

TAX HELP COLORADO---THE PITON FOUNDATION

2011—COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF AURORA—LOWRY CAMPUS
710 ALTON WAY, DENVER, CO 80230
BLDG. 903 ROOM 113

****WALK-IN BASIS-- FIRST COME, FIRST SERVE—NO APPOINTMENTS****

SATURDAYS 9AM – 3 PM

TUESDAYS 6PM – 9 PM

WEDNESDAYS 4 PM – 9 PM

FREE INCOME TAX HELP FROM JANUARY 29TH, 2011 – MARCH 12TH, 2011

The program is designed to help taxpayers whose household income is less than about \$49,000 a year.

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 just its third year, the nine colleges participating in the program in the 2010 tax season assisted 4,086 taxpayers receive refunds of more than \$8.3 million. During the upcoming tax season, you can help these college students bring thousands of dollars into the homes of working families in Colorado by being a [Tax Help Colorado volunteer](#).

The program is designed to help taxpayers whose household income is less than about \$49,000 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.

Students at the participating colleges take an accredited course on income tax preparation (ACC 132) in the fall semester. This course gives them Internal Revenue Service certification to provide free income tax preparation services. 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 date in April. 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. *Tax Help Colorado* provides a solution to the biggest problems that have historically faced organizations wanting to provide free tax-preparation services, securing computer

equipment for preparing 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 entire state.

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 looks good 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.

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. In the fall of 2008 and spring of 2009, three additional colleges -- Aims Community College in Greeley, Morgan Community College in Fort Morgan, and



the Community College of Denver participated in the program. Together, the colleges helped more than 1,350 lower-income taxpayers claim \$2.3 million in tax refunds. In 2009/2010, Emily Griffith Opportunity School in Denver, Northeastern Junior College in Sterling and Pueblo Community College joined Tax Help Colorado. In addition, the first four-year colleges, Adams State and the University of Colorado at Boulder, also joined the program. The Piton Foundation, which sponsors the program, is working to expand the model over the next three to four years until it is operating statewide.