

IRS News Release

Media Relations Office

Washington, D.C.

Media Contact: 202.317.4000

www.irs.gov/newsroom

Public Contact: 800.829.1040

Note to Editor: *This is the last in a series of reminders to help taxpayers prepare for the upcoming tax filing season.*

Who Will Prepare Your Tax Return?

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WASHINGTON – As the start of tax filing season approaches, the Internal Revenue Service is reminding taxpayers to start thinking about who will prepare their 2016 federal tax return. The IRS will begin processing tax returns on Monday, January 23. Many software companies and tax professionals will accept and submit tax returns before the IRS systems open on January 23.

In 2016, more than 131 million individual and family tax returns were e-filed, the most accurate, safest and easiest way to file. The rest of the returns received by the IRS, numbering over 19 million, were either prepared on a computer and printed or prepared by hand then mailed.

The IRS stresses that no matter who prepares it, by signing the return, the taxpayer becomes legally responsible for the accuracy of all information included.

Free Tax Preparation

Each year, millions of tax returns are prepared for free by taxpayers using [IRS Free File](#) or by volunteers at community organization sites nationwide.

[IRS Free File](#) lets taxpayers who earned less than \$64,000 prepare and e-file a return for free. Go to IRS.gov and click on the [‘Filing’](#) tab for options on using commercial tax software. Those who earned more than \$64,000 are still eligible for Free File Fillable Forms, the electronic version of IRS paper forms. This more basic Free File option is best for people who are comfortable preparing their own tax returns.

IRS trained and certified volunteers at thousands of [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance](#) and [Tax Counseling for the Elderly](#) (VITA and TCE) sites nationwide offer free tax preparation and e-filing. VITA offers free tax return preparation to taxpayers who earn \$54,000 or less. The TCE program is mainly for people age 60 or older and focuses on tax issues unique to seniors. AARP participates in the TCE program and helps taxpayers with low to moderate incomes.

- To find the closest VITA site, visit IRS.gov and search the word “VITA.” Or download the IRS2Go app on a smart phone. Site information is also available by calling the IRS at 800-906-9887.
- To locate the nearest AARP Tax-Aide site, visit aarp.org, or call 888-227-7669. There are also VITA and TCE sites that provide bilingual help for taxpayers who have limited English skills.

Many taxpayers pay for tax return preparation. By law, all paid tax preparers must have a Preparer Tax Identification Number, or PTIN. Paid preparers must sign the return and include their PTIN. The IRS offers tips to help taxpayers choose a tax return preparer wisely. The [Choosing a Tax Professional](#) page has information about tax preparer [credentials and qualifications](#). The IRS [Directory](#) of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications can help identify many preparers in your locality by type of credential or qualification.

The IRS urges taxpayers to avoid fly-by-night preparers who may not be available after this year’s April 18 due date or base fees on a percentage of the refund. The IRS also reminds taxpayers that a new law requires all refunds on returns that claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) or Additional Child Tax Credit (ACTC) be held until Feb. 15. This change helps the IRS detect and prevent fraud.