

The West Virginia Alliance for Sustainable Families (WVASF) works with seven regional



coalitions to promote EIC & CTC awareness on a consistent, statewide basis. Each regional coalition advertises through local newspapers, and WVASF engages several marketing strategies to reach residents across the state, especially those in rural communities. Using radio, television, Facebook, Valpak coupon mailing inserts, and billboard advertisements, WVASF promotes more than 80 VITA locations that operate through October each year.

Also, during “America Saves” week in February, WVASF partners with BB&T bank to sponsor a roving VITA site that goes to rural areas of the state. To promote the mobile site, WVASF distributes flyers, places newspaper advertisements, and trains tax volunteers to visit employers to pass out tax credit and VITA site materials. In 2011, the site visited four rural counties, where in addition to free tax filing assistance, BB&T opened reduced-fee bank accounts for interested tax filers. Free credit reports, unclaimed property searches and CHIP (Children’s Health Insurance Program) enrollments were also made available.

In 2011, WVASF prepared approximately 20,000 state and federal tax returns providing \$28 million in refunds, including \$7 million in EIC refunds and \$3.6 million in CTC refunds.

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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.*

- 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 laptop 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, trainings or to file tax returns. 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” 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 Rural Policy Research Institute, 88 percent of the 386 counties with persistent high poverty rates (20 percent or higher from 1970 through 2000) are rural.



Find It On the Web

www.eitcoutreach.org

- More Outreach Strategies and Examples