

OMB Focus Groups Clearance Package

Focus Groups With HCTC Participants and Potentially Eligibles

I. Introduction:

Background:

The Health Coverage Tax Credit (HCTC), a federal tax credit established by the Trade Act of 2002, is designed to help eligible Americans and their families pay for health coverage they might otherwise not be able to afford, by paying 80% of an eligible individual's health plan premiums.

The program is a partnership of the federal government, state governments and health plan administrators. The federal government administers the program. State agencies help identify people who are eligible and help promote the program. State agencies and health plan administrators work together to make qualified coverage options available for eligible individuals.

Traditionally, the HCTC was designed to assist:

1. Workers who lose their jobs due to the effects of international trade and who are eligible for certain Trade Adjustment Assistance (**TAA**) benefits (i.e., for workers who have been certified to have lost their jobs, or whose hours of work or wages are reduced due to increased imports); or who are eligible for benefits under the Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (ATAA) program.
2. People who receive benefits from the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (**PBGC**) and who are at least 55 years old.

In 2003 and 2004, research was conducted with program participants and potentially eligibles to understand their perceptions of the program. Survey 1 was conducted with participants and non-responders to understand program awareness, interest, usage and satisfaction. Survey 2 was conducted among the potentially eligible population to better understand what percentage would actually qualify for the HCTC. This research has not been repeated since that time.

Objectives of Data Collection:

As part of understanding how underlying needs, motivations and program usage/satisfaction may have changed since the program's infancy, we propose conducting focus groups across multiple regions and population types. Results of this effort will be used to design "Survey 4"—a mandated survey to take place in the fall of 2009 and results of which will be reported to Congress.

II. Methodology:

Sample Design:

A total of 12 focus groups will be conducted. Focus groups will be conducted in 3 markets to ensure geographic and regional representation. The markets are Boise, ID, Steubenville, OH and Charlotte, NC. Within each market, 4 groups will be conducted—2 with HCTC participants and 2 with 'non-responders'—those who are potentially eligible but have not attempted to register. Participant and non-responders groups will be further split by TAA and PBGC to ensure a 'like' composition within each group. Each region will contain the following group composition: 1 group of TAA HCTC participants (enrolled); 1 group of TAA eligible non-responders; 1 group of PBGC HCTC participants (enrolled); 1 group of PBGC eligible non-responders.

Focus Group Methodology and Administration:

The contractor will prepare screeners (to ensure the right respondents are recruited), develop the moderator's guide and moderate the focus groups. A focus group facility in each city will recruit and host the sessions. Videos/DVDs and audio tapes of each session will be made available.

Data Collection Dates:

Once approval to proceed is secured, it is expected to be a 4 week effort. At present time, we expect the timeframe to commence in mid-late July and end in mid-late August 2009. Recruiting will take approximately 2 weeks, conducting of the sessions—1 week and 1 week for reporting/consolidation

Focus Group Questions:

The moderator's guide outline is attached in this package. Each session will last approximately 2 hours. Topic areas include:

Introduction: The moderator will introduce the topic as seeking feedback on the Health Coverage Tax Credit Program. The moderator will encourage open, honest feedback and will set ground rules for productive group discussion.

Warm-up Question: Each participant will be asked to say their name, where they are from and one word to describe the HCTC program. They will be asked to describe why they chose that word.

- *For those enrolled*, they will be asked how long they've been enrolled
- *For those dropped out*, they will NOT be asked why they dropped out yet, that will be explored in-depth later in the discussion
- *For those not enrolled*, they will NOT be asked why they didn't enroll yet, that will be explored in depth later in the discussion

Program Understanding: The focus group participants will be asked to describe the HCTC program (this will help to assess their basic understanding of the program and how it works).

- What is the HCTC?
- How does it work?
- Who is eligible?
- How does one stay eligible?
- What does it cover?
- How does it impact your taxes?

Eligibility Communications: The first area of questions will cover:

- Communications channels/How they first learned about HCTC
- Information resources/Where they went with questions
- Communications recall/What communications tools do they recall (have copies of the most common tools, such as brochure, application, qualification letter, other to inspire recall and evaluation)
- Evaluation of communications tools
- Evaluation of the process for introducing the benefit, certification and enrollment
- *For those non-responders:* explore reasons for not enrolling, any areas that need clarification, changes they would suggest to make the program better meet their needs

Mindset: Review their experience as their jobs or pensions were lost. Talk about initial reaction to the loss, reaction to the concept of HCTC, the roll it played in their lives, feelings during this time, fears, future plans and opportunities for helping others in this situation. What types of communications make them feel better in this situation and what makes them feel worse.

Enrollment Process: *For those enrolled review:*

- Their overall enrollment process.
- Communications: All those communications points, where they go for information, where they go with questions, communications tools
- Payment process: Evaluate the differences between the monthly payment versus end of year payment options. Why each chose that approach. Benefits and drawbacks of each. Awareness of options.
- Program payment process evaluation
- *For those not enrolled,* review how far they got in the enrollment process, areas of communications, what worked well and what didn't, probe if there were any communications issues that affected their possible enrollment.

Opportunities for improvement: From all perspectives the groups will discuss ways the program could be improved in terms of awareness, education, eligibility, certification, enrollment and communications tools.

How data will be used:

The data will be used to inform design for Survey 4. A written report and a PowerPoint presentation will be derived from the perspectives collected during the sessions. No individual data will be reported, only summary findings will be reported out.

How data will be analyzed:

We will provide analysis of the sessions for each market and all combined markets. We will also analyze and report by participants and non-responders as well as TAA versus PBGC perspectives.

Who is conducting the research:

The research is being coordinated by Wage & Investment, Research Group 4 of the IRS. Accenture will be designing and analyzing materials and managing the subcontractor who will be recruiting and hosting the focus group sessions.

Location – region/city and facilities:

The focus group sample will be drawn from PE&R lists of Participants and Non-responders for TAA and PBGC populations in the recruitable zip codes for the 3 chosen markets

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, and is in line with the industry standard.

Recruitment efforts:

Taxpayers who are selected to participate in the sessions will also receive a reminder of the session date/time to encourage their participation.

Methods to maximize response rate:

Confirmation letters and reminder calls will emphasize the importance of participating and explain how results will be used to better equip the HCTC to serve their clients.

Expected Response Rate:

Previous experience with focus indicates the response rate will be approximately 10 percent.

Efforts to not duplicate research:

We not have found any previous research that duplicates our efforts.

III. Participant Criteria:

HCTC Participant groups will be screened to ensure program awareness/knowledge they are receiving benefits, and at least some level of involvement in the HCTC program.

Non-responders will be screened to ensure eligibility in the HCTC program.

Full screeners for participant, non-responders and TAA vs. PBGC for each are attached to this package.

IV. Privacy, Security, Disclosure

Research Group 4 will ensure that the utmost scrutiny is given to privacy, security, and disclosure when profiling the taxpayers that respond to the focus group sessions. Every precaution will be taken to assure the proper protection of the taxpayer responses.

We will carefully safeguard the security of data utilized, as well as, the privacy of the taxpayers. Physical security measures include a locked, secure office. In addition, we will store printouts of sensitive data in locked cabinets, and shred the data when we no longer need it. We will accomplish data security at the C-2 level through the Windows NT operating system. Systems are password protected, users are profiled for authorized use, and individual audit trails will be generated and reviewed. We will apply fair information and record-keeping practices to ensure protection of all taxpayer information.

We will protect the privacy of the taxpayers that participate in the focus groups by not using names in our report. We will also control official access to the information and will not allow public access to the information. The session recordings/tapes will be destroyed when we have completed the project and there is no further need for the data.

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.

V. Burden Hours

- Participant Screening:
 - o It is estimated that 1200 potential participants will need to be screened in order to secure 120 respondents who qualify and agree to attend the sessions. Screening is expected to take 3 minutes per potential participant. $1200 \times 3 / 60 = 60$ hours for screening
- Sessions and Travel:

- o Each of the 120 participants will spend approximately 150 minutes (120 in the session and 30 minutes of travel time). $120 \times 150 / 60 = 300$ hours
- Total estimated respondent burden: 360 hours
(60 screening plus 300 participation)

The total cost for this research is \$44,000 plus travel (travel is estimated to be \$4000)

VI. Special Tallies and Other Information

The following information will be provided within 5 business days after the close of the focus group sessions

1. Findings: a brief summary of significant (important) findings that were evidenced in the results.
2. Actions taken or lessons learned: a brief summary of actions taken or lessons learned as a result of the findings
3. Number of requests for taxpayer participation
4. Number of participants by market and group