

# 2026 Knowledge Bowl Guidelines

## Objective

The objective of the AFCPE® Knowledge Bowl is to promote the field of financial counseling and create a unique opportunity to involve university students in the AFCPE® Symposium. This annual event highlights the core competency domains of AFC® professionals and the important role that students play in the future of the financial counseling profession.

## Overview

The 2026 AFCPE Financial Counseling Knowledge Bowl will be held during the 2026 AFCPE Annual Research and Training Symposium November 17-19 in the D.C. metro area. Teams will compete in a gameshow-style competition. Questions presented are designed to be in a similar format to those found on the AFC exam, though they may not be identical. The team with the most points at the end of the competition will win first place, followed by subsequent teams in descending order of points to determine second place, and so forth.

## Eligibility

Full-time undergraduate or graduate students enrolled at an AFCPE Registered Education Program (REP) institution who meet the following criteria:

- have not yet taken the AFC exam
- have a strong interest in the field of personal finance, financial counseling, and the pursuit of the AFC certification
- have not previously participated in the AFCPE Knowledge Bowl competition

## Team Composition

- Teams may consist of up to four full-time students, all of whom are eligible to compete.
- If a team is unable to compete with four students at any stage of the competition, the remaining students must continue as a team.
- The team must be accompanied by a faculty or staff advisor.
- Only one team per institution is permitted

## Benefits

Benefits	Student	Advisor
AFCPE® Membership for 1 year	√	√
Registration for the AFCPE® Symposium	√	√
1-night stay at the Symposium hotel	√	√
Up to 45 experience hours towards the AFC	√	
Scholarship to obtain your AFC® (includes 1 exam attempt)	√	
Access to learning materials	√	√
\$500 cash prize for first-place winners	√	
2026 Knowledge Bowl Ambassador (KBA) title privileges for first-place winners	√	

KBA title privileges include but are not limited to recognition at the AFCPE Symposium, special mention on the AFCPE website, and opportunities to represent AFCPE throughout the year.

## Application Process

Submit a completed team application on or before, **April 30, 2026 (11:59 pm ET)**.

All applications must be submitted [online](#) and must include:

- Team Information
- Team Video
- Team Field Question
- Acknowledgement

### Team Information:

- Name, contact information, and headshot for each team member.
- Name, contact information, and headshot for the faculty/staff advisor.
- A copy of each team member's unofficial transcript.

## Team Video:

Submit a video with responses to the following:

- Introduction of each team member. Some ideas for introductions are:
  - Current degree program and projected graduation date.
  - How did you become interested in this area of study?
  - Describe future educational and/or career goals.
  - How is your passion for the field of financial counseling/planning/education visible to others?
  - What do you know now that you wish you had known when you started school?
  - Favorite personal finance topic or class taken in your degree program and why?
  - What current events or personal experiences have highlighted the importance of the financial counseling/education profession?
  - Why does your team want to compete in the Knowledge Bowl?
  - How did you hear about the AFC designation?
  - When do you plan to sit for the AFC exam?
  - How will the AFC benefit your career and those you serve?

## Video Guidelines:

- The video may be up to 10 minutes long.
- Please ensure the sound is clear and avoid the use of programs that run promotional banners that may distract reviewers from your video.
- Videos must be submitted in a format that all selection committee members can readily view without needing specialized software.
- Please house large, media-rich files on a server and provide a web link in the application.
- The team advisor may consult with their team on the video and provide support, however the work should be done by the students.
- **Note:** Clips from the videos may be shown at the AFCPE Symposium or other social platforms, so show your school spirit and have fun with it! (Release provided within application process)

## Team Field Question Rules/Guidelines:

- Each team must choose **one** of the following scenarios and submit **one** group response to the Field Question.
- Responses to the Field Question should be the exclusive work of the students.
- Students should not seek or accept help from their faculty/staff advisor, professors, professionals in the field, other students not on the team, or other third parties in preparing the response to the Field Question.
- Please submit the team response in a Word document, double-spaced. In 500 words or less share how you would counsel the client. Be sure to include at least **three** financial counseling skills, resources, and/or information you will use the process.

## Field Question Options:

### Option 1

Carlos and Elena Martinez come to see you because they are overwhelmed and discouraged about their finances. They believe they “should be fine” based on their income, but they don’t feel financially secure and they can’t easily explain where the money is going.

Carlos (34) recently accepted a new job in corporate finance and relocated the family to the Northeast U.S. His total annual cash compensation is \$155,000, including a \$125,000 base salary, with the remainder coming from bonus and long-term incentives. He is paid biweekly, and the timing/amount of his bonus is variable based on company and individual performance metrics.

Elena (35) stepped away from paid work after their third child was born. Her income had been strong, but less than Carlos’s, and the combined cost of childcare for three children under five and the emotional weight of placing them in care led both parents to decide she would stay home for now. Their children are Sofia (4), Mateo (2), and Isabella (3 months).

After the move, they bought a home they believed would be within their means but have been shocked by Northeast cost-of-living realities. Their property taxes are high,

and winter heating costs have added a monthly expense they didn't anticipate. Some moving and "setting up the house" costs were charged during the transition and are still affecting their monthly cash flow.

Medical bills are also continuing to arrive from Isabella's birth. During open enrollment after the move, Carlos selected a high-deductible health plan, not anticipating a third child so soon. They have multiple provider bills arriving at different times with different due dates, and they feel overwhelmed by the paperwork—so they've been paying some bills "when they can" and delaying others while they try to sort out everything.

The biggest issue, they feel, is tracking their spending while attempting to get caught up on medical and credit card bills and adjusting the size of their new family. Elena has been ordering frequently from Amazon to catch up on needs for the growing family (diapers, baby supplies, kids' clothes, household items, and organization/storage). They have been using multiple cards, sometimes for points, sometimes out of convenience and rarely look at transactions in real time. Small purchases feel harmless until they sit down to open the stacks of paper statements and bills that have accumulated at the corner of the kitchen counter which they find themselves often avoiding.

They've expressed rising stress and occasional arguments about "little purchases," but both agree the real problem is that they don't have a shared system. Elena feels ashamed and defensive about spending; Carlos feels anxious and frustrated that they "make too much money to feel like this. "Their savings is low after the move and the baby, so they feel "one surprise away" from trouble with growing worries about the future, too.

They tell you: "We thought this income would feel stable. It doesn't. We need a plan, but we don't even know where to start."

How might you support the Martinez family during this time of transition and overwhelm?

## Option 2

Miguel and Sandy have always considered themselves careful planners. Miguel has worked as a carpenter for over 20 years and takes great pride in his craftsmanship. Sandy is a public school teacher who loves her job and the stability it provides for their family. They live in a small home they purchased early in their marriage and had recently begun discussing two big goals: buying a larger home and adopting two children.

Six months ago, Miguel suffered a serious back injury on the job. After surgery and rehabilitation, his doctors determined he could no longer return to carpentry. He is receiving disability insurance benefits, but they replace only a portion of his income. While most medical costs were covered with the help of workers' compensation, ongoing expenses and reduced earnings have begun to erode their savings. Miguel is struggling emotionally with the loss of his career and feels pressure to get a new job soon that is less physically demanding. His employer mentioned possible retraining benefits, but additional schooling would take time and may involve tuition costs and uncertainty about future earnings.

Sandy's work benefits include generous paid time off, low-cost family health insurance, and a retirement pension plan. However, her salary alone cannot support all their goals. They have some savings, good credit, and manageable debt, but the recent setbacks have slowed their progress significantly. They are unsure whether purchasing a larger home is realistic now, yet they still desire to expand their family through adoption. They have begun researching adoption agencies and understand there will be substantial upfront costs, as well as ongoing childcare and other expenses associated with raising two children.

They arrive at your office feeling anxious but determined. They want guidance on managing cash flow during this transition, evaluating the financial impact of retraining, determining whether a larger home is realistic, and deciding how adoption fits into their revised financial picture. How can you help Miguel and Sandy?

## Selection Process

- Applications will be reviewed by AFCPE members who have no affiliation with any of the university teams submitting for the competition.
- Both video and field question responses will be evaluated and scored on a 1-4 point scale using the criteria below.
- Please note: the content/message of the video is more important than professional quality.

## Video Review Criteria

### 1. Clarity

- The video should have clear visuals, professional attire, and good audio quality. The final result should show good quality and that it was crafted with care.

### 2. Importance of the AFC®

- Teams should clearly explain the significance of the AFC® designation and its impact on their career goals.

### 3. Relevance

- The video should cover:
  - Introduction of each team member.
  - Why the team wants to compete in the Knowledge Bowl.
  - How the AFC® designation benefits their career and the people they serve.

### 4. Connection to AFCPE®

- The video should show how the team aligns with the mission, values, and goals of AFCPE®.

### 5. Creativity

- The video should be engaging and stand out in its presentation.

### 6. Perceived Opportunity

- The video should reflect a genuine interest in competing in the Knowledge Bowl and how the AFC® certification supports long-term career goals.

## Field Question Criteria

1. **Accuracy**
  - The response should accurately reflect financial counseling principles and align with industry standards.
2. **Holistic Approach**
  - The response should take into account the client's financial situation, considering both short-term and long-term goals to create a well-rounded comprehensive plan.
3. **Awareness of Financial Issues**
  - The response should demonstrate a strong understanding of the relevant financial challenges and the broader factors that may impact the client.
4. **Critical Thinking**
  - The response should show thoughtful analysis, evaluating various strategies and their potential outcomes.
5. **Quality of Solution**
  - The response should present practical, well-considered solutions that are tailored to the client's unique needs.
6. **Creativity**
  - The response should suggest innovative, practical, and effective solutions to address the client's financial challenges.

Selected teams will be notified on **June 4, 2026**, via email.

## Questions:

Questions about the Knowledge Bowl or the Knowledge Bowl application process may be directed to [education@afcpe.org](mailto:education@afcpe.org) or at (614) 368-1055.