

Free Tax Preparation Available For Local Low-Income Households

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ST. LOUIS — United Way 2-1-1 is partnering with local tax coalitions to provide free tax preparation services to St. Louis-area families with a household income of \$57,000 or less in 2020. Local residents can dial 2-1-1 or visit 211helps.org to find their nearest tax preparation site or for more information.

This year, the program has adapted to meet COVID-19 guidelines and keep volunteers and participants safe. While a limited number of sites offer walk-ins, most require advance appointments. All participants must call their tax preparation site ahead of time to receive more instructions and make an appointment, if needed. For most sites, participants will make an appointment to bring their tax documents to be copied or scanned. Volunteers will prepare and e-file returns separately and then alert participants when their returns are completed. Participants can expect their returns to be e-filed and ready for pickup within about one week.

“While most of our volunteers will not be working face-to-face with participants or offering walk-ins this year, we remain committed to safely helping local people improve their financial stability through this vital program,” said Debbie Irwin, community economic development director, United Way of Greater St. Louis. “This year, we expect even more people to qualify due to lost income during the COVID-19 crisis, and we want to help working families receive all of the tax credits they qualify for this year.”

Anyone interested in receiving tax preparation help and who is eligible under the \$57,000 household income threshold may contact United Way by dialing 2-1-1 or visiting 211helps.org/free-tax-prep for a list of locations and phone numbers to make an appointment, as well as information on qualifications and a list of documents required for services.

Last year, the partnership filed more than 16,000 tax returns in the St. Louis region, helping local low- and middle-income families receive more than \$18 million in tax refunds. United Way’s tax coalition partners include Metropolitan St. Louis Community Tax Coalition, Gateway EITC Community Coalition, National Association of Black Accountants, and St. Louis Tax Assistance Program. In 2020, 786 IRS-trained volunteers worked through the coalitions to provide free tax preparation services for people across the region.

The coalition also focuses on bringing awareness to local individuals and families who qualify to receive a refund through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a federal tax credit designed to help people increase their financial stability. The average national EITC refund in 2020 was \$ 2,604. According to the IRS, in 2020, more than 22 million workers and families nationwide received over \$57 billion in EITC.

“This year, many families across our region are facing income reduction or loss and may be struggling to save or make ends meet,” Irwin added. “Free tax preparation services and access to the Earned Income Tax Credit helps working families boost income, allowing them to save for emergencies, pay down debt and catch up on bills, which is especially vital this year. Research also shows long-term benefits such as improved

education and health outcomes for children and families, which can change lives for the better.”