



## Tips for Offering Help with Public Benefit Programs at a VITA Site

- Market programs offered at the VITA site as a “package of supports for working families.” In addition to the tax credits, programs such as health insurance, food stamps and child care provide support to working families. It is helpful to emphasize that together these programs form a comprehensive package of financial assistance.
- Let people know in advance what services will be available at the VITA site. Workers go to VITA sites anticipating that they will get help with their tax returns. They may be unprepared to talk about other help they need or may be unable to complete applications for other benefits if they are missing key documents. A “heads up” about what to expect and what to bring along is very helpful.
- Create a setting that helps families feel comfortable applying for an array of benefits. Staff of community organizations who are trained to help families complete application forms are often in the best position to help. Tax filers may feel insecure having government agency representatives present at VITA sites. Make it clear that information from a worker’s tax return will not be shared with the people on hand helping with applications for public benefit programs. It also is useful to clarify that getting the EIC or the CTC generally will not affect eligibility for benefits such as food stamps, subsidized housing, Medicaid and CHIP.
- Consider using a questionnaire to identify other benefits that families would be interested in receiving — and follow up. If it is not feasible to provide application assistance at the VITA site, a brief survey of tax filers can identify whether they are interested in obtaining benefits, such as health insurance and food stamps. It is important to follow up later by providing interested families more information and giving them the opportunity to apply for benefits they need and want.