



Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration Office of Audit

THE INTERACTIVE TAX LAW ASSISTANT HELPS ASSISTORS PROVIDE ACCURATE ANSWERS TO TAXPAYER INQUIRIES

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Highlights

Highlights of Report Number: 2011-40-043 to the Internal Revenue Service Commissioner for the Wage and Investment Division.

IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS

The Interactive Tax Law Assistant (ITLA) is an interactive web-based system designed to provide customer-specific tax law responses in an efficient and accurate manner. Testing showed that the ITLA provides assistors with accurate resolutions to taxpayer inquiries.

WHY TIGTA DID THE AUDIT

Each year millions of taxpayers call the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or walk into a local IRS office to ask tax law questions to help them meet their tax obligations. The overall objective of this review was to determine whether the ITLA improves the quality of responses and provides assistors with accurate resolutions to taxpayer inquiries. In addition, TIGTA determined whether performance metrics and efficiency savings goals for the project were clearly defined and achieved in accordance with the business case directives.

WHAT TIGTA FOUND

Eighty-one percent of assistors surveyed indicated that the ITLA helps provide consistent answers to tax law inquiries. They also rated it as user friendly. Additionally, the Customer Accuracy rates continue to be high for Accounts Management function assistors and have improved for Field Assistance Office assistors.

Prior to the ITLA, Accounts Management function assistors used the Probe and Response Guide and Field Assistance Office assistors used the Publication Method Guide to assist them in responding to taxpayers' tax law questions. The IRS converted existing tax law categories from the Probe and Response Guide and Publication Method Guide to create one source for all tax law categories in the ITLA.

TIGTA conducted a survey of Accounts Management function and Field Assistance Office assistors. TIGTA offered the survey to 1,321 Accounts Management

function assistors and 706 Field Assistance Office assistors—610 assistors responded (317 Accounts Management function assistors and 293 Field Assistance Office assistors).

The results showed that more than 73 percent of all assistors who responded are satisfied that the ITLA provides accurate and consistent responses and that it is easy to use. In addition, most assistors favor the ITLA as a research tool over the Probe and Response Guide and Publication Method Guide.

However, only 68 percent of Accounts Management function assistors and 52 percent of Field Assistance Office assistors are satisfied with the overall tax law training received. Only 46 percent of Accounts Management function assistors and 41 percent of Field Assistance Office assistors rated training as adequately focusing on problem areas. When discussing the negative responses related to training with IRS managers and employees, they advised us that the dissatisfaction with Field Assistance Office training could be a result of the Office's delivery method. Because of budget constraints, annual training is conducted by Digital Video Disk. The Accounts Management function, with a dissatisfaction rate of 33 percent, conducts its annual training and training for new hires in a classroom environment. The IRS stated it is exploring a variety of options for providing training to its employees.

WHAT TIGTA RECOMMENDED

TIGTA made no recommendations in this report. However, IRS officials reviewed this report and were pleased that TIGTA is acknowledging the positive impact of the ITLA on assistors and taxpayers.

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

<http://www.treas.gov/tigta/auditreports/2011reports/201140043fr.pdf>.