

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

**2012 Reporting Compliance Customer Satisfaction Surveys**

AUR/CCE/ISP Mail and IVR

**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**

In 2009, W&I Reporting Compliance formed a task force to assess their survey program. The campuses were being held accountable for survey findings and recommendations that they didn't have control over (i.e. notice clarity which is determined at the headquarters level); they were frustrated by the inability to react. Although Reporting Compliance received the survey data, there was disparity between programs on the ability to use this data to tie into customer expectations, operational goals or improvement opportunities. All of these surveys were program specific and updated solely with that program perspective versus Reporting Compliance as a whole. This did not allow Reporting Compliance to share data across their programs.

Using the recommendations from the joint SB/SE and W&I task force and a recent assessment of the entire W&I customer satisfaction survey program, the Reporting Compliance surveys were redesigned in FY2011 to be consistent between programs. Each of the three programs also instituted multiple survey instruments, with both a "transactional" survey at the conclusion of an interaction on the toll free line, and a survey delivered after the case had been closed. This was done to enable Reporting

Compliance to concentrate on items that either the campuses have control over or the Headquarters office need to drive program and process improvement.

## **AUR**

The AUR program is responsible for notifying taxpayers of and resolving discrepancies between the income reported on their tax returns and the income information reported to the IRS by third-party payers. Consequently, contacts frequently result in additional assessments of tax, interest, and penalties. In this context, the traditional definition of a satisfied customer is not applicable. Primary measures of satisfaction include taxpayer perceptions with regard to having been treated courteously, respectfully and with professionalism. A challenge within the context of AUR is separating the taxpayers' feelings regarding the fairness of the tax law or the outcome of the contacts from the experience of their interactions with the program.

## **CCE**

CCE conducts audits of taxpayer returns through the use of correspondence. Taxpayers do not meet with IRS employees directly, but may speak with an IRS Tax Examiner over the phone. Taxpayers are notified of the audit upon receipt of an Initial Contact Letter which identifies the tax return item or items in question. The letter also provides instruction on the types of documentation needed to verify the entries on their return. CCE is responsible for responding to customer technical and account inquiries from customers, resolving customer account issues, providing account settlement (payment options), and working related issues. The vast majority of IRS audits are conducted by the Correspondence Exam program. The mail based audit administration used in this program allows the IRS to maintain a wide audit coverage. As such, CCE is considered a cornerstone of our voluntary compliance system.

## **ISP**

ISP is responsible for protecting the rights of the requesting and non-requesting spouses. The program ensures each claim receives timely and consistent treatment in accordance with established guidelines and the law. Under current tax laws, when a married couple files a joint federal income tax return, each spouse becomes individually responsible for paying the entire tax bill. As a result, one spouse can be held liable for tax deficiencies assessed after a joint return was filed, even if the additional taxes were solely attributable to the income of the other spouse. If the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) cannot collect the additional taxes owed on the unreported income from the spouse who earned the income, it may seek to collect the money from the other spouse. The spouse may obtain relief from the additional liability if certain conditions are met. The program ensures each claim receives timely and consistent treatment in accordance with established guidelines and the law.

**3. Consideration Given to Information Technology**

Not applicable

**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**

Not applicable

**6. Consequences of Not Conducting Collection**

Without these types of feedback, W&I Reporting Compliance would 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 ACS**

Not applicable

**9. Payment or Gift**

W&I plans to provide a stipend of \$40 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. Digital audio files used to capture the 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**

The recruitment phase will take approximately 5 minutes per participant and 2 minutes for those not interested in participating. From prior experience, we estimate contacting

128 individuals to recruit 32 taxpayers. The response rate is estimated at 25%. Each of the four focus groups will take place in the form of a one-hour conference call. Participants will dial a toll-free number at a designated date and time. The estimated burden for participants will be one hour x 32 taxpayers (expect 8 to show per group).

Category of Respondent	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden
Recruitment for Focus Groups – Not Interested	96	2 min	3.2 hours
Recruitment for Focus Groups – Participants	32	5 min	2.7 hours
Participation in Focus Group	32	60 min	32.0 hours
<b>Total Burden</b>			<b>37.9 hours</b>

### 13. Costs to Respondents

No costs are anticipated.

### 14. Costs to Federal Government

The anticipated cost to the Federal Government is approximately \$12,552.76 for the four focus group sessions. 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**

April 1, 2013 - June 30, 2013

**B. STATISTICAL METHODS**

**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.

Taxpayers who participated in one of the 2011 Reporting Compliance mail customer satisfaction surveys (AUR, CCE, ISP) indicated their willingness to participate in future research at the end of the survey and provided their phone number and/or email address to be contacted.

Four focus groups – three of the groups will be limited to customers from one of the three Reporting Compliance functions (AUR, CCE, ISP). The fourth group will include a mix of customers from all the functions. Each focus group will be limited to 8 customers and will be scheduled for 60 minutes.

**2. Procedures for Collecting Information**

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 ICF International.

**3. Methods to Maximize Response**

Standard procedures will be used in order to obtain the highest response rate possible for the usability testing. The contractor will recruit usability testing participants and conduct the usability testing research. To encourage participation, the contractor will be offering a \$40 incentive.

**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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Attachments

- A: Usability Testing Screener's Guide
- B: Usability Testing Moderator's Guide