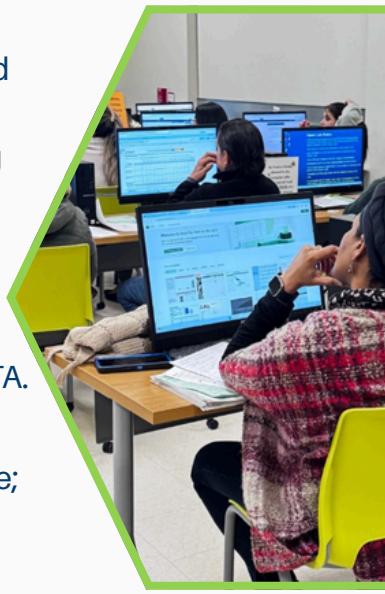
VITA LATINX PROGRAM

TAX ASSISTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITY

Beginning in March and concluding in mid-April, El Centro's VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program made a significant impact by providing free, Spanish tax preparation services to Latino individuals and families throughout the Greater New Orleans area. Through trusted, no-cost assistance, the program helped community members maximize their refunds while eliminating the financial burden of tax preparation.



This marked the sixth year that El Centro offered the program, which is sponsored by Entergy New Orleans, City of New Orleans Economic Mobility in Motion Fund (ARPA), Capital One, JP Morgan Chase and the WK Kellogg Foundation. Working with a dedicated group of volunteer tax preparers, El Centro presented "Super Saturdays." It was a community effort with a number of local organizations including the Kenner Hispanic Resource Center, University of Holy Cross, Beanlandia, Marrero Community Center,
New Orleans East Public Library and Hispanic Apostolate providing space for VITA.

Super Saturdays weren't limited to just filing taxes. There were also a number of resource providers including Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, Union Migrante; Immigration attorneys, Mauricio Pons and Juan Campos, that provided free immigration advice and notary services.

"We were inspired by the first Super Tax Day we witnessed in 2019, where Xavier Univeristy opened its gym to 50+ preparers and resources partners and I thought, " we could do this in our own community!" says El Centro Founder and Executive Director Lindsey Navarro. " Saturdays are the most available day of the week for our community, volunteers and resource partners and that's how Super Saturdays came to be."

This year, the VITA staff and volunteers prepared 546 tax returns, securing more than $90,000 in state refunds, $944,000 in federal refunds. Participants claimed $886,411 in key tax credits, including EITC, education credits, the Child Tax Credit, and the Additional Child Tax Credit.

"One thing we did notice was that there was a decrease in the number of people filing with ITINs (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) from the previous year," Navarro says. "This is likely indicative of how many community members are increasingly fearful about changes in immigration and federal agency policies. Our numbers found the following also to be true: on average those filing with social security numbers received $2000 in refunds in comparison to their ITIN filing counterparts who paid $1000."

Despite the challenges for ITIN holder, the overall results show the growing demand for accessible and culturally responsive financial services. By removing language and financial barriers, El Centro's VITA program ensures that more families can keep the money they have earned while strengthening their long-term financial stability. It's also a strong reminder of how much the Latino community is contributing to the local economy, paying taxes and providing jobs.

El Centro