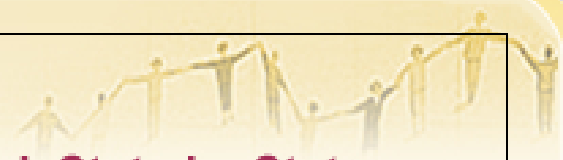




# Building a PEER TA Network State by State



**Office of Family Assistance  
Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network  
Engaging Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)  
Participants in Tax Filing Assistance -- Webinar  
January 30, 2013  
1:00 p.m. EST**

**Presenters:**

- **James Butler, Office of Family Assistance**
- **Maisha Thoms, Nehemiah Gateway Community Development Corporation**
- **Tom Hall, Delaware Division of Social Services**
- **Beckie Harrell, Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication of the Office of Internal Revenue Service**
- **Lesley Smith, Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network**

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the Engaging Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Participants in Tax Filing Assistance. During the presentation, all participants will be in a listen-only mode. If you're participating via the Web, the presentation slides will advance automatically within the webcast window. Web participants can submit a question at any time using the chat tool on your screen. Simply select chat with a chairperson and type in your question and then click Send.

If at any time during the conference if you're on the phone and you need to reach an operator, please press star 0. As a reminder, this Webinar is being recorded on Wednesday, January 30, 2013. I would now like to turn the presentation over to James Butler from the Office of Family Assistance. Please go ahead, sir.

James Butler: Hello everyone and welcome to our Webinar on Engaging Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Participants in Tax Filing Assistance.



## Building a PEER TA Network State by State

This Webinar is brought to you today by the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network here in the Office of Family Assistance.

Our hope for today's Webinar is that it will provide TANF programs, low-income-serving programs, and other stakeholders with peer-based strategies, as well as a national perspective for developing strategic partnerships and outreach efforts to engage low-income families in tax filing assistance and increase their awareness of eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC.

You will hear from State and local representatives on their outreach, engagement, and partnership efforts to increase the awareness of EITC and the Earned Income Credit, as well as from the Internal Revenue Service on their national efforts for launching two new free preparation models and how these models can be implemented within your communities.

Studies conducted by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities and ICF International have shown that EITC has a very positive impact on reducing poverty rates, increasing work, and in many cases, stabilizing a family's economic situation.

In our work with the State of Georgia, we were able to see and understand just how much it meant to have access to tax filing assistance through VITA tax sites. It has the potential to increase tax filing among TANF participants who may not know that they could be eligible for the EITC, and prevent those with limited disposable incomes from having to spend on tax preparation services.

The EITC and other tax credits are valuable income supports and incentives to low-income families. They promote work, reduce poverty, and have been shown to improve child outcomes.

Organizations seeking to maximize limited resources while providing necessary supports to families benefit greatly from linking clients to tax preparation services, because it has the potential to decrease recidivism.

To support you and your potential partners in thinking about how to start or maintain an EITC campaign and tax filing assistance services, we've put together some important resources related to creating and sustaining these efforts. The resources have been gathered from our partners in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and from the Welfare Peer TA Network and can be found on the Welfare Peer TA Network.

At the end of today's presentations, you will have an opportunity to ask questions through the Web Meeting system. You can submit questions to be answered following the last presentation or throughout the Webinar using the Q&A panel on your computer screen. If your question is for a specific speaker or program, please be sure to specify that in your question.

Following the presentations, we will ask you to respond to a short evaluation poll, as your feedback is very important to us and helps us shape our delivery of technical assistance.

All of the materials for today's Webinar will be posted on the Welfare Peer TA Network Web site and will be sent directly to you in a few weeks.

Now for today's presenters, we will have Maisha Thoms. Maisha is a Program Director at Nehemiah Gateway Community Development Corporation -- we will call it NGCDC -- for the Earned Income Tax Credit Campaign in the State of Delaware.

She is responsible for providing leadership and vision for the EITC Campaign, staff management, site strategy, volunteer staff recruitment, training, project management, marketing of the program, and the daily operation of the Campaign.

She joined the operation in 2011 as a tax site manager. In May of 2012, she became Volunteer Coordinator/Recruiter and in December of 2012, she moved into her current role. Prior to NGCDC, Maisha worked as a tax management consultant for Experis Finance, where she assisted Fortune 500 clients with corporate tax services.

Tom Hall has worked as a Social Services Administrator for Delaware's Division of Social Services since 2006. The Division of Social Services is directly responsible for administering Delaware's TANF, food benefits, subsidized childcare, general assistance, and refugee cash assistance programs.

Tom is responsible for the policy and program oversight of Delaware's cash assistance programs.

Beckie Harrell is a Senior Tax Analyst for the Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication -- better known as SPEC -- of the Office of Internal Revenue Service.

SPEC is responsible for building and maintaining partnerships with key stakeholder groups. Beckie put forth great effort in partnering with national organizations to ensure that taxpayers receive the services and tax information they need.

She has been working with the national partnerships for the last 12 years and has worked with the IRS for 22 years.

Our moderator for today's Webinar will be Lesley Smith, who is a Project Manager with ICF International.

Without further ado, we will now hear from Maisha Thoms of Nehemiah Gateway Community Development Corporation, who will start us off.

Maisha?

Maisha Thoms: Good afternoon. This is Maisha Thoms from Nehemiah Gateway, and I'm honored to be on the presentation this afternoon.

Our first slide is Who is Nehemiah Gateway?

Nehemiah Gateway Community Development Corporation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide access to financial education and services for low-to-moderate income individuals.

Incorporated in 2000, the organization offers a variety of programs focused on increasing the financial wellbeing of its customers through engaging them in strategies for asset development, financial management, and successful entrepreneurship.

NGCDC has conducted the Delaware EITC Campaign free tax preparation for the last 12 years. NGCDC is a project of the Shiloh Baptist Church, Delaware's oldest black Baptist church.

What is EITC and who qualifies?

The Earned Income Tax Credit is a refundable Federal income tax credit for low-to-moderate income workers that was approved by Congress in 1975, in part to offset the burden of Social Security taxes and to provide an incentive to work.

When EITC exceeds the amount of taxes owed, it results in a tax refund to those who claim and qualify for the credit. Many people will qualify for the credit the first time this year due to changes in their earnings, parental status, or marital status.

It's always a good reason to check eligibility each year, because one can move in and out of EITC eligibility based on earnings, parental status, marital status, or changes made to EITC dollar-qualifying amounts.

What can the EITC do for TANF participants?

Number 1, EITC increases the ability of workers in low-paying job categories to support themselves and their families.

Number 2, research clearly shows that helping a person reap additional tax benefits based on the amount that they've earned has increased the labor force participation for low-skilled workers -- especially single mothers.



## Building a PEER TA Network State by State



The 35-year history of EITC has successfully lifted more children out of poverty than any other social programs or category of programs. Without the EITC, the poverty rate among children would be 25% higher in the United States.

Lastly, the EITC can reduce participation in welfare and food stamps and the housing affordability burden of low-income households.

Nehemiah Gateway site locations.

We have several site locations in the State of Delaware. First up, you will see New Castle County. I won't go through and name them all. We have listed them out for you. But we primarily operate in libraries, community centers, churches, at the Goodwill in Wilmington -- which is a major job resource center -- and State service centers throughout the State and in libraries.

Our locations continue in Kent and Sussex Counties, Delaware -- at the Central Sussex building -- which is one of our coalition partner's buildings. Again, you will see our coalition partner First State Community Action listed, and they have several sites for us in Sussex County.

We are also at a senior center -- the Modern Maturity Center -- and a college in Dover -- Wilmington University.

We have two bilingual sites -- one in New Castle County, Delaware -- the Woodlawn Library in Wilmington, Delaware -- and in Sussex County, Delaware -- Central Sussex Building, Georgetown, Delaware.

Our marketing efforts.

The number one and top marketing effort is word of mouth. That goes an awfully long way with our clients. They have repeatedly come back to us for 12 years.

The January letter that is sent out by Delaware Division of Social Services is received by 100,000 people, and our presenter Tom Hall will speak further to that when he presents a little later.

Our client flyer -- we distribute between 30,000 and 50,000 client flyers each tax season -- we do send a postcard to our returning clients. About 10,000 to 15,000 postcards are distributed.

We just had our EITC Awareness Day press conference -- which is an annual event. That was last Friday, January 25.

We have street teams out on the street passing out our literature, our flyer, and any information that we can give the street teams to deliver. Our site partners also do distributions of our flyers for us and local business and community centers as well.

What impact do the NGCDC marketing efforts have?

It drives traffic to our sites. It allows us to complete 10,000 to 15,000 returns per filing season. It allows us to open 370-plus new deposit accounts and fill 300-plus requests for financial education, and we distribute over 10,000 financial resource booklets that have our partners' information in those financial resource booklets around financial education. You can also learn about savings, credit, budgeting, and so forth.



And it allows more Delawareans to access EITC benefits. According to the IRS, more than 8% of Delaware's EITC returns were filed through volunteers compared to 1 to 3% in surrounding States.

We are a coalition. Our coalition partners include Delaware Alliance for Community Advancement -- DACA -- First State Community Action Agency, Stand by Me, and the United Way of Delaware.

As the saying goes, it takes a village. Our partners make things happen. I will not read all of the partners listed, but as you can see, we have several partners that contribute to our success. From marketing and PR to volunteers and tax site facilities, our partners' contributions are instrumental to all of our programs. Whether for-profit or nonprofit, faith-based or secular, small business or large, we could not do it without the participation of our partners.

Increasing partnership participation -- that's always something that's very difficult, but we would love to increase it -- we would like to see increasing partnership participation through funding and volunteers. It's probably one of the hardest things to do in today's landscape.

We at NGCDC day in and day out strategize on how to continue to grow meaningful partnerships. Please spread the word about us. And if anyone on this call is interested in partnering with us or has any questions about our EITC program or other programs we conduct, please feel free to contact us at any time.

Next you will hear from one of our partners, Thomas Hall, from the Delaware Division of Social Services.

Thomas Hall: Good afternoon. You know, the Delaware legislature felt so strongly about informing low-income residents about the Earned Income Tax Credit they actually added to Delaware code -- which is what this slide is showing.

It adds a requirement for the Department of Health and Social Services that they notify potentially eligible families in writing about the Earned Income Tax Credit.

The Division of Social Services is the agency responsible for gathering and distributing information about the Earned Income Tax Credit to low-income families that we serve. We send letters to all recipients of the TANF program, general assistance, food benefits, and most Medicaid plans.

In that letter, we include things like the income eligibility limits for the Earned Income Tax Credit, the maximum amount a family could expect to receive based on family size, some conditions of eligibility such as Social Security number, citizenship, that you file a 1040 or 1040A, that you file a Schedule EIC.

We send information about all the wonderful tax preparation sites that Maisha was just talking about, their locations, the days and hours of operation, their contact information, information about myfreetaxes.com -- which is a site that we've been promoting this year, and it's the first time we've included that in our letter.

And then we also include what documents to bring to the free tax preparation sites. And those are things like picture ID, W-2, Social Security number, last year's return, childcare information, that kind of thing.

So in addition to what we do in terms of that letter, we also promote activities at our local DSS offices. And we do that by, in the beginning of January, sending an administrative notice to the field that describes the letter that was sent to the families and the benefits of the Earned Income Tax Credit for both the client and our community, and also it reviews the benefits and eligibility criteria for things like the Child Tax Credit and Delaware's Earned Income Tax Credit.

The admin notice serves to enhance our staff's knowledge about the EITC so that they can speak with clients with great understanding of the program and encourage people that maybe don't even file taxes -- don't pay taxes during the year -- to file taxes because they're potentially still eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit.

The offices are asked to display posters promoting the Earned Income Tax Credit, and we use a lot of materials that are available from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. And that Web site I listed here is [eitcoutreach.org](http://eitcoutreach.org).

We also make available at the offices tax forms, Schedule EIC and Form 8812 -- which is the Child Tax Credit form.

I will hand the presentation back to Maisha at this point.

Maisha Thoms: Thanks, Tom.

In wrapping up, none of this would be possible, of course, without the dedication of hundreds of volunteers and donations from financial institutions, foundations, and the United Way.

While the typical private firm charges about \$200 per return filed, Nehemiah Gateway spends about \$44 of staff time per return. That includes our financial counseling as well.

We have an excellent financial counseling program at each of our sites, if there are individuals interested in learning more about financial resources, all because trained volunteers provide more than 2 million of tax services -- that's why we were able to do this for \$44 per staff time.

Almost \$15 million of 2011's Federal refunds were claimed from returns prepared by Nehemiah Gateway's volunteers -- which included \$6.3 million in EITC credits. The total economic impact of the refunds exceeds \$24 million.

EITC funnels billions of dollars into low-income communities -- both urban and rural -- in the form of consumer spending and asset building with a modest flow of State and local tax revenue generated.

Finally, all TANF recipients should explore their eligibility for EITC by visiting a local tax site in the State of Delaware or nationally throughout the country between January and April, have their taxes done for free, and claim credits that they rightfully deserve.

Thank you. Next, I will turn the presentation over to Beckie Harrell from the Internal Revenue Service.

Beckie Harrell: Thanks. Well, good afternoon everyone.

First of all, I want to start by thanking James Butler and the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network for allowing me to come on and share some information with you all today.

So I'm very excited to be here. Today is a monumental day. It is the first day of our tax filing season for fiscal year 2012 -- which is starting today in 2013. So it's a very timely and appropriate day to have this information.

I'll give you a little bit of information about where I work and what we do briefly. We're part of the Wage and Investment Division that processes 130 million tax returns, and those returns only have wage income or investment income on them, and the folks filed normally 1040 tax returns.

We host a Free File Alliance that's on our Web site -- which is a consortium of software developers -- that anyone can go to if they meet the criteria to prepare their own tax return online and electronically file it to the IRS.

And then we also have more than 400 taxpayer assistance centers across the United States, and they're available for tax assistance as well.

This is a copy of our business model, and within W&I we have an organization as James mentioned -- it's called SPEC for short. And we partner with over 70 national partners, and we have almost 4000 local partners who have the same commitment to provide education, benefits, and services to underserved communities.

We work together within communities and have built more than 396 community coalitions that work together. And they include various

organizations. Some are faith-based, nonprofit organizations, financial institutions, corporations, State government entities, et cetera.

And combine three components as you can see on the little chart there -- tax education, tax preparation services, and then financial education and asset building.

So who are our customers?

Well, first I'm going to tell you about our partners. We have been working with all these partners and we have almost 70 national partnerships. So I think I mentioned that.

And one of them is the HHS and the Administration for Children and Families, and I am the relationship manager for that national partnership. And then we have a lot of partnerships with all the agencies within Administration for Children and Families all over the country, and they all work together within these coalitions and within their communities to provide services to our clients -- our mutual clients -- our taxpayers.

So some of the things we've done -- two years ago, ACF and the IRS/SPEC signed an MOU, and we've made some commitments to work together. And what's on the screen right now are some of the commitments that we've worked with, and the assets initiative and an EITC initiative, rural clients, Native American clients we have focused on and have worked with them and tax time asset building. We have been working with that as well.

We work with various regions, and right now we're working on a project with Region IV here in the Atlanta area, so just a little bit of history about our partnerships on a national basis.

So now this is last year's 2012 filing season results. And I just want to boast a little bit, because we have such awesome volunteers, and we need all these volunteers to be able to reach out and provide these services. IRS cannot do it by themselves.

So as you can see, these are some of the statistics. We have 90,000 volunteers, and that's just totally amazing. And last year, we had over 13,000 free tax preparation sites. And together, those 90,000 volunteers prepared over 3.2 million Federal tax returns and then 2 million State tax returns.

So we've had a lot of energy through our volunteers, and we just couldn't do it without them. So I definitely want to give kudos to all our volunteers.

So statistics indicate that there are between 16 and 19 million taxpayers that meet the free tax preparation criteria. But if you notice, we only prepared 3.2 million tax returns for free. So as you can see, there's quite a bit of discrepancy there, so we have a lot of work to do to try to capture and assist those other clients that fall into the category of eligibility for free taxes, and that's where we need your help.

And another thing I wanted to point out at this time is that 20% of all EITC-eligible taxpayers failed to claim the credit, and that 70% of the claimants pay fees for return preparation services.

So if you're eligible for EITC, you already are low-income. You do not need to be paying for return prep services. So this is another important reason why we need to get out and reach those folks.

And I told you that our model includes tax education. So we think that's a crucial component. Teaching people how to prepare and learn about filing their own tax returns -- and we've learned that teaching them to file -- it builds their knowledge and their confidence and empowers them for the future. So we are continuing to work and expand on those efforts.

Okay the next slide is the free tax preparation model and the facilitated self-assistance model. As James told you, we have two new models, and this is the first one and we call it FSA for short.

And basically, we have -- in addition to these two models we have had for 40 years -- we've had preparation sites that have provided top-notch service to taxpayers for over 40 years. And we call these traditional sites. That is where volunteers prepare tax returns through one-on-one personal interviews with the volunteer and the taxpayer.

But as you can see it's difficult. There's a lot of barriers for that happening in a lot of places and for a lot of reasons, so that's the reason we have added these two models.

Okay, so what is the facilitated self-assistance?

This approach uses a certified volunteer at a VITA site to help taxpayers in the preparation of their own tax returns. The role of the volunteer is now as a facilitator, not as a preparer, and multiple taxpayers can be assisted at one



time by each of the volunteers. Because the taxpayer is preparing their own return, the quality process required in traditional and Virtual VITA is not applicable.

There's a lot of ways that taxpayers can prepare and file their tax returns, and we have multiple software companies that we have assigned, and where they are able to work is in various States. They don't all have the capability to work throughout.

These are a sampling of the software companies, and it's just based on the States where they are able to market their software.

So you would find out from your relationship manager within the SPEC organization in your location as to which one would be applicable to you -- one or two that may be available in your area.

All right, the next slide is the Model 2 -- which is the Virtual VITA -- and this approach uses the same process as the traditional VITA site, except that the preparer and taxpayer are not face-to-face. Technology is used instead to connect the volunteer preparer and the taxpayer. The technology can include the Internet, the fax and video.

Although suitable for rural environments where it's difficult to build a traditional VITA site, this approach can be used in urban settings to provide a free alternative to qualified taxpayers.

But this model can provide volunteers with ability to offer services to the disabled population, the elderly communities, as well as those with

transportation issues or any other issues -- and that's whether they live in rural communities or even in urban.

Okay what are the barriers?

The new model -- there's a lot of barriers, and I'm sure you working with your clients out there are also aware that located in remote rural areas, there's not as many volunteers available as in an urban location and a lot of language barriers now we're finding and the hours of availability don't always suit the client.

So basically, this model works. There's two organizations that partner. So the taxpayer -- if it's in a rural area, for instance -- can go to a place that we call an intake site, and they can provide their documentation and work with a person there that is a volunteer who then takes the information and the documents and so forth and provides it to the second location -- which is the preparation site.

So this has worked quite well, and it needs the territory managers' approval, and they are very flexible, and the territory managers and the staff are flexible and working and trying to get the partners to work together and see how they can work out the two components so they can work together and provide services that are needed.

The benefits -- it makes services available to many more taxpayers -- there's better allocation of the volunteered time, there's better utilization of their equipment, and it requires less physical space. So it's a win-win for everybody.

So this is some procedural overview of how it would work. At the intake site, taxpayer comes in, process is explained, they sign a paper, and they fill out virtually an application with their documents and put all the information that is supported with documents. So it walks them through an interview process that ensures that their tax return will be processed properly.

These are some procedures for the preparation site. The volunteers that prepare the tax returns would be at the preparation site. It would always be an existing preparation site, and they review the information that the taxpayer has written and the documents that correlate with it, and then they contact the taxpayer to conduct an in-depth interview. The tax return is prepared, and then it's sent back to the taxpayer. So once the taxpayer signs and is confident with it, then they can electronically file it back to the IRS.

So if you're interested in an intake site or being a preparation site -- if you already are and want to take on an intake site -- these are some of the things that you would need to do in order to begin. But create a plan and see what you can come up with, with your resources, and then contact your SPEC relationship manager or the territory manager, and together you can work on creating a plan and merging and linking other sites together to be able to offer tax return services.

SPEC's role -- we can identify low coverage rates. So there are areas where there is absolutely no coverage with free tax prep now. And so it might be that once you learn where these areas are, that a plan could be worked out to get taxpayers and clients serviced in those areas.

There's a lot of matching and linking partners together in order to make the process work. But SPEC will coordinate and get you the information you need -- which is a number -- to be able to count the tax returns that are processed.

So SPEC is your first place once you consider doing it and talk with your territory manager and see what can be worked out in your location.

If you want information about free tax preparation resources or you want to direct your clients for this coming year, we have several ways to access them.

As I said before, there are 400 taxpayer assistance centers that clients can also walk into and get assistance. And the Free File is on the first page of the IRS.gov Web site, and that's available.

AARP site locations -- which are tax care for the elderly sites -- you can look on IRS.gov, on the AARP Web site or by calling those numbers.

The VITA site locations -- there's a toll-free number there. You can also find that on the Web site as well.

If you have any questions after today, you can contact myself and/or Dan Maier, and Dan is working with these two alternate models, and his contact information is there, and he would be more than happy to help you. At the end of the presentation, I'll have another additional way that you can also reach someone at the IRS for assistance.

So reaching out to promote the credits in 2013 -- another portion of our education efforts surrounds tax credits for low-income families, and the big one is the Earned Income Tax Credit. There's also a Child Tax Credit -- which

is for more than just low-income -- but education credit and so forth. So our biggest one that we work with because of the lack of knowledge about it is the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Our messages this year to conduct outreach -- we have five of them, and they are listed here. I won't read them. But these are our messages this year, and we have a lot of products and tools that can assist you in helping us get the message out to taxpayers.

These are some of the products and tools we have available -- lots of brochures and products and publications. Because of the late filing season, some of our publications have been postponed a tad, but we're trying as quickly as possible to get them all online.

We have marketing tools. We have drop-in articles, tax podcasts, public service announcements, and tips on tax issues.

We have a separate Web site. It's called EITC Central, and there are all kinds of information available there, and I'm going to go through some of this in just a minute. But there are also statistics and ready-made marketing tools.

And as Maisha mentioned earlier, EITC National Outreach Day was last Friday on January 25, and that is the kickoff for the campaign to spread the word and conduct outreach for the Earned Income Tax Credit.

So this campaign began Friday and will go to the end of the filing season. So any assistance that you all can provide or want to help your constituents with - - we've got the tools available for you.

If you're interested in partnering with us here in SPEC, there's a whole partner page that's totally about partnering with us. So it gives you some options and gives you some information. And please go there and visit, because there's probably a lot of information on there that you may not be aware of -- even if you already do partner with us.

So the next slide shows more information about the outreach corner -- which is specifically for our partners -- it houses a lot of the articles and a lot of the information and other tools. So visit this outreach corner, and you'll have easy access to the tools and also tax law information.

The next slide is a screenshot of the EITC Central Web site, and that's the Web address that you can reach. And there are news release template articles. They're pre-prepared articles, and you can just drop in your logo and tailor it to your organization's needs and your customers' needs. Fact sheets, technical information, and statistics so you can get your statistics from there as well.

And on the next slide, there's information about ordering products. You can call. You can speak to your IRS relationship manager or visit EITC Central, and it'll link you to a place to order. So these are available, so please make use of them.

The next slide is about our social media. We have also some free electronic products. We have sample tweets, YouTube videos, podcasts, news releases, the PSAs, and on-hold messages.

We have -- and I just want to say one thing about the on-hold messages. They are for your organizations. When you have a call coming in and you have to put someone on hold, this call can play in rotation and it's about the Earned

Income Tax Credit and how one needs to file a tax return in order to claim the credit, et cetera. So anyway, this is some information.

And if you'll go to the next slide please, this is just a copy of some of the sample tweets that we have, and I hope you can tweet. There's a lot of information out here, and once you start tweeting, it just escalates and can reach so many more folks. So it's just an easy way to get the word out.

The next slide is one of our marketing campaigns, and this can be used with one of our key messages. So we have products with this campaign ad and want you to visit our Web site and see what other products are available.

The next slide has more information about the Earned Income Tax Credit Awareness Day, and it was a one-day media blitz -- although it is done to launch and continue spreading the word throughout the filing season. So we encourage you, if you can, to get involved throughout the whole filing season.

If you want more information on any topic whatsoever, please write to [partner@irs.gov](mailto:partner@irs.gov) -- which is in the last bullet on this page.

So this is a list of some information for you -- ways that you can participate. There's a lot that organizations can do to reach their clients. I'm sure many of you are already engaged, and we thank you so much for that. But these are some other ways that if you haven't considered, you may consider in the future, and we would appreciate that.

The next slide -- this is my contact information, and I will be available for any questions. You can please e-mail me at my e-mail address there or call me. And also don't forget [partner@irs.gov](mailto:partner@irs.gov) if you have any questions.

So I appreciate you letting me be here and share this information with you today, and we would sure appreciate any help that you can give us to make sure that all of our mutual clients receive all the credits and information they need to file tax returns.

So thank you so much. I'll turn it over now.

### Resources

Lesley Smith: Thank you, Beckie. This is Lesley Smith with ICF International. I just want to thank you too Maisha, Tom and Beckie for your presentations.

I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight a few resources that the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance team has gathered and thought you may find useful.

A special thanks to the National Earned Income Tax Credit Outreach Partnership at the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities who provided us with a set of valuable outreach and engagement resources.

The outreach partnership is a collaboration of national organizations that have come together to promote the Earned Income Tax Credit and to encourage more access and take up of the Earned Income Tax Credit among various populations.

We've provided you with links and resources for filing for the Earned Income Tax Credit, completing the important forms, and linking underserved populations to tax filing assistance.



The next slide outlines some useful resources that currently appear on the Welfare Peer TA Network Web site and the Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse about the Earned Income Tax Credit and tax filing assistance.

Through these various slides, we've provided links to some useful Web sites. For example, the Earned Income Tax Credit Central contains all of the Earned Income Tax Credit needs in one central location for IRS partners, employers, government agencies and offices, and tax preparers. This site hosts the partner toolkit, the tax return preparer toolkit, marketing express, and information for the press.

### Questions & Answers

At this time, we'd like to begin our question-and-answer session. On the screen, you will see instructions on how you can submit a question to our list of presenters through the chat box on the lower left-hand side of your screen. We do already have some questions in the queue, and I'd like to begin with addressing some of those.

If I could start with Tom, this question is directed to you. Does claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit or other tax credits impact TANF or SNAP recipients' receipt of other benefits?

Thomas Hall: We disregard Earned Income Tax Credit as income, so it's not considered in terms of income. It is considered a resource.

In Delaware, we have \$10,000 resource for the TANF program, so that's really not an issue. And for the most part, we don't have a resources limit in the SNAP program.

Lesley Smith: Thank you. Maisha, for Delaware, are you seeing an increase in interest among your TANF and low-income clients to file for the Earned Income Tax Credit?

Maisha Thoms: Yes, we are. We always do see an increase in TANF and SNAP recipients. They come into our sites each year with the letter that Tom discussed that we put out and help the State put out. So we always know that that letter is being used wisely and people are coming in to see if they are able to claim the credit.

Lesley Smith: Great. Thank you. Beckie, this question is directed to you for the IRS. Is the IRS currently considering working with different agencies or programs in order to reach out directly to for-profit tax preparers to recruit more filers for free services?

Beckie Harrell: Well, our VITA program volunteers are not paid, and so it's possible that a person who prepares tax returns for profit can volunteer their time and services.

But we aren't particularly reaching out. I'm sure we would want to take any volunteers that we can -- especially if they are already tax law knowledgeable and able to prepare tax returns. So we would welcome them, but we don't have an initiative at this time.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you. For all of the speakers -- if we could start with Maisha -- what outreach activities are currently in place, if this does apply to you, for rural and travel communities to reach those in geographically dispersed areas?

Maisha Thoms: We use the model that Beckie described. We've been using it for the last couple of years -- Virtual VITA. We have intake sites and preparation sites throughout the entire State of Delaware, and it is highlighted in Kent and Sussex Counties.

Our partner, Barclays Bank, in Wilmington, Delaware, actually is the preparation site, and our sites in Kent and Sussex and in New Castle County function as the intake site. So our outreach efforts around Virtual VITA have been successful, and we're hoping that this year they will continue to be successful.

Lesley Smith: Thank you. And Beckie?

Beckie Harrell: Yes, we are hoping that we can expand the Virtual VITA so that it can reach into more rural areas. We also have an initiative with Native Americans, and we reach out to them and have tax return prep available on many of the reservations.

And so we are working with as many volunteers as we can to try to get services out to the rural folks.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you. This question is directed for Tom. Tom, could you please talk about what your TANF human service program did to provide clear justification to your legislature and other decision makers?

Thomas Hall: Oh, so this is a question in regards to the legislation that was passed. Actually, it goes back quite a ways with our current governor, who was actually the treasurer at one time.

And this is actually an initiative they took up on their own. So this was something that the State legislators and the treasurer at that time felt very strong about and pushed the legislation through. And I don't know if they needed a lot of external assistance in terms of making that decision.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you for clarifying.

Thomas Hall: Sure.

Lesley Smith: Beckie, a clarification question -- are there outreach materials on IRS.gov that can be printed?

Beckie Harrell: Yes, all of our products that are on there -- the electronic versions -- can be downloaded and printed.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you. A participant has indicated they've had some potential volunteers refuse to volunteer because of the liability of filing someone else's taxes. Could you speak to how someone can address these concerns of liability?

Maisha Thoms: Beckie, did you want me to answer that?

Beckie Harrell: Oh, go ahead. Sure.

Maisha Thoms: Volunteers are protected under the Volunteer Act of 1997, so if they are at a traditional VITA site or a TCE site having their return prepared by a volunteer, then yes, the volunteer is protected under that act and cannot be sued as long as it is not negligence or a willful wrong act.

Lesley Smith: Thank you. Do you have anything to add to that, Beckie?

Beckie Harrell: Nope, she covered it all.

Lesley Smith: Perfect. A question has come in that asks is there a list of VITA sites for each State, and if so, where can it be located?

Beckie Harrell: Yes, there is a list. On IRS.gov, where the search is in the top right-hand corner, if you enter VITA locators or VITA locations, it will direct you to a page, and there it'll ask you for the State that you live in. You can click on the State, and it'll pull up and give you the addresses -- all the contact information about the locations.

So because today's the first day, I think most sites are probably open and should be in there, but many of them may not be opened exactly today. But they're there, and you call and find out.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you. And also do you know, Beckie, if there are any potential delays in processing refunds? I do believe you mentioned during your presentation that returns can be submitted starting today.

Beckie Harrell: That's correct. Today's the day. And we do not anticipate any delays -- even though the filing was extended. And it was extended so that we could get everything that we needed to in order prior to the filing season that was based on the new tax law legislation that went into effect January 1.

So there are a few forms that, if persons qualify, they are not ready yet and they cannot be filed quite yet. But for the average person, they can be filed now, and we are not expecting any delays.

So an electronically filed tax return should have a refund back within three weeks -- 21 days. So hopefully everything will go very smoothly from today on. Thanks.

Lesley Smith: Very good. Thank you. Actually, there's a follow-up -- a separate but follow-up question for you, Beckie. It's directed for the IRS. Describe the quality review process for virtual site and what is acceptable time lag from intake to preparation and return getting back to taxpayer.

Beckie Harrell: Okay. Yes, the returns are all quality reviewed. So at the preparation site, someone will review what the originator -- the original preparer -- has prepared and make certain that the tax return is accurate. So a quality review is done on the Virtual VITA model.

As far as the time lag, it's going to be based on the situation and the plan that's worked out by the intake site and the preparation site. It could be instantly, or it could take days. And that information is going to be told upfront.

So if a person goes to the intake site, they are told that it's going to take three days or four days or whatever. So, you know, if they can sit down and do it by video camera and Skype, it could be done instantly. So it's all dependent on the resources and the partners that are working together.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you. And Tom, could you just clarify that when a client receives TANF and food stamps only, that they do qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit?

Thomas Hall: Well yes, if they have earned income, they should qualify. You don't have to be a TANF recipient or food benefit recipient. That really kind of doesn't really play into whether or not you're eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit.

And actually to clarify what I said before in terms of whether they're actually receiving the credit is how that impacts your TANF in Delaware. In Delaware, it is disregarded as both income and as a resource, so it's not considered at all so in terms of determining eligibility for TANF.

Lesley Smith: Okay. And a follow-up question for Beckie. Can a TANF client receive a tax refund if they have not worked but have children in the household?

Beckie Harrell: No, the Earned Income Tax Credit is for persons that have worked. You have to have earned income.

Lesley Smith: Thank you. And Tom, was there anything you wanted to add to that?

Thomas Hall: No.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you. A question is asked, if a person earns \$30,000 a year or less, can you discuss the benefits of filing for the Earned Income Tax Credit, and are there any drawbacks to filing?

Beckie Harrell: The benefit is that you would be in compliance with the law. And the drawbacks I don't know, because if you are eligible for a refund, I don't know why one would not file. There may be some extenuating circumstances where some other Federal government agencies might have a hold on the money that

would be refunded to you -- where -- for some back child support payments or perhaps education payments.

But all in all, it's our responsibility to file our taxes, if in fact we are required to pay taxes. So based on the results of filing a tax return, we should.

Lesley Smith: Okay, great. Maisha, a question for you, could you talk a little bit about how you got your staff to buy into this process of promoting the Earned Income Tax Credit and referring individuals for tax filing assistance?

Maisha Thoms: Sure. Nehemiah was founded in 2000, and it was founded on the basis of preparing taxes for free and making sure that anyone eligible for the EITC credit is rewarded in that way.

We also do returns out of the scope of EITC as long as the income levels are under \$50,000 for persons with dependents and under \$30,000 with persons without dependents.

So some of the persons that we do, do not receive the Earned Income Tax Credit, or they might be at the phase-out point where they're getting a very small Earned Income Tax Credit, but they can still have their taxes done for free.

So everyone buys into it in the State of Delaware. We are -- as we were told by our SPEC partner last Friday -- we are one of the top States with doing persons who receive the Earned Income Tax Credit. So it has been our basis and our foundation, and we push it very hard in the State of Delaware.



Lesley Smith: Perfect. Thank you. And for Beckie, what are the requirements to become a Virtual VITA intake or preparation site?

Beckie Harrell: There really are no requirements, because the person does not have to have tax law and they don't have to be certified with the tax law. So that is one plus, that a volunteer in a location can volunteer their time.

We do have an agreement -- a volunteer agreement -- that we want persons to sign no matter what capacity they volunteer in. And so once they sign that, that's the only requirement that there is, and that just says that they are going to do everything properly according to the processes that have been established, and that they aren't going to do anything wrong. So that's really the only thing to be an intake site.

You would also maybe want to make sure you have the equipment available, but I think in most cases that's not a problem.

But there is no tax law requirement -- which is a huge, huge thing for most folks who want to volunteer and who are afraid to prepare other tax returns. You're mostly a liaison between the taxpayer and the preparer at a preparation site.

Lesley Smith: Okay. Thank you. Starting maybe with Tom for this one, we've talked mostly about the Earned Income Tax Credit. In relation to the child credit, could you talk about whether or not this is income-based, or the qualifications for it?

Thomas Hall: Okay, sure. So taxpayers with children under 17 by the end of the last tax year, they qualify for \$1,000 tax credit per child on their tax return. And the

child credit reduces the tax bill dollar for dollar. For three children, for example, would reduce -- potentially reduce -- taxes by \$3,000.

So to qualify for the Child Tax Credit, the taxpayer must meet certain requirements, and that would include: they have to have a child under 17, the child has to be related to them somehow and there's a particular relationship there, they must have provided support for that child, that child must have been dependent, the child must have been a citizen, and the child must have lived in the United States for at least half of the year. That's what I know.

Lesley Smith: Very good. Thank you. Beckie, do you have anything you'd like to add?

Beckie Harrell: No, he covered it all. Thank you.

Lesley Smith: Perfect. Maybe a question back to both you, Beckie and Tom. If a person owes back child support, will it automatically be taken out of any refund they receive?

Beckie Harrell: Yes, it will.

Lesley Smith: Thank you. And back to Maisha, could you talk a little bit more about the specific strategies you've used to develop partnerships throughout the community?

Maisha Thoms: Yes -- we -- of course, we partner with the United Way. We have a big initiative with the United Way this year and Stand by Me. Stand by Me is supported by the State of Delaware, the governor, and United Way, and they offer financial coaching and other services to Delaware residents and the self-facilitated tax preparation, My Free Taxes.

So we definitely partner with Stand by Me because, not only at our sites do we want to offer free tax preparation, but we want to assist people with when they get that large refund for Earned Income Tax Credits -- which can be upwards to \$5,891, I think, for the 2012 filing year -- that they do the right thing with those monies. And that is to save, budget, so forth and so on, pay the necessities that need to be paid.

So Stand by Me is a great organization that provides financial coaching if one needs assistance around home ownership, buying a car, planning for vacations, education, so forth and so on.

Our other partners that we have -- First State Community Action and Delaware Alliance -- they are also doing the free tax preparation. So we are just assisting each other and coming together as a coalition to assist one another with back office support and getting further out into the community -- especially First State down in the rural areas of Sussex County in Delaware.

Our other partners, like the banks and businesses that support us -- of course, they're supporting us because of the service that we provide around financial education, financial literacy, and free tax preparation.

So the strategy, of course, that we use is that we try to tap into everybody that will assist us, and we've just been successful with maintaining warm relationships with a lot of organizations in Delaware.

Lesley Smith: Great. Thank you. And a clarifying question for Tom based on your explanation of the child credit, is the child credit income-based similar to the Earned Income Tax Credit where you need to be low-income?

Thomas Hall: Well, the credit is limited if your modified adjusted gross income is above a certain amount. So that amount at which the phase-out begins varies depending on your filing status. For example, married taxpayers filing a joint return -- the phase-out begins at \$110,000. For married taxpayers filing a separate return, it begins at \$55,000.

So there are some income limits in terms of who's eligible for the Child Tax Credit. I think that probably answers the question.

Lesley Smith: Yes, thank you. And then either for Beckie or Tom, are there specific earned income requirements or required number of hours or time worked in order to file?

Beckie Harrell: No. There is an EITC assistant -- which you can access on IRS.gov or through EITC Central. And if you're wondering, you can go in and find out if you're eligible for Earned Income Tax Credit based on the income you have and/or if it exceeds it. But there's no minimum to get it, other than you do need to work.

Lesley Smith: Thank you. Thank you for clarifying.

Beckie Harrell: I mean, did I -- I don't know. Maybe I misunderstood the question.

Lesley Smith: No. Absolutely, you answered it. Thank you. Okay, one more question here -- I think this will be directed towards Beckie. How much training does a volunteer need in order to prepare taxes?

Beckie Harrell: We have an online training course -- which is called Link & Learn. And I think it's oh -- do you know, Mary, how many hours it takes normally?

We have different levels. We have a basic and an intermediate and an advanced level, so it depends on each level that you want to get certification in. But it's online. It's an interactive program, and, oh, I don't remember the hours. I am so sorry.

Maisha Thoms: It takes our volunteers about six to eight hours to get through our training process. You can do it as independent study online as Beckie referred to on Link & Learn. But we do offer face-to-face training as well. We have trainers that come out to the colleges in the State of Delaware to provide training to volunteers that want to come into the site and do their training live and also take their test.

And Basic is all that we require our volunteers to be certified to. Now our managers -- our site staff, which there's typically two managers per site -- they need to certify to the intermediate level -- which training takes them a little longer to get through. There's also an ethics-type test in the volunteer agreement that has to be signed as well.

So, I would say about six to eight hours, maybe upwards to ten for site staff.

Lesley Smith: Thanks so much. Okay, this will be our last question for this afternoon. To whomever it most applies, feel free to jump in. Some of our customers are saying it costs about \$500 for speedy refunds. Is there somewhere they can file to get their refund back in days for free?

Maisha Thoms: I know that we typically advise our clients at our tax sites -- our traditional VITA sites -- that their refund would be back within seven to fourteen days. That's the typical turnaround that we see. We've been very successful with that.

We do not offer any type of rapid refund type of service -- which you're going to pay additional funds. We want everything to be free -- especially one that qualifies for Earned Income Tax Credit. We want them to be able to keep their entire refund, so we don't offer rapid refund services.

So seven to ten days is speedy. We consider that speedy when you're getting a free service and you're getting all of your monies back to you.

Beckie Harrell: And that is the norm to get a refund. So the twenty-one days is the outside range, but seven to ten is the actual average. So seven days is speedy, and it's not worth \$500.

Lesley Smith: Very good. Thank you, everyone. I'm going to turn this back over to James Butler for some closing remarks and next steps.

James Butler: Thank you, Lesley, and thank you everyone for attending today's Webinar and special thanks to our presenters, Maisha, Tom and Beckie, for sharing your expertise and knowledge on EITC and the Child Tax Credit.

Please be sure to fill out the evaluation poll that will pop up as you exit the Webinar. As I said earlier, a transcript and audio recording will be made available for everyone within the coming weeks.



## Building a PEER TA Network State by State



We'd also like to hear from you regarding future Webinar topics, so you can submit your ideas by e-mailing to the Peer TA Web site. That is [peerta@icfi.com](mailto:peerta@icfi.com).

Please help us to expand our network and reach a greater number of people by directing interested colleagues, and from your local and State networks and agencies.

On behalf of the Welfare Peer TA Network and the Office of Family Assistance, I'd like to thank all of you for joining us today and have a pleasant afternoon.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude the Webinar for today. We thank you for your participation.

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