

## **Screener Guide for “Improving First Contact Resolution with Tax Practitioners” Focus Group**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am an employee of the Internal Revenue Service. I am recruiting approximately 10 tax practitioners to participate in one of the focus group interviews that will be held during this tax forum. Management at the IRS has asked me to conduct the interviews at this forum to gather ideas and opinions about your experiences with first contact resolution with the IRS and to solicit your input on how to improve service.

First, may I ask a few qualifying questions?

**Question 1:** Do you contact the IRS for information? (We want practitioners that contacted the IRS seeking information about a concern, issue, question, or problem.)

*If the preparer has not contacted the IRS for information, then go on to the next potential recruit. If you feel they have substantial experience, then go to Question 2.*

**Question 2:** In the last year, have you contacted the IRS in person, on their website, by telephone, by mail, or by e-mail for information on tax related concerns, issues, questions or problems? Did you get a resolution to your issue on your first contact? Did you encounter problems getting a resolution to your issue on your first contact with the IRS? Do you feel you’d like to contribute ideas on improving the resolution of your tax related concerns, issues, questions, or problems on your first contact with the IRS?

If the practitioner indicates that they have had contact with the IRS to have an opinion about first contact resolution and you feel that the practitioner shows the experience to be able to participate, then invite the practitioner to participate in the focus group.

We would like to invite you to participate in the focus group on improving first contact resolution with practitioners with about nine other tax practitioners. Again, we want to hear your opinions, views and ideas. The session should take approximately 2 hours at \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm in Room \_\_\_\_\_.

The Paperwork Reduction Act requires that the IRS display an OMB control number on all public information requests. The OMB Control Number for this focus group is 1545-1349. We estimate the time required to be two hours. Also, if you have any comments regarding the time estimates associated with this study or suggestions on making this process simpler, please write to:

Internal Revenue Service  
Tax Products Coordinating Committee  
SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP  
1111 Constitution Ave. NW

Washington, DC 20224

## **Moderator’s Guide for “Improving First Contact Resolution with Tax Practitioners” Focus Group**

Hi! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m a focus group moderator from the Internal Revenue Service. This is my co-moderator \_\_\_\_\_.

The IRS has a strong commitment to provide excellent customer service and, in that light, we are seeking important information about first contact resolution with tax practitioners. The IRS would like to get your feedback to help us improve first contact issues with you.

Before we start, let me ask how many of you have ever participated in a focus group before? For those of you who have not, let me explain. A focus group is research tool used to gather ideas and opinions from a group of individuals with a common characteristic or experience by means of directed discussion.

We have some ground rules that I would like to go over:

The IRS has arranged this room during this conference for you to speak with us. We only need to know your first name in order to keep the discussion moving.

There are no **right or wrong answers**. Everyone’s opinion is valuable so I’d like everyone to participate. Please speak one-at-a-time, loudly, and clearly.

I will be watching our time and directing our conversation. My co-moderator will be the note taker. Because it’s hard to listen to your comments and capture everything, we will also tape this session. The tape will only be used to refresh our memory and to ensure that we convey your ideas and opinions accurately in the report. **(NO NAMES WILL BE USED IN THE REPORT)** Once the report is written, the tape is destroyed.

We will be here about 2 hours. There will be no formal break; however, if you need to stretch, go to the restroom, or walk around a little, please feel free to do so but please come back quickly. Your comments are very important to us. Please turn off any cell phones and/or beepers.

We are required by law to report to you the OMB control # for this public information request. That number is 1545-1349.

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### **Warm Up**

Let’s begin! Please give me your first name only, how long you’ve been in business and what types of returns you prepare. Note: Go around the table.

## **General Questions**

How do you currently communicate with the IRS regarding tax-related issues? (place the words *tax-related issues* on a flip-chart to help with probing questions or subsequent questions)

Probes: Is the inquiry into tax-related issues done via face-to-face contact, through a website, by telephone, by mail, by e-mail or some other tool? What kind of information are you seeking? Who provided you the information?

How often did you contact the IRS last year?

Where does most of your request for information come from or where do you go most to get answers to tax-related issues?

What kind of information do you feel you need from the IRS – do you feel it is a critical responsibility of the IRS to provide this information to you?

What’s the best way for you to receive information or access information from the IRS about tax-related issues?

Why are these the best ways?

## **Face-to-face Contact**

How many of you have gone to an IRS office to make an inquiry into tax-related issues? (*show of hands*)

What IRS office do you use for tax-related issues and why?

What type of tax-related issues do you bring to the IRS office? (*tax return related, notice, or other*)

What was your most recent issue about?

How many times have you contacted the IRS about this issue?

When you use an IRS office for tax-related issues are you able to get the issues resolved when you first make contact with a representative from the IRS? (*Yes or No*)

If you were not able to get your tax-related issues resolved when you made first contact with a representative from an IRS office, why do you think the IRS was unable to resolve it?

Probes: Was it because they did not understand the question? Was it because they did not know the answer? Was it because they referred you elsewhere? Was it because they had other customers waiting? Was it because of other reasons?

What should the IRS do differently to help resolve an issue the first time you contact an IRS office?

For those of you who don’t use an IRS office to make inquiries in reference to your tax-related issues, what do you think about going to an IRS office after hearing this conversation?

**Website**

How many of you access the IRS website regarding tax-related issues? (*show of hands*)

What websites do you use for tax-related issues and why?

What are the tax-related issues you are inquiring about on the website? (*tax return related, notice, or other*)

What was your most recent issue about?

How many times have you contacted the IRS about this issue?

When you use the website for tax-related issues are you able to get the issues resolved when you first contact the IRS website and make your inquiry? (*Yes or No*)

If you were not able to get your tax-related issues resolved when you first contacted the IRS, why do you think the IRS was unable to resolve it?

Probes: Was it because they did not understand the question? Was it because they did not respond to the question? Was it because the website was down and not available? Was it because of other reasons?

How can getting the issues resolved when you first contact the IRS using the website be improved?

For those of you who don’t use IRS websites for your tax-related issues, what do you think about going to the IRS’ websites after hearing this conversation?

**Telephone**

How many of you contact the IRS regarding tax-related issues on the telephone? (*show of hands*)

What are the tax-related issues you are inquiring about on the telephone? (*tax return related, notice, or other*)

What was your most recent issue about?

How many times have you contacted the IRS about this issue?

When you use the telephone for tax-related issues are you able to get the issues resolved when you first contact the IRS and make your inquiry? (*Yes or No*)

If you were not able to get your tax-related issues resolved when you first contacted the IRS using the telephone, why do you think the IRS was unable to resolve it?

Probes: Was it because of busy signals? Was it because you did not understand the menu choices? Was it because of excessive hold times? Was it because the representative on the phone did not understand the question? Was it because they did not know the answer? Was it because they referred you elsewhere? Was it because of other reasons?

How can getting the issues resolved when you first contact the IRS using the telephone be improved?

For those of you who don’t use the telephone to contact the IRS about tax-related issues, what do you think about using the telephone after hearing this conversation?

### **Mail**

How many of you contact the IRS regarding tax-related issues using the mail? (*show of hands*)

What are the tax-related issues you are inquiring about through the mail? (*tax return related, notice, or other*)

What was your most recent issue about?

How many times have you contacted the IRS about this issue?

When you use the mail to make an inquiry about any tax-related issues you may have, do you get a resolution when you first contact the IRS through the mail? (*Yes or No*)

If you were not able to get your tax-related issues resolved when you first contacted the IRS using the mail, why do you think the IRS was unable to resolve it?

Probes: Was it because they did not respond to your questions? Was it because they did not understand the question? Was it because they did not know the answer? Was it because they referred you elsewhere? Was it because of other reasons?

How can getting the issues resolved when you first contact the IRS using the mail be improved?

For those of you who don’t use the mail to resolve issues, what do you think about using the mail after hearing this conversation?

### **E-Mail**

How many of you e-mail the IRS about any tax-related issues? (*show of hands*)

What are the tax-related issues you are e-mailing the IRS about? (*tax return related, notice, or other*)

What was your most recent issue about?

How many times have you contacted the IRS about this issue?

When you use e-mail to make an inquiry about any tax-related issues you may have, do you get a resolution when you first contact the IRS? (*Yes or No*)

If you were not able to get your tax-related issues resolved when you first contacted the IRS using e-mail, why do you think the IRS was unable to resolve it?

Probes: Was it because they did not respond to the question? Was it because they did not understand the question? Was it because they did not know the answer? Was it because they referred you elsewhere? Was it because of other reasons?

How can getting the issues resolved when you first contact the IRS using e-mail be improved?

For those of you who don’t use e-mail, what do you think about e-mailing the IRS about tax-related issues after hearing this conversation?

### **Other Sources**

Do any of you use services we have not mentioned to get information while working with clients? (*show of hands*)

Probes: For example Tax information service like CCH, software, Publication 17 or Taxpayer Advocate Services (TAS)

What other sources do you use for tax-related issues and why?

Probes: For example Tax information service like CCH, software, Publication 17 or Taxpayer Advocate Services (TAS)

If they used TAS, what other contacts did you attempt to make before you had to go to TAS? Why did these prior contacts fail?

What are the tax-related issues you are inquiring about using the other sources? (*tax return related, notice, or other*)

What was your most recent issue about?

How many times have you contacted the other sources about this issue?

When you use the other sources for tax-related issues are you able to get the issues resolved when you first make contact with them? (*Yes or No*)

If you were not able to get your tax-related issues resolved when you first made contact using the other sources, why do you think they were unable to resolve it?

Probes: Was it because they did not respond to the question? Was it because they did not understand the question? Was it because they did not know the answer? Was it because they referred you elsewhere? Was it because of other reasons?

How can getting the issues resolved when you first make contact using other sources be improved?

For those of you who don’t use other sources for your tax-related issues, what do you think about using these other sources after hearing this conversation?

### **Conclusion**

Which method of contact would you pick as the best for resolving tax-related issues – as the method which was most successful for you?

Are there any more comments about these topics that you would like us to take back to IRS?

Are there any other issues you’d like to discuss?

Thank you for all your help. As our partners in tax administration, your ideas and opinions are very important to us. We hope that by working together we can both become more effective. Your participation here today is valuable and greatly appreciated.