

I-CAN! E-File Hits New High In Tax Refunds to Low-Income Americans

Washington, DC—A free electronic tax filing system, launched with funding from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) eight years ago, has grown to include 560 partners in 49 states helping low-income workers apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

This year, with about six weeks to go before the April 18 deadline for filing tax returns, the free system, called I-CAN! E-File, has processed more than \$110 million in EITC refunds and tax credits. The e-file project and a new website to assist military veterans are among the ways that LSC-funded initiatives provide access and information that help low-income Americans.

“We are in record territory at this point in the tax year,” said Robert J. Cohen, executive director of the Legal Aid Society of Orange County, a nonprofit program funded by LSC that created the electronic filing system. “This e-file system is an innovative and successful project that makes a positive difference in the lives of low-income workers and their families,” he said.

I-CAN! E-File and its partners promote the use of the free filing system and help low-income Americans use the system in preparing their tax returns. Partners include corporations, cities, credit unions and nonprofit organizations. This year, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County has focused on community colleges and libraries as key partners because they offer easy access to computers, information and assistance for people preparing tax returns.

I-CAN! E-File takes its name from the Interactive Community Assistance Network, a ground-breaking, self-help system developed by the Orange County, California, program to provide low-income individuals and families with access to legal forms and information. The website permits taxpayers at a fifth-grade literacy level to log on, answer basic questions about their finances, determine if they qualify for the EITC and then file their federal tax returns online or print out their tax forms and mail them to the IRS.

The website for I-CAN! E-file (www.icanefile.org) features a “live chat” function that allows website users to seek assistance with navigating the site. Users exchange instant messages with the website staff for help with passwords, screen displays and other web-related issues.

The EITC is a refundable federal income tax credit for low- to moderate-income working individuals and families approved by Congress in 1975 as a way to help offset the burden of Social Security taxes and to provide an incentive to work. When the EITC exceeds the amount of taxes owed, it results in a tax refund to those who claim and qualify for the credit. To qualify, taxpayers must meet certain requirements and file a tax return, even if they did not earn enough money to be obligated to file a return.

The I-CAN! E-file project receives funding from LSC’s Technology Initiative Grants program, known as TIG. Since its inception in 2000, TIG has awarded more than 450 grants, totaling more than \$36 million, to support innovative technology projects that improve services to clients, enhance efficiency at LSC-funded programs and increase access to legal information.

Glenn Rawdon, who heads the TIG program, said the I-CAN! E-File project shows the importance of TIG awards in leveraging resources to better serve low-income Americans. “LSC’s newest TIG awards will make it easier for veterans to seek disability benefits, for the public to obtain legal information and for Spanish-speaking persons to apply for civil legal assistance,” he said.

LSC is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that receives an annual appropriation from Congress to promote equal access to justice and to provide for high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income individuals and families. LSC funds go to 136 nonprofit legal aid programs across the country that provide legal services to persons at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty guideline.

Last updated on December 12, 2011.

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