

BIENNIAL IMPACT REPORT • FY 2024/25 – 2025/26

Building Trust, Empowering Californians



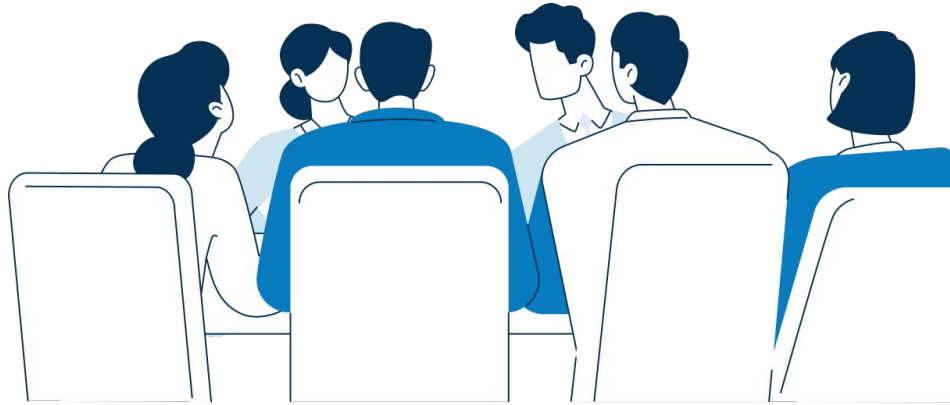
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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Consumer trust is not established through regulation alone. It is earned through transparency, accessibility, and confidence that reliable resources are available before financial harm occurs.

This principle has guided the California Tax Education Council (CTEC) throughout the past two years.



As tax-related fraud schemes, ghost preparer activity, and digital misinformation continued to evolve, CTEC remained committed to strengthening taxpayer protection while enhancing public access to accurate and trustworthy information. Our efforts extended beyond regulatory oversight to include digital modernization, expanded consumer education, enhanced compliance and monitoring systems, and strategic public awareness campaigns designed to help Californians make informed decisions when selecting a tax preparer.

These initiatives strengthened CTEC's ability to connect with and serve taxpayers throughout California. Through enhanced digital resources, public education campaigns, podcasts, multilingual outreach, and targeted awareness efforts, CTEC expanded access to critical consumer protection information and increased public engagement statewide. As a result, more taxpayers utilized CTEC's preparer verification tools and educational resources to identify qualified tax professionals, make informed decisions, and avoid fraudulent or deceptive practices. Simultaneously, CTEC continued to support entry into the tax preparation profession through a regulatory framework that promotes competency, accountability, and public confidence, helping ensure that California taxpayers are served by qualified and responsible professionals.

These accomplishments reflect the collective dedication of CTEC's Board, staff, education providers, contractors, enforcement partners, and industry stakeholders. Their collaboration and commitment continue to advance CTEC's mission of protecting taxpayers, promoting professional standards, and fostering public confidence in California's tax preparation industry.

As we look ahead, CTEC remains focused on taxpayer protection, innovation, accountability, and service excellence. By continuing to strengthen oversight, expand public education, and improve access to trusted resources, we will further our commitment to protecting California taxpayers and supporting the integrity of the tax preparation profession.

Fernando Angell III, CRTP
Chairperson

Impact At A Glance

EXPANDING PUBLIC ACCESS

More Californians
Found CTEC Online
This Tax Season

1.7M+

Google search
impressions
Generated Jan–Apr
2026 tax season

+525%

Non-branded search
visibility
"california tax", "tax
services" and more

6.8

Avg. ranking
(was 15.07)
Key search terms moved to
page one on Google

STRENGTHENING TAXPAYER AWARENESS

Californians Are
Responding to Fraud
Prevention Messaging

51%

CTEC awareness — LA respondents
CA Walker Research Solutions survey,
2026

77%

Would verify a tax preparer
Of surveyed taxpayers

84%

Would report fraudulent
preparers
Of surveyed taxpayers

83%

Would visit CTEC.org for
protection info
Of surveyed taxpayers

Independent research confirmed strong public awareness across English-, Spanish-, and Mandarin-speaking audiences. About one-third of LA respondents recalled CTEC campaign messaging within 12 months — indicating lasting brand equity beyond seasonal advertising.

MODERNIZING PUBLIC SERVICE

AI Tools Delivering
Faster, More Accurate
Taxpayer Support

93%

Average chatbot answer rate
For public inquiries via AI-assisted
support

80%+

Routine inquiry resolution
Reducing manual staff workload
through AI tools

CTEC implemented AI-assisted support tools to handle routine inquiries more efficiently, freeing staff to focus on complex cases while improving response times for the public.

SUPPORTING OVERSIGHT & ACCOUNTABILITY

Strong Screening
Upholds Professional
Standards in California

40,223

Total registrations
Registered tax preparers in CA
(FY 2024–25)

40,215

Total registrations
Registered tax preparers in CA
(FY 2025–26)

CTEC maintains a comprehensive application review process designed to verify qualifications, strengthen accountability, and prevent unqualified individuals from entering the profession. All new applicants must complete fingerprinting and background checks before registration approval.

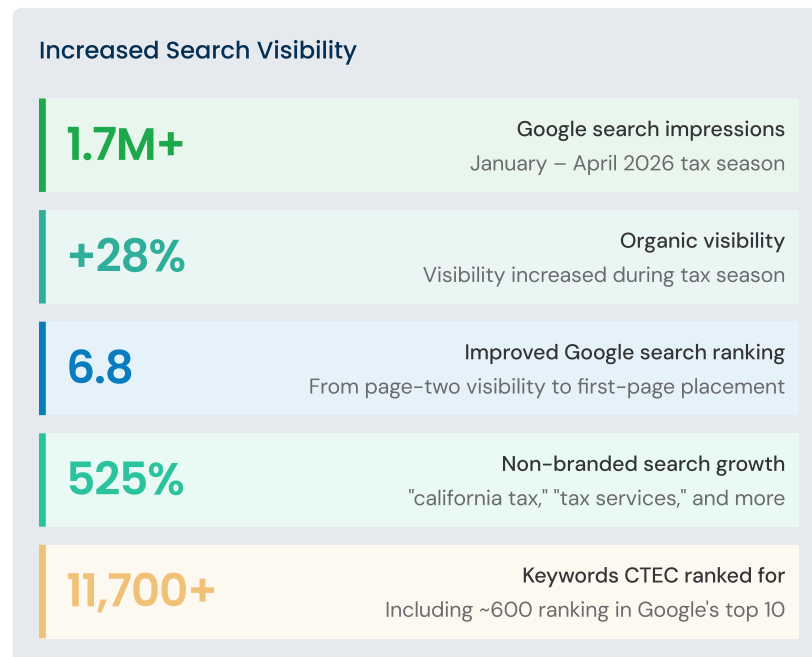
Expanding Public Access Through Digital Transformation

Guided by stakeholder feedback and recommendations identified in the State's 2023 Sunset Review, CTEC completed a major modernization of its digital infrastructure focused on improving accessibility, transparency, operational efficiency, and public trust.

CTEC launched a redesigned multilingual, ADA-compliant website intended to simplify navigation and improve access to registration, compliance, and taxpayer protection resources. Key upgrades included mobile-friendly functionality, enhanced search capabilities, secure online payment options, expanded access to Board and enforcement information, and improved account access.

CTEC also expanded multilingual educational resources, taxpayer guidebooks, FAQs, blogs, and simplified navigation tools designed to help users easily locate accurate information online.

These efforts, supported by an expanded SEO strategy, contributed to significant increases in digital visibility and public engagement during the January–April 2026 tax season.



These improvements helped more Californians access information related to tax preparer registration, fraud prevention, and compliance requirements during the filing season.

Evolving Digital Access

As online search behavior continues evolving, more taxpayers are increasingly receiving information through AI-generated summaries, conversational tools, and modern search experiences before visiting websites directly.

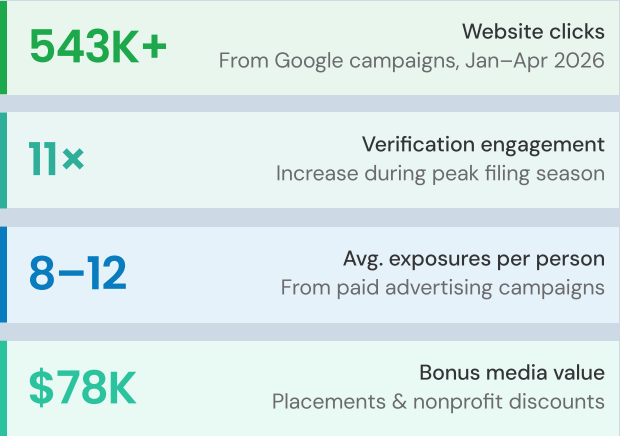
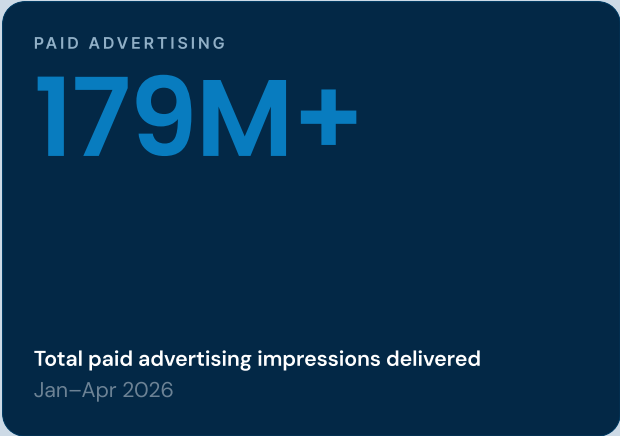
To improve visibility within these changing environments, CTEC expanded educational content, improved website organization, enhanced FAQs, and strengthened digital resource pages focused on compliance and consumer guidance.

Following the 2025 modernization launch, CTEC.org also demonstrated strong alignment with Google's EEAT principles, which evaluate experience, expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness of online information.

From January through April 2026, Google campaigns generated more than 543,000 website clicks, while the verification tool saw a major spike in activity in April, producing over 11x the engagement compared to March. Overall, paid advertising campaigns delivered more than 179 million impressions, with an average frequency of 8 to 12 exposures per reached person, further amplified by approximately \$78,000 in bonus media placements and nonprofit discounts

Media coverage, multilingual outreach, and affiliate pickup expanded access to fraud prevention and preparer verification information, generating an estimated earned media audience reach exceeding 241 million.

These trends indicate that more Californians are discovering CTEC resources at the moment they are actively seeking taxpayer protection, fraud prevention guidance, and compliance information.

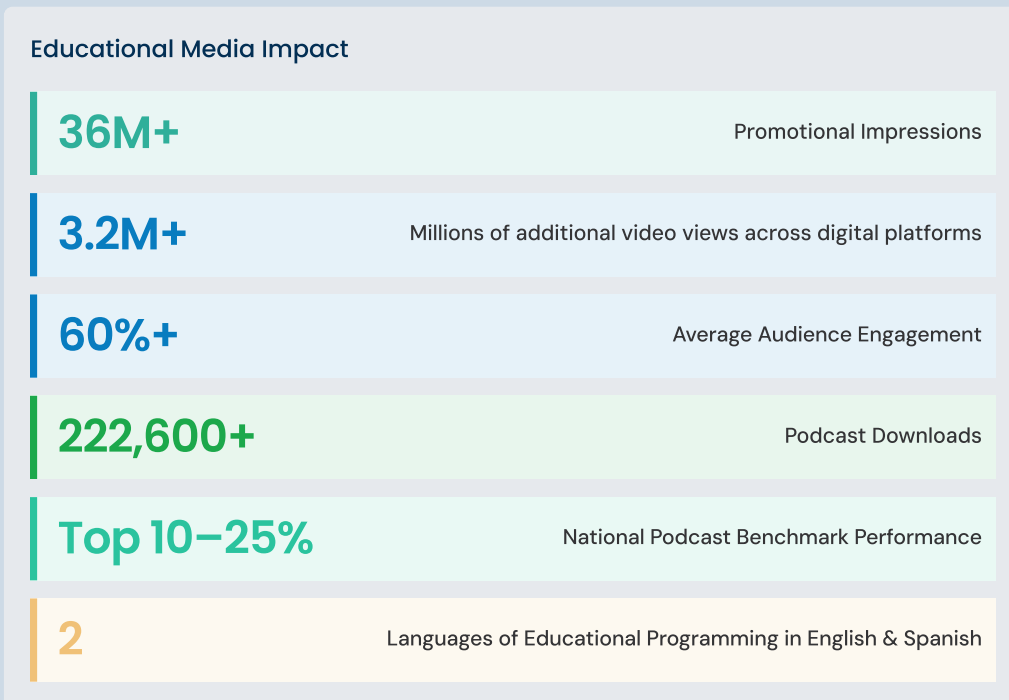


Real Californians. Real Impact.

CTEC continued expanding taxpayer education through a growing library of podcasts, vodcasts, and digital content designed to help Californians navigate complex tax issues, identify fraudulent activity, and make informed decisions when selecting a tax preparer.

Across Seasons 4 through 6, CTEC's bilingual podcast programs generated more than 222,600 downloads, while educational video content attracted millions of additional views across multiple platforms. Content focused on fraud prevention, taxpayer rights, disaster-related scams, and preparer verification consistently ranked among the most-engaged topics.

Audience engagement exceeded typical industry benchmarks, with average episode consumption exceeding 60 percent in both English and Spanish. Several episodes performed within the top 10–25 percent of national podcast benchmarks, demonstrating strong audience interest in taxpayer protection and consumer education content.



"I was listening to your podcast about ghost tax preparers. My last return was prepared by one. I'd love to know more."

After unknowingly using a ghost preparer, Catherine discovered CTEC through the organization's podcast discussing fraudulent tax preparation practices. Seeking guidance on how to identify legitimate preparers moving forward, she contacted CTEC for additional information and resources.

C Catherine S.

"This unlicensed fellow again is calling and threatening me with all types of actions, when I am the victim."

After experiencing repeated harassment from a non-credentialed preparer, Paul connected with CTEC for assistance and was referred to consumer protection resources. He later shared his experience publicly through the Taxpayer Beware podcast to help educate other taxpayers.

P Paul L.

"I was a victim of a ghost preparer. I want to tell my story to warn the community."

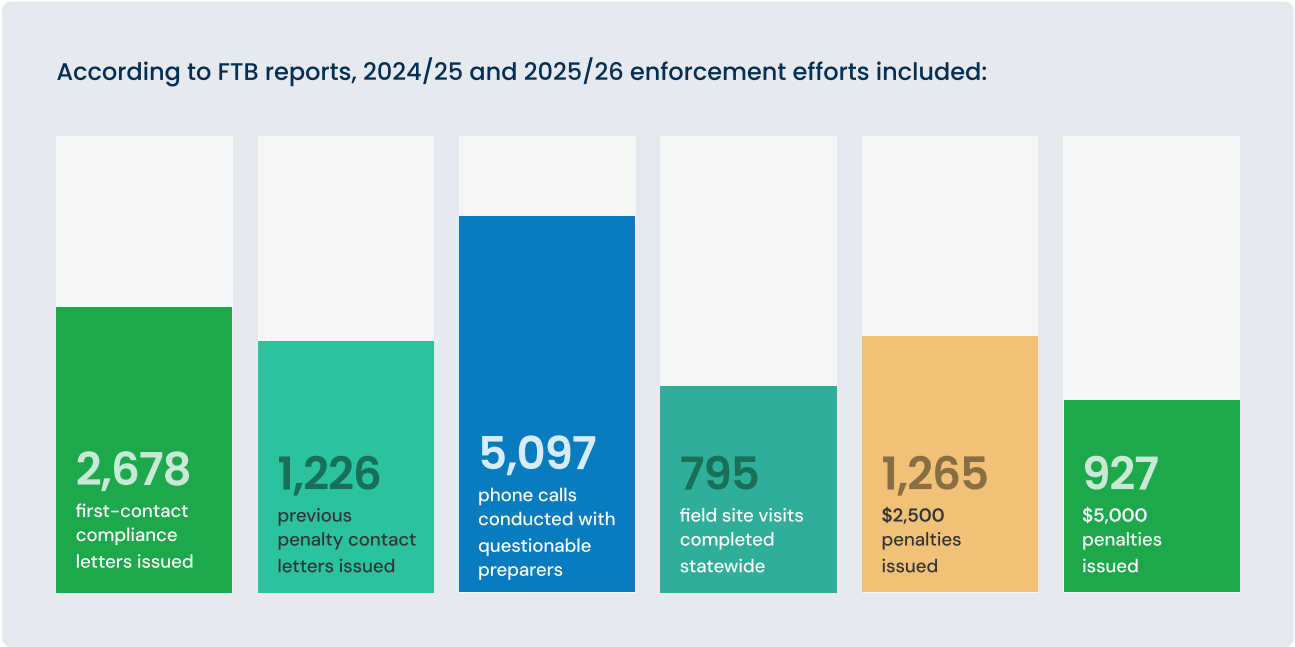
After becoming the victim of a ghost preparer, Caesar connected with CTEC through Spanish-language outreach efforts. With guidance from CTEC, he successfully amended his return and volunteered to share his story publicly to help warn others within the community.

C Caesar G.

Strengthening Accountability Across California’s Tax Preparation Industry

Protecting taxpayers requires more than public awareness alone. It also depends on strong oversight systems, regulatory compliance, and coordinated enforcement efforts that help deter unregistered activity and reinforce accountability within California’s tax preparation industry.

CTEC continued working closely with the FTB during the 2025 and 2026 enforcement cycles to support broader taxpayer protection and compliance efforts. Statewide enforcement activity included investigative outreach, compliance contacts, field visits, corrective notices, and penalties involving unregistered or noncompliant individuals.



Results are as of July 2026

FTB-reported enforcement penalties totaled approximately:

\$1.49M

during FY 2024/25

\$1.41 M

during FY 2025/26

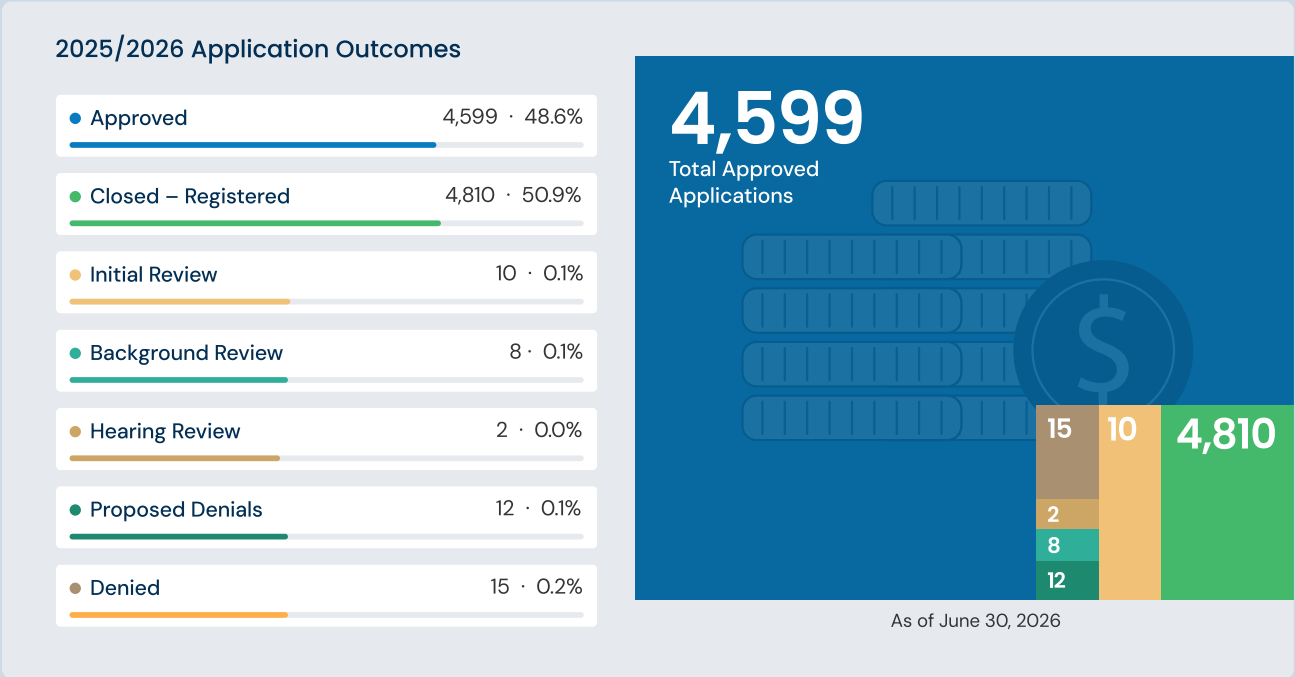
While penalties are not the primary goal of enforcement, these actions play an important role in promoting accountability, protecting taxpayers, and supporting confidence in California’s preparer registration requirements.

Ensuring High Standards for CTEC Registrants

Protecting taxpayers also requires strong oversight, accountability, and registration standards that help maintain integrity across California’s tax preparation industry.

As part of its taxpayer protection mission, CTEC maintains a comprehensive application review process designed to verify qualifications, strengthen accountability, and prevent unqualified individuals from entering the profession.

In addition to confirming required education and bonding, all new applicants must complete fingerprinting and criminal background checks through the California Department of Justice Live Scan system before registration approval.

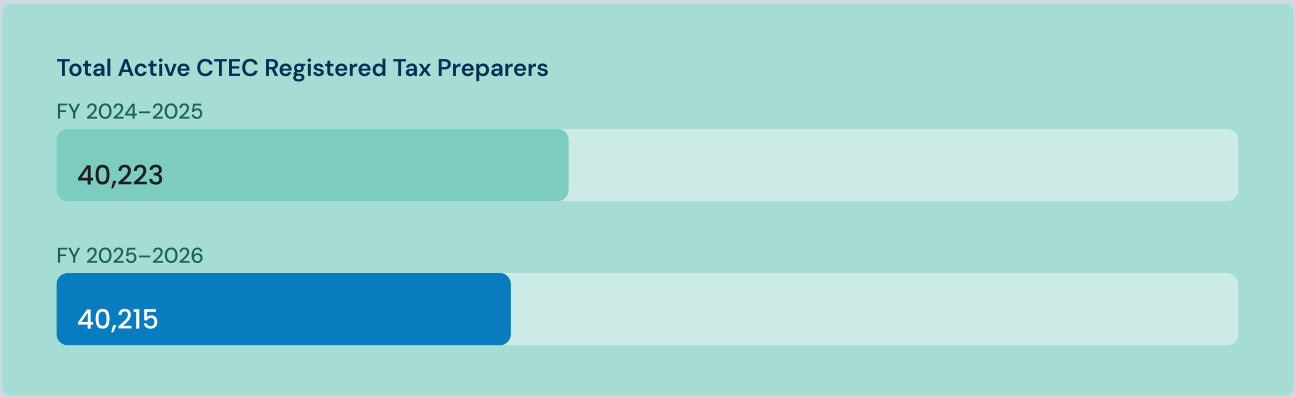


Applicants with potential compliance concerns were provided opportunities to submit additional documentation or participate in hearings before final determinations were made.

Applicants who fail to respond to requests for information or whose denials become final are prohibited from reapplying for three years, helping reduce repeated or unresolved compliance risks.

Growing Participation, Strong Oversight

Over the past two fiscal years, CTEC registrations remained stable.



LOOKING AHEAD

Strategic Priorities

As taxpayer fraud schemes continue evolving and Californians increasingly rely on digital services, CTEC remains focused on expanding access to trustworthy information, strengthening oversight systems, and helping taxpayers protect themselves before financial harm occurs.



Increase Digital Visibility

Expand educational content and first page search.



Strengthen Compliance Awareness

Reach prospective preparers with targeted education and compliance.



Multilingual Engagement

Increase multilingual engagement across Spanish and Mandarin platforms



Stay Ahead of Fraud

Enhance fraud prevention education focused on ghost preparer activity



AI-Assisted Support

Continue expansion of AI-assisted support tools



System Security

Continue investment in proactive website security reviews and system monitoring

Building on the progress of the past two years, CTEC remains committed to strengthening public trust, increasing transparency, improving public access to reliable information, and safeguarding the millions of Californians who rely on tax preparation services each year.

CONCLUSION

Over the past two years, CTEC continued expanding its role as both a regulatory oversight organization and a public-facing taxpayer protection resource — helping more Californians access trusted information, identify legitimate preparers, and better understand how to protect themselves from fraud.

These efforts demonstrate that effective taxpayer protection depends not only on regulation, but also on visibility, accessibility, education, and public trust.