



Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration Office of Audit

TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE ACCESS EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS, BUT ACCESS FOR HEARING- AND SPEECH-IMPAIRED TAXPAYERS COULD BE IMPROVED

Issued on September 8, 2010

Highlights

Highlights of Report Number: 2010-40-108 to the Internal Revenue Service Commissioner for the Wage and Investment Division.

IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS

During the 2010 Filing Season, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) exceeded its key toll-free telephone assistance performance measurement goals. However, hearing- and speech-impaired callers that used the IRS Tele-typewriter/Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TTY/TDD) telephone line experienced low Levels of Service and had difficulty reaching an IRS assistor.

WHY TIGTA DID THE AUDIT

Each year, millions of taxpayers contact the IRS by calling the various toll-free telephone assistance lines to seek help in understanding tax laws and meeting their tax obligations. The objective of this audit was to evaluate the customer service toll-free telephone access during the 2010 Filing Season and to evaluate the access and service provided to hearing- and speech-impaired taxpayers.

WHAT TIGTA FOUND

The IRS exceeded its key 2010 Filing Season toll-free telephone assistance performance measurement goals. The IRS planned to achieve a 73 percent Level of Service and a 635-second Average Speed of Answer. Instead, it achieved a 75.3 percent Level of Service and a 580-second Average Speed of Answer.

The IRS moved less complex calls to automation, leaving more complex calls for assistors to answer. The Average Speed of Answer has increased by 12 percent since the 2009 Filing Season. During the 2010 Filing Season, 72 million total dialed attempts were made to the IRS toll-free telephone Customer Account Services lines.

Through automation and assistors, the IRS answered 37.3 million calls during normal hours of operation. The IRS hired more assistors, but assistors answered fewer

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calls during the 2010 Filing Season than during the 2009 Filing Season, and callers waited longer to reach an assistor. Assistor Calls Answered only decreased by 14 percent.

The Level of Service for the TTY/TDD toll-free telephone line for the 2010 Filing Season was 8.8 percent, the lowest Level of Service since the 2003 Filing Season when it was 6.2 percent. The TTY/TDD product line Level of Service has consistently provided the lowest Level of Service among all of the Customer Account Services Enterprise product lines.

WHAT TIGTA RECOMMENDED

TIGTA recommended that the Commissioner, Wage and Investment Division, revise the various taxpayer instructions, including notices, for calling the IRS to clearly explain that the TTY/TDD number is for hearing- and speech-impaired individuals; include in IRS publications the Federal Relay Service website and toll-free telephone number as a means to communicate with the IRS; determine the efficiency of the placement of its TTY/TDD workstations; and revise TeleTax Topic 102 to include the TTY/TDD hours of operation.

The IRS agreed with three of our recommendations and partially agreed with one recommendation. It plans to revise taxpayer instructions for calling the IRS to explain that the TTY/TDD telephone number is for hearing- and speech-impaired individuals, analyze the placement of the TTY/TDD workstation, and revise the TeleTax Topic 102 to include the hours of operations for the TTY/TDD toll-free telephone line. The IRS also plans to assess IRS communications related to the availability of the Federal Relay Service website and toll-free number, and will make revisions as necessary.

READ THE FULL REPORT

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

<http://www.treas.gov/tigta/auditreports/2010reports/201040108fr.pdf>.

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