

**Appendix B. Screener and Moderator’s Guide for “Improving First Contact Resolution with Tax Practitioners” Focus Groups – TAB Project 2.02 (2)**

## **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: 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?

Question 2: Did you get a resolution to your issue on your first contact or encounter problems getting a resolution to your issue on your first contact with the IRS?

Question 3: 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**

You were asked here because you answered some earlier questions this week that you have had contact with the IRS over the past year. With these contacts you may have had problems/concerns with the response you received from the IRS and expressed an interest in helping us improve our first contact resolution. I'd like to ask you some general questions to get started.

How often did you contact the IRS last year?

What kind of information do you go to the IRS for?

**Definition of First Contact Resolution**

How do you define first contact resolution? (write on board "First Contact Resolution." Establish a common definition for purposes of the focus group discussion.)

How well does the IRS meet your definition of First Contact Resolution?

What should the IRS do to resolve an issue during the first contact?

What do you believe was the reason the IRS did not resolve your issue during the first contact?

Probe: Was it because they:

Did not understand the question?

Did not know the answer?

Referred you elsewhere?

Had other customers waiting?

(other reasons)

**Avenues of Communications**

What methods do you use to contact the IRS? (count out loud each method)

Probe:

e-mail

fax

walk-in (face-to-face)

telephone

irs.gov

mail/correspondence

What are your reasons for using this method?

Do you generally get your issue resolved on the first contact?

Are you satisfied with the number of contacts it takes to get your issue resolved?

If not, what do you think the IRS should do differently?

For those using the telephone to resolve your issue, what was the reason you did not get your issue resolved on first contact?

Probe:

- Busy signal
- Did not understand the menu choices
- Excessive hold times
- Employee did not understand the question
- Employee did not know the answer
- Employee referred practitioner elsewhere
- (Other reasons)

For those using face-to-face contact to resolve your issue, what was the reason you did not get your issue resolved with the first contact?

Probe: Office was closed

- Excessive wait time
- Office visited did not provide service/product requested
- Employee did not understand the question
- Employee did not know the answer
- Employee referred practitioner elsewhere
- (Other reasons)

For those who use the IRS website, what was the reason you did not get your issue resolved with the first contact?

Probe: Site/page was not available

- Unable to locate relevant information on the site
- Information provided was not relevant to issue
- Information was too basic to be useful
- Information was too complex to be useful
- (Other reasons)

For those who use a written communication channel (fax, email, mail/correspondence), what was the reason you did not get your issue resolved with the first contact?

Probe: Never received a response

- Response was not timely; already had answer from another source
- Employee did not understand the question
- Employee did not know the answer
- Employee referred practitioner elsewhere
- (Other reasons)

What other sources other than the IRS do you use?

Probe for reasons for using the other sources

Which method of communication would you pick as the best for resolving your issues?

Is there a method you would prefer if the IRS was better at it?

How could the IRS be better at this method?

**Other Sources**

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

Probes:

- Tax information service (CCH)
- Software
- Publication
- Taxpayer Advocate Services (TAS)

When you use these other sources, are you able to get the issues resolved when you first use them?

Does that make it a better source than the IRS?

What are your reasons for believing that it is a better source?

**Improvements**

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

Probes:

- Phones
- IRS.gov
- Walk-in (face-to-face contacts)

What are your reasons for feeling that way?

**Other Issues**

I'd like to switch gears a little bit and discuss some issues that the IRS has with identifying practitioners in order to provide information.

How many of you are affiliated with any organizations? (count out loud)  
probe for non-affiliated

If non- affiliated practitioners in group ask:  
What would be the best way to get information to you?

If all practitioners are affiliated ask:  
What would be the best way to get information to you?

What would be the best way to get information to practitioners who are not affiliated with any organization?

How can we identify these non-affiliated practitioners' needs?

And one final issue where we are interested in your perceptions: When taxpayers abandon preparing their own return and begin using a paid preparer, what do you think are their reasons for making this change?

Probes: Fear of making a mistake  
Fear of IRS (exam)  
Return too complex  
Time constraints  
Using other services anyway  
(Other reasons)

**Conclusion**

Are there any more comments about first contact resolution that you would like to further discuss before we end this session? Thank you for all your help. Your participation here today was valuable and greatly appreciated.