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A copy of the full report is available online at
<http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/research-public-service/publications/strategic-planning-considerations-for-expansion-of-low-income-tax-preparation-services-in-the-metropolitan-chicago-area>

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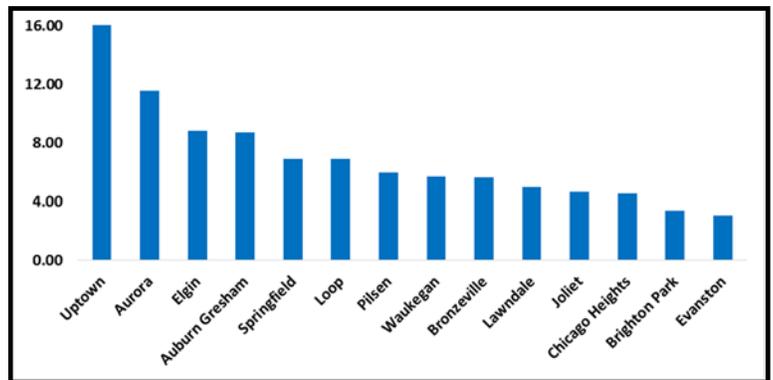
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Strategic Planning Considerations for Expansion of Low-Income Tax Preparation Services in the Metropolitan Chicago Area

In the United States, federal tax policy serves as a redistributive mechanism that attempts to combat income inequality and poverty. As a service provider in the Internal Revenue Service's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, the Chicago-based Center for Economic Progress (CEP) helps low-income tax filers access redistributive tools such as the Earned Income Tax Credit through free preparation of tax returns.

CEP's strategic plan calls for 10 percent annual growth over the next several years. This report emphasizes three key themes that should direct the organization as it seeks to put its strategic plan into action: site operations, volunteer participation, and potential expansion to new locations. It examines these themes from two perspectives: identification of operational baseline conditions (one example is shown in the table below), and analysis of strategic planning factors.

Returns Processed per Site Operating Hour, 2014



Source: Authors, from CEP data.

To guide CEP's future actions, the authors make eight specific recommendations organized under three objectives:

Improving Site Efficiency – The Chicago area is characterized by substantial unmet need for free tax preparation services, and CEP currently serves a very low percentage of area residents. Therefore, CEP should prioritize greater efficiency at its existing sites over expansion to new locations.

Increasing Volunteer Satisfaction and Retention – Volunteers are CEP's most valuable resource. Over 90 percent of volunteers say they will return next year, but under 40 percent do. Improving retention rate is one key to better client services.

Systematically Evaluating Expansion – Decisions regarding location are critical; they represent a major commitment of limited resources. For analysis of expansion options, the report offers a framework for evaluating neighborhoods and a set of criteria for comparing potential sites within a specific neighborhood.

This report offers a systematic approach for assessing and acting on a set of strategic concerns that are central to public administration and not unique to CEP: efficiency, service levels, resource allocation, staff satisfaction, and future expansion.