



SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT VALUABLE TAX CREDITS BY USING THE MEDIA

The media is an excellent vehicle for reaching a broad audience with critical information about tax credits. You can organize a press conference, draft op-eds or letters to the editor for print media, or run Public Service Announcements (PSAs).

- ***Hold a press conference at the beginning of the tax filing season (mid- to late January).*** You can use a press conference to kick off your tax credit outreach campaign. It's a great opportunity to get your story on TV, radio, or in the newspaper, especially if you can have a state or local government official participate. But planning ahead is key!
 - At least four weeks before the event ...
 - Decide what you'd like to do and how you'd like to do it. Talk to your network and your coalition about your ideas, get ideas from them and decide on the message you'd like to get out.
 - Decide who you'd like as your keynote. Contact your potential speaker to get on their calendar and make sure they can attend.
 - Research press contacts. Go online to local newspapers and TV stations — check the bio page or type in key words such as “taxes” or “tax credits” — to find out what reporters are writing about or are interested in. You want to target those reporters that are interested in economic issues, taxes, or families.
 - About two weeks before the event ...
 - Prepare your posters, brochures, banners, any props, and your press kit. The press kit should include marketing materials for the group, a press release for the event, quotes or testimonies from individuals, and your contact information.
 - Prepare a list of reporters to invite.
 - Write and fax a news/press advisory — which is simply an invitation that specifies the who, what when, where, and why.
 - The week of the event ...
 - Write the statement or introduction you plan to make at the press conference.
 - Finalize all details, and write the press release.

- Press release should be detailed. It will be a reference for reporters who attend the press conference, and it will be a resource for reporters who are not able to attend but otherwise interested in writing about tax credits.
 - Release should include a quote from head of your organization as well as quotes from participating officials.
 - Call all reporters the day before the press conference to remind them of the event.
 - On the day of the press conference, arrive early at the site to situate speakers, organize material, and so on. After the press conference is over, hand deliver or fax the remainder of the press kits to reporters who were unable to attend.
- ***Draft op-eds and guest columns and pitch to local newspapers during tax time (March and April).***
- Keep your op-ed or letter to the editor short: highlight what the credits are, how much they are worth, and how they can help families in your area. (Hint: use the information in the power point presentations from the webinars!) Have a local service provider or advocate sign the piece.
 - Find out who you need to contact at a particular newspaper.
 - Check online first. If it's a large newspaper, they will most likely have several editors, but a smaller newspaper may have just one.
 - Call and introduce yourself, letting them know who you are, the organization you work for, and what you do there.
 - Convince the newspaper to run your op-ed or letter to the editor.
 - Tell them why tax credits are important to the community they serve. Talk to them about how tax credits can help working families who need to make ends meet, how families need to know about the credits and get help filing their taxes, and how refunds from tax credits can potentially have an economic impact in the community.
 - You may be giving them material when they need to fill space!
 - Let them know how you can be a resource to them. You may be able to pass along stories of individuals who benefit from tax credits, like families who get refunds who then use the money to buy a home, or a car, or get needed medical care. In the future, you may also be able to put them in touch with service providers who can comment for other stories.

- **Organize a PSA campaign.** Radio or television PSAs can be an effective tool for informing families about tax credits. It takes planning and resources, but a PSA campaign is truly worth the effort.
- Create your PSA.
 - Find a locally known public figure or public official and ask them to be your spokesperson. For the 2005 tax-filing season, the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council worked with Senator Hillary Clinton to produce a 60-second PSA. NYSCCCC initially made the request in writing, then followed up with a phone call.
 - Work with your spokesperson on the PSA text. The National Women’s Law Center provided NYSCCCC with sample PSA text. NYSCCCC worked with Senator Clinton’s staff to come up with a final version. Senator Clinton’s office then produced the tape for distribution.
- Work on PSA distribution. A PSA radio campaign can be very costly, so it’s important to find the right partners.
 - Try and work with coalitions to help finance the PSA campaign.
 - Try and connect with your state broadcasters’ association. For example, NYSCCCC and its local coalitions worked with the New York State Broadcasters’ Association in 2006 and 2007. These associations sponsor a program called the Non-Commercial Sustaining Announcement program (NCSA).
 - Radio and TV stations are inundated with requests for PSAs. As a result, many critical announcements do not get enough exposure.
 - The NCSA program helps government agencies and not-for-profits to buy airtime at an extremely reduced rate. NCSA programs enable you to more than double your airtime — maximizing your chances of reaching your audience with impact.
 - The member stations of the state broadcasters’ association will ask their member stations to broadcast NCSA-sponsored PSAs. Because proceeds from the NCSA program support the member service program — such as sales staff trainings and other events — the member stations are motivated to play the NCSA-sponsored PSAs.
 - When the campaign ends, the broadcasters’ association provides you with documentation of all the radio stations that participated, the total number of spot announcements, and the value of the advertising you received, which you can compare to the amount your coalition actually paid.

- The payoff of working with your state broadcasters' association can be tremendous: During the NYSCCCC's eight-week PSA campaign early in 2007, 41 radio stations participated with a total of 1,771 spot announcements. NYSCCCC and its coalition received over \$309,925.00 worth of radio advertising for \$12,200.00.
- PSA campaigns can make a difference. After the 2007 PSA campaign, NYSCCCC received a significantly increased volume of tax credit calls, and callers would tell NYSCCCC that they heard about the tax credits through the PSAs. In addition, the number of tax returns filed at VITA sites in New York state in 2006 and 2007 increased — due in part to the radio campaign.

Now you can get started using the media to spread the word about valuable tax credits!

Donna Hercules-Hackshaw is with the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council (NYSCCCC). NYSCCCC has been working to make quality, affordable child care available to New York's families since 1975. Rooted in a statewide network of child care resource and referral agencies, the membership of NYSCCCC includes wide representation from child care providers, parents, businesses, community organizations, and other individuals. Donna is NYSCCCC's Special Projects Coordinator. She has directed NYSCCCC's tax credits outreach campaign since 2003. She was a presenter for the Oct. 30, 2007, webinar entitled Tax Credits Outreach: Tips and Tools for Service Providers and Advocates, part of the Citi Education Series on Family Economic Security co-sponsored by the Coalition on Human Needs and the National Women's Law Center. Donna can be contacted at dherculeshackshaw@nyscccc.org.

To access other materials from the webinars on tax credits and tax credits outreach in the Citi Education Series on Family Economic Security at the National Women's Law Center, visit www.nwlc.org/educationseries/downloads.html.

For more information about tax credits outreach, visit www.nwlc.org/loweryourtaxes or contact Amy Matsui at amatsui@nwlc.org.