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Family and Consumer
Sciences Agent



K-State Extension develops and delivers practical, research-based solutions to challenges faced by all Kansans, by addressing these critical issues:

- » Global Food Systems
- » Water and Natural Resources
- » Health
- » Community Vitality
- » Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

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Critical Issue: Community Vitality and Financial Health

Title: Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) helps community save money

Why is it important?

Shawnee County Extension recognizes that many people face barriers to filing their annual income taxes, including limited tax knowledge, uncertainty about the process, and the high cost of preparation services. The VITA program supports financial management resources and education so our community can learn to be financially secure and engaged with their finances.

How did extension address this issue?

During the annual tax season, Shawnee County Extension hosts four sites that provide free income tax preparation services to community residents. Community volunteers, trained through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, help lower to middle-income workers, students, retirees, individuals with disabilities, and others that qualify. The VITA free tax program gives reliable assistance, helps taxpayers understand their civic responsibilities, accurate filing, gaining confidence, maximizes eligible credits and refunds, and improves financial well-being.

What was the impact?

By providing community leadership in the VITA program, Shawnee County Extension and the volunteer tax preparers completed 2,094 tax returns for the 2025 tax year. Thirty community volunteers contributed 6,868 hours to tax preparation, valued at \$238,938. Additionally, site partners offering space and supplies contributed a value of \$11,655 to make VITA possible in Shawnee County.

Customers at the four Extension VITA sites owed \$661,675 in federal and state taxes and gained understanding of tax planning, withholding adjustments, and financial record keeping. On the other side, \$3.5 million in refunds went to local households, including more than \$465,785 in earned income tax credits, averaging \$1,640 per household. Clients also saved an estimated \$481,620 in tax preparation fees. Additional benefits from child tax credits, education credits, and property tax relief refunds brought significant financial resources back into our local communities.

Success story

The average client income was \$42,023, underscoring the importance of these services for financially vulnerable households. Additionally, 64% of our customers were aged 65 and up and 80% had gross incomes below \$64,000, which are goals of the program in meeting a variety of needs from our communities.

From customer comments, they emphasized the value of the service, noting reduced stress on them about taxes, confidence in their tax returns, and appreciation for expert guidance. Beyond tax preparation, VITA helps individuals understand tax responsibilities, plan for future tax years, and make informed financial decisions. The K-State Shawnee County Extension VITA program provides free tax assistance that strengthens households and communities.