



IR-2016-35: Free Help Preparing Tax Returns Available Nationwide

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WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service reminded taxpayers today that they may be eligible to receive free tax help at more than 12,000 preparation sites available nationwide. The sites, generally located at community and neighborhood centers, provide tax assistance to taxpayers with low- and moderate-incomes and the elderly.

The IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offers free tax help to individuals who generally make 54,000 or less, persons with disabilities, the elderly and individuals with limited English proficiency who need assistance in preparing their taxes. The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program offers free tax help for all taxpayers, particularly those who are 60 and older. VITA and TCE volunteers are trained and certified by the IRS to help with many tax questions, including credits such as the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#) (EITC) and the [Child and Dependent Care Credit](#).

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The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a significant tax credit for workers who earned \$53,267 or less in 2015. Last year, more than 27.5 million eligible workers and families received almost \$66.7 billion in EITC, with an average EITC amount of more than \$2,400. The maximum EITC amount for 2015 is \$6,242 for qualifying families. In order to receive the credit, eligible taxpayers must file a tax return, even if they do not have a filing requirement. The VITA and TCE programs can help answer many EITC questions and help taxpayers claim the credit if they qualify. Taxpayers may also use the IRS.gov [EITC Assistant](#) to help them determine their eligibility.

Before visiting a VITA or TCE site, taxpayers should review [Publication 3676-B](#) to be aware of the services provided. To find the nearest VITA or TCE site, taxpayers can use the VITA and TCE [locator tool](#) available on IRS.gov, download the IRS smartphone app [IRS2GO](#) or call 800-906-9887.

For assistance preparing a tax return at a VITA or TCE site, taxpayers must bring all required documents and information including:

- Proof of identification (photo ID)
- Social Security cards for the taxpayer, spouse and dependents
- An [Individual Taxpayer Identification Number](#) (ITIN) assignment letter may be substituted for those who do not have a Social Security number
- Proof of foreign status, if applying for an ITIN
- Birth dates for the taxpayer, spouse and dependents
- Wage and earning statements (Form W-2, W-2G, 1099-R, 1099-Misc) from all employers and other payers
- Interest and dividend statements from banks (Forms 1099)
- All Forms 1095, Health Insurance Statements
- Health Insurance Exemption Certificate, if received
- A copy of last year's federal and state returns, if available
- Proof of bank account routing and account numbers for direct deposit such as a blank check
- To file taxes electronically on a married-filing-joint tax return, both spouses must be present to sign the required forms
- Total amount paid for daycare services and the daycare provider's tax identifying number such as their Social Security number or business Employer

Identification Number

- [Form 1095-A](#), [Form 1095-B](#) or [Form 1095-C](#), Affordable Health Care Statements
- Copies of income transcripts from IRS and state, if applicable

The [military](#) also partners with the IRS to provide free tax assistance to military personnel and their families. The Armed Forces Tax Council (AFTC) consists of the tax program coordinators for the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The AFTC oversees the operation of the military tax programs worldwide, and serves as the main conduit for outreach by the IRS to military personnel and their families. Volunteers are trained and equipped to address military specific tax issues, such as combat zone tax benefits and the effect of the EITC guidelines.

In addition to free tax return preparation assistance, most sites will file returns electronically for free. Combining e-file with direct deposit is the fastest and most accurate way to file. The IRS issues nine out of 10 refunds in 21 days or less. Paper returns take longer to process. Taxpayers who chose to file electronically and owe, can [make a payment](#) by the April 18, 2016 deadline using [Direct Pay](#). This IRS free service allows taxpayers to make secure payments from a checking or savings account.

Taxpayers that prefer to file their own tax returns electronically have the option of using [IRS Free File](#). IRS Free File offers brand-name tax software to taxpayers who earned 62,000 or less in 2015 to file their returns for free. Taxpayers who earned more can use Free Fillable Forms, the electronic version of IRS paper forms. IRS Free File is only available through the IRS website by visiting [IRS.gov/freefile](#).

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