

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Grand Challenges

K-State Research and Extension develops and delivers practical, research-based solutions to challenges faced by all Kansans, which includes the grand challenges:

- Global Food Systems
- Water
- Health
- Community Vitality
- Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

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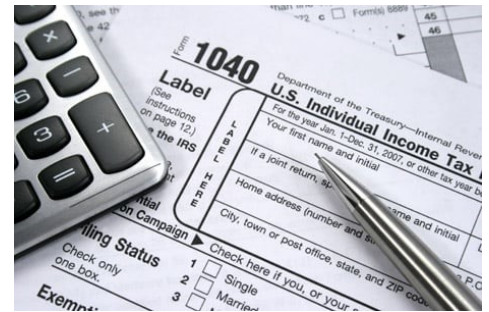


Grand Challenge: Community Vitality

Title: VITA Volunteers Meet Community Needs During Pandemic with Taxes-by-Mail Program

Why is this issue important?

Many residents rely on VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) services to prepare and file their taxes each year. VITA programs provide tax filers an accessible, free path towards filing their federal and state tax returns. Without VITA services, some tax payers would opt out of filing taxes altogether.



How did Extension address this issue?

Susan Fangman, Family & Consumer Sciences Agent, gives leadership to the VITA program in Shawnee County and works closely with the volunteers and agencies that are responsible for the initiative. Because of the pandemic, in-person tax preparation was suspended. Volunteers were still eager to help; with a lot of planning, a taxes-by-mail initiative was organized. This allowed volunteers to continue to provide the same level of service as they had in the past but without meeting anyone face-to-face. Clients were able to mail their tax documents to a secure mailbox and were able to talk to volunteer preparers by phone about their return.

What was the impact?

During the 2021 tax season (filing 2020 tax year returns):

- 23 IRS trained VITA volunteers filed 605 tax returns through the taxes-by-mail initiative. Taxpayers saved an estimated \$135,125 in tax preparation fees (Source: IRS)
- Many more returns were filed through the VITA program as volunteers work with community organizations to file tax returns as well as complete returns for those they know. We are still awaiting IRS reports for final numbers.