Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Strategies for Louisiana

Final Report

Baton Rouge, Louisiana
October 25–26, 2004

Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network

EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC) STRATEGIES FOR LOUISIANA

Final Report of Peer TA Activity

Conducted for the Louisiana Department of Social Services
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
October 25–26, 2004

Developed by the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network
Contract Number: HHSP2332004907YC

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

I. EVENT OVERVIEW I-1

II. ROUNDTABLE BACKGROUND II-1

III. ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS III-1

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS III-1

2. A SHARED VISION FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT III-2

   2.1 Building Foundations for Family Financial Self-sufficiency: Why TANF is the Right Place to Target an EITC Initiative III-3
   2.2 Community Action Agencies: Catalysts for Building Bridges to Financial Empowerment of Low-Income Communities III-8
   2.3 Questions and Answers [for both presenters] III-9

3. TAX ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIPS AND VOLUNTEER TAX ASSISTANCE SITE (VITA) PROGRAMS IN LOUISIANA III-10

   3.1 New Resources for Rural Communities III-11
   3.2 Questions and Answers [for both presenters] III-14

4. LOUISIANA BRIDGE BUILDERS FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT III-14

   4.1 Southern University AG Center III-15
   4.2 MAAT Foundation III-15
   4.3 Total Community Action III-16

5. STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING EITC COMMUNITY COALITIONS III-17

6. NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS ON THE EITC AND CTC III-21

   6.1 Louisiana Communications Strategy on the EITC and CTC III-21
   6.2 Working in Partnership with the Business Community III-22
   6.3 Questions and Answers [for both presenters] III-23

7. WORKSHOP: DEVELOPING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS III-24

8. WORKSHOP: DEVELOPING A VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE (VITA) SITE III-26

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT.)

Page

9. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FINANCIAL LITERACY III-28

   9.1 Developing Financial Literacy: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Money Smart Program III-28
   9.2 Reflections III-31

10. RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY INITIATIVES III-32

11. BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS III-33

   11.1 Rural Break-out Report III-34
   11.2 Mid-sized Town Report III-35
   11.3 Large City Report III-37

12. REFLECTIONS ON DAY 1 ..... III-38

13. WORKSHOP: OVERVIEW OF THE TAX WISE SOFTWARE SYSTEM III-38

14. DEVELOPING A MOBILE MULTI-COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT III-39

15. EITC LOUISIANA: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH STRATEGIES III-42

16. BUILDING THE LOCAL CAMPAIGN III-45

   16.1 Rural Areas III-45
   16.2 Mid-sized Towns III-47
   16.3 Large Metropolitan Areas III-48
   16.4 Reflections on Local Actions Plans by State Agency Staff III-49

17. CLOSING REMARKS III-49

APPENDIX A: AGENDA

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT LIST

APPENDIX C: EVALUATION SUMMARY

This report describes the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network event entitled *EITC Strategies for Louisiana* that took place in Baton Rouge, LA on October 25-26, 2004. The Agenda from the event is provided in Appendix A. Appendix B lists the event participants, and an Evaluation Summary is provided in Appendix C.

The report is available for download at: http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/taevents/chron.htm.

I. EVENT OVERVIEW

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The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network is a Federally-funded initiative sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of Welfare Peer TA is to provide peer-to-peer technical assistance to public agencies and private organizations operating the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Welfare Peer TA facilitates the sharing of information between and among States and localities to establish linkages between organizations serving the needs of welfare recipients.

In response to a request for technical assistance from the State of Louisiana, Welfare Peer TA sponsored a statewide Roundtable event in Baton Rouge, LA on October 25-26, 2004. Welfare Peer TA Roundtables are designed to bring together a group of professionals working in similar or complimentary disciplines in a workshop setting to foster peer-to-peer learning through interactive sessions. This Roundtable brought together Federal, State, and local staff to discuss the design and delivery of a coordinated Statewide EITC outreach campaign. Federal staff in attendance included representatives from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA). State agencies including the Louisiana Governor's Office, Department of Social Services, Department of Revenue, and Department of Labor all sent high-level staff. In addition, local representatives from eight service regions across Louisiana were present, including staff from Community Action Agencies, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, foundations, and local businesses. The event focused on discussions about the EITC in general, EITC eligibility, filing taxes, best practices on EITC outreach and free tax preparation from around the country, helpful tips and tools for launching an EITC outreach initiative, and developing local action plans for EITC and volunteer tax preparation initiatives.

As a result of this Roundtable, participants gained the following:

- An increased appreciation for the EITC and the impact it can have on the economy of local communities
- An increased awareness of the tools that are currently available to assist in EITC outreach and volunteer tax preparation, such as toolkits and outreach materials
- A chance to learn and use Taxwise, the tax preparation software of the IRS
- An increased recognition of the importance of financial literacy and the tools that are currently available to support the advancement of financial literacy

- Examples from model programs, EITC initiatives, and volunteer tax preparation initiatives currently occurring around the country
- The opportunity to collaborate with local stakeholders and formulate local action plans for each of the eight regions in Louisiana.

II. ROUNDTABLE BACKGROUND

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In recent years large numbers of TANF clients have entered the workforce and moved off of welfare. However, securing employment does not always equate to getting out of poverty. Many former TANF recipients earn annualized wages that still leave them and render them below the poverty line. Many of these current and former TANF clients are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).[1] Several studies, however, have revealed that, although they are eligible, many of these welfare recipients are not claiming the EITC for a variety of reasons.[2]

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) has been instrumental in closing the poverty gap for many of the nation's working poor. Enacted by Congress in 1975, the Federal EITC is a refundable tax credit that increases the income of low-and moderate-income working families by providing tax reductions and cash supplements. As a Federally-funded anti-poverty initiative, the primary purpose of the EITC is to help employed low wage earners maintain their financial self-sufficiency by offsetting taxes, supplementing wages, and making work more attractive than welfare. Despite the success of the program, research reveals that perhaps as many as "15% - 20% of tax filers eligible for the credit fail to claim it."[3]

Widely praised for its success in supporting work and reducing poverty, the EITC has grown to be one of the most successful and universally acclaimed provisions of U.S. domestic policy. In fact, several expansions in the late 1980's and early 1990's turned the EITC into the largest Federal aid program targeted to the working poor. The EITC provides some $37 billion worth of assistance to almost 21 million low-income working families and is credited for lifting 5 million people out of poverty,[4] including 2.7 million children of low-income workers living above the Federal poverty line.[5] Research also indicates that the EITC has had a powerful effect in increasing the proportion of single parents who are working.[6] These and other outcomes indicate that the EITC is one of the country's most powerful income supplements and effective work incentives for families with children. Numerous States and communities across the nation have undertaken initiatives to expand awareness of and claims for the EITC.

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[1] Studies show that TANF recipients who find jobs typically earn $8,000 - $12,000 per year, well below the poverty line for a family of three. Johnson, N., Llobrera, J., and Zahradnik, B. (2003) "A hand up: How State earned income tax credits help working families escape poverty in 2003." http://www.cbpp.org/3-3-03sfp.htm

[2] Phillips, K.R. "Who Knows about the Earned Income Tax Credit." The Urban Institute, January 2001. P.2, http://www.urban.org

[3] Berube, A & Tiffany, T. The "State Of Low –Wage Workers: How the EITC Benefits Urban and Rural Communities in the 50 States." The Brookings Institute, February 2004. P.3. http://www.brookings.edu/eitcseries

[4] The National EITC Outreach Partnership, "The Earned Income Tax Credit –A Fact Sheet" July 2004 www.centeronbudget.org/eitc-partnership/eitcfactsheet.htm

[5] Berube, A. (June 21, 2004) "Background on EITC Campaigns." Presentation: EITC Funder's Meeting. Brookings Institute. http://www.brookings.edu/metropolitanpolicyprogram.

[6] According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the percentage of single mothers who work rose from 73% in 1984 to approximately 82% in 1996, and that EITC expansions had a stronger effect in increasing workforce participation than welfare policy changes.

To expand TANF client and community awareness and participation in federal tax credit programs such as the EITC, the State of Louisiana requested technical assistance from the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network. In the summer of 2004, Louisiana's Department of Social Services (DSS) contacted Welfare Peer TA regarding the design and delivery of a coordinated Statewide EITC initiative to bolster Louisiana's efforts at establishing community partnerships, enhancing outreach, and, ultimately, improving access to the EITC and free tax filing assistance for low-income residents.

In response to the TA request from the State of Louisiana, the Welfare Peer TA Network planned, designed, and implemented a Roundtable event that was held on October 25-26, 2004 in Baton Rouge, LA. Approximately 80 individuals representing a wide variety of Federal, State, and local agencies and organizations attended the Roundtable. The event was designed to impart knowledge about the EITC, foster peer-to-peer learning, highlight best practices on EITC outreach and free tax preparation from around the country, provide helpful tools for launching an EITC campaign, and facilitate the development of local and regional action plans for immediate implementation.

The following report describes the Roundtable event that was designed to meet the needs articulated in Louisiana's request for technical assistance.

III. ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

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The Welfare Peer TA Roundtable event entitled "EITC Strategies for Louisiana" took place in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and was comprised of two intensive days of workshop sessions, interactive discussions, breakout groups, and presentations. The event was hosted in collaboration by the Louisiana Governor's office and the State-level Departments of Social Services, Revenue, and Labor. The following sections of this report summarize the content of the various event sessions.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

During this brief introductory session, five speakers each welcomed the Roundtable participants and offered their initial thoughts on the purpose, goals, and anticipated outcomes of the event. John Horejsi, the Federal Project Officer of the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, opened the event and discussed the purpose and mission of Welfare Peer TA. He highlighted how the EITC is a powerful strategy to help TANF families move one step closer to self-sufficiency because it is based on work, not welfare. Various benefits and assets of the EITC include that it is proven and effective, it rewards work, it strengthens families, and it poses no administrative or economic costs to employers.

James Gilmore, a representative from the Office of the Governor of Louisiana, brought greetings from the Governor. He stressed that the Governor's administration strongly supports this current Statewide EITC outreach effort and is very aware of the need for increased EITC outreach in the State of Louisiana as a result of the lost benefits of unclaimed dollars. Mr. Gilmore also reviewed some of the main accomplishments of the first seven months of Governor Blanco's term, such as addressing the health care crisis in Louisiana, convening a conference on women, increasing jobs, and sponsoring an upcoming poverty summit scheduled for early December 2004. Mr. Gilmore conveyed his excitement to be at such an important event and reiterated that "it's an exciting time to be in Louisiana."

Gary Matherne, the Deputy Secretary for the Louisiana Department of Revenue (DOR) explained how the DOR has been involved in EITC and VITA programs for quite some time. He also set the context for the event by providing some overall statistics about poverty and the EITC in Louisiana. Highlights from the statistics he listed are presented in Exhibit III-1.

EXHIBIT III-1 HIGHLIGHTED LOUISIANA POPULATION STATISTICS	
Category	**Total Amount**
Total Louisiana EITC Returns	421,318
Total Louisiana Returns Receiving the EITC	411,637
Sum of EITC Returns in Louisiana	$824,766,075
Average EITC Return per Applicant	$2,004
Total Population of Louisiana	4,468,976
Total Population Below Poverty Level	851,113 (19.6%)
Total Number of Families in Louisiana	1,268,194
Total Number of Families Below Poverty Level	183,448 (14.5%)
Total Family Income Less Than $35,000/yr.	513,182 (40%)

Mr. Matherne elaborated that almost 20 percent of the total population in Louisiana lives in poverty. Ten percent of Louisiana families are living on less than $10,000/year. He used these statistics to underscore the importance of the work being done on EITC outreach at this Roundtable event. Mr. Matherne ended his brief comments by encouraging participants to "take this work personally" and make it a personal issue to help support low-income families in the State.

Mr. Adren Wilson of the Louisiana Department of Social Services also offered his words of welcome and stated that this event promises to be an exciting and rewarding conference. He drew the distinction between a contribution and a commitment, and urged participants in the audience to "make a full commitment" to the cause of EITC outreach in the State of Louisiana.

To end the welcoming session, Mr. Larry St. Amant offered a few brief remarks on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Labor. He expressed his excitement to be participating in the first major coordinated conference on the EITC in Louisiana. He also emphasized that asset-building is the key to lifting low-income families out of poverty. The EITC, financial literacy training, and Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are powerful tools to foster financial independence in low-income families.

2. A SHARED VISION FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

During this session, Mr. Grant Collins, Chief Program Officer from the Office of Family Assistance gave an extensive presentation on the benefits of targeting TANF recipients as part of a Statewide EITC initiative. Mr. Leon McCowan, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Administrator for Region VI, introduced Mr. Collins and also described his own vision for the formula for alleviating poverty. Mr. McCowan sees the notion of strengthening families as the common thread throughout a wide variety of government programs and services,

such as Head Start, child support, child welfare, healthy marriage initiatives, fatherhood initiatives, and financial literacy initiatives.

2.1 Building Foundations for Family Financial Self-sufficiency: Why TANF is the Right Place to Target an EITC Initiative

During the morning's keynote presentation, Mr. Collins reviewed the current Administration's plan to strengthen welfare reform, listed a wide array of reasons why the EITC specifically benefits TANF recipients, illustrated past examples of successful EITC initiatives that targeted TANF recipients such as Benton Harbor, MI, and offered local data from the most recent tax season on EITC claims in Louisiana.

At the beginning of his presentation, Mr. Collins framed the context of the discussion with some relevant background information about welfare reform and TANF. He reiterated that the TANF program is administered by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and is the cash assistance program for the country, implemented through annual block grants to the States. Mr. Collins outlined the four main purposes of the TANF program, reminding participants that TANF seeks to achieve broader goals than solely to provide economic assistance to families. TANF also aims to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies and to encourage the formation of two-parent families. Similar to Mr. McCowan's opening remarks, Mr. Collins also stressed that welfare reform is always about strengthening families.

Mr. Collins described the many components of the current Administration's TANF reauthorization proposal being considered by Congress. These components include: strengthening Federal and State partnerships, maximizing work activities, improving program performance, facilitating program and service integration, enhancing child support enforcement, and encouraging abstinence and teen pregnancy prevention, all within the over-arching purpose of promoting the well-being of children and families. The reauthorization proposal commits to $16.5 billion in funding for the States. It also increases the incentives for States to pass through more child support monies, authorizes $74 million for abstinence and teen pregnancy prevention programming, and increases the flexibility for States to be more targeted and integrated in their service delivery systems.

The central message of Mr. Collins' morning presentation focused on creating EITC initiatives with TANF as the driving engine. Because the goal of TANF is not only to move individuals from welfare to work but also to move families out of poverty, the EITC is a great tool to accomplish the very goals of welfare reform. Mr. Collins outlined a host of compelling reasons why TANF is the right place to target an EITC initiative:

- **Children qualify a family for a larger EITC and Child Tax Credit (CTC) return.** The population of families with a parent and two children qualifies for the largest amount of the tax credit. For a family earning an annual income of $10,000 a year, the EITC can increase their annual income by up to 40 percent.

- **Nearly 100 percent of employed TANF clients are eligible for the EITC.** If an individual is employed and meets the eligibility criteria, they can receive increased amounts of Federal tax returns due to the EITC, whether they have children or not. A significant portion of these dollars go unclaimed because eligible participants do not file or are not aware of the EITC.

- **Nearly 67 percent of a State's participation is achieved due to employment.** Of those TANF recipients that count towards the Federal participation rate, two thirds of them will also most likely be eligible for the EITC.

- **Most TANF recipients do not know about or have not claimed the EITC.** These findings are based on research conducted by Maximus that indicated that more than 50 percent of TANF recipients included in the study did not know about the EITC and had not claimed it, even though they were eligible.

- **Minorities such as Hispanics, Native Americans, and African-Americans are less likely to have heard of or claimed the EITC.** In many instances, these populations can benefit greatly from EITC claims.

- **Individuals who have dropped out of high school, low-wage workers, and part-time workers are also less likely to have heard of or claimed the EITC.** In many instances, these populations can benefit greatly from EITC claims as well.

- **Many individuals that earn low annualized wages do not file for the EITC.** These individuals may assume that they are not eligible for the EITC due to their low wage totals.

- **Many individuals with employment, such as TANF leavers in some instances, are still below the poverty level and qualify for the EITC.** To be eligible, families must earn less than $15,260, which is the breakeven point for a family of three.

- **Some TANF recipients may be able to retroactively claim up to three years worth of the EITC.** For those individuals who were eligible, but failed to file for the EITC in previous years, they can receive retroactive EITC returns for up to three years.

- **Targeting TANF for an EITC initiative in Louisiana can generate an estimated $13.7 million for nearly 8000 families, including 16,000 children.** These estimates describe the benefit that increased EITC claims could have on the TANF population in Louisiana. When families claim the EITC, they may not necessarily move out of poverty, but they certainly move one step closer to self-sufficiency.

In addition, Mr. Collins also reviewed some national statistics about EITC claims. Eighty-seven percent of families that claimed the EITC had at least one child. Also, an estimated $36 billion dollars was generated across all States by the EITC in 2003. Unfortunately, an estimated $7.6 billion dollars remained unclaimed in 2003 by eligible families. Roughly 4.3 million families who qualified for the EITC did not claim it in 2003, all of whom could be positively affected by the receipt of EITC returns.

Benton Harbor, MI is a great example of the benefits to a community when TANF recipients are targeted for EITC outreach. Mr. Collins described the Benton Harbor pilot where the Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA) conducted EITC outreach to all current and former TANF recipients. The objectives of the Benton Harbor EITC pilot included:

- Increase utilization of EITC among current and former employed TANF clients for tax year 2003
- Conduct an aggressive door-to-door outreach campaign
- Provide free tax preparation services, as needed
- Verify method of filing
- Record results and process for possible replication.

In Benton Harbor, they engaged in various strategies to realize their goal. One strategy was to work with the Department of Social Services to send a letter to all current and former TANF recipients who had jobs. The local Black Ministerial Alliance also mobilized a cadre of volunteers to go door-to-door and inform community-members about the EITC. Lastly, a variety of local free tax preparation sites were offered. At the current time, no other program has occurred that is similar to what was done in Benton Harbor.

Highlighted outcomes of the Benton Harbor pilot include:

- Ninety-eight percent (628) of the 640 families were reached
- Eighty-five percent of those reached (545) filed EITC claims, including both Federal and State taxes
- Average EITC claim was estimated at $1339.50, yielding an average Federal refund of $1,523 and an average State refund of $193

- Estimated total EITC credit brought $730,028 into the community
- Estimated total refunds at $935,220.

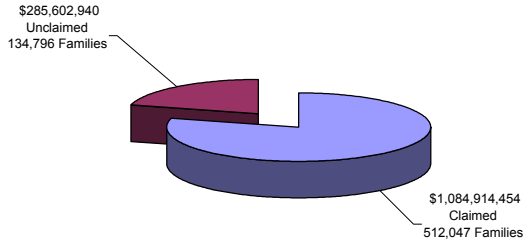
To conclude his presentation, Mr. Collins offered relevant local data about the EITC in Louisiana. Exhibit III-2 depicts a chart of claimed and unclaimed EITC dollars throughout the parishes in Louisiana. In total, Louisiana could gain up to $285 million dollars in EITC refunds by targeting the TANF population, which would benefit an additional 134,000 families and 234,000 children. Mr. Collins also listed a variety of action steps that the State of Louisiana could implement to improve EITC outcomes. These action steps are listed as follows:

- **Secure high level commitment to action.** This commitment to action can include the Governor's Office, the State legislature, and State Cabinet-level departments. The proclamation of an EITC Awareness Month is also a suggested endeavor.
- **Plan for a 100 percent uptake goal for tax year 2004.** With efficient and successful mapping through State New Hire data, planners can determine what TANF recipients are eligible, what TANF leavers are eligible, where they are located, and when they left the caseload.
- **Implement a year long strategy.** Start sooner than January of the current tax year to focus on the EITC.
- **Leverage program requirements and interactions.** Because welfare recipients are required to work, local employers are a great place to start EITC outreach, even from the first moment of a new hire's employment. Case diversions and case closures are also both good windows of opportunity to inform TANF customers about the EITC.
- **Get them as early as January with W-2's in hand.** The main emphasis of this action item is to reach TANF recipients early and to go far beyond "envelope stuffing" and simple outreach.

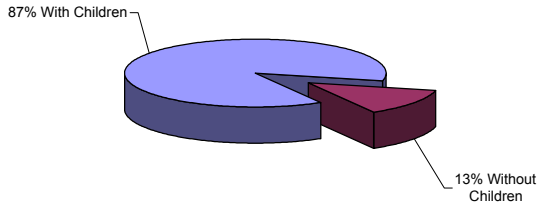
EXHIBIT III-2
TAX YEAR 2003 EITC SPECIFIC DATA FOR THE STATE OF LOUISIANA
OFFICE OF FAMILY SUPPORT BY REGION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
	South East	**Baton Rouge**	**Thibodaux**	**New Orleans**	**Acadiana**	**Alexandria**	**Shreveport**	**Monroe**	**STATE**
Amount of returns receiving EITC after deduction of disallowed claims*	70,889	81,130	48,799	75,494	130,418	46,174	65,303	37,772	512,047
Sum of EITC dollars for tax year 2003	$ 142,427,487	$ 176,635,881	$ 101,698,639	$ 165,686,600	$ 266,150,245	$ 96,298,665	$ 138,715,415	$ 85,532,545	$ 1,084,914,454
Average EITC per family	$ 2,009	$ 2,177	$ 2,084	$ 2,195	$ 2,041	$ 2,086	$ 2,124	$ 2,264	$ 2,119
Returns with EITC claims from filers with one or more qualifying children*	59,672 84%	59,672 74%	42,281 87%	66,241 88%	110,744 85%	40,067 87%	57,353 88%	33,589 89%	444,865 87%
Returns with EITC and Child Care Credits	4087 6%	3,957 5%	1,731 4%	3,991 5%	5,756 4%	1,250 3%	2,940 5%	1,118 3%	22,020 4%
Returns with EITC and Child Tax Credit	20224 29%	24,289 30%	14,248 29%	21,119 28%	37,152 28%	13,140 28%	20,330 31%	10,348 27%	147,908 29%
Returns prepared by Paid preparers*	50,886 71%	57,789.00 70%	33,552 68%	53,699 73%	95,774 73%	33,036 71%	50,994 77%	29,778 78%	373,561 72%
Returns prepared by Self preparers*	20,321 28%	23,956 29%	15,718 32%	19,634 27%	35,469 27%	13,167 28%	14,617 22%	8,417 22%	139,249 27%
Returns prepared by VITA preparers*	519 1%	365 0.4%	276 0.6%	291 0.4%	573 0.4%	656 1%	486 1%	24 0.1%	5,505 1%
Filers who met EITC income requirements who did not claim the credit in the prior year*£	**19,896** 28%	**21,691** 27%	**13,461** 28%	**18,395** 24%	**35,906** 28%	**12,368** 27%	**16,424** 25%	**8,805** 23%	**134,796** 26%
Estimated unclaimed EITC dollars based on the average EITC per family	**$ 39,974,288**	**$ 47,225,550**	**$ 28,053,144**	**$ 40,371,487**	**$ 73,275,090**	**$ 25,794,211**	**$ 34,887,555**	**$ 19,938,422**	**$ 285,602,940**
Earned Income from $1 - $10,000	26,997 38%	29,427 36%	18,580 38%	28,698 38%	50,836 39%	18,524 40%	24,183 37%	14,909 39%	195,738 38%
Earned Income from $10,001 - $20,000	27,142 38%	33,343 41%	19,017 39%	31,556 42%	50,524 39%	17,671 38%	26,946 41%	15,521 41%	204,723 40%
Earned Income from $20,001 - $30,000	15,619 22%	17,355 21%	10,423 21%	1,688 2%	26,938 21%	9,274 20%	13,468 21%	7,182 19%	105,010 21%
Earned Income greater than $30,000	2,148 3%	2,210 3%	1,614 3%	1,517 2%	3,859 3%	1,480 3%	1,718 3%	793 2%	14,221 3%
Returns with EITC claims with no qualifying children	11,217	9,348	6,518	9,253	19,674	6,107	7,950	4,183	67,182

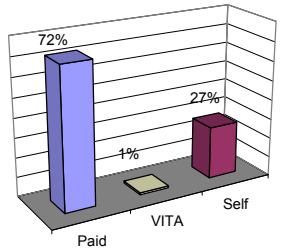
Louisiana 2003 EITC Status



EITC Claims With Qualifying Children



Returns With EITC By Preparation Type



£ EITC criteria other than income limitations were not taken into account for this item. Individuals counted in this section may pass income test and be deemed ineligible for other reasons such as age, legal alien status or state residency requirements.

Information is based on returns filed from January 2004 thru June 2004 for tax year 2003. Estimated unclaimed dollars should be treated and interpreted only as an indicator of the need to raise awareness.

Estimated unclaimed dollars should be treated and interpreted only as an indicator of the need to raise awareness.

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October 2004

2.2 Community Action Agencies: Catalysts for Building Bridges to Financial Empowerment of Low-Income Communities

For this session, Dr. Margaret Washnitzer, the Director of the Division of State Assistance within the Office of Community Services (OCS), discussed how Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are uniquely positioned to build community partnerships with various key stakeholders for a successful EITC initiative. An agency within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), OCS focuses an extensive amount of work on building partnerships and facilitating linkages between agencies. CAAs administer a wide variety of local programs (as many as 60 in certain cases), and they often garner the trust of local residents due to their intimate connections to the community. Unlike the reputation of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in the minds of many local residents, CAAs are well-known, trusted entities that work to reduce poverty and are not seen in a negative or distrustful light.

Dr. Washnitzer emphasized that CAAs are currently very much involved in EITC initiatives around the country. OCS began its involvement with EITC outreach over seven years ago. Presently, there are 148 Community Action Agencies with active experience on EITC outreach to local communities. OCS also makes grants related to asset-building and the EITC. In 2004, the agency gave $1.5 million for seven grants across seven States, and another $2.2 million is expected to be announced in December 2004 to include 15 more States. The 21st Century Solutions to Poverty Initiative from OCS will focus on conducting community analyses, community planning, and community engagement activities, including outreach.

Dr. Washnitzer ended her presentation with words of encouragement for the State of Louisiana and with a few final remarks about the close fit between the EITC and TANF. She sees how TANF and the EITC work hand-in-hand to reduce poverty and strengthen families. The role of CAAs in this close fit is to conduct outreach and provide tax preparation services, in addition to fostering linkages and building partnerships among key stakeholders in a given local community. Dr. Washnitzer stated her desire to make sure that CAAs aren't one of the best kept secrets throughout the country. She sees CAAs as an integral part of any EITC outreach initiative due to their extensive experience with the EITC over the past seven years.

2.3 Questions and Answers [for both presenters]

Q: What can local communities do to increase their chances of receiving a grant from OCS?

Dr. Washnitzer: We want to focus on building the local capacity of communities to compete for effectively one of our grants. Most are competitive grants, and they currently are hard to win due to the stiff competition. Louisiana is one of our target areas where we'd like to do considerable capacity-building.

Q: When you say capacity-building for local communities, what are some examples of what you mean?

Dr. Washnitzer: We plan to join with our counterparts in TANF to build the groundwork for successful grants-writing. This will most likely involve grant-writing training, technical assistance on building partnerships, developing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), and identifying outcomes. There's an urgency for me about this, and I plan to commence work on it immediately.

Q: Can you further elaborate some details about the unclaimed amount of dollars related to the EITC?

Mr. Collins: The total of unclaimed dollars that I cited is calculated by tallying the number of participants who are eligible for the EITC and computing the total dollars that they would have received had they filed for it. In addition to conducting that analysis on a national scale, I also conducted a specific analysis for the State of Louisiana. In Louisiana, $285 million was left on the table in unclaimed EITC dollars in last year's tax season. Effective outreach and free tax preparation services are the way to increase the amount of EITC dollars that are claimed.

Q: Do you have any data about the return on investment (ROI) of an EITC initiative?

Mr. Collins: Yes, certainly. In Benton Harbor, they returned $9 dollars to the community for every dollar that they put into their EITC initiative. It was a 9-fold return. When you see it all come together, it's a beautiful partnership. You start with TANF recipients as the engine, you draw on the experience and access of the Community Action Agencies, and you draw on the free tax prep and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites of the IRS. With those components, you can create a very successful and beneficial EITC initiative.

3. TAX ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIPS AND VOLUNTEER TAX ASSISTANCE SITE (VITA) PROGRAMS IN LOUISIANA

During this session of the Roundtable, which was moderated by David Cunningham of the Office of Family Assistance, two representatives from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) discussed the notions of partnerships as related to tax preparation assistance. Ms. Jan Pretus, the Territory Manager for Louisiana and Arkansas, has worked extensively across the State of Louisiana to build a strong foundation of tax preparation assistance through fostering partnerships and coalitions. Ms. Pretus is a manager within the Stakeholder, Partnerships, Education, and Communication (SPEC) office of the IRS. SPEC partners with local communities and businesses to develop and implement partnerships that promote education and awareness of the EITC and other Federal tax credits, provide free tax preparation services, and offer other asset-building opportunities. Ms. Pretus encouraged all participants to consider the SPEC program as a partner as they embark on the creation of their local action plans and local initiatives.

Ms. Pretus focused considerable attention on the IRS's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Through this program, free tax preparation services are offered to low-income individuals at various sites throughout a given State. The program originated in 1969 as a result of an increased emphasis on taxpayer education programs due to the Tax Reform Act of 1969. During her presentation, Ms. Pretus highlighted some statistics from the VITA program and the most recent tax season. In 2004, VITA sites were responsible for filing 23,718 tax returns. The average income of those that utilized VITA sites was approximately $17,000. Total EITC returns to the community were $10,158,665, with an average EITC of $1643 per family.

Ms. Pretus emphasized the need for effective outreach to increase the utilization of the critical services to the community that VITA sites provide. Her office makes contacts through direct outreach, media relations, and harnessing the power of linking with local employers. As an example, Entergy does a mass mailing about VITA sites in Louisiana. However, Ms. Pretus stated that there is still considerable work to be done. Next steps on the agenda for the IRS outreach efforts in Louisiana include:

- Provide more free tax preparation services, especially in rural areas
- Build more partnerships in all sizes of cities, not just in larger cities
- Expand outreach and education in rural areas related to the EITC, the Child Tax Credit (CTC), and other credits such as the Savers credit and the Education credit

- Link tax credits and refunds to other asset-building initiatives and financial literacy trainings
- Increase services to currently underserved populations in Louisiana, such as TANF clients with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and those with disabilities.

3.1 New Resources for Rural Communities

Subsequent to the presentation on VITA sites by Jan Pretus, Mr. Michael McBride, the coordinator of the IRS's national rural initiative, gave a presentation on the IRS's current attention given to rural areas. Mr. McBride colloquially refers to IRS rural initiative as "SPEC on the ROAD", which stands for the Rural Outreach and Assistance Demonstration (ROAD). The goal for the ROAD initiative is to develop outreach, free or low cost tax return preparation, and financial literacy pilot models that provide these essential services to the SPEC population living in rural America. Information gathered from the 2005 pilots will be used to develop a coordinated national rural strategy for FY 2006. For the majority of his presentation, Mr. McBride discussed various aspects of the national rural strategy, including the need for a rural strategy, the unique characteristics of and challenges posed by rural areas, the targeted strategies of the initiative, the measures of success.

Rural areas are particularly in need of attention from the IRS due to their high levels of poverty, their diffuse populations, and their historic lack of services as compared to urban areas. Of the 500 poorest counties in the United States, 459 of them are rural. Rural areas can stand to uniquely benefit from EITC outreach and free tax preparation services, even though the longer distances that characterize rural areas can make it more difficult to deliver services. The ROAD initiative defines rural areas as "places outside of urban areas." Urban areas are characterized as cities with a population of more than 50,000 people.

Mr. McBride outlined five major pilot areas or targeted areas of poverty where the IRS ROAD initiative will focus. These five areas include:

- The Old Plantation Belt—down the Eastern seaboard and along the Gulf of Mexico
- The Mid-South Delta—including the Mississippi Delta
- Appalachia—including the rural areas in Kentucky and West Virginia
- Indian Country—primarily the Indian reservations in the Northwest
- Southwest—including the rural areas of the Southwestern States.

For each pilot area, Mr. McBride and the ROAD initiative will work to identify key partners in the localities with a stake in improving the rural communities, engage civic leadership, obtain funding, and generate a broad coalition of partners through education, communication, and outreach.

The success of the ROAD initiative will be measured by the following factors:

- Improving quality of life for rural America
- Fostering self-sustaining partnerships
- Creating sites that continue to expand in the future
- Creating collaborations that grow through outreach
- Increasing tax benefits through collaborations
- Utilizing lessons learned to formulate FY 2006 rural initiatives.

These factors will be measured in a variety of ways such as an increase in eligible EITC claims, an increase in E-filed tax returns, survey results demonstrating an increase in customer and partner satisfaction levels, and increases in the number of taxpayers receiving financial literacy training and opening Individual Development Accounts (IDAs).

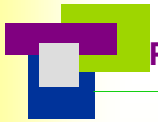
To end his presentation, Mr. McBride gave a detailed description of examples of tasks that he will undertake to achieve the four main strategies of the ROAD initiative. These examples of activities are displayed in the four slides contained within Exhibit III-3.

EXHIBIT III-3

Strategy 1
Indirect outreach via rural groups

Examples of Activities

- Identify self-sufficient partners
- Consult rural Americans and organizations on best actions
- Pilot with DOJ Weed & Seed locations
- Pilot with USDA/HUD local offices
- Pilot with DOL One-Stop Centers
- Pilot with a western RCAP state
- Identify additional partner organizations for FY 06



Strategy 2
Partner to establish self-sufficient VITA

Examples of Activities

- Pilot VITA/Coalition site with Empowerment Zone/Corporations
- Louisiana, HHS and New Orleans Territory to conduct three-pronged campaign
- AARP to collaborate on select pilots
- Pilot VITA sites with DOJ Weed & Seed locations

Strategy 3
Engage partners who emphasize Financial Literacy Programs

Examples of Activities

- Partner with NRFC to establish pilot outreach, tax prep, financial literacy program with Native American Tribes in Montana
- Establish pilot VITA site specializing in IDAs with DOJ Weed & Seed and HHS

Strategy 4
MOU with Federal Agency

Activities

Develop an Memorandum Of Understanding with HHS regarding community based grantees

3.2 Questions and Answers [for both presenters]

Q: What are some efforts being made specifically in rural areas?

Ms. Pretus: At IRS, we're located in New Orleans, and engaging rural areas is definitely a formidable challenge. In some rural areas, it is difficult to make even initial contacts. The State Department of Revenue (DOR) has been a wonderful source of help and assistance. However, at the IRS, we have a considerable stigma to face. We're seen as the taxing authorities, and people do not flock to utilize our services. Even though we're out in the communities conducting outreach, we still have to attitudinal hurdle to overcome. This is why we're working to pool our resources and set up coalitions and collaborations in rural areas.

Q: What partnerships do you have in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, and what role does the IRS play in these partnerships?

Ms. Pretus: We have several partnerships in New Orleans with organizations such as Total Community Action, ACORN, and the Central City Asset-Building Coalition. We also have partnerships with agencies that predominantly serve the Hispanic and Vietnamese populations. In Baton Rouge, we have partnerships with the Baton Rouge Asset-Building Coalition, the Mayor's Office, Southern University, Louisiana State University, and local Community Action Agencies. In all of these partnerships, IRS's role is that of the tax expert. We provide information, products, and the Taxwise software. We also conduct training of those that will be operating a VITA site. Overall, at the IRS, we rely heavily on coalition-building and partnering to do education and outreach and help to launch different VITA sites.

Q: Can you elaborate about the distinction between rural and urban areas as part of the ROAD initiative?

Mr. McBride: For this initiative, urban is defined as cities with a population of 50,000 or more. This includes the surrounding suburbs or urban fringes with a population density of 500 or more people per square mile.

4. LOUISIANA BRIDGE BUILDERS FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Moderated by Mr. Larry St. Amant, Assistant Secretary of Workforce Development within the Louisiana Department of Labor, the purpose of this session was to offer participants

examples of EITC efforts currently being implemented in Louisiana. As the service regions in attendance contemplated strategies and action steps for their local action plans, learning about existing local initiatives was intended to provide a springboard for ideas as well as a reference point to avoid duplicating efforts. Also, knowledge of these existing programs will facilitate the development of a coordinated statewide plan for EITC outreach.

4.1 Southern University AG Center

The AG Center is the outreach arm of Southern University. It is responsible for spreading the word about a variety of initiatives. As described by Ernie Hughes, the Center's Director of Development, the AG Center works to create a more educated citizen, who through education can make more responsible and educated life decisions. The AG Center provides training, outreach, marketing, and a variety of other services related to the EITC. Training on tax software is provided.

The majority of Mr. Hughes' presentation focused on the EITC outreach activities of the AG Center. Six months prior to tax season, the Center begins to recruit volunteers and build partnerships to help raise awareness about the EITC. Last year, eleven different community groups participated in EITC awareness activities. The AG Center also utilizes reserve funds in the university budget to pay for the design, development, reproduction, and dissemination of brochures about the EITC, which were sent to over 6000 individuals in 2004. Direct outreach is conducted through visits to churches. Lastly, the AG Center has a television station that creates and airs Public Service Announcements (PSAs).

4.2 MAAT Foundation

The MAAT Foundation is an acronym that stands for "Money Answers All Things." The presenter for this session was Crystal Rock, a Program Manager for the MAAT Foundation. MAAT is a faith-based organization with a focus on capacity-building and strengthening families. It partners with Federal, State, and local entities to provide services at the grassroots level. MAAT also operates as one of the major VITA sites in a rural community. Ms. Rock's presentation discussed the challenges of EITC outreach and tax preparation services in rural areas and the necessities of partnering with other faith-based organizations (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs). For Ms. Rock, relationship-building is the most critical process in a rural area.

Ms. Rock described the strategy of the MAAT Foundation's programs and services by what she referred to as "a willing environment community access network" or CAN. In this vein, MAAT focuses on building the entire individual in a holistic manner, because "individuals and families do not come in pieces." Throughout her presentation, Ms. Rock outlined some of the various services of the MAAT Foundation. MAAT offers a parent-child enrichment program, which works to encourage school readiness for 3- to 5-year-olds. It also offers parent education courses and wealth-building courses. As a VITA site, MAAT has a partnership with the local Community Action Agency (CAA) and with a local bank to encourage low-income families to not only claim the EITC that they are eligible for but also to develop financial literacy. Currently, MAAT is serving 17 families in a financial literacy program that uses the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Money Smart Program as a core curriculum. Outreach is conducted primarily through word-of-mouth.

In the coming year, the MAAT Foundation hopes to extend its EITC outreach campaign to a year-long effort. Future plans also include partnerships with local universities to encourage college students to help conduct mobile EITC outreach.

4.3 Total Community Action

During this session of the Roundtable, Dr. Peter Dangerfield described the programs of a New Orleans-based organization called Total Community Action, where he is the Executive Director. As described by Dr. Dangerfield, the programs and services of Total Community Action (TCA) are grounded in five core components, which are as follows:

- **Healthy relationships**—to assist a person in moving out of poverty
- **Asset-building**—including Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), education, business development, and home ownership
- **Enforcement of child support**—to support families
- **Intensive planning**—to create sound programs
- **Outreach**—to generate awareness and utilization of current programs offered.

TCA currently conducts a considerable amount of innovative outreach efforts to generate attention for its programs and services. These outreach activities are listed as follows:

- **Direct mail.** TCA has an envelope stuffer that reaches over 80,000 households in New Orleans and discusses the eligibility requirements of the EITC.

- **Indirect mailing through public school children.** A second flyer goes out to 87,000 children in the public school system who bring the information home to their parents.

- **Telephone calls.** Through telephone calls, an additional 15,000 people were reached last year and given information about the EITC.

- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs).** Elected officials, city council members, and other visible leaders of the community all appear in PSAs to promote the EITC. Then, TCA approaches local public television stations to educate them about the potential benefit of increased EITC claims for the community. Last year, TCA was successful in reaching 380,000 residents through in-kind hours of public air time from television stations.

- **Walker Talkers.** Through the TCA Church Collaborative of over 800 churches, local church members who volunteer to go out into the community to spread the word about the EITC are called "walker talkers." These individuals go in front of whatever audience they can locate and succinctly and clearly explain the components of the various government initiatives that are designed to help move persons out of poverty, such as the EITC, or IDAs. Walker Talkers go to grocery stores, beauty parlors, bars, lounges, and child care centers.

- **Official awareness.** Approximately 178 churches in the New Orleans area officially observed a certain week as their EITC awareness week. This year, TCA hopes to increase that total to 500 churches.

5. STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING EITC COMMUNITY COALITIONS

During this session of the Roundtable, Kaye Schmitz, the Executive Director of the Real Sense Prosperity Campaign, gave a presentation on an EITC campaign currently underway in Jacksonville, FL. Her presentation served as a sample best practice for the Louisiana participants. The Real Sense Prosperity Campaign, "Real Dollars for Real People," is supported by a broad-based coalition of community-wide partnerships between city officials, the IRS, community organizations, and area business leaders. Launched in October 2003, the campaign defines itself as "a coalition of companies and organizations from all sectors that have come together to improve the prosperity of the community by improving the prosperity of each of its citizens." The two lead partners in the initiative are the United Way of Northeast Florida and the Human Services Council.

To begin her presentation, Ms. Schmitz outlined the various reasons why the campaign was initiated, such as:

- The need to bring additional Federal dollars into the community
- The scattered focus and duplication of efforts by grassroots organizations at the time
- Restrictions placed on the IRS for EITC outreach
- The lack of a community champion for EITC awareness
- The thousands of dollars annually lost to taxpayers through predatory interest rates on refund anticipation loans
- The millions of dollars left unclaimed by EITC-eligible residents in Duval County, especially in rural areas.

To provide a roadmap for future EITC campaigns, Ms. Schmitz retraced the steps describing how the Real Sense Prosperity Campaign in Jacksonville, FL began. First, lead partners were identified and the United Way of Northeast Florida made a commitment to lead. Second, the lead partners initiated a significant coalition-building effort and approached other community organizations and key stakeholders about joining the campaign. Ms. Schmitz noted that once they achieved a critical mass, organizations began approaching them to ask to be included and the initiative "took on a life of its own." Due to their extensive outreach efforts, the coalition in Jacksonville currently includes more than 80 partner organizations. Selected examples of these organizations include Catholic Charities, Headstart, the Mayor's Office of Jacksonville, Sun Trust Bank, Bank of America, the Jacksonville Housing Authority, the University of North Florida, Publix Supermarkets, the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, and many others. The third step to launch the campaign involved securing funding. Seed funding for the campaign was initially supplied by the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund. Next, with the lead partners, the coalition, and funding in place, the campaign hired a Project Coordinator and established a management structure including committees for oversight, steering, VITA sites, financial literacy, and marketing. The coalition leaders recognized at that time that the initiative could not sustain itself solely on volunteer efforts. Also during the planning phase, the campaign set ambitious goals and high expectations for success.

The two overall purposes of the Real Sense Prosperity Campaign are to:

- To launch a proactive campaign that will assist low-income residents and the working poor to lift themselves out of poverty
- To bring millions of new dollars into the Jacksonville and Northeast Florida economic base.

Goals of the campaign are to:

- Secure the involvement of the Mayor of Jacksonville
- Increase the number of VITA sites in the area by 50 percent, including the addition of at least two rural VITA sites
- Increase the number of VITA volunteers by 50 percent
- Increase the number of tax returns prepared by 25 percent
- Increase the number of tax files receiving the EITC credit by 10 percent
- Train 50 people to teach financial literacy
- "Graduate" 20 low-income individuals from the first five modules of the Money Smart financial literacy course
- Hold two large media events
- Engage four local businesses in the outreach plan
- Conduct one direct mailing.

Methods used to accomplish these overall project goals and purposes involved many of the same combinations of effort as other EITC pilots throughout the country, including conducting targeted EITC outreach, providing free tax preparation services, increasing the number of EITC claims, and offering free financial literacy training. In addition, the Real Sense Prosperity Campaign was launched with the support of numerous "community champions" such as the Mayor of Jacksonville. Events held as part of the campaign included kickoff events in the community, a Volunteer Recognition Event at the close of tax season 2004 that included over 120 volunteers, and specific targeted outreach events. When pitching the project to potential partners, funders, civic leaders, and community members, the campaign highlighted the direct and indirect benefits of the EITC for both recipients and the community. For recipients, the EITC provides extra cash to meet living expenses, assists with the establishment of a good credit rating, moves recipients one step closer to home ownership, offers the potential to establish a small business, and makes working more attractive than welfare. At the community level, the EITC stimulates the local economy through an infusion of new money for consumption and investment and also reduces the tax burden to support welfare programs.

Ms. Schmitz ended her presentation with a number of constructive reflections about lessons learned and also a listing of positive outcomes that were generated as a result of the Jacksonville initiative.

Lessons learned include:

- In the early stages of a campaign, it may feel like "herding cats" to form a cohesive coalition. Many organizations may have differing expectations and viewpoints.
- A Project Coordinator is an extremely helpful position to spearhead recruiting efforts, to maintain a constant focus, to solicit assistance from key stakeholders, and to keep all partners on the same page.
- Launching the initiative with the support of community champions is a significant boost to the success of the campaign.
- Conduct outreach year-round and start early.
- Appeal to the business community to embrace the concept of EITC outreach and free tax preparation services.
- Leverage outreach vehicles such as Public Service Announcements (PSAs).
- Add a banking and Individual Development Account (IDA) element to VITA sites.

Outcomes from year one of the Real Sense Prosperity Campaign are as follows:

- A 58 percent increase in total tax returns filed from 1500 to 2500
- A 187 percent increase in EITC returns filed
- A 147 percent increase in total tax refunds brought back to the community to almost $3.7 million
- A 225 percent increase in total EITC refunds brought back to the community
- An increase in EITC refunds as a percentage of total refunds to 43 percent
- An overall increase of $1.1 million new Federal dollars brought back to the community from the previous year
- A return of $25.64 to the community for every dollar spent on the campaign.

Additional outcomes included 36 graduates from the Money Smart curriculum, more than 6000 volunteer hours recorded, and over 2600 calls related to tax preparation answered by United Way 2-1-1.

6. NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS ON THE EITC AND CTC

Earl Millet, Jr., the Regional Director for the Louisiana Department of Revenue facilitated this session that covered numerous examples of building collaborations related to the EITC. Presenters included Byron Arthur, the Press Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Revenue, and Lynn Mitchell, the Policy Director for Corporate Voices for Working Families. During his introduction, Mr. Millet discussed the role of the Louisiana Department of Revenue (DOR) in providing services and resources to low-income families in the State. He also emphasized how the Louisiana DOR is constantly looking to expand partnership relationships with other agencies throughout the State. Last year, the State of Louisiana held a Super Tax Day at the SuperDome on April 15, 2004.

6.1 Louisiana Communications Strategy on the EITC and CTC

Mr. Byron Arthur began his presentation with a discussion about how the vision of the Louisiana DOR is broader that merely handling money. Rather, the vision of this agency, under the leadership of Secretary Cynthia Bridges, is to educate, foster financial literacy, and help to provide taxpayers with the resources and full returns that they are eligible for. Part of the mission of the DOR is to inform citizens in Louisiana about the tax credits and other resources that are available to them. The creation of the EITC press toolkit was a seamless collaboration between the press secretaries of the cabinet-level State Departments of Revenue, Social Services, and Labor. These three agencies recognized the need for a coordinated Statewide communications strategy around the EITC.

As stated by Mr. Arthur, the objectives behind creating an EITC press toolkit in Louisiana were:

- To reach out to eligible low-income residents who were not claiming the EITC
- To educate the general public and encourage the community to partner together around the EITC
- To increase the awareness of elected and appointed officials about the potential economic impact of the EITC.

The target audience of the Statewide communications strategy included many individuals and entities, such as TANF clients, Head Start families, the State legislature, other public officials, the general public, the news media, local businesses, and Executive Office staff. The broader strategy also incorporated multiple parallel processes such as face-to-face meetings, posters, flyers, radio announcements, television air time, parent meetings, school contacts, and direct mailings to residences.

The purpose of the EITC media toolkit is to provide resources for organizations that lack extensive experience interacting with various sources of media. Within the toolkit is background information on the EITC, tips for delivering the EITC message, a listing of the elements of a successful EITC campaign, tips on how to find funding for an EITC campaign, timelines for benchmarks, sample radio scripts and press releases, contact listings, and tips on media relations.

6.2 Working in Partnership with the Business Community

Lynn Mitchell, the Policy Director for Corporate Voices for Working Families, used this session to highlight successful strategies for partnering with employers on EITC outreach initiatives. Corporate Voices for Working Families is a non-partisan, non-profit corporate membership organization created to bring the private sector voice into the public dialogue on issues affecting working families. The organization currently has 47 partner companies that employ more than 4 million individuals throughout all fifty States and generate annual net revenues of over $800 billion. Examples of corporations that are members include Accenture, Allstate, Baxter, CVS, Kodak, Goldman Sachs, IBM, Kinko's, Marriot, and TimeWarner.

Corporate Voices has developed an EITC tookit for working with employers. The toolkit covers the following themes:

- **The EITC is important for business**—because it demonstrates that employers are concerned about the financial well-being of their employees and willing to facilitate alternative means of income other than wages. Such efforts lead to increases in employee loyalty and assist with job retention rates.
- **EITC eligibility criteria**—statistics broken down by income level, marriage, and number of children. For example, a single parent with one child earning $30,338 or less is eligible for the EITC.
- **Engaging employers about the EITC**—Corporate Voices has developed outreach materials for organizations to use when interacting with employers about the EITC. These materials include posters, flyers, and a CD-ROM that employers can tailor and brand with their unique logo.

- **The advance EITC** - Corporate Voices encourages employers to give a W-5 form to all interested and eligible employees and to include W-5 forms in hiring and benefits packages for new employees.
- **Avoiding quick refunds**—by deterring employees from utilizing for-profit tax preparers and encouraging employees to visit VITA sites.
- **Free tax preparation help from the IRS**—through local VITA sites.
- **Examples of corporate best practices around the EITC**—including CVS's work with Community Action Agencies and local One-stop centers, Marriot's 1-800 toll-free hotline for employees to call and learn about the EITC, and TJX's large direct mailing to over 1300 retail stores.

Also part of the Corporate Voices EITC toolkit, Ms. Mitchell described a small "EITC At-a-Glance" sheet for employers to carry that will help when responding to questions about the EITC. This "cheat sheet" includes a calendar, small prepared scripts for frequently asked questions, and other general information about the EITC.

6.3 Questions and Answers [for both presenters]

Q: Can you briefly elaborate about the total membership of Corporate Voices and some of the characteristics of your members?

Ms. Mitchell: There are 47 employers who are part of Corporate Voices. We receive funding from Hitachi, Ford, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Q: Often times, it is hard to determine the proper person to contact within a large corporation. What advice do you give to those who are trying to identify a certain contact to help them avoid being referred numerous times?

Ms. Mitchell: There's no easy answer to that question, especially because of the wide variety of organizational types of many corporations. In some companies, the best person to speak too about EITC information might be the Director of Human Resources. In others, it may be a Work/Life Director. In others, a Director of Community Initiatives or Community Services might be most appropriate. At Corporate Voices, we leave it at the discretion of each member company to decide who their primary point of contact will be.

Mr. Collins: It is also advised to consider reaching out to employers who have a vested interest in changing their image in a particular community. The organizations that are seeking a

"face-change" may be very receptive to an initiative such as the EITC, because it can help them enhance their image.

Q: What about engaging Wal-Mart?

Mr. McCowan: Wal-Mart employs one out of every twelve Americans. They are clearly a force to be reckoned with. In ACF Region VI, we do plan to pursue a project with Wal-Mart to be a part of an EITC initiative for their employees. The way that Wal-Mart works is that corporate headquarters sets the visions and tone for all the local franchises. Based on this model, we plan to start engaging the corporate headquarters to make this occur. Being part of an EITC campaign that brings resources back to a local community can help Wal-Mart enhance their image.

Mr. Matherne: In terms of focus, I think it is particularly important for us to keep in mind that State government cannot will an EITC initiative upon the residents of the State. You cannot expect State government to make this happen in each of your local areas. Instead, we have to take this initiative to the local level and let local leaders make it occur. The initiative will not work on a Statewide scale if the localities are waiting for the State government to make it happen. I see this as a grassroots issue and something that has to be brought back home.

7. WORKSHOP: DEVELOPING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

To open this session, Mr. David Cunningham offered his reflections on engaging employers by highlighting an example from Waco, Texas. Waco has been a successful Federal EITC partner site. During the course of its EITC campaign, the Mayor of Waco took the initiative to invite leaders from all the major employers in the area to her office for a meeting about the EITC. Of the many positive impacts from that meeting, one result was particularly noteworthy. The CEO of the largest hospital in the community was so impressed with the information he learned about the EITC during the Mayor's meeting that he spearheaded an initiative with the Human Resource department of the hospital to determine how many hospital employees would likely qualify for the EITC. The Human Resource department discovered that of the 1600 total hospital employees, over 900 of them qualified for EITC tax returns. The hospital then conducted extensive outreach and awareness campaigns throughout the company and held workshops about the EITC for its employees.

Using this example, Mr. Cunningham encouraged the Roundtable participants to consider all the ways that local community partners and employers can help improve the percentages of

eligible citizens who claim the EITC. Even if the headquarters of a large corporation is not on board yet for an EITC campaign nationwide, local franchises can still work to improve EITC outreach. Mr. Cunningham also emphasized how local Mayors and County Commissioners have the power to mobilize and attract the attention of local employers. These are key partners who can greatly influence the success of a local EITC campaign. He encouraged participants to "do their homework" by identifying and contacting their local political leaders to educate them about the EITC.

Following Mr. Cunningham's introduction, Mr. Robin Taylor, Senior Tax Analyst for the IRS, gave a presentation on the IRS's business model for building community coalitions that support family financial self-sufficiency, tax awareness and education, tax preparation assistance, and financial literacy. Mr. Taylor stated that the purpose of his presentation was to provide structure to the community-based partnership model.

Mr. Taylor began his presentation by offering brief background and general information about the EITC, which was created in 1975 by Congress to help low-income families increase their financial stability. The EITC was introduced to enhance the attractiveness of working, as compared to receiving welfare, and to supplement wages. A fully refundable tax credit, the EITC can total up to $4300 for a family in a single tax year. This past filing season, the EITC generated in excess of $36 billion in tax refunds for low-income families nationwide. Heralded as one of the most effective anti-poverty programs in the country, the EITC has helped to lift billions of children out of poverty.

From the perspective of the IRS, Mr. Taylor stated that he would like filers for the EITC to receive 100 percent of the money they are eligible for. The IRS offers free VITA tax preparation sites to help families get as much of the money they deserve as possible. In addition, the Child Tax Credit (CTC) is a partially-refundable tax credit that is worth up to $1000 per child under the age of 17.

Mr. Taylor also discussed various ways that community- and faith-based organizations (CBOs/FBOs) can provide volunteer opportunities related to the EITC. CBOs and FBOs can recruit volunteers to serve at tax assistance sites, they can train volunteers to prepare simple tax returns, and they can help to manage a neighborhood tax preparation site. The IRS also advocates for a three-pronged approach for community coalitions to help with EITC outreach and tax preparation. This approach involves the three steps of 1) awareness and education, 2) free tax preparation, and 3) asset-building. During stage 1, coalitions should engage in marketing the EITC. This process involves educating families about the existence of the EITC

and CTC and other tax deductions for which they may be eligible. Target groups for outreach may include, the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population, low-income areas, civic leaders, and employers. Stage 2 of the model involves recruiting volunteers, establishing free tax preparation sites, screening families, training, and filling out tax returns. Stage 3, which Mr. Taylor flagged as the most difficult phase, involves all aspects of financial literacy training, such as opening savings and checking accounts, exploring home ownership programs, and utilizing Individual Development Accounts (IDAs).

Mr. Taylor ended his presentation by providing guidance on the steps necessary for designing a community coalition around the EITC:

- Gather local information about the number and location of EITC-eligible residents in the area
- Assess the number of potential tax preparation sites
- Conduct extensive education and outreach around the EITC
- Determine potential tax preparation delivery challenges existing in the community
- Convene a community-wide meeting that includes all stakeholders in the EITC initiative
- Identify key partners and establish a core planning group
- Establish goals for the program and develop an action plan.

8. WORKSHOP: DEVELOPING A VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE (VITA) SITE

During this session, Ms. Diane Puderer, a Senior Tax Specialist with the IRS, reviewed the IRS training resources available to operate a VITA program, including online support resources. Her presentation covered background information, tools necessary, resources, and the training required to operate a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site.

The VITA program of the IRS originated in 1969 as a result of an increased emphasis on taxpayer education programs due to the Tax Reform Act of 1969. Currently, there are over 5000 VITA sites operating nationwide. The current emphasis of the IRS is to increase VITA sites in rural areas. VITA sites offer free tax preparation services aimed at the IRS goal of helping low-income families to receive 100 percent of the refundable money for which they are eligible. VITA sites offer low-income families a positive alternative to paid tax preparation services.

Ms. Puderer elaborated how planning and developing a VITA site requires a site coordinator, a site location, resources and materials, and a volunteer base. The site coordinator is a very critical position that is responsible for planning, organizing, supervising, and promoting all aspects of the VITA program. Certain aspects of the volunteer group are also critical, such as the volunteers' availability, time, and desire to prepare tax forms, the volunteering spirit, organizational skills, and a certain level of computer literacy.

The majority of Ms. Puderer's presentation focused on providing Roundtable participants with a roadmap of how to develop and operate a VITA site. She discussed the various details and requirements associated with a VITA site. When going through the process of selecting and developing a VITA site, Ms. Puderer offered numerous themes that organizations and communities should consider:

- **Location.** The location of the site needs to have adequate space, appropriate facilities, and furniture, including handicap-accessible public restrooms. A safe and secure location is a must.
- **Equipment.** The equipment at the site needs to be able to support a computer lab and numerous computers, loaded with the Taxwise software. Other equipment needs include Internet access and a laser printer.
- **Supplies.** Each VITA site needs to have stocks of certain supplies such as printing paper, pencils, pens, and other office supplies.
- **Volunteers.** An organization considering becoming a VITA site needs to be able to recruit volunteers who meet the requisite minimum skill requirements. Young professionals and college students are often helpful volunteers, and volunteers with a background in finance and taxes are also a plus.
- **Training.** The organization considering becoming a VITA site needs to be able to support numerous IRS trainings, including C-VITA and Link and Learn. Training that the IRS provides covers forms and publications and resources on how to use the Taxwise software.

Ms. Puderer ended her presentation by offering details about the IRS Link and Learn on-line interactive training. For IRS SPEC and partners, she listed numerous benefits of using Link and Learn, such as reducing time spent in classes and associated travel expenses, providing consistent messages and opportunities for standardized delivery, saving money for updates to training materials, and the ability to offer the training anywhere and at anytime with a computer. For volunteers, the benefits of using the on-line Link and Learn training include easy access, the

ability to work at one's own pace, and immediate self-assessment feedback from periodic tests and quizzes.

9. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FINANCIAL LITERACY

Mr. Neil Goslin, Director of the Central City Asset-Building Coalition, opened this Roundtable session by providing some information about his organization and the work they do related to the EITC. Mr. Goslin was the Statewide Coordinator for the IDA collaborative in Louisiana, and he also has experience directing local EITC campaigns. Reflecting on his experience from past EITC work, Mr. Goslin stressed the importance of promoting asset-building in the lives of low-income individuals. Each year that he works on EITC initiatives, Mr. Goslin rediscovers the critical importance of the financial literacy component. Through a complimentary blend of services, the EITC helps to provide an additional injection of discretionary income for low-income families, while financial literacy training teaches those families how to manage, preserve, invest, and save that money.

9.1 Developing Financial Literacy: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Money Smart Program

Mr. Willie Lake, a Community Action Affairs Specialist with the FDIC, then provided an introductory overview of the FDIC Money Smart program and focused on strategies for empowering individuals and families to take financial control over their lives through financial literacy. Before elaborating on the Money Smart program, Mr. Lake offered his opening remarks about the FDIC.

Started in 1933, the FDIC is an independent agency of the Federal government created in response to the thousands of bank failures that occurred in the 1920s and early 1930s and caused the Great Depression. The purpose of the FDIC is to promote public confidence in the banking system of the United States by insuring deposits in banks. Mr. Lake pointed out that the FDIC insures deposits up to $100,000. He also stated that the FDIC promotes the soundness of financial institutions, regulates financial institutions for compliance with consumer laws, and facilitates community development efforts. Since the provision of the first FDIC insurances on January 1, 1934, no depositor has lost a single cent of insured funds as a result of a bank failure.

As outlined by Mr. Lake, the FDIC is currently involved in aspects of financial literacy and education for three purposes:

- To help fight predatory lending
- To encourage financial institutions to identify untapped markets
- To assist consumers in shaping their financial future.

For Mr. Lake, the best way to fight predatory lending is through empowering low-income individuals through education, information dissemination, and training. Predatory lenders often prey on vulnerable populations such as the elderly or those with a less-sophisticated understanding of financial institutions. Currently, 25 million consumers in the United States do not have a relationship with a bank. It is these individuals who may be particularly vulnerable to the high interest rates charged by predatory lenders and who are in particular need of financial literacy training.

Mr. Lake described financial education as the essential building block that provides a solid foundation to assist consumers in shaping their financial future. Common activities such as opening a checking account, buying a home, making investments, and managing money all can benefit from the sound principles of financial education.

FDIC created the Money Smart curriculum to help encourage the millions of American families to join the financial mainstream by providing information about basic financial services and money management skills. The ultimate goal of the FDIC's Money Smart initiative is to help low and moderate-income families make informed decisions about their financial futures through financial training. Money Smart can be linked to other asset-building strategies such as home ownership, educational development, investment, and starting a small business.

Mr. Lake focused the remainder of his presentation on the content of the Money Smart curriculum itself. He described the curriculum as covering all financial topics "from A to Z." Divided into ten instructor-led training modules covering basic financial issues, the subject matter of Money Smart includes:

- **Module 1: Bank On It**—Focuses on teaching participants how to recognize major types of insured financial institutions, defines banking terms, lists differences between banks and check-cashing services, and outlines the types of accounts and banking services.
- **Module 2: Borrowing Basics**—Explains the value of credit and the different types of loans.

- **Module 3: Check It Out**—Outlines the benefits of using a bank versus check-cashing services, describes type of checking accounts and fees, and provides instructions on how to open and maintain a checking account, how to write checks, how to use ATM and debit cards, and how to reconcile a checking account.

- **Module 4: Money Matters**—Describes the concept of budgeting and how to recognize the benefits of a budget.

- **Module 5: Pay Yourself First**—Identifies ways to save and describes how money grows when you save. Participants are taught to understand the various types of savings and investment accounts.

- **Module 6: Keep It Safe**—Elaborates the various consumer protection laws and provides safeguards such as how to avoid scams and how to protect identity.

- **Module 7: To Your Credit**—Describes how to order, read, and use a credit report. This module also discusses ways to repair credit.

- **Module 8: Charge It Right**—Lists the characteristics of credit cards, such as costs, interest, credit ratings, and other credit-related topics.

- **Module 9: Loan To Own**—Describes the different types of consumer installment loans and how to determine the right type of loan for different situations.

- **Module 10: Your Own Home**—Compares the benefits and pitfalls of renting versus owning a home and outlines how to determine readiness to buy a home, including definitions of basic terms used in a mortgage transaction.

Each training module, which often can be taught in 60 minutes or less, includes a comprehensive guide for instructors and a take-home booklet containing summaries and additional resource material for class participants. Also as part of the Money Smart curriculum, participants have to create a livable budget that includes short-term, intermediate, and long-term financial goals.

Mr. Lake also listed ten reasons why the FDIC Money Smart curriculum is unique. These reasons include that it is each to teach, each to learn, flexible, targeted to consumers, and comes at no cost. Other benefits include its universal appeal, the multiple types of media it utilizes, that it has been translated for multiple languages (e.g., English, Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese), and that it comes with the legitimacy afforded by the FDIC seal of approval. Lastly, the FDIC comes with no copyright restrictions. Organizations teaching the curriculum are free to make as many copies as they wish.

The Money Smart curriculum is being delivered through many mechanisms throughout the United States. Many small organizations have incorporated it into the services that they

offer. In addition, the FDIC and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) have joined forces to offer the Money Smart curriculum through DOL One-Stop Centers. In Arkansas, the Money Smart curriculum is even taught in public schools. Banks, colleges, universities, faith- and community-based organizations, and credit unions are all additional examples of places where the Money Smart curriculum is being taught. Mr. Lake also offered tips on how to increase attendance where Money Smart is being delivered, such as offering "door prizes," providing refreshments, issuing "certificates of completion," or tying the curriculum to other existing services.

Mr. Lake ended his presentation with a few remarks about the FDIC's Money Smart Alliance. Essentially a marketing and rollout strategy, the Alliance is a joint effort between the FDIC and others designed to promote and enhance the implementation of financial education using Money Smart. Examples of Alliance members include government agencies, community-based organizations, financial institutions, faith-based groups, private sector businesses, educational service providers, and employment/training service providers. By the end of 2007, the goal of the FDIC is to populate the Alliance with over 1000 member organizations. In the future, the FDIC would like to expand Alliance membership to national consumer organizations, bank trade associations, credit bureaus, U.S. Consulates, corporations, and Federal home loan banks.

9.2 Reflections

Following Mr. Lake's presentation, Mr. Goslin, the facilitator for the session, offered a few final reflections about the value of the FDIC Money Smart curriculum from the perspective of a past instructor. Mr. Goslin's tips include:

- Avoid lecturing and teach the Money Smart curriculum in interactive ways that includes experiential learning
- Emphasize the modules on budgeting and credit
- Provide incentives for participants to attend, such as scholarship stipends, or other intermediate incentives
- Evaluation is critical, so be sure to conduct a pre-test and post-test before and after curriculum modules
- Avoid the mindset of evaluating your curriculum based on how many you serve. Rather, evaluate your effort based on the quality of the teaching that you provided.

10. RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Mr. Harvey Britton of Total Community Action facilitated this session and introduced Ms. Jackie-Lynn Coleman. Mr. Britton also added that the work of asset-building, EITC outreach, and developing financial literacy is about creating comprehensive strategies to develop individuals in a holistic manner.

Developing Local EITC Initiatives: Opportunities and Challenges for Louisiana

Through advocacy, community service, outreach, and training, the Center for Economic Progress (CEP) promotes economic empowerment and encourages self-sufficiency by increasing the economic opportunities for low-income families. During this session of the Roundtable, Ms. Jackie Lynn-Coleman, the Training and Technical Assistance Manager for the National Community Tax Coalition (NCTC) with the Center for Economic Progress, reviewed the training resources and toolkits available to assist local communities in organizing outreach initiatives around financial self-sufficiency. Based in Chicago, the NCTC has over 500 affiliates representing over 43 States. These affiliates directly serve hundreds of thousands of low-income taxpayers each tax filing season, and have extensive knowledge of the EITC and other low-income tax credits. Last year, the work of the NCTC led to the completion and filing of over 20000 tax returns, which yielded $21 million in tax refunds. Also, 1600 bank accounts were open for 'unbanked' individuals. The mission of the NCTC is to promote tax credits and financial opportunities for working families, in addition to providing capacity-building for free tax preparation programs, and bringing the voices of working Americans into the policy arena.

Ms. Coleman manages a 14-member team of experts on tax preparation and financial literacy initiatives to support low-income families in local communities. Her team provides training on a national scale in issues of tax preparation, quality assurance, engaging employers, rural strategies, asset-building, engaging banking partners, using technology and e-filing, and volunteer management including recruitment and retention. Last year, the NCTC coalition served over 190 organizations through the provision of technical assistance. Technical assistance is provided through site visits, workshops, peer-to-peer dialogue, teleconferences, and a yearly conference that attracts over 300 participants. In addition, the NCTC uses the extensive participation of volunteers in a helping capacity. Over 1000 volunteers are mobilized to assist with training and technical assistance.

During a portion of her presentation, Ms. Coleman provided Roundtable participants with a list of recommended existing toolkits and trainings on the EITC and tax preparation. As listed and annotated by Ms. Coleman, these resources include:

- Mayor Daly's Office in Chicago has developed an EITC toolkit that contains the basic ingredients for an EITC campaign.
- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) provides a toolkit on the EITC that covers EITC facts, tips on how to promote the EITC in local communities, and sample outreach posters and flyers.
- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) also provides an annual training for community initiatives that seek to learn more about community outreach around the EITC. This training is usually conducted over a 2-day period in Washington, DC.
- The National League of Cities (NLC) has developed a toolkit for municipal leaders entitled "Maximizing the EITC in Your Community." This toolkit covers all the necessary groundwork to launch a local EITC initiative.

In closing, Ms. Coleman ended her presentation with a discussion about upcoming resources that the NCTC is in the process of developing such as documents describing pre-screening for EITC eligibility, an indicator benchmarking system, and other working papers on rural issues, urban issues, and working with the Tribal population.

11. BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS

This session of the Roundtable was designed to facilitate local action planning through break-out groups. Participants were encouraged to absorb and digest the rich information they had gained from previous presentations, and then to apply that information in the formulation of local action plans. Participants divided into three break-out groups assigned based on community size (large cities, medium-sized towns, and rural communities). Each planning group was supported by Federal and State staff to guide discussions, answer questions, and offer ideas. Mr. David Cunningham, the facilitator of the session, emphasized that this session was the participants' first chance to think aloud, think outside the box, and grapple with some of the questions posed in earlier sessions. Mr. Cunningham also offered broad cross-cutting themes that the three break-out groups were to pay specific attention to in their discussions, including community strengths, community challenges, community resources, building programs, conducting outreach, developing VITA sites, contacting media, and coalition-building. Lastly, each group assigned a team leader and a recorder for facilitation and documentation purposes.

11.1 Rural Break-out Report

Highlighted challenges faced by rural areas include:

- Education and outreach assistance
- Communication and outreach difficulties
- Transportation
- Providing timely services
- Public awareness efforts
- Finding facilities for VITA sites
- Migrant workers and migrant populations
- Attitudinal barriers
- Building relationships takes more time
- Long distances
- Lack of technology/lack of internet access
- Low return on investment (low ROI)
- Competition from paid preparers and predatory lenders.

Highlighted partnering opportunities and strengths include:

- Good relationships with faith-based organizations (FBOs)
- Trusted relationships with local businesses
- Working with Head Start and Community Action Agencies, as well as hospitals, universities, military bases, and civic organizations
- Accessible city and parish government leaders
- County Extension services
- Local coalitions of nonprofits
- Department of Labor (DOL) One-Stop centers.

Highlighted past successful strategies for replication are:

- Implementing mobile VITA sites
- The FDIC Money Smart curriculum
- Partnering with lumber yards or large retail stores such as Loew's
- Facilitating collaborations between government and grassroots organizations.

Outreach strategies are:

- Partnering with the local media and faith-based organizations
- Partnering with day care centers and other community non-profits
- Soliciting support for Congressional representatives
- Sponsoring a VITA site in a mall
- Selecting a prominent business serving rural areas as a champion and leverage their high levels of access (e.g., Lowe's)
- Look into the resources of the Congressional Black Caucus
- Play videos in Department of Social Services (DSS) waiting areas
- Solicit paid tax preparers to do pro bono work for low-income individuals.

11.2 Mid-sized Town Report

Outreach strategies as listed by the mid-sized town break-out group include:

- Utilize the orientation and intake process of the Department of Social Services (DSS)
- Job readiness classes
- Parenting skills classes
- Direct mail outs included with other regular correspondence
- Posters and flyers in prominent lobbies of organizations
- Having an EITC kickoff celebration event

- Plug the EITC at the Louisiana DSS Statewide poverty summit
- Encourage targeted employers to present the EITC to their employees
- Louisiana Department of Revenue Press Secretary media press releases
- Television, newspaper, and magazine advertisements.

Potential partners to be included for an EITC coalition in mid-sized towns are:

- Elected officials such as Mayors
- Faith- and community-based organizations (FBOs/CBOs)
- Community Action Agencies
- Cooperative Extension services
- The United Way
- University students
- Local businesses
- Local Chambers of Commerce
- School Boards.

VITA site implementation strategies include:

- Widespread dissemination of information about VITA site locations
- Strengthen the collaboration between the Louisiana DOR and DSS about VITA site outreach and awareness
- Identify other key partners not at the table
- Utilize the technical support and equipment provided by the DOR
- Provide free tax preparation services using recruited volunteers
- Identify gaps in services and areas where new VITA sites are needed.

11.3 Large City Report

Highlighted challenges facing large urban areas include:

- Low tax filer turn-out
- Word of mouth is not an effective advertising strategy
- Competition against the rapid refunds offered by paid tax preparers
- Attitudinal biases against the IRS
- Uncoordinated services and connecting the dots
- Cultural differences and ethnic communities within large metropolitan areas
- Lack of sufficient technical support
- The need for more outreach activities.

Highlighted opportunities and strengths include:

- Good communication and access to State agencies and State resources
- High quality of tax returns that are prepared
- Many opportunities for education and financial literacy
- Providing videos in Office of Family Services (OFS) offices
- OFS to become a VITA site.

Highlighted past successful strategies for replication are:

- The Jacksonville EITC campaign as described by Ms. Kaye Schmitz.

Outreach strategies are:

- OFS to run data and send out targeted mailing lists
- Run data on using New Hire data as a base for outreach
- Initiate “super sites” for tax preparation and EITC outreach
- Use church busses and tap other transportation resources for travel issues

- Implement a 1-800 number for citizens to call and locate their nearest free tax preparation site
- Utilize existing media contacts
- Strengthen partnership with the Strategies to Empower People (STEP) campaign.

12. REFLECTIONS ON DAY 1

To conclude the first day of the Roundtable event, Mr. David Cunningham offered a few final remarks and reflections on key themes that emerged from the content of the day. Mr. Cunningham's comments provided a wrap-up for the day and summarized critical points of learning. In "at-a-glance" fashion, Mr. Cunningham's highlighted points were:

- Employers are encouraged to consider the number of their own employees that might qualify for the EITC and initiate an outreach campaign within their own organization.
- The Mayor's Office in City Hall is a good place to start a local EITC campaign due to the political power of the Mayor.
- Identify and engage a large local business that can act as a champion for a local EITC initiative. Large farms or agri-business ventures tend to work well in rural communities.
- TANF is the right place to use as an engine for a local EITC initiative because a vast majority of TANF clients qualify for the tax credit.
- Create local action plans that include a multi-year strategy and an appropriate timeline for rollout.
- Take advantage of existing resources such as the FDIC Money Smart curriculum, existing EITC toolkits that have already been developed, and other EITC resources.
- Plan to track your results and capture your impact from day one. Formulate targeted goals and track outreach efforts.

13. WORKSHOP: OVERVIEW OF THE TAX WISE SOFTWARE SYSTEM

During this workshop session, a large computer lab was constructed with over twenty different laptop computer stations loaded with the IRS Taxwise software. Ms. Diane Puderer of the IRS led two consecutive group trainings for Roundtable participants to familiarize them with the various functions, features, and benefits of the software. Using a module-based approach, Ms. Puderer introduced participants to the online income tax filing process. She also walked the

group through each element of a hypothetical tax return. Topics covered included common commands, the "toggle tree", fields that fill-in automatically, exceptions and exemptions, icons, various color-coded features, and explaining acronyms. Ms. Puderer fielded questions along the way and ensured that by the end of her session, each Roundtable participant was proficient in the use of the software.

14. DEVELOPING A MOBILE MULTI-COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT

Conducting EITC outreach, providing free tax preparation services, and offering financial literacy training can be especially difficult in rural areas. Particularly in States such as Louisiana, the challenges posed by rural areas must be addressed in the formulation of an effective statewide EITC initiative. During this session of the Roundtable, participants learned of a best practice from another area of the country on the topic of mobile tax preparation. Ms. Diana Behm of the Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency made a presentation entitled "Strategies for Developing Mobile Tax Preparation Services."

Ms. Behm began her presentation by describing some background on the rural area of Oklahoma that she serves. In the far corner of Northeast Oklahoma, Jay, OK is a small town that borders other States such as Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri. Sometimes, residents must travel up to 60 or 70 miles to reach the nearest Head Start center. Ms. Behm also briefly covered some of the basics about her program, which is in its fourth year as a VITA site. Ms. Behm provides mobile tax preparation services through the vehicle of various Head Start centers in northeastern Oklahoma. She conducts outreach at Head Start teacher in-service trainings in the summer before each tax year. This early contact enables her to build rapport with the teachers and staff that she'll be working closely with in January. In addition to outreach with the teachers, Ms. Behm also conducts extensive outreach at Head Start parent meetings. She stated that Head Start centers have strong parent involvement and a considerable family partnership component, which both are positive factors to assist effective outreach. Local fairs, public events, and engaging the United Way campaigns of local employers are other methods of outreach.

The mission of Ms. Behm's program is to assist families earning less than $35,000 with free mobile income tax preparation and to empower families with information to promote financial self-sufficiency through the EITC, home ownership, and financial literacy classes. In addition to outreach, Ms. Behm's program provides tax and financial literacy programs to all Head Start parents in the fall of each year to promote the free tax preparation that is offered at Head Start centers in January of each year. E-filing commences on the first day that citizens can e-file their taxes. Then, the program operates in full gear from the last week of January through

the last week of February during tax season. During this time, Ms. Behm, her staff, and volunteers work long hours to provide free tax preparation services at all the local Head Start centers by traveling to each at pre-determined times.

Ms. Behm stated that she is pleased with the outcomes that her program has been able to foster in the first three years of operation. In year 1, her CAA completed 140 tax returns and brought in $240,000 in refunds back to the local economy. In year 2, the agency completed 188 returns and brought back approximately $300,000 in refunds to the economy. Year 3 of the program experienced significant growth as the agency completed 350 returns and brought $500,000 back to the rural local economy. Also in year 3, 20 Head Start volunteers trained for tax preparation and one family was able to buy a home with the financial boost from their EITC return. In year 4, Ms. Behm's goal is to triple her numbers.

Drawing on her experience providing mobile tax preparation services to rural areas for over three years, Ms. Behm focused the rest of her presentation on offering tips and lessons learned for participants interested in creating similar programs. Relating to outreach, Ms. Behm encouraged participants to begin early, to promote the EITC at every possible opportunity, and to repeat the message early and often. She listed potential outreach opportunities to include United Way campaigns, resource fairs, Head Start parent meetings, Head Start in-service trainings, newspapers, radio, television, newsletters, the public schools, laundromats, and restaurants.

She also listed 12 "must have" items for a mobile tax preparation site. These items include:

- Laptop computers with Taxwise software (she operated 5 at each site)
- Laser printer with extra print cartridge
- Reams of printing paper
- VITA envelopes for returns
- File folders
- Extension cords and power strips
- Computer discs
- Intake forms
- C-VITA flip charts
- IRS Publication 17
- Volunteers and staff
- Smiles and patience.

A mobile tax preparation site must also pre-designate all the locations it will visit at pre-determined times. In this way, the mobile tax preparers have a roadmap of where they will be going and when. On this vein, Ms. Behm reminded Roundtable participants to set appointment times in advance, create and send "appointment cards" with a list of needed documents to file taxes to each site, confirm locations one-week prior to each filing session, and build extra time into the schedule for potential walk-ins or for late arrivals. During tax preparation at a site, each

return should take no more than 20-30 minutes. Also, it is recommended to find activities, books, or games for children to play while their parents are preparing tax returns.

During each tax preparation session, a site coordinator should be responsible for organizing and managing the entire staff and schedule. In her experience, this site coordinator is usually a lead Head Start teacher. It is recommended that specific volunteers be assigned to specific computers, and that each site designates a "greeter" who is responsible for organizing all paperwork and intake forms. A "rover" is also recommended that can go around, answer questions, and troubleshoot. The file for each customer after their tax return is complete should include: two signed 8453 forms, signed State returns for each State they have filed in, W-2 forms, 1099 forms, an intake form, and a back-up disc. The IRS Volunteer handbook is an exceptional resource that outlines the roles and responsibilities of each of these positions.

When developing a plan for a moving tax site, Ms. Behm offered the following recommendations:

- Set realistic goals for the number of returns you can expect to do
- Do not over extend what staff can do
- Plan ahead
- Market your success and share your outcomes with your community.

Questions and Answers

Q: Do you have a wireless transmission computer at your sites?

Ms. Behm: No. We used a phone line transmission, and it was from our home headquarters in Jay, OK. This process seemed to work well for us.

Q: How do you channel all the returns from five computers to one printer? Do you route all returns to one computer, and then only link that one computer to the printer?

Ms. Behm: Actually, we rely heavily on disks. We use 3.5 inch disks and print using those. On average, we go through about 300 discs in a day while at a site. These discs help us to stay organized. One disc per computer is a good rule of thumb.

Q: Have you thought about using a wireless printer?

Ms. Behm: These are things we'd love to do, but we don't have the resources or technical knowledge to support such things at this time. We only just started using DSL recently. Wireless isn't quite on the horizon yet for us.

Q: How do you handle rejected returns?

Ms. Behm: We look closely at the return and especially look back at the intake sheet. A lot of times, rejected returns have to do with an account and a debt indicator. In our presentations before tax season, we talk extensively about the importance of paying back-logged child support or taking care of bad student loans.

Q: What do you do when one of your filers has to sign an additional form after you've left the site and moved on to another site?

Ms. Behm: That's the beauty of using the Head Start centers. They are in the field all the time, and they have close relationships with the parents. We'll send those documents to be signed in a confidential envelope. The center knows to expect it. This is one example why using an existing network, such as the Head Start centers, is so important to us. If we were to prepare taxes at a school or at a Lowe's, we'd have to be much more creative in devising strategies to help individuals to sign additional forms. We'd essentially have to set up meeting times to meet them at Lowe's again.

Q: Do you have any thoughts about working with the Native American population?

Ms. Behm: In my experience, it's very important for me to know who they are when I go to their site. It's also important to go very slowly and carefully and explain things fully. In some cases, they may be more reluctant to share information.

15. EITC LOUISIANA: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH STRATEGIES

This session of the Roundtable enabled Ms. Mary Joseph, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Social Services, to unveil the Statewide EITC and CTC community initiative strategy. This initiative is designed to enhance the ability of Louisiana's most vulnerable families to access EITC benefits and mobilize the Louisiana economy. Ms. Joseph's

presentation touched on the announcement of the availability of funds for new project mini-grants, the Louisiana EITC initiative logo, and resources for promoting outreach and awareness.

Ms. Joseph began her presentation with an extensive list of thank you's for all the individuals and organizations that were instrumental in formulating and launching the Louisiana EITC initiative, including the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network's support of this Roundtable. The three main partners in this initiative include the Louisiana Departments of Social Services, Revenue, and Labor. Ms. Joseph then unveiled the official logo of the Louisiana EITC initiative, which is pictured below as Exhibit III-4.

EXHIBIT III-4
OFFICIAL LOGO OF THE LOUISIANA EITC INITIATIVE

The press secretaries of the three Louisiana departments spearheading this initiative initially presented the need for a unified logo. A single official message is a critical factor for the success of the initiative. This logo will symbolize being part of the Louisiana EITC partnership and will be included on all products related to the campaign.

Ms. Joseph also discussed the design and development of a new Web page dedicated to providing information about the EITC on the Louisiana DSS Web site. The purpose of this new development was to inform and educate the most vulnerable families such as those on TANF, Food Stamps, and participating in Head Start. After completion, this Web site was presented to the Governor's Communications Council for approval. Presently, all State departments have

been encouraged to follow the lead of the Louisiana DSS and include increased information about the EITC on each of their Web sites. The Louisiana DSS's EITC page can be accessed by visiting: http://www.dss.state.la.us/departments/dss/Earned_Income_Tax_Credit.html.

Next, Ms. Joseph announced the availability of limited funding to support outreach strategies and enhance the participation of TANF clients and the minority community in the various tax credit programs. This funding represents the commitment of the Louisiana DSS to the success of this Statewide EITC initiative. Ms. Joseph elaborated that priority for the receipt of funding would be given to rural communities with limited or no existing tax assistance resources. Mobile outreach and youth outreach strategies are also strongly encouraged for inclusion in the mini-grant applications. The Louisiana DSS is also considering the creation of a 1-800 number for the concentrated tax season, as well as providing peer support and training. To direct the participants to outreach-related resources, Ms. Joseph noted three specific organizations and positions as targeted "outreach specialists," which include the Office of Community Mobilization and Outreach, Regional Community Specialists, and the Head Start Collaboration Office. These outreach resources are available to ensure that outreach strategies are sustainable beyond the first year of the statewide initiative.

Ms. Joseph ended her presentation by thanking and naming all the partners involved in the Louisiana EITC initiative. These partners, as mentioned by Ms. Joseph, include:

- US DHHS, Administration for Children & Families
- US Internal Revenue Service
- Louisiana Governor's Office
- Louisiana Department of Revenue
- Louisiana Department of Labor
- Louisiana Department of Social Services
- Louisiana Welfare Rights Organization
- Louisiana Head Start Association
- Louisiana Agenda For Children
- Louisiana Association of Community Action Agencies
- Tulane University
- Grambling University
- Total Community Action
- United Way
- IDA Collaborative
- Children's Cabinet
- Louisiana MATT.

Mr. Cunningham closed Ms. Joseph's session with a few final remarks and words of enthusiasm for Louisiana's EITC initiative. He reminded participants that this Roundtable has laid the foundation of all the elements that they will need for their local action plans. For Mr. Cunningham, the goal of this Roundtable was to enable all participants to leave the event with the ability to immediately transition from the planning to the implementation phase of their local initiatives. In addition to reiterating his previous key lessons about EITC initiatives in general,

Mr. Cunningham emphasized the importance of "seven points of contact." This commonly-held marketing theory asserts that individuals must hear a message seven times before the message becomes internalized and actively elicits a response. With this message in mind, Mr. Cunningham encouraged the Roundtable participants to brainstorm ways that the message about the EITC can reach their community residents seven different times. These outreach strategies must include more than one flyer or one poster. However, when flyers, posters, brochures, waiting room videos, announcements on grocery store bags, billboards, press releases, and public service announcements are combined, they increase the likelihood that a given citizen will learn about and internalize the message enough to take action to apply for the EITC.

16. BUILDING THE LOCAL CAMPAIGN

During this session of the Roundtable, participants separated into break-out groups in a similar fashion as the previous day to further refine their local action plans. Groups largely mirrored the previous day's division based on community size, although Baton Rouge and New Orleans, the two large metropolitan areas, separated into distinct groups for the purposes of efficiency and city-specific discussions. For reporting purposes, however, the outcomes from the group discussions are divided into the small three categories from the previous day: rural areas, mid-sized towns, and large metropolitan areas (i.e., the results from New Orleans and Baton Rouge have been merged).

16.1 Rural Areas

The break-out group for rural areas reported that they focused their discussion primarily on identifying a master list of key partners for an EITC initiative, brainstorming strategies for sustainability, and outlining various means of recruiting volunteers.

Potential key partners include:

- Universities, community colleges, and technical colleges
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield
- Non-profits (e.g., Volunteers of America, United Ways, Children's coalitions, Community Action Agencies, Head Start programs)
- DOL One-stops
- Chambers of Commerce

- Civic groups such as Lions Clubs, Kiwanis, and Rotary clubs
- Business/industry employers (e.g., P&G, Century Tel, Bell South, Entergy, Concordia Electric, CLECO)
- The Southern University AG Center
- State agencies
- Law enforcement agencies
- Housing authorities
- Public school systems
- Media outlets (radio, TV, print media, and Statewide press releases)
- Financial institutions
- Private foundations (e.g., Rapides Foundation, the Mid-south Delta Initiative, and the Foundation of the Mid-south)
- The Delta Regional Authority
- Day care and child care providers.

Locations to recruit volunteers include:

- Churches
- Ministerial alliances
- University/post-secondary institutions
- Banks/credit unions
- Social service agencies
- Large businesses (employee groups)
- CAAs
- Head start parents
- TANF clients.

Strategies for sustainability of the local EITC coalition include:

- Holding volunteer recognition events
- Conducting consistent and regular coalition meetings
- Forming steering committees
- Implementing effective public awareness campaigns
- Creating outreach advisory councils (via universities)
- Obtaining continued funding
- Lobbying for the designation of an EITC week on a statewide level.

16.2 Mid-sized Towns

The break-out group for mid-sized towns reported that they focused their discussion primarily on listing local action steps for EITC campaign implementation. As described by this group, these action steps are:

- Hold meetings with local Mayors
- Identify and recruit partners from the pool of local nonprofits, businesses, government agencies, ministerial alliances, school boards, Head Start programs, the Louisiana DSS and DOR, and the Federal IRS
- Identify a consistent meeting place for coalition meetings
- Draft a letter of invitation for partners
- Harness the resources of local colleges to form a volunteer base
- Identify outreach locations and conduct extensive outreach
- Write and distribute media releases
- Include a financial literacy component and look into the FDIC Money Smart curriculum.

16.3 Large Metropolitan Areas

The two groups representing large urban areas discussed both specific action steps as well as listed potential partners to include in an EITC coalition. The outcomes of their discussions are described in the following section of the report.

Potential key partners include:

- Habitat for Humanity
- Head Start programs
- Government agencies including DSS and Medicaid as well as Federal assistance from OCS and IRS
- Large local employers (e.g., Restaurants, retailers, Lowe's, and Home Depot)
- Media sources
- Local universities
- Kiwanis club
- Local churches
- The Urban League.

Outreach strategies as listed by the large urban areas include:

- Word of mouth
- Flyers and brochures
- Contact the Economic Development Board in each parish
- Engage local businesses
- EITC recognition activities among employees of government agencies
- Billboards
- Local media spotlights and public service announcements
- Advertise using public transportation busses and bus-stops

- Mailouts to TANF clients
- Community meetings and yearly community forums
- Lobby for the Governor to make a statewide proclamation about the EITC in Louisiana.

16.4 Reflections on Local Actions Plans by State Agency Staff

Following the presentation of the local action plans, representatives from the various hosting State government agencies such as the Louisiana Departments of Social Services, Labor, and Revenue, offered their remarks and input on the plans. Largely, comments touched on how the representatives were impressed with the comprehensiveness of the plans, the broad-based coalitions that the plans include, and the utilization of existing resources such as Community Action Agencies (CAAs).

However, the representatives did note certain aspects of constructive criticism of the plans, such as suggested activities that the plans potentially overlooked. Mr. Gary Matherne of the Louisiana Department of Revenue encouraged each break-out group to designate a specific individual or agency that would be responsible for spearheading the transition from this Roundtable back to the community. Mr. Matherne was concerned that the plans did not include a specific task leader. Representatives also suggested an increased inclusion of the advance EITC, as well as a consideration of applying for mini-grants related to the EITC.

17. CLOSING REMARKS

During this final session presenters and Federal sponsors offered closing remarks and appealed to the participants to take the lessons learned at the Roundtable and act as catalysts for change in service improvement in their local communities. Federal Project Officer John Horejsi specifically thanked the participants for their contributions and energy. Mr. Horejsi encouraged the participants to build on the information presented at the meeting to improve services to customers in their home regions, to maintain a dialogue with one another and with their peers in other States, and to continue to use the Welfare Peer TA Network as a tool and asset in this important work.

Other resources made available to participants moving forward with the Earned Income Tax Credit include:

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities:
http://www.cbpp.org

National League of Cities:
http://www.nlc.org/home/

Center for Economic Progress:
http://www.centerforprogress.org/

The National Community Tax Coalition:
http://www.tax-coalition.org/

Corporate Voices:
http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/

Louisiana EITC Official Web site:
http://www.dss.state.la.us/departments/dss/Earned_Income_Tax_Credit.html

Louisiana Department of Social Services:
http://www.dss.state.la.us/

Louisiana Department of Revenue:
http://www.rev.state.la.us/

Louisiana Department of Labor:
http://www.ldol.state.la.us/

Louisiana Governor's Office:
http://www.gov.state.la.us/

Delta Regional Authority:
http://www.dra.gov/

Internal Revenue Service:
http://www.irs.gov/

IRS Link & Learn training:
http://www.irs.gov/app/vita/index.jsp

Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network:
http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/

FDIC Money Smart curriculum:
http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/

The Welfare Peer TA Network was excited to have hosted this successful event and looks forward to future collaboration opportunities with TANF professionals in Louisiana. Others interested in further materials related to the EITC, free tax preparation services, and low-income families are encouraged to visit the Welfare Peer TA Network Web site, located at http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/.

APPENDIX A:
AGENDA

Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Strategies for Louisiana

Baton Rouge, Louisiana | October 25–26, 2004

AGENDA

Day One: October 25, 2004

8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.	**Registration**
8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	**Welcome and Introductions** *Ann Williamson, Secretary, Louisiana Department of Social Services* *Cynthia Bridges, Secretary, Louisiana Department of Revenue* *John Warner Smith, Secretary, Louisiana Department of Labor* *John Horejsi, Federal Project Officer, Welfare Peer TA Network, Administration for Children and Families* This is Louisiana's first statewide workshop on the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). This workshop will help build the capacity for communities to organize local initiatives and develop collaborative partnerships with public officials, civic and social service providers, employers, etc., to promote greater awareness of the Federal EITC and Child Tax Credits (CTC). These local efforts will enable low-income families to become financially independent and self-sufficient. These efforts will also significantly enhance the economy of local communities and promote the development of a stronger work force.
9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	**A Shared Vision for Community Economic Empowerment** *Leon R. McCowan, Regional Administrator, Administration for Children and Families, Dallas Regional Office* **Building Foundations for Family Financial Self-sufficiency. Why TANF is the Right Place to Target an EITC Initiative** *Grant Collins, Chief Program Officer, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families* Participation of former Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients in the EITC and CTC programs are important elements for building financial self-sufficiency. However, research reveals that current and former TANF clients are less likely to participate in these programs. The studies also report that minorities are less likely to receive these program benefits. This presentation will highlight several successful HHS pilot projects and targeted outreach strategies that have enhanced the participation of TANF clients and minority communities in the tax credit programs. These innovative outreach strategies will enable communities to bring millions of dollars in unclaimed earned benefits into the local economy.

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. *(Continued)*	**Community Action Agencies: Catalyst for Building Bridges to Financial Empowerment of Low-income Communities** *Margaret Washnitzer, Director, Division of State Assistance, Administration for Children and Families* Community Action Agencies are uniquely positioned to build community partnerships with the EITC financial literacy programs and tax assistance in local communities. These local initiatives provide low-income residents with critical resources and skills to develop financial self-sufficiency. This presentation will include updates on programs and grant opportunities that will enhance the development and expansion of local initiatives. A question and answer session will follow formal remarks from the two panelists.
10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	**Tax Assistance Partnerships and Volunteer Tax Assistance Site (VITA) Programs in Louisiana** *Jan Pretus, Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Territory Manager, Arkansas and Louisiana* The power of coalitions is a driving force in all communities. The IRS Territory Office, through the Stakeholder, Partnerships, Education, and Communication (SPEC) organization, provides critical support to communities engaged in EITC outreach initiatives. SPEC partners with communities and businesses in developing and implementing community-based partnerships to promote education, and awareness of Federal tax credits, free tax preparation services, and asset building opportunities. This session will share highlights on the program 's successes in Louisiana and support for developing local initiatives. **New Resources for Rural Communities** *Michael McBride, Chief, Educational Institutions and Government Partnerships, IRS* The IRS ' SPEC FY 05 Rural Outreach, Tax Return Preparation, and Financial Literacy Strategy outlines a plan of action that involves SPEC Offices and various partners utilizing rural pilots and models to deliver services to selected areas of low-income rural America. Information gathered from the FY 05 pilots is to be used to develop a national Rural Strategy for FY 06. Key to this strategy is the fact that it will utilize identification of, collaborate, and build alliances with groups that have extensive pre-existing rural infrastructures as a means of reaching even the most rural population. Equally important is the fact that partner organizations have extensive knowledge of other rural organizations. The State of Louisiana is an integral participant in the FY 05 Rural Strategy. A question and answer session will follow formal remarks from the two panelists.
10:30 a.m. – 11:10 a.m.	**Louisiana Bridge Builders for Community Economic Empowerment** *Facilitator: Larry St. Amant, Office of Workforce Development Assistant Secretary, Louisiana Department of Labor* **Overview of Louisiana EITC Initiatives: Sharing Best Practices of EITC Outreach Projects** *Ernie Hughes, Director of Development, Southern University AG Center* *Crystal Rock, Program Manager, MAAT Foundation, Hammond Project* *Peter Dangerfield, Executive Director, Total Community Action* A question and answer session will follow formal remarks from the panelists.
11:10 a.m. – 11:25 a.m.	**Break**

11:25 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.	***Strategies for Building EITC Community Coalitions*** Facilitator: Michael McBride, *Chief, Educational Institutions and Government Partnerships, IRS* *Kaye Schmitz, Executive Director, Real Sense Prosperity Campaign* The Real Sense Prosperity Campaign, funded by United Way of North Florida developed a broad-based, community-wide partnership between city officials, IRS, community organizations, and area business leaders. The coalition also secured the participation of faith-based leaders and the Hispanic community. The project included both an urban center and two rural communities. In the first year of operation, in 2004, The Real Sense Prosperity Campaign returned positive earnings (a ratio of 17:1) for net investment made on EITC outreach.
12:05 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.	**Break**
12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	**New Opportunities for Developing Collaborative Partnerships on the EITC and CTC** *Facilitator: Earl Millet, Jr., Regional Director, Louisiana Department of Revenue* **Louisiana Communications Strategy on the Earned Income Tax Credit and CTC** *Byron Arthur, Press Secretary, Louisiana Department of Revenue* The Louisiana Department of Revenue is a leader in providing community outreach on the EITC and CTC. This session will highlight the Louisiana inter-departmental outreach and communication strategy on tax credits and tax assistance resources. **Working in Partnership with the Business Community** *Lynn Mitchell, Policy Director, Corporate Voices for Working Families* Businesses have a vested interest in supporting community EITC outreach initiatives and helping their employees learn about tax credits they are eligible to receive. Corporate Voices for Working Families has successfully developed EITC outreach partnerships with major business leaders to promote family stability and self-sufficiency. This session will highlight successful strategies for partnering with employers on EITC outreach initiatives. Corporate Voices for Working Families will also make the EITC Toolkit available for the business community.
1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	**Workshop: Developing Community Partnerships** *Robin Taylor, Senior Tax Analyst, IRS* The IRS SPEC (Stakeholder, Partnerships, Education, and Communication) provides outreach and education assistance. Its approach is to combine community resources and goals with other organizations in providing assistance to low-income populations in local communities. This presentation will share the SPEC business model for coalition building that supports family financial self-sufficiency, tax awareness and education, tax preparation assistance, and financial literacy.
2:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	**Workshop: Developing a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Site** *Facilitator: Robin Taylor, Senior Tax Analyst, IRS* *Diane Puderer, Senior Tax Specialist, IRS* There are varied strategies to promote the availability of the EITC and CTC. Developing a VITA program is a resource available in some communities. Tools, resources and training modules facilitate the development and maintenance of a VITA program site. This session will review the IRS training resources to operate a VITA program, including online support resources.
2:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.	**Break**

2:45 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	**Empowerment Through Financial Literacy** *Facilitator: Neil Goslin, Director, Central City Asset Building Coalition* **Developing Financial Literacy: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Money Smart Program** *Willie Lake, Community Affairs Specialist, FDIC* An introductory overview of the FDIC Money Smart Program, this session will focus on strategies for helping families to develop an understanding and vision for the future, empowering individuals and families to take financial control of their lives through financial literacy.
3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	**Resources for Developing Community Initiatives** *Facilitator: Harvey Britton, Outreach Coordinator, Total Community Action* **Developing Local EITC Initiatives: Opportunities and Challenges for Louisiana** *Jackie Lynn Coleman, Technical Assistance Manager, National Community Tax Coalition, Center for Economic Progress* The Center for Economic Progress (CEP) provides services promoting access to the EITC and CTC. Annually, the CEP hosts the national training workshop on developing EITC partnerships and initiatives. The CEP is instrumental in the development of training resources for community agencies on the EITC and CTC. This session will include a review of training resources and toolkits available to assist local communities organizing community outreach initiatives.
4:30 p.m. – 5:10 p.m.	**Building the Foundation for Local Community Projects: Meeting the Challenges for Organizing Local Initiatives in Urban Settings, Medium-Sized Towns, and Rural Communities** Participants will separate into three groups to work on planning their own local EITC initiatives. Groups will be assigned based on community size (large city, medium-sized town, rural community).
5:10 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.	**Organizing Regional Community Partnerships** Regional Breakout Session: Small groups will work in teams by region to develop local community outreach strategies. Teams will build on their own expertise to begin formulating strategies for an EITC initiative that is locally based, but scaleable to the State. Brainstorming and planning materials will be provided. Community project planning models, Louisiana best practices and developing new ideas will be incorporated into the local area planning session.
5:45 p.m.	**Day 1 Adjournment**
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	**Networking Session** *The Louisiana Head Start Association will host this event. More details will be provided at the conclusion of the Day 1 session.*

Day Two: October 26, 2004

8:00 a.m. – 8:20 a.m.	**Building Local Initiatives: Community Project Planning** *David Cunningham, Consultant, Self-Sufficiency Initiatives* This session will focus on strategies for meeting the needs of diverse stakeholders in order to support long-term partnerships. Included will be a discussion on ways to maximize local community resources, utilize guerilla marketing, and Seven Points of Contact strategies.
8:20 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	**Developing Local EITC Initiatives: Action Planning** *Jackie Lynn Coleman, Technical Assistance Manager,* *National Community Tax Coalition, Center for Economic Progress* *Kaye Schmitz, Executive Director, Real Sense Prosperity Campaign* Roundtable Planning Session: Regional teams will use their work from the previous day to refine and develop a local EITC and CTC outreach initiative. Teams will be supported by workshop faculty.
9:45 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	**Break** **(All participants will have the opportunity to attend each of the two workshops. Workshop assignments will be recorded on participants ' badges.)**
10:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.	**Concurrent Workshop Sessions**
Blue Group	**Workshop I: Overview of the Tax Wise Software System** *Diane Puderer, Senior Tax Specialist, IRS (Blue Group)* This session will include an introduction to the IRS Tax Wise software and online income tax filing process. It will also include computer training modules.
Green Group	**Workshop II: Developing A Mobile Multi-Community Outreach Project** *Facilitator: Robin Taylor, Senior Tax Specialist, IRS* *Diana Behm, Special Projects Manager, Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency* Providing –tax assistance to rural communities can be a challenge. This workshop will share information on strategies for developing and managing a Mobile Multi-Community Tax Filing Assistance Program.
10:45 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	**Concurrent Workshops**
Green Group	**Workshop III: Overview of the Tax Wise Software System** *Diane Puderer, Senior Tax Specialist, IRS* This session will include an introduction to the IRS Tax Wise software and online income tax filing process. It will also include computer training modules.
Blue Group	**Workshop IV: Developing A Mobile Multi-Community EITC and CTC Outreach Project** *Facilitator: Robin Taylor, Senior Tax Specialist, IRS* *Diana Behm, Special Projects Manager, Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency* Providing tax assistance to rural communities can be a challenge. This workshop will share information on strategies for developing and managing a Mobile Multi-Community Tax Filing Assistance Program.

11:30 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.	**Break**
11:50 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.	**EITC Louisiana: Resources to Support Local Community Outreach Strategies** *Facilitator: Mary Joseph, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Louisiana Department of Social Services* The Department of Social Services will unveil the EITC and CTC community initiative strategy. The presentation will include the announcement of project mini-grants, initiative logo, and discussion of the Louisiana EITC Web site and new resources for promoting client awareness of earned tax credits. The initiative is designed to enhance the ability of Louisiana 's most vulnerable families (TANF clients, Head Start families, and Food Stamp recipients) to access EITC benefits. The project also promotes local communities to undertake educational initiatives on the EITC and CTC.
12:20 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	**Working Roundtable: Building the Local Campaign** Participants will collaborate on the development of their regional community strategies to promote the EITC and CTC.
1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	**Review of the Developing New Community Initiatives** Regional planning teams will share strategies for enhancing and/or developing local community EITC and CTC initiatives.
1:30 p.m.	**Closing Remarks, Evaluation** *Adren Wilson, Assistant Secretary, Office of Family Support, Louisiana Department of Social Services* *Pearl Turner, CSBG Director, Louisiana Department of Labor* *David Cunningham, Consultant, Self-Sufficiency Initiatives*
2:00 p.m.	**Adjourn**

APPENDIX B:
PARTICIPANT LIST

Welfare Peer Technical Assitance Network

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Strategies for Louisiana

Baton Rouge, Louisiana | October 25–26, 2004

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APPENDIX C:
EVALUATION SUMMARY

APPENDIX C:
WELFARE PEER TA NETWORK
EITC STRATEGIES FOR LOUISIANA
EVALUATION SUMMARY

At the conclusion of the Roundtable, participants were asked to evaluate how well the Welfare Peer TA event met their expectations and needs. The double-sided evaluation form asked participants first to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of five general statements about the Roundtable on a 5-point scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. Each of the five statements and associated average scores are presented in the below chart.

Statement	Average Score
Conference planners adequately prepared me for the meeting by providing clear written and verbal communication regarding the meeting's purpose and expected outcomes.	4.5
Conference planners handled the preparation, arrangements, and scheduling of the event in a timely, courteous, and competent manner.	4.5
The speakers were thorough in the subject areas presented.	4.7
The speakers engaged the audience and facilitated interactive discussions.	4.3
The information will be useful to me/my staff in developing new approaches to addressing the problem.	4.5

Additionally, participants were asked three open-ended questions about their reflections on the Roundtable and their future technical assistance needs. These questions and representative responses received are presented below:

What did you find most useful about attending this Roundtable (i.e., any immediate or long-term benefits to you/your staff that you anticipate as a result of attending this Roundtable)?

- Learning how to partner with other organizations
- The background information on the EITC and amount of annual unclaimed dollars
- Getting a sense for how the Louisiana statewide campaign will operate
- The opportunity to network with other agencies
- National EITC statistics
- Information about how EITC is being encouraged in other parts of the country.

What issues would you have liked to have had more discussion about at the Roundtable?

- The costs of paid tax preparers and more details about how they operate
- How to integrate financial education into program delivery
- VITA site development opportunities and protocols
- Advanced EITC
- EITC eligibility charts based on family-size and income
- More guidance on action steps for implementing an outreach campaign.

In which areas, of those covered, would like to receive additional technical assistance?

- Advanced EITC
- VITA site operation
- Outreach efforts and developing effective outreach instruments
- Rural mobile tax prep sites
- Partnering with local community businesses.

The Welfare Peer TA Network is a service of the Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contractors supporting the Network are Rivera, Sierra & Company, Inc. and Caliber Associates, Inc. under Contract No. HHSP23320042907YC. For further information, please contact José A. Rivera, Project Director at 301-881-4700 or jrivera@riverasierra.com.

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