



Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration Office of Audit

FIELD ASSISTANCE OFFICE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS HAVE IMPROVED, BUT ENHANCEMENTS COULD IMPROVE TAXPAYER SERVICE

Issued on May 6, 2009

Highlights

Highlights of Report Number: 2009-40-072 to the Internal Revenue Service Commissioner for the Wage and Investment Division.

IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS

Millions of taxpayers visit local IRS offices called Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TAC) to obtain face-to-face assistance. Management information is essential to effectively oversee the TACs. Knowing what services are provided at each TAC would allow the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to determine where to focus its resources, better plan for consistently delivering high-quality services to taxpayers, and enhance overall Field Assistance Office operations. Expanding the use of current technology to adopt industry best practices would also improve customer service and the taxpayer experience.

WHY TIGTA DID THE AUDIT

This audit was initiated to assess the IRS Field Assistance Office's corrective actions to improve its management information systems. Over the last 3 years, TIGTA has reported on the IRS' inability to compile and maintain accurate and complete management information to oversee and measure the effectiveness of its TAC Program.

WHAT TIGTA FOUND

The IRS developed and implemented three different information systems that capture the number of taxpayers and the primary service provided to those taxpayers who visit the TACs and generate management information reports. Although the IRS has improved its TAC Program management information systems, these systems do not capture all services provided to taxpayers.

However, Contact Recording, a fourth system implemented by the IRS, captures the audio portion and screen activity during assistor/customer interactions for quality review and could provide the number of services provided to taxpayers. Quality reviewers listen to a statistical sample of recordings, the results of which

could be used to project the number of services provided by all TACs.

Additional management information system reports could also provide insight on the reasons why taxpayers visit the TACs but leave without receiving services. Further, system controls are in place to ensure the accuracy of data entered into the systems, but more oversight is needed to ensure the accuracy of system data.

Finally, the IRS should provide 1) taxpayers with wait times on IRS.gov, the IRS public web site, and on-screen monitors located at each TAC and 2) online appointment scheduling for taxpayers seeking tax return preparation services. Current IRS guidelines require that taxpayers visit the TACs to schedule appointments to receive this service.

WHAT TIGTA RECOMMENDED

TIGTA recommended that the Commissioner, Wage and Investment Division, 1) use Centralized Quality Review System staff and data to identify multiple services provided to taxpayers while quality reviewers listen to contact recordings, 2) use existing system data to identify opportunities for improving taxpayer services, 3) ensure internal controls are reinforced to ensure management information systems data are entered accurately and reviewed, and 4) expand the use of current technology to adopt industry best practices.

In their response to the report, IRS management agreed with the second and third recommendations and plans to take appropriate corrective actions. Management disagreed with the first recommendation, stating that a new quality review system to identify services provided would not significantly enhance data already available. IRS management also disagreed with our recommendation to expand the use of current technology to adopt industry best practices, stating that current system capacity is limited and will not support expansion to electronic options for taxpayers. In addition, IRS management did not agree with our outcome measure, stating that adding a new component to the current system for an online appointment process would be cost prohibitive. The IRS did not provide a cost/benefit analyses or any documents to support this position.

TIGTA maintains that data to identify multiple services provided to taxpayers who visit TACs would provide meaningful information needed to make management decisions. TIGTA also continues to believe that an online appointment process could be accomplished with currently available off-the-shelf software programs.

READ THE FULL REPORT

To view the report, including the scope, methodology, and full IRS response, go to:

<http://www.treas.gov/tigta/auditreports/2009reports/200940072fr.pdf>

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