

Department of the Treasury



Customer Service Plan 2011

Executive Summary

As part of its mission managing the U.S. Government's finances and resources, the Department of the Treasury serves millions of customers. As required by Executive Order 13571 on Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service, the Department has developed this plan, which identifies specific actions and initiatives which will further advance Treasury's customer service over the next year, focusing on one signature initiative and three key service areas. Treasury strives to be a citizen-centered organization and serve customers in the most efficient, expedient, and convenient manner possible.

SIGNATURE INITIATIVE: ELECTRONIC TRANSCRIPT DELIVERY APPLICATION ON IRS.GOV *Internal Revenue Service (IRS)*

Overview: The IRS will develop an application on IRS.gov that will enable a taxpayer to securely send a transcript of his or her tax records to an authorized third party.

Timing: Electronic transcript delivery will be rolled out in phases, with the next phase launching in Summer 2012.

Key Customer Groups: Taxpayers and tax professionals.

Challenges: A transcript is a summary of a taxpayer's tax return or account and is often required when taxpayers seek to obtain a mortgage or other loan. The IRS receives millions of transcript requests annually through traditional service delivery channels such as mail, fax, telephone, or in-person visit. In fiscal year 2011, the IRS launched an application that allows taxpayers to *request* transcripts online through IRS.gov; however, the IRS is currently only able to *deliver* transcripts to the taxpayer's address on record through the mail. In order to better serve taxpayers' needs, the IRS will conduct a pilot of a new self-service application on IRS.gov that will allow taxpayers to authenticate their identities online and securely send their transcript to designated third-parties using the internet.

Featured Actions: Send My Transcript to Bank Proof of Concept – 2H 2012. A way for taxpayers to authenticate on IRS.gov and securely send their transcript to a participating bank using the internet.

SERVICE 1: ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS TO BENEFICIARIES *Financial Management Service(FMS)*

Overview: FMS supports the Department of the Treasury's strategic goal of fostering a prudent use of taxpayer resources by providing timely, accurate, and efficient disbursements of federal payments. To more efficiently and effectively achieve this goal, FMS is working to pay federal beneficiaries electronically, rather than via paper checks. FMS will deliver all federal benefit payments for existing check recipients electronically by March 1, 2013 via direct deposit or the Direct Express® Prepaid Debit MasterCard® card. (New enrollees are required to select an electronic payment option as of May 1, 2011.)

Key Customer Groups: Federal benefit recipients and federal benefit paying agencies.

Challenges: Over the past two fiscal years, Treasury has disbursed an average of 822 million benefit payments each year to millions of beneficiaries. Treasury's paperless initiative requires that the existing 8.4 million monthly federal benefit checks be converted to electronic payments by March 1, 2013. However, it is estimated that 2.7 million federal benefit check recipients are unbanked. In addition, some recipients have been resistant to voluntarily converting to electronic payments despite extensive public education efforts.

Featured Actions: FMS will continue nationwide GoDirect campaign to convert current check recipients to direct deposit. Additionally, FMS will enable the GoDirect call center to process both direct deposit and Direct Express® enrollments via a single toll free telephone number or a single website and Expand the Direct Express® card to multiple benefit payment types.

SERVICE 2: PERMITS ONLINE

Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB)

Overview: Permits Online provides an electronic method for drafting, submitting, and tracking original and amended applications for federal permits and registrations, which are required to manufacture and trade in the alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and ammunition industries. The Permits Online system includes business rules and customer support features to help prospective industry members submit complete and accurate information on their permit application the first time. By receiving complete applications, TTB can reduce the time spent in returning applications to customers for correction and re-reviewing corrected submissions, thus improving the time from application to permit issuance.

Key Customer Groups: Permits Online services new and existing companies engaged in the business of producing, importing, or wholesaling alcohol beverages, tobacco products, firearms, and ammunition, as well as tax-free alcohol users and dealers. TTB processes approximately 5,800 original and 18,200 amended permits on an annual basis; the total number of regulated industry members is now well over 56,000. The majority of these companies are small businesses.

Challenges: Historically, the volume of original permit applications has increased an average of 6 percent annually. Currently, permit processing workloads are tracking at 4 percent above prior year levels and, with resources contracting, maintaining or improving upon prior year service times is a challenge. Permits Online assures that TTB can meet the growing demand for permits. Delays in permit application processing stunt federal revenues and impede economic growth, primarily in the small business sector, as taxable commodities, such as finished wine, beer or spirits products, cannot be lawfully produced without a federal permit from TTB.

The application process itself presents problems for prospective or existing industry members. The key challenges for customers in applying for a TTB original or amended permit are determining:

- what type of permit they need to operate;
- what forms need to be completed;
- what documents and supplemental information they need to provide to TTB; and
- what types of changes in their business require TTB notification (i.e., when do they need to file for an amendment to their permit)?

Featured Actions: TTB will continue to expand the types of permits that can be applied for online.

SERVICE 3: VIDEO COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AS A SERVICE DELIVERY ALTERNATIVE

Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

Overview: To test the use of video communications technology to provide a service delivery alternative outside of IRS facilities, increase access to face-to-face service where currently unavailable and improve the timely delivery of services and case resolution.

Key Customer Groups: Taxpayers that seek in-person delivery of services or issue resolution.

Challenges: There is a segment of the taxpaying population who has become accustomed to an “in-person” channel of service. The pilots will test the viability of interacting with these taxpayers in a virtual environment.

Featured Actions: To deploy video communications technology to connect taxpayers and IRS employees in a service interaction. The IRS will deploy this technology in 15 customer facing locations, where taxpayers will walk-in to receive services. The customer facing locations will be supported by 27 locations where IRS employees will deliver services. Pilot scenarios will:

- leverage established partner sites as an alternate service delivery location (e.g., Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Low Income Tax Clinics);
- establish a virtual presence in geographic areas with no staff or few staff; and
- supplement with virtual service delivery option at sites that are understaffed and sites that have high taxpayer traffic.

Pilot success will be measured by reduction in taxpayer wait times, improvement in customer satisfaction, reduction in administrative costs, and increase in timely delivery of services.

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Featured Actions: Launch Send My Transcript to Bank Proof of Concept, a way for taxpayers to authenticate on IRS.gov and securely send their transcript to a participating bank using the internet.

1. Increase Feedback from Customers

- Conduct usability testing to create a better overall taxpayer experience for the authentication process that enables access to the online transcript request and delivery application.
- Conduct user research with internal and external stakeholders to better understand industry and business needs with respect to the transcript delivery process.

2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Deploy a web self-service application which enables taxpayers to request a copy of their transcript online without having to call the IRS.
- Provide ability to allow taxpayers to authorize the IRS to send their transcripts securely to a third- party, such as a financial institution, with a digital signature.
- Reduce turnaround time for banks to receive transcripts.
- Improve content pages on IRS.gov to better explain the different types of transcripts and their uses.

3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Enable taxpayers to send a transcript online and get an immediate status regarding the approximate delivery date.
- Decrease the turnaround time for sending a transcript to taxpayers from multiple days to a few hours.
- Measure downstream traffic impact of usage of the online transcript application on call volume.

4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Reduce costs for the Income Verification Express Services (IVES) unit.
- Reduce transcript delivery time from 7-10 days to 24 hours.

5. Key Milestones

- Launch Send My Transcript to Bank Proof of Concept. (*Summer 2012*)
- Complete evaluation of Proof of Concept for expansion in fiscal year 2013. (*By December 2012*)

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1. Increase Feedback from Customers

- Conduct qualitative/quantitative research on a sample of the existing Direct Express® cardholder population (2 million+) to determine customer satisfaction; identify potential customer service improvements and new card features. *(Completion scheduled for December 2012)*
- Conduct qualitative/quantitative research on a sample of current benefit check recipients to determine how best to reach this audience before March 1, 2013 and determine which messages will resonate with this population. *(Completion scheduled for December 2012)*

2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Enable the GoDirect call center to process both direct deposit and Direct Express® enrollments via a single toll free telephone number or a single website (previously separate telephone numbers and websites were maintained for each method). Public education materials now point to a single telephone number/URL thus simplifying the enrollment process for federal check recipients. *(Completion scheduled for December 2012)*
- Expand the Direct Express® card to multiple benefit payment types in order to provide those beneficiaries receiving multiple benefit payments the option of a single card for all payments. Direct Express® is currently available for SSA, SSI, VA Compensation or Pension, Railroad Retirement, and OPM. Services will expand to two Department of Labor programs: the Longshore and Harbor Workers Compensation program, and Black Lung Compensation program. *(Completion scheduled for December 2012)*

3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Monitor wait times and abandon rates. The GoDirect call center (operated by the Federal Reserve Bank (FRB) Dallas for FMS in support of the All Electronic initiative) closely monitors wait times and abandon-rates for the call center. FMS includes educational inserts promoting the All-Electronic initiative in recipients' paper payments each month. As a result, call volumes are extremely high on benefit payment dates. Using various estimating tools, the FRB Dallas dramatically increases staffing on payment dates to ensure wait times and abandon rates are minimal. In addition, check recipients are encouraged to call at a non-peak time for the most efficient service. (*Ongoing*)
- The Performance Measure Management team ensures that performance measures are used to hold staff accountable for achieving results timely and efficiently, and provides opportunities for the staff to spot trends or make suggestions for new areas to examine. The performance metrics for the percentage of payments that are made via EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) are as follows:

Fiscal year 2011 target = 83%

Fiscal year 2012 target = 85%

Fiscal year 2013 target = 89%

4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Eliminate paper federal benefit checks by March 1, 2013. The total Departmental savings from paperless initiatives will be over \$500 million over a five year period of which over \$300 million can be attributed to FMS. These include savings on postage, printing, and a reduction in the number of customer service transactions resulting from lost or stolen checks. There were more than 540,000 Social Security and Supplemental Security Income checks reported lost or stolen and had to be reissued in 2010. The conversion to electronic payments will help mitigate the issue of lost and stolen checks since it is much more difficult to commit fraud. (*Completion scheduled for September 2013*)

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Featured Actions: TTB will continue to expand the types of permits that can be applied for online.

1. Increase Feedback from Customers

- Create an e-mail address specifically for customers to report feedback on the ease of use of the system, ideas for improvement to the process, and the level of customer service provided by TTB employees using Permits Online. *(Complete by March 31, 2012)*
- Promote the availability of the Permits Online Customer Feedback e-mail and encourage feedback from users through postings on TTB.gov and electronic newsletters. *(Begin by March 31, 2012)*
- Evaluate and expand the questions regarding Permits Online customer service experience within the existing post-application customer service surveys currently conducted for a random sampling of permit applicants to gain additional information on the level of service. *(Complete by March 31, 2012)*

- Solicit feedback from audience members at trade association/industry events attended by TTB personnel or at which TTB representatives are invited to speak. *(Ongoing)*

2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Conduct quarterly reviews and updates to the online guidance, both the “help” function embedded within the Permits Online system and the guidance posted at TTB.gov, in order to either proactively update the instructions prior to system changes or in response to customer feedback. *(Begin by December 31, 2011)*
- Develop and conduct a live Webinar for future and repeat customers (e.g., consultants to businesses applying for a TTB permit) that outlines the external functions of the Permits Online system, provides helpful tips for fully utilizing the system’s navigation features, explains how to use embedded “help” guidance, and describes other features of the external interface. *(Complete by March 31, 2012)*
- Develop an online training/reference guide for Permits Online for new and returning customers to offer system users 24-hour access to dynamic, comprehensive training. *(Complete by September 30, 2012)*
- Provide refresher training for TTB customer service representatives on the internal and external Permits Online interfaces to ensure TTB employees are knowledgeable and up-to-date on system functionality and able to meet customer needs. *(Ongoing as system releases are deployed)*
- Install software to establish the capability to track, and eventually decrease, the average wait time for permit applicants calling the Permits Online Help Desk for assistance with filing an application. *(Ongoing)*
- Maintain response times of one business day for returning customer voicemails and e-mails submitted to the Permits Online Help Desk. *(Ongoing)*
- Provide biennial recommendations, based on customer feedback, to the Permits Online software vendor regarding potential software improvements or design enhancements to the commercial off-the-shelf product that serves as the platform for Permits Online in order to improve the overall customer experience and system efficiency. *(Complete by September 30, 2012)*

3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Measure and publicize the average processing times for each type of permit application in order to provide customers with accurate service expectations. *(Begin by March 31, 2012)*
- Publish the service timeframes that customers can expect to receive a reply to voicemails and e-mails submitted to the Permits Online Help Desk. *(Begin by March 31, 2012)*
- Develop reports to measure the average time applications spent in each of the six primary internal steps of the Permits Online workflow (i.e., Initial Review, Specialist Review, Referral Review, Field Review, Final Review, and Manager Disposition) and analyze the results of the report data to determine bottlenecks and areas in need of efficiency and/or process improvement. *(Complete by September 30, 2012)*

4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Expand the permit types eligible to electronically file their original permit or permit amendment applications in Permits Online to include: Breweries, Distilled Spirits Plants, Alcohol Fuel Plants, Tobacco Manufacturers, Tobacco Importers, and Firearms Manufacturers. *(Complete by September 30, 2012)*
- Sustain an overall average processing time for original applications of 75 calendar days, assuming constant staffing levels and permit application growth of 6 percent, by leveraging the workflow and triage components of Permits Online and related initial application receipt processing activities. Initial projections for average annual cycle times were 85 to 90 days, given the staffing reductions as part of government-wide efficiency efforts. TTB expects the Permits Online system to enable TTB to exceed this projected processing time, and target 75 days to process an original permit application. *(Ongoing)*
- Identify and address process, guidance, and system issues or problems by analyzing common customer inquiries and feedback during quarterly Permits Online customer service meetings. *(Ongoing)*
- Analyze options for enhancing the Permits Online automated notification to customers regarding the required supplemental documentation for each type of permit application to improve the electronic triage process for permit applications. *(Complete by September 30, 2012)*
- Decrease mailing costs of application packets and approval documents, as well as reduce the future need for additional file room space, by continuing to add new application types to Permits Online and through promotion of the system. *(Ongoing)*

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Featured Actions: To deploy video communications technology to connect taxpayers and IRS employees in a service interaction. The IRS will deploy this technology in 15 customer facing locations, where taxpayers will walk-in to receive services. The customer facing locations will be supported by 27 locations where IRS employees will deliver services. Pilot scenarios will:

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Pilot success will be measured by reduction in taxpayer wait times, improvement in customer satisfaction, reduction in administrative costs, and increase in timely delivery of services.

1. Increase Feedback from Customers

- Use survey at the conclusion of service interaction to collect taxpayer experience and satisfaction with video communications technology and virtual service environment. (*Fiscal year 2012*)
- Deploy usability testing to gain valuable insight on how taxpayers interact with video communication technology and the use of this technology as an alternative to “in-person” delivery of services. (*Fiscal year 2012*)

2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Deploy video communications technology as an alternative to in-person service delivery. (*Fiscal year 2012*)
- Expand partnership arrangements to deliver services in non-IRS locations, e.g., Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites or Low Income Tax Clinics. (*Fiscal year 2013*)

3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Evaluate the impact to taxpayer wait times in high volume walk-in centers with the use of video communications technology as a supplemental service delivery option.

- Assess the ability to increasing access to taxpayers not in close proximity to a Taxpayer Advocate office.

4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Improve tax cases resolution during the Appeal process by eliminating the transferring of tax cases when in-person treatment is requested.
- Reduce costs and increase taxpayer access through the expansion of partnering arrangements to deliver IRS services in non-IRS locations.
- Reduce costs associated with the staffing of walk-in assistant centers and increase taxpayer access to services through expanded hours of operation.