

**OMB Statement for
Field Assistance Customer Comment Focus Groups 2011
Wage & Investment Division
BPA TIRNO-10-Z-00010, Task Request # 0008
Requisition W-1-W0-0U-SA-A00-000**

A. Introduction

Background

IRS has replaced its traditional measures of accomplishment with a balanced measurement system consisting of business results, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction for the Wage & Investment (W&I) Division's Field Assistance (FA), an important service delivery channel, with 401 field offices serving walk-in customers. The overall goal of this task request is to provide meaningful feedback to managers and staff in those field offices.

The IRS has been measuring customer satisfaction in its Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TACs) since January 1998 using a survey card. Every taxpayer who requires a wait ticket from the Q-matic system is given a comment card. Taxpayers who are not assisted personally by an IRS employee are not given a comment card. Taxpayers are instructed to leave completed surveys in a drop box and the TACs mail them to the data collection subcontractor for processing. While this process has worked well in terms of generating a high volume of ratings, there are severe limitations with this current system:

- The survey administration process at the 401 TACs is highly decentralized and uncontrolled. A TIGTA audit report documents shortcomings in the implementation of the walk-in survey and says the statistical scores and comparisons imply more precision and accuracy than the data warrant.
- Many customers do not resolve their issues when they visit the TACs. For this reason, the typically high ratings may reflect their opinions of staff helpfulness; customer perceptions of the IRS's service performance often decrease as time elapses and their problems persist.
- The rating questions often leave doubts as to the specific nature of the customer's suggestion or complaint.

Addressing these issues with a tightly controlled sampling process would be very expensive, would be burdensome on IRS field employees, and could disrupt workflow in TACs. As a result of these issues, the IRS made a decision to change the basic character of the TAC Survey to a comment card-type of feedback mechanism. The goal of the Comment Card Survey is to provide specific qualitative feedback (i.e., comments) to sites. The comment cards still retain some rating questions, which will be tabulated and reported three times a year, but the emphasis would be on quick turnaround of

comment card feedback to the offices where the comment took place. As experiences in the private sector have shown, successful comment card programs have the following features:

- easy for customers to use;
- a standardized distribution and data collection process; and use of technology to distribute feedback to sites quickly and at minimal cost.

Objectives

The purpose of the focus groups is to gain information that will assist the IRS in providing better service to Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TACs) customers. The focus group moderator's guide is based on Pacific Consulting Group's methodology. **The qualitative data obtained from focus group respondents will assist in evaluating various aspects of their experience and to provide input as to establishing the areas of the process that need improvement. The focus group feedback received will not institute new policy, yet will enable the Service to effectively meet taxpayer needs.**

B. Methodology

Focus Group Study Design

There will be three Field Assistance Focus Groups conducted at by teleconference. The moderator's guide and screener script are attached.

Data to be Collected

The qualitative data obtained from focus group respondents will assist in evaluating various aspects of their experience and to provide input as to establishing the areas of the process that need improvement.

How Data will be Collected and Used

Data will be collected by conducting three telephone focus groups. The data will be used to develop the survey instrument to better identify process improvement areas.

Data Collection Dates

The data collection period for recruitment of participants and conducting the focus groups is estimated to be May 2 – June 30, 2011.

Who is Conducting the Research/Where

PCG will be conducting the research in conjunction with Field Assistance. The research will be conducted by phone and recruitment will take place from a nationwide panel of TAC customers. The goal is to have a representative cross section of Field Assistance customers.

Cost of Study

The estimated cost for the focus group is \$10,015.

Stipend

There will be a \$50.00 stipend paid to participants. This fee is the standard amount currently used in the market research industry as an incentive for non-professional level focus group participants.

Location-Region/City and Facility

Participants will be selected from designated TACs nationwide.

Expected Response Rate

The expected response rate is 7%.

Methods to Maximize Response Rate

With regard to the low response rate, the IRS will assume that all data collected from the Focus Groups is qualitative in nature, and that no critical decisions will be made by this office solely from the analysis of data from the Focus Groups. The results from this phase of the Field Assistance Study are simply one piece of a larger set of information needed to assess the needs related to services provided by the IRS.

Initial recruitment will occur at certain TAC locations by TAC staff as taxpayers leave the TAC (Pre-recruit Sign-up attached). Those lists will then be used by PCG to recruit participants for the focus groups by phone (phone Focus Group screener attached). PCG will follow-up with those participants who have accepted the invitation (Focus Group Confirmation Letter attached).

Respondents are assured privacy of their responses to the extent allowed by law.

Test Structure and Design

The study will be conducted using three one-hour phone focus groups with a goal of having 8 participants at each session with a total number of participants of 24. The attached recruiting script will be used to recruit participants from a list of TAC customers. Of those 1000 taxpayers, we expect to call no more than 360 in order to obtain 24 participants. We've included 5 minutes of burden time for this set of taxpayers.

The attached moderator's guide will be used during the focus group session conducted by a training moderator from PCG.

Efforts to not Duplicate Research

This is currently the only FA Focus Group study being conducted.

Participants Criteria

The focus group participants must have used TAC services for the most recent tax year.

C. Privacy, Disclosure, Privacy, Security Issues

All participants will be subject to the provisions of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights II during this study and Macro will ensure that all participants are treated fairly and appropriately.

The security of the data used in this project and the privacy of taxpayers will be carefully safeguarded at all times. Security requirements are based on the Computer Security Act of 1987 and Office of Management and Budget Circular A-130, Appendices A & B. Physical security measures include a locked, secure office. Notes are stored in locked cabinets or shredded.

The IRS will apply and meet fair information and record-keeping practices to ensure privacy protection of all taxpayers. This includes criteria for disclosure—laid out in the Privacy Act of 1974, the Freedom of Information Act, and Section 6103 of the Internal Revenue Code—all of which provide for the protection of taxpayer information as well as its release to authorized recipients.

The focus group notes and report will not contain any tax return or taxpayer information. Participants will not be identified in any of the documents or files used for this project. We will limit and control the amount of information we collect to those items that are necessary to accomplish the research questions. We will carefully safeguard the security of data utilized as well as the privacy of the survey respondents. We will apply the fair information and record-keeping practices to ensure protection of all survey respondents. 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 information as well as its releases to authorized recipients.

PRA Statement and OMB Control Number

The OMB Control Number for the study and all required information will be provided to participants at the end of the focus group: “The Paperwork Reduction Act requires IRS to display an OMB Control Number (1545-1349) on all public information requests. If you have any comments regarding the time estimates associated with this study or suggestions for making this process simpler, please write to the Tax Products Coordinating Committee, SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP, 1111 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20224.”

D. Burden Hours

Expected burden hour estimates as follows. Recruiting of non-participants estimate of 1000 at 3 minutes each for a total estimated burden of 50 hours and recruiting of participants estimate of 360 at 5 minutes each for a total estimated burden for recruitment of 30 hours. The three Focus Group sessions estimate 24 participants who dial in at 60 minutes each for an estimated burden of 24 hours for the Focus Group sessions.

$$1000 \times 3 = 3000/60 = 50$$

OMB Supporting Statement
W&I CARE, Field Assistance
Field Assistance – Focus Groups
 $360 \times 5 = 1800/60 = 30$
 $24 \times 60 = 1440/60 = 24$
Total minutes = $6240/60 = 104$

OMB # 1545-1349

The total estimated burden is 104 hours.

Other Information

The following information will be provided to the Organizational Performance Division within 60 days after the close of the survey data collection operations:

- Findings: A brief summary of significant findings that were evidenced in the results.
- Actions taken or lessons learned: A brief summary of any action taken or lessons learned as a result of the findings.
- Number of participants per focus group.
- Number of requests made for taxpayer participation
- Focus group dates.

Statistical Contact

For questions regarding the Focus Groups and methodology, contact:

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Attachments

Moderator's Guide
Focus Groups Sign-up
Phone Focus Group Screener
Focus Group Confirmation Letter

**IRS W&I Field Assistance
Phone Focus Group Moderator’s Guide**
(Notes to the moderator are in italics)

Overview

Hello, I’m Jennifer Schranz from Pacific Consulting Group. I will moderate our discussion today. The topic we’ll be discussing is your satisfaction with the IRS office you visited recently and your feelings about the service you received. The overall goal of the research is to provide information that will help the IRS provide better service to customers like you. Specifically, we are working with the IRS to make changes to their local offices. Your input is very important for establishing the areas of the process that need improvement. This is your opportunity to have input and to tell the IRS what your experiences have been and to make recommendations for change.

First, I would like to thank all of you for calling in today. Our discussion will take about one hour. We would like to know your real attitudes and feelings, so please be as open and frank with us as you can. We would like for you to think about your opinions of the IRS with regard to your interactions with them and not your opinions regarding tax laws specifically. We are recording this session, and we have some IRS personnel listening in with us, but please keep in mind that our focus here is on your experiences and opinions, not on your individual identities.

Introductions

[Moderator: Gather responses in a roundtable fashion]

To get started, let’s introduce ourselves. Please tell us your first name; what IRS office you visited most recently, what day and time you visited, and your reason for going.

Payments

[Moderator: Build from the introductions section. Did anyone visit to make a payment? If so, direct this question to him/her first and then open it up to the group. Skip section if no one used the TAC to make a payment recently or in the past.]

First, I’d like to follow up on one of the main reasons people visit IRS offices. For those of you who visited an IRS office to make a payment

- Were you aware of other ways that you can make payments?

- *(If yes to above)* Why did you prefer this method as opposed to other options such as mailing in your payment?
- What could the IRS do differently to make you more comfortable using other methods to submit your payments?

Physical Location Attributes

[Moderator: Open discussion but get response from everyone]

Now let's talk about the IRS office itself. What are your opinions about the location you visited?

Probes

- *Accessibility*
- *Security*
- *Parking*
- *Cleanliness*

How about the hours of operation? Where those convenient for you?

The IRS is considering extending their hours. Which option would benefit you the most?

[Moderator: round table – take vote]

- Monday – Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm
- Monday – Friday 4:30pm to 6:00pm
- Saturday – 9:00am to 2:00pm
- Other *(specify)*

Which of these factors that we've discussed is most important to you? *[Moderator: recap accessibility, security, parking, cleanliness, hours of operation]*

Wait Time

Timeliness of Service

[Moderator: Round table]

Next, I would like to know your thoughts on the time you spent inside the IRS office. How long did you wait before being served and how long did you spend talking with an IRS representative?

[Moderator: Open Discussion]

- How do you feel about the time you waited?
- Do you have any suggestions for improving timeliness of the service?

Improvement (Modernization) Ideas

[Moderator: Open discussion]

Now I would like you to think about suggestions for improving other instances when you wait in line for service. For example, when you go to an amusement park, Disney for example, you can

choose to wait in the ride lines or you can purchase a “front of the line” pass. Another example is a doctor’s office where you make your appointment ahead of time and show up at your assigned time.

The IRS is considering options along these lines. Do you have any suggestions of what works well or something you would like to see the IRS try at its offices?

Probes

- *Online appointments*
- *Modernization/New technologies*

Survey Process

Next I’d like you to think about your recent visit. I’d like to ask each of you whether or not you received and completed a survey comment card. It’s a large postcard sized card with questions rating your satisfaction with your visit to the IRS office.

[Moderator: round table – tally number receiving card and number completing card]

For those of you who completed the card, please describe how you received the survey card (or knew about it), and how you went about completing and returning it.

For those of you who didn’t complete a card, why did you choose not to complete it and could IRS do anything differently to encourage you to complete it?

Do you recall if any of the questions were difficult to read or answer? *[Moderator: open discussion]*

What are your thoughts about completing the survey at a kiosk machine at the IRS office rather than on a paper card?

Overall Improvement

The last question I have is:

What additional suggestions do you have for the IRS regarding how they can serve you better?

Probes: New technology

Wrap Up

Those are all the questions that I have for this session. I want to thank you and the IRS wants to thank you, for participating in this discussion. PCG will be sending a \$50 token of our appreciation in the mail within two weeks.