

OMB Statement for Innocent Spouse Customer Satisfaction Survey
Wage & Investment Division – OPTION YEAR 1 CY 08
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Introduction

One of the most important and major parts of the Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 (RRA98) deals with innocent spouse claims. The Innocent Spouse Program, within the Innocent Spouse Program Office of the Wage and Investment (W&I) Division is responsible for protecting the rights of the requesting and non-requesting spouses. They ensure each claim receives timely and consistent treatment in accordance with established guidelines and the law.

Under current tax laws, when a married couple files a joint federal income tax return, each spouse becomes individually responsible for paying the entire tax bill. As a result, one spouse can be held liable for tax deficiencies assessed after a joint return was filed, even if the additional taxes were solely attributable to the income of the other spouse. If the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) cannot collect the additional taxes owed on the unreported income from the spouse who earned the income, it may seek to collect the money from the other spouse. The spouse may obtain relief from the additional liability if certain conditions are met.

Processing of requests for Relief from Joint and Several Liability is centralized at the Cincinnati IRS Campus now known as the Cincinnati Centralized Innocent Spouse Operation (CCISO) of the Andover Compliance Center. Examiners make a determination by considering requested information from the taxpayer. The examiners will consider all known facts and circumstances when applying Internal Revenue Code 6013(e) or Internal Revenue Code 6015.

The Innocent Spouse Tracking System (ISTS) tracks all innocent spouse cases. The system includes a separate database area and new commands to service that data. A front-end system provides the examiners with all the data they normally access in working a case. This interface provides employees with the ability to automatically input tracking data to the ISTS records. For reporting purposes, ISTS provides a flat file of ISTS data to Examination, for management reporting. This flat file should serve as the sampling database for customer satisfaction surveys.

IRS now uses a balanced measurement system, consisting of business results, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction, to assess how well it is achieving its mission and objectives. As an important customer interface for Wage & Investment, Innocent Spouse will need feedback from customers (i.e., taxpayers) to continuously improve its operations.

This project has three primary goals: 1) to identify customer expectations of the Innocent Spouse Program; 2) to track customer satisfaction for the Innocent Spouse Program on a national level; and, 3) to identify operational improvements.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Innocent Spouse Customer Satisfaction Survey is a mail survey. The questionnaire is attached. The survey is expected to take 5 minutes or less for customers to complete [January 1, 2008 - December 31, 2008](#).

The objective of the surveys is to capture customer expectations and perceptions about the Innocent Spouse process. The questionnaires are based on Pacific Consulting Group's methodology, which asks respondents to evaluate various aspects of their experience and to provide an overall summary evaluation.

The questionnaire was developed based on input from traditional and cognitive focus group sessions with customers who were serviced by the Innocent Spouse staff in prior years. The outcome of the focus groups helped to build a more detailed questionnaire tailored to obtain:

- insight from the customer's perspective about possible improvements.
- useful input for program evaluation and execution at the programmatic and field office level of service delivery.

The survey includes several ratings questions evaluating service delivery during the Innocent Spouse process as well as several demographic items. In addition, ample space is provided for additional suggestions for improvement.

Survey scoring for this contract will be based on the Customer Satisfaction Survey Score response average to the keystone question – "Overall, how satisfied were you with the Innocent Spouse process." Questions will utilize a 5-point rating scale, with 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. All survey responses generated will be confidential. The questionnaire will capture information to evaluate our service provided to the taxpayer during the transaction and prior to the transaction. It will also provide information W&I can use to develop "actionable" improvement tasks and strategies. Another key feature of the questionnaires will be the capture of open-ended comments on questions answered with a low rating of a "1" or "2". This will help IRS better understand why taxpayers give the ratings they give.

Disclosure, Security & Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be safeguarded. The data collection process, participants will be identified to IRS personnel by their first names only. In addition, no participant's names will be mentioned in the focus group report. Participants will be advised that observers from the IRS may be behind the one-way mirror and that their comments will be audio and videotapes.

The survey will not contain tax return or taxpayer information. Survey participants will not be identified in any of the documents or files used for this project. We will limit and control the amount of information we collect to those items that are necessary to accomplish the research questions. We will carefully safeguard the security of data utilized as well as the privacy of the survey respondents. We will apply the fair

information and record-keeping practices to ensure protection of all survey respondents. The criterion for disclosure laid out in the Privacy Act, the Freedom of Information Act, and section 6103 of the Internal Revenue Code provides for the protection of information as well as its releases to authorized recipients.

We will apply fair information and record-keeping practices to ensure protection of all taxpayers. The criterion for disclosure laid out in the Privacy Act, the Freedom of Information Act, and section 6103 of the Internal Revenue Code, provides for the protection of taxpayer information as well as its release to authorized recipients.

Design and Methodology

The sample universe will consist of taxpayers with recently closed Innocent Spouse cases. The vendor will administer the survey by mail on a monthly basis. Standard procedures will be used in order to obtain the highest response rate possible for these surveys. These will include: 1) an advance letter (pre-note) about the survey; 2) a cover letter with the survey; 3) a postcard reminder; and, 4) a second letter and survey to non-respondents. The vendor will ensure that taxpayers responding to the survey are guaranteed anonymity.

The vendor will, on a quarterly basis, summarize the quantitative ratings and produce a national report showing customer satisfaction scores on all Innocent Spouse survey items and overall improvement priorities for the function. The vendor will include any relevant database variables in the analysis and will weight the survey responses as necessary to accurately reflect the entire customer base.

Sampling

IRS Innocent Spouse Project Office will provide the vendor a complete database each month from which a random sample can be drawn. The database will consist of a unique identifying number (TIN), customer name and address, and relevant database information about each innocent spouse case, all in a single record. The database will also contain information as to whether the questionnaire should be sent to the innocent spouse or the innocent spouse's taxpayer representative. Accordingly, the address of the taxpayer's representative will be included on the database.

Based on the information provided herein and discussions during preceding tasks, the vendor will develop a sampling plan. The sampling plan will be designed to result in 1,600 completed questionnaires for the year (400 completed questionnaires per quarter) at the national level. The sample will focus only on Merit cases. Merit cases are those that have gone through the entire Innocent Spouse Process to closure.

Upon receipt of the data file, the vendor will run the file through standard checks to ensure complete mailing address and to remove duplicate cases both within the file, and across files of other surveys that are being conducted. The vendor will randomly select 2,667 records a year to achieve the desired quantity of completed interviews.

Estimates of the Burden of Data Collection

The Innocent Spouse survey has been designed to minimize the burden on the taxpayer. The time that a respondent takes to complete the survey has been carefully considered and only the most important areas are being surveyed. The average time of survey completion is expected to be approximately 5 minutes, plus 2 minutes to read the pre-notification letter. All questions are generally one sentence in structure and on an elementary concept level.

We have made every attempt in designing the survey to maximize the response rate. Using a response rate of 60%, the total burden in hours is estimated to be 223 hours.

For respondents, the estimated burden is expected to be 187 hours (1,600 pre-notification letters x 2 minutes/60 minutes) + (1,600 survey responses x 5 minutes/ 60 minutes). The number of burden hours for non-respondents is estimated to be approximately 36 hours (1,067 pre-notification letters x 2 minutes/60 minutes). The total estimated burden for this study is 223 hours for the year.

Other Information

The following information will be provided to the Organizational Performance Division within 60 days after the close of the survey data collection operations:

- Findings: A brief summary of significant findings that were evidenced in the results.
- Actions taken or lessons learned: A brief summary of any action taken or lessons learned as a result of the findings.
- Number of completed questionnaires.
- Taxpayer participation rate
- Number of requests made for taxpayer participation
- Data collection beginning and ending dates
- Cost for surveys (excluding regular IRS salaries)

Cost Estimate

The estimated cost for administering this survey is \$81,100.

Statistical Contact

For questions regarding the study, questionnaire design, or the statistical methodology, contact:

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