

California Asset Building Program

Financial empowerment strategies to help all Californians build savings and wealth

OUR GOALS: People don't spend their way out of poverty. They save and invest their way out. But policies to encourage saving and wealth accumulation mainly benefit the upper half of earners. In fact, thirty percent of Californians don't have enough savings to get by for three months if they were to lose their jobs. We aim to help people permanently exit poverty by giving them access to the financial tools and incentives that have helped middle and upper income people build savings and wealth. We want to broaden the middle class—so all Californians have the means to get ahead and a real stake in the economy.

OUR WORK: To achieve these goals, we have three key objectives:

1) POLICY. Educate state and local policy makers on ways to help all Californians build savings and assets. We are a resource to California officials—the Governor, Treasurer, Comptroller, Legislators, Mayors, and City Council members. A few highlights:

- **Legislation.** We have served as a resource on 16 bipartisan bills to create from-birth savings accounts; remove barriers to saving for welfare recipients; help more Californians save their tax refunds and build their savings for college or retirement. We recently developed a briefing book to inform state legislative staff on a range of policy ideas.
- **“Bank on” campaigns.** We conceived “Bank on San Francisco” and helped launch six “Bank on” coalitions throughout the state. These coalitions aim to help “un-banked” residents open starter accounts and enter the financial mainstream. We are a resource to over 50 “Bank on” coalitions forming throughout the country. We also helped the Governor and President Clinton launch Bank on California, the first state level effort.
- **Other city efforts.** We've also helped cities put moratoriums on new payday lending and check cashing outlets; incentivize financial institutions to locate in lower income communities; create citywide alternative payday loan products; and develop citywide Kindergarten to College initiatives
- **WE Connect.** We helped start First Lady Maria Shriver's WE Connect initiative, to help low income people access under-used resources like the Earned Income Tax Credit. The campaign is being adopted in several other states.

2) EDUCATION. Elevate understanding—in Sacramento and statewide—of strategies to help Californians build, protect and control assets; and strengthen local coalitions.

- **Bipartisan Asset Policy Forum.** This first-of-its-kind state level forum is held monthly in Sacramento. Crowds of fifty to a hundred legislators, staff, media, state personnel, and nonprofits come together with local and national experts to discuss new research findings, policy innovations, and challenges facing working families.
- **Taking the Forum “on the road.”** These discussions are usually co-sponsored with local politicians and community groups to explore topics such as how to bring more Californians into the financial mainstream; address the growing wealth gap; create alternatives to payday loans; or build a more accurate federal poverty line.

3) COMMUNICATIONS. Inform the public about the promise of assets policies and the challenges they address. We write for the state's major newspapers—*Los Angeles Times*, *Sacramento Bee*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and others. We appear on NPR and TV.

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