

Office of Management and Budget Clearance Package

Customer Focus Groups:

Employee Plan Voluntary Compliance Customers

Internal Revenue Service
Tax Exempt and Government Entities Division

December 12, 2007

Background

IRS has replaced the traditional measures of accomplishment with a balanced measurement system, consisting of business results, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction, to assess how well it is achieving its mission and objectives. The IRS Tax Exempt and Government Entities division (TE/GE) has administered four ongoing monthly mail surveys since 2001. TE/GE collects feedback from four customer segments: Employee Plan (EP) Determination, Exempt Organization (EO) Determination, EP Examination, and EO Examination. TE/GE collects feedback from these four customer segments to identify what TE/GE can do to improve service, to track progress in improving customer satisfaction over time, and to identify improvement opportunities.

The Rulings and Agreements function of Employee Plans also has a Voluntary Compliance program in addition to their Determination program. The Voluntary Compliance program seeks to assist plan sponsors to understand and comply with the pension law. If the program identifies a plan that fails to satisfy the requirements of the pension law, they may enable the plan sponsor to correct the problem and preserve the tax benefits of the plan. There are three categories in which the program enables a plan sponsor to make corrections to their plan: self-correction which allows the sponsor to self-correct a failure to satisfy the pension law without pre-approval from the IRS and without paying sanction; correction with IRS approval under which an employer pays a limited fee; and an audit in which the employer corrects and pays a reasonable sanction. In recent years, Employee Plans has made efforts to streamline the Voluntary Compliance process and is currently increasing efforts to promote the program to small employers as directed by the Pension Protection Act of 2006. Due to the increased attention and expanded scope of the program, TEGE would like to conduct focus groups with customers of this program, which is not covered by the existing determination customer survey.

Research Methodology

The IRS and The American Society of Pension Professionals and Actuaries (ASPPA) are sponsoring their annual Benefits Conferences in different locations across the country in 2008. A majority of customers who participated in the Voluntary Compliance program attend these conferences each year. The upcoming conferences provide an excellent opportunity to collect customer opinions and ideas from plan sponsors and practitioners for improving the Voluntary Compliance program.

TEGE will obtain lists of registered conference participants from ASPPA for the Los Angeles Benefits Conference taking place on January 24-25, the Great Lakes Benefit Conference taking place on April 3-4, and the Mid Atlantic Benefits conference taking place on May 22-23. Approximately 200-250 sponsors and

practitioners attend these conferences each year so we anticipate TE/GE will be able to confirm 12 attendees to participate in a focus group at each of the three locations. One week before the conference TE/GE will send reminder e-mails or phone calls to the participants who already agreed to participate. The focus groups will be moderated by a TE/GE facilitator assisted by one member of TE/GE's Strategic Planning staff. The facilitator and Strategic Planning member will prepare reports summarizing the focus group discussions and findings. Neither the notes of the discussions nor the summary reports will include participant's names or any identifying information. The participant screener and a draft of the moderator's guide are attached.

Tallies and Other Information

The following information is needed to satisfy OMB clearance requirements. It must be provided within 60 days after survey data collection operations are concluded:

1. FINDINGS: Provide a brief summary of significant (important) findings that were evidenced in the results.
2. ACTIONS TAKEN OR LESSONS LEARNED: Provide a brief summary of any actions taken or lessons learned as a result of the findings.
3. TAXPAYER PARTICIPATION:
 - a. SURVEYS:
 - i. Number of requests for taxpayer participation
 - ii. Number of questionnaires returned or interviews completed
4. DATE THE DATA COLLECTION BEGAN
5. DATE THE DATA COLLECTION ENDED
6. COST: Include printing, postage, travel, overtime payments, payments to vendors, and any other costs incurred as a direct result of the survey (do not include regular salaries of IRS employees).

Estimated Burden Hours

The IRS plans to conduct three focus groups with twelve participants each. We estimate each group to last one and a half hours. Participants will experience minimal screening time and no travel time.

Only the burden of those customers participating in the focus groups is calculated below since the amount of time required to refuse participation is minimal.

(36 participants X 90 minutes per focus group) = 3,240 minutes = 54 hours

Estimated Study Cost

The only cost to this study will run approximately \$3,000 for the TE/GE facilitator and Strategic Planning staff to travel to the focus group locations of Los Angeles and Chicago. The IRS is utilizing the conference facilities so there is no location cost involved. The IRS will not offer participants an incentive to participate or refreshments.

Study Contact

For questions regarding the study, contact:

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