



# Best in Dough

Keep your cash flowing, your portfolio growing, and your entire financial house in order with these 26 expert-vetted, game-changing apps, accounts, and services.

BY LISA ARBETTER, BRANDI BROXSON, AND MAGDALENA PUNIEWSKA

## BUDGETING

### Best for Answering “Where Does All My Money Go?”

#### Qube Money

**WHAT IT IS:** The app separates your money into “qubes,” digital versions of the paper envelopes used in the popular cash-envelope budgeting method. Create a qube for each category—food, travel, utilities—and fill it with the amount you plan to spend. Instead of doing the math in your head to figure out how much you have for takeout, just open the app and select the appropriate qube, and the funds will be transferred to the linked Qube Card.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Clarity about your cash flow is “the foundation upon which your financial house is built,” says Manisha Thakor, a Smart Money Awards judge (see page 47 for more info on our experts). Beyond getting you to create a careful budget, Qube might even change your mindset about spending. “Increasingly, I see people ‘leak’ money through seemingly small, inconsequential purchases,” Thakor says. “In today’s I-want-it-right-now-and-I-can-buy-it-with-one-click world, having to choose which qube you’re using forces you to slow down and think about how much you really want this item.”

### Best for Visualizing Your Debt-Free Life

#### Charlie

**WHAT IT IS:** Enter the amount of your credit card, car, or student loan debt and what you pay monthly. Next, toggle through different payment amounts to see how much faster you could be rid of the debt (and how much interest you’d save) by contributing, say, an extra \$20

or \$50 a month. If finding that money seems difficult, try the app’s creative automatic-saving feature, which lets you set up rules like “Put away \$10 every time I shop at Target.”

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Charlie makes the most insidious part of debt—interest payments—very visible. Decreasing your principal by even a tiny amount can add up to enormous savings in interest fees, Thakor says, but “it’s often difficult to comprehend until you see the actual numbers.” Charlie shows you those numbers in a way that’s fun and motivating, says judge Jully-Alma Taveras.

#### I TRIED IT!

“The interface is the exact opposite of what you’d expect from a digital banking app—it’s bright and a breeze to navigate and great for anyone hoping to squirrel away money. I like how you can customize your savings goals. I’m setting mine up to save \$20 every Taco Tuesday.” —*Rachel Sylvester, REAL SIMPLE senior editor*



### Best for Knowing Exactly What to Ask Your Financial Planner

#### Personal Capital Financial Roadmap

**WHAT IT IS:** Estate planning, retirement cash flow, investments...a solid financial plan includes so many things. Personal Capital built this tool to help its wealth management clients prioritize where to put their money. After analyzing your info—like age, assets, and debt—it ranks tasks so you can discuss them with your adviser.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** “When your money is tied to a goal and you can track your progress, you have a much greater chance of success,” says judge Jannese Torres-Rodriguez. “This tool helps clients be better advocates for themselves, and it lets advisers home in on areas with the greatest opportunities for improvement.”





### Best for Low-Cost Financial Planning Vanguard Digital Advisor

**WHAT IT IS:** For professional-level financial planning without the high price tag, say hello to your very own robo adviser. Input your savings habits, goals, and risk tolerance, and this intuitive bot spits out a diversified portfolio of Vanguard ETFs (exchange-traded funds). It also provides personalized advice and ongoing automated investment management.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** The buy-in for financial planning can often seem steep, but the \$3,000 minimum here feels doable. Plus, you'll enjoy savings on fees, even compared with other robo-adviser services: Digital Advisor charges a fee of about 0.15 percent of your balance (versus the usual 0.25 percent). So if you have \$10,000 in your account, you'll pay \$15 a year for investment advice. Thakor called Digital Advisor a "financial Swiss Army knife—so many useful tools bundled into one simple package."

### Best for Answering "Will My Retirement Savings Last?"

Silvr

**WHAT IT IS:** After you link your accounts or enter an estimate of your assets, you'll get your retirement readiness score, a calculation of how long your income will last in retirement—down to the month and year—and suggestions to improve your situation. Pony up the subscription price (from \$7 a month) to unlock strategies that could save you thousands in taxes and fees.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** It quells the fear that you'll never be able to retire—showing you where you are now, and how to get to your goal. "Retirement can feel abstract when you have no idea if you'll have enough money to live off of. This app gives you clarity and action items," says judge Maggie Germano.

### I TRIED IT!

"I input a few numbers, like how much I have in savings, how much I make, and how much I spend, to determine if I'll have enough to retire when I want to. Based on that, I was able to increase and decrease my target age and play around with the numbers to see my goals. The app also gave me a timeline to make sure I continue on the right track, which puts me at ease. Retirement can often seem overwhelming, but after spending a little time on the app, I felt more in control." —Emily Kehe, REAL SIMPLE creative director

## RETIREMENT

### Best for Handling Your 401(k) Rollover Capitalize

**WHAT IT IS:** This free service is exactly what you wish you had when you last switched jobs—a frustration-free way to roll over your retirement accounts. It helps with everything, from finding your accounts and initiating the transfer to handling the paperwork and follow-up. If you don't have an IRA to transfer the funds into, Capitalize compares products from leading providers to find the right option.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** "Roll over 401(k)" is a to-do list bottom dweller if ever there was one. This app knocks it off your list entirely, so you can "avoid the drama and keep what's yours," Torres-Rodriguez says. "It simplifies the process beautifully," Brown agrees.



RETIREMENT FOR THE REAL WORLD On September 23 at 4 p.m. ET, REAL SIMPLE is hosting a virtual summit with Fidelity about how to increase your nest egg. Go to [realsimple.com/retirementgoals](https://realsimple.com/retirementgoals) to sign up.



## CREDIT CARDS

### Best for Building Credit Perch

**WHAT IT IS:** To get credit, you need... credit. This catch-22 confounds many young adults who have no credit history but need access to all the grown-up things good credit allows, like an apartment lease or a car loan. Perch, a free app, lets users build credit through recurring, on-time expenses, such as a Netflix or Spotify subscription. Connect Perch to the user's bank account; the more on-time transactions the app verifies, the higher the user's credit soars.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** This app helps kids avoid the strings, temptations, and pitfalls that credit cards sometimes bring. "It offers a different, more inclusive way to show credit responsibility to a potential lender," says judge Winnie Sun.

### Best for Maximizing Points The NerdWallet App's Optimize Feature

**WHAT IT IS:** Is your credit card doing enough for you? NerdWallet helps you answer that question by analyzing your spending habits and suggesting rewards cards that fit your lifestyle. If you log a lot of miles in your car, for example, the app might suggest a card that gives you cash back every time you fill the tank.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** It takes the work out of researching and comparing cards, and its recommendations reflect your shopping habits. "I like how it strategically helps a consumer pick out the best credit card. That's a time-saver," says judge Tania Brown.

### I TRIED IT!

"I've had the same credit card forever, and I've been meaning to research others that might net me better rewards. I shared what credit card I currently use, and the app combed through my transactions and found that dining is a top spending category. It recommended a credit card that would earn me four points per dollar spent on dining (much more than what my current card offers). I'm planning to open this new card so I can rack up some miles for my honeymoon next year." —Brandi Broxson, REAL SIMPLE features editor

### Best for Improving Your Credit Score Without Risk Chime Credit Builder Visa Credit Card

**WHAT IT IS:** This no-fee, hybrid debit-credit card sets limits on spending, allowing those with no or low credit to build their ratings. You decide how much you want to spend and move that amount from your Spending account to your Credit Builder account—then use the card as you would any other Visa. With each swipe, the money spent gets earmarked for your end-of-month bill, which Chime can automatically pay on time. Then Chime reports that gold-star behavior to the three major credit bureaus.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** There's no high credit limit tempting users to shop, no interest, and no fees, making this a credit card with training wheels, Thakor says. "It helps you build a credit rating by doing something you want to get into the habit of doing anyway—paying your monthly credit card bill in full."



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## BANKING

### Best for Motivating You to Save More

#### Yotta

**WHAT IT IS:** This high-interest savings account combines the excitement of a lottery with the critical act of saving. For each \$25 deposited, you get a recurring ticket into weekly drawings, with prizes ranging from 10 cents to \$10 million. Also key: For now, withdrawals are unlimited, so if an emergency arises, your money is just an ATM away.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Research shows that people save more when presented with a prize-linked savings choice. Yotta also offers a better interest rate

than most banks—0.2 percent, compared with the 0.01 to 0.04 percent offered by many institutions. (That's 20 cents on \$100 versus as little as a penny on \$100.) "Customers get more for their money even if they don't win prizes," Germano says.

### Best for Banking in Good Conscience

#### Ando

**WHAT IT IS:** This digital banking app invests 100 percent of customers' money into eco-friendly initiatives, like clean energy. Pie charts show users exactly where their money is going and

how their impact grows. Ando does all this without charging fees, requiring a balance, or cutting out conveniences, like ATMs.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Transparency. A recent study found that 60 of the world's largest commercial and investment banks have collectively put \$3.8 trillion into fossil fuels over the last five years—something they definitely don't advertise. "This bank is helping to improve the world, rather than make it worse," Germano says. Ando is so serious about green initiatives, even its debit card is made of 80 percent corn.

## INVESTING

### Best for Socially Responsible Investing

#### Betterment's SRI Portfolios

**WHAT IT IS:** Create social change and make money with three low-fee options: the Social Impact SRI Portfolio, which invests in U.S. companies that support racial, ethnic, and gender diversity; the Climate Impact SRI Portfolio, which funds companies with lower carbon emissions and divests from companies that hold fossil fuel reserves; and the Broad Impact Portfolio, which gives money to companies that believe in socially responsible practices, like ethical labor management and board diversity.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** These portfolios upend conventional wisdom that the only way to express your values through investments is by buying individual stocks or bonds. "Betterment is great for people who are interested in ESG—environmental, social, and governance—investing but not sure how to do the research," says judge Lauryn Williams. They also make good financial sense: "These options are more affordable than most ESGs," Torres-Rodriguez says.

### Best for Helping Young Adults Reach Their Goals

#### Fidelity Spire

**WHAT IT IS:** Most young people aren't thinking, "How can I build my portfolio?" They're wondering how to save for a vacation, down payment, or wedding. With this app, just input a goal, the amount you need, and a deadline. Then learn which type of investment account will help you get there. It's free to set up goals, but by opening (or linking) a Fidelity account, you'll access a suite of features, including the interactive decision tool, which shows you the costs and benefits of putting money toward one goal versus another.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Goal-based planning creates healthy financial habits, and Fidelity Spire is a great teacher. "I like the simplicity. It helps you pick your priorities and decide the best financial tool to use," Brown says.

### Best for Choosing Individual Stocks with Confidence

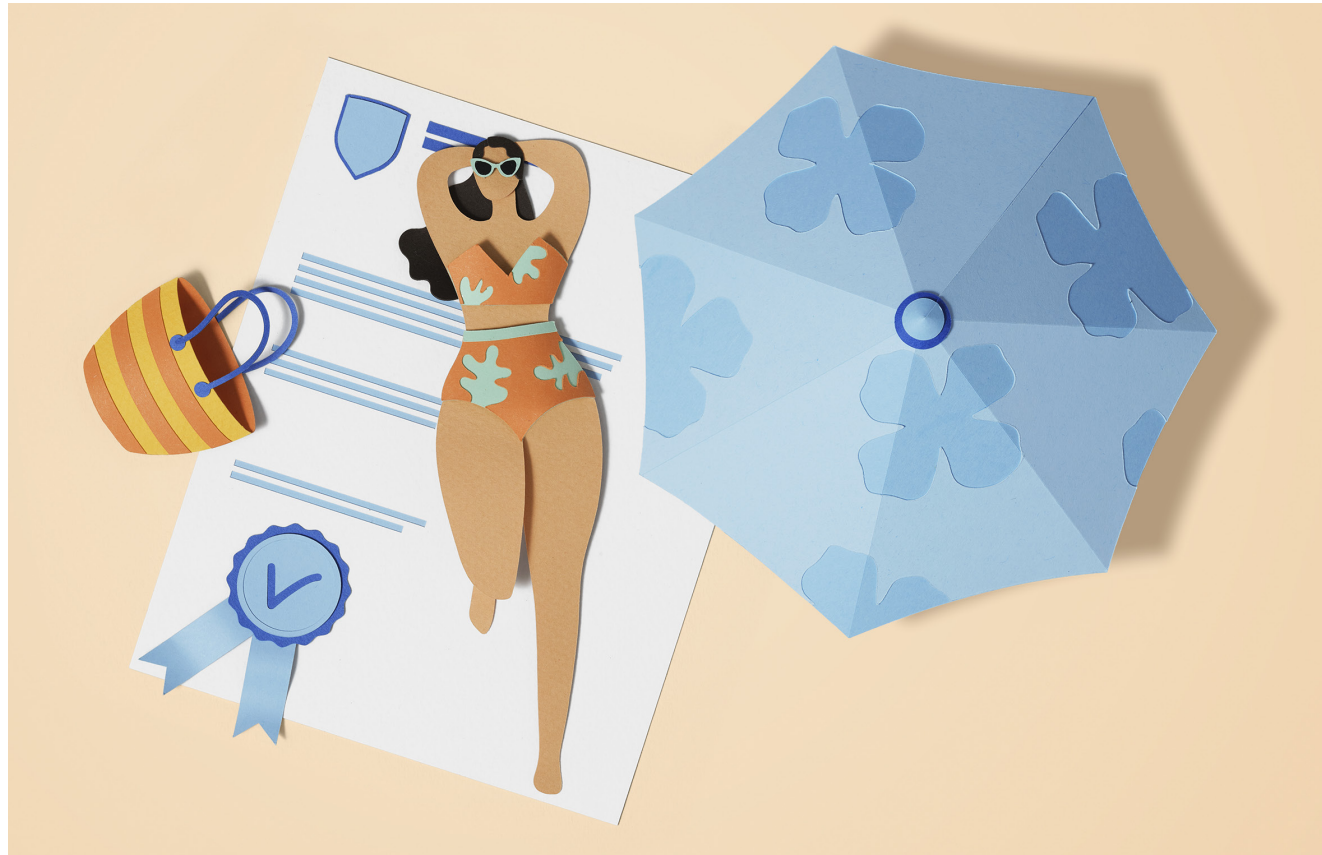
#### Front

**WHAT IT IS:** Maybe you're interested in buying individual stocks because you want more control and fewer fees, but you're intimidated by the amount of research and analysis required. Front is your answer. Connect your brokerage account, and the free app scans your holdings, analyzing and scoring the health of your portfolio. You can also chat with and follow other investors, and keep up with financial news.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** It makes stock-picking experts of us all. "It's pretty fantastic to think that this app can streamline technical information into a score that is manageable for the average person to make an investment decision," says judging team Talaat and Tai McNeely.







## INSURANCE

### Best for Taking the Confusion out of Health Care

#### Sidecar Health

**WHAT IT IS:** With this customizable health insurance plan, you pay directly for care at the time of service. You can see what other members have paid and what the plan will cover before you book your appointment. (Yes, you can go to any doctor you darn well please!) To get your reimbursement, simply upload a picture of your itemized bill to the site or app. There's no open enrollment period, so you can apply for or cancel coverage anytime. (Sidecar is available in 16 states, with plans to roll out to more.)

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Paying directly for care can save members 40 percent or more. While the cost of health care in the U.S. varies by state, it averages around \$495 per month. With Sidecar, it's about \$240. "I like the idea of letting you and your trusted physician come together to settle on a reasonable price and compensating your doctor on the spot," Sun says.

### Best for Getting Life Insurance in an Instant

#### Bestow

**WHAT IT IS:** Only 54 percent of Americans have life insurance, leaving a lot of spouses, aging parents, and children unprotected in an emergency. Bestow gets you a plan promptly—no medical

exam, no lengthy interviews, and no upsell. Answer a few questions, and the algorithm assesses your risk. Once approved, you'll see your actual premium (not a quote) and have the option to immediately buy a competitively priced policy backed by a top carrier. Case in point: The recent average rate for a 20-year, \$1 million term life insurance policy for a nonsmoking, 35-year-old woman in very good health was \$42.75 per month, according to the Policygenius Life Insurance Price Index. At Bestow, a similar policy might be only \$33.50.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** "Most of us know we need life insurance, but we're turned off by the price and process," Sun says. Bestow has made an annoying but necessary chore quicker and more affordable.

## REAL ESTATE

### Best for Easing the Stress of Buying a Home

#### Lower

**WHAT IT IS:** This direct-to-consumer lender is a one-stop shop for finding, financing, and insuring a home. It analyzes thousands of data points on similar closed loans and insurance quotes to get you the best rates. It even assists with saving by matching up to \$1,000.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Oh, the time you'll save. "Collecting data on all the various rates and options out there is a lot like finding the perfect partner—the process can be arduous," Thakor says. "Lower feels like a bespoke financial matchmaker in a sea of financial dating apps."

### Best for Reducing Down Payments and Closing Costs

#### Bank of America Real Estate Center

**WHAT IT IS:** That hefty down payment. Those sneaky closing costs. These two expenses can crush the dream of homeownership. Bank of America's Real Estate Center lets you find properties eligible for home-buyer grants, which could amount to \$17,500 you don't need to pay back.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** The platform's superpower: "The grants may cover the down payment and closing costs," Germano says.

#### I TRIED IT!

"I'm a real estate hobbyist and love to browse available homes. This site has a familiar interface with the addition

of even more specific filters, like max HOA fees and properties with a water view. I've witnessed many friends go through stressful home searches, and I think this tool will help others make informed decisions." —Stephanie Sisco, REAL SIMPLE home director

### Best for Generating Rental Income Without All the Stress

#### Doorvest

**WHAT IT IS:** Owning a rental property is a lot of work, particularly if you plan to buy and manage it yourself. Doorvest handles the annoying stuff, like finding the place, renovating, and connecting you with insurance, financing, and mortgage companies. It will even manage the property when it's up and running, guaranteeing rent payments for the first year. All this, of course, comes at a cost. The average rental home on Doorvest is \$150,000, with a down payment of \$30,000, and the company takes 10 percent of the monthly rental rate. But between equity, tax breaks, rental income, and property appreciation, you could earn \$12,000 the first year and \$122,000 in the first 10, according to Doorvest, all while barely lifting a finger. (Note: Doorvest is only in the Houston area but plans to expand next year.)

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** You get to manifest your inner real estate mogul. By taking over many of the complicated and time-consuming bits, Doorvest lets you sit back and build long-term wealth. It's passive income, with an emphasis on "passive."





## LIFE EVENTS

### Best for Caregivers Handling Loved Ones' Expenses

#### Carefull

**WHAT IT IS:** In the U.S., 53 million adults are caregivers, and many look after their loved ones' finances. Carefull eases this often unwieldy task by consolidating checking, savings, and credit card accounts and analyzing them for late or missed payments, mistakes, changes in spending, and unusual transactions. Should anything fishy arise, the caregiver and those in their designated circle are alerted via text and email.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** It's like a second set of eyes. Carefull got the highest ratings across the board from our judges, who described its ability to help with the family-and-finances tangle as "huge" and "super important." "I really like how you can keep other family members in the loop so it can be a team effort," Sun says.

### Best for Finally Getting Your Estate in Order

#### Gentreo

**WHAT IT IS:** If you haven't yet made end-of-life arrangements, you're not alone: 57 percent of U.S. adults don't have estate-planning documents, according to a Caring.com study. For one price, Gentreo creates comprehen-



sive, state-specific documents—wills, health care proxies, powers of attorney—and stores them in a secure digital vault easily accessed by you and your loved ones. If laws change, you get an alert.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Nothing says "adulting" quite like estate planning, which is why it's so easy to put off. "The simplicity of Gentreo nudges people in the right direction," says judge Erin Lowry.

### Best for Small-Business Owners

#### QuickBooks Cash

**WHAT IT IS:** This high-yield banking account with a debit card integrates seamlessly with other QuickBooks products, so business owners can do their banking, accounting, payroll, and more from one dashboard. It combines payments and spending, offers instant access to payment proceeds, and pays 1 percent interest on all balances.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** "Having your bank account on the same platform as your accounting makes sure nothing gets missed," Germano says.

### Best for Managing Business and Personal Finances in One Place

#### Oxygen

**WHAT IT IS:** For creators, entrepreneurs, and freelancers whose life and work converge, this no-fee, no-minimum digital banking platform offers personal and business accounts in a single app. The business account integrates with accounting tools, and the credit card offers cash back on everyday expenses, like gas. The app also helps owners create an LLC, which protects personal assets from business-related debt or lawsuits.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** "If you want to start your company quickly, this may be an easy way to get the banking up and running," Sun says. "Simplifying the LLC process is a great added value," Williams notes.

### Best for Getting Your Kid to See the Value of College

#### Discover My College Plan

**WHAT IT IS:** The average student leaves college more than \$30,000 in debt. So who can blame a family for wondering, "Is it worth it?" This interactive tool compares college costs and potential careers and salaries to determine your return on investment.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** One key component of the student loan crisis is the "lack of guidance in comparing outstanding loans with future income potential," Thakor says. "If that equation is off, you start school with a financial kettlebell tied to your foot." This tool provides insight into what you're really getting.

## SHOPPING

### Best for Debt-Free Purchases

#### Reel

**WHAT IT IS:** You could put that splurgy couch on a credit card, but if you don't pay off the balance right away, you'll end up forking over an average of 18 percent interest a month. A smarter option: Set up a Reel, a savings plan for a specific item—that couch, a new pair of jeans, anything. Fund it with automatic daily or weekly contributions from your bank account, and once you hit your target, the platform will place the order for you (after confirming you still want it). The Group Reel option lets multiple users pitch in, so it's great for families giving a joint gift.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Reel cultivates healthy financial habits while helping to eliminate buyer's remorse. "I like that it encourages saving for purchases rather than using credit," says judge Barbara Ginty.

### I TRIED IT!

"I've had my eye on these tortoiseshell sunglasses, and I created a Reel to help me save \$5 a day. I'm set to have enough to buy them in a little over a month. And I have the option to transfer the funds back to my bank at any time, should my lust for the shades wane." —Martha Upton, REAL SIMPLE associate editor

### Best for Building Wealth as You Buy

#### Bumped

**WHAT IT IS:** Score fractional stocks of companies you love simply by shopping. Set up a free brokerage account, link your credit card to the Bumped platform, select your favorite brands (such as Starbucks and Apple), and get a portion of the companies every time you spend. You can watch your portfolio grow or sell your stocks after they arrive in your Bumped account.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** Stock market newbies are often told to "buy what you know." This platform, which uses that concept, "is a great way to teach beginners about investing," Brown says. ■

### METHODOLOGY

TO CREATE THE SMART MONEY AWARDS, WE COMPILED A LIST OF FINANCIAL COMPANIES OFFERING PRODUCTS THAT DEBUTED (OR WERE UPDATED) BETWEEN JANUARY 2020 AND JUNE 2021. A PANEL OF 14 JUDGES RATED THE PRODUCTS ON INNOVATIVENESS AND RELEVANCE TO REAL SIMPLE READERS. ALL DETAILS WERE CORRECT AS OF PRESS TIME.

### JUDGES

**TANIA BROWN, CFP,**  
COACH AT SAVERLIFE

**CINDY COUYOUMJIAN, CFP,**  
FINANCIAL PLANNER AT  
CINERGY FINANCIAL

**MAGGIE GERMANO,** CERTIFIED  
FINANCIAL EDUCATION  
INSTRUCTOR AND HOST OF THE  
PODCAST *MONEY CIRCLE*

**BARBARA GINTY, CFP,** HOST OF  
THE PODCAST *FUTURE RICH*

**ERIN LOWRY,** AUTHOR OF  
THE THREE-PART BOOK SERIES  
*BROKE MILLENNIAL*

**TALAAAT AND TAI McNEELY,**  
MONEY AND MARRIAGE EXPERTS  
AND COHOSTS OF THE PODCAST  
*THE HIS AND HER MONEY SHOW*

**TAYLOR PRICE,** FOUNDER  
OF TAP INTUIT, A FINANCIAL  
EDUCATION PLATFORM

**BOLA SOKUNBI,** CERTIFIED  
FINANCIAL EDUCATION  
INSTRUCTOR AND AUTHOR OF  
*CLEVER GIRL FINANCE*

**WINNIE SUN,** FINANCIAL  
ADVISER, SPEAKER, AND  
FOUNDING PARTNER OF SUN  
GROUP WEALTH PARTNERS

**JULLY-ALMA TAVERAS,** FOUNDER  
OF THE FINANCIAL EDUCATION  
PLATFORM INVESTING LATINA

**MANISHA THAKOR, CFA, CFP,**  
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EDUCATION PLATFORM  
*MONEYZEN*

**JANNESE TORRES-RODRIGUEZ,**  
MONEY EXPERT AND HOST OF THE  
PODCAST *YO QUIERO DINERO*

**LAURYN WILLIAMS, CFP**  
FOUNDER OF WORTH WINNING,  
A FINANCIAL PLANNING FIRM

