



IR-2016-46: Tax Time Guide: Online Tools Help Taxpayers Choose a Qualified Tax Professional

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[The Tax Gap](#)

[Fact Sheets](#)

[IRS Tax Tips](#)

[Armed Forces](#)

[Latest News Home](#)

Issue Number: IR-2016-46
Inside This Issue

Tax Time Guide: Online Tools Help Taxpayers Choose a Qualified Tax Professional

WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service today reminded taxpayers of options available to them on IRS.gov to get information and tips about selecting qualified tax professionals.

This is the third in a series of 10 IRS tips called the Tax Time Guide. These tips are designed to help taxpayers navigate common tax issues as this year's April 18 deadline approaches.

Taxpayers can use the IRS.gov/chooseataxpro website that includes a list of consumer tips for selecting a tax professional. There is also a [gateway page](#) with links to national nonprofit tax professional groups, which can help provide additional information for taxpayers seeking the right type of qualified help.

"The filing of a federal income tax return represents one of the biggest financial transactions of the year for many Americans, whether they are getting a refund or paying tax due," IRS Commissioner John Koskinen said. "Choose your tax return preparer carefully because you entrust them with your private financial information that needs to be protected."

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[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[News](#)

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Over half of the more than 150 million individual returns filed last year were prepared with the help of a paid return preparer.

For example, some taxpayers may want to get help with the provisions of the Affordable Care Act, and tax professionals provide one of several options available. The vast majority of people will only have to check a box on their federal income tax return to indicate they had health coverage, but others have Marketplace coverage with tax credits, have exemptions or need them, or may have to make a payment because they could afford to buy health insurance but chose not to. Tax professionals can help guide taxpayers through what they need to do in these circumstances.

There are some basic tips taxpayers can keep in mind when [selecting a tax professional](#). They include:

- Select an ethical preparer. Taxpayers entrust some of their most vital personal data with the person preparing their tax return, including income, investments and Social Security numbers.
- Make sure the preparer signs the return and includes their Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN). All paid preparers are required to have a valid PTIN.
- Review the tax return and ask questions before signing. Taxpayers are legally responsible for what's on their tax return, regardless of whether someone else prepared it.
- Never sign a blank tax return. It's a clear red flag when a taxpayer is asked to sign a blank tax return. The preparer can put anything they want on the return – even their own bank account number for the tax refund.

Last year the IRS launched a [Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications](#) on the IRS website to help taxpayers verify credentials and qualifications of tax professionals. The Directory is a searchable, sortable database with the name, city, state and zip code of credentialed return preparers as well as those who have completed the requirements for the IRS [Annual Filing Season Program](#).

The IRS requires anyone who prepares any federal tax return for compensation to obtain a PTIN. All valid PTINs are issued by the IRS. There are nearly 700,000 individuals with valid PTINs. Anyone with a valid PTIN can prepare and sign federal tax returns they prepare.

For more information, see:

- [Who can represent you before the IRS?](#)
- [IRS Tax Pro Associations Partners](#)
- [What are the red flags? IRS tips for choosing a tax preparer](#)
- [When, and how, do I file a complaint about a tax preparer?](#)

Other tips in the Tax Time Guide series are available on [IRS.gov](#).

[Back to Top](#)

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