

How Atlas Scaled Inclusive Credit with Academy Bank as a Strategic Partner

Challenge

Atlas needed a banking partner who could support a complex, high-volume secured credit platform while meeting strict regulatory requirements.

Solution

Academy Bank delivered deep expertise in consumer compliance and infrastructure—guiding Atlas through onboarding, risk controls, and scalable systems.

Results

With Academy Bank's support, Atlas scaled quickly, improved user engagement, and built a platform ready for long-term growth.

Credit cards are among the **most common financial products** in the United States, yet a large portion of the population struggles to access them. Of the approximately 150 million people who apply for credit cards each year, roughly 90 million—**about 60% are declined**.¹ The reasons vary, but the result is the same: millions of people are locked out of mainstream credit and the financial opportunities that come with it.

Atlas was created to change that.

Founded in early 2022, [Atlas](#) is a fintech company building a more inclusive, consumer-grade credit experience—one designed to meet people *where they are*, not where the traditional credit system *thinks* they should be.

Rather than rejecting applicants with limited or poor credit histories, Atlas approves them for small, initial credit lines and increases those to up to \$500 of unsecured credit over time based on usage and behavior. The product also allows users to make a deposit into a secured deposit account for access to a higher, partially secured limit. These features

are part of Atlas's broader vision to build a dollar optimization platform that helps members save 5% of their annual income.

The demand for a more accessible credit solution was clear, but bringing a product like Atlas to market wasn't easy. Like many fintech startups, the team faced a steep climb:

- A highly regulated industry, where compliance and risk management are non-negotiable
- An industry-wide pullback in fintech investment, which pushed many startups—including Atlas—to prioritize capital efficiency from day one
- The need for the right banking partner, one who could balance innovation with stability and bring real experience navigating consumer compliance

SOLUTION

Building a Scalable Banking Partnership

Atlas initially went to market by layering together various providers to enable wallets, payments, and card issuance. But as the product gained traction, the team needed a strong relationship with a financial institution to support long-term growth.

That partner was [Academy Bank](#).

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We needed a deeper partnership directly with a bank to really scale this up... We were looking for a long term, stable partner that understands the space and is committed, and we found all of that in Academy Bank. Our goal has always been a strong 10+ year partnership and we're looking forward to many more years of working together, and growing together.

- Zane Salim

CEO and Co-Founder, Atlas



Academy Bank played a direct role in helping Atlas prepare for growth. The bank's strengths aligned with Atlas's top priorities: a commitment to fintech partnerships, deep experience in consumer compliance, and a strong regulatory foundation. Academy Bank helped establish the processes needed to manage BSA reviews, oversee compliance, and put effective risk controls in place as Atlas scaled.

The partnership also supported product features aimed at increasing access. Together, the teams developed workflows to support Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) onboarding and a Spanish-language version of the product—both designed to reach underserved segments of the market. These efforts required close coordination to ensure each feature met both product and compliance standards *without* slowing down deployment.

As Atlas matured, Academy Bank's role expanded beyond product-level input to include the infrastructure needed to support long-term growth. The bank helped navigate the operational demands of scaling a complex credit platform—providing oversight, advising on risk and compliance structures, and helping shape the systems behind the scenes. That included working through requirements like multiple types of payment processing, which supported high levels of transaction volume. With that foundation in place, Atlas was positioned to move faster, serve more clients, and grow with confidence.

RESULTS

Growth, Retention, and Readiness to Scale

The partnership between Atlas and Academy Bank helped transform a promising early product into a growing financial platform with measurable traction and operational discipline.

Subscriber Growth

Between April 2024 and May 2025, Atlas nearly tripled its subscriber base. This growth reflected rising demand from consumers and the company's ability to bring new users into the product effectively at scale.

Stronger Retention and User Activity

Client engagement improved alongside growth. During the same period, both twelve-month retention, and the share of users regularly using their cards increased nearly 30%. In other words, the product strengthened as the client base grew.

Scalable Daily Operations

Atlas built a fast-moving operating model with regular meetings across support, risk, and product to stay close to what was working—and where issues were emerging. This structure enabled the team to monitor key trends, adjust quickly, and keep pace with growth. That same level of discipline carried into the relationship with Academy Bank, which remained actively involved in compliance oversight and product performance as Atlas scaled.

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Our approach has been to invest alongside the businesses and partners, which has allowed us to build a strong foundation for scale. As we expand and bring in new partners, we're evaluating the technologies and processes we'll need. This will support growth while we continue to deliver at a high level.

- David Robinson

Director of Fintech & Embedded Banking, Academy Bank



More Than a Bank: Your Fintech Partner

Atlas has already made meaningful progress toward expanding access to credit—and the partnership with Academy Bank has helped make that possible. Together, the teams built a strong foundation that balances innovation with regulatory clarity, enabling Atlas to grow quickly while serving clients who have traditionally been overlooked by the financial system.



I think the best way to scale this for consumers is through long-term partnerships. I love the partnership with Academy because they understand our consumers, they understand our product, and they bring very thoughtful risk management."

- Zane Salim

CEO and Co-Founder, Atlas



A Partnership That Proves What's Possible in the Future of Fintech

For Academy Bank, the engagement with Atlas demonstrated what's possible when a fintech partner brings bold ideas and a bank brings deep operational and compliance expertise.

From navigating complex onboarding requirements to supporting high-volume payment processing and customized infrastructure, Academy proved its ability to meet the demands of a fast-growing, first-of-its-kind program. And most importantly, it showed that Academy Bank is ready—and built—to support the next wave of fintech innovation.

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About Atlas and Academy Bank

Atlas

[Atlas](#) is an accessible rewards credit card and automation platform that helps people save more with less effort. By starting users with low limits and growing trust over time, Atlas delivers a modern credit experience that puts inclusion, automation, and transparency at the core.

Academy Bank

[Academy Bank](#) is a full-service commercial bank with \$2.9 billion in assets and more than 75 banking centers in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Arkansas and Missouri. Academy Bank provides a wide range of financial solutions for business and individuals, including commercial and business banking, treasury management and mortgage services. Academy Bank is privately held and family-owned by Dickinson Financial Corporation, a \$4.4 billion holding company headquartered in downtown Kansas City, Missouri. Academy Bank's sister bank, Armed Forces Bank, headquartered in Leavenworth, Kansas, proudly serves active and retired military and civilian clients around the world with more on-base locations than any military bank in the country. For more information, visit www.academybank.com.