
Improving Customer Service

The IRS is on its way to achieving a new standard for improved customer service. We are committed to improving our service, whether by resolving a difficult problem or simply giving fast and accurate tax information over the telephone. The employees of the Internal Revenue Service want to provide good service and this annual report demonstrates how we are achieving our goal to become a customer-focused organization. We want to change the way the IRS relates to the American people. Our customer service standards for 1998 are listed below along with our progress report for 1997.

Easier Filing

Our electronic filing options make filing easier for everyone. There are fewer errors and that means fewer contacts with the IRS. We can process these returns more quickly and that means quicker refunds. We have expanded opportunities for simplified return filing and payment of taxes through our electronic filing, joint Federal-state filing, TeleFile, and electronic payment programs.

In 1997, IRS received 19.1 million electronically filed individual returns and schedules compared to 14.9 million in 1996. This included almost 4.7 million returns through TeleFile, the first totally paperless way for you to file a Federal income tax return. IRS also received over \$390 billion in electronic payments.

Access to Information

We are making a number of changes to improve the service we give to you.

- **Eliminate unnecessary notices:**

By the end of the year, we will eliminate more than 45 million pieces of mail, almost one-third of the total number of notices the IRS has been sending to taxpayers. In the past, these unnecessary notices have caused taxpayers to try to contact us when they didn't need to do so.

- **Rewrite notices:** By 1999, we will rewrite all notices in plain language. Notices will be approved for sending to taxpayers only after testing them completely on ordinary people who do not have tax law backgrounds. Clearer notices will reduce the need for taxpayers to call us.

- **Improve telephone service:** Our toll-free telephone sites will be open 16 hours a day, six days a week. In previous years, taxpayers could reach us by telephone only 12 hours a day, five days a week.

- **Make it easier to get answers in person:** Our walk-in offices will be open on Saturdays during the busiest weekends of the filing season. There will be more temporary walk-in centers during the peak season for taxpayers who want to pick up forms and publications. Local offices will have monthly "problem solving days".

In 1997, we assisted 104 million taxpayers by providing pre-recorded tax information, refund status information and telephone assistance from our representatives.

Accuracy

Our goal is to answer your questions and process your tax returns accurately.

In 1997, we achieved an accuracy rate of 96% answering questions about tax law and 93% for account questions. Our accuracy rate for processing tax refunds was 99.4%.

Prompt Refunds

If you file a complete and accurate tax return and you are due a refund, your refund will be issued promptly and accurately. However, your refund may be delayed if your return is selected for further review.

In 1997, refunds were issued on time for all complete and accurate returns. Refunds based on electronically filed returns were issued, on average, within 14 and one-half days and within 38 days for paper returns. In addition, five million taxpayers had their refunds directly deposited into their bank account, a 216% increase compared to 1996.

Initial Contact Resolution

Our goal is to satisfactorily resolve all your issues the first time you contact us.

In 1997, we met that goal almost 78% of the time. We will continue our efforts to address all your issues and improve the level of our service in 1998.

Canceling Penalties

If you provide sufficient and accurate information to our assisters but are given an incorrect answer and reasonably rely on it, we will cancel related penalties.

Resolving Problems

If you have a problem that has not been resolved through normal processes, you may contact our Problem Resolution Office. A caseworker will contact you within one week and will work with you to resolve the issue.

During 1997, over 154,000 cases were referred to Problem Resolution and taxpayers were contacted within one week of referral 83% of the time.

Simpler Forms

We will make tax forms and instructions simpler and easier for you to use. We made some changes this year but we want your ideas for improvements. Please e-mail us your suggestions and comments through the IRS Internet Home Page (www.irs.ustreas.gov) or write to the Tax Forms Committee, Western Area Distribution Center, Rancho Cordova, CA 95743-0001.

In 1997, we highlighted the benefits of IRS *e-file* electronic services in the tax packages. We also included information about approved private delivery services which taxpayers may use to meet the “timely mail-

ing as timely filing/paying” rule for tax returns and payments. We developed new publications for taxpayers to use in planning for adoptions and for medical savings accounts and revised the earned income credit publication to make it easier to understand. We have also made it easier to obtain tax forms and publications. Taxpayers used the Quick and Easy Access to Tax Help and Forms page in the tax packages to find the different ways to get tax information and tax products. Nearly 740,000 fax transmissions were made to taxpayers who requested tax products. In addition, taxpayers had access to over 600 forms and publications along with other tax related material on the Internet. The IRS Home Page received over 197 million hits (information accesses) and taxpayers downloaded over eight million products.

Providing First-Rate Service

Every year, we are finding ways to make it easier to file, easier to get help, easier to get problems solved and improving the accuracy of returns filed. Our long-term goal is to provide service to taxpayers that is consistently as good as they receive from leading companies in the private sector.

IRS Customer Service Standards Annual Report for 1997



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