

**Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Research Studies:
EITC Post Filing Season Marketing Focus Groups
TIRNO-05-Z-00003, Task Order 13**

OMB PACKAGE

I. Introduction

Background/overview. In 2006 the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) implemented new marketing strategies to increase public awareness about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Among those targeted by these strategies were taxpayers who may not be aware of EITC or know that they are eligible for the tax credit. Since 2006 the IRS has continued to refine its EITC marketing strategies to ensure that it is reaching targeted audiences. In Spring 2008, Westat, under contract with the IRS, conducted focus groups around the continental U.S. with English-speaking and Spanish-speaking, EITC-eligible taxpayers to collect their feedback about newly developed radio ads, posters, and brochures designed to educate the public about EITC. Those taxpayers offered suggestions about ways that EITC marketing materials could be designed so they would be most likely to catch taxpayers' attention and motivate people to learn more about the tax credit. The IRS revised some of their EITC marketing campaigns considering the feedback offered by taxpayers during the Spring 2008 focus groups. In early 2009, the IRS released several new EITC ads using a variety of media (radio, TV, and hardcopy) to increase public awareness of EITC during the Tax Year 2008 filing season.

Under Task Order 13, the IRS has contracted with Westat to conduct 14 focus groups with English-speaking and Spanish-speaking, EITC-eligible taxpayers across the continental US. Ten of these discussion groups will be conducted to obtain feedback about English and Spanish EITC radio, television and poster ads that were publicized in early 2009 for the TY 2008 tax filing season. The remaining 4 groups will function to collect taxpayers' feedback about English TV and radio ad "concepts" that have not yet been publicized, but that IRS is considering using in the future.

Objectives of data collection. The objectives of these focus groups are to: (1) supply IRS with insights into eligible taxpayers' awareness of EITC; and, (2) learn how effectively ads that were publicized in early 2009 and ads that remain in the "conceptual" phase (not yet publicized) inform taxpayers about EITC and motivate them to learn more about and possibly file for the tax credit. These focus groups present an opportunity for the IRS to solicit qualitative information from taxpayers about issues such as:

- Taxpayers awareness of EITC and how they learned about it, including any experiences with EITC ads that were publicized in early 2009;
- Actions taxpayers may have taken to learn about EITC on their own, such as going to www.irs.gov/eitc, or calling an IRS toll-free line;

- Feedback about how well each of the different publicized and unpublicized ads brings to mind, and is recognizable as being related to, “EITC” (e.g. supports “brand recognition”);
- Feedback about how well each of the publicized and unpublicized ads motivate taxpayers to learn more about and/or file for the tax credit, including any differences in effectiveness between those designed as paid ads and public service announcements;
- Feedback about each of the publicized and unpublicized ad’s ability to effectively reach targeted demographics, such as taxpayers with limited English proficiency, different ethnic groups, urban and rural taxpayers, and families, including the non-traditional and those without children;
- Suggestions about media types (e.g., print, radio and TV) that should be used to most effectively reach EITC-eligible taxpayers; and,
- Suggestions for enhancing EITC marketing strategies so they can most effectively inform eligible taxpayers about EITC and motivate participation.

Results from the 14 discussion groups are expected to support the IRS in its selection of EITC marketing campaigns by informing the agency about taxpayers’ general awareness of EITC, and, providing a qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of each of the publicized and non-publicized EITC ads with regard to how well they resonate with EITC-eligible taxpayers. Outcomes from these discussions will be used to help the IRS (1) identify the campaign themes that effectively reach targeted demographics; (2) determine the potential effectiveness of having more than one EITC campaign theme; and, (3) identify marketing strategies that help maintain “brand” recognition of EITC across different campaigns.

II. Methodology

Sample design. Fourteen focus groups will be conducted with English-speaking and Spanish-speaking taxpayers who are “potentially” eligible to receive EITC. The discussion locations are pending selection by the IRS and will provide representation of taxpayers residing within the 4 geographic regions within the continental United States¹ (Northeast, Midwest, South, West). No more than 10 respondents will participate in each discussion group. Participants will represent taxpayers who may or may not have ever filed for EITC. IRS will provide Westat with lists of EITC-eligible taxpayers drawn from IRS databases, including names of taxpayers who have claimed EITC in the past, and taxpayers who IRS has identified as potentially eligible to file for the tax credit based on their tax return data.

Five of the discussion groups will be conducted with English-speaking respondents to assess TV and radio ads that were publicized in early 2009. Five discussion groups will be held with Spanish-speaking respondents to assess Spanish-language radio, TV and poster products that

¹ As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau

were publicized in early 2009. Four discussion groups will be held with English-speaking respondents to assess English television storyboard concepts and radio spots that IRS has not yet publicized. Participant criteria for selection into the 3 discussion group types will be the same; therefore, the same screening protocol will be used to screen participants for all 3 group types. The English version of the Recruitment Screener (see Attachment A) is included in this OMB package; however, this document will also be translated into Spanish.

In recruiting participants, we will strive to include individuals who represent:

- EITC-eligible taxpayers who have filed for the tax credit;
- EITC-eligible taxpayers who have not filed for the tax credit;
- Taxpayers from urban, suburban, and rural areas;
- Taxpayers for whom English is a second language;
- Taxpayers with and without children;
- Taxpayers residing in cities where campaigns to market EITC have been implemented; and,
- Taxpayers residing in areas served by IRS community partners, such as organizations that support the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program.

Data to be collected. A total of 14 focus group discussions will be conducted. Five groups will be conducted with English-speaking respondents to assess TV and radio ads (“English IRS-Approved Ads”) that were publicized in early 2009. Five discussion groups will be held with Spanish-speaking respondents to assess Spanish-language radio, TV and poster products (“Spanish IRS-Approved Ads”) that were publicized in early 2009. Four discussion groups will be held with English-speaking respondents to assess not-yet-publicized English TV storyboard concepts and radio spots (“English Concept Ads”). IRS is interested in learning whether some of the ad concepts that they have not yet approved for dissemination could be viable for use in the future.

The discussion format is the same for all 3 group types, and entails:

1. Completion of a Personal Information Form or “PIF” (see Attachment B) to collect basic demographic data and non-sensitive information about participants’ tax-filing experiences;
2. Consent for Participation and Session Audio Recording² (Attachment C); and,
3. Administration of the Discussion Guide tailored for the particular group type. Three separate versions of this guide are included in this OMB Package: English IRS-Approved Ads (Attachment D), Spanish IRS-Approved Ads (Attachment E) and English Concept Ads (Attachment F).

² Participants are given a copy of the Consent Form to keep for their records.

The PIF and consent form will be translated into Spanish. The moderator for the Spanish discussions is fluent in English and Spanish, and will follow an English version of the “Spanish IRS-Approved Ads” Discussion Guide.

Qualitative data will be collected during these discussions to identify taxpayers’ awareness of EITC, and their reactions to the new marketing themes that have been designed to motivate taxpayers to learn more about and file for the tax credit. Each focus group discussion will be audio-taped with participants’ signed consent. Outcomes from the different groups will be systematically analyzed based upon audio transcripts and session notes to identify themes that arise within and across the groups about the major topics under discussion (e.g., awareness of EITC; feedback on EITC marketing materials.)

How data will be used. Results from the focus groups will be used to provide IRS with insight about how aware EITC-eligible taxpayers are of the tax credit, whether participants encountered any of the EITC ads that were publicized in early 2009, and how these taxpayers responded to the publicized and unpublicized marketing materials designed to increase awareness of EITC. While these qualitative results are not generalizable to the entire “EITC-eligible taxpayer population”, they do provide valuable input about the kinds of strategies that could motivate taxpayers to learn more about and potentially file for the tax credit.

How data will be analyzed. Using control analysis strategies, we will systematically review and analyze the transcripts from each of the 14 focus groups to identify themes that emerge. This procedure begins with analyzing each line of the transcript and generating substantive “open” coding categories. We may also use NVivo 7, a software package that enables the coding, linking, shaping, searching, and modeling of qualitative data.

Dates of data collection. A total of 14 focus groups will be conducted across the Continental U.S beginning in April 2009. Data collection is expected to be completed by May 2009.

Who is conducting the research? The research is being conducted by Westat. Westat will not be using any subcontractors. Westat is located at 1650 Research Blvd., Rockville, MD 20850.

Cost of study. IRS originally contracted with Westat to conduct 11 focus groups under this task order at the cost of \$174,879 across 7 tasks. IRS is in the process of initiating a contract modification that would increase the project budget by an estimated \$39,157 to allow for an additional 3 groups to be conducted. Once the contract modification is finalized, a total of 14 focus groups will be conducted across 7 tasks under this task order at the cost of \$214, 036.

Stipend. A \$100 cash stipend will be provided to each focus group participant. The purpose of the stipend is to encourage participation, and to thank respondents for sharing their time and contributions to the discussion. A stipend of this amount is typical when conducting focus groups with populations that may incur child care and/or transportation expenses to attend the discussion.

Recruitment efforts. Westat will initiate recruiting activities using a list of EITC-eligible taxpayers provided by the IRS. Recruitment and participant screening be conducted via telephone. Lessons learned while recruiting for similar focus groups under previous IRS task orders indicated that some taxpayers were reluctant to participate in a study sponsored by the

IRS. Project telephone recruiters will have a list of Frequently Asked Questions (Attachment G) to refer to when responding to inquires about the intention of the focus group discussions.

To ensure adequate attendance at the focus group discussions planned for Task Order 13, some recruiting may need to be done “off-list”. To support any needed “off-list” recruiting, Westat will seek out community partners within the different discussion locations to serve as liaisons to members of underserved and hard-to-reach populations. We anticipate that IRS Stakeholder Partnership, Education and Communications organization (SPEC) partners may be in a position to be especially helpful in this regard. SPEC partners work with local coalitions to help link low-income, elderly, disabled and limited English proficient individuals and families with information about EITC and free tax preparation services.

We will track recruitment rates for each discussion group and provide reasons that taxpayers give for choosing not to participate. We will also track the number of individuals who were invited to participate in each discussion group and the number who actually ended up participating.

Location-region/city and facilities. Fourteen separate discussions will take place in different cities within the continental United States. Locations are pending selection by the IRS, and will represent the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions. Westat will seek space within professional focus group facilities in these locations to conduct the groups. If a professional facility is not available in a targeted location, we will secure a facility (e.g., conference room in a church or community center) in which the group discussion can be conducted so as to ensure participants’ privacy and anonymity.

Methods to maximize response rates. Since this is a qualitative effort, the calculation of response rate is not relevant. The results from these focus groups will not be representative of the entire population being studied. Nonetheless, we will still attempt to encourage participation during our recruiting phone calls. In addition, all participants will: (1) be sent a confirmation letter (Attachment H) reminding them of the focus group date, time and location; (2) receive a reminder telephone call (Attachment I) one business day before the discussion group; and, (3) be provided a stipend when they show up for the group. The confirmation letter and reminder telephone call script will be translated into Spanish.

Efforts not to duplicate research. This project is part of an ongoing, qualitative data collection effort that the IRS is conducting with EITC-eligible taxpayers to learn about their awareness of the tax credit and to gather their feedback about the effectiveness of different EITC marketing strategies.

III. Participants Criteria

Participants for the 14 groups will represent English-speaking and Spanish-speaking, EITC-eligible taxpayers residing within the locations pending selection by the IRS; selected locations will represent the 4 geographic regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) within the continental United States. The criteria for participation are based on a person “potentially” being eligible to file for EITC. Westat will initiate recruiting activities using a list of EITC-eligible taxpayers provided by the IRS; however, we anticipate that, in order to achieve an adequate response rate, some recruiting may need to be conducted off-list with the support of community

organizations, such as IRS SPEC partners. Because IRS SPEC partnerships work with local coalitions to help link low-income, elderly, disabled and limited English proficient individuals and families with information about EITC and free tax preparation services, taxpayers who are recruited off-list in this manner will be considered to be “potentially eligible” for EITC and deemed appropriate focus group members.

Potential participants will be screened on issues such as whether they filed a tax return last year (a Yes/No item; no details will be asked), whether they remember filing for EITC on their last return, and household composition (with regard to children under age 18). The IRS wants to include individuals in these discussions who may not have recently filed a tax return, taxpayers who have never filed for EITC, and those that do not have children among those that review the publicized and unpublicized EITC marketing themes they have developed.

IV. Privacy, Security, Disclosure, Anonymity

Westat personnel are trained in the importance of protecting the privacy and anonymity of project participants and confidentiality of study data. All project staff have signed Westat’s “Assurance of Confidentiality Pledge”, a general assurance of confidentiality. Data collected during recruiting and screening activities (e.g., name, address) will be kept in locked cabinets or areas when not in use. Once the recruiting task is completed, all respondent names and addresses contained in the screener will be shredded.

During the focus groups, only the first name of participants will be used. Each discussion will be audio-taped with each participant’s signed consent. Should an individual decline to be audio recorded, s/he will be excused from participation and “paid and sent” (provided the \$100 honorarium and thanked for their time.) Westat will prepare typed near-verbatim transcripts for all focus groups and will deliver them to the IRS. All identifying information will be removed from the transcripts before submission. All hard copy data (e.g. screener data), consent forms and audiotapes will be maintained in a locked file cabinet. Screener data and group participant rosters will be maintained separately to minimize potential for identification. All electronic materials will be maintained on a password-protected site. All audio tapes and hardcopy data forms will be destroyed within 3 months after the end of the contract period. In addition, to protect the privacy of the respondents, no names will appear in any report documentation.

V. Estimated Burden Hours

The estimated time to complete the participant screening is 4 minutes and the estimated time for each focus group attendee is 2 ½ hours including travel time (30 minutes each way). We will assume a 50% percent success rate in soliciting participation. We anticipate that we will need to contact a larger than usual number of taxpayers for each focus group since our experiences while recruiting for previous focus groups conducted for the IRS indicated that some taxpayers are reluctant to participate in a study sponsored by the agency. We are hopeful that outreach conducted with community programs will help minimize the number of people that we call and screen for each focus group, since these agencies will be in the capacity to act as liaisons for the study and can deliver a message of credibility and safety to taxpayers.

Screening Burden		
Total number of potential participants screened: [Approx. 350 participants screened for each of 14 focus groups (350 x 14 = 4900)]	4900	People
Estimated time to complete screening	4	Minutes
Estimated participant screening burden (4900 X 4 minutes = 19,600 minutes / 60 = 327 hours)	327	Hours
Focus Group Participation Burden		
Estimated number of participants: 140 participants (n=10 for each focus group). There will be 14 focus groups.	140	People
Time to conduct the focus group (1.5 hours) plus half hour commuting time each way (1 hour)	2.5	Hours
Estimated focus group participant burden (140 X 2.5 =)	350	Hours
Total burden (Screening + Focus Group Participation)	677	Hours

VI. Special Tallies and Other Information

The following information will be provided to the EITC Office at IRS within 60 days after the close of the focus group data collection operations:

1. SOI Control Number
2. Title of study
3. Purpose of study
4. Findings: a brief summary of significant (important) findings that were evidenced in the results.
5. Actions taken or lessons learned: a brief summary of actions taken or lessons learned as a result of the screening and/or focus groups.
6. Number of participants screened.
7. Number of participants who were invited to the focus group.
8. Number of participants who actually participated in the focus group.
9. Date and times of the focus groups.
10. Date the data collection ended.
11. Actual burden hours
12. Estimated costs associated with the data collection.

Attachments

Attachment A – Telephone Recruitment Screener

Attachment B – Participant Information Form (PIF)

Attachment C – Consent for Participation & Audio Recording

Attachment D – Discussion Guide for English IRS-Approved Ads

Attachment E – Discussion Guide for Spanish IRS-Approved Ads

Attachment F – Discussion Guide for English “Concept” Ads

Attachment G – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQS)

Attachment H – Session Confirmation Letter

Attachment I – Telephone Reminder Call Script