

EITC THIRD PARTY FOCUS GROUPS WITH TAX PREPARERS

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PURPOSE: To learn about the types and quality of communication that third party tax preparers have with the IRS while filing EITC returns for their clients, and to collect feedback about ways to enhance communication among the IRS and tax preparers. Participants represent third-party tax preparers who have filed EITC schedules and returns on behalf of their clients.

LOCATIONS AND DATES:

SITE 1 July X, 2007
 SITE 2
 SITE 3
 SITE 4
 SITE 5
 SITE 6
 SITE 7
 SITE 8 August X, 2007

TOPIC:

Third party tax preparers' communication with IRS when filing for EITC, and recommendations for enhancing such communication.

[NOTE: Items in [blue font](#) denote messages/reminders to the moderator.]

I. INTRODUCTION (10 minutes)

A. Welcome and Overview

Hello, I'm [\[moderator's name\]](#), and I'm the moderator for today's group discussion. Also with us is my colleague [\[notetaker's name\]](#). We work for Westat, a private research firm located in Rockville, Maryland.

As paid tax preparers you are already familiar with the Earned Income Credit (EIC), also known as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which was created in 1975 to offset federal taxes on earned wages for working families and low income individuals. You were invited to participate in this discussion group because you are all tax preparers who have processed EIC claims for your clients. Our purpose today is to talk about different kinds of communication that you have with the IRS during the filing process

This information will be used to inform the IRS about where tax preparers get information needed to process EIC claims, and the types of interactions preparers have with the IRS during the filing process. It will also be used to suggest ways that the IRS can help improve the ways preparers, taxpayers and the IRS communicate with each other.

This is a free flowing discussion, and there are no wrong answers. I am interested in hearing different points-of-view.

I want to thank each of you for coming today and for fitting this session into your schedule.

B. Disclosures and Ground Rules

1. Facility: Describe mikes, mirrors, observers (IRS, Westat).
2. The session is being audio-taped so I can write an accurate report, not about who said what, but about *what* was said. Your contributions to our discussion will be anonymous, and your names will not appear in the summary report.
3. Your participation in the discussion group is voluntary. Participation in the group will not affect your personal tax status, or your status as a tax preparer. All of the information that you share is protected under the Privacy Act. Identifying information about you will not be shared with the IRS. This information is covered on the [consent form](#) that we are handing out now. The form lists an address where you can submit comments about the time and burden you experienced for this research study and a toll free number you can call if you have any questions about the study, or need more information. Please sign one copy of the consent form and keep the other for your records.

<**NOTETAKER:** Distribute two copies of consent form to each participant. Collect one signed form from each, leave one copy for them.>

<**Moderator, read:**

The Paperwork Reduction Act requires that the IRS display an OMB control number on all public information requests. The OMB Control Number for this study is 1545-1349. Also, if you have any comments regarding the time estimates associated with this study or suggestions on making this process simpler, please write to the, Internal Revenue Service, Tax Products Coordinating Committee, SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP, 1111 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20224.

4. There are a few things I'd like to go over to help make our discussion more productive:
 - Please speak one at a time. I'm interested in what everyone has to say, so if you have a comment, please make sure everyone can hear it.
 - I want to hear from everyone, but not every person has to answer every question.
 - I want to hear a range of experiences, so if you have an opinion different from what most in the group are saying, please don't hesitate to speak up (there are no right or wrong answers)
5. At any time you can excuse yourself to go to the restroom, or to get more food or beverages. I ask that only one person leaves the room at a time so we can keep the discussion going.

C. Participant Introductions and Rapport-building

Please introduce yourself to the group by telling us your first name, and about a place that you have always wanted to travel to for a vacation.

<Moderator and notetaker: Introduce yourselves last.>

II. PREPARERS' EIC INFORMATION NEEDS AND RESOURCES (35 minutes)

1. I told you that the purpose of this focus group discussion is to learn about tax preparers' communication with the IRS during the EIC filing process. When I say "communication with the IRS", what does that mean to YOU?

Probe: What do you consider to be "communication" with the IRS?

2. Now let's talk about the things you need to process EIC claims for your clients.

What kinds of information do you look for to help you process EIC claims in a new tax year? Keep in mind, I'm not talking about the information that your clients bring to you. I mean the kinds of background information that you as tax professionals need to know to process EIC claims.

Probe: What kinds of information do you need regarding:
(*Probe for any specifics for each*)

- EIC regulations and criteria for EIC eligibility?
- IRS Worksheets or forms (1040, 1040a, 1040EZ)?
- Other info?

3. Which of those materials and information do you get from the IRS and how do you get them?

Probe: How do you obtain the materials and info you need from the IRS?

- From the IRS website (irs.gov or eitcfortaxpreparers.gov)?
- Publications mailed to you from IRS?
- Post Office or other public service office?
- Phone or other direct contact with IRS personnel?

4. Where else do you go (besides IRS) to get the information and materials you need to process EIC returns?

Probe: How about: (*probe for any specifics for each*)

- Online/Internet sources
- Manuals, other hardcopy materials
- Computer software (*which ones?*)
- Professional seminars, trainings, conferences
- Information provided by your company

- Others?

5. As tax professionals you are probably all familiar with the “due diligence” requirements that the IRS has for preparers filing for EIC for their clients.

What kinds of information do you look for so you know that you are meeting the “due diligence” requirements?

6. Where do you go to get information about due diligence requirements?

Probe: How about: (probe for any specifics for each)

- The IRS or other Online/Internet sources?
- Manuals, other hardcopy materials
- Computer software (which ones?)
- Professional seminars, trainings, conferences
- Information provided by your company
- Others?

7. What kinds of information about EIC have been easy to obtain from the IRS?

Probe: What do you think has made it easy to get that information from the IRS?

8. What kinds of information about EIC have been difficult to obtain from the IRS?

Probe: What do you think has made it difficult to get that information from the IRS?

9. How easy or difficult has it been for you to obtain information from the IRS that you need to serve EIC clients for whom English is a second language, or who have special needs (e.g. disability, blindness)?

10. Where do you expect to find the information and materials you need about EIC from the IRS?

Probe: How about: (probe for kinds info they expect to find for each)

- On the IRS website?
- Publications mailed to you from IRS?
- IRS materials available at the Post Office or other public service office?
- Phone or other direct contact with IRS personnel?

III. COMMUNICATION WITH THE IRS (35 minutes)

1. Let's have a show of hands to learn how many of you have ever had some kind of personal contact (e.g. phone conversation or in-person contact) with IRS personnel.

If at least one participant raised his/her hand, ask:

What kind of contact was it and what was the experience like for you (positive or negative)?

Probes:

- Did you get the information you needed? (Why or why not?)
- Did the information you received seem accurate?
- How long did it take to get the information you needed?

If none of the participants raised their hands, ask:

Have you heard from other preparers about what their experiences dealing with IRS personnel in-person were like? If yes, how did they describe that experience?

2. Now let's talk about any time when you may have had a problem, concern, or a question about an EIC return that you filed. What did you do to try to resolve that issue?

Probe: Did you contact the IRS about it?

- If yes, was the issue resolved?
- If No, how come, and did you resolve it some other way?

If none of the participants had a problem, ask:

Have you heard from other preparers about what it was like for them when they had a problem or question about an EIC return they filed? If yes, how did they resolve the issue (if known)?

3. We've talked about the different types of information you need to process EIC returns, and the different ways you have gone about to get the information from the IRS and other sources.

What do you think would be some effective ways for the IRS to communicate with tax preparers about EIC matters (e.g. Internet, email, telephone, mail, in-person)?

Probe: How should communication the IRS has with preparers about EIC be specific to the kinds of information the IRS is passing along, such as:

- Due diligence compliance
 - Updates to regulations and policies
 - Problems with EIC returns submitted
4. The IRS has resources about EIC available for tax preparers processing EIC returns (e.g. eitcfortaxpreparers.gov website), and is looking to develop more resources to support you during that process. Please tell me how useful you would find the following:

(For each, ask for specifics about [why it would or wouldn't be useful](#))

- An online training course about EIC regulations
 - An online training course on due diligence requirements
 - Feedback from the IRS to individual preparers about their EIC returns (e.g., stats on their returns like # approved, # audited)
 - Continuing education credits for attendance at IRS training sessions (online or others)
 - Other resources participants suggest?
5. I'd like you each to tell me, what is one thing that you think the IRS can do to help improve communication that preparers have with IRS about EIC?

IV. WRAP UP AND CLOSING (10 minutes)

I'm going to take a minute to ask our observers in the back if there is anything else they would like to know from you. Please feel free to get up and stretch, help yourself to more snacks and drinks, and I'll be back momentarily.

<**Moderator:** Provide observer with any questions raised by participants. Ask questions raised by observers to participants.>

We're coming to the end of our discussion. As we wrap things up, is there anything else you think I should know about how the IRS can most effectively help improve communication among preparers and the IRS about EIC?

Thank you again for your time and comments. What you've shared will help us to describe to the IRS how they can improve the ways that they communicate with you and other preparers about EIC.