Note From Our President

The beginning of March seems like a lifetime ago, when we didn’t give a second thought to going shopping, attending concerts, going to work and meeting friends for lunch. And we were all so very busy.

Some were busy working and balancing family, child care, exercise and vacations. Others were busy working multiple jobs without child care support and figuring out how to make ends meet. What is clear now is that we were either too busy to notice the structural inequities in our economic system, or we were too busy living their difficult reality.

One silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic is that we can’t ignore those inequities anymore. The folks who are now deemed essential workers are the same folks who have the least. The least health care coverage, the least child care options, and the least paid time off or paid sick leave. And some of the lowest wages in our economy.

At GSO, our mission is to create financial stability for low-income workers so they can thrive. This mission just got much harder yet even more imperative... and we are up for the challenge. Now more than ever, low-income workers need the security of having cash in their pockets, and the state and federal Earned Income Tax Credits could provide them with up to $8,000. Add to that the stimulus checks, and workers could receive an important infusion of cash and the security that comes with it. Key to receiving this money? Filing one’s taxes.

To meet the moment, GSO launched Million 4 a Billion — our campaign to reach more than 1 million low-income Californians and help them access billions of dollars in tax credits. (Read more on pg. 2)

In addition to pivoting our programs to a digital forward campaign in five weeks, GSO is also busy advocating for continued CalEITC funding and funding for critical outreach, education and free tax preparation services, which help more people claim their credits. (Read more on pg. 4)

We also have our eyes on the big picture. As the country and our policy makers begin to think about how to create a more just and equitable economy, GSO is developing a narrative changing research campaign to provide us, and our partners, with the most effective, powerful and persuasive message framework to ensure we are successfully communicating and influencing policymakers.

In April, I celebrated my first six months as President of GSO. These are not the challenges I expected to face, but I am grateful to be able to lead an organization working every day to help alleviate the anxiety and financial insecurity faced by so many in our state.

Amy Everitt, President, Golden State Opportunity

The COVID-19 crisis is shining a light on the economic disparities that impact every corner of our state. It is so important to educate Californians about the assistance available to them this tax season, and I am excited to participate in [GSO’s Million 4 a Billion] campaign to get help to the people who need it most.

Golden State Opportunity strives to improve the lives of working Californians.
Million 4 Billion

A campaign to reach more than 1 million low-income Californians and help them access billions of dollars in tax credits.

With more than 4 million Californians newly unemployed and millions more sheltering in place at home as a result of COVID-19, access to CalEITC refund cash is more critical than ever before.

That is why, in just five weeks, GSO built a new digital-first program designed to help low-income families file their taxes for free online with virtual support from our network of volunteer tax preparers. On April 15th, we launched the 'Million 4 a Billion' campaign.

Leveraging our proven digital outreach tactics and a massive phone banking effort, GSO is reaching out to more than one million likely CalEITC eligible Californians to connect them with our online tax filing services in order to ensure the $1 billion allocated for CalEITC refunds reaches working Californians in their time of need. In our first two weeks, more than 1,300 wanted an appointment.

Earlier this month, a robocall from Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis went out to 1.5 million Californians likely eligible for the CalEITC, informing them of our campaign and lending legitimacy to our work with her trusted voice. We now have 13 community partners making phone calls to their fellow Californians informing them that they could be eligible for a tax refund and offering our free online filing service, and three groups providing IRS-trained volunteers to complete tax returns.

In order for 'Million 4 a Billion' to reach as many Californians as possible, however, we'll need your continued support. Join us in spreading the word about the campaign on social using the #Million4Billion hashtag!

COVID-19 Resources Page

As millions of Californians lost their jobs and livelihoods in the first weeks of lockdown, CalEITC4Me’s website saw record levels of traffic as people desperately sought tools and information to weather the economic devastation brought on by the novel coronavirus.

In an effort to ensure that CalEITC4Me could serve as a clearinghouse for helpful information for low-income workers and their families, we created a dedicated resource page highlighting the full spectrum of programs and services that exist to help Californians stay healthy, safe and financially stable throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

As the state continues to launch new programs and services, such as a statewide hotline to answer questions and connect people with assistance, we’ve continued to update our COVID-19 resources page regularly as new information becomes available. We'll continue to do so, and we encourage you to take advantage of this resource for the communities you serve.
**2020 Census**

GSO is partnering with organizations statewide, including United Way and the East Bay Community Foundation, to provide our extensive experience running multi-channel outreach and education campaigns to reach “Hard to Count” (HTC) populations, and encourage them to complete the 2020 Census. Ensuring a complete count in the Census will ensure equitable political representation and funding for federal safety net programs across the communities we serve.

We began our digital outreach in early March when the Census Questionnaire Assistance toll-free phone lines opened, and we’ve since texted over 300,000 Californians in the Bay Area and Los Angeles County area to remind them to fill out the Census.

In this new section of our newsletter, we will be highlighting individuals who received the EITC in the past to share how receiving the tax credit has gone on to shape the trajectory of their lives.

We’ll kick off the series with GSO’s own Vice Chair Alejandra Campoverdi:

“I was raised by a single mother who had recently immigrated to Los Angeles from Mexico just a few years before I was born. We often struggled and in order to make ends meet, we relied on public programs such as WIC and Medi-Cal. But there was one time of the year when our family was able to breathe a little deeper and that was during tax season. I didn’t realize it at the time but we were EITC recipients, so tax time meant extra money in our pockets for everything from food to school supplies. We waited for tax time each year like it was Christmas. We even used our EITC return to buy my first car! The EITC was a lifeline for my family and provided a critical financial boost that allowed me to access opportunities that would have otherwise been out of reach.

Breaking the cycle of poverty in your family isn’t easy but with the help of the EITC, I knew there was money I could consistently rely on as I fought hard to build a better life. That foundation supported me when I went on to attend Harvard University, and it informed my perspective when I ran for Congress in 2017. Perhaps closest to my heart, I had an opportunity to introduce my mother to President Obama in the Oval Office when I served as a White House official in 2009. As I watched them hug, I couldn’t help but realize - that single mother who used her EITC return to further my education was now meeting the President of the United States.”
COVID-19 presents an opportunity to re-think our economic public policy making to continue what is working and to address ongoing inequities. One of GSO’s highest priorities is protecting the $1 billion allocated for CalEITC refunds and the critical funding for outreach, education, and free tax preparation services that maximize its impact.

Having a robust state-level EITC program has greater significance as COVID-19 plunges our state into a recession. With more than 4 million Californians newly unemployed, and many others seeing hours cut or having a spouse lose their job, the current middle class will become CalEITC eligible.

In the four years since implementing the CalEITC, the state has decreased the amount of federal EITC we leave on the table by $400 million. That money goes directly to low-income workers in high-poverty areas helping them afford life’s basic necessities while fueling local economies by driving demand for goods and services.

Our other priority is to end disparities of folks who work hard, pay taxes but have not been able to claim the CalEITC. GSO and our partners are fighting for the inclusion of ITIN holders in the CalEITC, many of whom continue to perform essential services during this crisis and are being left out of other forms of COVID-19 relief.

At the federal level, we are supporting efforts to expand direct cash assistance to Americans who are struggling. We are among a coalition of anti-poverty nonprofits advocating for the Monthly Economic Crisis Support Act in Congress, which would provide $2,000 per month to low- and moderate-income households throughout this crisis.

Click here to sign on to our Budget Letter calling for continued CalEITC funding.

Partners Highlight: Asian Youth Center

The Asian Youth Center (AYC) is one of GSO’s Million 4 a Billion outreach partners. Founded in 1989, AYC empowers and serves low-income families, immigrants, and at-risk youth in the San Gabriel Valley. AYC’s volunteers have been making outreach calls three times a week since our April launch and have reached 123 individuals around the state to help them get the resources to file their taxes for free.
Welcome to our new team member!

Angelica Villanueva

Inland Region Organizer

A native of the Coachella Valley, Angelica majored in economics at UC Riverside. She has extensive experience working with nonprofits to connect low-income families with the services to help them thrive, including as a site coordinator for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA). Angelica’s knowledge of how to run a VITA program has proven instrumental in making the pivot to digital tax filing services as part of our Million 4 a Billion Campaign.

Toolkits & Materials:

Please visit CalEITC4Me.org/resources to access and download our toolkits and collateral materials.

Our materials are available in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, Tagalog, Russian, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Farsi! If you would like to order collateral, please contact sandra@goldenstateopportunity.org.

Interested in monthly updates or want to receive outreach trainings?

Please visit www.caleitc4me.org/be-our-partner today to learn how to join our webinars, receive the latest news, find events near you, or sign up your organization to receive training on CalEITC outreach.