CalKIDS Institute Advances Financial Well-Being, with Support from Citi Foundation

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LOS ANGELES [October 22, 2026] — The UCLA CalKIDS Institute is expanding efforts to connect low-income families across Southern California with early wealth-building opportunities through trusted tax-time outreach systems, supported by a $500,000 grant from the Citi Foundation.

The UCLA CalKIDS Institute is one of 70 community organizations selected for the Citi Foundation's 2026 Community Finance Initiative, which provides a collective $35 million in funding for efforts to help low-income families navigate affordability challenges and strengthen their financial resilience.

Based at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies, the CalKIDS Institute works to advance research, policy and practice related to CalKIDS and early wealth-building. CalKIDS, California's statewide children's savings account program, provides eligible children with state-funded college savings accounts, also referred to as CalKIDS Scholarship Accounts, that can be used for qualified higher education expenses.

The Citi Foundation grant will support the CalKIDS Institute's Leveraging VITA for Early Wealth Building Initiative, a two-year effort to integrate early wealth-building opportunities into existing Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) outreach systems across Southern California. Working with VITA coalitions, nonprofit organizations and public agencies, the initiative will help low-income households learn about and engage with programs including CalKIDS, 530A ("Trump") Accounts, HOPE Accounts and ScholarShare 529 plans.

> "Tax time creates a powerful opportunity to reach families at a moment when they are already thinking about their finances and connecting with trusted community organizations. With the Citi Foundation's support, we have an opportunity to reimagine that moment—not only as a time to file taxes and claim tax credits, but as a pathway to building assets and creating greater financial opportunity for children and families. We're excited to learn from this work and build a model that can inform efforts well beyond Southern California," said Nayiri Nahabedian, Executive Director of the UCLA CalKIDS Institute.

Beyond direct outreach, the initiative represents an important research effort. The project will generate one of the first large-scale datasets examining families' awareness of early wealth-building programs, barriers to participation, and what helps move families from awareness to engagement. The findings will help build a stronger evidence base for understanding how these programs can effectively reach and engage families and inform future outreach strategies, program design, and policy.

The new initiative from the CalKIDS Institute builds on broader work to connect students and families with early wealth-building opportunities. At UCLA, the Institute has developed partnerships across campus to help eligible students learn about, claim, and use their CalKIDS accounts to support their education.

Beyond UCLA, the Institute works with schools, colleges, community organizations, and public agencies across California to strengthen CalKIDS outreach and engagement and develop approaches that can be replicated across communities.

> "The path towards achieving financial health looks different for everyone — some families may be concerned about emergency costs while others may be thinking about saving for retirement. Community organizations are there, providing trusted guidance, during every step of this journey," said Brandee McHale, Head of Community Investing and Development at Citi and President of the Citi Foundation in the announcement. "At a time when many families are feeling stretched, we're proud to support nonprofits that are showing up every day with the tools and support that American households need to pursue economic opportunity."

About the CalKIDS Institute

The CalKIDS Institute at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies works to advance research, policy and practice related to children's savings accounts and the California Kids Investment and Development Savings Program (CalKIDS). Through research, outreach and partnerships, the Institute seeks to expand access to educational opportunity and strengthen the financial futures of California children and families. https://calkidsinstitute.seis.ucla.edu/