



Outreach Strategies

You don't have to be a tax expert to help working families learn about and claim the Earned Income Credit and the Child Tax Credit!

Community organizations, social services providers, government agencies, faith-based groups, schools, labor unions, employers, advocacy groups and others all can play a vital role in bringing these tax benefits within reach of working families and individuals. Whether your goal is to incorporate tax credit outreach into your routine activities or to launch a full-fledged community-wide campaign, you will find what you need here.

As you develop and enrich your Tax Credit Outreach Campaign, you may be looking for ideas that will help you engage new partners in outreach activities, or for strategies that will help you conduct effective outreach activities in particular communities. The material in this booklet will help you with either approach.

Each section of this guide focuses on a potential outreach partner or a community in which there is likely to be a need for outreach. For each of these, you will find suggested outreach strategies, as well as examples of activities being implemented by organizations like yours across the country. In addition, you will find the answers to commonly asked questions about the tax credits and notes about much more information available on our website, www.cbpp.org/eic2008.

As you consider new ideas for outreach, spend some time exploring the companion booklet in this kit, ***Your Tax Credit Outreach Campaign: What You Need to Know***. It describes “Six Key Elements of a Successful Outreach Campaign” and can help you in planning your activities and building a campaign that continues past the tax filing season and into the future.

What's Inside?

Conducting Tax Credit Outreach with:

Public Benefit Programs	4
Businesses and Employers	6
Schools	8
Immigrants and Workers Whose First Language is Not English	10
Workers with Disabilities and Families Raising Children with Disabilities	12
Workers Not Living with Children	14
Workers Who Are Homeless	16
Rural Communities	18
Foster Parents, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Other Relative Caregivers	20
Tribal and Native Communities	22
Military Personnel and their Families	24
Faith-Based Institutions and Organizations	26
Strategies for Promoting Free Tax Filing Assistance	28
Share Your Outreach Story	32



Public Benefit Programs

Many state and local government agencies that administer public benefits such as Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), food stamps or subsidized child care, have ongoing contact with families and individuals who work and also receive public benefits. Enlisting such agencies in tax credit outreach is an effective way to reach large numbers of eligible workers on a regular basis.

Organizations engaged in outreach activities aimed at boosting enrollment in specific benefit programs like Medicaid and SCHIP are natural partners and can be encouraged to inform families about tax credits as well. Similarly, Tax Credit Outreach Campaigns can alert families to the opportunity to obtain other benefits that may be critical to the health and well-being of their families.



Right from the Start
Medicaid (RSM) a
health coverage outreach

project of the state of Georgia, has teams of Medicaid eligibility workers based in community locations throughout the state. Their main job is to identify pregnant women and children who are eligible for Medicaid and enroll them in health insurance. RSM workers are now also informing families about the EIC and CTC at job fairs, school and community health fairs, recreational events, and retail stores. RSM staff also provides information on tax credits at Department of Labor "one-stop career centers" that offer various employment-related services, such as career counseling and job training information.

*Contact: Ken Duke, RSM Project Director,
(404)657-4086 or kn Duke1@dhr.state.ga.us.*

Strategies

- Work with state or county program administrators to arrange for information about tax credits for low-wage workers to be included in regular mailings to families and individuals receiving public benefits. Include a flyer or envelope stuffer with benefit checks, WIC coupons, program renewal notices, waiting list information, rent notices in public housing, or other mailings.
- Train eligibility workers to inform families seeking public benefits about the tax credits and free tax filing assistance. They can assure families that claiming the tax credits generally does not affect their eligibility for benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid or subsidized housing.
- Reach out to workers who previously earned too much to qualify for the EIC or the CTC and may now be eligible. They may have been laid off or had their work hours reduced. Connect with them through unemployment offices, job training programs and government assistance programs.
- Contact your local Workforce Investment Board, which is required to secure contracts to provide job readiness, job placement and post-employment services to TANF recipients entering the labor force. Caseworkers can ensure their clients know about the tax credits and how to claim them — an important step in making a successful transition into the workforce. Encourage local boards to require companies receiving employment services contracts to provide workers with tax credit information.

- Include information about tax credits in electronic benefit screening programs. States and nonprofit groups have been developing electronic programs which screen families for benefits, including Medicaid, SCHIP, LIHEAP (energy assistance) and WIC, and let them know they may qualify. Work with program designers to incorporate information about tax credits and free tax filing assistance. One benefit screener called RealBenefits, developed by Community Catalyst in Boston, can be tailored to screen families for EIC eligibility and to indicate how large a refund they may be able to get. *Contact: Enrique Balaguer, Community Catalyst, (617) 275-2804.*
- Connect with outreach workers who promote a variety of benefit programs. Provide them with tax credit information to share when they are signing families up for health coverage, food assistance or child care. Also, invite them to participate in tax credit outreach events and to be on hand at tax assistance sites.

FACT:

39.8 percent of food stamp recipients and a large share of families receiving subsidized child care are working families.

Glad You Asked That!

Q: Many people work and also get cash assistance. Can they still claim the EIC or the CTC?

A: Yes. As long as they earn wages and meet the income and other eligibility requirements. These workers may use the Advance EIC payment option, if they wish.

Q: Will getting the EIC or the CTC lower the amount of other public benefits? Could someone lose benefits altogether?

A: Generally, no. The EIC and the CTC are not counted as income for Medicaid, food stamps, SSI or federally assisted housing programs. However, the EIC and the CTC can count as a resource (also called an asset) in determining eligibility for some benefits. Often, if the beneficiary has few or no other resources, saving part of a tax credit refund does not cause the person to exceed the resource limit for a benefit program. Rules about whether the tax credits count against a program's resource limit vary by program.



Find It On the Web

Tips for offering help with public benefits at a VITA site

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

More Questions and Answers on Tax Credits and Public Benefit Programs

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Businesses and Employers

Since the EIC and the CTC are tax benefits for people who work, employers are logical and important partners in any campaign. Partnering with local businesses that cater to low- and moderate-income consumers can reach customers, as well as employees. Government agencies and nonprofit groups are employers too. Their workers often earn modest wages and could qualify for the credits.



Working with
corporate Human
Resources Departments,

Progress Through Business (Progress), which has an office in Madison, Wisconsin, has successfully coordinated workplace tax preparation efforts with numerous companies. For example, they are currently working with 18 facilities (mostly distribution centers) at Staples, the office supply company. Progress arranges to make available trained tax preparers to complete tax returns before, during and after the workday. Extended break periods or other accommodations are made so that tax filing won't conflict with work productivity. Progress also helps connect employees to bank accounts and their company retirement plans. Progress can help Outreach Campaigns contact businesses anywhere in the country.

Contact: Dr. John Hoffmire, Progress Through Business (608) 345-5111, or hoffmire@wisc.edu.

Strategies

- Interest local businesses in conducting tax credit outreach by stressing that they have a stake in boosting EIC and CTC participation: Promoting the credits helps stabilize the workforce. When employees have the money they need to get to work, pay for child care and address their families' day-to-day needs, they are more likely to keep their jobs. Tax credits mean more money in the pockets of community residents. Customers are better able to pay their bills. Community leaders can think of the credits as an economic development tool.
- Enlist a business organization to deliver the message about the importance of the tax credits. Gaining the support of the Chamber of Commerce, merchants' associations, trade groups or other business organizations will give your campaign credibility with employers and will provide a link to large networks of businesses.
- Persuade local businesses to use tax credit promotional materials. Stores can display posters and flyers. Family restaurants can print tax credit messages on tray liners or placemats. Department stores can play announcements on in-store public address systems. Utility companies can include tax credit information with their monthly bills.
- Show employers effective ways to inform employees about the tax credits. Incorporate tax credit information with employee paychecks, December through March. Display posters and flyers where employees check in at the beginning and end of each day, and in the employee lounge or lunchroom. Publish an article about the tax credits in employee newsletters. One large government employer ran an EIC message as a computer screensaver. Another placed an EIC reminder on the telephone recording that plays when a caller is "on hold." Another business made EIC information available through its employee "resource line," an internal hotline employees can call for information about company benefits and other services.

- Encourage employers to inform workers about the Advance EIC payment option and make it easy for them to obtain and complete IRS Form W-5 to start Advance EIC payments.
- Train managers to deliver information about the EIC and the CTC to employees they supervise and to new hires. Include tax credit information in employee manuals.
- Direct employees to free tax filing sites. Employers with many low-wage employees can provide a list of nearby VITA sites or they can arrange to have VITA volunteers visit the worksite to help employees file their tax returns.

Glad You Asked That!

Q:

How do employers give their workers Advance EIC payments?

A:

Employers provide their employees the Form W-5. Instructions for processing Advance EIC payments are contained in the Advance EIC chapter of IRS Publication 15, Circular E, Employer's Tax Guide. The Employer's Tax Guide also contains Advance EIC tables employers can use to easily determine the amount to add to an employee's paycheck. ***Employers can order free copies of the Employer's Tax Guide and the Form W-5 for 2008 from the IRS by calling 1-800-TAX-FORM, or they can be downloaded from the IRS website at www.irs.gov/formspubs.***



Find It On the Web

**More Outreach Strategies and Examples
Fact Sheet on Advance EIC Payments**

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Working with schools offers many opportunities to reach families that may qualify for the tax credits. Schools are usually viewed as trustworthy institutions and families pay attention to information children bring home from school. School administrators are often willing to help with tax credit outreach efforts since they know that a secure home environment promotes school achievement. Many have recognized the value of the EIC and the CTC in contributing to family stability.



Tax Help New Mexico (THNM) is a statewide coalition of 40 partners, including 24 educational institutions. THNM created a web-based training module to help schools offer basic tax law and preparation courses so that students can learn how to prepare tax returns. When students complete the class and pass the IRS certification exam, they can volunteer as tax preparers at their school's VITA sites to receive course credit. In 2007, nearly 200 students helped over 26,500 tax filers claim more than \$20 million in EIC and CTC refunds through 36 VITA sites in 19 cities.

Contact: *Diana Matier, THNM, (505) 224-5242, or dmatier@cnm.edu.*

Strategies

- Ask school officials to share tax credit information with families who are likely to qualify. Focus on schools in which many students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, or Title I schools, which serve elementary school children in low-income communities. Your state Department of Education can tell you which school districts have these programs. Enlist school superintendents or individual principals to distribute information along with notices of eligibility for school meals or with other materials such as school newsletters, report cards and lunch menus.
- Recommend that your state PTA provide information on the EIC and the CTC to all local PTA presidents and encourage them to share the information with families through mailings and community assemblies. Offer to arrange for a speaker to talk about tax credits for working families at an upcoming PTA meeting.
- Make sure school counselors know about the EIC and the CTC and where families can get free tax assistance. These school employees frequently come into contact with families in financial crisis.
- Ask administrators to provide tax credit information to General Education Diploma (GED) classes and to send information with GED certificates.
- Engage community colleges and technical schools in outreach. Students who have returned to school to improve their job skills and are working part-time or at low wages may be eligible for the EIC and the CTC. Others who are taking non-credit courses to learn about personal finance issues, such as homeownership, also may be eligible.

- Involve students in conducting outreach in the community. Many schools have incorporated community service activities into the curriculum. Students can help publicize the EIC and the CTC and assist at VITA sites. Fraternities and sororities, as well as other student associations, can take on tax credit outreach projects.

Glad You Asked That!

Q:

Can a working family claim a child for the EIC if she is a college student living at school?

A:

Full-time students up to 24 years of age can be qualifying children for the EIC. If the student lives away from home to attend school, it is considered a “temporary absence” and the student still can count as a qualifying child.

Q:

If a student gets financial aid, can his family still get the EIC or the CTC?

A:

Non-taxable scholarships and grants are not considered income in determining eligibility for the EIC and the CTC; taxable grants and scholarships also are not considered “earned income,” but are included in determining “adjusted gross income,” which may affect eligibility for the EIC and the CTC. Check with IRS at 1-800-829-1040 to find out which scholarships and grants are taxable or non-taxable.

Q:

If a family gets the tax credits, will it mean the student won’t qualify for financial aid?

A:

The EIC is counted as family income in determining financial aid eligibility, but CTC refunds are not. However, that doesn’t mean the EIC will prevent the student from getting financial aid since adding the amount of the credit to other income often will not cause the family to exceed the income limit for financial aid.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

More Questions and Answers on Tax Credits and Student Financial Aid

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Immigrants and Workers Whose First Language is Not English

Workers who are not proficient in English often earn low incomes and may not understand that they can qualify for the EIC and the CTC. It is especially important for outreach messages to emphasize that immigrants who are legally authorized to work and have Social Security numbers (SSNs) may be eligible for the EIC, and that families may qualify for the CTC even if all family members do not yet have SSNs. Conducting outreach only in English will miss eligible workers who can greatly benefit from this information and assistance.



The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a refugee

resettlement agency with offices in 25 U.S. cities. Its Atlanta office, which serves over 1,500 refugees and asylees each year, partners with banks and community organizations to provide financial education. In 2007, IRC held four workshops to help clients get ready to have their taxes prepared. The workshops presented information on the EIC and CTC, the tax filing process and what to do before going to a free tax preparation site. Members of IRC's staff, who speak 25 languages, escorted clients to VITA sites to provide interpretation services.

Contact: Harriet Kuhr, IRC, (404) 292-7731 x 28 or Harriet.Kuhr@theirc.org.

Strategies

- Use bilingual materials. This kit includes flyers, posters and envelope stuffers in English and Spanish. Flyers in 19 additional languages also are available on our website at www.cbpp.org/eic2008.
- Dispatch bilingual staff or volunteers to explain the tax credits and answer questions at presentations to community groups or in one-to-one conversations. Immigrant workers may have trouble understanding complex tax rules or they might have been denied other public benefits, such as food stamps or Medicaid, in the past and might assume they do not qualify for tax benefits. Immigrants may incorrectly believe that claiming tax benefits could jeopardize their immigration status or their ability to become a citizen.
- Provide information about the EIC and the CTC through Newcomers Clubs, settlement houses, immigrant aid associations and legal services. Organizations such as Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Services and Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA) provide helpful services to refugees. *To find the MAA in your state, call the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center at (202) 667-4690 or visit www.searac.org*
- Partner with organizations that are likely to have bilingual and bicultural staff, including educational and social programs sponsored by churches, mosques or synagogues. Encourage schools to provide bilingual material about the tax credits, and work with English as a Second Language (ESL) programs or migrant education coordinators. Community events, such as health fairs, educational programs, job fairs, or holiday festivals also present outreach opportunities.
- Enlist businesses in immigrant communities, such as ethnic grocery stores or restaurants, barber shops or nail salons. They are important places to display posters and flyers and to talk directly to customers.

- Promote multi-lingual free tax help in the community. Immigrant workers and workers who have limited English proficiency may be especially vulnerable to ill-trained or dishonest commercial preparers. To provide an alternative, encourage trusted institutions in the community to establish VITA sites and recruit VITA volunteers. When advertising VITA sites, indicate which sites provide services in languages other than English.
- Work with non-English language media. Many non-English-speaking communities have their own radio and TV programs and newspapers. Encourage news coverage, run ads, write articles and develop public service spots on the tax credits. Identify the best times for broadcasting. For example, farm workers may listen to the radio in the pre-dawn hours before beginning work in the fields. *For information on Spanish language media, contact National Council of La Raza at (202) 785-1670. For other non-English media by language or ethnicity, visit New America Media at news.newamericamedia.org/directory. Note: Membership is required to access some features.*

FACT:

According to the 2000 Census, nearly 47 million people—about one in five U.S. residents—reported speaking a language other than English regularly at home.

Glad You Asked That!

Q:

Can immigrant workers get the EIC?

A:

Many immigrants who are legally authorized to work can get the EIC. The immigrant worker, his or her spouse, and children listed on the Schedule EIC must each have a valid Social Security number that permits work in the U.S. The “qualifying children” must have lived with the worker in the U.S. for more than six months of the year. Also, the worker’s main home must be in the U.S.

Q:

Can immigrant workers get the CTC?

A:

If they qualify, immigrant workers can get the the CTC if they or their qualifying children have either a valid SSN (including a non-work SSN) or an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). The child must be a U.S. citizen or resident alien who lives in the U.S.



Find It On the Web

Tax credit flyers in 19 languages other than English and Spanish
More Outreach Strategies and Examples
More Questions and Answers on Tax Credits and Immigrant Workers
Information on Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs)
www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Workers with Disabilities and Families Raising Children with Disabilities

Low-wage workers with disabilities and families that are raising children with disabilities face profound challenges. Finding transportation to and from the job may be costly and difficult to arrange. Out-of-pocket health care expenses may be higher than for other families. Securing child or adult day care for a family member with special needs may pose a financial burden. For these reasons, the income boost that the EIC and the CTC provide can be vital. Outreach efforts can inform families that special rules may help them qualify if they work and have a severe disability or are raising a child with a severe disability. Such efforts also can allay fears that claiming the credits will jeopardize the public benefits that people with disabilities depend on.

In the National Organization on Disability/Harris “Survey of Americans with Disabilities” released in June 2004, 26 percent of people with disabilities reported annual household income of \$15,000 or less. In addition, 83 percent of people with disabilities said they had never claimed an income tax credit or deduction related to their employment or disability. Such families and individuals may not know about the tax credits.



The United Way of Palm Beach County (UWPBC) in Florida worked with the Real Economic Impact Tour to identify ways to increase awareness of tax benefits and use of free tax filing services among people with disabilities. Three of UWPBC's 30 VITA sites are located at organizations serving people with disabilities. One partner, Goodwill Industries, provided funding to support sign language interpretation for clients at any VITA site. In 2007, UWPBC completed 1,312 tax returns at the three VITA sites, enabling tax filers secure \$1.8 million in tax refunds.

Contact: Linda Roman, UWPBC, (561) 375-6639, or lindaroman@unitedwaypbc.org.

Strategies

- Enlist groups that advocate for people with disabilities. The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), a coalition of approximately 100 national disability organizations, can link you to their state and local contacts. CCD members include organizations such as Easter Seals, Family Voices, the Arc of the United States, United Cerebral Palsy, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and others that have members throughout the country. *To contact CCD members, visit www.c-c-d.org.* You also may find potential partners by contacting the National Council on Independent Living. *For more information, visit www.ncil.org.*
- Encourage “Disability Program Navigators” (DPNs) to incorporate tax credit outreach into their routine discussions with people seeking employment. The Disability Navigator Initiative is a joint project of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) which aims to help people with disabilities better understand work support programs and other services available through DOL One-Stop Career Centers. Provide DPNs and One-Stops with tax credit outreach materials. *For more information, visit www.doleta.gov/disability/new_dpn_grants.cfm.* *To locate DOL One-Stop Career Centers in your state, visit www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/onestop/onestopmap.cfm.*

- Reach out to your state’s Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) Program. The Social Security Administration funds community-based BPAO programs in every state to help SSA beneficiaries with disabilities make informed choices about work. Ensure that benefits specialists have the information they need to alert people to the tax credits and how to claim them. *For a directory of BPAO programs across the country, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work/ServiceProviders/BPAODirectory.html.*
- Encourage state agencies that provide services to people with disabilities (such as agencies for vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, supported living, mental health, mental retardation or developmental disabilities) to share information about the EIC and the CTC with program participants and their families.
- Take steps to ensure that free tax assistance sites are accessible to people with disabilities. Until existing sites can be modified, a mobile tax assistance site or home visiting program may be good alternatives.

The Real Economic Impact Tour operates in about 60 cities and focuses on ensuring that people with disabilities know they may qualify for the tax credits and can claim them. For more information, visit www.reitour.org. This website has information on making VITA sites accessible.

Glad You Asked That!

Q: Can a person who receives disability benefits get the EIC and the CTC?

A: To be eligible for the EIC, individuals must have earned income. Most disability-related benefits are not considered earned income, but a person who received long-term, employer-paid disability benefits and is under minimum retirement age can qualify for the EIC, even if he or she did not work during the tax year. Such disability benefits are considered earned income. Social Security Disability Insurance, SSI and military disability pensions are not counted as earned income.

Q: Can children with disabilities be claimed for the tax credits?

A: A person of any age with total and permanent disabilities may be claimed as a “qualifying child” for the EIC. A child claimed for the CTC, including a child with disabilities, must be under age 17 at the end of the year.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

Fact Sheet on the Tax Credits and People with Disabilities

More Questions and Answers on the Tax Credits for People with Disabilities

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Workers Not Living with Children

Tax credits can represent a useful income boost for low-wage workers who do not have children living with them — including non-custodial parents and childless workers. Workers not living with children who earn less than \$12,590 (or \$14,590, if married) receive only a small EIC (averaging about \$240), but non-custodial parents may be able to claim a substantial CTC if they are permitted by a divorce or separation agreement to claim a child as a dependent. The CTC can be worth up to \$1,000 per dependent child under age 17 for workers who earned more than \$11,750 in 2007. It is important to bring this news to workers who may know they do not qualify for the EIC, but who may not understand that they *could* qualify for the CTC.

FACT:

In 2005, the average annual earnings for workers not raising children who are eligible for the EIC was about \$6,050. Half of them (51 percent) work in service industries. About 21 percent work full-time, year around. About 45 percent are single men and 39 percent are single women. About 16 percent are married.

Strategies

Many of the places that are natural gathering points for families with children — such as schools and child care programs — may not be fruitful outreach settings for this group of workers. Special strategies are needed:

- Target workers who are likely to have been employed on and off during the year. Distribute materials at: pick-up and drop-off spots for day labor; hotel, motel and other service worksites that may hire seasonal employees; General Assistance, food stamp or unemployment offices; and programs serving migrant workers.
- Identify individuals whose circumstances have impeded their efforts to work. Try reaching them through: Veterans Administration hospitals or service centers; transitional housing programs; homeless shelters, food banks and soup kitchens; probation offices; half-way houses or mental health or substance abuse service centers; and literacy or GED programs.
- Reach out to workers in school or training programs. Distribute materials at: universities with non-traditional students; community colleges; English as a Second Language or literacy programs; Vocational rehabilitation centers; and job training programs.
- Alert the state or county Child Support Enforcement agency (also referred to as the IV-D agency), which establishes child support orders — typically requiring non-custodial parents to pay a set amount of child support each month — and provides services to enforce these orders. As part of its work, the IV-D agency may have contact with non-custodial parents and can use such opportunities to provide information about how they may qualify for the tax credits.



- Provide tax credit information when child support obligations are being established either through a court or an administrative process. Decisions about which parent claims the child as a dependent for tax purposes are often made at this time. Information about the CTC can be provided to both parents at the same time they are notified about the process for establishing child support.
- Ask employers to help inform workers about the tax credits. A special note about the availability of the CTC may be of particular interest to non-custodial parents whose child support payments are being deducted from their paycheck.
- Reach out to Fatherhood Programs. This broad range of community-based human service initiatives are aimed at nurturing men in their roles as fathers and caregivers to children. Some groups are geared toward assisting fathers in particular circumstances or life stages, such as teen fatherhood programs; others focus on helping young men develop employment and life skills, as well as parenting skills.

The Economic Opportunity Committee of St. Clair County (EOCSCC) in Port Huron, Michigan provides a wide range of services including emergency assistance, financial planning, housing and energy assistance to help residents with limited incomes become self sufficient. EOCSCC's 12-month money management program serves 300 participants, most of whom do not have children. Some participants are people with disabilities who are allowed to earn income from employment and claim the EIC. During the tax season, they can take advantage of EOCSCC's VITA site.

Contact: Karen Perkins, EOCSCC, (810) 982-8541 or kperkins@stclairroc.org.

Glad You Asked That!

Q:

What special forms must non-custodial parents complete in order to claim the CTC?

A:

Non-custodial parents eligible to claim the CTC must use the 1040 or 1040A and attach Form 8332, "Release of Claim for Child of Divorced or Separated Parents," and Form 8812 to claim the CTC. (They may not use the 1040 EZ.)



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples
Fact Sheet on the Tax Credits and Workers Not Living With Children
www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Workers Who Are Homeless

Workers who are homeless face serious challenges that may prevent them from claiming the EIC and CTC. Without a stable place to live, workers who are homeless may not receive mail consistently, making it hard to be sure they will receive the documents needed to file a tax return and claim tax credits. Sometimes, people who are homeless are unable to keep track of documents they may have received or their documents have been destroyed.



Catholic Charities
Housing Resource

Center (CCHRC) in St. Louis,

runs a hotline and conducts "mobile outreach" to help people who are homeless and also coordinates homeless prevention programs that help with rent and mortgage assistance and home repairs. In conjunction with the St. Louis Tax Assistance Program (TAP), CCHRC works with area shelters and distributes flyers to alert shelter residents to the tax credits and the availability of free tax filing assistance. TAP coordinates five free tax filing sites where clients can also open a bank account to get their refunds through direct deposit. In 2007, the five sites filed 1,549 tax returns bringing more than \$1.5 million in tax credit refunds back to the community.

Contact: Jane Schoeck, CCHRC, (314) 241-5600 x 7106, or jschoeck@ccstl.org.

Strategies

- Let workers know they can file a tax return and claim tax credits even if they do not have a permanent address. Shelters or other service providers, such as a health care clinic or a drop-in day center, can allow residents or clients to use their address for tax purposes. Organizations that do this should ensure their mail-handling procedures are secure and provide a way for refund checks to reach workers safely. Some organizations require mail to be opened in front of two staff members so that both can verify that checks were received.
- Enlist food banks, soup kitchens, shelters, transitional housing programs and local welfare agencies that come in contact with homeless persons. Work with shelters to establish free on-site tax filing clinics. Engage job placement assistance programs for homeless persons in tax credit outreach. They can extend their efforts by informing employers with whom they work about the credits and encouraging them to share information with all of their employees.
- Contact national organizations that have state or local affiliates to identify local groups providing services for people experiencing homelessness, such as the National Coalition for the Homeless, (202)462-4822 (www.nationalhomeless.org), the Alliance to End Homelessness, (202)638-1526 (www.endhomelessness.org), the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, (202)638-2535 (www.nlchp.org) and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, (800)838-4357, (www.nchv.org).
- Reach out to your state's Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. School districts are also required to have a homeless "liaison" to coordinate educational services for students who are homeless. Encourage your school district's liaison to provide information about the EIC and CTC to families.

- Explore using “street newspapers,” which raise public awareness about poverty and homelessness by publishing articles by people who are homeless or formerly homeless, advocates and professional writers and are sold by people who are homeless. Outreach Campaigns can encourage publishers to inform sellers about the tax credits, to publish stories about the tax credits, and to advertise the locations of local VITA sites. Place an advertisement to recruit volunteers for free tax filing assistance. *To find out if there is a street paper in your area, contact the North American Street Newspaper Association: editor@streetnewsservice.org.*
- Connect with your city’s “Plan to End Homelessness” by enlisting participating groups in tax credit outreach activities. These initiatives were spearheaded by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Housing and urban Development, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Counties and the National League of Cities. *To find out if your state or city has a “Plan to End Homelessness” visit www.ich.gov/library/10-year-plan-cities.pdf. View plans for some locations at www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/communityplans.*

FACT:

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, research suggests 40 percent of families experiencing homelessness have children, and approximately 40 percent of all homeless adults are employed at some time during the year.

Glad You Asked That!

Q:

If a person who is homeless has lost the papers they need to file taxes, what can they do?

A:

If a worker cannot get a copy of their documents from their employer, he or she can complete Form 4852, “Substitute for a Missing Form W-2 or Form 1099.” This form requests information about wages and taxes withheld, so it is helpful if workers have documentation, such as a final pay stub, when completing this form. Workers without a final pay stub may still be able to complete the form by estimating their earnings. It will be helpful to get assistance from a local VITA site on how to do this.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Rural Communities

Wages in many rural communities are lower than in larger cities, making it more likely that workers may qualify for the EIC. However, since services of all kinds are less accessible than in urban areas — from social services and libraries to VITA sites and even commercial tax preparers — information about the tax credits and places to go for tax filing assistance may be less available. Outreach efforts are needed, especially in isolated communities, to provide a channel for tax credit information to reach rural workers.

Strategies

- Rural communities tend to be close knit, so identifying trusted leaders and institutions will help get Outreach Campaigns started. For example, in some rural places a local minister might be a key starting point. Work with local organizations to help determine how to target outreach efforts.
- Ensure visibility and access by conducting outreach and free tax preparation in a community's commercial center where rural residents go to fulfill multiple needs.
- Inform small business owners about how helping employees claim these tax credits can increase employee productivity. In addition to promoting the tax credits, some small businesses may be willing to serve as free tax preparation sites during or outside of business hours. Larger businesses such as factories and farms can also become engaged in outreach efforts. Rural areas with tourist attractions, such as bed and breakfasts, gift shops and restaurants, employ workers who may qualify for the EIC and CTC.
- Involve statewide organizations and businesses that may have connections in rural areas. Enlist the state Department of Human Services, the United Way or Catholic Charities in outreach. Encouraging a statewide approach to outreach will enhance the likelihood that rural areas are included.
- Collaborate with the Cooperative Extension Service. There are nearly 3,000 county and regional Cooperative Extension offices based at more than 100 land grant colleges and universities. In addition to addressing rural and agricultural needs, Cooperative Extension focuses on issues such as family financial management and community economic development. Extension offices can send information about tax credits to families, offer financial literacy classes, help set up VITA sites or provide training to volunteers. *To identify offices in your state visit www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/index.html.*



Chenango Regional EITC Partnership (CREP) in Norwich, New York

promotes the EIC, CTC, free tax filing assistance and financial fitness workshops throughout tax season. To better serve its rural counties, CREP coordinated 14 remote VITA sites. Partnering with housing authorities, libraries, community organizations, a town hall and farm bureau, CREP provided day-long free tax preparation in communities that otherwise wouldn't have access to this service. The 14 sites, in conjunction with a central VITA site, completed 260 tax returns in 2007.

Contact: Gary Quarella, Opportunities for Chenango, Inc. (607) 336-2101 x 121, or gquarella@ofcinc.org.

- Find out when there are community events and how to become involved. For example, local sports events, festivals, church picnics, back-to-school nights, PTA meetings or regional conferences can offer great opportunities to reach many eligible workers at once.
- Take advantage of schools in rural areas. They can be an important channel for tax credit information and may also provide a central location for VITA sites. Community colleges and universities provide an important avenue to reach out to some working parents and low-income students not raising children.
- Create support for tax credit outreach by informing county commissioners and town councils about how the EIC and CTC can stimulate the local economy. In addition, these officials often hold other positions in the community and can influence a variety of organizations to lend their support to tax credit outreach efforts.
- Establish a mobile tax preparation site. A van, staffed with volunteers, can tour the region and prepare tax returns at pre-arranged locations. Or, individual staff members can carry a laptop and help workers file their taxes at home or where they work. Partnering with a community college can mean access to student volunteers and lap top computers to facilitate electronic filing. IRS offices may also loan computers to VITA sites.
- Use technology to bridge long travel distances. Videoconferences or webcasts can be used to conduct meetings or trainings. Hospitals, local universities and community colleges, corporations and businesses, federal or state agencies, or Cooperative Extension Services Offices may have the necessary equipment and may be willing to host a meeting. Alternatively, some websites offer “web conferences” services or interactive “webinars” that allow people to come together. Keep in mind that these web-based tools may not be useful for Outreach Campaigns working in communities where high speed internet connections are not available.

FACT:

According to the 2000 Census, the vast majority (96 percent) of the 500 counties with the lowest per capita income are in rural areas.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Foster Parents, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Other Relative Caregivers

Millions of children are currently in foster care or are being cared for by a grandparent or other relative outside the formal child welfare system. These families often do not know that they may be able to claim such children for the EIC or the CTC.



The Village for Families and Children in Hartford, Connecticut provides a variety of support services, including foster care and adoption assistance. Each year the Village serves over 400 foster parents and grandparents. In 2007, as a member of the Hartford Asset Building Coalition, the Village promoted the tax credits and its free tax filing site by training staff who work with adoption, foster care and grandparent programs. They shared information with program participants, displayed posters in organizations and businesses, sent emails and spoke on radio programs. As one of 18 VITA sites in Hartford, the Village completed 420 tax returns, helping families obtain \$1.2 million in federal tax refunds.

*Contact: David McGhee, The Village,
(860) 297-0598.*

Strategies

- Develop outreach materials that draw attention to the eligibility of foster parents and relative caregivers. Campaign materials that refer only to a parent's eligibility will miss many families that may qualify.
- Work with public foster care agencies. State agencies, such as child welfare agencies and agencies that administer TANF programs, may interact on a regular basis with foster parents and relative caregivers. Encourage them to incorporate information on claiming the EIC and the CTC in any training they provide for families. They also can send information about the tax credits with foster care payments and cash assistance payments and talk about the credits during home visits.
- Reach out to community-based programs that support foster parents with services such as family counseling and crisis intervention. Some organizations also offer help with school supplies and clothes.
- Involve foster parent associations and support groups. Ask your state foster care association to share tax credit information with local groups. Outreach Campaigns can offer to arrange a speaker for local meetings or write an article for association newsletters. *To locate your state and local foster care associations, visit the National Foster Parent Association website at www.nfpainc.org.*

- Ensure that Area Agencies on Aging, senior employment programs and programs that recruit seniors as volunteers — such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) — share information about the tax credits with seniors who are raising children. Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE), sponsored by the IRS, provides seniors and low-income families with free tax filing assistance. AARP is the largest TCE participant, providing services through its Tax-Aide Program. *To find the nearest Tax-Aide Program, contact AARP at 1-888-AARP NOW (1-888-227-7669). During tax time, locations are available on the AARP website at www.aarp.org/taxaide. Find information about the tax credit and other resources for grandparents at www.aarp.org/families/grandparents*

FACT:

According to the 2005 American Community Survey, nearly 2.9 million grandparents raising grandchildren were in the labor force.

Glad You Asked That!

Q: Rules for claiming foster children for the tax credits have changed in recent years. What do foster parents need to know?

A: Under current IRS rules, children who lived with a foster parent for six months or longer can be claimed for the EIC and CTC. (In the past, foster children had to live with the foster parent for the full 12 months of the year to qualify for these tax credits.) While this had made it a little easier to claim a foster child, another rule has made it more difficult: In order to claim a foster child, the child has to have been placed with the foster family by an authorized government or private placement agency.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

Links to additional resources related to assisting foster families with tax credits

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Tribal and Native Communities



Midwest Minnesota CDC (MMCDC) and the White Earth Investment Initiative (WEII) provide free tax preparation for the residents of White Earth reservation in northwest Minnesota, and Community Development Bank provided no fee, no interest savings accounts to deposit refunds. MMCDC and WEII prepared tax returns at the Shooting Star Casino and worked with its HR department to arrange for the VITA site to open on the day employees got their W-2 forms. Promotional efforts were so effective that on the day the site opened, appointments were filled for two weeks. In addition to the casino site, MMCDC and WEII traveled to five remote villages twice a week to provide free tax filing assistance. To promote the effort, envelope stuffers were sent to tribal council and casino employees, information was broadcast on TV screens in break rooms, and ads were placed in tribal newspapers and the casino's newsletter. During many of the free tax filing visits, children visited the Readmobile where volunteers read stories. In 2007, the sites completed 382 tax returns, enabling White Earth residents to claim \$235,821 in tax refunds.

Contact: Sarah Ruppel, MMCDC, (218) 844-7027, or sruppel@mmcdc.com

Efforts to improve the economic status of Native Americans — one in four of whom live in families with income below the federal poverty line — are increasing. Particularly in rural areas, small businesses, hotels and casinos are emerging and are contributing to economic growth. However, employees in small businesses generally earn low wages, as do workers in the service and tourism industries. Thus, despite the progress, the average income of Native Americans remains less than \$9,000 per year.

Poverty and other barriers to economic development among tribal communities stem from historical interactions with the federal government. Land trust regulations restricted resources and job opportunities. As a result, Native communities frequently are guarded about relations with the federal government or people who are not part of their community. Thus, eligible people in tribal communities may be hesitant to claim the credits. Tax filing may not only be intimidating, but may be perceived as being in conflict with traditional tribal values of self-reliance.

Strategies

- Get to know the community. There are 562 federally recognized tribes, bands, nations, pueblos, rancherias, communities and Native villages, in addition to many other groups that are not federally recognized. It is important for outreach approaches and messages to be consistent with the values and beliefs of individual tribes, as well as community priorities. Native communities have limited resources, so it may be difficult for groups to commit to outreach, even if they support outreach goals.
- Reach out to urban Native Americans. More than 65 percent of the four million Native Americans nationwide live in urban communities. The following ten cities have the largest American Indian and Alaska Native populations: New York, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Anchorage, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, Tucson, Chicago and San Antonio.
- Work with a trusted organization in the community that may be interested in promoting the tax credits, such as: the tribal health agency, urban Indian centers, tribal Head Start or housing agencies, and tribal councils. Community members will know the most effective ways to work with tribal elders and other leaders who play a pivotal role in

influencing community priorities. Visit the Tribal Leaders Directory and view tribal leaders by region at: www.doi.gov/leaders.pdf or visit www.ncai.org.

- Engage tribal community colleges and universities, which serve as career centers, libraries, economic development centers, public meeting places and child care centers. They may be able to provide computers, volunteers and a space for free tax preparation. Tribal colleges also can inform students about the EIC and CTC and encourage them to tell family members and neighbors. *The American Indian Higher Education Consortium provides information for all tribal colleges and universities in the U.S. at www.aihec.org.*
- Enlist Native media in informing people about the tax credits. They can deliver information in the language or dialect of the community. Newspapers can publish stories about how tribal members benefited from the credits and they can advertise free tax filing assistance. Non-Native media may also be influential in Native communities. For example, radio stations may schedule shows of particular interest to tribal members.

The Native Financial Education Coalition (NFEC) publishes Building Native Communities: A Tribal Leader's Guide to Launching an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Campaign. To find out more about the guides and to order free copies, contact First Nations Oweesta Corporation, (605) 342-3770 or info@oweesta.org. To learn more about NFEC visit www.nfec.info.

Glad You Asked That!

Q:

Can Native Americans claim the EIC and CTC even if they are exempt from federal income tax?

A:

In general, Native Americans are not exempt from federal income tax on their earnings. Native Americans are only exempt if a treaty between a tribe and the U.S. government, or a U.S. statute, specifically excludes certain income from taxation. For example, a treaty may establish a tribe's right to tax-exempt fishing activities and tribal members earning income from fishing will be exempt from federal and state income tax. If the income is exempt from income tax, it is not considered "taxable earned income" for purposes of the EIC and CTC, and is not counted in figuring eligibility for, or the amount of, the credits. A worker may have earned income from other employment and can claim the EIC and CTC based on that income, if eligible.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

Links to a directory of Native-owned businesses (www.sba.gov/naa/business.html)

Links to a broad range of tribal agencies

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Military Personnel and their Families

Many enlisted members of the military earn less than \$30,000 and are raising children. In addition, many National Guard members and Reservists have been activated for duty, which can result in a significant reduction in a family's income. Military families may qualify for tax benefits such as the EIC or CTC, but may not realize they are eligible.

To address the needs of these families, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, in partnership with the IRS, has established VITA sites at 300 U.S. military installations. Military VITA sites file over 500,000 federal returns each year. While such assistance is important, it may not reach some members of the military or their families. Family members who do not live near a military post may not get the relevant tax information they need, since they may seek help from people who are not well-versed in the special rules regarding military pay and eligibility for the EIC and CTC.



As part of an on-going legal assistance program, the Luke Air Force Base Legal Office (LAFBLO) in Arizona administers and coordinates a VITA site that serves the greater Luke AFB community.

Throughout the year, information about the VITA site is shared with squadrons through flyers, newsletters, emails and word of mouth. Each year, the Retiree Activity Office also informs its network about the VITA site. During the tax season, 45 to 60 members serve as volunteer tax preparers. In 2007, LAFBLO completed nearly 6,000 tax returns.

Contact: Captain Brock Ohlson, LAFBLO, (623)856-6901.

Strategies

- Contact the Family Assistance Center for the military unit in your area to ensure it is aware of the EIC, CTC and free tax filing assistance programs in the community. The National Military Family Association provides links at its website to Family Assistance Centers for the National Guard and Reserves. The American Red Cross and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America are other organizations that provide support to families of units called up for active duty. Their local chapters may also be good points of contact for efforts to reach military families. *Contact the Government Relations Department, National Military Family Association, at 1-800-260-0218 or at families@nmfa.org for suggestions on who to contact or visit www.nmfa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=links#FamilyAssistance.*
- Contact a near-by military installation that has a VITA site. Ask how to refer members of the military living off-post to the VITA services offered at the post or base.

Glad You Asked That!

Q: Can military personnel claim the EIC and the CTC?

A: Yes. Military personnel can claim the credits whether they live in the U.S. or overseas. The IRS considers an individual assigned to an overseas tour of duty to be temporarily absent from the U.S. due to a special circumstance. Military personnel who live with qualifying children while stationed on active duty outside the U.S. can be eligible for the tax credits. Even if their qualifying children remain in the U.S., the children may be claimed for the EIC and the CTC. Military couples living apart due to a military assignment must still file a joint return to claim the EIC and the CTC.

Q: Can an individual serving in the military be considered a qualifying child for the EIC?

A: An individual serving in the military who is under age 19 may be claimed as a qualifying child for the EIC. The individual is considered to be temporarily absent due to the military assignment.

Q: How is combat pay counted in determining eligibility for the EIC?

A: Military pay received in a combat zone is non-taxable earned income, but it is treated differently than other forms of non-taxable earned income for EIC purposes. Military personnel can choose to count combat pay when figuring their eligibility for the EIC if it is an advantage. For example, adding combat pay to a family's earnings might raise the family's income above the EIC eligibility limit and the family would not want to count it. However, in families with little income, counting combat pay could result in a larger EIC and the family would want to do so.

Q: Does combat pay count for the CTC?

A: Combat pay must be counted as income in figuring the CTC. For the CTC, counting combat pay will always work to the family's advantage, enabling more military families to qualify.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples

More Questions and Answers on the Tax Credits and Military Personnel

Link to IRS Publication 3, "Tax Information for Military Personnel"

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Faith-Based Institutions and Organizations

As centers of worship and social activity, faith-based institutions — churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples — play an integral role in many communities. They are generally stable and reliable institutions, maintaining membership and leadership over long periods of time. As a result, religious leaders are often trusted by not only their own members but also by the larger community. Religious institutions also may have social action agendas which may present opportunities for members to become involved in tax credit outreach.



Families 1st / Faith Fellowship Ministries in Richmond, Virginia runs

a family restoration education and mentoring program and child development training for caregivers. For six years, FFFM has hosted one of 17 VITA sites in the Richmond metropolitan area. In 2007, FFFM expanded its outreach efforts by engaging 52 churches to promote the tax credits and the VITA site. They included information in bulletins, on message boards, on flyers and in emails. Prizes were offered to the churches with the greatest number of members getting their taxes filed at the VITA site.

Contact: Carolann Pacer-Ramsey, FFFM, (804) 649-0311, funnylady3468@comcast.net.

Strategies

- Enlist faith-based groups to become involved in tax credit outreach activities. They can participate both by alerting congregants who may qualify for the credits and also by conducting outreach in the community. Because religious institutions often call upon members to aid and serve others, partnering with faith-based organizations can not only assist your outreach efforts, but can help them meet their own goals.
- Identify the right person to approach within the organization. For example, a leader of the church Social Ministry or Peace and Justice Committee may be the person who can introduce the subject of becoming involved in outreach and taking on volunteer opportunities. Or, identify a congregant who may be knowledgeable about the needs of low-wage workers or about the tax credits — for example, a social worker or an accountant — who may be willing to champion the idea of becoming involved in outreach.
- Offer to provide posters, flyers and other materials on the tax credits that can be made available to members. Volunteer to give a talk about the credit at the next gathering of members.
- Work with religious institutions may sponsor emergency food pantries, child care programs, or schools. These settings all present opportunities to share information about the tax credits and free tax filing assistance.

- Motivate the organization to consider hosting a VITA site. The buildings which house churches, synagogues or mosques are a valuable resource because they are likely to be in well-known locations and they may already be accessible to people with disabilities. Congregants may be willing to volunteer as tax preparers or site coordinators. Help arrange for training and to find sources of computer equipment and other site needs.
- Explore faith-based organizations as a source of funding for tax credit outreach campaign activities. Find out the process for obtaining financial support and make the case for contributing to the campaign as a high-impact way to assist working families in the community.
- Engage social services organizations such as Catholic Charities, Jewish Family and Children's Services and Lutheran Social Services. They have direct contact with families who may be eligible for the tax credits and they may have connections to individual congregations that would be eager to join outreach efforts. *To find a local affiliate, visit www.catholiccharitiesusa.org, www.ajfca.org or www.lutheranservices.org.*
- National faith-based organizations such as The Council of Churches and the North American Interfaith Network include partners or members of various faiths that work to address a wide range of issues, including poverty. Outreach Campaigns can partner with members of these networks to share information about the tax credits and free tax filing assistance through newsletters, websites or special events. *To find a local affiliate visit www.nccusa.org/ecmin/councils-links.html or www.nain.org.*

FACT:

According to the 2003 Current Population Survey, more Americans volunteer through religious organizations than any other type of organization.



Find It On the Web

More Outreach Strategies and Examples
Links to national faith-based organizations

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Strategies for Promoting Free Tax Filing Assistance

A basic goal for any Tax Credit Outreach Campaign is to get the word out to low-wage workers that they may qualify for significant tax benefits. But, the outreach job is not done until they file their tax returns and obtain the tax credits they've earned. That's why a critical element of a successful campaign is the effort to link workers with free tax filing assistance, through the IRS-sponsored Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. While VITA is the largest such program, people also use the AARP Tax Aide program or other separate free tax preparation programs.



The Citizens Committee for New York City maintained a multi-lingual hotline in 2007 for the citywide Cash Back campaign to promote tax credits and free tax filing assistance in partnership with the New York City EITC Coalition. The pre-recorded hotline, available in English, Spanish and Russian, provided contact information for 18 groups that could answer questions, screen callers for free tax preparation eligibility and arrange for interpretation services at tax filing sites. It is estimated that the Cash Back campaign received about 2,000 calls during the 2007 tax season. In 2008, the Cash Back hotline will also promote health insurance and food stamps enrollment.

Contact: Pinky Vincent, Citizens Committee, (212)989-0909 x 578 or pvincent@citizensnyc.org.

Strategies

Hotlines

Set up a hotline to publicize free tax assistance sites, precluding the need for tax filers to rely on the IRS toll-free number which is often inaccessible, especially during tax season. A local hotline can provide callers basic information about eligibility rules and locations for nearby VITA site. In areas where large numbers of residents speak languages other than English, a local hotline with bilingual operators can be critical to an Outreach Campaign's ability to help workers claim the EIC and CTC.

- Link up with an existing information hotline, such as information and referral (I&R) services (commonly run by United Way agencies) that already receive calls from individuals likely to be eligible for the EIC and the CTC. Operators may be able to answer tax credit questions during tax filing season. Help prepare for the extra volume of calls the hotline can expect to receive by contributing staff, volunteers or funds. Another possibility is to add tax credit information to Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR) agency hotlines which help families in search of affordable child care. CCR phone counselors can discuss tax credits with callers and point out that tax refunds can be used to cover the out-of-pocket costs of child care. Large employers may have company-wide hotline services to assist employees with concerns about transportation, child care, and other needs. Adding tax credit information makes sense.

- Establish a new hotline by hiring an answering service or engaging volunteers or a voicemail system. Top-notch tax credit hotlines operate seven days a week, 24 hours a day — or at least during some non-business hours — and have operators that speak languages other than English, where needed. Your hotline can help callers determine if they are likely to be eligible for the EIC and the CTC or it can simply refer them to VITA sites.

Strategies

Financial Institutions

Under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), financial institutions — including mainstream banks, community banks, credit unions and locally owned savings institutions — are evaluated on their efforts to help underserved neighborhoods gain access to credit and other financial services. Financial institutions have become enthusiastic Tax Credit Outreach Campaign partners and have helped tax filers open bank accounts and arrange for direct deposit of refunds.

- Encourage financial institutions to offer affordable bank accounts at free tax preparation sites and work with them to decide on favorable terms. For example, banks can waive or reduce monthly fees, minimum balances and penalties. A report from The National Community Tax Coalition (NCTC) explains desirable bank account features that can be negotiated with financial institutions to offer the most practical options for taxpayers. *Find “Financial Institution Partnership Guidelines” in NCTC’s Resource Library under the financial services section at www.tax-coalition.org.*
- Enlist banks or credit unions to provide free check-cashing for people who do not have bank accounts or are not interested in opening one. One Outreach Campaign partnered with a bank to issue “signature cards” to tax filers when they had their tax forms completed at a free tax filing site. When the taxpayer received his or her IRS check, a participating financial institution “redeemed” the card by cashing the refund check free of charge.
- Augment volunteer efforts by enlisting financial institutions to allow their employees to volunteer at a free tax site on company time. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) works with banks to organize such efforts. Contact your regional FDIC office to find out if there are financial institutions in your community that may be interested in becoming involved in your Outreach Campaign. *FDIC regional offices can be found at www.fdic.gov/about/contact/ask/regionaloffices.html.*

The Federal Communications Commission has assigned the telephone dialing code “2-1-1” to be used exclusively for community information and referral purposes. The United Way of America and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems have promoted development of a nationwide “2-1-1” system which will enable callers anywhere to dial 2-1-1 to find information on local human services programs. Forty-one states and D.C. now have “2-1-1” call centers, which operate with state and local funds. Many local Tax Credit Outreach Campaigns now use “2-1-1” as their hotlines. For more information about 2-1-1 initiatives in your area go to www.211.org.

Strategies

FACT:

At least 10 million U.S. households do not have a bank account and are “unbanked.” According to the Federal Reserve Board, more than 80 percent of the “unbanked” earn less than \$25,000 per year, making them potentially eligible for the EIC.



As part of the Pierce County Asset Building Coalition (PCABC) in

Tacoma, Washington, Key Bank sponsored a “Super Saturday” tax filing event to kick off the 2007 tax filing season. The bank provided refreshments and helped with publicity, printing materials, and supplying volunteers. Bank employees opened accounts for tax filers. Key Bank and Columbia Bank also provided vouchers so that people who did not establish a bank account could cash their refund checks for free. In 2007, PCABC prepared 3,742 tax returns through VITA and AARP Tax-Aide sites, which brought over \$4 million in total refunds into the community.

Contact: Barbara Gorzkiski, Associated Ministries, (253) 383-3056, or barbarag@associatedministries.org.

Technology and the Internet

Use of the Internet has opened up many Tax Credit Outreach Campaign opportunities, from presenting new channels for publicizing campaign activities to employing new screening tools to help tax filers understand how much they may be eligible to receive through the tax credits. Outreach Campaigns can link low-income workers with technology that can save time and paperwork. For example, with electronic filing, tax filers not only can get their refunds more quickly, but they also reduce errors.

- Let workers know how to obtain EIC and CTC tax forms at the IRS website, www.irs.gov/formspubs. You can also download key forms and post them to your own organization’s website. The IRS website also provides information about eligibility for the EIC and CTC, including an on-line tool in English and Spanish for individuals to figure their own eligibility — search for “EITC Assistant” at www.irs.gov. Providing this information helps ensure that workers — especially those who choose to file their own returns — do so properly.
- Expand access to electronic filing (e-filing) at VITA sites by helping them obtain computer equipment. Local businesses that are upgrading their computers may be willing to donate their older models. The IRS can provide free software needed for e-filing. Talk to your IRS Territory Manager about the computer system requirements for this software. E-filing can improve VITA services, enabling filers to receive their refunds much faster than returns sent by mail and, because many minor errors on e-filed returns are caught before the return is accepted, corrections can be made averting refund delays.
- Post information about VITA sites on your website and send email announcements to your contacts or listserv to inform them about free tax preparation services. Be careful to monitor VITA site schedule changes during the filing season so that you can update information as needed.

- Reach out to “digital divide” programs. While the number of low-income households with access to the Internet is steadily increasing, low-income families still are much less likely than higher-income families to have regular Internet access. Programs to address this gap, known as the “digital divide,” provide such families education and access to computers, the Internet and other technologies. These programs may assist families in learning to e-file their taxes.

FACT:

According to a February 2007 survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 55 percent of adults living in households with annual incomes of \$30,000 or less have access to the Internet.



In 2007, United Way of America launched the United Way Financial

Stability Partnership, a nationwide initiative designed to help low- and moderate- income individuals achieve financial stability. Over the next five years, among other goals, this initiative will work to increase EIC claims and participation in IDA programs and will connect workers to public benefits and bank accounts. Working with Nets to Ladders (N2L), United Way is using the Benefits Enrollment Network’s SavingsPoint Service, a web-based software program that allows VITA sites the ability to open bank accounts for tax filers without requiring bank staff to be present. *To learn more about the United Way Financial Stability Partnership visit www.national.unitedway.org/fsp. To learn more about SavingsPoint and how your Outreach Campaign can use this service visit www.netstoladders.com.*



Find It On the Web

**More Outreach Strategies and Examples
2007 Earned Income Tax Credit Estimator**

www.cbpp.org/eic2008



Share Your Outreach Story

The outreach examples in this booklet represent just some of the great tax credit outreach ideas that are working in communities across the country. You can find lots more examples on our website, www.cbpp.org/eic2008. Each year we expand and update our collection of examples to keep Tax Credit Outreach Campaigns abreast of the latest strategies and success stories. We are most interested in highlighting new partnerships, innovative techniques for promoting the tax credits and free tax filing assistance, and new twists on tried-and-true approaches. We encourage you to share your outreach story with us by emailing us at eickit@cbpp.org or sending us your outreach story to Tax Credit Outreach Campaign, c/o Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 820 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002. You also can fax your information to the attention of Roxy Gaines at (202) 408-1056.

Please provide the following information so that we can consider featuring your story in the 2009 Tax Credit Outreach Kit or on the website:

- Organization(s) involved in the outreach activities
- Where and when the activity took place
- A brief description of the activity
- A short discussion of the results (For example, number of tax returns filed, total amount of tax credit refunds that came into the community)
- Contact for more information, email or phone, preferably both

***Thank You In Advance for Helping Others
Enhance Their Tax Credit Outreach Campaigns!***