

**SB/SE Automated Underreporter (AUR)  
Customer Experience Improvement Project  
Taxpayer Focus Groups**

## **Introduction**

The objective of this focus group is to understand the IRS Automated Underreporter process from the customer's perspective. Automated Underreporter is the name of the process IRS uses to match third-party information such as W-2s, interest and dividend statements and securities sales, etc. to the income amounts reported on individuals' income tax returns. When they don't match up, IRS writes the taxpayer and asks for an explanation and/or proposes an increase in tax that should have been paid. For purposes of this focus group, we will refer to this process using the term AUR. In our discussion today, we would like to gain insight into your experiences with this program. We are specifically interested in:

1. Understanding the overall customer experience of going through the AUR process.
2. Understanding the "pain points" in the process that might contribute to a customer feeling dissatisfied with the experience.
3. Understanding from the customer's perspective what we can change to create a more positive experience for individuals going through the AUR process

## **Purpose of Discussion, Ground Rules, Disclosures**

1. This is not about the details of your specific AUR inquiry; your case outcome should not be part of this discussion
2. Our discussion *is* about your experience specifically with the AUR process. (It is not about the filing of your taxes or any other IRS interactions.)
3. We want to hear from each of you. While you do not have to answer every question, or any questions you are not comfortable discussing, we do want to be able to benefit from hearing about your experience.
4. Your answers and comments will be kept private. Your name will not be used in any report for this project.
5. The focus group will take no more than 2 hours to complete.
6. We are videotaping and audio-taping our session with you, but it is only so that we can review your comments and accurately describe them. [For in-person groups] We also have a few observers here. Again, they are only interested in your descriptions of the process – they have nothing to do with your cases.

## **Warm-Up**

Before we start our discussion, why don't we go around the table and introduce ourselves (using first names only). Tell us briefly what made you decide to come to this group tonight? Let's begin!

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**Customer Experience With Automated Underreporter**

***Overall AUR Process***

1. Take a few minutes to write down or draw the sequence of events that occurred regarding your interaction with the IRS on your AUR. Write down what type of interaction or event happened. Include events such as letters, phone calls or other interactions whether initiated by the IRS or by you.
2. Let's share a few of these stories. Tell me about your experience? What happened first? What happened next?
3. What were your overall reactions, thoughts and feelings throughout this process?
4. Were there specific interactions, which you remember, more clearly as particularly pleasant? What were they and why were they pleasant?
5. How about interactions that were unpleasant? What were they and why were they unpleasant? Please describe a few of those in more detail - what happened; what did you think/feel, what you did next, and what was the result?
6. At what point were you most frustrated?
7. What would have made you feel better?
8. Was there something you expected to happen that did not? Why did you have that expectation?
9. At what point were your expectations met adequately?
10. How did you feel at the time and how do you feel now that some time has passed?

***Details of the AUR Process***

1. What was the starting point of your being involved with AUR?
2. What did you see as your goal in this process?
3. What was the biggest obstacle to achieving your goal?
4. Was the initial notification letter and your role in the process clear and easy to understand? If not, why not?
5. During the AUR process, how well informed were you about your case and its status?
  - a. How did you keep track of where your case was in the AUR process?
  - b. What would be your preferred method(s) for being kept informed about the status of your case? (i.e. letter, phone call, email, postcard, other)
6. From the beginning of the inquiry process until your AUR inquiry was closed
  - a. How many times were you in contact with the IRS?
  - b. What type of contacts were these?
  - c. What type of letters or notices did you receive from the IRS?
    - i. Did you open all you got? (If no) why not?
    - ii. Can you recall what they said or asked for?
    - iii. Were you able to understand the letters or notices? (If no) why not?
    - iv. Did you respond to them? Why (not)?

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- v. Did you have enough time to respond (and get the documents requested)?
- vi. Was the information requested reasonable? (If no) why not? *[Probe for relevance, amount, difficulty of obtaining (e.g., bank statements).]*
- vii. Was the envelope provided helpful? (If no) why not? *[Probe on size, whether mailing label would be better.]*
- viii. Based on the date of the letter, did you have the full amount of time to respond? *[Probe on any apparently unfairly dated letters.]*
- d. Did you have any telephone contact with the IRS?
  - i. Who initiated it, you or them?
  - ii. Did you have any problem getting through?
  - iii. Did you use the toll free number? How was that experience?
  - iv. Did you get the Tax Examiner assigned to your case?
  - v. Did it work well? Why (not)? Was the person (people) you spoke with helpful? Courteous?
- 7. When you had questions about the process, how did you try to get them resolved?
- 8. Describe the time that you spent on resolving the tax issue. (Note to moderator, “time” is left intentionally ambiguous to mirror question on survey. Moderator probes, describe the: overall length of time from beginning to end of process; time spent on any single part(s) of the process; wait time for response from IRS); What would have made you act faster?
- 9. If you used an accountant or other tax professional did (s)he work through the AUR process with the IRS or did you do it yourself? Did (s)he tell you about the progress of your case?
- 10. How did you know that your case had been closed?
  - a. Did you receive a communication?
  - b. Did you call to determine if it had been closed?

Summary

What could the IRS have done differently to make your AUR process a better experience?

- a. Did the IRS lead you to expect anything that did not happen or they didn't deliver on?
- b. Are there any tools or guidelines that would have made it easier and/or faster for you to provide the information requested by the IRS to close your case?
- c. How could notices and letter from the IRS regarding your AUR inquiry be made easier to understand?

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**Wrap-up**

Those are all the questions we have. Is there anything else you would like to say about the AUR process before leaving?

Finally, for the IRS to speak with the public, we are required to have approval from the Office of Management and Budget. Their approval number for this project 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: IRS Tax Products Coordinating Committee, 1111 Constitution Avenue, NW, IR-6526, Washington, DC 20224.

Thank you again for your participation in our discussion.