Office of Management and Budget Clearance Package

2010 IRS Employee Plans (EP) Phone Forums:

Assessing Customer Satisfaction

Internal Revenue Service
Tax Exempt and Government Entities Division

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Introduction

Background

The Tax Exempt and Government Entities (TE/GE) Division of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) was established in 1999 to help implement the IRS Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (Public Law No.105-206). The Act shifted the IRS mission from enforcement to public service in helping individual taxpayers, organizations, and other entities comply with tax laws. TE/GE aims to improve the IRS's ability to meet the special needs of pension plans, exempt organizations, and government entities in complying with tax laws.

The office of Employee Plans (EP), one of TE/GE's business units, helps external customers understand and comply with the pension law. EP external customers include retirement plan sponsors, plan participants, and practitioners working in the retirement benefits arena. EP serves the market of nearly one million qualified pension benefit plans covered under the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) section 401(a) that must file annual returns for group pension, profit-sharing, 401(k), employee stock ownership (ESOP), and stock bonus plans. According to 1998 return figures, over more than $4.0 trillion in assets were handled by about 1 million plans.[1]

EP Customer Education & Outreach (EP CE&O) was established in 1999 to facilitate implementation of the IRS Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998. Headquartered in Washington, DC, EP CE&O provides educational services and information to EP external customers to help them understand and comply with pension law. EP CE&O compliance activities include both direct and indirect contacts with external customers and consist of two elements: Customer Education and Outreach. The former involves the direct contact with customers through IRS participation at conferences/seminars/workshops and the delivery of speeches. Outreach involves indirect contact with customers through newsletters, publications (includes educational videos and interactive CDs), Web sites, and customer partnerships.

Phone forums are a component of the EP CE&O Customer Education Program. They are 30 to 90 minutes long and are led by IRS EP personnel. The forums address topics relevant to retirement plan sponsors, plan participants, benefit practitioners, and tax practitioners. Past topics have included 403(b) Plans, Employee Plans Compliance Resolution System (EPCRS), and Retirement Plan Distributions. A large and wide audience appears to have been reached, as an average of approximately 800 individuals with assigned personal identification numbers (PIN) have called into each of the past five EP phone forums[2].

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[1] IRS Tax Exempt and Government Entities (TE/GE) Web site, http://tege.web.irs.gov/templates/TEGEHome.asp?MWContent=/content/TEGEMainWindow/linkedHTMLDocuments/about_te_ge.htm

[2] Based on EP phone forum registration records for five phone forums scheduled on the following dates: December 4, 2008; April 16, 2009; July 27, 2009; September 30, 2009; and October 28, 2009.

In general, customer feedback on various EP CE&O Customer Education and Outreach activities has been positive. However, EP CE&O has acknowledged the need to assess their education and outreach initiatives in terms of effectiveness and customer satisfaction[3] The EP phone forum participants have the potential to provide valuable feedback regarding their satisfaction with phone forums as an educational tool. Yet, to date, no customer satisfaction surveys have been undertaken with regard to the EP phone forums. Surveying participants would be critical in EP CE&O's efforts to improve future EP phone forums, and help to achieve the broader IRS mission of customer support. Twelve EP phone forums are planned for 2010. It is our goal to sample up to six EP 2010 phone forums to obtain customer satisfaction feedback. Our plan to conduct six surveys is contingent on the variability of responses in the initial surveys. If variability is low, we will not need to administer all six surveys.

Objectives of Data Collection

The purpose of this study is to obtain feedback from individuals who will participate in the 2010 EP phone forums. Participants will be asked to give their opinions on a range of issues including, but not limited to, the ease of registering and participating in the phone forums, the clarity of the speakers, and suggestions for future forum topics. Information obtained from this survey will be used to tailor future phone forums to the needs and interests of the customers.

Methods

Sample Design

We anticipate conducting up to six surveys. It is necessary to distribute this survey more than once because the topics vary across phone forums. One of the goals of this study is to assess which topics customers are most interested in. Therefore it is necessary to collect data on a diverse array of phone forum topics.

For each study, individuals who register for, and participate in, the EP phone forum will be eligible to participate in this survey. A master list of individuals who participate in a phone forum is provided by AT&T at the conclusion of each phone forum. On average, approximately 800 individuals have participated in each of the past five phone forums. It is estimated that a similar number of individuals will participate in future phone forums. In order to obtain a statistically valid sample with a 95% confidence interval and .05 margin of error, responses will need to be obtained from 260 individuals. Participation in the survey is voluntary.

Data to be Collected

[3] EP Connections: Interview with Mark O'Donnell, http://www.irs.gov/retirement/article/0,,id=108854,00.html, Page Last Reviewed or Updated: March 10, 2009.

Attachment 1, *Customer Satisfaction Survey*, provides the questions that participants will be asked to respond to. The questions ask participants to provide feedback on the phone forums. Additionally, participants are given the opportunity to provide suggestions for future phone forums. It should be noted that each of the scheduled phone forums addresses a specific topic that is identified to the participants in advance. Since preparation of the 2010 phone forum schedule is not yet complete, for ease of reading, Attachment 1 makes repeated references to the Retirement Plan Distributions topic discussed during the October 28, 2009 phone forum. When preparation of the 2010 phone forum schedule is completed, the topical information will be changed.

How Data Collected and Used

The data will be collected electronically using web survey software provided by CVENT (http://www.cvent.com). Potential participants will receive a notification at the email address they provided for the phone forum. This email will provide the participant with background information on the purpose of the study. Additionally, the email will contain a link to the online survey. After clicking on the link participants will be asked to verify their identity and complete the survey. A sample email is included in **Attachment 2,** *Survey Email Invitation*.

Analysis will be conducted on responses to the survey items. EP CE&O will be provided with descriptive statistics that summarize forum participants' opinions on a range of issues including, but not limited to, the ease of registering and participating in the phone forums, the clarity of the speakers, and suggestions for future forum topics. These findings will be reviewed and considered by EP CE&O in planning future phone forums. For example, responses will be analyzed to determine if the current length of the phone forums is appropriate or if it should be changed. Similarly, EP CE&O will examine the suggestions for future phone forum topics in order to tailor future outreach efforts to the needs and interests of its customers.

Dates Collection Begin/End

We anticipate conducting up to six surveys in the 2010 calendar year. The six surveys will occur simultaneously with each phone forum, as they are scheduled. All surveys will conclude by the end of the 2010 calendar year.

After receiving a survey invitation, participants can complete the survey at their convenience. The survey will remain open for two weeks. After this date, participants will not be able to access the online survey.

Who Is Conducting the Research

The survey design and Web implementation was developed by TE/GE Research & Analysis staff. The administration of the survey will be conducted by Research & Analysis, with the assistance of EP CE&O.

Cost of Study

There are no anticipated costs of conducting this study. The Web survey software (CVENT) has already been purchased by TE/GE Research & Analysis. Additionally, because the survey is being administered online there are no travel, printing, or mailing costs.

Stipend

Participation in the survey is voluntary. A monetary stipend will not be offered to participants.

Recruitment Efforts

Recruitment will be limited to individuals who register for, and participate in, the EP phone forums. EP CE&O will provide TE/GE Research & Analysis with a master list of attendees for each phone forum. Only those individuals who are randomly selected from each master list will be recruited via email to participate in the study.

Specific language has been developed to foster participation in this study. The recruitment text will be displayed on the first screen of the survey web page, and provide potential participants with the necessary information (disclosure information, Paperwork Reduction Act Statement, and OMB Control Number) to make an informed decision. Such language is as follows:

Welcome to the IRS Employee Plans (EP) [Insert Month and Day of Forum, 2010] [Insert Forum Topic] Phone Forum Survey!

We are looking for feedback on your participation in the IRS EP [Insert Month Day, 2010] [Insert Topic] Phone Forum. IRS EP is conducting a brief, voluntary survey to obtain your opinions on a range of issues relevant to the EP Phone Forum referenced above. Your participation in this survey will greatly assist us in making our phone forums more responsive to your needs and interests. The responses you provide on this survey will not be disclosed to any other individuals.

The survey consists of fourteen questions, and should take approximately five minutes to complete. We thank you in advance for completing this survey and look forward to future improvements to our phone forums.

The Paperwork Reduction Act requires that the IRS display an OMB control number on all public information requests along with the address where you can send comments regarding the study. The OMB number for this study is 1545-1432. If you have any comments regarding this study, please write to:

> **IRS, Tax Products Coordinating Committee**
> **SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP, 1111 Constitution Ave. NW**
> **Washington, DC 20224**

Location and Facility

No physical space is required for this study. Participants can complete the survey on any computer with internet access.

Expected Response Rate

The goal of TE/GE Research & Analysis is to have an 80% response rate. If an insufficient response rate is not met after the first survey, additional surveys will not be conducted.

Methods to Maximize Response Rate

Participants will have the ability to complete the survey at a time and place that is convenient to them. Additionally, one week after the survey invitation has been sent to eligible participants, a follow-up email will be sent reminding individuals to complete the survey. The email will remind participants of the purpose of the survey and provide them with the link. A sample of this email is included in **Attachment 3,** *Reminder Email*.

Test Structure/Design

Participants will complete an online survey that consists of 14 questions. The majority of the items on this survey are Likert questions in which participants respond to a series of questions on a seven-point scale (*Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*). In addition to Likert questions, participants are also asked to respond to multiple choice questions and open-ended questions asking their opinions about the phone forums.

Efforts to not Duplicate Research

EP CE&O has not performed any quantitative research on its EP phone forums. Therefore, no data currently exists regarding customer satisfaction with this outreach method. As the first study examining this area, this study will not duplicate any other research.

Participants Criteria

The only criteria necessary for participation in this study is that individuals registered for, and participated in the EP phone forums. A random sample of individuals that registered for, and participated in each phone forum will be created. Therefore, all eligible participants have an equal chance of being invited to participate in this survey series.

Privacy, Disclosure and Security Issues

All responses to the EP phone forum surveys are private. Only TE/GE Research & Analysis employees will have access to the master file. Furthermore, these files will be password protected and encrypted. Any information provided to EP CE&O will not contain any personally identifiable information (PII). Additionally, reports or communications about the EP phone forum surveys will not contain any PII.

The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement & OMB Control Number will be provided on each page of the online survey.

Burden Hours

We estimate 20.80 burden hours for each survey. If all six surveys are conducted, we estimate a total of **124.80 burden hours**.

An average of approximately 800 individuals have participated in each of the past five phone forums. We assume that a similar number will participate in each of the 2010 EP phone forums. Not all participants of the phone forums will be invited to participate in each study. Instead, participants will be randomly sampled for each survey. For each of the proposed six studies, in order to obtain a statistically valid sample for a population of 800 (with a 95% confidence interval and .05 margin of error) responses will need to be obtained from 260 individuals. With an 80% response rate we expect to receive completed responses from 208 participants. Of those 208 participants, we expect half will complete the survey after receiving a follow-up reminder email.

Below are the burden calculation :

Total **Population:** 800 per forum
Total Number from population that are **Sampled:** 260 per survey
260 x 80% participation rate = 208 participants per survey.
260-208 = 52 non-participants per survey

Participant burden per survey:

208 x 0.5 minutes (invitation email) = 104 minutes

208 x 5 minutes (survey completion) = 1040 minutes

104 x 0.5 minutes (survey reminder, sent only to those not completing survey in first week. We estimate that half of the 208 will need a reminder) = 52 minutes

Total: 1196 minutes

Non-Participant burden per survey:

52 x 0.5 minutes (invitation email) = 26 minutes

52 x 0.5 minutes (reminder email) = 26 minutes

Total: 52 minutes

Total burden estimate:

1196 + 52 = 1248 minutes per survey (20.80 hours)

1248 x 6 surveys = 7488 minutes.

7488 minutes = 124.80 hours

Study Contact

For questions regarding the study, contact:

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