

FAQs about Volunteering with VITA or TCE

The Basics		
1	What is VITA? What is TCE?	From February through April, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) helps working and low-income individuals and families save money through free tax preparation (where volunteers prepare tax returns for clients) or Facilitated Self-Assistance (customers do their own returns, with volunteer help). Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) provides the same service, giving special attention to those aged 60 and older.
2	What do VITA/TCE volunteers do?	There are multiple volunteer positions available at a VITA or TCE site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Tax Preparer</u> who prepares tax returns for clients or helps them complete their own returns. • <u>Quality Reviewer</u> who double checks all returns for errors and accuracy. • <u>Site or Lead Coordinator</u>, who oversees tax sites and supervises other volunteers. • <u>Greeter</u> who welcomes clients and ensures that they have all the documents they need to prepare their taxes. • <u>Interpreter</u> who translates for non-English speaking or hearing-impaired customers.
3	Where do I volunteer?	There are multiple VITA and TCE locations around Pierce County--locations will be finalized by early December. You can choose the site that works best for you in terms of location, days and hours. If we have understaffed sites, we may ask volunteers if they will consider switching sites to meet the need.
4	When do I volunteer?	Our tax season is from early February through April 15th (with training taking place in January). Each site is open different days and hours. Your schedule will depend on your availability. Volunteers work an average of 4 hours a week.
5	What skills or experience will I need?	Basic computer skills, communication, confidentiality, customer service and respect for cultural differences. No tax prep experienced required!
6	How do I apply?	To apply for VITA, visit www.VolunteerTaxHelp.org to fill out an online application. To work with seniors through TCE, apply with AARP Tax-Aide by visiting AARP.org , and clicking the "Volunteer" button.
7	Can I volunteer if I'm not a U.S. citizen?	Yes, you may, as long as you are in the United States legally.
Training and Support		
8	Will there be training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a 1.5 hour orientation for <u>all NEW volunteers</u> that covers standards of conduct and other volunteer basics. All volunteers should pass the Standards of Conduct test. For <u>greeters and interpreters</u>, there is no further training after the orientation. • In early December, there will be an intro day for new and returning volunteers, who can choose to attend the sessions they need (intro to tax preparation; intro to training materials; intro to software). • For <u>Tax Preparers and Quality Reviewers</u>, there in-depth tax training sessions on Saturdays in January, with some at-home study. Tax Preparers must pass at least the Basic certification test, and Quality Reviewers must pass both Basic and Advanced. • For <u>Site Coordinators</u>, if they are new to the position, there will be additional training to complete. All training and materials are provided free of charge.

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9	When and where does training take place?	Orientations take place once per month in November, December and January; new volunteers should attend one of these sessions. Tax trainings take place on Saturdays and some evenings in December and January. After you apply, you will receive additional information about training dates, times and locations.
10	What happens once I start?	If this is your first year, you will have help your first few days from your Site Coordinator or a more experienced volunteer. When they feel you are able to do a return on your own, you will work independently. All returns will be double checked by a Quality Reviewer.
11	Will I be working alone?	You will not be working alone. You will be with other staff and volunteers at the site.
12	What support is provided if I have questions?	The returning volunteers and Site Coordinator are there if you need any assistance. They are very helpful, and there are also materials to fall back on if they are not available.
Benefits to the Community		
13	Why are VITA and TCE important?	Paid tax preparers often cost hundreds of dollars--which many people can't afford. VITA/TCE provide tax prep free of charge, ensuring that families receive all the deductions and credits they qualify for. Last year, more than 6,000 households in Pierce County received free tax help at a VITA or TCE site.
14	Why use a free tax preparer?	All our volunteers are highly trained and must adhere to ethical standards of conduct. Services are free of charge. Clients can learn about other financial services (such as obtaining bank accounts or financial education) and social services (such as energy assistance) while they wait for their taxes to be completed.
15	Who qualifies for these services?	For VITA, individuals and households should have incomes of \$56,000 or less (but we don't turn people away unless their tax needs are out of scope). For taxpayers who choose Facilitated Self-Assistance (where they do their own return, with help from a volunteer), the income cutoff is higher. TCE primarily works with those who are aged 60 and above.
Benefits to Volunteers		
16	Can I get internship or community service credit?	Yes, as long as you work with your professor or school to complete whatever forms, hours or documentation they require. We will confirm your training and volunteer hours.
17	What skills will I gain?	Tax preparation and basic accounting, and high quality customer service, which can help you obtain future jobs. You will also learn about other financial and social services in Pierce County. Most important, you will provide a valuable service to low to middle income families in our community!
18	Can I get my own taxes done at a VITA site?	Yes, you may! That's one of the many benefits of this program. You may also provide tax preparation for family members and friends.

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Challenges and Concerns		
19	What happens if I make a mistake?	As protection for both you and the tax payers, you will only be allowed to complete tax returns at a level at which you have passed a certification test. All completed tax returns will be checked for errors by a certified Quality Reviewer.
20	What if my schedule changes during the tax season?	Your service is valuable and we prefer you stay for the entire tax season, but we understand that schedules change. If that happens, you may be able to switch to another site which better fits your new schedule. If that is not possible, please let your Site Coordinator know you won't be able to continue.
21	What if I need extra hours for internship or course credit?	If you need more hours than your current tax site offers, you may be able to volunteer at more than one site, or help with one-day tax events during the tax season.
Additional Questions		
22	Who sponsors VITA and TCE?	Many different organizations in Pierce County work together to offer VITA. AARP Tax-Aide is the primary organizer of TCE sites. VITA is made possible by grants from the IRS, the WA State Department of Commerce, and Key Bank, among others.
23	What if I have more questions?	For VITA questions, please contact Amy Allison, amy@associatedministries.org , or Faith Brown, faith@soundoutreach.org . For TCE questions, please contact Sylvia Wilson, AARP Tax-Aide, at srw1218@gmail.com .