribution while learning a new skill. The multicultural staff and clients are dedicated and passionate about improving lives and building a strong immigrant community in Portland. I really enjoy meeting the clients and many of them let me practice my French language skills with them. It feels great to contribute to an organization that is building capacity and helping integrate new Mainers into our community.”

- Soxna Dice, volunteer in 2013

Volunteers have dedicated effort and countless hours, helping ProsperityME achieve its mission, one that wouldn’t be achievable without their help over the past 10 years.

Special thanks to the following volunteers:
Jennifer Wilson, 2012 • Miles Painter, 2013 • Phaeng Southisombath, 2014 • Daniella Makuza, 2014 • Justin Ehringhaus, 2015 • Melissa Ntangere, 2015 • Catherine Odede, 2016 • Samuel Kenney 2019
"When I initially joined the board, I was impressed with the organization's passion, both within Claude and the other board members. Claude has the contagious can-do attitude, which is complimented by his interest and ability to learn from the knowledge and experiences of [ProsperityME] board members, and other community members...I am proud of the success and growth of this relatively small organization and I look forward to the future, as I believe [ProsperityME] can continue to make an increasingly positive impact on the immigrant and refugee communities."

- Eric Boucher, Former Board Treasurer, Current Board Member

"What I appreciate most is the dedication to the mission, from the board and the staff. Everyone involved sees and understands the value of the services we provide and is a part of the organization to make a difference. I see [ProsperityME] continuing the good work they are doing and reaching and educating more individuals in our community. Everyone benefits when people take the time to learn smart, savvy financial education basics."

- Quincy Hentzel, Board Member

"It’s incredible what this organization does in the community. They not only make sure that people have financial education, but they support them beyond that. That’s the reason why we recently changed our name to ProsperityME because we want to show that we’re not [just] educating people, but we’re helping them to take their lives to the next level and to truly prosper."

- Megan Piper, Committee Member

"Bravery within the organization, creativity, unafraid to fail, and loyalty to people around the organization – that's how I would describe ProsperityME."

- Jay Espy, Elmina B. Sewall Foundation

"We get to help people and build a personal connection. When we see a homeless, single mother come in crying, saying, 'I don't have a place to stay... I have kids,' and we help that person secure an apartment, that makes our day. When we see people come in without any direction then we point them in the right way, it's the feeling we get from helping that makes us feel good. We can work on weekends, we can even work all night on that feeling; only thing is, we would have to find a way to get more funding."

- Claude Rwaganje

"I would like to see it mature and have a larger voice and power in the field and take on more systemic issues."

- Andrea Perry, Broad Reach Fund
Our Team

Claude Rwaganje, Founder and Executive Director
Claude Rwaganje is the Founder and Executive Director of ProsperityME since 2008. Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Claude currently serves on the board of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce and was appointed in 2018 to the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston’s Community Development Advisory Council. Claude also serves as a member of the Financial Literacy Advisory Council (FAME) and the Avesta Housing Home Ownership Center Advisory Committee. Claude has received numerous awards for his service to the community, including Bowdoin College’s Spirit of Service Award (2012), Bates College Harvard Center’s Community Partner Award for Outstanding New Initiative (2013), Portland Press Herald’s “10 Mainers to be Thankful For” (2012) and the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce award for Public Sector Leadership (2017). Claude holds a Master’s degree in Business Administration and is a certified coach and housing counselor through NeighborWorks America.

Clement Yombe, Program Director
Clement joined ProsperityME in 2012. He leads program development, management and implementation, including teaching and counseling students. He is responsible for training and supervising our instructors, as well as working with our program partners and volunteers. Clement is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo and holds a law degree from the Protestant University of Congo. He earned a M.A. in Community Development Policy and Practice from the University of New Hampshire. Prior to joining ProsperityME, Clement held training and managerial positions at Staples, International Paper, and Windham Hotels. He serves on the board of HomeWorks, a Maine-based non-profit dedicated to consumer homebuyer education.

Joanna Caoutte, Financial Education Instructor
Joanna and her mother moved to Maine from Burundi in 2015. She first worked for Greater Portland Health as an outreach provider helping underserved and at-risk patients access vital health care and social services. In this role, she was able to apply the financial literacy skills she learned when she took ProsperityME’s Basic Money Management class. In fact, she was so inspired by the impact her newfound financial knowledge had on her life and the lives of those she served that she decided to join ProsperityME as an instructor. Since then, she has helped countless New Mainers gain their financial footing. Prior to coming to Maine, Joanna held the position of Knowledge Management and Communication Officer for Global Health Corps at Care International in Burundi. She holds a B.A. in Communications Sciences from Lumière University of Bujumbura, Burundi. Joanna, who speaks five languages, lives in New Gloucester with her husband, Matthew, and their standard poodle.

Matteson Nadeau, Event and Marketing Coordinator
Matteson manages all of ProsperityME’s events and marketing programs. Her daily responsibilities include all outbound communications, social media and website, and orchestrating donor and community recognition campaigns and events. In addition to her commitment to ProsperityME, Matteson acts as the Treasurer on the Steering Committee at MaineTransNet, an organization that supports and advocates for transgender people and their families. Matteson lives in South Portland with two cats and an adorable, three-legged dog appropriately named Bucky Barnes. A graduate of the University of Southern Maine, Matteson holds a B.A. in English Literature and a professional certificate in Grant Writing.

Byron Bartlett, Director of Administration
Byron Bartlett, a Maine native who grew up in Poland, manages all day-to-day operations at ProsperityME including facilities, finance, human resources and information technology. Byron’s experience in the corporate world, which includes more than 20 years at large financial institutions, coupled with his most recent role as School Administrator at Wayfinder Schools, made him the ideal candidate for the job. In addition, he has experienced firsthand the positive contributions immigrants make in our state and is dedicated to keeping the ProsperityME organization running smoothly as we continue to grow and serve an ever-expanding client base. Byron attended Roanoke College, Fitchburg State College and the University of Southern Maine. He has served on the Board of Directors of The Maine State Chapter of the March of Dimes and the Portland Ballet, and has fundraised for countless nonprofit organizations throughout Maine. Byron lives in Portland with his husband, Chris, and their Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, Stella Blue.

Rasha Al Shareefi, Administrative Assistant
Just a few short years ago, Rasha and her family emigrated from Jordan to Westbrook, Maine. As our Administrative Assistant, hers is often the first voice our ‘customers’ hear when they call to sign up for our classes. Her encouragement and friendly manner put them at ease while she efficiently provides them with the information and support they need. Prior to coming to the U.S., Rasha attended Balqa’ Applied University where she was pursuing a degree in Accounting Information Systems and Marketing. She also worked at the Intercultural Community Center as a math and science teacher. Since moving to Maine, has become a strong advocate as well as a role model for immigrants seeking to become educated and self-reliant. Fluent in Arabic and English, Rasha is a new member of the Kiwanis Westbrook chapter and aspires to become a journalist.
Leadership & Partners

Our Current and Past Partners

- Avesta Housing
- Bates College
- Bowdoin College
- Catholic Charities Refugee & Immigration Services
- City of Portland Social Services
- Coastal Enterprises, Inc
- Cooperative Development Institute
- cPort Credit Union
- Central Maine Community College
- Cultivating Community
- Finance Authority of Maine (FAME)
- Greater Portland Cash Coalition
- Infinity Credit Union
- Lewiston Adult Education
- MaineShare
- Maine State Housing Authority
- New Ventures Maine
- Norway Savings
- Portland Adult Education
- Portland Housing Authority
- The Telling Room
- University of Southern Maine

Board Officers

Helen Andreoli 2015 - Present
Colette Twigg-Rowse 2015 - Present
Eileen Fongemie 2018 - Present
Craig Tribuno 2016 - Present

Board Members

Elizabeth Eames 2012 - Present
Bill Brown 2009 - Present
Christen Graham 2017 - Present
Gregory Hansel 2010 - Present
Quincy Hentzel 2012 - Present
E’nkul Kanakan 2009 - Present
Jon Paradise 2015 - Present
Eric Boucher 2011 - Present
Mutima Peter 2009 - Present
Tara Jenkins 2019 - Present
Cheryl Lancaster 2019 - Present

Past Board Members


Advisory Board Members

Karin Anderson, Eugene Ardito, Sharon Brobst, Julie Criscitiello, Ana Hussey, Ndabaruta Kabirigi, Edward Loro, Paul Mukiza, Larry Pelletier, Dana Totman and Rob Wood
Our Vision for the Next Ten Years

ProsperityME has high hopes for the future—community feedback is an essential component of our growth.

Where do we go from here?

ProsperityME has passed the startup stage. After ten years providing services with a great track record, we are now moving to expand our services and broaden our mission.

Our re-branding started with a name change in 2018, a website redesign earlier this year, and internal capacity strengthening.

Where we’d like to go;
- Expand our financial services to high school and low income individuals
- Create a subsidiary of ProsperityME for funding sustainability
- Expand our housing program—and down payments for housing—beyond just asylum seekers
- Increase our business management training
- Explore the viability of a scholarship endowment fund
- Build a stronger workforce development program with partner organizations

We hope to make ProsperityME a hub for immigrants and low income people alike, that promotes not only financial literacy and stability, but helps them build wealth and create financial peace of mind.

We envision a future where all of Maine's refugees and immigrants, and their families and their communities, reach financial stability and improve their quality of life.
Thank You to Our Supporters

Foundations

- Elmina B. Sewall Foundation
- Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment
- Broad Reach Fund
- Sam L. Cohen Foundation
- Bank of America Charitable Foundation
- Robbins-de Beaumont Foundation
- Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation
- Leo & Rhea Fruhman Foundation
- Jane’s Trust
- John T. Gorman Foundation
- The Arthur Vining Davis Foundation
- The Virginia Hodgkins Somers Foundation
- Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust
- TD Charitable Foundation
- Maine Community Foundation
- Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development
- The Eunice Frye Home Foundation
- Wal-Mart Foundation, State Giving Program
- Gannett Foundation
- Bingham Betterment Fund
- Jane B. Cook 1983 Charitable Trust
- Emanuel & Pauline A. Lerner Foundation
- United Way of Greater Portland
- Cushman D. Anthony Charitable Giving Fund
- People’s United Community Foundation
- Bill and Joan Alfond Foundation
- Frances Hollis Brain Foundation
- Bangor Savings Bank Foundation
- Maine Community Foundation
- ABCommunity Foundation

Corporate donors

- Hannaford Supermarkets
- Diversified Communications
- Maine Credit Union League
- Norway Savings Bank
- Coastal Enterprises Inc.
- cPort Credit Union
- Biddeford Savings Bank
- Machias Savings Bank
- Portland Financial Planning Group, LLC
- LL Bean
- Portland Adult Education
- IDEXX Laboratories, Inc.
- Key Bank of Maine
- Portland Sea Dogs
- R.M. Davis
- Clark Insurance
- Wells Fargo
- Casco Federal Credit Union
- BerryDunn
- Infinity Federal Credit Union
- Bangor Savings Bank
- Avesta Housing Development Corp.
- Bath Savings Institution
- Tricorp Federal Credit Union
- Triton
- East Brown Cow Management
- Morgan Stanley Foundation
- Coast Line Credit Union
- Holden Agency Insurance
- Northeast Bank
- Edward Woon
- Auto Europe Group
- New Ventures Maine
- Verrill Dana, LLP
- MaineHousing

And thank you to the countless individual donors who have stayed with us from the beginning!
We appreciate all of the support we have received over the past 10 years, and we ask that you please continue to support ProsperityME's programming through a tax-deductible donation today.

THUMBS UP! We asked members of the ProsperityME community to describe the future of our organization in a single word. Here are some of the results:

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 8013 Portland, ME 04104

Office Locations:
62 Elm Street Portland, ME 04101
37 Park Street Lewiston, ME 04240