

For several years, the San Bernardino Transitional Assistance Department (TAD) in California has coordinated a



VITA program. TAD administers services in 15 offices throughout the county, including cash assistance, SNAP, and public housing as well as other services such as child care and refugee resettlement. Each office offers free tax preparation for the public from mid-January through the end of April; all of the offices provide VITA services in Spanish.

In November and December 2010, TAD called clients who were currently working or had worked in 2010 to see if they would be interested in receiving free tax preparation assistance. In January 2011, staff made additional phone calls and discussed the EIC, CTC, and VITA with clients during appointments. In addition, TAD distributed flyers in the community and sent a mass mailing to its entire contact list to promote the service.

Volunteer tax preparers at the VITA sites included 15 TAD staff plus 65 participants in the Subsidized Work Experience program (Welfare-to-Work). Working with the VITA site was one option for program participants to fulfill their work requirements. Participants go through a background check and orientation in addition to receiving VITA training. Participants are paid the minimum wage and can receive vouchers to purchase professional attire if needed. As a result of this work experience, many participants have gained full-time employment. In 2011, the 15 VITA sites filed 1,743 tax returns generating \$4,112,136 in federal refunds, including \$2,364,366 in EIC refunds.

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Public Benefit Programs

Many state and local government agencies that administer public benefits such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), food stamps (now called SNAP) 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 CHIP 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.

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

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.

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

A: The EIC and the CTC are not counted as income for any program that receives federal funding. The EIC and the CTC are not counted as a resource (also called an asset) in determining eligibility for benefits for 12 months after the refund is received. 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. For more information, see page 19 in the companion booklet, *"Your Tax Credit Outreach Campaign: What You Need to Know"*.

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, CHIP, 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 HelpEngen, (formerly RealBenefits), can be tailored to screen families for EIC eligibility and to indicate how large a refund they may be able to get. Visit www.helpengen.com. For questions, contact: Enrique Balaguer, HelpEngen, (617) 275-2804 or ebalaguer@transengen.com.
- 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:

According to Food & Nutrition Service 2010 data, 40.7 percent of SNAP (food stamp) recipients are in working families.



Find It On the Web

www.eitcoutreach.org

- 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