



**Economic Self-Sufficiency Coalition
Steering Committee**

**Meeting Minutes
May 8th 2007**

Present: Marci Bellaire, Diane Bessel, Lauren Breen, Mary K. Comtois, Stephanie Connors, Doris Corley, Ivy Diggs-Washington, Brad Dossinger, Dietra Grant, Reggie Groggin, Donna Mallon, Michael Martin, Laurie Schaller, and Ann Sweeney.

The meeting began with a discussion of Coalition strengths and areas in need of improvement as identified by members of the Steering Committee.

Coalition Strengths	Coalition Areas in Need of Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong mission and vision • Family Financial Wellness Day • Tax Preparation Activities • Collective Talents: Member Agencies, Individuals, Reputation/Credibility, Momentum • Work together especially around tax preparation • Diversity/membership growth – a real privilege to be part of the group • Strong foundation • Getting word out (starting in November); family financial wellness day • Creation now working towards refinement; recognized entity; concept of ESSC and VITA sites • Different leaders; breadth of knowledge and connection to common cause; really working together and not blaming • Working with volunteers; education around the issues; opening up hearts to the West Side; synergy – educational experience around building bridges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about analysis paralysis – over-thinking activities of the coalition and its committees • Take a risk, be more proactive • Handle on what comes next – need to set a future direction and a plan for work infrastructure • Sites need to meet their goals; focus on achieving outcomes; guidelines for financial support and customer services; agencies are tight on resources and hoarding; need for volunteers; level of support and managing agency perceptions • Not heard about free tax sites – why is this? Why aren't more people coming; are refund anticipation loans possible? • Promote people bringing a friend to the sites; lack of community awareness and need for social marketing • Self-Sufficiency Calculator needs to be used more; people view the EITC as too good to be true – trick somewhere; social marketing campaign • Streamline tax preparation process; w-2 people need them; one EFIN at FFWD • Committees – tax preparation is dominant; volunteer recruitment and training –washouts; clearer expectations and marketing pieces; use volunteers in varying capacities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure volunteer efforts – volunteer orientation (for UB in January) clearer roles • Institutional partnerships with sites – “adopt a site” – greater ownership • Communications – shared across the committees – bigger picture • Later notification around family financial wellness day • Awareness of participation for that event for groups (e.g., HSBC) communication needs to take place 2-3 weeks before • Infrastructure – need more business leaders – advisory influence on the coalition; for profit sector/institutional support • Streamline sites – overwhelmed by process and need to be available all season; concentrated period of time would be better with regard to volunteer and other resources • Risk in leadership – need a better plan for succession
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Committee Updates/Activities:

- a. EITC/VITA – Wrapping up tax season and returning equipment to IRS; At present, \$11,257.276 in federal refunds (12,051 returns across all local sites) – not including state refunds; planning a volunteer appreciation event for June 20th (to be held at Shanghai Reds Restaurant)
- b. Financial Education - Reviewing moneyskills.org web-based application and will meet to develop a financial education implementation strategy; next meeting will be held on May 16th 8:30-10:00 at the United Way
- c. Asset Building – Working on the IDA conference to be held in September/October; have secured \$18,000 for the event which will be for local funding institutions/banks as well as community organizations; call to be held on June 7th at 10am; more information available soon
- d. Job Access – Not presently a working committee; some possibility that the Tools For Living Committee will begin work on this issue and fold into the Coalition.
- e. Communication/Advocacy – Diane has asked a Coalition member to consider taking the Chair role for this committee; will be working on updating the website as well as developing a policy agenda; also considering the poverty learning circles concept in order to build community awareness of these issues in Buffalo and Erie County.

ESSC Projects/Upcoming Activities

Mobile Assistance Unit – Diane provided an update on the Mobile Assistance Unit. We have estimates on repair work and insurance costs. Local unions may be willing to provide assistance with build-ins. We are working on an on-going budget for the bus – fuel costs are a concern.

Kids in Distressed Situations (KIDS) Distribution – The Coalition was recently approached by the Community Foundation regarding the possibility of providing vouchers to tax site participants for free clothing/household items. The KIDS Program provides more than \$400,000 in free, un-used merchandised based on a \$25,000 contribution from the foundation. Want to use the tax sites to assist with distribution. A map of KIDS/Tax Site Locations was distributed. Steering Committee Members were asked to share any concerns they might have about this program with Diane.

VITA Site Volunteer Appreciation Event – An event is being planned for June 20th 5:30-7:30 and will be held at Shanghai Reds.

United Way Day of Caring (August) – Hoping to hang flyers about Tax Preparation program in the 14215 zip code area. We will also advertise the IDA opportunity.

Family Financial Wellness Day (January) – We will be doing a tax season debrief in June and starting planning for Family Financial Wellness Day.

Sustainability

Grant Updates – Diane completed a grant application for the Office of Community Services: EITC and Asset Development grant last week for the tax preparation program. The grant would ensure that the Coalition maintains a coordinator for the tax program. Only 10 groups will be funded across the country. It is hoped that this grant can be used in completing additional applications.

Diane also asked members to please continue to share information about grants that the coalition should consider applying for. She now receives the federal update daily. The coalition is also planning to apply for funds through the FB Heron Foundation.

Moving forward, she would also like the group to consider ironing out a Memorandum of Understanding regarding funding opportunities in order to develop the strongest possible local application. Several local and national coalitions have developed these MOUs including the prisoner re-entry task force. Such an agreement would allow the group to draft more collaborative proposals (which are often viewed more favorably by funders) rather than having individual entities apply on their own. Diane likewise suggested that she would like member agencies to consider having a “general” letter of support available on their hard drive for grant writing purposes. Diane will compose a draft letter for member review and consideration.

Finally, Diane will be meeting with Everywomen Opportunity Center and Buffalo State College to learn more about the status of the Self-Sufficiency Calculator/Self-Sufficiency Standard. The funding for the Calculator ended in January and additional funds are needed to update the standard and the calculator.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30pm.