



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Strengthen Working Families and Local Economies: How to Mount a Successful EITC Outreach Campaign

October 19, 2006

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Speakers:

Jim Ananich, councilmember, City of Flint, Mich.
Margaret Bozik, assistant director for management, planning, and communications, Community and Economic Development Office, City of Burlington, Vt.
Buddy Dyer, mayor, City of Orlando, Fla.
Patty O'Callaghan, councilmember, City of West Lafayette, Ind.

HOLSCLAW: Hello, and good afternoon. On behalf of the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, I would like to welcome you all to our October audioconference call, "Strengthen Working Families and Local Economies, How to Mount a Successful Earned Income Tax Credit Outreach Campaign." I am delighted that you all have joined us today and extremely appreciate the number of callers that we have dialed in. We have a great host of speakers today. Mayor Buddy Dyer from Orlando, Fla., is on the line – Mayor, can you say hello?

DYER: Good morning to everyone.

HOLSCLAW: I also have Councilmember Patty O'Callaghan from the City of West Lafayette, Ind., on the line.

O'CALLAGHAN: Hello.

HOLSCLAW: Margaret Bozik, assistant director for management, planning, and communication with the Community and Economic Development Office in the City of Burlington, Vt.

BOZIK: Hello, everyone.

HOLSCLAW: And joining us very shortly will be Councilmember Jim Ananich from Flint, Mich. And I want to just take a few moments to provide some framework for today's call. Since its inception, the YEF Institute has been engaged in helping municipal leaders across the nation launch Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) outreach campaigns. Some of you on the line today may be very familiar with EITC outreach campaigns, as we often refer to them. Others may be brand new to this. So, I hope that today's call gives you a sense of what four communities are doing around connecting low- and moderate-income families to this important tax credit, but also helps spark some ideas of your own to help you take action at the local level and help connect residents to the EITC.

We know here at the Institute that the EITC can bring much needed dollars back into the pockets of families and, therefore, back into your local economy. Cities represented on the call today have first-hand experience with some unique and varied strategies that I think you will find very interesting. We know that local elected officials across the country have discovered a way to strengthen working families, while bringing more federal dollars back into their local economy and that is through connecting them to the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Just to make sure that we are all on the same page, I want to make a special note of what the EITC is. It is a tax benefit for low- and moderate-income working families, as well as a small benefit for some workers without children. Workers who qualify for the EITC and file a federal income tax return can receive a refund, even if no taxes were taken out of their pay. So, it is refundable and that is very important to note. While most EITC filers claim the credit in a lump sum at the end of the year, some workers may be eligible to receive the EITC in advance through their employers. I would also like to note that in 2005 the credit provided up to \$2,662 dollars for a parent with one child earning less than \$31,000 dollars, and working parents that were raising more than one child earning less than \$35,000 could qualify for up to almost \$4,500. So, this is a significant amount of money for low- and moderate-income families in your community.

Councilmember Ananich, welcome to the call.

ANANICH: Thank you. Sorry about that. I got delayed. Some of my students held me after.

HOLSCLAW: Absolutely, and I will properly introduce you and let the callers on the phone today know that you are also a 7th grade math teacher. So, we welcome you. One final note that I would like to point out about the EITC is that in tax year 2004, which is the year that we have the most recent data for, the EITC was worth \$40.7 billion to working families, more than any other federal program. So, it has a long history of lifting families out of poverty and while the take-up rate for the EITC is actually somewhere around 80%, which is very significant and very high, it is that 15-25% of families not claiming this huge amount of money that is being left at the federal level that makes it worth launching an EITC outreach campaign. Many of these campaigns have a lot of different goals, including increasing the number of families that learn about and claim the credit, increasing the actual amount of overall refunds, connecting families not only to the EITC but also other tax benefits that they may be eligible for, as well as connecting them to other community services that might be helpful. So, on the line today, I am very pleased to have Mayor Buddy Dyer from the City of Orlando, Fla. He is the 32nd mayor of the city and upon taking office he has outlined a bold set of initiatives to accomplish during his tenure. He is a successful attorney in private practice and was first elected to public office in

1992. He also served in the Florida State Senate for 12 years, being twice re-elected. He is also an environmental engineer.

You just heard from Councilmember Jim Ananich from Flint, Mich. He is representing the 7th Ward of Flint and was elected in November of 2005. He is the current Vice Chair of the Finance and Legislative Committee and he served on the staff of State Senate Minority Leader Bob Emerson in Lansing, and was Legislative Assistant in the Office of Congressman Dale Kildee in Washington. As I noted before, he is also a 7th grade social studies, not math, teacher in the Flint School District and the past chair for the United Teachers of Flint. So, welcome Councilmember Ananich.

ANANICH: Thank you.

HOLSCLAW: Councilmember Patty O’Callaghan is from West Lafayette, Ind., and is the former City Council President. She is also the Director of Social Justice Ministries in the Lafayette Urban Ministry. She has a long history of community work and has spent more than 10 years as the Director of Tippecanoe Court Appointed Special Advocates.

And finally, Margaret Bozik, Assistant Director for Management, Planning, and Communications in the City of Burlington, is joining us today. She has managed the city’s CDBG program for the past eight years and participates in policy development and planning initiatives, especially in the areas of economic mobility and social equity. She is also a member of the Vermont Bar Association. So, with those introductions, I want to get us to the meat of our call and throw out my first question to the speakers and maybe I will start with Mayor Dyer. How did you learn about the EITC and specifically, decide to launch an Earned Income Tax Credit initiative?

DYER: Our staff was working on asset building in some of our higher poverty neighborhoods and had several discussions with members of the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation about how we go about it in a cooperative manner and suggested the Earned Income Tax Credit program, and we called it, eventually, the “Extra Credit Campaign” and we launched it in a cooperative fashion with the city, the county, and Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation and probably, most importantly, the Orlando Chamber of Commerce. Having that business connection was really important in terms of being able to reach more employees that were eligible and were not claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit.

HOLSCLAW: Now, that is really interesting and we are definitely going to come back to that business angle. Councilmember Ananich, how did Flint get involved?

ANANICH: Well, the biggest way that I think we got involved – we had always had some EITC dollars coming in, but our Community Economic Development Administration within our city, under the direction of Nancy Rich – she has really taken a lead on this. She has really done a great job and what she did was, she came to us, the city council and asked for \$80,000 - half from Community Development Block Grant money. We developed a community in the City of Flint - middle to upper middle homes - and we used some federal dollars, with the understanding that when we sold a house, that we would use the proceeds to help lower-income families and we thought that this was a good way to spend those dollars, but also to help bring dollars back to Flint. And so, the city council allocated that money for the first time. We had never used any

CDBG money and we had never used any city money to actually try to go after those dollars, and we have been very successful with that. With a small investment, we have really made large gains and it has been really a great program.

HOLSCLAW: And how much was that investment, overall?

ANANICH: \$80,000 dollars is all we put into it.

HOLSCLAW: That's terrific. And what about Councilmember O'Callaghan from West Lafayette? How did you initially get engaged in outreach around EITC?

O'CALLAGHAN: Well, we went to get a state EITC in Indiana and we were finally successful at getting that at 6% of the federal credit, but what we realized is that once we worked so hard to get that, we realized how many people do not take advantage of it. You talked about 15-25% of people who are eligible for the credit don't claim it, so we wanted to get that money back from the federal government into our community and just for Tippecanoe County - Lafayette and West Lafayette, Indiana - in 2002, the estimate was that it was \$1.7 million that was left in Washington that we could use right here in our community.

HOLSCLAW: Wow. And Margaret what about Burlington?

BOZIK: Well, I really have to give credit to the National League of Cities, because it was when the "EITC toolkit" came across our mayor's desk a couple of years back, he said, "Wow, this really seems to fit with some public benefits outreach work that our VITAs were doing on Martin Luther King Day," and seemed to be a good match in terms of an outreach campaign and the timing was good. Then things kind of grew from there.

HOLSCLAW: That's terrific. I would like to talk a little bit, especially just in case there are new participants on the line that are interested in launching EITC outreach campaigns for the very first time, about unique strategies that you have employed to let residents know about this Earned Income Tax Credit and perhaps if you would like to start, Councilmember Ananich, telling us a little bit about how Flint is reaching out?

ANANICH: I think that that is one of the strongest points of our EITC program, is that we have had a very aggressive grassroots program in the community. One of the things that we did is that we have billboards up, which I think is very strong, and we have a lot of different partners that have been getting involved: banks, media outlets, hospitals, faith-based organizations, the county government, and in all the different sites we keep information. When we do other programs, such as a down payment assistance program, we talk to people about EITC because so often people who are eligible for down payment assistance would also be eligible for the EITC. We do a lot of outreach in the community. We have billboards, strategically located throughout the community and our slogan is: "Owe less to the IRS." It really jumps out at people and it makes them think, Okay, everybody wants that, right? So, we get a lot of people who call in from that and we have had tremendous success from outreach efforts and I think it has been in large part because of our partnering.

HOLSCLAW: That's great and I would like to follow up on something that you just said. In case folks are newer to this, you mentioned sites, and by sites, I believe you were referring to free income tax preparation sites, which many cities across the country are hosting in public libraries, in businesses, and in a variety of venues and I know all of the speakers on the line today are in the midst of hosting these types of sites. Perhaps, I will turn to Mayor Dyer. Can you talk a little bit about how you are doing outreach in Orlando?

DYER: Sure. One of the important ways that we are going about it is business to business, and we have actively engaged the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce and they went out and had workplace information sessions with various employees, workplace posters and then statement stuffers delivered to all the employees of the businesses that are members of the Chamber. So, we figured that we reached 1,200 employers and about 700,000 employees through that and then we, at tax season, we likewise had almost 30 volunteer income tax assistance preparation sites and we had a really large blitz during that season. We did statement stuffers with the utility companies, which reaches about 120,000 customers, the cities credit unions and we did stuffers in their statements of about 110,000. We ran PSAs on all the city buses. We did radio blitzes, newspaper articles, and TV coverage. The Chamber had stuff in their magazine. So similar to Flint, we had a big media campaign.

HOLSCLAW: Okay. And Councilmember O'Callaghan, tell us what you are doing in West Lafayette to let folks know about the EITC savings.

O'CALLAGHAN: Well, I think that it is important to note that small cities really can get something done. That is great to hear about Orlando and the great numbers there, but even in a smaller city, people can use the free media, and not have to spend money on it, but to get the news media involved and that has been one of the best ways for us to get the word out about the EITC. When people see it on the news, we have gone to the New News Show. We have had them come live to our site and in the newspapers, and that has been a great thing. Another is that we have made up postcards and we have direct mailed to clients of Lafayette Urban Ministry, who earn some money, but not enough and let them know about the EITC and our free tax preparation sites. Another interesting thing that we have done is that we have joined with the LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) and we have made up these postcards for them, so that everyone who comes to the Area Four Agency to sign up for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance program also gets a card about the EITC and the free tax preparation. So, that is direct access to people who need it.

HOLSCLAW: It is a great idea. And Margaret, what about in Burlington?

BOZIK: Well, we are also a small city, which means that our VITAs can actually go out and do door-to-door flyering in all of our lower-income neighborhoods. We also post tear-off flyers. We use bus ads. We use free media coverage, public access television. We also have a televised kick-off event, where our mayor joins with the mayor of the adjoining City of Winooski to generate some press coverage in that way. Finally, we use our 211 line, which is actually a statewide information call center that is manned 24 hours a day to get the word out.

HOLSCLAW: That is great. If you are interested in more strategies because I can see they are fabulous and I hope that the callers on the line are hearing the diversity among larger and smaller communities, but also just different ways of approaching this - Orlando is certainly very unique in the business approach that they have taken with a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and there are lots of interesting lessons there - we would invite you at the National League of Cities to log onto our website (<http://www.nlc.org/nlctoolkit/html/>) and download a copy of our "Maximizing the Earned Income Tax Credit in your Community: A Toolkit for Municipal Leaders." Hopefully, you will find a whole host of additional strategies in there.

BOZIK: Can I inject one thing?

HOLSCLAW: Absolutely.

BOZIK: It is actually kind of interesting what Margaret said. I actually was visiting a friend of mine, a colleague who works with me, in Congressman Kildee's office and now lives in Burlington, and I actually saw, so I can personally attest, that I actually saw some of the EITC advertisements that she is speaking of, and it struck me and I thought that it was interesting and I am glad that I remembered that and it was a really good campaign that they had put together.

HOLSCLAW: That is fantastic. I am impressed with all the very creative ways, from Flint's "Owe Less to the IRS," to the other creative things that folks are coming up with, continually year after year. One of the important things to remember is that the individuals that are eligible for the EITC are a moving target. It is constantly changing. As our economy is changing, folks are coming in and out of eligibility status and it is truly a low- to moderate-income credit in that you can earn up to \$35,000-\$36,000 a year and it reduces your tax liability. So, the population that you are talking about trying to reach is quite diverse. And you know, Mayor Dyer, you talked a little bit about partnerships. I want to suggest that our participants on the line today give them some flavor of who else you are doing this with, because clearly all four of you are not doing this alone. So, Mayor Dyer, would you also talk a little bit more about the unique partnerships that Orlando has?

DYER: Yeah, and one of the things that we did, we can identify where some of the lower-income employees are, so we worked directly with the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association, for instance, knowing that a lot of the employees that work in the hotel and lodging industry are going to be the service types that are eligible for the income tax credit. So, they were a group that we specifically targeted, but we also have a lot of partners and one of the interesting things is if you are familiar with the ACORN group (www.orlando.acorn.org), we have them here working with us, as well as the Chamber. So, you have, kind of extreme ends of political organizations or the political spectrum, all working together and it is interesting. It has had an economic impact, but it has also had a community-building impact on the city as well.

HOLSCLAW: Margaret, in Burlington, being a smaller community, obviously the largest city in Vermont, but still a smaller community compared to most, who have you found to partner with?

BOZIK: Well, first of all, one of our local colleges gives credit to their accounting students for volunteering to be tax assisters at the site and that is really critical, because that immediately

gives us a pool of 30-50 students who have some background and are fairly easy to train. We have several banks that are key partners, both in providing funding and other services. We have a local credit union that has been very active and actually developed an alternative refund anticipation loan product and then we partner with the local community action agency, the IRS, and the United Way, which is really our major link to the business community.

HOLSCLAW: Thanks, Margaret, and I should note, if you are interested in more information on predatory lending and predatory practices like refund anticipation loans, feel free to log onto our web site (www.nlc.org/iyef) and look under “Asset Building.” That is a new area of work for the Institute, if you are already engaged in this work or interested in expanding. I want to turn to Councilmember Patty O’Callaghan. Tell us, in West Lafayette, who are you partnering with?

O’CALLAGHAN: Well, certainly the university is a good key that I would encourage anybody that has a university or college in their community to tap into those for volunteers and the Rotary for volunteers. Our main first partner was a financial planning group, but they were not necessarily too busy at tax time. They knew numbers and so they were our first group of volunteers that were trained to do the tax preparation. And certainly all the social service agencies to get the word out about the Earned Income Tax Credit and we also had a partnership with Lafayette Savings Bank, because one of the things that people do tend to do is get the rapid refund anticipation loan so that they can get the money right away, because they do not have a bank account. We partnered with Lafayette Savings Bank to open a no minimum balance, no fees for a year bank account, so that we could have their refund direct deposited to that account, and that way, they could get their refund within 10 days and hopefully then be less tempted by the rapid refund loan.

HOLSCLAW: That’s terrific. What about Councilmember Ananich in Flint? Who are you partnering with?

ANANICH: Well, we try to do a good diverse amount of partnering as well. Last year, we had six or seven VITA sites, and we have expanded that. We were able to expand that to nine this year and I think one thing that we did is that we let one of the agencies take the lead every year, so that everyone shares in the public relation side of it and every one shares in the thanks. We do have recognition dinners for them and some of the sites that we have are the Genesee County Community Action Resource Department within the Genesee County government, Lamont Community College, we have two different churches, the Lamont Community College Hispanic Tech Center - we have a Hispanic Tech Center in the City of Flint and that reaches another group of people. We also partner with the disability network. We try to be as diverse and as user-friendly as possible and one of our other sites is the public library.

We have these sites all throughout the city and, as a matter of fact, the Genesee County site operates tax assistance year-round. They do not just do it at tax time. They do it year-round to help people go back and do amendments and other things like that. I think it is really helpful because all of these agencies and all these different groups believe in what they are doing and when they get the chance to take the lead, they really grab with both hands and run with it. I think it has worked well for us.

HOLSCLAW: These are some great suggestions and I know that many of the callers that have joined us today may have questions. If you do, I would encourage you to either e-mail Michael Karpman at Karpman@nlc.org with your questions or, very shortly, the operator will give us some instructions on how you can ask a question via phone. I have two more questions for our speakers before I open it up to see what questions you may have. One is, especially for the elected officials on the line, can you just briefly note what role can the elected official play? Many of the callers that may be on the line may be with community-based organizations and may want to involve elected officials and many may be elected officials themselves and could be struggling with what their very specific role could be. So, maybe I will start with Councilmember Ananich. Can you tell us what you would give for a couple of suggestions of roles that an elected official could play?

ANANICH: Well, I think there are various roles that an elected official could play. I think one of them is an advocate for the program. Many activities are eligible for CDBG dollars, Community Development Block Grant dollars. We have been very active as a council supporting it, but one thing that I did personally was we actually did our Earned Income Tax Credit kick-off on Martin Luther King Day this year and at the Flint North End Soup Kitchen, where everyone met, we got t-shirts and we actually went out into the community and knocked on doors and tried to educate people on the Earned Income Tax Credit and we got a great response because a lot of people just did not know about it, and we had a really aggressive advertisement campaign. But some people are just not in the sites where we have it, they do not see the billboards or the free media that we get, and that hand-to-hand, that touching of them and sitting in their home explaining the program - I enjoyed it very much and I think that the people that we spoke to did too.

HOLSCLAW: That's terrific. Mayor Dyer, what about Orlando, what role have you specifically played?

DYER: Certainly as a public advocate or spokesman, when you are the mayor you are able to get on just about any radio station that you want to. So, one of the things that we do is a free media/radio blitz. Certainly, going to the editorial board of a newspaper and getting them to promote the campaign as well. And one of our councilmembers signed up and got the training and did tax preparation at one of our sites.

HOLSCLAW: That's terrific. Councilmember O'Callaghan, what about for yourself?

O'CALLAGHAN: Well, I agree that the mayors have a great bully pulpit and we have the mayors of West Lafayette and Lafayette do our press conference and we do this several times during the tax season and that is a good way to get that free media to come out. I am learning on this call as well and I will look at our CDBG funds and see if we can use some of that.

HOLSCLAW: Great. That leads me to our next question, and I certainly have a long list, but I want to make sure that our callers have some time for questions too. I would love to just briefly also note the impact that you feel like you have had in your community. If you know monetary figures of what you are bringing back locally, I would love for you to highlight that, but also if you have a comment to make about, more broadly, how you feel this effort is helping strengthen

families in your community, we would love to have your insights on that, too. Perhaps, I will start with you Margaret for Burlington.

BOZIK: Sure. We are a city of 40,000 in a state of 600,000. So, we are looking at a very small state. We have three local VITA sites, free tax sites. Last year, we served just over 1,000 clients at those three sites and brought back a combined EITC total of around \$655,000. And I say combined, because here in Vermont, we do have a 32% state credit as well. But in addition to just bringing that money back, I think this campaign has really been a key cornerstone for a larger asset-building campaign. It has gotten us into areas of encouraging people to save, of looking at ways to reduce debt. We have begun a free credit score campaign that kind of grew out of this. So, it has just been a great foundation.

HOLSCLAW: That is wonderful – Mayor Dyer, what about Orlando?

DYER: Well, we know nationally and we think it is the same in Orlando that between 15-20% of individuals and families who are eligible do not apply for the EITC and it is somewhat hard to measure, but we can measure, based on our VITA sites, and we know that between 2004 and 2005, the number of individuals and families who applied for the Earned Income Tax Credit at our VITA sites increased by almost 60% and the dollars brought back increased by about 80%. So, we know at least within our VITA sites that we have had some great success and I would agree also that just being part of recognizing asset-building and being just one part of that piece is an important thing for the community.

HOLSCLAW: That's great. Councilmember Ananich?

ANANICH: Specifically, I know that last year, before I was elected to council, before we aggressively started going after these dollars, I think we had about 800 people that were served in the VITA sites. That would have been for the 2004 tax year and we had about \$300,000 that came in and last year, when we really revved up, I think we had over 1,324 people served and we had exactly \$616,263 and the total tax refund, including EITC as a result of the coalition efforts, was over one million dollars. So, we really had a great impact. We brought more money into the city and more money into people's hands and we have been very, very successful with it.

HOLSCLAW: And finally, Councilwoman Patty O'Callaghan.

O'CALLAGHAN: Well, here, just at this one site, we have gone from doing 100 returns to 300 returns. Last year, we did 654 returns, and total EITC federal and state was \$525,000 and total tax refunds was over \$1 million and it is real money in the hands of people that really need it. So, it is going to stay here in the community to help people feed, clothe, and shelter their families. So, we think this is a win-win-win. Because it is a win for the person that receives it, it is a win for the local economy, because that money is spent here and it is also a win because there is less demand on the social service agencies during that time when they are getting that tax refund. So, just one really quick story about a couple who, because of the \$4,000 EITC refund that they received, they were out of debt for the first time and now they were going to be eligible for a Habitat for Humanities home, so now they were able to find their own home. It is amazing.

HOLSCLAW: It is life-changing. That is great and I should mention, as the moderator, that families can back file for the EITC, back to three years. So, there have been instances where people have literally been owed by the federal government \$10,000 plus and have been able to sign up for a program that helps them get into housing. So, that's great. Well, I want to give our operator, the chance to tell folks on the line how to get into the queue to ask a telephone question and as soon as she has done that, I have a question ready that has come in from our e-mail.

OPERATOR: If you would like to ask a question, press *1 on your telephone keypad.

HOLSCLAW: Terrific. A question we have coming in on e-mail, which I anticipate several people may be interested in, so I thought I would ask this one first. Could you all talk just briefly about the budget that you have allocated towards the EITC outreach campaign? One of the things the National League of Cities has talked a lot to communities about is that it does not necessarily take cold, hard cash from the city to operate efforts and free tax prep sites. Obviously, it helps and in some instances, there are actual hard costs, but more and more, communities are very interested in cities that are actually putting these types of efforts in their budget. And we would like to hear from the speakers, what, if any, dollars have you put into EITC campaigns and perhaps where the other funding is coming from? Who would like to talk first?

DYER: I would be glad to, Buddy Dyer, Mayor of Orlando. We have a three-year initiative, a three-year partnership. The city of Orlando is putting in \$75,000 a year. The Orange county government is putting in \$150,000 and the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation is putting in \$75,000. So, in terms of hard, cash dollars, there is \$300,000 a year coming from the three partners.

HOLSCLAW: Mayor Dyer, of the city money, is that CDBG or is it general funds?

DYER: I think that it is all general funds.

ANANICH: I can also speak to that. This is Jim Ananich, in the City of Flint. We put in, as I said before, \$80,000 of Community Development Block Grant money. Half of it was CDBG money and the other half was from land sales and we were able to buy computers for some of the VITA sites. All of our dollars were spent on advertising and all the materials that were used. We did mailings, billboards, and newspaper ads. We did a tote bag, which was pretty interesting. The tote bag had our slogan on it and had information about down payment assistance and it had information about other federal programs that are similarly targeted to these individuals and part of our rationale for the tote bag was that we were going to make the people that came into the site sort of our spokesmen. They took it back and showed it to their family members and friends. I think it had a good effect because we had a lot of people that commented on our tote bags and I think it helped to expand on the program. So, a small amount of actual dollars, \$80,000, actually had a big multiplying effect.

HOLSCLAW: What about West Lafayette?

O'CALLAGHAN: Well, I will make people feel better about not having to spend very much money because the city does not right now put much hard cash into the program. We have gotten a grant from our community foundation for laptop computers and we do, as I said, the free media kinds of things and direct mailings and those kinds of things, so we have not had to put in very much hard cash. We also get great support from the IRS and everybody needs to know that, that they can get all the training materials and things from the IRS and certainly the National League of Cities training materials, as well as the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Just go to www.cbpp.org and they have a great toolkit and materials for people.

HOLSCLAW: I am so happy that you mentioned that, Patty, because the IRS can be a tremendous help with free software for the free tax preparation site, if you are approved by them, and also help with the training. In our toolkit and in the CBPP toolkit that Patty just mentioned, is how to get in contact with your local IRS territory manager. So, our good friends in Atlanta can help connect you to them, as well as if you are having any trouble at all figuring out who your territory manager is. So, Margaret, what about in Burlington?

BOZIK: Well, we spent probably about \$1,000 a year on outreach costs and that comes out of - we happen to have some old Urban Development Action Grant money that we used to pay for that. We get funding from the United Way and local banks for additional outreach and for site personnel and for coordinators to run the sites and that are actually a fairly easy sell because the return on investment is so high. And then, in terms of space, right here at City Hall, we have computers and desks that, after hours, go unused and it makes a great location for actually running a site.

HOLSCLAW: That's terrific. And some really important points on funding, and I think our callers can see how incredibly diverse the budgets are for this type of initiative and I think that that is one of the wonderful things about it. I should mention that Margaret just said about return on investment and if you are interested in some models of how some cities have approached working that return on investment, I would encourage you to visit the City of San Antonio, Texas web site (www.sanantonio.gov/comminit/pdf/112604%20EITC.pdf). They have done a return on investment study with a private group. I believe the City of Baltimore has as well. There are a couple of cities around the country that have done this and it gives you not only the dollars being returned, but the multiplier effect. I now want to go with Melissa. Do we have callers with questions?

OPERATOR: The first question is from Katherine Klosek in Salisbury, Md.

KLOSEK: Hi, I have sort of heard an answer, but my question was, with the VITA sites, we have one or two that were funded by Delmarva Power, which is our local power company, and they are not providing funding this year, so the VITA sites are going to be limited, but I guess when everybody mentioned the partner list of things, would that be the recommendation for getting funding or - because I do not really know why Delmarva decided not to fund the sites this year.

HOLSCLAW: Sure and that is something that we see a lot in these coalition models across the country, that partner's ability to be part of the coalition and support it in the exact same way you

just campaigned. For the speakers on the call, do you have some suggestions on, and maybe Mayor Dyer, you may have some insights on engaging the broader business community that could be helpful to underwriting some of the cost.

DYER: Again, we are very fortunate to have some great partners, the counties working with us and the Chamber, so we have, county-wide, 27 VITA sites and a lot of them, where the site is, is staffed with volunteers from that particular organization, like the Credit Union staffs their own and we have a couple of banks. The city staffs one at the main bus terminal in the downtown, and one of the things that we do, I guess I should have mentioned, it is not hard dollars, but it is dollars, is that city employees that want to participate in doing the VITA sites, we allow them on city time to get 16 hours of training and then up to 36 hours, on city time, of volunteering at the VITA sites.

HOLSCLAW: That is a great point.

DYER: I might also suggest that the caller look to see if they have a community foundation in their community, because, again, this is the kind of thing that an investment of their dollars will benefit the community.

HOLSCLAW: Melissa, do we have another question?

OPERATOR: The next question is from Sandra Piquet in Bunnell, FL.

HOLSCLAW: Sandra, you are on the line.

PIQUET: Hi, good afternoon. My question is for Mayor Dyer. Do you have any process in place for reaching the ESL community with your EITC outreach at this point?

DYER: We do. We have Spanish language materials that are sent out and we have something in the City of Orlando called the Hola Office, which is for new Spanish-speaking residents and they can access information about this program at our Hola Office. The Chamber of Commerce would probably be your best source.

HOLSCLAW: And that is at the Orlando Chamber of Commerce.

DYER: You can get to it at www.orlando.org.

HOLSCLAW: Terrific. And for the other speakers on the line, this is a good question. Are there targeted populations that you are reaching out to, that may be a little more difficult to reach for a variety of reasons, and what are some strategies that you have employed?

O'CALLAGHAN: One thing that we have done is with the laptop computers that we got from our community foundation, we have gone off site to places where people may feel more comfortable coming to. So, we have done a day at a church that has a large Hispanic population and at a subsidized housing complex that has a large Hispanic population and we have volunteers that were trained to do tax prep that also spoke Spanish. We also had several volunteers that

were just the interpreters. They did not do the tax prep. We had English speaking tax preparers, so we had interpreters for them.

BOZIK: Here in Burlington, our principal languages other than English are Vietnamese, Serbo-Croatian, and French and then Mi-Mi, but most of our Mi-Mi speakers are actually not literate in Mi-Mi. So, we also do kind of on-site services. We will take laptops out to places like the Association of Africans Living in Vermont. We use interpreters and we also do have some bilingual tax assistants.

HOLSCLAW: Melissa, do we have another question?

OPERATOR: The next question is from Charles Malloy in Bennettsville, S.C.

HOLSCLAW: Hi, Charles, you are on the line.

MALLOY: Yes, we wanted to know if in the outreach, did anyone notify the citizens what the earned income was so that they would not be scared off that it was something that they did not qualify for?

HOLSCLAW: So, to the speakers, in your outreach materials, because we all know that getting a letter that has the letters I, R and S in it can be scary, how have you approached your media campaigns or your outreach materials in a way that you think has been a little more welcoming or inviting to folks to take you up on what you are offering?

O'CALLAGHAN: May I speak one thing?

HOLSCLAW: Sure.

O'CALLAGHAN: Specifically for what the caller talked about, the income guidelines, our postcard actually says on it who qualifies and you need to have worked and made how much, and that really does help people because sometimes people will think that they would not qualify, but as you said earlier, married filing jointly, last year, if they had two kids, they could make up to \$37,000 and still be eligible. So, we put the income guidelines right on the postcard.

HOLSCLAW: Others?

ANANICH: I am looking right at our brochure that we sent out and it is not a lot of verbiage and it is very straightforward, what is the Earned Income Tax Credit and it describes it, who qualifies, how much of a refund is available, and how does it work?

HOLSCLAW: And for other samples of what some cities are doing, I would encourage you to log onto our web site (www.nlc.org/iyef) and download the toolkit or also request a toolkit from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. They have a different one that gives you some samples of outreach materials that might be helpful.

HOLSCLAW: I have a question from Waco, Texas, that has come in via e-mail and they are wondering, they have not heard anyone mention anything about partnering with AARP, and many of us know that AARP has been doing free tax prep for seniors for a long time. Can anyone talk about how they have partnered with AARP or perhaps what your experience has been locally?

ANANICH: I can definitely speak about that. This is Jim Ananich in the City of Flint and I have to say that I was remiss in stating that, because we have a very good relationship with AARP and that sort of expands the amount of sites that we have. They have been very active at their own sites in our senior centers and they have been very helpful. I am glad that the e-mailer brought that up, because they have been very helpful in the City of Flint at least.

DYER: This is Mayor Dyer. I likewise am remiss in doing that because they train a lot of our volunteers and in addition to manning sites, they also supervise a number of the sites.

O'CALLAGHAN: In West Lafayette, when we got started, we did not file the returns ourselves. We worked with the AARP site to file them before we became independent and now we certainly refer to each other's sites.

HOLSCLAW: And I know that a lot of different cities have used AARP to get up and running. AARP has been generous enough to give a volunteer as a mentor to a new site and help that site get up and running, so that they are running efficiently and have that historical expertise that has been critical, especially if you are newer at this.

Well, another question I have coming in via e-mail is how can I find out the dollar amount of EITC that tax filers in my specific community are not receiving and while we know that the data is flawed, admittedly, and it is only up until a certain year, there are some methods that folks are using to figure out about how much money is being left on the table. Would any of you like to mention how you have done that in your community and what resources you have used?

BOZIK: Well, Certainly the Brookings Institution is a great resource for that. They have all the information and it is just the Brookings Institution and it is the Metropolitan Policy Group underneath that, and they have all the information, just right there online. It is a great web site: <http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/eitc.htm>.

HOLSCLAW: And what you are referring to is that you can actually put in your community and the past year and it will generate an Excel spreadsheet and information for you. So, it is www.brookings.edu, I believe. But it is the Brookings Institution if you Google that. Other experiences of sort of figuring out locally what the data looks like?

ANANICH: I cannot speak specifically to what the data looks like, but I have a flyer here in front of me that might have possibly been prepared by the City of Flint or it might have come with our packet from the National League of Cities, but from my experience, the IRS themselves are very helpful - there is a phone number on here, 1-800-829-1040. That is to help you find the nearest site for the EITC. On their web site, they have information about an EITC Assistant tool (<http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=130102,00.html>), the 2005 EITC limits, and I think

that they want to see this program succeed as well. I think that they are a very helpful resource to go to.

HOLSCLAW: That is a great point, Jim, and I appreciate that. The IRS can be very helpful and I am not sure if that number is still current, but I encourage you all to think about reaching out to your territory managers in your area to get some assistance with thinking about the numbers.

BOZIK: And you can just go to www.irs.gov on the web and get it that way.

HOLSCLAW: Well realizing that our time is coming to a close, I want to ask one last question to each of our speakers around challenges and advice. What would be your best piece of advice for participants or callers that are on the line, that are thinking about getting into EITC outreach or expanding the outreach program that they already have in place? Maybe I will start with you, Mayor Dyer.

DYER: I think partnerships and working together and bringing together community resources and assets is probably the best piece of advice that I can give you.

HOLSCLAW: Great. What about you, Councilmember Ananich?

ANANICH: I would say similar things that Mayor Dyer said. I think that one of our greatest successes is that we had over 250 volunteers this last year. I think that they can help relate the message to the people sometimes even better than the politicians can and to keep making partnerships and to keep working with people and building trust with people so they see that this is not some scam, but an actual program that is going to help them.

HOLSCLAW: Great. Margaret?

BOZIK: I have to ditto what everyone has said about partnerships. They are just absolutely key and I think one other thing I might add would be to build in some way of getting feedback about how successful your outreach is being. Because I know that we have done some modifications on what we are doing, based on what clients have told us about what they learned, where and how.

HOLSCLAW: That's great. And Councilmember O'Callaghan?

O'CALLAGHAN: I would encourage them not to be afraid to get started in doing it. Even if the first year, it is just some outreach to let people know what the free sites are that are already available in your community. That is how we started first. Just letting them know and then we realized that we could do a site ourselves and get even more people involved. But, just to do it, because it is their money and it is money that will come back to your community and help people who need it.

HOLSCLAW: Those are fantastic points, and I should underscore that each city, really, approaches this in a different way and your role is going to look very different, based upon what may already exist in your community. I guess my small token of advice would be to really reach

out to your elected officials in a passionate way and engage them in, hopefully, through the resources that we have mentioned, like the National League of Cities' EITC outreach toolkit, you will have some documented roles that city leaders can play to help you boost take up of the Earned Income Tax Credit. I encourage you to reach out to myself, Abby Hughes Holsclaw at the National League of Cities, or Heidi Goldberg at the National League of Cities if we can be of any assistance at all. I also want to encourage you to join a group called the National Community Tax Coalition. The National League of Cities is a part of the National Community Tax Coalition and has been since we helped start that group. It is basically a network of affiliates doing free tax preparation from across the country. So, there is a rich set of lessons learned and expertise. They just had their annual conference in Los Angeles last weekend and I encourage you to look them up at www.tax-coalition.org. So, all of this information is on the National League of Cities web site at www.nlc.org/iyef.

So, on behalf of the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families, we are indebted to Mayor Buddy Dyer, Councilmember Jim Ananich, Margaret Bozik from Burlington and Councilmember Patty O'Callaghan for their time today. We greatly appreciate your insights. I hope that the callers have been inspired and hopefully have walked away from this call with new ideas. I encourage you and we applaud your work. If you are interested in being featured on a call in the future, we request that you please stay in touch with us and let us know how this is helping you and what you are going to do in your community. It is the only way that we are able to continue to share the best practices that are happening across the country. So, with that, I will turn the call back over the Melissa, our operator.

OPERATOR: Thank you for participating in the National League of Cities audioconference. Listeners may register for future audioconferences on the YEF Institute web site at www.nlc.org/iyef. You may now disconnect.