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ABOUT THE NETWORK

The EITC Funders Network brings together funders interested in the Earned Income Tax Credit, free- and low-cost tax preparation, and asset building. The Network seeks to increase awareness of EITC-related projects, foster collaboration, share information about the current status of EITC-related work, and help shape the future of the field.

The Network is generously funded by:

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation
The Piton Foundation*

A Note From the Coordinator

Dear EITC Funders Network,

In 2015, the EITC turns 40 years old. While we may not be breaking out the birthday cake, the anniversary is an important opportunity to raise awareness of the importance, staying power and impact of this poverty reduction strategy.

A public event [covered on CSPAN](#) held on January 30th in Washington D.C., provided public officials, policy experts and families an opportunity to talk about the value of the EITC and the ways that communities are engaged in helping working families obtain this credit.

While wildly successful, it is still estimated that 1 in 5 eligible taxpayers do not receive the EITC. To close this gap, many of your grantees will have tried innovative outreach and engagement strategies. As this tax season comes to a close, we'd love to hear:

- What are some innovations you've been supporting?
- What are some new strategies your grantees have been trying?

Sharing these strategies is a way the EITC Funders Network can help accelerate change and improvement.

Sincerely,

Ami Nagle
Network Coordinator

2015 Webinars!

- [Click here](#) to join us on March 17th for a webinar with CBPP to hear the latest policy changes afoot at the federal and state level.
- You can view last month's webinar with CFED to learn more about their efforts to support free tax preparation by visiting our [recent events page](#).

Interview with a Funder



Elizabeth Brister

Manager, Low-Income Customer Assistance Initiative
Entergy Corporation

Research News

Understanding the Impact of the EITC and Other Tax Credits on the Lives & Budgets of Working Families

In their newly released book, *It's Not Like I'm Poor*, leading poverty researchers Sarah Halpern-Meekin, Kathryn Edin, and Laura Tach capture how everyday Americans have gotten by since welfare reform's sweeping transformation in the 1990s.

Drawing on interviews with 115 families, the authors share what they learned about the impact of the expanded tax credits (and the subsequent cash infusion at tax time) on the lives of working families. The stories include how dreams of upward mobility are often dashed by the difficulty of trying to get by on meager wages.

Why does Entergy support EITC-related work?

At first glance, it might seem unusual for a utility—a private business—to focus on the Earned Income Tax Credit and helping low-income families have their taxes prepared for free. But Entergy has a strong corporate social responsibility commitment. Our service area within the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas includes some of the lowest income communities in the country. We know that many families we serve are struggling to make ends meet. It seemed to us that efforts to support economic security—including helping families learn about and gain access to the EITC—is a very direct way we can help improve the lives of our customers and the economic health of our communities.

What kind of EITC-related work does Entergy support?

Our EITC and free tax preparation work has evolved a lot over the past 10 years. We started with inserting a flyer into our monthly utility bills to let people know about the EITC and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance services. This was no small task. It is the only non-Entergy literature that we allow in our bills and it reached 2 million households.

From there the work grew and grew. We built our efforts by tapping our own in-house capacity and know-how to grow and sustain local outreach efforts. For example, we donated the services of our paid advertising agency to develop a comprehensive paid and earned media campaign as well as design and brand promotional materials. We've used our contacts in the media to secure earned media coverage. And last year we launched a special VITA locator website embedded in our own corporate website. This web resource helps our customers identify locations and hours of VITA sites and services available to help make getting their taxes done easier.

In addition to this in-house work, we have invested in excess of \$1.5 million since 2007 to a range of community nonprofit partners that focus on building financial capacity for low income families. We see our EITC-related work as part of a bigger picture of helping families gain economic security. Through partnerships with nonprofit agencies, we've been actively promoting and supporting linking financial services and asset building to tax time, helping build and sustain Individual Development Account (IDA) programs and supporting our grantees in developing

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Outreach & Tax Preparation

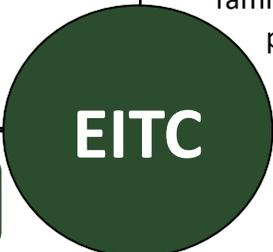
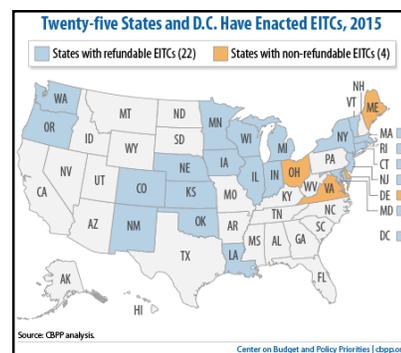
Outreach Toolkits for Advocates, Community Tax Assistance Sites and Elected Officials

As we approach the height of tax season, [Tax Credits for Working Families](#) recently released toolkits to help strengthen EITC outreach efforts. These toolkits share best practices from tax credit outreach programs from around the country as well as useful ideas on ways to bring elected officials and advocates together in spreading the word. Template materials such as sample press releases, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site visit planning guidelines and draft op-eds can all be found in this helpful resource. These guides include both a [toolkit for advocates and community tax assistance sites](#) as well as an additional [toolkit specifically for elected officials](#) interested in becoming involved in EITC outreach efforts.

Policy

Informative Brief on the Structure and Impact of State EITCs

The Center for Budget and Policy published a [brief encouraging the adoption or expansion of state EITCs](#). The report includes an update on the status of state EITCs around the country and makes the case for the positive impact of state EITCs on the lives of working families. Furthermore, the report indicates that state EITCs can be easy to administer and less expensive than many other tax cuts. Modeled after the federal EITC, state EITCs aim to reward work and alleviate poverty among working families, particularly children.



Benefits Access

Understanding the Impact of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Passed in July 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides federal funding for training to help unemployed and underemployed workers qualify for better jobs. The new law is substantially different from its predecessor, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), in its emphasis on targeting low-income adults and youth with limited training and skills to help them overcome barriers to economic success. The changes made by WIOA are important, not just for workforce programs and agencies, but also for human service programs serving low-income youth and adults and for advocates and community stakeholders who care about these individuals. [Click here](#) to read an article from CLASP about the WIOA and its current implementation.

Financial Empowerment

What is the Ultimate Goal of Financial Education?

While many programs aim to increase the financial well-being of low income workers, “financial well-being” has never been uniformly defined, nor is there a standard way to measure it. [This report](#) from the [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#) provides a conceptual framework for defining and measuring success in financial education by delivering a proposed definition of financial well-being, and insight into the factors that contribute to it. The four key elements of financial well-being include the following: control over day to day finances; capacity to absorb a financial shock; financial freedom to make choices to enjoy life; and ability to meet financial goals. This framework is grounded in the existing literature, expert opinion, and the experiences and voice of consumers garnered through in-depth, one-on-one interviews with working-age and older consumers.

Interview with a Funder (continued from page 2)

relationships with community banks to bring financial services to their clients. We also hope to act as a model for other businesses with charitable giving or social responsibility missions. Last year Entergy won the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's 2014 Citizen Award for best economic empowerment program. We were honored to be recognized and hope we can use that recognition to serve as an example for other corporations.

Who are some of your partners?

This is a big job and no one group can do it alone. First and foremost our partners are our community-based grantees. They know the local lay of the land. They know community needs and assets. They know the history of what has been tried and worked or failed. We rely tremendously on them. And we think of this as more than a traditional grantee-grantor relationship. We want to be in the thick of it with them in their local areas. So we work in close collaboration with our community partners to figure out how our Entergy-originated efforts and connections can be of use to the broader community. We also feel that our public sector and foundation colleagues are also our partners. We have a close working relationship with the Internal Revenue Service local offices. We've also forged a partnership with the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (WRF). Through this partnership, we are leveraging WRF's capacity-building grants to grow VITA services in Arkansas and encourage strategic planning for IDAs and other asset building services through the VITA network.

What are some of the biggest challenges you face in your work? What questions do you have for your EITC Funders Network colleagues?

Entergy has doubled down on its commitment to support VITA and asset-building services in our four-state service area. But our resources will never be able to meet the scale of need in communities with poverty levels in the double digits. Our greatest need is the development of other partners who are interested in lifting families out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. The EITC and IDA programs help families pursue education, buy or improve housing and put real dollars back in our local economies. Who could be against this? Our hope is to lead by example, inspiring more private and corporate foundations, especially in the financial sector, to join us in the effort to provide human and financial capital toward this vital initiative.



EITC and Two Generation Strategies

In partnership with the Grantmakers Income Security Taskforce and Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families, we are exploring strategies related to two generation approaches to poverty alleviation.

Stay tuned for upcoming events and information on this front!