



TAX HELP COLORADO

Sponsored by Colorado's Colleges and The Piton Foundation

Participating Colleges (by year joined)

2007

z Community College
of Aurora

2008

z Aims Community College
z Community College
of Denver
z Morgan Community
College

2009

z Adams State University
z Emily Griffith
Technical College/Metro
State University
z Northeastern
Junior College
z Pueblo Community
College

2010

z DeVry University
z Otero Junior College
z Trinidad State
Junior College

2011

z Front Range Community
College
z Lamar Community
College
z Pikes Peak Community
College

2012

z Arapahoe Community
College
z Southwest Colorado
Community College

2013

z Red Rocks Community
College
z Fort Lewis College

What is Tax Help Colorado?

Tax Help Colorado is a program that uses colleges – primarily community colleges – to provide free income-tax return preparation to lower- and moderate-income working families in Colorado. In its ninth year, 18 colleges participating in the program assisted nearly 9,400 taxpayers at 27 sites, at colleges and high schools, to claim refunds of \$18 million.

Who is eligible for free tax-preparation services?

The program is designed to help taxpayers whose household income is less than about \$54,000 a year. According to census figures, about 30% of Colorado families are eligible for the program. In particular, *Tax Help Colorado* targets lower-income working families who are eligible for tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. For these families, who are struggling to make ends meet, paying a paid tax preparer \$175 or more to have their tax return done is an added financial burden.

How does the program work?

Students at the participating colleges take an accredited course on income tax preparation in the fall semester (ACC 132). This course gives them IRS certification to do free income tax preparation. In the spring semester, students who have taken the income tax class operate a free tax preparation service at the college, for which they receive college credit (ACC 133). Trained volunteers from the community sometimes work at the tax sites too. The free tax sites typically operate from late January through the tax-filing deadline. Days and hours of operation vary from college to college. The program is modeled after the highly successful Tax Help New Mexico program, which helps nearly 30,000 taxpayers each year through 50 free tax sites across New Mexico.

Why use colleges to provide this service?

The biggest problems that have faced organizations wanting to provide free tax-preparation are securing computer equipment for filing tax returns electronically and finding and training volunteers to prepare the tax returns. Colleges have computer labs with up-to-date equipment, they have students to be the volunteer tax preparers, and they offer classes that train people on preparing tax returns. Also, there are community colleges located across the state, including in more rural areas, which allows this free service to be available essentially statewide. In Colorado, there are 16 community colleges with about 30 campus locations that pretty much cover the state, as well as four-year colleges located in key areas of the state.

Tax Year 2015 Accomplishments

Free filing for
9,347 taxpayers

z

\$17.9 million in
refunds claimed

Participating High Schools (by year joined)

2012

z Adams City High School

2013

z Alamosa High School

z Horizon High School

z Mountain Range High School

2014

z Aurora Central High School

z Centauri High School

z Legacy High School

z Northglenn High School

2015

z Lincoln High School

z Thornton High School

What are the benefits to the colleges and their students of providing this service?

College students receive valuable real-world experience preparing tax returns. Having this experience on their resume also looks good to potential employers, as does having IRS tax law certification. Participating in the program also offers students exposure to careers in the accounting field and with the IRS. In addition, the program offers students a strong community service experience, which more and more colleges are requiring, and also is beneficial on a student's resume. Colleges get the added benefit of bringing more people from the community onto their campuses, and in fact, colleges in New Mexico have reported increases in student enrollment, particularly in their accounting/business programs. The two courses that make up Tax Help Colorado also provide high school students with a good opportunity for concurrent enrollment.

Where is the program operating in Colorado?

Tax Help Colorado was launched in 2007 at the Community College of Aurora, with CCA students taking the income tax class in the fall semester and operating a free tax site at the Lowry campus in the spring of 2008. Between 2008 and 2014, 17 more colleges joined the program, including three four-year colleges and the number of Tax Help Colorado sites expanded to 27 in the 2016 tax season. Almost 500 students, in addition to some community volunteers, are involved. The Piton Foundation, which sponsors the program, has worked closely with the Colorado Community College System to build the program statewide.

The Piton Foundation sponsors Tax Help Colorado as part of its efforts to improve the lives of Colorado's low-income children and their families. Tax credits, such as the Earned Income Credit, have long been recognized as one of the greatest anti-poverty tools in America. Tax credits help working families by reducing the tax burden on low-wage workers and supplementing their income so that they can afford to pay for housing, food, health care, and transportation. Economists estimate that money returned to local economies and the state from tax refunds is turned over two-to-three

times, therefore greatly benefiting Colorado's economy, as well as individual taxpayers.

*For more information: contact Courtney Sabine at The Piton Foundation, 303-454-3756/
csabine@garycommunity.org*