CASE STUDY

Instant Payments Give Suncoast Credit Union Members Faster Access to Their Money

Suncoast Credit Union

Corporate One

Suncoast Credit Union's decision to join the RTP® network, the instant payments rail run by The Clearing House, was not driven by a desire to be first to market or to chase payments innovation for its own sake. Instead, it was rooted in a clear understanding of member needs and a pragmatic view of risk, operations, and long-term value. As Brandie Forrester, Director of Payment Operations at Suncoast, described it on The Payments Nerds® podcast, providing instant payments to members proved to be less about theoretical benefits and more about immediate, real-world impact. As it turns out, joining the instant payments revolution provided benefits to the organization that were not fully anticipated at the outset.

From the beginning of the instant payments project, Suncoast viewed the RTP network and its capabilities through the lens of financial inclusion. Serving a large population of underserved members across Florida, the credit union recognized that faster access to money can materially affect daily life. With many members working hourly shifts or participating in the gig economy, they often need money immediately to cover essentials like gas, groceries, and utilities. As Forrester explained, many members "who work a shift may need to put gas in their car just to get to work the next day." Instant payments over the RTP network offers a way to close that gap by delivering funds in seconds rather than days.

Despite this clear mission alignment between Suncoast's priorities and the capabilities of the RTP network, fraud concerns initially slowed internal momentum. Like many financial institutions, Suncoast thought speed meant higher fraud risk. Experience quickly challenged that assumption. The credit union found that fraud risk did not increase just because of instant clearing and settlement. Like other payment types, fraud risk was primarily driven by improper account access or account takeovers. With multifactor authentication required to initiate a payment, along with clear rules on the receive side for payment acceptance and rejection —particularly by blocking RTP credits to accounts that were flagged for elevated risk—Suncoast was able to manage fraud exposure effectively. Over time, the data spoke for itself: more than 96% of RTP transactions were completed, and most rejections were tied to members entering incorrect account numbers, not fraud.

Easy Onboading

The implementation of instant payments capabilities for Suncoast's members further reinforced how manageable RTP adoption could be. Suncoast had estimated that connecting directly to the RTP network might take more than a year. Instead, Suncoast worked with Corporate One Federal Credit Union, a corporate credit union that provides investment, funding, and payment solutions, and Suncoast was live on the RTP network in roughly three months. For Forrester, who has led dozens of payments initiatives over her career, the experience stood out. The most significant effort involved ensuring 24/7 core availability and thoroughly testing accept and reject scenarios, rather than complex development work.

The positive impact of offering instant payments to members was immediate. Suncoast received its first RTP credit within 33 seconds of activation, and volume continued to build from there. In the first month alone, the credit union processed more than 30,000 RTP transactions totaling $11 million, Forrester said. Perhaps more importantly, this volume appeared to supplement ACH and wire traffic. In particular, the RTP network seemed to unlock new payment flows from digital wallets, investment platforms, and online gaming payouts. For Suncoast, the RTP network was not merely replacing an existing payment rail, it was expanding how and when money entered the institution and how quickly members could access their money.

Equally significant was when those payments occurred. A substantial portion of RTP activity took place outside traditional banking hours, including late nights, weekends, and holidays, when other types of electronic bank payments are not available. This always-on availability proved to be just as valuable as instant settlement. Members could receive funds when life demanded it, whether that meant accessing money after a late shift, shopping on a weekend, or receiving payments while traveling. Connecting to the RTP network allowed Suncoast to align money movement with modern consumer expectations that are now shaped by real-time digital experiences.

Some of the most revealing lessons emerged only after the credit union was live on the RTP network. Suncoast discovered that members who were moving money from digital wallets to checking accounts, occasionally directed RTP credits to previously charged-off (closed) accounts after failing to update wallet-linked bank information. These transactions allowed the credit union to recover losses and, in some cases, return surplus funds to members once balances were satisfied. While unintended, this outcome highlighted the RTP network's potential role in collections and recovery, an application that Suncoast did not consider during initial planning.

Growing Gradually

Rather than rushing to expand instant payments broadly, Suncoast chose a steady and deliberate path forward. The credit union started with receive-only functionality, which allowed the organization to build confidence in the system, observe member behavior, and generate immediate value without introducing outbound payment risk. Send functionality will be rolled out gradually, with each use case assessed independently, ensuring growth aligns with operational readiness and risk appetite.

Suncoast's experience offers a clear lesson for other credit unions: RTP adoption does not require an all-or-nothing leap. Institutions can enter the network thoughtfully, learn quickly, and expand intentionally. In doing so, instant payments become not just a faster rail, but a strategic capability that strengthens member relationships and supports long-term growth.

> *"I've been on over 20 to 30 payment projects, and this was the easiest one that I've ever been part of."*
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> *- Director of Payment Operations Brandie Forrester*