



Tax Time Thursdays with Oklahoma Native Assets Coalition

Outreach to Native Communities Notes

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Presented by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' Get It Back Campaign

Presenters:

[Christy Finsel](#) – Executive Director, Oklahoma Native Assets Coalition

[Patsy Schramm](#) – Native EITC and VITA Network Coordinator, Oklahoma Native Assets Coalition

Strategies to Engage Underserved Native Communities

Christy Finsel, Citizen of the Osage Nation

- Worked with ONAC for 12 years
- ONAC collaborates with Native Nations and partners to promote Native-led asset-building programs and initiatives
- Direct service provider of asset-building programs as well as capacity-building for partners
- Current programming: Intermediary grant funder for 20 Native VITA programs, National Native EITC/VITA Network, Native BankOn, create and promote resource guides and conduct national research
- Offer Native-specific financial education, savings account programs, and cash assistance programs
- Invitation-only Native VITA grants provide flexible funding with simplified application and reporting processes
- Promote connection between VITA and banking access
 - o More than 50% of Native communities are unbanked or underbanked
- Approach: wraparound services for whole families + broad promotion of asset-building

Patsy Schramm, Citizen of the Cherokee Nation

- Native EITC & VITA Network includes 250 Native/Native-serving VITA sites and advocates
- Network shares information, resources, and opportunities
- Serves on the Taxpayer Opportunity Network steering committee to share Native perspective
- Biggest obstacle: lack of internet connectivity; especially challenging as there is a push for Facilitated Self Assistance return filing – all areas aren't equipped for this

- Best practices:
 - o Outreach succeeds most when it's done through trusted messengers
 - o As an ally, be consistent in offerings, be respectful, and connect with local Native VITA programs
- [Urban Indian Centers](#) and [Indian Health Service Facilities](#) can offer platforms for reaching urban Native communities
- Virtual VITA volunteers are needed in Native and rural areas
 - o Contact Patsy to be connected to a program to volunteer

Outreach & Native Communities: Key Takeaways

1. Connect with trusted tribal sources as entry points when working with Native communities. Each group is unique, so ask community members and officials what works best – communities appreciate you honoring their wishes. Diversifying your offerings, as mentioned above, can allow for a wider variety of local connections. Keep your approach local and remember that no one size fits all.
2. Think outside the box! Some Native communities are in rural and hard to reach places, so you will likely need to be creative to reach a wide audience. For example, one group in Juneau, Alaska budgets yearly for jumper flights to remote Alaskan Native villages. These small planes are equipped as mobile VITA sites and have been helpful for reaching smaller communities. Innovation and creativity are important. More funding is helpful and often necessary for new approaches.
3. Consider offering wraparound, integrated asset-building services. Connecting clients with banking services, financial coaching, and other services can help build financial stability. It's okay to introduce these services slowly – incrementalism can help build understanding, trust, and long-term momentum.

Audience Insights

- Reaching out to a wide variety of partners can help to build a repertoire of trusted messengers that can be tapped yearly.
- Teaching financial basics is helpful and often necessary for long-term financial wellness of clients.
- “It's been important for us to work with our tribal partners on data sovereignty. We've learned that it is important to handle tribal VITA and tax data separately and in a contained way that is approved by the communities we work with.”