Volunteer Hotline
For VITA/TCE Volunteers Only
1-800-829-VITA (8482)
January 21 – April 15
Hours of Operation (Local Time) Monday – Friday, 7:00 AM-7:00 PM
No service available on Saturdays

Contact Information for Partners, Coordinators, Volunteers
Enterprise Service Help Desk 1-866-743-5748 (loaned IRS equipment)
E- Services Help Desk 1-866-255-0654
Civil Rights Unit 1-202-317-6925 (not toll-free)
SPEC Relationship Manager:
State Department of Revenue:
State Tax Forms:
State Volunteer Hotline:

Contact Information for Taxpayers
IRS Refund Hotline 1-800-829-1954
IRS Identity Protection Specialized Unit 1-800-908-4490
IRS Forms/Publications 1-800-829-3676 (800-TAX-FORM)
IRS Tax Fraud Referral Hotline 1-800-829-0433
IRS Tax-Help for Deaf (TDD) 1-800-829-4059
VITA Site Locations 1-800-906-9887
TCE Site Locations 1-888-227-7669
Refund Offset Inquiry (Treasury Offset Program) 1-800-304-3107
Taxpayer Advocate Service 1-877-777-4778
Social Security Administration 1-800-772-1213
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Message from the Director

Thank you for helping the IRS’s Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication (SPEC) organization administer the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (VITA/TCE) programs. Your commitment shows that VITA/TCE is a “cause,” not just a program.

I would like to congratulate you on a tremendous 2020 filing season. SPEC continued to have a positive effect on the millions of taxpayers who had their tax returns prepared at VITA/TCE sites across the country. Over 2.4 million tax returns were prepared and filed at over 11,000 VITA/TCE sites by nearly 73,000 volunteers in filing season 2020.

During the past year, you worked to expand services to reach more Americans needing assistance with filing their taxes. In addition, you supported our SPEC volunteers and the taxpayers we serve as new challenges impacted the world during the height of the tax filing season. You helped to get the word out about the extension of the filing season, Economic Impact Payments and the Get My Payment application.

The VITA/TCE program continues to have a positive impact on the millions of individuals we serve. Your continuing support provides free tax preparation services to low- and moderate-income taxpayers, the elderly, persons with disabilities, Native Americans, rural taxpayers and those individuals with Limited English Proficiency. The success of our community-based tax preparation program is due to your strong commitment.

This Partner Resource Guide provides valuable material for both SPEC partners and coordinators. It contains vital information to help you manage your VITA/TCE sites. The tools and processes included in this publication ensure consistent and accurate tax return preparation. The web links provided allow you to easily view the referenced IRS products. Please contact your SPEC relationship manager or local SPEC territory office for additional information on materials or procedures.

We know your commitment will continue into the 2021 filing season, and I know we all agree on the importance of following quality procedures consistently to ensure high tax return accuracy and site quality. Your use of this Partner Resource Guide is essential to the program’s continued success.

Frank Nolden
Director, Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication

SPEC Mission

The Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication (SPEC) mission is to assist taxpayers in satisfying their tax responsibilities by building and maintaining partnerships with key stakeholders, seeking to create and share value by informing, educating, and communicating with our shared customers.
Purpose of this Guide

The purpose of the Publication 4396-A, Partner Resource Guide, is to inform you of your obligations and expectations as a SPEC partner. The guide will assist you with administering effective VITA/TCE programs. The publication covers the operation of VITA/TCE programs before, during, and after the tax filing season. This guide provides references and resources to answer questions you may have as a SPEC partner. Program coordinators should review the table of contents of this document to become familiar with the topics covered, with the intent to refer to it as needed throughout the year to assist with program operation.

Publication 4396-A should be used as a resource in tandem with the Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook, which is designed to assist site coordinators effectively operate VITA/TCE tax preparation sites. While the two publications may provide similar information, they contain distinctive material on key aspects of the defining roles and responsibilities for their respective intended audiences.
Chapter 1: VITA/TCE Program Guidelines

Introduction
Stakeholder Partnerships, Education & Communication (SPEC) is the outreach and education function of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The SPEC mission shares the strategies of many community organizations in that it strives to assist taxpayers in satisfying their responsibilities by building and maintaining partnerships with key stakeholders, seeking to create and share value by informing, educating and communicating with shared customers.

SPEC combines three components:

Tax Education - IRS outreach program provides critical information to taxpayers to ensure they understand and comply with their tax obligations. Partners and community-based coalitions disseminate information designed to enhance the public’s knowledge of general income tax law, available tax credits, current legislative changes affecting tax law and the availability/advantages to e-file.

Return Preparation – SPEC volunteer tax preparation programs, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) provide free tax preparation services to low and moderate-income taxpayers, the elderly, persons with disabilities, Native Americans, rural taxpayers and those individuals with limited English proficiency.

Financial Education and Asset Building - The goal is to work with partners who provide free tax preparation sites to encourage taxpayers to use their refund dollars to improve their financial health. By working in connection with financial institutions and other organizations, partners can provide the financial options that taxpayers need and want; banking, savings, debit cards, financial counseling, and other financial services. Incentives like these present an affordable way for taxpayers to begin asset building and achieve financial independence.

Chapter 1-1: Partner Roles and Responsibilities

The Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication (SPEC) organization develops and supports leveraged partnerships and coalitions. SPEC maintains an objective of ensuring sites in the VITA/TCE Programs are managed according to established Quality Site Requirements (QSR), and that tax return preparation is completed by IRS-certified volunteers. SPEC supports VITA/TCE tax preparation sites by conducting oversight reviews and providing current/updated information through Volunteer Tax Alerts (VTA) and Quality Site Requirement Alerts (QSRA).

Your role as a partner is essential to the success of VITA/TCE Programs. As a SPEC partner, you serve your community by educating and assisting taxpayers who need the benefit of financial stability. SPEC has the highest regard for the individuals and organizations that choose to partner with the IRS in providing this valuable and much-needed service to underserved populations. Your responsibilities include:

- Maintaining program integrity and providing reasonable protection of information provided by the individuals who use the services
- Ensuring the organization complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Completing and providing all required documentation on time
- Recruiting, training, certifying, and reporting volunteers and volunteer site coordinators
- Preparing a comprehensive marketing plan
- Determining and securing adequate site locations
- Requesting a Site Identification Number (SIDN) and applying for an Electronic Filing Identification Number (EFIN)
- Obtaining equipment compatible with the electronic filing program (computers, printers, and printer cartridges)
• Ordering IRS training materials, site forms/publications, and software
• Overseeing site operations and ensuring all Quality Site Requirements are met at every site
• Maintaining effective lines of communication with site coordinators, SPEC relationship managers and volunteers within your network
• Volunteer recognition

VITA/TCE programs build networks that are continually discovering and implementing innovative ways to best serve taxpayers. This Partner Resource Guide, Publication 4396A, includes information related to major program components, forms, and publications you may need and a description of their use. This publication will provide you with the tools necessary to be successful and it will guide you through the obligation’s partners face while providing community service in their area.

**Solicitation of Donations Guidelines**

A 501(c)(3) organization that partners with the IRS to provide free tax preparation may solicit voluntary donations at a VITA and TCE site to support its charitable activities if the solicitation:

• Occurs after the return is completed;
• Is in support of their activities unrelated to tax preparation services; and
• Is outside the area where return preparation is conducted.

The tax preparation process is considered complete once the taxpayer has been provided a copy of his or her tax return and all source documentation, and the taxpayer has left the return preparation area. Taxpayers should not feel pressured to contribute and the site must avoid the perception or concern that free tax preparation services hinge on a donation.
Chapter 1-2: Required Forms and Reporting

Form 13533, Sponsor Agreement

Form 13533, VITA/TCE Partner Sponsor Agreement, reiterates the key principles of privacy and confidentiality. Individuals using the services at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) or Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) sites, place a great deal of trust in the individuals preparing their return. While they expect an accurate return, they also expect that the information they provide will be protected in such a way as to respect their privacy and maintain the confidentiality of the information shared. Therefore, partners and volunteers must keep the information confidential and protect it from unauthorized individuals and misuse. By signing this agreement, the sponsor agrees to make certain their volunteers are aware of the standards of conduct and privacy and the key principles of confidentiality.

Form 13715, SPEC Volunteer Site Information Sheet

Form 13715, Volunteer Site Information Sheet, is used by partners to submit site information (i.e. dates, location, hours, etc.) to the IRS. The purpose of this form is to provide a consistent method of requesting and capturing accurate site information. The information should be provided to your SPEC relationship manager annually, but no later than January 15th. If your hours of operation or location change, please submit an updated Form 13715 to your SPEC relationship manager immediately.

Form 13715 has been revised to add a new line to record the site’s submission of Form 15272, VITA/TCE Security Plan, or its equivalent to the local territory office. The check box for this item must be completed by all sites for the 2021 tax filing season.

Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement – VITA/TCE Programs

Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement, outlines the conduct and ethical behavior expected from volunteers as they assist taxpayers in completing an accurate tax return. All volunteers must sign and date Form 13615 stating that they will adhere to the Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) and will comply with the Quality Site Requirements (QSR). The Form 13615 also captures the level(s) of tax law certification the volunteer has achieved. Form 13615 is not valid until the sponsoring partner’s approving official (site coordinator, instructor, administrator, etc.) has:

- checked government issued photo ID to verify identity for the volunteer prior to the volunteer working at the VITA/TCE site,
- verified the required certification level(s),
- signed and dated the completed form, and
- if minors, they will be volunteering to follow their state guidelines for securing approval.

If minors will be volunteering, the site should follow their state guidelines for securing approval for minors. Form 13615 now includes a signature line for parents or guardians, to grant permission for their minor children to volunteer in the VITA/TCE programs. Exception: Parents and/or guardians will not be required to sign Form 13615 for the minor children if the VITA/TCE High School – based program has an alternate consent requirement.

Once the Forms 13615 are validated, the information should be transferred to the Form 13206 (or similar listing containing the same information) and sent to the SPEC territory office. The Forms 13615 are not required to be held at the site/partner level. The Forms 13615 can be destroyed, returned to the volunteer, or held by the partner or site.
However, the original Form 13615 should be used at the end of the filing season to report required information and volunteer hours for those eligible for Continuing Education (CE) Credits. The Forms 13615 should not be destroyed when volunteers are applying for CE Credits.

**Form 13206, Volunteer Assistance Summary Report**

Form 13206, Volunteer Assistance Summary Report, or similar document containing the same information, is used to report the information gathered from the volunteers’ Forms 13615 to the SPEC territory office. The partner or site coordinator is required to submit their volunteer lists by February 3rd, but no later than February 15th, for sites opening after February 3rd. As new volunteers report to the site(s), additional submissions to the SPEC territory office are required by the 3rd of each month.

The partner’s approving official must check the box in the heading section of Form 13206, or the partner/coordinator created listing, certifying that all volunteer identities were validated using government issued photo ID, completed certifications were verified and Form 13615 was signed and dated by them, as well as by all the volunteers listed on Form 13206. If the partner or site coordinator chooses to create their own listing, it must contain all the same information the Form 13206 requires.

**Maintenance and Retention**

Copies of the Forms 13615 or Form 13206, or similar listing containing the same information, should be available at the partner or site location with the required information for each volunteer to verify agreement to the VSC. If these forms are not available at the site, the coordinator is required to have a method in place to track volunteer certification levels and be able to provide this information upon request.

Transfer volunteers’ certification information to Form 13206 or similar listing containing the same information and forward to the SPEC territory. Once the territory office receives the volunteer listing, partners can destroy Forms 13615, return the forms to the volunteers, or choose to retain the forms at their discretion.

**Exception:** If the volunteer is applying for Continuing Education (CE) Credits, the Form 13615 CE Credits Section must be completed and turned into the SPEC territory office by April 30th, or alternative date indicated in Chapter 5, Volunteers Who Are Tax Professionals, Continuing Education Credits.

Partners should maintain Forms 13206, or similar listing, as proof of volunteer certification for as long as the volunteers are participating in the sponsoring partner’s VITA/TCE operations or until receipt of the new annual certifications. Copies of the Forms 13615 or Form 13206, or similar listing containing the same information, should be available at the partner or site location with the required information for each volunteer to verify agreement to the VSC. If these forms are not available at the site, the coordinator is required to have a method in place to track volunteer certification levels and be able to provide this information upon request.

Note: AARP Foundation Tax-Aide (Tax-Aide) will complete and send a unified list of volunteer certifications containing the same information as requested on Form 13206 to the SPEC territory office. Tax-Aide is still required to secure Form 13615 from all volunteers and the listing must certify that each volunteer has signed and dated their agreement and the Tax-Aide approving official has validated the form as described above.
## Chapter 1-3: Filing Season Action Plan

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<th>Actions</th>
<th>Coordinator</th>
<th>Partner</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year Round</td>
<td>Volunteer recruitment and retention.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continue volunteer training and certification, i.e., Link &amp; Learn Taxes (L&amp;LT).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Update Form 13715, Volunteer Site Information Sheet, and submit as changes occur.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure you have two Responsible Officials designated and registered in E-Services for each of your Electronic Filing Identification Numbers (EFIN) and that information is updated as required.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retain until December 31(^{st}) of the year in which the return(s) was filed: Form 8453, Individual Income Tax Transmittal, supporting documents not included in the electronic records submitted to the IRS; complete electronic backup, using a Personal Mass Storage Device (PMSD) of all electronically transmitted returns (does not apply to Online users); and the acknowledgment file for IRS accepted returns. (This can be a single year-end acknowledgment report from TaxSlayer). Ensure personally identifiable information (PII) is secured. For additional information about privacy, see Publication 4299, Privacy Confidentiality, Civil Rights - A Public Trust.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outreach Delivery, e.g., Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Awareness Day, Veterans, Disability, ACA, Identity Theft, Online Payments, Health Care Tax Credit, Financial Education &amp; Asset Building (FEAB).</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Begin initial volunteer recruitment and retention plans for next filing season.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Review and update your program, outreach and publicity efforts.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>New sites: First apply for Site Identification Number (SIDN) through your SPEC Office by submitting Form 13715, Volunteer Site Information Sheet, and then apply for an EFIN on IRS.gov via E-Services. Note: The SIDN for the site will be required when applying for an EFIN.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide the projected number of training material products and EITC products you will need to your SPEC contact.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Identify/secure computer equipment for volunteer tax site(s) meeting the minimum operating system requirements for tax preparation software.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Complete and sign Form 13533, VITA/TCE Partner Sponsor Agreement, or Form 13533-A, FSA Remote Sponsor Agreement, and return to SPEC contact (all partners receiving financial assistance from IRS are required to complete, sign and return before any services can be provided).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete Form 2333-V, Order for VITA/TCE Program, for training materials and submit to your IRS SPEC contact. You should receive an e-mail with this form attached.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Order tax preparation software through your SPEC contact.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Partner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Escalate volunteer recruitment, publicity and outreach.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select or firm up site: location(s), beginning/ending dates, and days/hours of operation.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identify instructors for electronic filing, tax law training and Site Coordinator Training.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule date and place for electronic filing training and certification.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule date and place for volunteer tax law training and certification ensuring you have enough training materials.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule date and place for Site Coordinator Training.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin preparing Form 13715 and ensure e-Service’s information is up to date for your EFINs.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>New: Begin Site Coordinator Training for all coordinators and alternate coordinators. Requirement is to complete the Site Coordinator Training and Site Coordinator Test certification prior to performing any site coordinator duties. Both Site Coordinator Training and Site Coordinator Test certification are annual requirements. Publication 5088, Site Coordinator Training, is available on Link &amp; Learn Taxes or IRS.gov and can be used in face-to-face training and for individual review. Publication 1084 is an essential resource for Site Coordinator Training. In addition, coordinators should review Publication 4299 to familiarize themselves with the updated security requirements at the sites.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin planning National EITC Awareness Day Events.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Complete or update Form 13715, and submit to SPEC contact – the information should be provided annually to your SPEC contact by December 1 (for grant partners) and no later than December 20 for all others.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Begin community awareness publicity regarding your site(s).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet to plan strategy for staffing/operating site(s).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Identify volunteer to serve as an alternate site coordinator.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verify order of training materials and forms/supplies for sites.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post publicity posters, i.e., Publication 3676-A.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After training, secure completed Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement, from each volunteer-verify their identity using government issued photo ID and certification and sign the form. Transfer volunteer information to Form 13206, SPEC Volunteer Assistance Summary Report, or partner created list containing the same information for each site or at the partner level.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Partner</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish a quality review process for all sites before opening.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure all volunteers will have a name badge showing their first name and the first letter of their last name per Publication 5166, IRS Volunteer Quality Site Requirements.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>New:</strong> All VITA/TCE sites must have a site security plan. Prepare Form 15272, VITA/TCE Security Plan, or similar document and submit to the local territory office by December 31, for approval. A copy must be maintained at the site location. or more information, refer to the updated Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality and Civil Rights – A Public Trust.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>New:</strong> Form 15273, Virtual VITA/TCE Plan, is required once a partner decides to open one or more Virtual VITA/TCE sites. Form 15273 must be signed by the partner or authorized designee and submitted to their relationship manager. Submission should be sent at least two weeks in advance of opening the site(s). Form 15273 must be reviewed and approved by the SPEC territory manager or designee prior to opening the site(s).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All prior year retention documents should be destroyed after December 31.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All site coordinator training and certification must be completed annually no later than January 15.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Ensure all required reference materials per Publication 5166 are available either in paper or electronic format at all open sites.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure Civil Rights information is posted or displayed at the sites, Publication 4053 (EN/SP), or Document 143, (on Tax-Aide website).</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Order additional training material as needed before the site opens.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conduct volunteer training/meeting to verify roles/ responsibilities.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish a quality review process for all sites before opening.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure Quality Site Requirements (QSRA) and Volunteer Tax Alerts (VTA) are discussed with and distributed to all volunteers.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implement an Intake/Interview &amp; Quality Review process for all returns prepared at the site; ensure that volunteers do not prepare returns beyond their certification level per Publication 4012 and develop a process to refer out of scope returns to a professional preparer.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure all virtual sites are using the current Form 14446, Virtual VITA/TCE Taxpayer Consent, when either a taxpayer, preparer and/or quality reviewer is not present for the return process. Ensure the virtual process is thoroughly explained to the taxpayer(s).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Open VITA/TCE e-file sites.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Promote and implement EITC partner events using sources such as EITC Central.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Partner</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>February</strong></td>
<td>All VITA and TCE-Non-Tax-Aide sites are to submit Form 13206 (or partner created list with the same information), to your IRS SPEC territory office by February 3rd – for sites not open by February 3rd, no later than February 15th. Report each volunteer only once during a filing season.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>TCE/Tax-Aide sites provide the IRS SPEC territory office by February 3, a list of volunteers which includes the same information required on Form 13206.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure all required reference materials per Publication 5166, are available either in paper or electronic format at all open sites.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitor site Intake/Interview and Quality Review process to ensure all volunteers are using Form 13614-C, for every return and all ten Quality Site Requirements are being followed.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Submit a list of volunteers, sites and partners that have completed volunteer milestones in 10-year increments (e.g., 10/20/30/40 years) to your SPEC contacts by February 25th using Form 14308, SPEC Site Milestone Recognition, and/or Form 14309, SPEC Volunteer Milestone Recognition.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide any updates for Form 13715, or Form 13206 (or partner created list with the same information), by the 3rd day of each month.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discuss and distribute Quality Site Requirements and Volunteer Tax Alerts with all volunteers.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March</strong></td>
<td>Work with SPEC contact to prepare certificates for volunteers. Schedule volunteer recognition ceremonies. Initiate formal appreciation for site sponsor (certificate and letter)&gt;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ensure all required reference materials per Publication 5166, are available either in paper or electronic format at all open sites.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure QSRA and Volunteer Tax Alerts VTA are discussed with and distributed to all volunteers.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>April</strong></td>
<td>Submit the final Form 13206 (or partner created list with the same information) for the current filing season, reporting any new volunteers not previously reported to the SPEC territory office. Continue to submit Form 13206 to report new certified volunteers working after the traditional filing season ends.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Complete Continuing Education (CE) Credits section of Form 13615 for volunteers requesting CE credits and forward to SPEC contact.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collect and store all IRS volunteer ID badges (inserts and holders).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ensure all applicable Forms 8453, with attachments, were submitted to the IRS Submission Processing Center. Austin Business Reply Labels (D 9282E) are available from your SPEC contact.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Initiate site closeout procedures as referenced in Publication 1084.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Partner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secure and delete tax information from all IRS loaned and partner computers per Publication 4473, IRS Computer Loan Program – Welcome Package and Publication 4390, VITA/TCE Computer Loan Program.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognize volunteer efforts, plan/attend volunteer and sponsor recognition ceremonies.</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secure and delete tax information from all IRS loaned and partner computers per Publication 4473, and Publication 4390. Return IRS Laptops to the depot by May 15 for sites not open past April 15.</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Evaluate filing season, site operations and volunteers, and provide SPEC contact with feedback to improve or enhance operation for next year.</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Complete the e-mailed Partner Survey.</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conduct remainder of recognition ceremonies.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When applicable, secure/confirm site location for next year.</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin volunteer recruitment for next filing season.</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Schedule a closeout meeting with IRS SPEC contact.</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If applicable, submit VITA/TCE grant applications.</td>
<td>X X</td>
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</table>
Chapter 2: Site Reviews

Introduction

Site and return reviews are an integral part of assuring VITA/TCE sites provide quality service to taxpayers. Taxpayers must feel confident they are receiving an accurate tax return. SPEC is responsible for providing oversight of all VITA/TCE return preparation sites. Partners are responsible for overseeing the operations of the sites they sponsor.

As a SPEC partner, you can generally expect to be visited/reviewed every five years. When SPEC territory offices are determining this five-year period, they consider when a site has had a Quality Statistical Sample (QSS) review, SPEC Shopping Review, Field Site Visit (FSV) and/or Remote Site Review (RSR). Territories use established criteria for selecting sites for FSV/RSR, including but not limited to: new sites during their initial year of operation, established sites with new coordinators, FSA Fusion sites, Virtual VITA sites, VITA/TCE Grant sponsor sites, and sites not visited in the last five years.

Sites selected for Quality Statistical Sample (QSS) site reviews are selected from the VITA/TCE population of sites. The selection may mean that sites could receive a QSS review multiple times within a five-year period. To ensure the measure is statistically valid, the Statistics of Income (SOI) Office determines what sites will receive QSS reviews. The results of the QSS return reviews provide the only statistically valid measure applied to the entire VITA/TCE return population in determining return accuracy.

Quality Site Requirements

VITA/TCE sites must adhere to the Quality Site Requirements (QSR). The purpose of the QSR is to ensure quality and accuracy of tax return preparation and consistent operation of sites. Partners are required to communicate the QSR to all volunteers, to ensure IRS and partner-mutual quality objectives are met. Publication 5166, IRS Volunteer Quality Site Requirements, provides detailed information regarding steps partners need to take to meet the QSR.

- QSR #1 Certification
- QSR #2 Intake/Interview & Quality Review Process
- QSR #3 Photo ID and Taxpayer ID Numbers
- QSR #4 Reference Materials
- QSR #5 Volunteer Agreement
- QSR #6 Timely Filing
- QSR #7 Civil Rights
- QSR #8 Site Identification Number
- QSR #9 Electronic Filing Identification Numbers
- QSR #10 Security
Quality & Oversight Changes for 2021

Change to Quality Site Requirement (QSR) #5 – Volunteer Agreement

New: The approving official is required to validate volunteers’ identities using government-issued photo identification, when reviewing and signing Forms 13615. Volunteers’ identities must be verified prior to any volunteers’ participation in the VITA/TCE program. Government-issued photo identification (ID) includes valid driver’s license (U.S.), state ID (U.S.), Military ID, national ID, visa, Global Entry ID or passport.

The name on Form 13615 must match both the name on the government-issued photo ID and the volunteer’s name added to TaxSlayer or other tax preparation software. The use of nick names in the tax preparation software is not allowed.

Change to Quality Site Requirement (QSR) #10 – Security

New: All security, privacy, and confidentiality guidelines as outlined in Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights – A Public Trust, are required to be followed. A copy (paper or electronic) of this publication must be available at every site and used when referring to security, privacy, confidentiality, and civil rights issues.

This filing season site reviews will include an assessment of the following security procedures:

- Preparing an annual security plan to safeguard taxpayer data. (Sites can use Form 15272, VITA/TCE Security Plan, or a similar document that captures the same information.)
- Protecting all computers with passwords.
- Using a hard-wired internet connection or password protecting all wireless internet connections.
- Securing computers, printers and all equipment after site operating hours.
- Safeguarding PII at the site by safely storing and/or properly disposing of the information.
- Securing IRC Section 7126 consent notices as required.
- Limiting volunteer access in the tax software outside of site operating hours.

Recommendations for Partners to Improve Quality

One of the key factors in preparing an accurate return is the quality of the initial taxpayer interview. As you prepare your training schedule, place emphasis on providing your volunteers Intake/ Interview and Quality Review Training. Your coordinators are your strongest ally in this effort. Consider engaging the coordinators in discussions on how they can improve the volunteer’s interview skills. For example, role-plays can demonstrate the correct interview methods.

Publication 5101, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training, is available for use in classroom training or as a self-study tool. The training guides volunteers through the steps of conducting a complete and accurate taxpayer interview and quality review.

Publication 5299, VITA/TCE Quality Review Refresher, was created to help strengthen the skills of an effective quality reviewer. Volunteers that serve as quality reviewers are encouraged to review this publication as a refresher on the importance of the Quality Review Process.

Publication 5310, VITA/TCE Tax Return Quality Review Job Aid, provides volunteers an outline of one suggested best practice on how to quality review a tax return.
Partner Reviews

As a sponsoring partner, you are strongly encouraged to conduct site and return reviews at your volunteer sites to help ensure consistency in site operations and affirm accurate return preparation. Your presence at your sites and your continued encouragement can have a positive effect on the adherence to the Quality Site Requirements (QRS) and Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC). Your organization can gather valuable data on trends and best practices found during visits. The data you gather can be used to customize future training to improve site operations and to address tax law issues that might need more attention. You and your site coordinators play a primary role in ensuring the sites are providing accurate return preparation and maintaining the highest ethical standards.

Form 6729-D, Site Review Sheet, Form 6729-P, Partner Return Review Sheet and Publication 5140, Job Aid: Partner Site and Return Reviews, are available for use in conducting these reviews. The Job Aid guides you through evaluating site operations and gives you tips on reviewing tax returns for accuracy. These partner tools are optional; you may use forms you develop for this purpose.

SPEC recommends you create a schedule to visit your sponsored sites; plan your method to conduct reviews; and establish a policy for follow-up reviews. You will determine who will conduct the reviews and how to perform the reviews. Ensure the selected reviewers are certified in tax law to the highest level of certification needed for returns prepared at the site. SPEC recommends you review one to three tax returns for accuracy during your visit. Your SPEC relationship manager is available to work with you to develop a review plan.

Quality Statistical Sample Reviews

Quality Statistical Sample (QSS) reviews are critical to the success of the VITA/TCE programs and play a vital part in improving quality and consistency. The review process verifies accuracy of volunteer-prepared tax returns and compliance with Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) and Quality Site Requirements (QSR). These reviews also provide opportunities to identify and correct problem areas and/or share best practices.

Analysts assigned to the Quality Program Office (QPO) in SPEC headquarters, with extensive tax law experience, conduct these unannounced reviews. QSS reviews include a thorough review of the site’s processes and operations for adherence to the QSR. Each QSS review also requires multiple return reviews and can include duplication of the tax returns (including scanning, faxing or photocopying) for verification of data collected.

2020 QSS Review Results

Quality Statistical Sample (QSS) Review results for 2020:

- Return Accuracy Rate: 94%
- Adherence Rate to the QSR: 95%
- We sincerely thank our volunteers who worked tirelessly during the 2020 Filing Season while facing significant operational challenges. Many sites closed for the season in March and subsequently reopened using alternative filing methods to continue helping taxpayers in need. The hard work and dedication of our VITA/TCE volunteers is evident in the above referenced QSS results.

For more detailed information on the QSS site and return reviews for the 2020 filing season, see Publication 5347, Fact Sheet for Partners and Employees - Quality Statistical Sample (QSS) Review Results, that can be found on the Site Coordinator Corner.
Field Site Visits

Field Site Visits (FSV) are critical to the oversight of VITA/TCE programs and play an integral role in improving the quality of service provided at volunteer sites. Your SPEC relationship manager or another tax consultant in the SPEC territory generally conducts these visits. FSV are not audits. These visits are opportunities for the SPEC relationship manager to aid or offer guidance, identify and share best practices, and strengthen adherence to the QSR. FSV are critical for the ability of SPEC to identify trends, measure site adherence to the QSR, and monitor site operations. FSV generally are unannounced and include one return review.

Remote Site Reviews

Remote Site Reviews (RSR), like FSV, allow SPEC to reach more partners and coordinators during the filing season. Prior to conducting the remote review, a tax consultant will contact the coordinator to schedule the review for a time convenient for the partner or coordinator. Tax consultants conduct RSR virtually, usually by telephone. In addition to providing an overview of site operations, RSR provide an opportunity for the partner or coordinator to ask questions and request assistance. RSR are announced and do not include a return review.

SPEC Shopping Reviews

SPEC Shopping Reviews are intended to gauge the taxpayer experience and test tax law accuracy based on specific scenarios. Shopping reviews will involve unannounced “mystery” shoppers posing as taxpayers using a pre-defined scenario to have their federal tax return prepared by an IRS-certified volunteer preparer. The results of these reviews consist of comparing the volunteer-prepared tax return with the pre-determined tax return. However, since these reviews are not statistically valid, they are not used to measure the accuracy of returns prepared at VITA/TCE sites.

Mystery shoppers will remain anonymous until the return is completed and has gone through the site’s Quality Review Process. Once the mystery shopper identifies themselves, they will ask for a printed copy of the return. The return will be deleted to avoid the transmission of a fictitious return. The mystery shopper will then conduct a site review to verify the site is adhering to the QSR and VSC. Preliminary results of the site review will be discussed after the review. The results of the SPEC Shopping Review will be forwarded to the partner and/or coordinator by the SPEC relationship manager.

Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) Shopping Reviews

TIGTA performs reviews to test return accuracy. They use a method known as “shopping”. This process uses pre-designed scenarios generally to test new tax law and/or new procedures. TIGTA shopping results are not statistically valid and cannot be projected to the entire population of returns prepared at the volunteer sites. Neither SPEC nor its partners are notified of TIGTA’s shopping plans prior to a visit.

During the filing season, TIGTA reviews are conducted by a cadre of TIGTA Auditors (shoppers). A TIGTA shopper has a pre-defined taxpayer scenario and assumes the role of the taxpayer requesting services from a VITA or TCE site. Shoppers remain anonymous until the return is completed and through the site’s Quality Review Process.

Once TIGTA identifies him/herself the return is deleted to avoid the transmission of a fictitious return to IRS. If your site is visited by TIGTA, we ask that you notify your SPEC relationship manager and provide feedback regarding your experience with the review or send an email to partner@irs.gov.
Civil Rights Unit (CRU) Reviews

The Civil Rights Unit (CRU) plans to visit volunteer sites operated by partners receiving federal assistance. The purpose of visits is to validate compliance with Civil Rights rules and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. The results of these visits will be discussed with the partner and SPEC Headquarters. For more information on Civil Rights notification, refer to Publication 4053 (EN/SP), Your Civil Rights are Protected. For additional information on providing reasonable accommodations, see the Fact Sheets on the Site Coordinator Corner.

SPEC Financial Reviews

The primary purpose of the financial review is to ensure that grant funds are spent in accordance with grant terms and conditions, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circulars, federal laws, and statutes. Financial reviewers also consider whether the grantee sub-awards a portion of their grant. The Grant Program Office can also recommend recipients for a review depending on monitoring activities. These reviews are conducted throughout the calendar year. Reviewers will contact your partner to schedule the review. They will give your partner verbal feedback after the review and follow-up with a written report. This provides the partner an opportunity to respond to any findings.
Chapter 3: Volunteer Recruitment, Recognition and Retention

Introduction

Partners are responsible for recruiting, training and certifying volunteers to prepare accurate returns for the taxpayers they serve. Partners must also comply with the IRS standards, policies and procedures required of the VITA/TCE program. Partners can contact their SPEC relationship manager for ideas, advice and resources for recruiting volunteers as well as developing and implementing training and certification programs.

Chapter 3-1: SPEC Volunteer Recruitment

Introduction

Volunteers are the heart of the VITA/TCE program. Volunteers come from various professions and social positions: working professionals, retirees, college and high school students, IRS employees and individuals who just want to help others in their communities.

SPEC and its valued partners share a common goal to increase the number of volunteers. To assist with volunteer recruitment, SPEC utilizes a formalized process to enroll and track potential volunteers and connect them with partners.

SPEC Volunteer Recruitment Process

Interested individuals may register at IRS Tax Volunteers to become volunteers. This information is shared with partners who coordinate staffing at volunteer return preparation sites and outreach activities. SPEC also uses this data to contact potential volunteers, sending correspondence to encourage participation in the VITA/TCE program.

- SPEC processes volunteer information and shares it with the appropriate SPEC growth group office.
- SPEC growth group tax consultants contact these potential volunteers via letter, thanking them for their interest and inviting them to attend a SPEC-sponsored Welcome Orientation webinar.
- SPEC growth group tax consultants connect potential volunteers with partners in need of volunteers in their respective localities.
- Partners contact potential volunteers to share program information and provide training to be certified to work at a community site.

Other Assistance

While the SPEC Volunteer Recruitment Process assists partners in identifying individuals who are interested in volunteering, partners are encouraged to develop their own recruitment plans to best fit their specific program objectives. SPEC relationship managers can help with volunteer recruitment plans and referrals to other community resources. At the partner’s request, SPEC will provide communication templates, including links to fact sheets and Link & Learn Taxes (L&LT), for use in recruiting, training and retaining volunteers.
Chapter 3-2: Volunteer Recognition

Introduction

SPEC has successfully built a network of national/local partners and volunteers who help meet individual taxpayer’s needs for tax education and assistance during the tax filing season. Partners have effectively recognized their volunteers by their own design and maintain local control over these celebratory events. Recognizing volunteers for significant milestones, outstanding commitment, and dedication is extremely important to the SPEC organization.

Volunteer Milestone Recognition Process

SPEC will honor milestones of ten-year increments to mark partner, volunteer, and site dedication. SPEC provides certificates of recognition for those partners, volunteers, and sites whose years of service are increments of ten. Therefore, SPEC will recognize partners, volunteers and sites with significant milestones at 10, 20, 30 and 40 years of service in the volunteer tax preparation program. Partners may find other ways to recognize milestone accomplishments for intervening years.

Partners are to send all 10-year milestone requests to their SPEC relationship manager or territory manager. Partners must submit Forms 14309, SPEC Volunteer Milestone Recognition and 14308, SPEC Site Milestone Recognition; for 20- and 30-year volunteer and site milestone recognitions, no later than February 25. SPEC relationship managers recognize partners on Form 14307, SPEC Partner Milestone Recognition.

All requests for recognition items must be checked for spelling and submitted to partner@irs.gov as soon as possible, but no later than February 25 to ensure delivery by April 10.

Note: SPEC recommends recognizing partners, sites and volunteers in an alternate way when submitted milestones forms do not meet the deadline.

If there are questions as to if a request for milestone recognition was submitted in a timely manner, SPEC Headquarters may require the original email be forwarded again showing that the request was sent to partner@irs.gov timely. In addition, please copy your SPEC relationship manager on the email sent to partner@irs.gov.

Headquarter Role

SPEC Headquarters responsibilities:

- Sending reminder to SPEC Area offices to help ensure all milestone requests are submitted by February 25.
- Confirming spelling as appropriate and preparing milestones certificates.
- Ensuring milestone items are completed in time to ensure delivery by the April 10 deadline.

Area and Territory Office Role

The SPEC Area and Territory Offices responsibilities:

- Instructing and sending reminder for partners to send all 10-year milestone requests to their relationship and/or territory manager emphasizing the February 25 ordering deadline.
- Instructing and reminding partners to send all 20, 30 and 40-year milestone requests for volunteers and sites to partner@irs.gov by February 25.
• Preparing and shipping all 10-year milestone certificates for volunteers, sites and partners by April 10.
• Submitting all 40-year partner milestone requests to Oversight Products and Quality headquarter analyst by February 25.
• Communicating the milestone recognition process and the February 25 deadline to partners including providing templates (Form 14307, Form 14308 and Form 14309) to facilitate the process.
• Ensuring partners have current relationship/territory manager contact for emailing all 10-year milestone requests for volunteers, sites and partners.
• Confirming spelling for all requests received.
• Ensuring requests for clarification received from headquarters are responded to quickly and accurately to ensure timely fulfillment of recognition items.
• Determine method of record keeping for all 10, 20, 30 and 40-year milestone requests received.
• Note: The national relationship manager for Tax-Aide will be responsible for these actions relative to Tax-Aide recognition.

Coordinator/Partner Role

Coordinators/partners must timely complete the templates provided to them by their SPEC relationship manager, identifying volunteer and site milestone accomplishments.

• Complete Form 14308, SPEC Site Milestone Recognition and Form 14309, SPEC Volunteer Milestone Recognition timely, identifying sites and volunteers, due milestone recognition.
• Ensure all completed 10-year milestone templates for volunteers, sites and partners are submitted annually to the relationship and/or territory manager no later than February 25.
• Ensure all completed 20, 30 and 40-year milestone templates for volunteers and sites are submitted annually through partner@irs.gov no later than February 25.
• Confirm all spelling.
• Decide how they will make presentations to recipients.
Chapter 3-3: Volunteer Retention

Introduction

SPEC and our partners share the goal of cultivating quality volunteers. Our partners shared their best practices for recruiting, supervising and recognizing their volunteers. Volunteer retention is the outcome of effective volunteer management.

Build relationships

Many partners shared that getting to know their volunteers was a priority. Partners stated the importance of building relationships at their sites.

“Get well acquainted with volunteers so they feel connected.”

“There has to be nurturing.”

“Develop camaraderie among volunteers and cultivate personal satisfaction among volunteers at the site and for the people they assist.”

“Provide a supportive environment for them to derive their own personal satisfaction by helping others and interacting with a great group of fellow volunteers.”

“Volunteers need to be reminded regularly, and in the off-season, how important they are.”

“Volunteers should be made to feel the importance of their contribution to the community.”

“Hosts a ‘Welcome Back Breakfast’ for new and returning volunteers. Also host an ‘end of filing season’ picnic to present awards and certificates.”

“Add volunteers who are friends or relatives who want to help taxpayers.”

Foster effective leadership

Partners identified how effective leadership at their sites greatly contributed to the satisfaction of their volunteers.

“Site coordinators make or break a site. When you change site coordinators you change the entire culture of the site.”

“The positive and negative satisfaction comes from the site coordinator.”

“An energetic and motivated leader communicates well and frequently with the volunteers, soliciting their input for improvement and making it happen immediately. Make them feel empowered and valued.”

“Treat volunteers with respect, never forget they are volunteers and could be doing anything else with their time and they chose VITA.”

“Partners should visit each site throughout the filing season to bring them treats and just say ‘thank you’ to the volunteers.”
**Make community connections**

Several VITA/TCE sites shared how they cultivate connections in their communities to build cadres of volunteers. These community connections may include employers, and colleges and universities.

> “Many of the volunteers are retirees from large companies who are very dedicated to returning year after year.”

> “Form partnerships with employers whose employees can operate a site. Some employers allow their volunteers to do tax preparation on site during their normal business hours.”

> “Encourage volunteers to return each year. Recruit students from the nearby universities.”

> “Distribute public service announcements in the community about the benefits of VITA/TCE volunteering. Promote the various forms of available credits (college, CPE) and opportunities (internships, tax preparation education).”

**Communicate with volunteers year-round**

Successful partners also communicate with volunteers before, during and after the filing season. Effective communications can be as unique as the partners themselves, such as newsletters, social activities, emails, meetings, mini-training sessions and volunteer web-portals.

Most partners emphasized the importance of off-season communication to keep volunteers engaged with the VITA/TCE program. Keeping in touch with volunteers throughout the year promotes camaraderie and provides a way to share technical knowledge, keeping volunteers’ skills sharp.
Chapter 4: Volunteer Training and Certification

Introduction

A basic component of quality service is ensuring the accuracy of income tax returns prepared at VITA/TCE sites. A tax return is accurate when the law is applied correctly, and the completed return is free from errors. The accuracy is based on the taxpayer interview, all supporting documentation, and a completed Form 13614-C, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Sheet. Numerous elements contribute to return preparation accuracy. Key among these elements is annual volunteer training and certification.

Developing a Training Program

Partners need to develop training programs based on the number and experience level of their volunteers, and the needs of the taxpayers they will serve. You can conduct training as self-study, as classroom training, or a combination of both. At a minimum, your training plan must include training in Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC), Intake/Interview & Quality Review, tax law and use of return preparation software (TaxSlayer software), and Quality Site Requirements (policy and procedures).

Note that not all training may apply to all your volunteers. For example, site coordinators must complete specialized Site Coordinator Training. You may also find the need to provide additional training for peer-to-peer or designated quality reviewers and for volunteers acting as your Electronic Return Originator (ERO).

Additionally, while the focus here is on the preparation of federal income tax returns, partners need to develop training programs with curriculums that cover state income tax return preparation. Contact your State Department of Revenue for ideas, advice, and available resources.

Certification Requirements

All volunteers must complete certifications annually. All certification examinations require a minimum grade of 80%. If volunteers fail to achieve the minimum passing grade, they may take one retest. The minimum grade on a retest is also 80%. The certification level required for all volunteers is determined by the volunteer’s role.

All Volunteers: New volunteers must complete the Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) Training. Returning volunteers are encouraged to review the VSC Training as a refresher. ALL VITA/TCE volunteers must pass a Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) certification and sign and date the Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement. By signing this form, the volunteer is agreeing to comply with the requirements and uphold the highest ethical standards. An approving official must also review and sign the form. Volunteers who perform only administrative duties, like greeters or facilitators, are only required to certify in VSC.

New instructors, tax preparers, quality reviewers and site coordinators are required to take the Publication 5101, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training. Returning volunteers in these positions are encouraged to review the training as a refresher. All volunteer instructors, tax preparers, quality reviewers, and site coordinators must pass the Intake/Interview & Quality Review certification test.

Volunteer instructors: Volunteer instructors are required to certify in VSC, Intake/Interview & Quality Review, and tax law. Instructors must certify at the Advanced tax law certification or higher (including specialty levels and Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals) depending on the level of the classes they will teach.
Volunteer Tax Preparers: Volunteers who answer tax law questions, prepare or correct tax returns and/or conduct quality reviews of completed tax returns are required to certify in VSC, Intake/Interview & Quality Review, and tax law. The preparer’s certification level must be at or above the level needed for the tax returns prepared.

Quality Reviewers: Designated or peer-to-peer quality reviewers must certify in VSC, Intake/Interview & Quality Review, and tax law. Quality reviewers must (at a minimum) certify at the Basic level or higher (including specialty levels) based on the complexity of the tax returns reviewed.

Coordinators: Coordinators are required to certify in VSC, Intake/Interview & Quality Review, and the new Site Coordinator Test prior to performing any site coordinator duties. Site coordinators are also required to complete site coordinator training. Site coordinator training includes reviewing Publication 5088, Site Coordinator Training, and Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook. Site coordinators who prepare tax returns, provide tax law assistance, correct rejected returns, or quality review tax returns must certify in tax law to the level required for the complexity of the returns. If they do NOT perform any of these duties, they are not required to certify in tax law.

Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals: The volunteer certification process includes a special tax law certification for certain tax professionals, “Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals.” VITA/TCE volunteers covered under Treasury Department Circular No. 230, Regulations Governing Practice before the Internal Revenue Service, are only required to take the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals as their tax law certification. These volunteers are required to certify in Volunteer Standards of Conduct and Intake/Interview & Quality Review prior to taking the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals. In addition, if the volunteer covered by Circular 230 is going to perform the duties of a site coordinator, they are required to take the Site Coordinator Training and pass the new Site Coordinator Test with a score of 80% or higher.

New! Qualified Experienced Volunteer (QEV) Test: SPEC offers a tax law certification that allows experienced VITA/TCE volunteers to certify on new provisions and tax law changes as well as more complex tax situations encountered at sites. Upon passing this test, volunteers will be considered certified at the Advanced level. Volunteers are not required to certify in Basic or Advanced before taking this test. In addition, the volunteers are required to certify in Volunteer Standards of Conduct and Intake/Interview & Quality Review. This is an optional certification path. Experienced volunteers may choose the traditional certification path instead. SPEC puts no limit on the number of years of volunteer service required before taking this test. However, SPEC partners may have additional qualification requirements. Volunteers should check with the sponsoring partner to ensure they are qualified to take this test. Volunteers certifying only in this tax law certification are not eligible for Continuing Education Credits.

Note: SPEC established the minimum certification requirements for volunteers who are authorized under Circular 230; however, partners may establish additional certification requirements for their volunteers. Partners may require all volunteers to use the traditional certification path. Volunteers should check with the sponsoring partner. The Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals does not qualify a volunteer to receive CE Credits. Qualified Experienced Volunteer test (QEV) Test does not qualify for CE Credits. Those volunteers seeking CE Credits must certify to Advance level to qualify for CE Credits. For more information, see Chapter 5: Volunteers Who Are Tax Professionals.

Instructor Resources

There are several resources available for partners to use in developing their training program. The site VITA/TCE Central on Link & Learn Taxes (L&LT) is the one-stop shop for volunteer training. VITA/TCE Central provides access to the latest training and testing materials including:

- Classroom Presentations and lesson plans
- Publication 4555-e, VITA/TCE e-Instructor Guidance (contains information for instructors who teach volunteers how to prepare tax returns using L&LT or the printed VITA/TCE training guide, Publication 4491)
- VITA/TCE Training Guides (PDF)
Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) Training

SPEC developed the VSC specifically for free tax preparation operations. Often volunteers face ethical issues, which arise in unexpected situations requiring quick decisions and good judgment. In many cases, the volunteer will react to unusual situations and not realize until after the fact that an ethical dilemma occurred.

All volunteers are required to prepare accurate returns and provide quality service to taxpayers. The following Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) ensure that volunteers provide this quality service:

VSC #1-Follow the ten Quality Site Requirements (QSR). QSR ensures VITA/TCE sites are using consistent operating procedures that will ultimately assist with the accuracy of volunteer-prepared returns.

VSC #2-Not accept payment, solicit donations, or accept refund payments for federal or state tax return preparation from customers. VITA/TCE sites will not accept compensation for their services in any manner from the clients they serve. The use of a tip/donation jar at any site is a violation to this standard of conduct. In addition, a taxpayer refund cannot be deposited into volunteer or partner bank accounts.

VSC#3-Not solicit business from taxpayers you assist or use the information you gained about them for any direct or indirect personal benefit for you or any other specific individual. Volunteers must properly use and safeguard taxpayer’s personal information. Furthermore, they may not use confidential or non-public information to engage in financial transactions, and they cannot allow its improper use to further their own or another person’s private interests.

VSC#4-Not knowingly prepare false returns. It is imperative that volunteers correctly apply tax law to the taxpayer’s situation. While a volunteer may be tempted to bend the law to help taxpayers, this will cause problems down the road for the taxpayer.

VSC#5-Not engage in criminal, infamous, dishonest, notoriously disgraceful conduct, or any other conduct deemed to have a negative effect on the VITA/TCE programs. Volunteers may be prohibited from participating in the VITA/TCE programs if they engage in criminal, infamous, dishonest, or notoriously disgraceful conduct, or any other conduct prejudicial to the government. Volunteers must take care to avoid interactions that discredit the program.

VSC#6-Treat all taxpayers in a professional, courteous, and respectful manner. To protect the public interest, Internal Revenue Service employees, partners, and volunteers must maintain the confidence and esteem of the people we serve.

New volunteers must complete the Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) Training. Returning volunteers are encouraged to review the VSC Training as a refresher. Some partners may require all volunteers to take the VSC training annually. Both new and returning volunteers must annually take the VSC certification exam.
Volunteer Standards of Conduct Training includes:

- An explanation of the six VSC defined on Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement
- Information on how to report possible violations
- Consequences of failure to adhere to the program requirements
- Examples of situations that raise questions on ethical behavior
- An overview of the Intake/Interview & Quality Review Process

Training Resources:

Publication 4961, VITA/TCE Volunteer Standards of Conduct – Ethics Training, is an electronic product used in a classroom setting or for independent study. The VSC training does not include tax law and is required for the greeter or facilitator position, as well as tax preparers. This publication includes the competency test for those volunteers wishing to take the paper test and submit the test to an instructor or other designated official for grading. The publication outlines the steps the volunteer and instructor need to take for completing the Form 13615 when the certification is accomplished using the paper VSC test. This publication is also available in Spanish, Publication 4961(SP), Normas de Conducta para los Voluntarios en los VITA/ TCE – Entrenamiento de Ética.

Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook, provides an explanation of each standard and the suggested corrective actions to take if a violation occurs at a VITA/TCE site. It is the responsibility of the partner and/or site coordinator to report a volunteer that has intentionally violated the Volunteer Standards of Conduct. The volunteer must immediately be removed from all site activities and the IRS-SPEC relationship manager notified with the details of the violation.

Certification:

The preferred method of taking the Volunteer Standard of Conduct training and certification is through L&LT. VSC training is available in L&LT on the certification page. Once the volunteer has passed the VSC certification test, and other certifications if applicable, he or she should check the Volunteer Agreement checkbox in L&LT, acknowledging he or she read the VSC Agreement, and agrees to adhere to the VSC. Volunteers can create a Form 13615 with an electronic signature, with much of the information populating on the form from the volunteer’s registration. The volunteer needs to complete any missing information and submit it to their approving official for further processing. The Form 13615 created in Link & Learn will record all the volunteer’s completed certifications.

Volunteer Registry

The Volunteer Registry is a listing of volunteers and/or partners that have been removed from the VITA/TCE Programs indefinitely. In most cases, volunteer/partners are added to the registry due to performing intentional unethical practices harming the taxpayer, volunteer, or the IRS. There are no appeal rights for volunteers added to the registry.

Partners and Site Coordinators are the first line of defense to prevent violations of the Volunteer Standards of Conduct. The identity of all volunteers should be validated using a government issued photo ID prior to participating in the VITA/TCE program to ensure volunteers previously banned do not reenter the program. Volunteers and partners violating the standards of conduct by performing egregious actions may be added to the IRS Volunteer Registry. The SPEC Director will determine if a volunteer or partner should be added to the registry.
Egregious actions include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following willful actions:

- Creating harm to taxpayers, volunteers, or IRS employees
- Refusing to adhere to the Quality Site Requirements
- Accepting payments for return preparation at VITA/TCE sites
- Using taxpayer personal information for personal gain
- Knowingly preparing false returns
- Engaging in criminal, infamous, dishonest, disgraceful conduct
- Any other conduct deemed to have a negative impact on the VITA/TCE Programs

SPEC relationship managers check the partners and volunteers listed on Form 13533, Sponsor Agreements, and Form 13206, Volunteer Assistance Summary Reports (or an acceptable listing) to determine if any partner or volunteer is listed in the Volunteer Registry. If a partner or volunteer is in the Volunteer Registry, that partner or volunteer must be notified they will never be permitted to participate in the VITA/TCE programs.

**Volunteer Protection Act**

Volunteers often have questions about personal liability for mistakes they might make when preparing tax returns at a VITA/TCE site. Public Law 105-19, Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 (VPA), generally protects volunteers from liability for negligent acts they perform within the scope of their responsibilities in the organization for which they volunteer. The VPA protects volunteers from liability if harm was not caused by willful or criminal misconduct, gross negligence, reckless misconduct, or conscious indifference to the rights or safety of the individual harmed by the volunteer.

The Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement specifically outlines expected behavior for volunteer tax preparation volunteers. By complying with these standards, volunteers can avoid unethical actions that could void protections granted to them by the Volunteer Protection Act.

**Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training**

SPEC continues to emphasize the positive correlation between the proper use of the Intake/Interview & Quality Review Process and the preparation of an accurate tax return. SPEC oversight reviews indicate consistent use of complete intake, interview, and quality review processes result in more accurate returns. Since the implementation of this process, the accuracy of the VITA/TCE returns has increased. Volunteers who refuse to use the complete intake and interview process and/or refuse to use the required quality review process are in violation of the Volunteer Standards of Conduct. Training is required to ensure that all volunteers follow a consistent Intake/Interview & Quality Review Process.

New volunteers who conduct intake, answer tax law questions, or prepare or review tax returns must complete the Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training. Returning volunteers are encouraged to review the training as a refresher. Some partners may require all volunteers to take the Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training annually. Both new and returning volunteers must take the Intake/Interview & Quality Review certification exam.

The Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training includes:

- An overview of the intake/interview and quality review process
- The purpose and use of Form 13614-C, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Sheet
- The interview process including probing questions and conflict resolution
• Procedures for verifying taxpayer identity and taxpayer identification numbers (SSN, ITIN)
• Due diligence
• Quality review requirements, concepts and methods

Training Resources:

Publication 5101, Intake/Interview and Quality Review Training is an electronic product which can be used in a classroom setting or for independent study.

Publication 5299, VITA/TCE Quality Review Refresher, was created to help strengthen the skills of an effective quality reviewer. Volunteers that serve as quality reviewers are encouraged to review this publication as a refresher on the importance of the Quality Review Process.

Publication 5310, VITA/TCE Tax Return Quality Review Job Aid, was designed to be used in conjunction with Publication 5299 and provides SPEC volunteers an outline of how-to quality review a tax return.

Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook, provides additional information on interviewing and quality review which can assist instructors and site coordinators in conducting this training.

Certification:

The preferred method of taking the Intake/Interview & Quality Review certification test is through L&LT. The training is available in L&LT or as the stand-alone Publication 5101. The Intake/Interview & Quality Review certification test is also available in Form 6744, VITA/TCE Volunteer Assistor's Test/Retest, for those volunteers needing to take the paper test and submit the test to an instructor or other designated official for grading.

Tax Law Training

As a partner, you must ensure that volunteers who will be instructing tax law, answering tax law questions at intake, or preparing or reviewing tax returns have been properly trained in tax law and the use of the tax preparation software. This training will also enable the volunteers to pass the appropriate certification examinations (e.g. Basic or Advanced). While most experienced returning volunteers may be able to refresh their tax law knowledge and tax preparation skills through self-study, new and less experienced volunteers are best trained in a classroom setting by experienced instructors. Classroom instructors must be certified at the Advanced or the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals certification level prior to conducting training. The content and format of tax return preparation training will depend upon the experience level of the volunteers and the complexity of the typical tax returns experienced at the tax sites.

In addition to the practice tax returns presented in the Basic and Advanced certification examinations, volunteers should be encouraged to complete a variety of exercise returns. Partners may require a minimum number of satisfactorily completed exercises in order to be certified to prepare returns during the tax season.

The Tax Law Training includes:

• Typical tax documents seen at the tax site (e.g., Forms W-2, 1099-R, 1099-INT/DIV, etc.).
• Typical IRS tax forms that are included in a return including Form 1040 and all schedules and supporting forms.
• An explanation of tax law for each in-scope tax topic that the volunteers will most likely encounter at the tax site. At a minimum all tax topics covered on the appropriate exam (Basic or Advanced) should be covered.
• Instruction on entering taxpayer document information in the tax preparation software.
• Preparing exercise returns and having them evaluated by experienced instructors.

Training Resources:

• Publication 4491, VITA/TCE Training Guide, is a textbook covering tax law which can be used for self-study or by Instructors to prepare classroom lessons. This publication provides tax law following the lines on Form 1040.

• VITA/TCE Central is available on IRS.gov through L&LT and contains a variety of resources for volunteers and instructors. Instructor Tools include classroom presentations, lesson plans, and Publication 4555e, Instructor Guide. There are quick links to a variety of training resources.

• Link & Learn Taxes is available through IRS.gov. The certification paths provide skills checks, job aids, and other resources on tax law topics. It can be an excellent resource to use in conjunction with Publication 4491 to review/reinforce self-study and classroom training.

• Publication 4012, VITA/TCE Volunteer Resource Guide, is an essential publication for volunteer tax preparers which covers tax law topics as well as information on using the tax preparation software. Experienced volunteers conducting self-study should use this publication to reinforce their review. Instructors should refer volunteers to this publication frequently during classroom training and stress its use as a resource at the tax site. Volunteers should be encouraged to record notes in this publication for further reference during tax season.

• Publication 17, Your Federal Income Tax for Individuals, can be a valuable resource for information on tax law which can supplement Publications 4491 and 4012. In the classroom, Instructors should encourage volunteers to refer to this publication when preparing returns.

• Form 6744, VITA/TCE Volunteer Assistor’s Test/Retest, contains the VSC, Intake/Interview & Quality Review, Basic, Advanced, and additional tax law specialty module exams. Volunteers can take the examinations, record their answers on the answer sheets provided, and then have them graded by instructors or the examinations can be taken on-line using L&LT.

Certification:

The preferred method of taking the tax law certification exams is through L&LT. As described above, the Form 6744 includes most of the certification tests for those volunteers wishing to take the paper test and submit the test to an instructor or other designated official for grading.

TaxSlayer Webinars

TaxSlayer is the tax preparation software contracted by the IRS and provided to partners/sites for use in the VITA/TCE programs. There are numerous excellent TaxSlayer webinars and mini-training guides available on the Practice Lab website which can be accessed through L&LT. Partners should encourage volunteers to view these self-paced training tools. The webinars allow volunteers to become familiar with TaxSlayer Pro return preparation software. The training webinars cover topics from setting up the software to preparation of the return from start to finish. Volunteers can work independently through the online lessons. Check with your SPEC relationship manager for the password to the Practice Lab.

• Practice Lab is available using TaxSlayerPro, which is the online version of the software, and can be used to prepare exercise returns during training. Volunteers can use it to prepare mock tax returns for the certification test problems.

• TaxSlayer Training Videos provide demonstrations on how to enter taxpayer data into the software. Lessons follow the flow of Form 1040. Many videos contain quizzes to reinforce the lesson objectives. Videos demonstrating TaxSlayer administrative functions can support training for Electronic Return Originators (ERO) and site coordinators.
**Tax Site Policies and Procedures Training**

Partners need to ensure that all volunteers receive training on the policies and procedures that are inherent in the VITA/TCE Programs. These include taxpayer rights and responsibilities, confidentiality of taxpayer data, scope of service, and site administrative issues. The content and format of this training will be largely dictated by the partner’s needs.

**At a minimum, this training must include a review of the Quality Site Requirements (QSR).**

Additionally, this training could include information on local forms and procedures, particularly items concerning auxiliary financial services offered at tax preparation time.

**Training Resources:**

- Publication 5166, IRS Volunteer Quality Site Requirements, is an electronic publication that covers the ten QSR. It is suitable for self-study and can be used by instructors to prepare classroom training.
- Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook, provides detailed information on the QSR which can assist instructors and site coordinators in conducting this training.

**Site Coordinator Training and Site Coordinator Test**

Partners are responsible for assigning volunteers to serve as site coordinators and need to ensure that they have been properly trained to carry out the responsibilities of managing their sites. Site Coordinator Training and the new Site Coordinator Test are annual requirements for all VITA/TCE site coordinators and assigned alternate coordinators. Coordinators and alternate coordinators must certify by passing the Site Coordinator Test with a score of 80% or higher prior to performing any site coordinator duties.

Site Coordinator Training resources include: Publication 5088, Site Coordinator Training and Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook. In addition, coordinators should review Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights - A Public Trust, to familiarize themselves with the updated security requirements at the sites. Publication 5088, Site Coordinator Training, is available on Link & Learn Taxes or IRS.gov and can be used in face-to-face training and for individual review.

Partners are required to verify that all volunteers acting as site coordinators or alternate site coordinators have completed Site Coordinator Training as appropriate. Partners are required to verify coordinators pass the Site Coordinator Test with an 80% rate or better prior to performing any site coordinator duties. The Site Coordinator Test is available in the Form 6744, *VITA/TCE Volunteer Assistor’s Test/Retest*, and on Link & Learn Taxes.

Site Coordinator Training Includes:

- A refresher of key elements of VITA/TCE site operations
- An explanation of roles and responsibilities of a coordinator
- Navigation through Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook
- A review of the Quality Site Requirements (QSR)
- A review of the Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC)
- Information about site security requirements
Site Coordinator Training Resources:

- Publication 5088, Site Coordinator Training, provides information about key elements of VITA/TCE Site Operations.
- Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook, provides detailed guidance on effective site operations for the VITA/TCE Programs.
- Publication 5166, VITA/TCE Volunteer Quality Site Requirements, is an electronic publication that covers the ten QSR. It includes examples of non-compliance and recommended corrective actions.
  
  Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights – A Public Trust, provides updates on new security requirements for the VITA/TCE Programs.
- TaxSlayer Training Videos
Volunteer Certification Process Flowchart

**Volunteer Standards of Conduct**
All volunteers, including volunteers who do not prepare returns.
Estimated Completion Time: 1 hour
Minimum Proficiency Required: 8 out of 10 Correct

**Intake/Interview and Quality Review**
All tax law certified volunteers, site coordinators, quality reviewers, and instructors.
Estimated Completion Time: 20 minutes
Min. Proficiency Required: 8 out of 10 Correct

**Foreign Student**
Est. Completion Time: 2 hours
Min. Proficiency Required: 40 out of 50 Correct

**Site Coordinator**
Est. Completion Time: 1 hour
Min. Proficiency Required: 12 out of 15 Correct

**Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals**
Limited to volunteers who are authorized under Circular 230 to practice before the IRS. These volunteers have a professional designation of attorney, Certified Public Accountant, and/or Enrolled Agent. Volunteers who complete this certification level can prepare any tax returns that fall within the scope of service of the VITA/ITEP Program.
Est. Completion Time: 1 hour
Minimum Proficiency Required: 12 out of 15 correct

**Basic**
Recommended for, but not limited to, volunteers with 0-1 years of experience.
Est. Completion Time: 4 hours
Min. Proficiency Required: 24 out of 30 Correct

**Advanced**
Recommended for, but not limited to, volunteers with two or more years of experience.
Est. Completion Time: 4 hours
Min. Proficiency Required: 28 out of 35 Correct

**Qualified Experienced Volunteer**
Est. Completion Time: 2 hours
Min. Proficiency Required: 16 out of 20 Correct

**Puerto Rico Level I**
Requires Basic or Advanced Certification
Est. Completion Time: 2 hours
Min. Proficiency Required: 12 out of 15 Correct

**Puerto Rico Level II**
Requires Puerto Rico I Certification
Est. Completion Time: 2 hours
Min. Proficiency Required: 12 out of 15 Correct

**Optional Specialty Courses**

**Military**
Requires Advanced Certification
Est. Completion Time: 1 hour
Min. Proficiency Required: 12 out of 15 Correct

**International**
Requires Advanced Certification
Est. Completion Time: 1 hour
Min. Proficiency Required: 12 out of 15 Correct
Chapter 5: Volunteers Who Are Tax Professionals

Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals

SPEC offers a federal tax law update test that allows VITA/TCE volunteers with the professional designation of attorney, Certified Public Accountant (CPA) or Enrolled Agent (EA), to recertify on new provisions and tax law changes. (Volunteers with professional designations must have an active license and be in good standing.) In addition, all volunteers are required to certify to the Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) and Intake/Interview & Quality Review Test. The test is available on Link & Learn Taxes and is also printed in the Form 6744, VITA/TCE Volunteer Assistor’s Test/Retest. The Federal Tax Law Update test for Circular 230 Professionals is optional. Volunteers who would like additional training can choose the traditional certification paths (Basic, Advanced, etc.) available to all new and returning volunteers.

Note: The Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals does not qualify a volunteer to receive CE Credits. Those volunteers seeking CE Credits must follow the requirements for Continuing Education Credit guidance in this chapter.

Link & Learn Requirements

- Link & Learn Taxes Online Certification Learning Management System (LMS) will identify the volunteers who have registered as an attorney, CPA, or EA. Those eligible volunteers will have access to the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals.
- Any volunteer who is already registered in the system as an attorney, CPA, or EA will not have to change any account settings. However, those volunteers must use the same account they used in the prior tax year in order to access the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals.
- Volunteers who already have a registration in the system and are not identified as an attorney, CPA, or EA will need to manually change their registration using the My Account feature in L&LT to have access to the certification test.
- Once the eligible volunteer has passed the Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) and Intake/Interview & Quality Review certifications, the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals will be available for completion.

Volunteer Requirements

The eligible volunteer must:

- Be an attorney, CPA, or EA with an active license and in good standing.
- Pass, with a score of 80% or higher, both the VSC certification test and Intake/Interview & Quality Review certification test. First year volunteers must take the VSC and Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training before taking the certification tests. Both certifications must be passed before taking the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals.
- Pass the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals with a score of 80% or higher.
- Electronically sign Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement, agreeing to the VSC.
- Print Form 13615 and record their professional credentials as indicated on their identification card which includes: professional designation (attorney, CPA, or EA), licensing jurisdiction, bar, license, registration or enrollment number, effective or issue date, and expiration date (if provided).
- Provide a copy of the completed Form 13615 and their credentials at the time of volunteering to the partner or site coordinator. This should be in the form of a wallet identification card for their profession.
Once the required certifications are successfully completed, eligible volunteers are authorized to prepare all tax returns within the scope of the VITA/TCE Programs.

Note: SPEC established the minimum certification requirements for volunteers who are authorized under Circular 230; however, partners may establish additional certification requirements for their volunteers. Volunteers should check with the sponsoring SPEC Partner. Also, the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals does not qualify for CE Credits.

**SPEC Partner Requirements**
The SPEC Partner or site coordinator must:

- Validate the volunteer’s credentials as indicated on their professional identification card against the Form 13615.
- Confirm the identity of the volunteer using a government issued photo identification.
- Verify the volunteer certified by passing the Federal Tax Law Update Test for Circular 230 Professionals.
- Sign and date the Form 13615 as the authorizing official.

**Continuing Education Credits**
SPEC VITA/TCE Programs are approved to provide IRS Continuing Education (CE) credits for:

- Enrolled Agents (EAs)
- Non-credentialed tax return preparers participating in the IRS Annual Filing Season Program (AFSP).
- California Tax Education Council (CTEC)
- Certified Financial Planners (CFP)

Attorneys and Certified Public Accountants (CPA) may also qualify for CE credits depending upon their state licensing requirements or National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA). Volunteers must retrieve the CE certificate from L&LT and submit it to their governing board for CE credit approval. **Note: IRS SPEC VITA/TCE Program is not an approved NASBA Sponsor.** CFPs can self-report their CE Credits on the CFP website. The programs are also approved to provide CE credits for CTEC. CTEC is responsible for registering non-credentialed tax preparers for the state of California.

Volunteers can earn CE credits by completing training, passing the certification tests, and serving as an IRS-certified volunteer instructor, tax return preparer, and/or quality reviewer in the VITA/TCE Programs.

Continuing Education Credit Certificates will be available for volunteers to print from the VITA/TCE Central home page of L&LT.

**Volunteer Requirements**
Volunteers requesting CE credits are required to:

- Notify their SPEC Partner if interested in earning CE credits.
- Read the CE credit requirements available on IRS.gov under L&LT.
Register in L&LT and complete the Professional Status field by indicating one of the following:

- EA, non-credentialed tax return preparer participating in the AFSP Program, CPA, attorney, or CFP: If volunteers are already registered in L&LT, they can edit their registration by updating “My Account” and selecting the appropriate Professional Status.

- EA and non-credentialed tax return preparers are required to include a Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN) and the first and last name on their PTIN account in L&LT on the “My Account” page. The PTIN number is an eight-digit number beginning with the letter “P” and eight numbers, i.e. P0XXXXXX. (Note: An incorrect name or PTIN will cause the volunteer information to reject during the Return Preparer Office validation process.)

California volunteers applying for CE Credits must also enter their CTEC number (a six-digit number beginning with the letter “A” and six numbers, i.e., AXXXXXX). The CTEC number auto-populates on Form 13615 from the information the volunteer enters on the “My Account” page of L&LT.

Complete the following training and certification tests in L&LT prior to performing their volunteer duties:

- Complete the Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) training, and to pass the certification test (80% or above).

- Complete the Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training, if a new volunteer, and all volunteers (returning and new) are required to pass the certification test (80% or above).

- Complete the Advanced tax law training and pass the certification test (80% or above.)

- Optional: Complete one or more of the specialty federal tax law training options and pass the certification test(s) (80% or above).

Print, sign and date Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement-VITA/TCE Programs, from L&LT after all training and test modules are completed. The form can be signed electronically in L&LT.

Submit the printed Form 13615 to the coordinator or partner for validation before beginning the volunteer hours. The address and e-mail on the form must be correct in case clarification of volunteer information is needed.

Complete the minimum required ten non-paid volunteer hours as a quality reviewer, tax return preparer, and/or instructor.

Additional requirements for EAs and non-credentialed tax return preparers:

- EA and non-credentialed tax return preparers are required to provide a copy of the PTIN card to the VITA/TCE partner or coordinator once they have completed their volunteer hours. The partner or coordinator will verify that the PTIN number and the full name match the information on the Form 13615. (Note: An incorrect name or PTIN will disqualify the volunteer for CE credits during the Return Preparer Office validation process.)

- For California tax preparers, the Form 13615 must contain the California Tax Education Council's registration number (a seven-digit number beginning with the letter “A” and six numbers i.e. AXXXXXX). The CTEC number auto-populates on Form 13615 from the information the volunteer enters on the “My Account” page of L&LT.

Additional requirements for CPAs and other professionals:

- It is the responsibility of the CPA or attorney to submit their CE certificate to their state governing board for CE credit approval.

- Attorneys, CPAs, and CFPs are NOT required to have a PTIN to earn IRS SPEC CE Credits.
Note: All volunteers who provide a valid PTIN number will have their information reported to the Return Preparer Office.

Partner or Coordinator Requirements
SPEC Partners or Coordinators are responsible for completing the Continuing Education (CE) Credits section of the Form 13615 for all volunteers requesting CE credits.

Partners or coordinators with volunteers requesting CE credits are required to:

- Review the Form 13615 to make sure all required fields are completed, and the volunteer completed the required certifications.
- Complete the SIDN number, site or training address. The number of CE credits the volunteer can receive is based on their tax law certification level, as outlined on the Form 13615.
- Record the number of volunteer hours worked. The volunteer must work a minimum of ten hours to receive CE credits.
- Validate the CE credits information on Form 13615 by printing your name, title, and signing and dating the form in the CE Credits section at the bottom of page two.
  - Note: The Form 13615 needs to be validated by signing in both the certification section and the CE credit section. Volunteers may not sign their own Form13615 as the approving official.
- Submit the completed Form 13615 to the territory office no later than April 30th, if the site closes on or before April 15th. For sites that are open after April 15th, submit the Forms 13615 monthly as volunteers meet the CE requirements (certification and hours worked).

Note for California EAs and non-credentialed tax return preparers: The Form 13615 must contain the California Tax Education Council (CTEC) registration number (a seven-digit number beginning with the letter “A” and six numbers i.e. AXXXXXX). The CTEC ID number should be entered in L&LT when the volunteer registers. It will print on the L&LT generated Form 13615 when the volunteer prints the form. California professionals must include their CTEC number to earn CE Credits via SPEC VITA/TCE Program.

Available Continuing Education Credits
Volunteers can receive up to 14 hours of CE credits for certifying in tax law at the Advanced level and volunteering as a quality reviewer, tax return preparer, or tax law instructor for a minimum of ten hours. An additional four hours of CE credits can be earned by certifying in a specialty course. The maximum allowable CE credits are 18 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Law Certifications</th>
<th>CE Credit hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VSC (Ethics)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Tax Law Updates (Advanced)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Tax Law (Advanced)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Federal Tax Law Course</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Allowable CE Credits</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specialty Federal Tax Law Courses include International, Military, Puerto Rico I or II, and/or Foreign Student.
Note: Volunteers who are participating in the VITA/TCE programs as an IRS-certified volunteer cannot receive compensation for any activities to be eligible for CE credits.

**How Volunteers Receive CE Credits**

- Upon completion of all program requirements, CE certificates will be available via L&LT for each volunteer that has met all requirements of the program. Please refer to the Getting Started Job Aide in L&LT for assistance on printing certificates.
- In addition, for all volunteers with a valid PTIN, CE credits will be uploaded to their PTIN account. To view your continuing education credits in your PTIN account, go to the PTIN system login page. Keep in mind you are required to have a valid PTIN prior to certifying.
- Certified Financial Planners must self-report their CE credits to the CFP Board. Guidance is available at [www.cfp.net](http://www.cfp.net).
- Attorneys and CPAs must present their CE certificates to their governing board for approval.

Note: Volunteers will be notified if their information was rejected. Most common errors are invalid PTIN and name mismatch.

**Tax-Aide Responsibilities**

Tax-Aide coordinators will complete the CE Credits section of the Form 13615 in the same manner as described above, for all volunteers. Tax-Aide supervisors or local coordinators will electronically forward complete Forms 13615 to their assigned SPEC territory office contact for processing. Tax-Aide volunteers are required to certify via L&LT to receive CE Credits.

**Overseas Military Responsibilities**

The overseas military coordinators will send a Form 13615 (original or scanned) for volunteers applying for CE credits to the SPEC Headquarters Relationship Manager for overseas military.

**Annual Filing Season Program (AFSP)**

The Annual Filing Season Program launched by the Return Preparer Office (RPO) is intended to recognize and encourage non-credentialed tax return preparers who voluntarily increase their knowledge and improve their filing season competency through continuing education. A non-credentialed tax return preparer is a tax return preparer without professional credentials. This program allows them to obtain an AFSP Record of Completion for participation in an annual continuing education program. AFSP participants are also included in a public database of return preparers on the IRS website. There are also reduced requirements for exempt individuals. IRS VITA/TCE volunteers are considered exempt if they meet all the above requirements to obtain at least 14 hours of continuing education credit through the VITA Program and obtain an additional one hour of ethics training from an IRS Approved Provider.

**Record of Completion**

After completing the required continuing education requirements and renewal of PTIN for the upcoming year, volunteers will receive an email from TaxPro_PTIN@irs.gov with instructions on how to elect to participate and receive their record of completion in the online secure mailbox. After notification that they qualify, volunteers must sign the Circular 230 Agreement in their PTIN account and the AFSP-Record of Completion will be viewable/printable from their secure mailbox in the PTIN system.

Chapter 6: Partner Program Resources

Chapter 6-1: Product Ordering

Introduction

SPEC Products, Systems, & Analysis (PS&A) group develops training products to assist you in supporting our community filing season efforts. These products assist in preparing accurate returns and in effectively communicating the IRS’s tax law messages. Media and Publications print products and coordinate the delivery of these products.

Required SPEC Products for Your Site

Administrative Products

- Form 6729-P, Partner Return Review Sheet
- Form 13206, SPEC Volunteer Assistance Summary Report
- Form 13533, VITA/TCE Partner Sponsor Agreement
- Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement
- Form 13715, SPEC Volunteer Site Information Sheet
- Publication 1084, VITA/TCE Volunteer Site Coordinator Handbook
- Publication 4053 (EN/SP), Your Civil Rights are Protected (poster; available in multiple languages)
- Publication 4134, Low Income Taxpayer Clinic List (4134-SP in Spanish)
- Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights – A Public Trust
- Publication 4600, Safeguarding Taxpayer Information (brochure)
- Publication 4836, VITA/TCE Free Tax Programs (VolTax poster in English & Spanish)
- Publication 5166, IRS Volunteer Quality Site Requirements

Preparation & Filing Products

- Form 13614-C, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Sheet (available in multiple languages)
- Form 14446, Virtual VITA/TCE Taxpayer Consent (available in multiple languages)
- Publication 17, Your Federal Income Tax for Individuals
- Publication 4012, VITA/TCE Volunteer Resource Guide

SPEC Product Ordering Background

Products needed for the upcoming filing season are projected each summer. These estimates are the basis for determining the number of each type of product that will be printed in the fall for preparation of quality returns. These estimates also allow SPEC to have the necessary number of products available for fall and winter training classes. Partners participate in this process by communicating with the SPEC relationship manager the total number of volunteers expected for the upcoming filing season.
Orders are placed through the Computer Assisted Publishing System (CAPS). These orders are then electronically submitted to our print and fulfillment vendors for shipping.

Once the materials have been printed, they are shipped to the volunteers directly from the shipping warehouse. Shipping usually takes place in late November or early December.

Process for Ordering Printed Products for the 2020 Filing Season

There are three ways to order training products:

- Electronic Form 2333-V, Order for VITA/TCE Program
- Request through SPEC relationship manager
- VITA Pre-Populated Spreadsheet

Ordering Method #1: Electronic Form 2333-V (preferred)
In September/October, an e-mail containing a PDF Form 2333-V, Order for VITA/TCE Program, is sent to each VITA program account containing a valid e-mail address. The Form 2333-V is pre-populated with your contact and account information.

Once you receive the order form, review and update your contact information as necessary. Then enter order quantities on the order form and save a copy of the order on your computer. Next, e-mail the completed order form to the virtual mailbox for processing: pdf.orders@eforms.enterprise.irs.gov.

If the order form submitted contained errors, you will receive an error notification explaining why your order was rejected and what information needs to be corrected. If the order form does not contain errors, the partner will receive an order acknowledgement.

Once approved by your SPEC relationship manager in CAPS, the order is forwarded for fulfillment.

Note: Notify your SPEC relationship manager if your product order is a significant increase or decrease when compared to your prior year order.

If the order form is lost or misplaced, your SPEC relationship manager can email Form 2333-V again to the partner.

IMPORTANT: Never share your electronic Form 2333-V. The electronic form encodes the account number on the PDF file and the address information will update the embedded account number.

Example: Bob receives his electronic Form 2333-V from the M&P office in October and promptly fills it out and sends it in the same day. Mary is a new volunteer and did not receive a Form 2333-V. To help Mary out, Bob sends her a copy of his blank Form 2333-V so she can place an order. Mary fills it out with her name and address information and sends it in the PDF. Weeks go by and Bob never receives his materials. Meanwhile, Mary received double of everything.

What happened? Bob’s order and Mary’s order were sent to Mary since Mary’s address was the last address associated with the account. To prevent this, please make sure you work with your SPEC relationship manager for new volunteers or for volunteers that do not receive an automated Form 2333-V and NEVER share your Form 2333-V.

Ordering Method #2: Request through a SPEC relationship manager
Contact your SPEC Relationship Manager to manually input an order into CAPS. Please provide the products you need as well as the quantity requested and the name and address of the recipient. SPEC relationship managers can also send you a replacement electronic 2333-V order form as well.
**Ordering Method #3:** VITA Pre-Populated Spreadsheet

The pre-populated spreadsheet is used to save time inputting existing account information for those regional coordinators servicing a large population of volunteers. You may order any of the products listed on the spreadsheet. The pre-populated spreadsheet and instructions can be sent to you by your SPEC relationship manager.

![Spreadsheet Image]

Note: Product availability may vary from year to year.

You can customize the spreadsheet by deleting unnecessary accounts. **However, do not add or delete columns.** If new accounts need to be added to the pre-populated spreadsheet, add the account information after the pre-populated information. The account number field should be left blank, and an account number will automatically be generated when received. Confirm with your SPEC relationship manager that the individual does not already have an existing account.

After you complete the spreadsheet, e-mail it to the virtual mailbox, **pdf.orders@eforms.enterprise.irs.gov**. If the spreadsheet submitted contained errors, you will receive an error notification e-mail.

**Troubleshooting Orders**

If you have placed an order for materials and you have not received it according to the Shipping Schedule, please contact your SPEC relationship manager via e-mail to see if the order was placed. Additionally, you can contact the ordering distribution department directly at **vita.administrator@irs.gov**. When sending messages to the ordering distribution department e-mail address, be sure to include your account number (if known) and copy your SPEC relationship manager.

Note: **ONLY** issues related to troubleshooting orders should be sent to the ordering distribution department e-mail address **vita.administrator@irs.gov**.

**Training Resources**

**Publication 4012, VITA/TCE Volunteer Resource Guide**

Publication 4012 is a training tool and site reference guide for the VITA/TCE Programs. It conveys tax law in the form of interview tips, narratives, flow charts, diagrams, charts, and graphs within the scope of the VITA/TCE Programs.

Note: An electronic copy of Publication 4012 in TaxSlayer meets the VITA requirement for having the reference material available at the site.

**Availability:** Paper or electronic.
Publication 4491, *VITA/TCE Training Guide*

Publication 4491 is the training guide for the instructor and student participants in the VITA/TCE Programs. It contains four courses:

- Basic
- Advanced
- International
- Military

The electronic version of these courses is also on Link and Learn Taxes.

**Availability:** Electronic only.

**Publication 4491-X, VITA/TCE Training Supplement**


The content should be included in VITA/TCE training prior to individuals assisting taxpayers with issues covered in the supplement, if applicable.

**Availability:** Electronic only.

**Form 2333-V, Order for VITA/TCE Program**

Annually, Form 2333-V is pre-populated from the CAPS program and e-mailed to you to order VITA/TCE material for training and site assistance. After completing the form, you should return it to the CAPS system via e-mail as explained above.

The blank version of the Form 2333-V may ONLY be used to request items for manual input to CAPS by a SPEC relationship manager. The blank version of the form should not be submitted to the automated e-mail address since it does not include the special encoding necessary to automate the form for processing.

**Summary of 2021 Product Updates**

**Paper Products for the 2021 Filing Season include:**

- Publication 4836 (EN/SP), VITA/TCE Free Tax Programs - English & Spanish (VolTax Poster) included with Publication 4012, to allow volunteers to post at their sites.
- Publication 4012, Volunteer Resource Guide
- Publication 4011, Foreign Student and Scholar Volunteer Resource Guide
- Publication 4695 (PR), VITA/TCE Puerto Rico Volunteer Test
- Publication 4696 (PR), VITA/TCE Puerto Rico Resource Guide
- Form 6744, Volunteer Assistor’s Test/Retest
• Form 13614-C (English & Spanish), Intake/Interview & Quality Review Sheet
• Form 13614-NR, Nonresident Alien Intake and Interview Sheet*
• Publication 730, Important Tax Records Envelope (VITA/TCE)
• Publication 3676-A (EN/SP), VITA/TCE Site Location Poster (EN/SP)
• Publication 5055, Facilitated Self-Assistance (FSA) Tabletop Sign

Note: Obtain Publication 730 from your SPEC Relationship Manager.

Electronic only publications are:

• Publication 17, Your Federal Income Tax for Individuals
• Publication 4491, VITA/TCE Training Guide
• Publication 4491-X, VITA/TCE Training Supplement
• Publication 4961, Volunteer Standards of Conduct (Ethics)
• Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights – A Public Trust
• Publication 4942, VITA/TCE Online Specialty Course Health Savings Account (HSA)

Note: Our ordering system, CAPS, will shut down at close of business on Friday, July 31, 2020, for annual system upgrades. CAPS will not be operational to take orders until October 2020. The automated PDF with pre-populated Form 2333-V, Order for VITA/TCE Program, will be sent in September 2020.

Please communicate any address changes before September 1, 2020, to your SPEC relationship manager.
Chapter 6-2: Web Tools and Resources

Introduction

Partners, coordinators and volunteers participating in the VITA/TCE programs can access a wide array of information to help with day-to-day operations at the sites by visiting various web pages available on IRS.gov.

SPEC is continuously striving to ensure that information for operating sites is easily accessible. As SPEC continues to transition from printed products to electronic products, it is essential that all site coordinators, partners and volunteers are aware of the available resources.

Partner and Volunteer Resource Center

The Partner and Volunteer Resource Center contains links to information that will assist VITA/TCE partners with operating their free tax preparation programs. Topics include quality, tax preparation, scope, training, tax outreach, online tools, and tips. Partners can also send comments, suggestions or other feedback to SPEC via the provided link.

Become an IRS Partner to Help in Your Community

The Become an IRS Partner to Help in Your Community site provides information about becoming a partner with the VITA/TCE Programs. If you know of an organization that may be interested in making a difference in the community by partnering with the IRS, please feel free to share this information. They can submit their interest directly via the VITA/TCE Volunteer and Partner Signup. Free tax preparation not only assists with tax benefits but can also offer stronger financial stability for people and the communities in which they live. Individuals can also sign up to become certified VITA/TCE volunteers, which is the starting point for “People Helping People.”

Site Coordinator Corner

The Site Coordinator Corner contains critical information that site coordinators need to successfully operate VITA/TCE sites. Site coordinators should check this site often to review updated materials and information. Links on this site connect to the latest forms and publications. SPEC-issued fact sheets and other documents are generally posted and updated as soon as changes occur to their content. This site contains links to:

- Partner Best Practices
- ePublications
- Quality requirements, results, and alerts
- IRS forms/publications
- Fact sheets on a variety of topics
- Civil Rights Units Advisories

Subscribe to the IRS Outreach Connection

The IRS Outreach Connection is an online center with content and products that can be used in your own communication vehicles. As a subscriber, you will have access to ready-to-use articles for print publications and websites. This is free news you can use each month, targeted by time of year, to coincide with what your customers, employees, and volunteers need to know. New items are added to the IRS Outreach Connection each month. In addition to drop-in
articles, the page also includes links to helpful tools, publications and videos. You can submit suggestions for topics to us at partner@irs.gov.

**Volunteer Alerts**

Volunteer Tax Alerts (VTA) are issued as needed to clarify certain tax law issues throughout the filing season.

Quality Site Requirement Alerts (QSRA) are issued as needed to clarify SPEC procedures related to Quality Site Requirements.

These alerts are available at IRS.gov using keyword search “Quality and Tax Alerts for IRS Volunteer Programs.”

You can also access these alerts via:

- Site Coordinator Corner
- TaxSlayer VITA blog
- Gov Delivery System. The alerts will be emailed to you as they are released. If you do not receive these alerts via email, please contact your SPEC relationship manager.

**Taxpayer Advocate Service**

The Taxpayer Advocate Service is Here to Help You

What is the Taxpayer Advocate Service?

The Taxpayer Advocate Service (TAS) is an *independent* organization within the Internal Revenue Service that helps taxpayers and protects taxpayer rights. Our job is to ensure that every taxpayer is treated fairly and that you know and understand your rights under the Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

What can TAS do for you?

We can help you resolve problems that you can’t resolve with the IRS. And our service is free. If you qualify for our assistance, you will be assigned to one advocate who will work with you throughout the process and will do everything possible to resolve your issue. TAS can help you if:

- Your problem is causing financial difficulty for you, your family, or your business.
- You face (or your business is facing) an immediate threat of adverse action.
- You’ve tried repeatedly to contact the IRS, but no one has responded, or the IRS hasn’t responded by the date promised.

How can you reach us?

We have offices in every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Your local advocate’s number is at www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/contact us, and in your local directory. You can also call us at 1-877-777-4778.

How can you learn about your taxpayer rights?
The Taxpayer Bill of Rights describes ten basic rights that all taxpayers have when dealing with the IRS. Our Tax Toolkit at www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov can help you understand what these rights mean to you and how they apply. These are your rights. Know them. Use them.

How else does the Taxpayer Advocate Service help taxpayers?

TAS works to resolve large-scale problems that affect many taxpayers. If you know of one of these broad issues, please report it to us at www.irs.gov/sams.

**Low Income Tax Clinics**

Low Income Taxpayer Clinics (LITCs) are independent from the IRS. LITCs are organizations that represent and advocate for taxpayers who have problems with the IRS. Taxpayers whose incomes are below a certain level may be eligible for assistance (generally not to exceed 250% of the federal poverty level). Up to 10% of the cases accepted by the LITC may include taxpayers who have income above 250% of poverty. For this reason, it is often best to refer a taxpayer and allow the LITC clinic to make the eligibility determination.

LITCs assist individual taxpayers with a variety of federal tax issues. For example,

- making payments,
- helping request collection alternatives with the IRS for unpaid taxes,
- helping provide needed documentation to qualify for tax exemptions and credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),
- obtaining tax refunds that were stolen due to identity theft,
- and appealing IRS decisions.

Individual taxpayers include wage-earners, self-employed taxpayers and those with an individual tax debt even if related to operation of a business. LITCs may also help taxpayers who have both a federal tax dispute and related state and local tax disputes. In addition, clinics can provide information about taxpayer rights and responsibilities in different languages for individuals who speak English as a second language. LITC tax professionals offer services for free or a small fee.

To locate the closest LITC or learn more about LITCs:

- see the LITC page at http://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/litcmap,
- download IRS Publication 4134, Low Income Taxpayer Clinic List, at www.irs.gov,
- or call 1-800-829-3676.

Note: Sites may order printed copies of Publication 4134 to have on hand.

Contact your local LITC to find ways to partner together on special referral protocol, joint outreach or education. Sites can also request copies of local LITC brochures or business cards.
Chapter 6-3: Outreach Delivery

Introduction

SPEC serves as a channel to help the IRS deliver critical tax information and education to individual taxpayers. Outreach performed directly or through SPEC partners increases public awareness about key tax law topics and available options. SPEC collaborates with others in the IRS to disseminate outreach materials and products to support key tax topics.

Outreach Materials

The IRS offers electronic communication materials to reach customers. Partners can use the information to educate customers, employees and volunteers about any of the provided topics.

Partner Role

You will receive partner e-mail messages from your SPEC relationship manager that contain IRS outreach messages. These e-mails ask for your assistance in delivering the messages to your clientele. When you receive these e-mails, we ask that you review the materials to see how the outreach message fits your communication channels.

We will ensure that you have the current products and tools available for your clientele. You will receive tools such as:

- Key messages
- Links to videos
- Social media messages
- Direct links to other key products

Partner Template Toolkit

Some IRS partners look to market their VITA/TCE sites using material that includes the IRS logo. If an IRS partner wishes to include the IRS logo on their VITA/TCE marketing materials, they must submit the request to their SPEC relationship manager for review and approval.

To assist in making the process simpler, there are ready-made templates with the IRS logo for use by SPEC partners. Partners may choose to use these templates and not worry about the expense and time involved in creating and designing their own products. Using the IRS templates will save time with faster approval and provide consistent messaging with a professional look that includes the IRS logo.

Using the templates is optional. Partners may still create and submit their own material and request use of the IRS logo, but the approval process will take more time.

IRS review and approval are required for use of the IRS logo regardless of which option is chosen below.
**IRS Logo Approval Process**

Partners using their own product design:

A partner that wishes to use their own product design and wants to include the IRS logo must submit the product(s) through their SPEC relationship manager for review and approval. This approval process can take up to three weeks.

**Partners using the Publication 5176, Partner Template Toolkit:**

*Publication 5176*, Partner Template Toolkit, includes thumbnail pictures of each available ready-made template, instructions on how to get the templates and guidelines on how to use the templates.

Partners that want to take advantage of using these toolkits may contact their SPEC relationship manager. Once a request is received from a partner, the following steps are to take place:

- The SPEC relationship manager will send the requested template(s) to the partner.
- The partner completes the template(s) and sends back to the IRS for review and approval.
- The SPEC relationship manager will coordinate appropriate review and approval.
- The approved template(s) will be sent back to the partner in a PDF format.

This approval process can take one to two weeks.

**Requesting the use of the IRS logo for a website**

If a partner wants to add the IRS logo on their webpage, a request must be sent to the IRS for review and approval. The partner is to share where and how it will be placed on the webpage.

Once the SPEC relationship manager receives all details, the review and approval process will begin. This approval process can take up to two weeks.

Note: The IRS logo placed on a partner’s website must direct users to the IRS.gov home page.

**Key Reminders:**

Approval to use the IRS template(s) or partner product with the IRS logo must be obtained annually. If any changes are made to a product after IRS approval, it must be resubmitted for review and approval.

Partners are encouraged to take a minute to review the *Publication 5176, Partner Template Toolkit*, and follow the instructions that are included if they are interested in using any of the templates.
**Social Media**

Social media is at the top of the list when trying to help people get the information they need or want on demand. The IRS realizes social media is a great resource to deliver accurate and consistent outreach to millions of people instantly. We know that partners actively use social media to promote the work of the VITA/TCE programs. We encourage all partners to continue expanding the use of social media for outreach and share the IRS key messages on a regular basis.

We also encourage partners to “follow,” “like,” “retweet” and “share” messages issued from the IRS social media accounts. IRS uses several social media platforms including Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. More information on IRS’s social media presence can be found at [IRS Social Media](#).

**Sharing Details of Outreach Activities**

Whenever you have the opportunity to share outreach materials with taxpayers or publicize tax and/or financial education/asset building events, we ask that you please provide your SPEC relationship manager with the details, so they can have an awareness of your efforts.
Chapter 7: VITA/TCE Program Policies

Chapter 7-1: Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights

Disclosure and Use of Tax Information – IRC 7216 Requirements

Introduction

Regulations under Internal Revenue Code Section (IRC) 7216, Disclosure or Use of Tax Information by Preparers of Returns, became effective January 1, 2009. The regulations updated regulations that had been substantially unchanged since the 1970s and give taxpayers greater control over their personal tax return information. The regulations became final on December 28, 2012.

The statute limits tax return preparers’ use and disclosure of information obtained during the return preparation process to activities directly related to the preparation of the return. The regulations describe how preparers, with the informed written consent of taxpayers, may use or disclose return information for other purposes. The regulations also describe specific and limited exceptions that allow a preparer to use or disclose return information without the consent of taxpayers.

Note: See the TaxSlayer User Guide and Chapter 7-2, TaxSlayer, for information on IRC 7216 consents available using TaxSlayer.

Additional References

- Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights – A Public Trust
- Section 7216 Frequently Asked Questions

Protecting taxpayer information is critical to maintaining the strong integrity and success of the VITA/TCE Programs. Absent an applicable regulatory exception, Treasury Regulation section 301.7216-3 strengthens taxpayers’ abilities to control their tax return information. In general, the regulation requires tax return preparers, including volunteer preparers, who intend to use or disclose a taxpayer’s tax return information for a purpose other than current, prior and subsequent return preparation; to obtain taxpayer consent and provide taxpayers with specific information, including who will receive their tax return information and the particular items of tax return information that will be disclosed or used.

Treasury Regulation Section 301.7216-3 provides limited circumstances when, without first obtaining consent from the taxpayer, a tax return preparer may disclose or use a taxpayer’s tax return information other than to prepare a tax return. Some of the most common circumstances in the VITA/TCE programs include:

- Compiling and using a list to solicit tax return preparation business
- Performing legal or ethical conflict reviews
- Disclosing or using certain, limited statistical compilations

Note: Under the regulations, disclosure of a statistical compilation must be anonymous as to taxpayer identities, meaning the compilation:

- Does not include any personally identifiable information, such as the taxpayer’s name, SSN/ITIN, address or other personal information
Does not disclose cells containing data from fewer than ten tax returns

**Exception:** The regulations continue to require consent to the use or disclosure of tax return information in marketing or advertising of statistical compilations containing or reflecting dollar amounts of refund, credit, or rebate, or percentages relating thereto.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Using and Disclosing Taxpayer Information:</th>
<th>Requires a Consent to Use?</th>
<th>Requires a Consent to Disclose?</th>
<th>Requires a signed paper consent(s) if volunteers are entering the PIN?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing current, prior, or subsequent year returns.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes other than preparing prior, current, or subsequent year returns.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting the number of returns (for example the number of types of returns such as Earned Income Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit) prepared, for fundraising, marketing, publicity, or other uses related to the volunteer site tax return preparation business.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting any data containing return dollar amounts for marketing or advertising or any other non-fundraising activities.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting any data containing return dollar amounts for fundraising activities.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Carry Forward Consents</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational EFIN Consents</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tax return preparers must obtain consent to use or disclose tax return information before tax return information is used or disclosed. Tax return preparation services must be provided regardless of the taxpayer’s decision on whether to agree to the use and disclosure of their data. Taxpayers who choose not to consent to the use or disclosure of their data must not be denied services; however, the services provided may be limited to tax return preparation and tax return preparers must not use or disclose their data. Each partner/volunteer organization must evaluate the uses of taxpayer information against IRC 7216 requirements to ensure compliance.

**Relational EFINS**

Sites with relational EFINS must solicit consent to “Disclose” in order to electronically file a tax return using tax preparation software. The relational EFIN process requires the tax preparation software provider to share the return data with a third party, the primary sponsor, who is required to comply with IRC Sec. 7216 regulations. Since individual taxpayer data is shared, taxpayers must consent to disclose the data. If the taxpayer does not grant consent, or no PIN and date are entered at a VITA or non-Tax-Aide TCE site, the return cannot be e-filed since the relational EFIN process shares the data with the preparing site and the primary sponsor at the point the return is acknowledged. The only way to ensure data is not shared with the primary sponsor is to stop the e-file from being processed.
**Mandatory Consents to Disclose or Use Taxpayer Information**

**Revenue Procedure 2013-14: Mandatory Consent Language**

**Revenue Procedure 2013-14** provides the language that must be included in a consent to disclose or a consent to use tax return information with respect to a Form 1040-series income tax return. A taxpayer need not sign consent to engage a tax return preparer to perform tax return preparation services if the preparer and taxpayer do not plan for the preparer to disclose or use the taxpayer’s tax return information for any purpose other than preparing a return.

**Mandatory Consents Statements**

The following statements must be included in consent, except that a tax return preparer may substitute the preparer’s name where “we” or “our” is used.

Consent to “Disclose” (such as, financial aid, establishment of a bank account, other government agency assistance or bank products) All consent to disclose tax return information must contain the following statements in the following sequence:

- Federal law requires this consent form be provided to you. Unless authorized by law, we cannot disclose your tax return information to third parties for purposes other than the preparation and filing of your tax return without your consent. If you consent to the disclosure of your tax return information, Federal law may not protect your tax return information from further use or distribution.

- You are not required to complete this form to engage our tax return preparation services. If we obtain your signature on this form by conditioning our tax return preparation services on your consent, your consent will not be valid. If you agree to the disclosure of your tax return information, your consent is valid for time that you specify. If you do not specify the duration of your consent, your consent is valid for one year from the date of signature.

Consent to “Use” (such as, financial aid, establishment of a bank account, other government agency assistance or bank products) All consents to use tax return information must contain the following statements in the following sequence:

- Federal law requires this consent form be provided to you. Unless authorized by law, we cannot use your tax return information for purposes other than the preparation and filing of your tax return without your consent.

- You are not required to complete this form to engage our tax return preparation services. If we obtain your signature on this form by conditioning our tax return preparation services on your consent, your consent will not be valid. Your consent is valid for time that you specify. If you do not specify the duration of your consent, your consent is valid for one year from the date of signature.

All consents must contain the following statement:

If you believe your tax return information has been disclosed or used improperly in a manner unauthorized by law or without your permission, you may contact the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) by telephone at 1-800-366-4484, or by email at complaints@tigta.treas.gov.

**Multiple Disclosures or Uses Within a Single Consent Form**

Treasury Regulations section 301.7216-3(c) (1) provides that a taxpayer may consent to multiple uses within the same written document or multiple disclosures within the same written document.

- Disclosure consents and use consents must be provided in separate documents.
Multiple disclosure consents and multiple use consents must provide the taxpayer with the opportunity; within the separate written document, to affirmatively select (accept/reject) each separate disclosure or use.

The taxpayer must be provided the mandatory consent language for each separate disclosure or use.

The mandatory statements need only be stated once in a multiple disclosure or multiple use consent.

**Disclosure of Entire Return**

If consent authorizes the disclosure of a copy of the taxpayer’s entire tax return or all information contained within a return, the consent must provide that the taxpayer has the ability to request a more limited disclosure of tax return information as the taxpayer may direct.

**Electronic Signature Requirements**

**Revenue Procedure 2013-14** provides specific requirements applicable to a taxpayer’s electronic signature to consent to disclose or use the taxpayer’s tax return information. All consents to disclose or use tax return information must be signed by the taxpayer through an affirmative (physical) action. A verbal consent is not an affirmative action and therefore not acceptable as a valid consent.

- For consents on paper, the taxpayer’s consent must contain the taxpayer’s handwritten signature.
- For electronic consents, a tax return preparer must obtain a taxpayer’s signature on the consent by one of the following methods. Note: Consult your software provider to determine which method(s) is/are available in your tax preparation software. Not all software providers support all methods.
  - Preparers may assign a personal identification number (PIN) that is at least 5 characters long to the taxpayer. To authorize the consent, the taxpayer may type in the pre-assigned PIN as the taxpayer’s signature authorizing the disclosure or use. The taxpayer must affirmatively (physically) enter the PIN for the electronic signature to be valid;
  - Have the taxpayer type in the taxpayer’s name and then hit “enter” to authorize the consent. The taxpayer must affirmatively (physically) type the taxpayer’s name for the electronic consent to be valid; or
  - Any other way the taxpayer affirmatively (physically) enters 5 or more characters unique to the taxpayer that the tax return preparer uses to verify the taxpayer’s identity. For example, entry of a response to a question regarding a shared secret (such as mother’s maiden name, favorite color, a significant date, etc.) could be the type of information by which the taxpayer authorizes disclosure or use of tax return information.

If the preparer is entering the consent PIN and date into the tax preparation software, the taxpayer must sign and date a paper consent form before entering the consent PIN and date into the tax preparation software. The site may give the signed paper consent form to the taxpayer or maintain at the site. Whether the signed copy is given to the taxpayer or maintained at the site, a copy of the consent in the tax preparation software with the PIN must be provided to the taxpayer for his/her records.

Note: See the TaxSlayer User Guide for information on IRC 7216 consents available using TaxSlayer.
Civil Rights Site Requirements

Introduction

In accordance with federal law and the Department of the Treasury – Internal Revenue Service policy, discrimination against taxpayers on the basis of race, color, national origin (including limited English proficiency), disability, sex (in education programs or activities), age or reprisal is prohibited in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

Taxpayers with a disability may request a reasonable accommodation and taxpayers with limited English proficiency (LEP) may request language assistance to access service.

Note: Taxpayers must not incur any cost for reasonable accommodations and language access.

Additional References

- Publication 4883, Grant Programs Resource Guide
- Protecting Taxpayer Civil Rights

Data Collection Requirements

Currently, recipients of Federal financial assistance from the Department of the Treasury are required to meet certain legal requirements relating to nondiscrimination and nondiscriminatory use of Federal funds. Those requirements include ensuring that entities receiving Federal financial assistance from the Treasury do not deny benefits or services, or otherwise discriminate based on race, color, national origin, disability, and age, or based on sex in educational programs and activities. The Department of the Treasury has an obligation to enforce nondiscrimination requirements to ensure that its Federally assisted programs and activities are administered in a nondiscriminatory manner. In order to carry out its enforcement responsibilities, the Department must obtain a signed assurance of compliance and collect and review information from recipients to determine their compliance with applicable requirements before and after providing financial assistance (see 31 CFR 22.5, 22.6 and 28 CFR 42.406).

In accordance with the Title VI regulations (see 31 CFR 22), the Department of the Treasury is authorized to request data from its recipients and those applying to receive financial assistance from the Department. Treasury will request recipients to submit a Title VI narrative describing their compliance status at the time of the application for assistance. The Department will also request recipients to submit data during post-award compliance reviews. Please note that Treasury will make available sample policies and procedures to assist recipients in completing these requests for data and will provide technical assistance directly to recipients as needed.

The purpose of the information collection is to advise recipients of their civil rights obligation; obtain an assurance of compliance from each recipient, and collect pertinent civil rights information to determine if the recipient has adequate policies and procedures in place to achieve compliance, and to determine what, if any, further action may be needed (technical assistance, training, compliance review, etc.), to ensure the recipient is in compliance and will carry out its programs and activities in a nondiscriminatory manner. Treasury will also collect civil rights related information from all primary recipients of Federal financial assistance from the Department. Primary recipients are non-federal entities that receive Federal financial assistance in the form of a grant, cooperative agreement, or other type of financial assistance directly from the Department and not through another recipient or "passthrough" entity. Please note that this information collection does not apply to sub-recipients, Federal contractors (unless the contract includes the provision of financial assistance), nor the ultimate beneficiaries of services, financial aid, or other benefits from the Department.
Many recipients already collect information, including race and national origin data, on the beneficiaries that receive tax preparation assistance. Recipients will also be required to provide information with their application for Federal financial assistance. Treasury anticipates that data, records or files that will be used to respond to the information collections are already maintained in electronic format by the recipient, so providing the information electronically will further minimize administrative burden. Treasury will also allow recipients to scan and submit documents that are not already maintained electronically. If the recipient is unable to submit their information electronically, alternative arrangements will be made to submit responses in hard copy.

Recipients can submit comments to the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Civil Rights Unit concerning data collection for civil rights compliance and enforcement purposes under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and similar statutes applicable to Federal financial assistance, by emailing edi.civil.rights.division@irs.gov.

**Posting Civil Rights and D-143 (Tax-Aide Sites)**

Information on taxpayer civil rights must be displayed or provided to taxpayers at all VITA/TCE sites at the first point of contact between the IRS certified volunteer and the taxpayer, even if a return is not completed. All VITA/TCE sites, including military sites that service civilians, are required to display a current Publication 4053 (EN/SP), Your Civil Rights are Protected (poster) or a current D-143, Tax-Aide Poster.

**Update:** In addition to the English/Spanish Publication 4053, Your Civil Rights are Protected, and the Tax-Aide D-143, *Civil Rights Poster* (Tax-Aide Spanish version available is D-15589), all VITA/TCE sites serving Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and/or Vietnamese Limited English Proficient (LEP) taxpayers must also post Publication 4053 in these various languages. These posters are electronically available at IRS.gov.

Using only Publication 730, Important Tax Records Envelope, or the Tax-Aide envelope to notify taxpayers of their civil rights is not acceptable because these products only provide information to the taxpayer who receives service. Publication 4454, Your Civil Rights Are Protected (brochure), and Publication 4053, Your Civil Rights Are Protected (poster), are available to provide taxpayers who do not receive the Publication 730 or the Tax-Aide envelope.

Tax-Aide may secure D-143 from their state coordinator. If a Tax-Aide site does not have a current D-143 displayed during a site review, the reviewer will provide them with a copy of Publication 4053 (EN/SP) to use in the interim.

**Violation of Civil Rights**

Noncompliance with civil rights can be very costly, involve lengthy court proceedings, and can include:

- Referral to the Civil Rights Unit for further investigation
- Private lawsuits
- Termination of current federal assistance
- Denial of additional federal assistance
- Termination from the VITA/TCE programs

**Providing Reasonable Accommodations**

Taxpayers with a disability may require a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in, or receive the benefits of, a program or activity supported by the IRS. An accommodation is any change made to a practice, policy, or procedure that allows persons with disabilities equal access to programs and activities.
When a taxpayer requests an accommodation, the site must determine the accommodation needed, whether it is reasonable, and if it can be provided. If a site’s representative must deny a request for a specific accommodation because it is not reasonable, discuss with the taxpayer alternative accommodations that would adequately remove the barrier to service.

Note: Disabilities are not always visible.

Site Coordinator Fact Sheets/Civil Rights Unit (CRU) Advisories covering reasonable accommodations can be found at the Site Coordinator Corner or by contacting your local SPEC relationship manager. Also, see Chapter 8: Serving Taxpayers with Disabilities, for more information.

**Providing Language Assistance**

Taxpayers with limited English proficiency (LEP) may require language assistance in order to participate in, or receive the benefits of, a program or activity supported by the IRS. Language assistance may include both oral (interpretation) and written (translation) services.

Sites must take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by persons with LEP. In determining what constitutes reasonable steps, sites should conduct an individualized assessment that balances the following four factors:

- The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered
- The frequency with which persons with LEP come into contact with the program
- The nature and importance of the service provided by the program to people’s lives
- The available resources

Using Demographic Data to Prepare for Reasonable Accommodation and Language Assistance Requests

Prior to each filing season, sites should assess the demographic makeup of their service areas so that they are prepared to respond to requests for accommodation and language assistance.

There are several sources for demographic data regarding the LEP population. A Federal Interagency website, www.lep.gov, is a primary resource for demographic information; with this information found under the demographic data tab on the website. In addition, the U.S. Census Bureau compiles American Community Survey (ACS) data you can tailor to a geographic area. The ACS demographic information is accessible at the data tab on the following link: https://www.census.gov/topics/population/language-use.html

**Civil Rights Assurance Process**

**VITA/TCE Partners**

All SPEC partners agree to comply with civil rights laws by signing Form 13533, VITA/TCE Partner Sponsor Agreement. There is only one form and one signature needed for each partner to certify that it will uphold taxpayers’ civil rights, maintain program integrity, and protect information provided by the taxpayers serviced through the VITA/TCE programs. SPEC will continue to secure and maintain Form 13533 from all partners.
Grant Partners

Grant recipients accept the assurances and certification by checking “I Agree” in Block 21 on the SF 424, Application for Federal Assistance. These assurances and certifications are also applicable to any organization that sub-awards grant funds and should be included in their contracts or memorandums of understanding when sub-awards are involved. Refer to Publication 1101, Application Package and Guidelines for Managing a TCE Program, and Exhibit 2 in Publication 4671, VITA Grant Program Overview and Application Instructions, for the “List of Assurances and Certifications.”

Financial records, supporting documents, statistical records, and all other records pertinent to an award are retained for a period of three years (3) from the final submission date for the grant cycle. Additional guidance is available in Publication 4883, Grant Programs Resource Guide for VITA Volunteer Income Tax Assistance & TCE Tax Counseling for the Elderly, or contact the IRS VITA Grant Office at Grant.Program.Office@irs.gov for more information.

Civil Rights Unit Reviews

Each year, the Civil Rights Unit (CRU) selects VITA/TCE sites for desk audits and on-site compliance reviews. The purpose of these reviews is to assess site compliance with civil rights requirements and provide assistance to address identified issues. The results of CRU reviews are discussed with the partner and SPEC headquarters.

How to Make a Civil Rights Complaint

If a taxpayer believes discrimination occurred based on race, color, national origin (including LEP), disability, sex (in education programs or activities), age or reprisal, he or she can file a complaint. Send written complaints to:

Internal Revenue Service
Civil Rights Unit
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 2413
Washington, DC 20224

For all inquiries concerning taxpayer civil rights, contact IRS at the address referenced above or e-mail edi.civil.rights.division@irs.gov
Chapter 7-2: VITA/TCE High School Program Volunteer Guidelines

Beginning with tax season 2021, high school-based programs engaging with student or minor volunteers are subject to the following volunteer guidelines for considerations for age, proof of identity, and parental/guardian permission for minor children.

- SPEC headquarters has not set a minimum age for volunteers. SPEC territories or partners may choose to implement minimum age requirements.
- Volunteers (of any age) need to pass the required certifications (including Volunteer Standards of Conduct) and must (based the Partner’s judgment) perform the essential functions of the position(s) they are assigned.
- Minor children can prepare returns but are not permitted to perform quality reviews of completed tax returns and/or volunteer as a coordinator or alternate coordinator.
- Volunteers are required to show government-issued photo identification (ID) to the coordinator prior to working at the site. Coordinators can make exceptions to use official high school identification for students volunteering at or for an official VITA/TCE High School Program.
- Form 13615, Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement - VITA/TCE Programs, now includes a signature line for parents and/or guardians, to grant permission for their minor children to volunteer in the VITA/TCE Programs. Exception: Parents and/or guardians will not be required to sign Form 13615 for their minor children if the VITA/TCE High School-based Program has an alternative consent requirement.
Chapter 7-3: Policy for IRS Employees Who Volunteer

Introduction

SPEC is committed to providing partners the policies needed to ensure they are compliant with all VITA/TCE programs’ guidelines. In doing so, partners can support their VITA/TCE sites in achieving the highest quality service. This is also conducive to having a successful filing season in a consistent, ethical manner.

IRS employees volunteer their time to provide free tax preparation for their communities. SPEC partners recognize these efforts and host end of the filing season appreciation ceremonies to acknowledge their contributions to VITA/TCE programs. Partners need to understand these guidelines for IRS employees attending VITA/TCE recognition ceremonies or other partner sponsored events.

Ethic Rules for SPEC Partners providing Oversight in VITA/TCE Programs

The Department of the Treasury ethics rules prohibits IRS employees from engaging in the preparation of tax returns for compensation, gift, or favor. IRS employee volunteer efforts must remain 100% uncompensated.

IRS employees must reject any compensation, gift or favor. If they do not reject these items, the IRS employee must reimburse the partner for any items provided to them as recognition for their tax preparation efforts. This is regardless of the value.

For example, during a recognition ceremony, the partner provides all volunteers with a $10 gift card to thank them for their volunteer work. The IRS employees must decline any gift card, regardless of the amount. Additionally, if there is any type of raffle or drawing at the recognition event, IRS employee must decline participation or receipt of any item.

SPEC partners may include IRS employees when recognizing volunteer tax preparation efforts if whatever items provided to them are part of a group recognition celebrating the successes of the filing season.

For example, IRS employees may accept the certificate of appreciation issued to all volunteers each year by the IRS SPEC office. IRS employees may also accept a pin given to all volunteers who reach certain milestones of service. IRS employees may also enjoy the food and drinks offered at an end-of-season reception open to all volunteers if not prohibited under the general restrictions that apply to IRS employees for accepting gifts.

IRS employees may also enjoy light snacks while volunteering because these items directly support tax assistance efforts.

Allowable Reimbursement

SPEC partners may provide cash reimbursement for travel expenses to IRS employees who volunteer as coordinators. These items are not considered compensation, gift, or favor.
Chapter 7-4: Guidance for Return Preparer Misconduct at VITA/TCE Sites

Introduction

SPEC recognizes that most of our partners provide adequate oversight by ensuring volunteers exercise due diligence when preparing or quality reviewing a tax return. To ensure SPEC and our partners have the necessary tools to assist taxpayers who may be victims of Return Preparer Misconduct (RPM), SPEC partnered with the Identity Theft Victims Assistance (IDTVA) Office to formalize SPEC’s current procedures to address RPM at VITA/TCE sites. These procedures should be used to handle those limited incidents where volunteer misconduct occurs, and the taxpayer(s) is harmed by not receiving their expected refund. Additionally, this guidance is also intended to coordinate efforts between partners and IRS to ensure taxpayers are not reimbursed from multiple sources, i.e., receive a refund from both the partner and IRS.

What is Return Preparer Misconduct?

Return Preparer Misconduct generally involves the orchestrated preparation and filing of false income tax returns (in either paper or electronic form), including Form 1040X, by unscrupulous preparers who may change direct deposit information or claim, for example: inflated personal or business expenses, false deductions, fraudulent tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Periodically, the IDTVA office may receive claims from taxpayers regarding RPM at a VITA/TCE site. As appropriate, SPEC territory offices will work with partners to resolve taxpayer(s) claims. If a partner alerts a SPEC employee of potential RPM at a VITA/TCE site, the territory office will attempt to determine if the error was unintentional (a mistake) or intentional (without the taxpayer’s knowledge or consent). Partners with any questions about these procedures or about a possible RPM, should contact their SPEC relationship manager for assistance.

How Are Partners Expected to Assist Taxpayers?

When a partner becomes aware that a volunteer mistakenly entered the incorrect bank account number on a taxpayer’s return, the partner should advise the taxpayer of the following:

- The IRS assumes no responsibility for tax preparer or taxpayer error. Taxpayers are responsible for both verifying their account and routing numbers with their financial institution; and double-checking the accuracy of the numbers on the tax return prior to signing and submitting the tax return.
- If the return has not posted to IRS systems, the taxpayer can ask the IRS to stop the direct deposit refund by calling 800-829-1040, Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- If the financial institution designated on the return has accepted the deposit, the taxpayer should work directly with the financial institution to recover their funds.
- Generally, if the financial institution recovers the funds and returns them to the IRS, the IRS will send a paper refund check to the taxpayer’s last known address on file with the IRS.
- If the taxpayer has contacted the financial institution and two weeks have passed with no results, the taxpayer should be advised to file Form 3911, Taxpayer Statement Regarding Refund, with the IRS, to initiate a trace. This allows the IRS to contact the bank on the taxpayer’s behalf to attempt recovery of their refund.

If the taxpayer is unable to recover their refund or the financial institution does not return the refund to the IRS, partners are encouraged to provide relief for the taxpayer. If a volunteer mistakenly enters an incorrect bank account number on a taxpayer’s return, which ultimately results in the taxpayer not receiving the expected refund, this scenario is not considered to be return preparer misconduct.
SPEC partners should have a strong quality review process in place to validate the accuracy of the bank account information on the tax return as a part of their quality review process. The volunteer should confirm the accuracy of the bank account information with the taxpayer prior to submitting the tax return. If the quality review process validates that the information provided by the taxpayer is correctly input onto the return, the occurrence of mistakes will be very minimal.

**What Can Be Expected From the IRS?**

The IRS may provide relief to a taxpayer when, without the taxpayer’s knowledge or consent, the volunteer return preparer intentionally either altered a taxpayer’s tax return data or misdirected a portion or all of a refund. The following are a couple of scenarios that could result in the IRS providing relief to a taxpayer:

- A correct return is filed except the VITA/TCE volunteer income tax preparer intentionally misdirects the refund by placing the volunteer’s bank account on the tax return without the taxpayer’s knowledge or consent.
- Items on the tax return are inflated after the taxpayer signs Form 8879, IRS e-File Signature Authorization; the taxpayer receives the expected refund, but later becomes aware of inflated items and did not receive the inflated amount of the refund.

**How Can Partners Assist Taxpayers?**

Taxpayers who believe they are victims of preparer misconduct at VITA/TCE sites should be advised to submit the following:

- Form 14157-A, Tax Return Preparer Fraud or Misconduct Affidavit – Complete form in its entirety and sign under penalties of perjury. If the filing status is Married Filing Joint, at least one signature is required. Taxpayers may refer to page 3 of Form 14157-A for specific instructions on additional documentation requirements.
- Form 14157, Complaint: Tax Return Preparer – Complete form in its entirety. Information provided on this form will be shared with SPEC and the Return Preparer Office (RPO) to report misconduct. Taxpayers should not send a duplicate copy to RPO. Note: Section A, Return Preparer information must be completed for consideration.
- A signed copy of the taxpayer(s) tax return(s), as it was intended to be filed (if required to file).
- A copy of the tax return received from the volunteer tax preparer.
- The completed Form 14157-A should be placed on top of all required documentation and mailed as follows:
  - If the taxpayer(s) is submitting this information in response to a notice or letter received from the IRS, the taxpayer(s) should send the completed Form 14157-A, Form 14157, and other documents with a copy of the notice or letter to the address contained in that notice or letter.
  - If the taxpayer(s) did NOT receive a notice from the IRS, taxpayer(s) should send the completed Form 14157-A, Form 14157, and other documents to the IRS where the taxpayer(s) would normally mail Form 1040.
Chapter 8: Serving Taxpayers with Disabilities

Introduction

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that people with disabilities have equal access to tax preparation services provided through the VITA/TCE Programs. To help ensure equal access, you should plan by evaluating the availability of resources and considering the types of reasonable accommodations that may be requested by taxpayers needing assistance due to a disability. It is important to recognize that not all people with similar disabilities require the same accommodations, and that sometimes, flexibility and creativity will be required. As with the tax preparation process, allow your interview to guide you through the process of providing the assistance that the taxpayer needs. If there are any questions about whether to approve or deny a request for an accommodation, you can consult with the IRS Civil Rights Unit at edi.crd.ra@irs.gov. Keep in mind, taxpayers with a disability should be provided with a reasonable and/or effective alternative accommodation that provides equal access. If a request for an accommodation is denied and the denial is challenged, you must be able to show that granting the accommodation would cause an undue hardship or fundamental alteration to your program.

Additional References

- **Publication 5192**, Key Points for Communicating with People with Disabilities
- **Publication 5231**, Key Points for Communicating with People who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- **Site Coordinator Corner**, Fact Sheets and Civil Rights Unit Advisories

Serving Taxpayers with Mobility Impairments

In order to prepare your site for the upcoming season, make sure that you and your volunteers are familiar with physical barriers that would prevent taxpayers with mobility limitations from being able to navigate the site and that proactive measures are taken to remove these barriers:

- Are there steps leading into the building that would prevent wheelchair access? If so, is there an alternate entrance at street level or a ramp available for wheelchair access? If an alternate entrance is available, are there signs at the main entrance advising taxpayers of the accessible entrance?
- Are doorways wide enough to accommodate a person in a wheelchair?
- If restrooms are provided, are the restrooms handicapped accessible?
- Is there enough space around a tax preparation station to allow for wheelchair access?
- Are there tax preparation stations on the ground floor of the building, or is there elevator access to other floors?

Serving Taxpayers Who Are Blind or Low Vision

Taxpayers who are blind or who have low vision may face unique challenges when completing Form 13614-C:

- For taxpayers who can read printed materials, enlarging a copy of Form 13614-C may be the only accommodation necessary.
- For taxpayers who cannot read print, offer to have a volunteer greeter or preparer read Form 13614-C to the taxpayer and write his or her answers.
If the taxpayer has called ahead for an appointment, schedulers may offer to send the taxpayer a link to Form 13614-C within an email. Many taxpayers who are blind or low vision have access to special technology that will allow them to complete the form on their own computers.

When reviewing a tax return with a taxpayer who is blind, the reviewer should be prepared to verbally read the key information to the taxpayer, rather than pointing to the information. Consider finding a private space to read this information aloud. Taxpayers can usually offer suggestions about the best way that you can help them sign their returns.

**Serving Taxpayers Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

Taxpayers who are deaf or hard of hearing have varying ranges of language skills and abilities. Some can communicate verbally with you, while others cannot. Some can read lips, and some communicate with English Exact Sign which is a method of sign language that mimics the English language precisely as it is spoken. However, most taxpayers who are deaf or hard of hearing communicate with American Sign Language (ASL). The following items should be considered when working with taxpayers who are either deaf or hard of hearing:

- ASL is not the same as spoken English; both languages differ in both vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, do not assume that simply writing notes between yourself and the taxpayer is an acceptable means of communicating important and specific information needed to prepare a complete and accurate tax return. Writing notes, however, can be helpful for basic interactions such as obtaining taxpayer contact information and arranging for the provision of a sign language interpreter.

- Have a certified or licensed ASL interpreter (requirements may vary from state to state) available to assist taxpayers who request such an accommodation. Determine organizations in or near your community that may be able to help provide these services.

- Allow time to coordinate schedules with both the taxpayer and the Interpreter. You may not be able to immediately obtain interpreter services.

- Allow additional time when preparing returns for someone who requires an interpreter. The communication of information through a third party often means preparation time will be greater than usual.

- Taxpayers may choose to bring someone they trust to interpret for them, but this should not be your first solution. You should still offer interpreter services to taxpayers because taxpayers may not want family members or friends to know their personal tax information. It is their right to expect the same level of privacy and confidentiality to which any taxpayer would be entitled through the provision of a qualified interpreter.

- The taxpayer should be able to see the interpreter always. Determine the best place to accommodate the tax preparer, the taxpayer, and the interpreter comfortably.

- Speak directly to the taxpayer, not to the interpreter. For instance, it is not appropriate to ask the interpreter, "Can you ask him if he brought a blank check so we can enter his bank information for direct deposit?" Instead, ask the taxpayer, "Did you bring a blank check so we can enter your bank information for direct deposit?" This can be challenging for volunteers who have not worked with an interpreter on behalf of a taxpayer.

- Provide some degree of visual privacy when preparing returns for taxpayers who are deaf, especially when multiple sign language users are present in the same space. Sign language is visual conversation.

- Background noise can be distracting and make it difficult for a taxpayer who is hard of hearing to understand what you say. When possible, provide a quiet private space to maximize comprehension and minimize confusion.

- When speaking to taxpayers who are hard of hearing, avoid covering your mouth or looking away. These taxpayers may be relying, in part, on reading lips to receive the information you are presenting. Turning away from them can affect their ability to do such.

- Use a consistent volume when speaking to taxpayers who are hard of hearing.
Helpful Suggestions in Obtaining Interpreters

- Contact the university near you that teaches sign language and ask for a graduate student or an experienced student volunteer. (Many schools are looking to partner with organizations so that their senior level students have the opportunity to get credit hours for volunteer work).

- Contact a partner with a local organization whose mission is to establish and maintain a network of services for the deaf, hard-of-hearing, late deafened (hearing loss occurring after childhood), and deaf-blind.

- SPEC partners that receive federal funded grants represent less about 10% of our total partners so the cost for paying for interpreter services may not be reasonable for a non-grant funded VITA partner depending on the circumstances. However, some have processes in place, but this may result in re-scheduling an appointment with the taxpayer to meet with the interpreter. Even grant funded partners may have to re-schedule an appointment for providing these services because interpreters may not be at the site full time.

Note: These interpreters may or may not be certified.

American Sign Language Video Resources

SPEC partnerships with the National Disability Institute and National Association of the Deaf, identified the need to provide more information regarding free tax preparation services for deaf and hard of hearing taxpayers who use ASL as their primary language. SPEC has created a series of ASL videos describing the return preparation process available at VITA/TCE sites. These videos benefit volunteers who serve as ASL interpreters and are useful for anyone wanting to become more familiar with the tax preparation process.

The videos can be found on IRS.gov at American Sign Language (ASL) Videos.
Chapter 9: E-Services and e-Filing

Chapter 9-1: E-Services and EFIN Application

Introduction

To protect the integrity of the Volunteer Return Preparation Program, SPEC has procedures for processing e-file applications. Applications to become an IRS e-file provider must be submitted online using the IRS e-file Application process. Partners must designate individuals that they desire to become Responsible Officials for the Electronic Filing Identification Number (EFIN). Responsible Officials must first register in E-Services, prior to submitting the e-file application electronically. Applications can be started and saved in progress, and modifications to a site’s application can be made quickly and easily without restarting the process.

Additional References

• Publication 3112, IRS e-file Application and Participation

Registering for E-Services

Everyone listed as a Responsible Official must register for E-Services prior to submitting the e-file application electronically. The Responsible Official must use E-Services to gain access to the IRS Registered User Portal (RUP) through the IRS.gov website. Each partner should have at least two Responsible Officials with access to the process.

Note: Any Responsible Official departing the VITA/TCE Programs must ensure that a new Responsible Official is in place in E-Services, before departure.

Below are the steps to navigate the online E-Services process:

• Begin at IRS.gov
• Click on the “Tax Pros” tab located at the top right of the home page
• Click on the “Access E-Services” link in the blue box in the graphic
• Select “E-file Provider Services” under E-Services Applications
• Click on “Access e-file Application”
• Select “Login” if already registered in E-Services or “Create Account” if the customer has not registered for E-Services

The E-Services process involves collecting personal data for the sole purpose of authenticating the user’s identity, so no one else can access your IRS online account. It takes about 15 minutes to register. The required elements for the registration processes are:

• Legal name (verified with IRS & Social Security Administration [SSA] records)
• Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN)
• Tax filing status and mailing address
• Email address
• Date of birth (verified with SSA records)
• One financial account number linked to your name:
  • Credit card – last 8 digits (no American Express, debit or corporate cards) or
  • Student loan – (Enter the student loan account number provided on your statement. The account number may
    contain both numbers and letters. Do not include any symbols.) or
  • Mortgage or home equity loan or
  • Home equity line of credit (HELOC) or
  • Auto loan
• Mobile phone linked to your name (for faster registration) or ability to receive an activation code by mail
• Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) [Is taken from either the current year or prior year filed tax return and verified from IRS
  records]
• Username (Create a preferred username) Read the rules for selecting a username
• Password and Personal Identification Number (Create a unique password and 5-digit numeric PIN) Read the helpful
  hints on selecting a secure, unique password and PIN
• A private, personal fact that you may use later to retrieve a forgotten Username
• Home mailing address (If you have moved since you last communicated with the IRS, please update the information
  when registering as it will be verified from IRS records)

To avoid problems, the person registering should write down the Password, Username, and PIN exactly as created. The
PIN is the individual’s legal electronic signature for the e-file application.

Registering for E-Services is a two-step process:

1. A one-time automated process which cannot be completed without the Username, password, and PIN. The user should
   have this information available before continuing the registration process. For security purposes, a confirmation code is
   sent via postal mail to the user’s home address within seven to ten days.

2. The confirmation process occurs within 28 days of receiving the confirmation code; the Responsible Official must log
   back into E-Services and select the “Confirm Registration” link to complete the registration process.

If any user enters an incorrect Username, Password, PIN or attempts to confirm more than twice incorrectly, on the third
failed attempt they will be locked out.

Note: The user is not a registered user until the registration is confirmed.

After entering the confirmation code, the applicant will receive the “Registration Success” page. This means the
registration process is complete. The Responsible Official must close the browser to allow the system to update the
confirmation. Open a new browser and go to “Already Registered, Login” link. The Login page should not be saved as a
favorite because the Registration URL (or link) is updated periodically for security purposes and will be invalid if saved as
a favorite.

Once registration is confirmed, the user will have access to ESAM application. If a partner’s Responsible Official is having
difficulty with the application process, E-Services Registration, or Confirmation process, he/she may always call the e-
Help Desk at 1-866-255-0654.
To access the IRS E-Services application:

- Log in to E-Services using your login and password
- After logging into e-file application, “Select Organization” is the first page you see. Select individual or the specific application you want and then continue. If user is associated with more than 20 applications, he/she will be required to go to the ESAM landing page to search for the specific application.
- Once on ESAM Application Landing Page:
  - Select “New Application” to start a new application or
  - Select ‘View/Edit” icon to view or update the application

**IRS e-file Application Completion**

Before the partner’s Responsible Official can submit the e-file application, the site must obtain a Site Identification Number (SIDN) from their local SPEC office. Tax-Aide sites will obtain SIDNs from their state Admin Specialist. Once the SIDN is obtained, the application can be completed.

Applications can be started and saved in progress and modifications to the applications can be made quickly and easily without restarting the process. A tracking number will be assigned to the application once saved.

The following information is required when completing a new application:

- Identify as “New Application”
- Select “Not Required” for What Tax ID firm operates under
- Volunteer Organization selects “Not Required” for the “Tax ID” selection
- Business Structure should be “Volunteer Organization”
- Firm name should be generic so users should input “SPEC Volunteer Program”.
- “Doing Business As” (DBA) should be the name of the site followed by the Site Identification Number (SIDN)
- Business Phone and Fax Number should be the name/phone number of the Responsible Official
- Physical Address should be the site address
- Mailing Address should be the address of the Responsible Official or the address the firms wants correspondence sent to a specific address other than the physical address. (Select the radio button that allows you to add a mailing address)
- Year-Round Address and Year-Round Phone Number (Year-round address is used if site is not open for 12 months.)
- Provider Option select “Electronic Return Originator,” Service Type select “Not-For-Profit,” and for Business Activity it should be “Not-For-Profit”
- Input the SIDN
- Forms are no longer selectable by the provider and all forms displayed are available for the provider option selected.
- Responsible Official information needs to be completed. (Select the Add button to add multiple Responsible Officials.) Remember, there should be two (2) Responsible Officials on each application.
• A Responsible Official is an individual with authority over the e-file operation at a location. Each Responsible Official must be a “U.S. Citizen” and be at least 18 years of age. Enter a “yes” in this field when completing the Responsible Official information.

• Responsible Official Authorities are set by default – View, Update and Add, Delete & Change, but can be altered if needed.

• Add Primary Contact and Alternate Contacts

• Alternate contact/phone number should be your SPEC Relationship Manager and another key volunteer for your site. (Select the Add button to add multiple Alternate contacts)

• “Not-For-Profit” service Type do not need “to add” the Principal” or “Principal Consent” role.

• Primary contacts cannot be edited in this system. To change the primary contact users must select “ADD” and this will replace the name that is currently in the system.

• After you have completed the required pages in the IRS e-file Application, as described above, your application is ready to be submitted. Enter your E-Services Personal Identification Number (PIN) on the Application Submission and Completion page. This PIN is the one you selected during E-Services Registration. If any information is left blank or entered incorrectly the errors will be listed on Application Submission page.

• Once a correctly completed IRS e-file Application is submitted, an acknowledgment including a tracking number appears advising application processing will begin. After the process is complete, the Responsible Official should print the tracking number. Tracking numbers can be used to search and check the status of a submitted e-file application. Or after 48 hours, the Responsible Official may login to their E-services account and all EFINs associated with their name should be listed, including the new EFIN(s). Also, the Responsible Official will receive a letter in 14 days showing the new EFIN(s) assigned.

**Application Types**

There are three e-file application types:

1. **New**: A partner will need to complete a new e-file application if the partner is opening a new site or if the is partner is new to the VITA/TCE Programs.

2. **Revised**: A partner would need to revise an e-file application if any information on an EFIN account has changed. Changes must be submitted within 30 days of any change. Changes can be made by the Responsible Official online. Partners are strongly encouraged to have at least two Responsible Officials. Anyone who is listed on the application as the Responsible Official can log in through E-Services and make any updates to the application, including adding an additional Responsible Official. Each Responsible Official must individually register for E-Services before they can be added to an existing e-file application.

3. **Reapply**: Once the EFIN Status is updated to Dropped and the partner wishes to continue in the IRS e-file program, the Responsible Official must reapply and will receive a new EFIN.

The EFIN status can be Active, Inactive, or Dropped. Below are reasons why an EFIN will be placed in Inactive status and later possibly Dropped.

Every year there is an “EFIN Cleanup” project where any EFIN which has not been used to prepare/submit at least one electronically filed return in two years is systemically inactivated. The EFIN will be placed in “inactive” status and their provider options are dropped. Letter 3250-C, ERO Deactivation Letter, will be mailed to each mailing address on record notifying the site that the EFIN is no longer active due to non-use. If they wish to have the EFIN to remain active, they must contact the e-Help Desk within 30 days.
The EFIN cleanup begins in May of each year and the drop date is sometime in the fall (which is why you frequently see EFINs dropped in November). It is very critical to monitor all sites continuously, especially from November thru January to ensure the EFIN has not been dropped.

When information is received that a person is deceased, an analysis is done for any associated EFINs. Deceased individuals listed on the application must be removed and replaced within 30 days. After that the EFIN will be placed in “inactive” status.

If a letter is returned by the postal service as undeliverable or there is no response, an e-Help Support ticket is created and forwarded to SPEC Headquarters requesting the correct year-round address and alternate contact information. The EFIN is also placed in “inactive” status until the information is corrected.

If no response is received within the 30-day timeframe, the EFIN is systemically dropped (usually 60 days later).

A “Dropped” EFIN cannot be reactivated and cannot be updated or used again by the Partner. Dropped EFINs may be reassigned systemically to another provider after 12 months.

**SPEC Territory Office Responsibility**

Partners may contact their SPEC Territory Office regarding:

- Associating a Responsible Official with an existing EFIN application: If a volunteer has an EFIN but is not registered in E-Services, they will need to register for E-Services and then provide their SPEC relationship manager with the following information: Name, Position Title, U.S. Citizen Status, Social Security Number, Date of Birth, and E-mail address.

- Adding a second Responsible Official to an existing EFIN application: If a volunteer has an EFIN and is registered for E-Services, but wants to add a secondary Responsible Official, the secondary Responsible Official needs to register for E-Services and then provide their SPEC relationship manager with the following information: Name, Position Title, U.S. Citizen Status, Social Security Number, Date of Birth, and E-mail address.

- Deleting a Responsible Official from an existing EFIN application: If the Responsible Official for an existing EFIN application is no longer working in the VITA/TCE Programs, the partner will need to find a replacement Responsible Official, have the Responsible Official register for E-Services, and then provide their SPEC relationship manager with the following information: Name, Position Title, U.S. Citizen Status, Social Security Number, Date of Birth, and E-mail address.

Do not contact the territory office if the volunteer is having problems registering for E-Services. Instead, the volunteer should contact the e-Help desk for assistance at 1-866-255-0654.

**Verifying the New e-file Application**

Once the site is accepted into the e-file program, the partner is responsible for providing their SPEC relationship manager with the EFIN to update the SPEC database.

**Revising the e-file Application**

Partners and SPEC employees share the responsibility for revising and updating the e-file application within 30 days of changes to the information on their current application.

- Firm/Site name
- Physical Address
- Mailing Address
- Year-Round Address
- Telephone numbers
- e-mail addresses
- Contact persons
- Responsible Official (remove is no longer with the site or deceased)
- Authorized Users

Note: When adding new Responsible Officials to an existing application, the application status will move to Resubmission Required. The application must be resubmitted within 45 days or the application will delete. Remember to delegate the proper authorities of work to be performed by the RO.

**Exception:** When a new application is needed:

- A new site
- Previously suspended partner/site from the VITA/TCE Programs
- No EFIN activity for two years

Note: Partners do not need to reapply for an EFIN each year if they continue to e-file returns.

**Permanently Inactive EFIN**

There are some situations when a site will be permanently inactive and the VITA/TCE EFIN needs to be deactivated, such as:

- Refusal to adhere to SPEC Quality Site Requirements.
- Site closed and will not be operational in the future.
- Unethical practices in return preparation including failure to comply with:
  - Publication 3112, IRS e-file Application and Participation
  - Publication 1345, Handbook for Authorized IRS e-file Providers of Individual Income Tax Returns
- Significant unresolved complaints about authorized e-file volunteer return preparation site(s).
- Failure to cooperate with SPEC oversight efforts.

**Acceptance to the e-file Program**

Once the IRS receives your application to become an Electronic Return Originator (ERO), we will review each application and make a determination of acceptance. See Publication 3112, IRS e-file Application and Participation, for information on the review process and acceptance to participate.
Once accepted into the IRS e-file program, an Electronic Filing Identification Number (EFIN) will be assigned to the responsible official. It is the responsibility of all participants to protect this identification number. It is your key to e-file. Your role as an ERO includes but is not limited to:

- Electronically sending the return to a transmitter that will transmit the return to the IRS. Currently TaxSlayer, LLC, the developer of TaxSlayer Software, serves as the transmitter for all volunteer sites using IRS provided software.
- Timely originating the electronic submission of returns.
- Ensuring that any rejects are properly corrected in a timely manner.
- Submitting any required supporting paper documentation to the IRS.
- Providing copies to taxpayers.
- Retaining records and making records available to the IRS.
- Accepting returns only from taxpayers and Authorized IRS e-file Providers.

**Sanctioning**

Violations of the IRS e-file requirements may result in a warning or the sanctioning of an ERO. The failure of an ERO to comply with any requirement or provision outlined in Publication 3112, IRS e-file Application and Participation, or Publication 1345, IRS e-file Handbook for Authorized IRS e-file Providers of Individual Income Tax Returns, or Rev Procedure 2007-40 (updated information for Publication 1345), could result in sanctioning by the IRS. Sanctioning may be a written reprimand, suspension or expulsion from participation from the IRS e-file program, or other sanctions depending on the seriousness of infractions. For more information, refer to Publication 3112.

Additionally, Volunteer EROs, identified on E-Services EFIN application, for a VITA/TCE EFIN, must comply with the SPEC Quality Site Requirements (See Chapter 2 for a list of the Quality Site Requirements). Failure to comply with the Quality Site Requirements could result in removal from the IRS SPEC volunteer e-file program and suspension of the EFIN.

**IRS Quick Alerts**

Quick Alerts is a free IRS online service that disseminates e-file messages to all subscribers. The messages keep the subscriber up to date on events that impact e-file Transmitters, Authorized e-file Providers and e-file Software Developers.

Why Should You Subscribe?

There are three categories that provide all around e-file information which is certain to enhance your tax season e-filing knowledge.

- Alerts – Processing delays, programming issues, changes to any filing season procedure, Participants Acceptance Testing System (PATS) changes.
- General Notifications – Seminars, Conferences, and e-file publication changes.
- General IRS e-file Service Center Messages – IRS e-file program updates, general information, service center maintenance schedules, IRS e-file Help Desk phone numbers, and more.
Chapter 9-2: TaxSlayer

Introduction

IRS provides licensed software to each volunteer return preparation site for electronic tax preparation and transmission. The current software provider is TaxSlayer.

The minimum return requirement for sites to receive tax preparation software is 50 accepted returns. Territories will use filing season 2019 production to determine if sites meet this minimum requirement. SPEC territory managers have the authority to provide software to sites not meeting the minimum requirement. Territory managers must provide a justification and plan of action to the Area Office for approval. The Area Office must grant an exception prior to ordering software for these VITA sites. SPEC Headquarters handles exceptions for Tax-Aide sites.

Additional References

- TaxSlayer VITA/TCE Springboard (for all your TaxSlayer connections, including the VITA/TCE blog, Practice Lab, and TaxSlayer Pro Online/Desktop User Guides)
- Publication 4012, Volunteer Resource Guide

Filing Season 2021 Recommended System Requirements

Pro Online

- High Speed Internet Access
- A modern Web Browser:
  - Web Browsers are programs used to access the internet, such as Google Chrome, Safari, Microsoft Edge, or Mozilla Firefox.
  - Please note that Internet Explorer and its derivatives (AOL Desktop Gold, for example) are the most likely to create problems for users.
- Adobe Reader installed on your device.
- For Windows-powered computers, Windows 8, 8.1, or 10 (not 10S) is required.

Desktop/ Contingency

TaxSlayer Pro recommends the following to run the software at Optimal Performance:

- Computer: Quad Core Processor
- Memory: 8 GB of Ram
- Disk Space: 1 GB per tax year (for desktop)
- Operating System: Windows 8.1 or 10 with the latest updates
- Removable Storage: USB 3.0 or Flash Drive for backing up data for Desktop Program
• Printer: 100% HP Compatible Laser printer
• Display: 1024 X 768 screen resolution or higher
• Internet Connection: High Speed Internet Connection
• Browser: The latest version of Microsoft Edge, Chrome, Firefox or Safari
• Software: Adobe Acrobat Reader & Microsoft .NET Framework 4.5 or Higher

Note: TaxSlayer Pro does support Windows 10 S or Windows 7.

TaxSlayer Pro will run using the following as Minimum Requirements:

• Computer: Dual Core Processor
• Memory: 4 GB of Ram
• Disk Space: 750 MB
• Operating System: Windows 8.1 with the latest updates
• Drives: 12x CDROM (For Desktop Program Installation)
• Removable Storage: USB or Flash Drive for backing up data (USB 3.0 or higher strongly recommended for Desktop Program)
• Printer: HP Compatible Inkjet Printer
• Display: 1024 X 768
• Internet Connection: High Speed Internet Connection
• Browser: The latest version of Microsoft Edge, Chrome, Firefox or Safari
• Software: Adobe Acrobat Reader & Microsoft .NET Framework 4.5 or Higher

Note: High speed Internet, such as cable and/or DSL, is preferred.

TaxSlayer Pro (Desktop) should not be installed on any computers running: Windows 95, 98, ME, NT, 2000, XP, 7 or Vista. Microsoft has ended all support for these operating systems and therefore the programming languages used to develop TaxSlayer Pro are no longer compatible with these versions of Windows. *In addition, TaxSlayer Pro (Desktop) is not compatible with Mac computers.

Microsoft will be ending all support for Internet Explorer on January 31, 2020. The programming languages used to develop TaxSlayer Pro and TaxSlayer Pro Online will no longer be compatible this browser.

**Wireless Technology**

The IRS and TaxSlayer continue to recommend partners/volunteers use wired connections when transmitting taxpayer information via the internet. If wireless technology is used, it is recommended that the site use a dedicated password protected Wi-Fi network for internet access. A site can use a wired or wireless router for their internet access. However, if they are sharing the primary internet connection with the host facility, capacity will be diminished. Where possible, the use of a dedicated internet service is recommended, this will provide the fastest internet connectivity.
The number of computers connected by a wireless router impacts the internet speed available to the site and the length of time it takes to refresh a page. The higher speed of the internet access, the more computers that will be able to access the wireless router at one time without reduction of speed.

For sites experiencing slowness, send the following information with Subject line “Speed Test” to mailto:support@vita.taxslAYERpro.com:

- SIDN
- Geographical location (city/state)
- Time of test
- Internet provider
- Connectivity – wired or wireless at the site
- Internet download/upload speed – as related to the geographical location, the end users can go to https://www.speedtest.net, enabling TaxSlayer to create a database of this information
- Number of computers at the site accessing the internet connection
- Go to a command prompt and type or copy: “tracert vita.taxslayerpro.com”

Copy and paste results into the email or use a screen capture function to gather the information.

**Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) and reCaptcha**

It is imperative that we all continue to ensure taxpayers using the services offered through the VITA/TCE programs are confident that their Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is not compromised.

Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) is a security system requiring users, such as volunteers, to confirm who they are through an authentication process, with information unknown by the user, prior to TaxSlayer allowing access to the Pro Online software. reCaptcha authentication will be required once a user has entered their password wrong two times. This process is critical in combating identity theft to protect taxpayer information. Due to the heightened awareness of personal identity theft and the growing world of cyber threats, these changes must be implemented by TaxSlayer, for its Pro Online professional web-based product. The requirements are in line with the IRS Commissioner’s Security Summit guidance and cannot be deactivated.

**MFA Requirements**

The first time a user logs into a computer or device to access TaxSlayer Pro Online, the user will be required to go through Multi-Factor Authentication. TaxSlayer provides the options of receiving a 6-digit numeric authentication code via email or text.

Additionally, Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) is required to authenticate every 15 days unless one of the following occurs:

- The first time a user logs in to a unique device.
- When a computer is re-imaged.
- Three failed login attempts in addition to reCaptcha on the second failed login attempt.
- When the “Forgot Password” feature is initiated.
Logging in with a different browser on the same computer (i.e. logging in with Chrome and then opening Edge and logging in).

Each login if your browser does not store cookies.

With many VITA/TCE sites using borrowed computers in locations such as libraries, community centers, and other public facilities, these MFA procedures will add an additional layer of protection to mitigate the risk of identity theft from cyber intrusions.

MFA is **not** required in the Practice Lab environment, TaxSlayer FSA products or for Desktop users.

**Pro Online Site Activation**

Returning sites/users will be able to use the same active login username(s) from the prior year:

- Once TaxSlayer receives the software order, sites from filing season 2020 will receive an email letting them know their filing season 2021 software order has been processed. It will not have a link to activate the site because the site is already active.
- TaxSlayer will deactivate a returning site if a software order for tax year 2020 is not received by 12/31/2020. Once the order is received, TaxSlayer will re-activate the site.
- If a returning site has a different contact name on the software order, the new contact person will need to contact TaxSlayer Customer support. TaxSlayer will generate an email with a link to provide administrative rights to the new site contact. See the TaxSlayer VITA/TCE blog for more information on email format using the following link: [https://vitablog.taxslayerpro.com/2020/01/16/pro-online-2019-new-site-administrators-reminder-2/](https://vitablog.taxslayerpro.com/2020/01/16/pro-online-2019-new-site-administrators-reminder-2/).

New sites will receive two emails with activation links:

- One email with the Site Activation Notification code, requiring the site to verify site specific information when creating an Administrator account; and
- Another email with a User Activation code that requires the contact person on the software order to create a user account for their "My Account" page.

**Security Related Features**

**Security Templates**

A security template is a listing of permissions that can be used by a user once the template is assigned to that user. Each user can only be assigned one security template. Assign the user a security template that allows them to complete their duties at the volunteer site. It is highly recommended that coordinators assign volunteers to the lowest level "ROLE" necessary for each user.

In most cases, you can use the security templates that TaxSlayer Pro Online predefines with your software. You can choose from the following six (6) predefined security templates for each user:

- ADMINISTRATOR
- SUPERUSER
When users/preparers are created, security template must be selected. If one of the predefined security templates is not enough, a site is able to create customized security templates. For a listing of what is included in the predefined security templates, search “security template definition” on the TaxSlayer blog available at: https://vitablog.taxslayerpro.com

**Preparer Setup – Security Features**

Within the Configuration Menu, there are options in the Preparer Setup screen that can enhance the security of the volunteer program. During the preparer setup or modification, one of the options is to check the box for “Can view own returns only?” If this box is checked, then that preparer will only be able to see a return they created or that has been assigned to them by the site administrator. This feature is recommended to be used for all preparers that are not part of the Quality Review process or who are not responsible for E-filing. If the preparer becomes involved in an activity at the site that requires viewing all returns, the site administrator can remove the checkmark from the box and the preparer will then have access to all returns prepared at the site.

**Office IP (Internet Protocol) Whitelist**

For added security measures, TaxSlayer Pro Online access can be restricted to IP addresses associated with a site. Users will only have access to TaxSlayer when logging in from the IP addresses that are added to the list. Instructions can be found in the TaxSlayer Pro Online User Guide. Best to be used with a static IP address.

**Carry Forward of Taxpayer Data**

Returning sites that used TaxSlayer in filing season 2020 will have carry forward data based on the returns prepared. TaxSlayer will alert the preparer a return was created last year for the primary taxpayer and carry forward data is available. This data will include the taxpayer’s (spouse if applicable):

- Name, Filing Status, taxpayer identification number (SSN/ITIN), date of birth, and phone number
- Dependents (including date of birth, SSN/ITIN, and relationship)
- W-2/W-2PR employers (employer EIN database)
- Form 1099-R (payer EIN database)
- Schedule D (Capital Loss carry forward)
- Schedule C (name, business code, and description)
- Schedule E rental information and Schedule K-1’s (payer information)
- Depreciation
- Childcare providers with dependents claimed
- Schedule B financial institutions information for Form 1099-INT/DIV
- State and local refund worksheet
- Simplified General Rule Worksheet
• IPPIN Warning (if IPPIN existed on prior year return)
• Form FEC data
• Education Credits
• Applied Refund from Previous Year
• Form 1099-MISC data
• Un-allowed Loss on Schedule E
• Return Notes

The carry forward data may not match the current information on Form 13614-C, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Sheet, provided by the taxpayer. When importing carry forward data, the volunteer **must** carefully review the imported data to ensure it matches the current Form 13614-C.

**TaxSlayer Consent Form Requirements per IRC 7216**

This section provides information about how to apply consents within the TaxSlayer tax preparation software. Taxpayers using volunteer sites will need to consent annually on whether they want their tax return information disclosed or used. Taxpayers must affirmatively consent during the return preparation process for partners/sites using or disclosing taxpayer data for purposes other than current, prior, or subsequent year tax return preparation. For a married filing joint return, both taxpayers must either grant or deny the consent (they both must agree). If the taxpayer does not sign a paper consent, then the taxpayer must enter his or her own PIN in the tax preparation software. IRC 7216 rules apply based on use or disclosure of taxpayer data for the following consents:

• Global Carry Forward
• Relational
• Use
• Disclose

**VITA/TCE Site Responsibility**

Based on IRC 7216, if the return preparer is entering the consent PIN and date into the tax preparation software, the taxpayer must sign and date a paper consent form before the consent PIN and date can be entered.

Many taxpayers do not want to enter their own PIN; therefore, a paper consent is required for sites when the return preparer is entering the consent PIN on behalf of the taxpayer.

There are two options a site can use for taxpayers to sign a consent:

1. Electronic only – Taxpayer reviews the consent on the computer and enter his or her own PIN in the tax preparation software.
2. Paper and electronic – The preparer enters the PIN on behalf of the taxpayer into the tax preparation software. If the preparer is entering the consent PIN and date into the tax preparation software, the taxpayer must sign and date a paper consent form before the preparer enters the PIN and date into the software.
Retention Requirement

The site may give the signed paper consent form to the taxpayer or maintain it at the site. Whether the signed copy is given to the taxpayer or maintained at the site, a copy of the consent in the electronic tax preparation software with the PIN must be provided to the taxpayer for his/her records.

Global Carry Forward

SPEC and TaxSlayer agreed to implement global carry forward of taxpayer information for all VITA/TCE tax preparation sites beginning with Filing Season 2018. Taxpayers must affirmatively consent during the return preparation process to allow their information to be available for global carry forward in the subsequent tax year. A taxpayer who consents will be able to visit any VITA/TCE site in the subsequent year and the site will be able to populate the return with data from the prior year.

The Global Carry Forward consent allows all tax returns prepared within one VITA/TCE site to be available to all VITA/TCE partners/sites. TaxSlayer will embed this consent into the Online software, and taxpayers must grant or deny the global sharing of their tax return data with all partners/sites. If the consent is granted, the taxpayer’s data will be available to all VITA/TCE partners/sites during subsequent filing season.

Based on the agreement with SPEC, TaxSlayer embeds the electronic version of the Global consent into all Online VITA/TCE software packages. It cannot be edited or deleted.

SPEC developed Form 15080, Consent to Disclose Tax Return Information to VITA/TCE Tax Preparation Sites, paper Global Carryforward consent. Form 15080 is printable and required if the return preparer is entering the granted consent PIN and date into the tax preparation software on the taxpayer’s behalf. Form 15080 is not needed if the taxpayer does not consent to the Global Carryforward of return data to all sites or if the taxpayer(s) enters his/her own PIN into the tax preparation software.

The English/Spanish versions of Form 13614-C, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Sheet, will include Form 15080. Form 15080 will also be added to the electronic versions of Form 13614-C in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, Creole-French, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

Relational EFIN

If the site has a Relational EFIN, the consent form is added to the software by TaxSlayer when the order is processed. This allows TaxSlayer to accept the return for filing based on the Relational EFIN consent being accepted by the taxpayer. These consents provide the site with the ability to see reporting data for all EFINs under the relational (primary) EFIN. If the consent is not granted by the taxpayer or no PIN and date is entered at a VITA or non-Tax-Aide TCE site, the return must be marked as paper and mailed to the IRS for processing and return data will be excluded from reporting at the Relational EFIN level.

If a partner has a Relational EFIN, TaxSlayer will embed this form into the tax software. Based on IRC 7216 guidelines, TaxSlayer has included the mandatory use/disclosure language on the Relational consent. It cannot be deleted or edited.

Use/Disclose

The Use and Disclose consent forms allow the site to use aggregate return data for statistical purposes and will require a consent to Use/Disclose based on IRC 7216. If data is used only for this purpose, the site will need to add these forms during setup. The site must not check the “required” box for these generic Use/Disclose forms because this makes the return appear as part of a Relational EFIN and (if consent is denied) it will cause a rejected return if electronically filed.
There will be two forms required for Use/Disclosure for non-relational EFIN. Partners/sites must add these consents during the site setup process. Name one form “Consent to Use Personal Tax Return Information” and the other “Consent to Disclose Personal Tax Return Information”. If a taxpayer denies these consents the return can still be electronically filed.

Non-Relational Denied Consents

Per IRC 7216, the taxpayer is not required to sign anything (paper or electronic) for a denied consent. If the consent is denied for a non-relational EFIN, no PIN or date is needed, and the return can be electronically filed.

Note: If the preparer marks Accept and does not enter a PIN or date, the application will generate an error message and the preparer will be required to:

- Enter the PIN and date, or
- Change to consent to Denied
- If no PIN and date is entered this consent will be considered as denied.

See Publication 4299, Privacy, Confidentiality and Civil Rights - A Public Trust, for guidance on consent forms for VITA/TCE sites.

Prior Year Software Access

TaxSlayer Pro Online and Desktop software gives sites the ability to prepare Federal, state and local individual tax returns for the previous three tax years (TY2019, TY2018 and TY 2017). Sites can electronically file federal and participating state individual tax returns for the previous two years (TY2019 and TY2018).
Chapter 9-3: Computer Loan Program

Introduction

In support of return preparation activities, SPEC provides equipment (computers and printers) to its partners and volunteers involved in the VITA/TCE Programs. By providing these resources, SPEC supports the goals of the IRS concerning tax return preparation activities by:

- Promoting electronic filing (e-file)
- Improving return accuracy; and
- Providing free tax return preparation services through IRS-certified volunteers to underserved communities, including taxpayers with low to moderate incomes, taxpayers with disabilities, elderly taxpayers, and taxpayers with limited English proficiency.

Additional References

- Publication 4473, Computer Loan Program – Welcome Package
- Publication 4390, VITA/TCE Computer Loan Program

Equipment Resource Needs

Although SPEC encourages partners to become self-sufficient, some partners are unable to obtain the technology required to electronically file tax returns. To encourage electronic preparation and transmission, SPEC has a core group of computers and printers loaned in support of VITA/TCE Programs. Your SPEC relationship manager will work with you to meet your equipment needs based on available resources.

Loaned IRS Equipment Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>June - November</th>
<th>SPEC solicits equipment orders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August - December</td>
<td>Partners submit signed Property Loan Agreements (PLA) when all equipment is received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>SPEC issues instructions to partners for return of equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April - May</td>
<td>Partners return equipment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Form 13632, Property Loan Agreement

As a condition of IRS loaned equipment, the recipient annually agrees to provide appropriate physical security by signing Form 13632, Property Loan Agreement (PLA). Appropriate physical security is always defined as being in the control of a volunteer while in use and being in a controlled, limited access (preferably) locked location when not in use.

Your local SPEC relationship manager will send you the form within two weeks of your receipt of equipment. Please verify that the equipment received matches the PLA within 20 days of receipt of the PLA. Make any needed changes to the PLA, sign and return the PLA to your local SPEC office. Be sure to store a copy of your PLA separately in case your computer is lost or stolen, and you need to provide information to the SPEC office and law enforcement.
**Equipment Use**

Equipment is loaned to support the VITA/TCE Programs. As such, use is restricted to preparation and filing of electronic tax returns and related program activities such as:

- Training and educating volunteers and taxpayers about individual’s rights and responsibilities;
- Reaching out to taxpayers to inform them of the services of the volunteer organization;
- Promoting activities to assist the volunteer organization in increasing its ability to deliver related tax matters or services without the direct involvement of the IRS; and
- Administering the activities of the volunteer operation as they relate to volunteer electronic tax return preparation and filing.

**Inappropriate Equipment Use**

Equipment may not be used for:

- Commercial purposes - One of the cornerstones of the VITA/TCE Programs is free return preparation for low-income and elderly taxpayers. No fee may be collected for volunteer services associated with return preparation.
- Games - The installation of game software is prohibited.
- Collateral, exchange or sale - While we do loan equipment for use in the VITA/TCE Programs, it remains the property of Internal Revenue Service. It may not be swapped for other equipment, sold for personal gain or used as collateral.
- Personal Use - The equipment should not be used for personal business.

**Protection of Equipment**

As a condition for the use of IRS loaned equipment, the recipient agrees to provide appropriate physical security while the equipment is in his/her possession. Appropriate physical security is always defined as being in the control of a volunteer while in use and being in a controlled, limited access (preferably) locked location when not in use.

Unfortunately, a few computers and printers are lost or stolen each year. Please remember these safeguarding rules to prevent a loss:

- Do not leave the laptop or printer in a vehicle where it is visible. When transporting equipment, place in the trunk or under cover on the floor of the vehicle.
- Do not store the laptop or printer in a vehicle; use vehicles for transporting only.
- Do not leave the laptop or printer unattended in a public location.
- Do not leave the laptop or printer in a closet or cabinet that does not lock and where access is not limited.
- Do not expose the laptop or printer to extreme weather (hot or cold).
- Keep away from hazards such as liquids, food, and smoke.
Reporting Lost or Stolen Equipment

With heightened attention on security of data and computers used in support of the volunteer program, it is necessary to ensure incidents of lost and stolen equipment are reported to the IRS. The recipient of loaned equipment agrees to notify the IRS if equipment (computers and printers) is stolen or lost immediately, but not later than the next business day after confirmation of the incident. Partners are also required to notify IRS immediately, but not later than the next business day after confirmation of the incident, if a partner owned computer is stolen or lost. Partners should provide all information that is readily available to their SPEC relationship manager. In the event of a theft, the recipient is required to notify law enforcement immediately and file the appropriate reports. The SPEC territory office must complete an incident assessment with supporting documentation within ten days to assist the IRS with documentation.

Returning Equipment

Laptops

Laptops are to be returned when filing season activities are over. They should be shipped so they are received by the Depot no later than May 15 annually. Because some sites will continue to operate after April 15, partners can keep equipment they will continue to use for electronic filing of returns. Laptops retained by volunteers after the filing season must be returned to the Depot no later than November 1 each year.

Note: VITA/TCE volunteers using the online versions of tax preparation software are no longer required to follow disk-wiping procedures before returning IRS laptops to the Depot. However, desktop users must continue using the disk-wiping procedures.

Printers

Printers are governed by the local SPEC territory office. Please contact your SPEC relationship manager to determine whether the printer(s) should be returned. If you retain possession of a printer after the filing season, a newly signed PLA is required to show the continued loan and provide required information for inventory validation. No printers or printer components should be shipped to the Depot. If a printer is broken, do not throw it away. Contact your SPEC relationship manager to make arrangements for return.
Chapter 10: 2021 VITA/TCE Site Operations

VITA/TCE Return Preparation Models and Requirements

Generally, most VITA/TCE return preparation sites operate in a face-to-face environment making it easier to service low-to-moderate income taxpayers. These taxpayers may not be comfortable or have the equipment to work with volunteers preparing their tax returns virtually.

SPEC is providing guidance in Publication 5450, 2021 VITA/TCE Site Operations, to offer face-to-face partners with alternative strategies for preparing tax returns in filing season 2021 if offices and sites close. These alternatives can be used to continue filing tax returns virtually to support taxpayers with timely filing requirements.

In all instances, the VITA/TCE Quality Site Requirements (QSRs) and Volunteer Standards of Conduct (VSC) must be understood and adhered to by all volunteers whether in-person or virtual. The partner/site coordinators must develop a strong security process limiting volunteer security roles to protect access to all taxpayer personally identifiable information (PII) regardless of where returns are prepared and/or quality reviewed. If necessary, partners are encouraged to develop alternative plans for securing volunteer hours.

Please request a copy of Publication 5450, 2021 VITA/TCE Site Operations from your relationship manager or find on IRS.gov.

Counting of Returns With EFIN & SIDN

The preparation site utilizes its own EFIN (Electronic Filing Identification Number) to electronically file the return. Those totals will be reflected in TaxSlayer reports as being credited to the preparation site. The Preparation Site will also utilize its’ own SIDN on all returns prepared under Virtual VITA/TCE.

Exception: Partners who wish to continue utilizing the Intake SIDN as a tool to monitor the effectiveness of their virtual service locations must document this exception request in their Virtual VITA/TCE Plan (which is submitted to their SPEC Territory manager for approval).

Prior Year Return Preparation

VITA/TCE sites with the necessary software and reference materials are encouraged to prepare prior year returns. A current Form 13614-C must be completed for all prior year returns and will be used to determine the required certification level and if the return is within scope of the VITA/TCE Programs. IRS tax law-certified volunteers can prepare prior-year returns at the same tax law certification level as obtained in the current year. All prior year tax returns must be prepared using tax preparation software. Every effort should be made to secure experienced (at least 2 years) volunteers to prepare these types of tax returns. Refer to the Site Coordinator Corner to locate prior year reference materials and additional guidance.

• Modernized e-File allows electronic filing of prior year returns. It accepts the current tax year along with two prior tax year returns.
• Use the correct SIDN and EFIN to ensure your site receives credit for preparing these types of tax returns.
• A prior year Form 13614-C can be referred to as a reference tool but cannot replace the use of a current form.
• For additional assistance refer to the Prior Year Return Job Aid in Publication 4012, Volunteer Resource Guide.
• IRS tax law-certified volunteers can prepare prior-year returns at the same tax law certification level as obtained in the current year.

**Amended Return Preparation**

IRS tax law-certified volunteers can prepare amended returns at the same tax law certification level as obtained in the current year. VITA/TCE sites may prepare amended returns even if they did not prepare the original return. As with prior year returns, sites are strongly encouraged to assign amended returns to qualified IRS tax law-certified volunteers. Amended returns must be prepared using tax preparation software. The taxpayer must have the original return and adequate information for preparing these returns. Refer to the Amended Return Job Aid available in Publication 4012, Volunteer Resource Guide for additional assistance.
**Forms and Publications Links**

**Form 6729**, QSS Site Review Sheet

**Form 6729-D**, Site Review Sheet

**Form 6729-P**, Partner Return Review Sheet

**Form 6744**, VITA/TCE Volunteer Assistor’s Test/Retest

**Form 13206**, Volunteer Assistance Summary Report

**Form 13533**, VITA/TCE Partner Sponsor Agreement

**Form 13614-C**, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Sheet

**Form 13615**, The Volunteer Standards of Conduct Agreement – VITA/TCE Programs

**Form 13715**, SPEC Volunteer Site Information Sheet

**Form 14308**, SPEC Site Milestone Recognition

**Form 14309**, SPEC Volunteer Milestone Recognition.

**Form 15272**, VITA/TCE Security Plan

**Form 15273**, Virtual VITA/TCE Plan

**Publication 17**, Your Federal Income Tax for Individuals

**Publication 4012**, Volunteer Resource Guide

**Publication 4053 (EN/SP)**, Your Civil Rights are Protected

**Publication 4299**, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Civil Rights - A Public Trust

**Publication 4396-A**, Partner Resource Guide

**Publication 4491**, VITA/TCE Training Guide

**Publication 4836 (EN/SP)**, VITA/TCE Free Tax Programs

**Publication 4961**, VITA/TCE Volunteer Standards of Conduct Training – Ethics Training

**Publication 4961(SP)**, Normas de Conducta para los Voluntarios en los VITA/TCE - Entrenamiento de Etica

**Publication 5088**, Site Coordinator Refresher Training

**Publication 5101**, Intake/Interview & Quality Review Training

**Publication 5140**, Job Aid: Partner Site and Return Reviews
Publication 5166, VITA/TCE Volunteer Quality Site Requirements

**Acronym Glossary**

**CRU** Civil Rights Unit – A division within the federal government responsible for enforcing federal statutes prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, disability, religion, and national origin.

**EFIN** Electronic Filing Identification Number – An identification number assigned to authorized IRS e-file providers. An EFIN is required to electronically file a federal tax return. Persons wishing to obtain an EFIN may apply through their IRS E-Services account.

**EIC or EITC** Earned Income Tax Credit – A refundable tax credit. Eligibility and the amount of EITC is based on earnings, income, filing status, residency, and the number of qualifying children in the home.

**FSA** Facilitated Self-Assistance – A VITA/TCE Site where eligible taxpayers prepare and electronically-file federal tax returns free, with on-site assistance from qualified volunteers.

**IP PIN** Identity Protection Personal Identification Number – A six-digit number issued by the Identity Protection Specialization Unit to taxpayers who are victims of identity theft.

**IRS** Internal Revenue Service – The Federal agency responsible for administering the Internal Revenue Code enacted by Congress.

**ITIN** Individual Taxpayer Identification Number – A nine-digit identification number issued to the IRS – for tax purposes use only by individuals who do not qualify for a Social Security Number. The first digit is 9, the fourth and fifth digits range from 77 - 88.

**ITA** Interactive Tax Assistant – An online tool that leads taxpayers to answers to a limited number of current and prior year tax law questions using a question and response process.

**MeF** Modernized e-File – A replacement of existing IRS tax return filing technology with a modernized, internet-based electronic filing platform. This transaction-based system allows tax return originators to transmit returns electronically to the IRS in real-time, improving turnaround times.

**QSR** Quality Site Requirements – Ten requirements identified as necessary to ensure taxpayers visiting VITA/TCE sites receive quality service and accurate tax return preparation.

**QSRA** Quality Site Requirement Alerts – A SPEC communication to VITA/TCE sites during the filing season that updates, corrects, and/or clarifies operational procedures and processes related to the Quality Site Requirements.

**SIDN** Site Identification Number – A number assigned by SPEC to identify each VITA/TCE site. SIDN starts with the letter “S” followed by 8 digits.

**SPEC** Stakeholder Partnerships, Education & Communication – The outreach and education function of the IRS Wage and Investment Division. SPEC administers the VITA and TCE programs.

**TCE** Tax Counseling for the Elderly – The TCE program offers free tax assistance to individuals who are age 60 or older. Cooperative grant agreements are entered into between IRS and eligible organizations to provide training and technical assistance to volunteers who provide free tax counseling and assistance to elderly individuals in tax preparation of their Federal tax returns at convenient locations.
TIGTA Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration – Agency of the U.S. Department of Treasury that provides oversight of IRS activities.

VITA Volunteer Income Tax Assistance – One of the volunteer tax return preparation programs administered by IRS. VITA provides free tax preparation services primarily to low- and moderate-income taxpayers. VITA sites may focus on serving special needs populations, such as limited English proficient, persons with disabilities, or those in rural areas.

VSC Volunteer Standards of Conduct – Inform volunteers of their responsibility to provide taxpayers with ethical, confidential and quality tax return preparation.

VTA Volunteer Tax Alerts – A SPEC communication to VITA/TCE sites during the filing season that address trends during QSS, TIGTA, or SPEC reviews.