



Tax Credit Awareness Campaign

MLK Day of Service 2012

December 9, 2011

"A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth."
– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dear VISTAs and Sponsors,

On Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday, January 16, 2012, many of you will join other Americans across the country to honor and celebrate Dr. King's life and legacy by helping your neighbors and communities and by promoting his message of equality, social justice, and opportunity for all.

For this year's MLK Day of Service, the Corporation for National and Community Service, in alignment with its 2011–2015 Strategic Plan, has adopted the overarching theme of Economic Opportunity. As Dr. King worked for increased opportunity for all Americans, we encourage all VISTA projects and members to create or support an initiative that opens doors to economic opportunity for low-income families and individuals, especially given the current economic challenges facing our nation.

Many of you may already be far along in developing a service activity for MLK Day. For those of you still looking for an opportunity to participate on MLK Day of Service, joining the Tax Credit Awareness Campaign is an ideal way to honor Dr. King's life and teachings and strengthen economic security in the communities where VISTAs serve.

Because MLK Day of Service occurs near the tax filing season, we encourage you to develop or support MLK Day activities that local raise awareness about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and free tax preparation services through Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites.

The Earned Income Tax Credit, one of the federal government's largest and most effective anti-poverty programs, is a federal tax credit for families and individuals who work but make very low incomes. The EITC helps to reduce the federal tax burden on low-income workers. The EITC lifts families out of poverty, supplements wages, and help low-income workers build long-term assets.

Unfortunately, each year millions of eligible workers miss out on this important federal tax benefit because they do not know about the program, do not know how to claim the credit, or do not know where to find free tax filing. Outreach efforts by VISTAs and their projects can help ensure that eligible workers claim the tax credits they have earned.

If you are still seeking an opportunity to participate on MLK Day, please review below additional information and links to EITC and VITA resources that can help you plan a tax credit awareness activity.

You can also find other service opportunities, learn about the MLK Day of Service, and register your activity by visiting www.mlkday.gov.

Thank you,



Mary Strasser
Director
AmeriCorps VISTA

Guidance and Resources for EITC Awareness Activity

1. What are VISTAs and sponsors encouraged to do?

- First, please read this summary.
- Over the next few weeks, we will send a series of communications to VISTAs and sponsors via listservs, and include announcements in social media outlets and VISTA Campus.
 - Please share this information with other VISTAs and project sponsors.
- Visit MLKDay.gov to plan and promote your projects. Links to resources about EITC are available to help you plan a tax credit awareness activity and other events related to economic opportunity. You can also order [free marketing resources](#), and [MLK Day gear](#).
- We would like to highlight the impact and contributions VISTA projects make to enhance economic opportunity for low-income families on MLK Day.
 - Please share your MLK Day accomplishments with your Corporation State Office and at <http://mlkday.gov/share/index.php>.

2. What is the Tax Credit Awareness Campaign?

- The campaign encourages VISTAs and sponsors to create or support 2012 King Day activities that help low-income families take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and find free tax preparation services, such as the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, in their community.

3. What is the Earned Income Tax Credit?

- The EITC is a refundable income tax credit for low-income working individuals and families. It can result in money back to those who claim and qualify for the credit.

4. What is the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program?

- VITA program offer free tax preparation assistance from IRS-certified volunteers at thousand of VITA centers in communities across the nation. Many centers also electronically file returns for free.

5. What sorts of activities could you do for King Day to promote the EITC and VITA?

- **First**, educate yourself about the EITC and VITA.
 - Visit the [EITC Information for IRS Partners](#) and [EITC Central](#), which hosts the [Partner Toolkit](#), the [Tax Return Preparer Toolkit](#), [Marketing Express](#), and information for the Press.
 - You can also visit the IRS's main site, <http://www.irs.gov> keyword: EITC.
- **Second**, find a VITA site in your community. VITA sites are often located in community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls, and other

locations around the country. To find the closest VITA site, call a toll free hotline 1-800-906-9887.

For more information on VITA program, visit <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=107626,00.html> and <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=219171,00.html>.

- **Third**, contact the VITA site to tell them about the King Day of Service and ask how you might be able to participate in service activities that support EITC and VITA programs locally. Many VITA sites have customized information and flyers ready to be shared with your community.
- **Fourth**, the VITA site may not be familiar with the EITC Awareness Campaign, but we know you will be creative. Here are a few ideas to get you started:
 - Identify local VITA sites in your community and share referral information about the EITC and local VITA sites with your own VISTA project and its beneficiaries
 - Research other King Day activities occurring in your community and set up an information table about VITA sites and the EITC. You can search for other community projects, or register your own, at <http://www.mlkdav.gov>
 - Assist a local VITA site by identifying potential tax preparation volunteers from the Baby Boomer community or a nearby Senior Corps RSVP site
 - Connect a local VITA site with a local school so that students can bring VITA and EITC information home to their families
 - Join with other VISTAs in your community to help spread the word on EITC Awareness Day, January 27, 2012 (see below for more information)

6. What EITC and VITA resources are available?

- **ABOUT THE 2012 KING DAY OF SERVICE:** Visit <http://www.mlkdav.gov/>. VISTAs and sponsors can register King Day events and share results and media coverage on this site.
- **TO FIND A VITA SITE: Call 1-800-906-9887.** This is a VITA Hotline Toll Free Number, specifically available to identify free tax preparation sites in local areas.
- **FOR EDUCATION INFORMATION AND OUTREACH MATERIALS ON THE EITC AND VITA:**
 - **[EITC Awareness Day – January 27, 2012](#)**. Sponsored by the IRS, EITC Awareness involves partners across the country in a one-day media event to raise awareness about EITC and promote free tax assistance. The EITC Awareness Day may be an excellent way for VISTAs to get involved. More Information is available at <http://www.eitc.irs.gov/ptoolkit/awarenessday/>.
 - **[EITC Central](#)**. An online source for ready-to-use [news releases](#), [letters to the editor](#), and [tweets](#). You will also find [local statistics](#), [fact sheets](#), [fast facts](#), [newsletter](#) and [Web](#) articles, [tips](#) for running an EITC campaign, and other basic [marketing and communication](#) materials. For websites and Facebook pages, download a [widget](#) and [banner ads](#). There are even pre-recorded on-hold [messages](#), in English and Spanish, for the telephone system. <http://www.eitc.irs.gov/central/main/>
 - **[Marketing Express](#)**. Another source of grab and go products to help carry out the EITC message. You can create customized posters and print ads featuring the new EITC ad campaign with your organization name, address and message. Check out our updated EITC Marketing Made Easy webinar on the [IRS video portal](#) after mid-December. Get a peek at the new EITC ad campaign and a quick “how-to” demonstration for using EITC Central and Marketing Express. <http://www.eitc.irs.gov/express/main/>

- [Toolkit for EITC Outreach](#). The National Tax Credit Outreach Campaign website provides a clearinghouse of tools and resources for state and local outreach, including strategies to launch a statewide communications campaign; partner with local leaders; promote partnerships with businesses; and, tailor outreach to rural, tribal, and immigrant communities. The kit is updated annually. A free hard-copy of the kit is mailed to any organization on request. Requests for the kit can be made at the website (<http://eitcoutreach.org/>), which also provides translations of an outreach flyer in 19 languages other than English and Spanish.
- **IF A SPONSOR IS INTERESTED IN A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN WORKING WITH A LOCAL EITC COALITION:** Visit <http://www.cbpp.org/eitc-partnership/state-links.htm>. This is a directory of partnerships by state, including contact information for the coalition lead or the local IRS SPEC manager.
- **INFORMATION ON ANY TAX RELATED TOPIC:** Visit www.irs.gov or call 1-800-829-1040.

7. Is there any special assistance for low-income elderly families that I should know about?

The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) Program provides free tax help to people aged 60 and older. Trained volunteers from nonprofit organizations provide free tax counseling and basic income tax return preparation for senior citizens. Volunteers who provide tax counseling are often retired individuals associated with nonprofit organizations that receive grants from the IRS.

As part of the IRS-sponsored TCE Program, AARP offers the Tax-Aide Counseling program at more than 7,000 sites nationwide during the filing season. Trained and certified AARP Tax-Aide volunteer counselors help people of low-to-middle income, with special attention to those aged 60 and older.

For more information on TCE, call 1-800-829-1040. To locate the nearest AARP Tax-Aide site, call 1-888-227-7669 or visit [AARP's website](#).

8. Is there any special assistance for military families that I should know about?

The military also has a strong VITA Program. The Armed Forces Tax Council (AFTC) consists of the tax program coordinators for the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The AFTC oversees the operation of the military tax programs worldwide, and serves as the main conduit for outreach by the IRS to military personnel and their families.

Airmen, soldiers, sailors, marines, guardsmen, and their families worldwide receive free tax preparation assistance at offices within their installations. These VITA sites provide free tax advice, tax preparation, and assistance to military members and their families. They are trained and equipped to address military specific tax issues, such as combat zone tax benefits and the effect of the new Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) guidelines. Most service members file their tax returns electronically at their tax centers and, by selecting direct deposit, receive their refunds in as little as one week. This combined effort ensures that service members receive free tax assistance from well-trained and equipped military tax preparers.

9. Is participation in the Tax Income Awareness Campaign required?

No, it is not required. Many VISTAs may be well along in the planning an MLK Day activity unrelated to this campaign, and we do not want to disrupt that. For those VISTAs and sponsors that have not yet made a decision, we hope this focused work will be a good option.

10. How much time should I spend on this campaign?

We imagine that you will spend the equivalent of a full work day “on” – around 8 hours – in volunteer service. You may choose to spend more of your own time volunteering, but remember that your primary responsibilities are to your year-round project.

11. Does the volunteer time need to be on King Day (January 16, 2012)?

No. The service activity **does not** have to be on January 16, 2012, to be counted toward the MLK Day of Service. In fact, many VITA sites are closed on King Day. We ask that you focus your activities around MLK Day, so projects can show their support of the Economic Opportunity focus area.

We hope you will find a way to participate in this campaign. Imagine the impact of more than 5,000 VISTAs across the country spreading awareness and encouraging low income families to take advantage of the EITC and VITA!

Good luck with your 2012 King Day of Service activities!