

Phase III of Automated Telephone Scripting and Routing Research – Testing the IRS Individual Toll-Free Line (800-TAX-1040) Study 1

Focus Group Moderator’s Guide

INTRODUCTIONS AND GROUND RULES

Hi, my name is [name], and I’m a researcher with the Internal Revenue Service. I’ll be moderating today’s session. The purpose of today’s session is two-fold. First, we will spend some time discussing your prior experiences with the toll-free line – what you remember about your reason(s) for calling and your overall impressions. Then we will spend some time interacting with the toll-free line as a group and you’ll share your thoughts about the information presented and the ways it’s organized.

Before we get started, I’d like to thank you for your willingness to participate in today’s focus group, and go over a few ground rules.

- I will be watching our time and directing our conversation. We will be here for about two hours. There will be no formal break; however, if you need to visit the restroom or otherwise take a quick break, please feel free to do so.
- Your participation in this group is entirely voluntary.
- Because we want to assure we’ve collected all of your comments and suggestions, this session is being recorded so that we can write an accurate report about the issues that are raised during the discussion.
- During the discussion, try to talk one at a time in a voice as loud as mine, and avoid side conversations.
- Speak your mind and say what’s true for you. You do not have to answer every question, and we are not looking for everyone to agree. Everything you say here will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. No names will be used when reporting out on today’s session.
- Feel free to respond directly to someone who has made a comment; you do not have to address all of your comments to me.

Are there any questions before we begin?

Let’s first start by going around the room and having each of you introduce yourselves by your first name only. Also, since we are here today to discuss phone calls to the toll-free line, please share the topic or reason you’ve contacted the IRS via the phone in the past.

PART 1: Previous Toll-free Line Experience

What were some of the reasons you needed to call the toll-free line in the past?

How would you gauge the success of your call, or multiple calls to the IRS?

- If you needed more information, what would your next step be?
- What types of information, if any, were you looking for that was not provided?
- Approximately how many times did you need to call the IRS to get the information you needed? For issue resolution?

What source of information, if any, did you consult prior to contacting the IRS via the toll-free line?

- Would you consider the toll-free line your first stop when looking for information about your federal tax obligations?

Would your strategy for collecting information change if you had a different issue?

What kinds of challenges, if any, did you encounter while trying to use to the toll-free line?

What are your thoughts about the menu or prompts on the toll-free line?

- Were they easy or difficult to understand?

PART 2: Group Exercise

This is the first menu that taxpayers hear when they contact the toll-free line.

[Moderators, dial the 1040 Line, select English, and play the main menu. Note taker: make a note of where/if the menu needs to be replayed and/or repeated.]

- What types of instructions, if any, should the line provide to taxpayers upfront?
- What does prompt 1 mean to you? (repeat for prompts 2-5)
- Is there an opportunity to provide taxpayers with some guidance or instruction on this line? If so, what is it and what information should be provided?
- Do you feel that the options presented provide you with sufficient information to make a selection?
- Is there any information that is unnecessary on this menu? Any information missing?
- Is there any information that is confusing or needs clarification?

Now, let's delve deeper in to Menu Option 1.

[Moderator, play the option 1 prompts. Replay/repeat as needed.]

- What do you believe the main messages are on this line?
- What does prompt 1 mean to you? (repeat for prompt 2)
- Do you feel that the options presented provide you with sufficient information to make a selection?
- Is there any information you were expecting to find, but didn't?
- Is there any information that is unnecessary on this menu?
- Is there any information that is confusing or needs clarification?

Finally, let's do the same thing with Menu Option 2.

[Moderator, play the option 2 prompts. Replay/repeat as needed.]

- What do you believe the main messages are on this line?
- What does prompt 1 mean to you? (repeat for prompt 2)
- Do you feel that the options presented provide you with sufficient information to make a selection?
- Is there any information you were expecting to find, but didn't?
- Is there any information that is unnecessary on this menu?
- Is there any information that is confusing or needs clarification?

PART 3: Suggestions for Improvement

Now that we've discussed your previous experiences, and spent some time working through the toll-free line as it currently stands, I'm interested in hearing your suggestions for enhancement and improvement.

- What, if anything, would you consider to be strength of the toll-free line?
- What are its challenges, if any?
- What other information would you like to hear on the toll-free line?
- Are there specific language/specific general topics the IRS should add?
- Is there anything the IRS could say on the line that would make you feel better about needing to call?
- What other suggestions do you have for improvement?

Is there anything else anyone would like to add?

CONCLUSION

This concludes today's session. I would like to thank you all for coming to share your thoughts and ideas today. Your insights and suggestions are extremely valuable and will be used to help improve the taxpayer experience with the toll-free line.

PARTICIPANT SCREENER

Recruitment Goals

- Four focus groups to be conducted in person in four cities.
 - Recruit 14 participants in each city so that each group has 10 participants
 - Recruit a mix for questions 2-7 from the screener guide.
 - Recruit for 120 minute session
- Recruiting criteria
 - Taxpayer who has interacted with the 1040 Line, at any point in the past.
 - At least 18 years of age
 - Diverse in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, filing status education and tax preparation method

Focus Group Specifications

Location	Date	Time	# of Recruits
Atlanta	TBD	TBD	14
City 2 - TBD	TBD	TBD	14
City 3 - TBD	TBD	TBD	14
City 4 - TBD	TBD	TBD	14

INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is [name] and I am calling on behalf of [Contractor]. We are conducting a paid study to gather feedback and opinions on the IRS toll-free line.

The study will consist of a focus group session on <date> in <city>. The session will last about 120 minutes. If you are eligible and decide to participate, you will receive a \$75 honorarium. The focus group discussion will be strictly for research, and all of your comments will be held private to the extent covered by law. Would you be interested in participating?

() Yes - Continue

() No - Terminate: Thank you for your time. Have a good [day/evening].

[If YES above] I'd now like to ask a few questions to see if you meet the criteria that the focus group is looking for.

Screening Questions

1. Have you ever called the IRS via the 1-800-829-1040 toll-free number?

() Yes - Continue

() No - Terminate: Thank you for your time. Have a good [day/evening].

2. Are there any children in your household who are...? [Check all that apply.]

() 18 or younger

() 19-23 and in college

() 19-23 and not in college

() No children present

3. What is the total annual income of your household? (Read list)
- Less than \$15,000Continue
 - \$15,000 but less than \$25,000.....Continue
 - \$25,000 but less than \$50,000.....Continue
 - \$50,000 or more.....Continue
4. To which age group do you belong? (**Note to recruiters: Recruit mix of ages and genders.**)
- under 18- Terminate: Thank you for your time. Have a good [day/evening].
 - under 21
 - 21-35
 - 36-50
 - 51-65
 - 66+
5. Gender? (**Note to recruiter: Do not ask. Fill in using Name on record and their voice tone during the call. If not clear, leave blank.**)
- Female
 - Male
6. Filing Status?
- Single
 - Married Filing Joint
 - Married Filing Separate
 - Head of Household
 - Widow/Widower
7. Tax Preparation Method?
- Self prepared paper
 - Self prepared with off the shelf computer program
 - Self prepared with online software
 - Paid Preparer

INVITATION

Thank you for answering our questions. Based on your responses, you qualify for the focus group. We would like to invite you to take part in this study. The focus group will be held on <date/time> at <location>. You will receive a \$75 honorarium at the end of the session for participating.

8. Are you free at that time and are you willing to participate?
- Yes - Continue
 - No - Terminate; Thank you for your time. Have a good [day/evening].

I'm glad that you will be able to join us! At this point I need to collect some contact information from you.

(Note: This information is required only as a part of this study. Your information is kept strictly private to the extent allowed by law. Your phone number is required only for a reminder call that will be made prior to the start of the research study).

- Name (first, last):
- Email:
- Phone
- Mailing Address (with city, state, and zip):

Thank you. We are only inviting a few people, so if for some reason you are unable to participate, it is very important that you notify us as soon as possible so we can find someone else to take your place. Please call or email *[insert contact and phone, email]* if this should happen. We look forward to having you participate on *[insert appropriate date]*.

We are required by law to report to you the OMB (Office of Management and Budget) Control Number for this public information request. That number is 1545-1349. In addition, if you have any comments about the time estimate associated with this study or suggestions on making this process simpler, you may write to the IRS. Would you like the address?

[If yes]

Internal Revenue Service, Tax Products Coordinating Committee, SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP, - Room 6129 1111 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20224.

Thank you for your time. We will be in touch again the day before the session to confirm your attendance.

TERMINATE TEXT

Thank you very much for your time, and thank you for answering our questions. Unfortunately, based on the requirements, we are not able to extend you an invitation. Perhaps we can include you in a future research session. Have a good *[day/evening]*.

REMINDER SCRIPT

Hello, my name is *[name]* and I am calling on behalf of *[Contractor]*. This call is to remind you about participating in the IRS toll-free focus group on *[date]* from *[start time]* to *[end time]*, which will take place at *[location]*.

If for some reason you are no longer able to participate, it is very important that you notify us as soon as possible so we can find someone else to take your place. Please call or email us at *[contact phone and email]*.

Thank you for your willingness to participate, we look forward to seeing you on *[date]*.

CONSENT FORM

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is conducting focus groups to gather feedback and opinions on taxpayer experiences with IRS toll-free line.

You have been invited to participate in a 120 minute testing session and discussion with a representative of the IRS and other taxpayers like yourself. The IRS will be using these findings to improve its communications with taxpayers. Before you agree to join in this discussion, please review and consider the conditions listed below:

- Participation in this discussion is completely voluntary.
- Any questions you have will be answered before the discussion begins.
- The discussion may be audio and/or video taped.
- The information you give will be anonymous and your name will not be associated with your answers.
- Your name will not be used in any reports about this group and no quotes will be attributed to you.
- You may choose not to answer questions that you do not want to answer.
- You may choose to leave the discussion at any time for any reason.
- Although we believe that participation in this focus group poses little or no risk to you, some people may feel a little anxious about the discussion.
- You will receive a \$75 honorarium as appreciation for your participation and time.
- Should you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact *[insert name, title]* at *[IRS/Contractor]*, at *[phone number]*.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the conditions stated above and agree to participate in this focus group. You will be given a copy of this consent to keep for your records.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

The Paperwork Reduction Act requires that the IRS display an OMB control number on all public information requests. The OMB Control Number for this study is 1545-1349. **The time estimated for your participation is 120 minutes.** If you have any comments regarding the time estimates associated with this study or suggestions on making this process simpler, please write to the Internal Revenue Service, Tax Products Coordinating Committee, SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP, - Room 6129 1111 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20224.