

**Supporting Statement
Approval Request to Conduct Focus Group Research
(OMB #1545-1349)**

IRS W&I Field Assistance Focus Groups

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary

Executive Order 12862 directs Federal agencies to provide service to the public that matches or exceeds the best service available in the private sector. In order to work continuously to ensure that our programs are effective and meet our customers' needs, we seek to obtain OMB approval.

This collection of information is necessary to enable W&I to garner customer feedback in an efficient, timely manner, in accordance with our commitment to improving service delivery. The information collected from our customers and stakeholders will help ensure that users have an effective, efficient, and satisfying experience with the W&I's customer service programs. This feedback will provide insights into customer or stakeholder perceptions, experiences and expectations, provide an early warning of issues with service, or focus attention on areas where communication, training or changes in operations might improve delivery of products or services. These collections will allow for ongoing, collaborative and actionable communications between the IRS and its customers and stakeholders. It will also allow feedback to contribute directly to the improvement of program management.

2. Purpose and Use of the Information Collection

Improving service to taxpayers requires ongoing assessment of service delivery, by which we mean conducting customer-based research in addition to evaluating internal operations. W&I Research will collect, analyze, and interpret information gathered through this clearance to identify strengths and weaknesses of new services provided at local IRS offices and make improvements in service delivery based on feedback. The solicitation of feedback will target virtual service delivery (VSD) and facilitated self assistance (FSA) options. Responses will be assessed to plan and inform efforts to improve or maintain the quality of service offered to the public. If this information is not collected, vital feedback from customers and stakeholders on W&I's services will be unavailable.

3. Consideration Given to Information Technology

If appropriate, the contractor will collect information electronically and/or use online collaboration tools to reduce burden.

4. Duplication of Information

No similar data are gathered or maintained by W&I or are available from other sources known to W&I.

5. Reducing the Burden on Small Entities

Small business or other small entities are not involved in this research effort.

6. Consequences of Not Conducting Collection

Without these types of feedback, W&I will not have information to adjust its services to meet individual taxpayer needs.

7. Special Circumstances

There are no special circumstances. The information collected will be voluntary and will not be used for statistical purposes.

8. Consultations with Persons Outside W&I Field Assistance

Not applicable.

9. Payment or Gift

W&I plans to provide a stipend of \$50 per participant, an industry-standard amount for participating in this form of research.

10. Confidentiality

No PII will be collected during the focus groups. Moderator will indicate that no names will be used in the final report. Also, the data returned to IRS will have no identifying information relating specific records to individual taxpayers. Nonetheless, IRS will ensure that privacy **to extent allowed by law** and security of the aggregated results will receive the utmost attention. Public and official access to the information will be tightly controlled. The computer files containing this tabulated information will remain password protected at all times. Data security approaching level C-2 will be accomplished using the Windows XP operating system. Audiotapes used to record testing sessions will be destroyed when the project is completed 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.

11. Sensitive Nature

No questions will be asked that are of a personal or sensitive nature.

12. Burden of Information Collection

Sign-up sheets will be used as instruments to collect information from respondents at selected Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TACs). It is estimated that 1000 TAC customers (50 hours) will sign-up. Of those, 360 customers (30 hours) will be recruited to determine if these individuals are from the three types of customers being researched and are available for the designated date and time. Expected response rate is based on past participation levels for similar focus groups among those contacted and qualified to be successfully recruited. Of the estimated 27 confirmed focus group participants, it is expected that 18 (67%) will participate in the phone focus groups (18 hours). The annual burden hours requested (98 hours total) are based on the number of collections we expect to conduct over the requested period for this clearance. No travel is required.

Category of Respondent	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden
Sign-up sheet time	1000	3,000 mins (1,000 x 3 mins ea)	50 hrs
Participant recruiting time	360	1,800 mins (360 x 5 mins ea)	30 hrs
Focus group participation time	18	1,080 mins (18 x 60 mins each)	18 hrs
Totals		5,880 mins	98 hrs

13. Costs to Respondents

No costs are anticipated.

14. Costs to Federal Government

The anticipated cost to the Federal Government is approximately \$10,014.57 annually. These costs are comprised of: focus group recruiting costs, costs to moderate the sessions, create a summary, telephone conference call costs, and participation incentive fees.

15. Reason for Change

Not applicable.

16. Tabulation of Results, Schedule, Analysis Plans

Feedback collected provides useful information, but it does not yield data that can be generalized to the overall population. Findings will be used for general service improvement, but are not for publication or other public release.

Although the W&I does not intend to publish its findings, W&I will disseminate the findings when appropriate, strictly following "Guidelines for Ensuring the Quality of Information Disseminated to the Public.", and will include specific discussion of the limitation of the qualitative results discussed above.

17. Display of OMB Approval Date

We are requesting no exemption.

18. Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions

These activities comply with the requirements in 5 CFR 1320.9.

19. Dates collection will begin and end

Data collection will begin in April 2012 and end by May 28, 2012.

B. STATISTICAL METHODS

Data collection methods and procedures will vary; however, the primary purpose of these collections will be for internal management purposes; there are no plans to publish or otherwise release this information.

1. Universe and Respondent Selection

The activities under this clearance involve samples of self-selected customers selected to cover a broad range of customers or to include specific characteristics related to certain products or services. Results will not be used to make statements representative of the universe of study, to produce statistical descriptions (careful, repeatable measurements), or to generalize the data beyond the scope of the sample. The specific sample planned for each individual collection and the method for soliciting participation will be described fully in each collection request.

Qualitative surveys are tools used by program managers to change or improve programs, products, or services. The accuracy, reliability, and applicability of the results of these surveys are adequate for their purpose.

The samples associated with this collection are not subjected to the same scrutiny as scientifically drawn samples where estimates are published or otherwise released to the public.

2. Procedures for Collecting Information

Data collection methods and procedures will vary and the specifics of these will be provided with each collection request. W&I expects to use telephone data collection methods, both for recruiting and for conducting the focus groups. The focus groups will be moderated by professional moderators at Pacific Consulting Group.

3. Methods to Maximize Response

Information collected will not yield generalizable quantitative findings; it can provide useful customer input, but it does not yield data about customer opinions that can be generalized.

4. Testing of Procedures

No pretest is necessary for these focus groups as W&I has evidence from previous research that the research procedures to be used for this task are successful.

5. Contacts for Statistical Aspects and Data Collection

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