



# Annual Report 2015

## The Taxpayer Advocacy Panel is...

An independent panel of citizens whose mission is to listen to taxpayers, identify taxpayers' issues, and make suggestions for improving IRS service and customer satisfaction.

A group of citizens who volunteer to listen to what taxpayers have to say about the IRS. We not only listen, we try to do something about it.

A Federal Advisory committee established under the authority of the Department of the Treasury.

A unique organization that increases opportunities for U.S. taxpayers to communicate with the IRS.

Geographically and demographically balanced with approximately 75 members that represent the entire nation.



**Taxpayer**   
**Advocacy Panel**

IMPROVING THE IRS

[www.ImproveIRS.org](http://www.ImproveIRS.org)



To: Jacob J. Lew  
Secretary of the Treasury

John A. Koskinen  
Commissioner, Internal Revenue Service

Nina E. Olson  
National Taxpayer Advocate

From: 2015 Taxpayer Advocacy Panel (TAP)

Subject: 2015 TAP Annual Report

The 2015 TAP year brought the addition of the Special Projects Committee to the panel. The Special Project Committee focuses on issues concerning U.S. taxpayers working and living abroad, as well as other emerging issues that do not fit, into the other five project committees. Each committee concentrates on a specific systemic area and is charged with providing recommendations to the IRS to improve taxpayer service and satisfaction with our voluntary tax compliance system. The six standing project committees and two internal committees, for 2015 are:

- Notices and Correspondence
- Special Projects
- Tax Forms & Publications
- Taxpayer Assistance Center (TAC) Improvements
- Taxpayer Communications
- Toll -Free Phone Lines
- Internal Communications (internal)
- Outreach (internal)

The magnitude and scope of the work accomplished in the past twelve months by these six project committees has been impressive. This report includes issues identified, elevated to the IRS, pending review by the IRS, and, as appropriate, implemented or pending implementation by the IRS.

A major focus of TAP has been to conduct outreach activities throughout the year. It is through this critical contact with taxpayers that TAP members receive feedback from the public regarding issues, as well as receive recommendations and suggestions that lead to a more positive image for the IRS and its representatives. These grassroots efforts are TAP-membership driven in the form of one-on-one discussions, speeches and presentations, town hall events, networking, and community involvement.

We are proud to present this 2015 Annual Report. This report is a testament to the sense of civic duty, patriotism, and belief in the American way of life possessed by ordinary citizens from all walks of life. Without their volunteerism and dedication to improving government services, this report would not have been possible. TAP is, and always will be, ready and able to listen to and represent the interests of American taxpayers.

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## Letter from the Departing Chair

I am proud to submit this report of the accomplishments of the Taxpayer Advocacy Panel (TAP) during 2015 and our recommendations to the IRS. With its diverse and dedicated membership of citizen volunteers the TAP offers an independent perspective unlike that of any other group. In no other way is the voice of the taxpayers themselves heard in a systematic way. We are in the best position to advise the IRS on how to effectively interact with taxpayers.

While the report fully documents our accomplishments and recommendations, several are of particular note:

- For the first time the TAP membership included a U.S. citizen residing outside the U.S. The result was a set of recommendations for better communications with overseas taxpayers, many of whom are unaware of their obligations and have few ways to get help. If implemented, we believe these ideas could significantly improve compliance from this underserved group.
- The IRS sends the CP2000 letter to a taxpayer when it IRS detects a discrepancy between a return and one or more information returns. We find that its design is poor and the tone threatening. It can create needless anxiety and may provoke behavior that is not in the taxpayer's best interest. In the course of our work in developing this recommendation, we were surprised that the IRS had not done some very basic work to measure the letter's effectiveness. The TAP recommended changes to the wording and presentation to more clearly communicate the letter's purpose and not unnecessarily frighten the recipient.
- By virtue of its grass roots nature, TAP is able to witness the impact of the draconian cutbacks in toll-free lines and Taxpayer Assistance Centers and convey them to the IRS. The TAP is very aware of budget constraints, and we attempt to find solutions that can have a significant impact at minimal cost. However, we are also aware that many initiatives are simply a matter of priority. We do not shy away from calling out important changes even if it seems unlikely that they will be implemented in the near term. It is TAP's responsibility to "keep the heat on" the IRS and, by extension, Congress, so they remain acutely aware of the impact of reductions in service. Indeed, members of our Taxpayer Assistance Center committee made numerous visits to the centers to see for themselves the conditions and to meet with the centers' staff and management. As a result, the committee made a series of recommendations for better managing wait times at TACs and low cost ways to improve the VITA program to help fill the gaps left by service reductions.
- TAP plays an important role in holding the IRS accountable for the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, including the "Right to Quality Service". We proposed a set of simple steps the IRS can take to better hold its phone representatives accountable for the level of service they provide. Many of these simple steps have long been in use in the private sector and include the representative repeating his or her identifying number at the end of the call, as well as offering more ways for the taxpayer to provide feedback, both good and bad.

- Many TAP recommendations are easily implemented and can have an outsized impact. For example, TAP recommended adding the following sentence to letters the IRS sends to ask taxpayers to verify certain items of income: “Please note that interest and fees may be accruing while this issue is being resolved”. Through outreach to groups and individuals in their own communities, TAP members can see how IRS communications are perceived and handled by taxpayers, and make suggestions that might otherwise never surface.
- TAP members are frequently asked by the IRS to advise them on specific topics. For example, our Toll-Free committee did a thorough review of the script taxpayers hear when calling for information after receiving an Earned Income Tax Credit audit letter. Tax Forms and Publications Committee members also reviewed Form 974 (Premium Tax Credit) and the instructions for Form 4797 (Sales of Business Property). The reviews of just those two forms yielded 26 specific recommendations for improvement.
- During 2015, the TAP’s volunteer members generated 104 recommendations from 15 issues. TAP members conducted 830 outreach activities with a total audience of 1,707,074. The IRS formally accepted and agreed to implement 53 recommendations, and rejected 43. However, even TAP recommendations that are not immediately adopted by the IRS often plant a seed and bear fruit later.

While TAP accomplished much during the year, I would be remiss in not noting the significant headwinds we faced in our efforts. The fundamental TAP mission is seriously hampered by a budget that is simply not suited to fulfilling our mission most effectively. We are a group of very different people spread literally across the world. The inability to meet face-to-face, except in small groups once a year, makes it very difficult for committee members to form cohesive teams. The full membership of TAP has not met together in over three years. Moreover, IRS information security policies prevent TAP from using common virtual meeting platforms like WebEx or GoToMeeting. And there is essentially no money available to support outreach, which can be a significant burden in large states.

I believe the problem is exacerbated by the sense among members that the TAP is not treated with the same regard by the IRS as it may have been in the past. Small gestures can go a long way to maintain members’ enthusiasm and engagement. Increased interaction between the National Taxpayer Advocate and TAP leadership can improve the perception with TAP membership that they are a valued member of the TAS organization.

Despite these challenges, the TAP continues to perform a vital role. This report culminates another year of work to improve our voluntary system of income tax compliance. A well-functioning democracy requires a tax code that is perceived as fair and is easy to comply with. If that compliance becomes too difficult, or if it becomes unduly burdensome, citizens may simply not comply and the shared sense of responsibility that has made America so special for over 200 years will crumble.

I have been honored to serve for three years as a TAP member, as Vice Chairman, and as Chairman, helping to continue TAP’s record of productive, reasonable solutions to the IRS’s reporting, communication, and customer service issues. I am grateful to our Vice Chairman Andrew VanSingel, who ably backed me up on several occasions and was a source of valuable advice and support. The committee chairmen were all a pleasure to work with. They are the

ones who ensure that the real work of TAP gets done, through their leadership and many hours of crafting the nuggets of ideas from our outreach activity into well researched and documented recommendations to the IRS.

During my time with TAP I interacted with many IRS employees. Almost all were knowledgeable, professional and clearly dedicated to providing the best possible service to taxpayers. I especially want to acknowledge the good work of Sheila Andrews, the TAP Director, and the superb TAP staff, without whom none of this would be possible.

Mike Swartz  
TAP 2015 National Chair

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## TAP Vision and Mission Statement

The volunteer members of the Taxpayer Advocacy Panel (TAP) listen to taxpayers, identify taxpayer issues, and make recommendations for improving IRS service and customer satisfaction. The mission is to partner with the IRS and continuously look for ways to improve IRS service to taxpayers.

TAP provides the taxpayer perspective on critical tax administrative programs and helps identify grassroots issues through outreach. TAP also provides opportunities to gather independent taxpayer comments and suggestions regarding IRS service, customer satisfaction, and process improvements; it has direct access to the appropriate operating divisions to ensure recommendations are considered. The TAP scope focuses primarily on issues that fall within the jurisdiction of the Wage & Investment (W&I) and Small Business/ Self-Employed (SB/SE) Operating Divisions.

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## Introduction to the Taxpayer Advocacy Panel (TAP)

The Department of the Treasury (Treasury) was the driving force in creating the Taxpayer Advocacy Panel (TAP) in 2002 based on a review of IRS advisory committees. This Panel, which was originally named the Citizen Advocacy Panel, operated in only ten states. Due to its contributions, Treasury recommended it be expanded nationwide and renamed the Taxpayer Advocacy Panel.

TAP members are drawn from an extensive, nationwide pool of citizen volunteers with at least one member from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. In 2015, a US citizen living abroad was added to bring an international perspective to the TAP. Much of the success of TAP is attributed to the diverse backgrounds and experience the members bring to the panel. Member recruitment is conducted annually during early spring and is widely advertised in local and national media. Potential members are screened and interviewed by existing panel members and IRS staff, in addition to undergoing a thorough background check. A final pool of candidates is then forwarded through the Commissioner of Internal Revenue to Treasury for final approval and appointment.

Before introducing you to the 2015 work and accomplishments of TAP, acknowledgement and thanks are due to the IRS TAP staff for their talent and commitment. As a result of their dedication to the taxpaying public, TAP volunteer members are able to work to protect and promote taxpayers' interests.

So, what is TAP?

TAP is an independent advisory committee that operates under the auspices of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), which ensures panel advice, and recommendations are objective and accessible to the public. From an administrative perspective, TAP is accountable to Treasury, the IRS, and the National Taxpayer Advocate. The Taxpayer Advocate Service (TAS), an independent division within the IRS hierarchy, provides essential funding, technical, administrative, and clerical support to TAP.

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## Letter from the Incoming Chair

At the time of this writing, it's early February 2016, and we are excited to begin another TAP year. Even though volunteer panel members give freely of their time, there are still costs associated with training panelists and operating each committee. While budget constraints are an increasing hindrance for travel, the initial face-to-face committee meetings are key for an effective and fully functioning TAP each year. The 2016 training meetings will take place at three different locations beginning February 29th. Two committees will meet at each site, with one over-lapping day of joint training. Each project committee will elect a chair and vice-chair and will be assigned issues appropriate to the committee's purpose.

The elected chair of each project committee, along with the TAP Chair, Vice- Chair, and Internal Communications Committee chair, make up the Joint Committee. In prior years, funding has been available for the Joint Committee to meet in person one time annually. This meeting historically served as an opportunity for TAP staff and volunteer committee leaders to complete a critical review of the current and past year. It also served as a planning mechanism for the coming year. The TAP Director has been notified the budget will not allow this critical face-to-face Joint Committee meeting to take place in 2016.

A significant aspect of fulfilling the TAP mission involves outreach to taxpayers. In order for panel members to "listen to taxpayers", they must first reach them. TAP members are unable to conduct effective outreach outside of their local communities due to lack of available travel funds. Social media may be conducive to reaching some taxpayers but the effectiveness of face-to-face meetings and one-on-one conversations with taxpayers cannot be matched.

Practitioners are a very significant source of information relating to IRS service and customer satisfaction. These professionals generally encounter taxpayers, taxpayer issues, and ideas for improving the IRS on a continual basis. Tax practitioner seminars, conferences, and training events are an excellent source for outreach. Many practitioner organizations would welcome a TAP member as a speaker. In 2014, a 50-minute presentation, "Introducing TAP", was approved by the IRS as a qualifying hour of continuing education for a particular practitioner society. The obstacle is that seminars and conventions are often located in major cities outside of the TAP member's home area. A request for outreach activity requiring travel and overnight accommodation is generally denied due to budget constraints.

Having to "do more with less" is a resounding recurrent statement within TAP, as well as within many other governmental departments and organizations. By utilizing frequent conference calls, emails, newsletters, and other internal communications, TAP strives to continue in its mission of listening to taxpayers, identifying taxpayers' issues, and making recommendations for improving IRS service and customer satisfaction. However, TAP members can be frustrated and discouraged when common sense suggestions for improvement, noted by IRS as "having merit", are rejected based solely on budget constraints and the system's lack of resources to implement them.

The tax code is extremely complex. Each year brings changes and new tax laws, which require implementation and enforcement. 2014 saw the first year of the Affordable Care Act's effect on taxpayers and their tax returns. Today, the penalty for individual non-compliance is even greater and will continue to increase in coming years. As each new tax law is introduced, taxpayers are consistently reaching out for information and assistance to comply. In dealing with

its own budget cuts, the IRS is continuing its move to online informational sources and limited assistance at service centers. These cutbacks in IRS taxpayer services disproportionately impact the poor and elderly, as they have little access to other resources.

The ever increasing pervasiveness of the internet impacts virtually every facet of life and has brought about increased identify theft issues. Even IRS records have proven to not be bullet proof in the electronic realm. Within the past year, TAP has created a Special Projects committee to work with such important and critical issues as they affect taxpayers and IRS's administration of the tax system.

Recently, the National Taxpayer Advocate, Nina Olson, invited TAP, along with other IRS Advisory Committee Chairs, to participate in a Public Hearing on Taxpayer and Stakeholder Needs and Preferences to be held in the spring in Washington, DC. Along with other TAP leaders, I am extremely excited about this important public hearing as well as the invitation and privilege to attend and participate.

Over the past two years, the IRS has worked to develop a "Future State" vision, outlining the IRS's intended activities in five years and beyond. The National Taxpayer Advocate will hold a series of public forums around the country to seek comments and suggestions regarding the wants and needs of taxpayers in order to comply with their tax obligations.

Despite the restrictions and constraints, TAP members are dedicated to its mission. The panel believes in its ability to assist taxpayers by listening, identifying issues, and making recommendations to improve the IRS service and customer satisfaction. I am honored to be a part of this panel and to serve as its 2016 Chair.

Gina Jones  
2016 TAP National Chair

## The Taxpayer Advocacy Panel by Geography

Treasury authorized TAP to have up to 75 volunteer panel members for 2015. Appointed members serve a three-year term from December 1 through November 30. Every effort is made to name at least one alternate member per state. Should a member be unable to complete their appointment, or choose to resign from the TAP, an alternate member may replace them during the year or at the start of the next succeeding TAP year.

The list of members in Appendix A at the end of this report may exceed the number of Treasury authorized members in the listing below due to resignations and other changes in membership during a TAP year.

State	Member(s)
Alabama	1
Alaska	1
Arizona	1
Arkansas	1
California	5
Colorado	1
Connecticut	1
Delaware	1
Florida	2
Georgia	2
Hawaii	1
Idaho	1
Illinois	2
Indiana	1
International	1
Iowa	1
Kansas	1
Kentucky	2
Louisiana	1
Maine	1
Maryland	1
Massachusetts	2
Michigan	1
Minnesota	1
Mississippi	1
Missouri	2
Montana	1

State	Member(s)
Nebraska	1
Nevada	1
New Hampshire	1
New Jersey	1
New Mexico	1
New York	5
North Carolina	1
North Dakota	1
Ohio	2
Oklahoma	1
Oregon	1
Pennsylvania	3
Puerto Rico	1
Rhode Island	1
South Carolina	1
South Dakota	1
Tennessee	2
Texas	4
Utah	2
Vermont	1
Virginia	1
Washington	1
Washington, D.C.	1
West Virginia	1
Wisconsin	1
Wyoming	1

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## Outreach Committee Report

### **Chair**

Andrew VanSingel, Illinois

### **Members**

Jerome Bell, North Carolina  
Eric Butler, Tennessee  
Francis Grinnan, New York  
Dan Halleman, Colorado  
Catherine Jeppson, California  
John Slough, West Virginia

### **Designated Federal Officer**

Cedric Jeans, Chief, TAP East, Memphis, TN

### **Staff**

Linda Rivera, Senior Program Analyst, Washington DC  
Theresa Cook, Case Advocate, Philadelphia, PA  
Annette Johnson, Case Advocate, Texas  
Kudiratu Usman, Program Analyst, Washington, DC  
Rose Babb, Management Assistant, Brooklyn, NY

### **Committee Work Scope and Recommendations**

The Outreach Committee is comprised of one representative from each TAP project committee, usually the committee's vice-chair, and is led by the TAP Vice-chair. Its mission is to support TAP members in their outreach work and improve the quality and quantity of that outreach work. Outreach is critical both as a source of issues from the public and to increase public awareness of TAP itself. Outreach activities may include, for example, a presentation to a group, a one-on-one encounter with a taxpayer, a letter or an article placed in a publication, or a visit to a Congressional office or VITA center.

### **Committee Work Completed in 2015**

Work completed by the Committee during 2015 included:

- Reviewed monthly outreach activities by members, broken down by month, hours, audience reached, and issues secured for TAP consideration.
- Proposed changes to the policies and structure of the monthly activity and participation reports.

This resulted in structural and format changes to the monthly activity report.

The committee initiated discussions about members who had been identified as not being actively engaged in the work of TAP and the potential for encouraged resignations, involuntary dismissals, or similar actions. The committee also considered the possibility for the use of virtual outreach presentations in the future. During 2016, the Outreach Committee expects to continue discussions on these topics.

## Annual Summary of TAP Member Activities

Activity	Total Hours Spent on		Outreach Activities		
	TAP Committee Activities	TAP Outreach Activities	Number of Events	Possible Issues Identified	Estimated Audience
Press Releases/Media Interviews		20.10	20	0	1,546,900
Postings on Social Media/Other Websites		33.80	32	1	141,027
Committee/ Subcommittee/and Ad Hoc Meetings and Referral Research/ Preparation	9,442.30		N/A	N/A	N/A
Meetings with Public/ Civic Groups		466.85	137	88	4,957
Tax Forums, Expos and Annual Meeting Speakers/Booth		608.00	42	8	11,500
Other Public Individual and Small Group Contacts		1,307.95	599	164	2,690
<b>Total Reported Hours and Activities</b>	<b>9,442.30</b>	<b>2,436.70</b>	<b>830</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>1,707,074</b>

- These estimated totals are based on data collected from the monthly activity reports submitted by TAP members in 2015
- N/A Data Not Provided or Available

## TAP 2015 Project Committee Accomplishments

### Project Committee Organization

The Taxpayer Advocacy Panel (TAP) had six core customer-focused Project Committees in 2015. The committees worked on projects identified and defined by the TAP Joint Committee (JC) and IRS program executives. Each committee was similar in size and consisted of members from around the country. The project committees worked with the IRS to define problems and then develop Referrals with recommendations to address the topics. TAP also addressed ad hoc issues and made recommendations to the IRS for changes in these areas as well. The IRS values the outside perspective provided by the variety in backgrounds, experiences, and thinking of the TAP members, which may lead to fresh approaches not readily apparent to IRS staff.

The TAP Internal Communications Committee worked on products used in 2015 by TAP for internal TAP business, as well as for interaction with taxpayers. This included publishing the monthly TAP Newsletter, updating outreach materials, and setting procedures to respond to issue submitters to let them know the status of their issue.

### TAP Submitted 104 Recommendations to the IRS

The six core Project Committees submitted 104 recommendations to the IRS in 2015. Further, the TAP Internal Communications Committee completed three special projects in addition to its normal duties.

Referrals to the IRS may be accepted and implemented, currently or prospectively, or may be rejected in whole or in part. TAP Referrals may be rejected based on policy, staffing, or fiscal/ budget concerns. A rejected Referral may be resubmitted for reconsideration if there is additional information that might impact the IRS decision. Even when a TAP Referral is initially rejected by the IRS, it may plant a seed that “bears fruit” in later years.

Recommendations	
Submitted	104
Accepted	41
Partially Accepted	12
Rejected	43
Considered	8
Unresolved/Open	0

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## TAP 2015 Special Events and Activities

### **2015 TAP Chair and Vice Chair begin their work as TAP Leaders**

TAP members selected Michael Swartz, Austin, Texas, as National Chair of the Panel for 2015. Michael also served as the 2014 TAP Vice Chair. Members also selected Andrew VanSingel from Brookfield, Illinois as TAP Vice Chair. Andrew served as the Chair of the 2014 Taxpayer Communications Project Committee.

### **New Members appointed for 2015**

On November 21, 2014, Treasury appointed 15 new members and 14 new alternates. Fourteen alternates previously approved by Treasury were selected by the TAP Director to join the 15 new members and 46 returning members for 2015. The 2015 TAP year began with virtual New Member Orientation and virtual briefings for new and returning members in January 2015 followed by the initial meeting for each of the project committees.

### **TAP Recruitment Drive for 2016 new members starts with a new electronic application process**

Recruitment for 2016 TAP members and alternates opened on March 9, 2015 and closed on April 20, 2015. For the first time, interested candidates applied for the panel through USAJobs. This effort was tested to expand the TAP marketing program, improve efficiencies in the ranking process, and streamline the electronic application. At the close of the application period USAJobs received 1084 applications, which is a 181% increase over the 386 applications received in 2014.

The Human Capital Office (HCO) ranked the applicants in May and interview panels consisting of a TAP Member and TAP Staff interviewed over 100 of the top candidates in June. The TAP Director sent the recommended selections to the National Taxpayer Advocate to fill 17 member vacancies as well as numerous alternate candidate recommendations for future vacancies.

### **TAP Membership-Wide Project Participation**

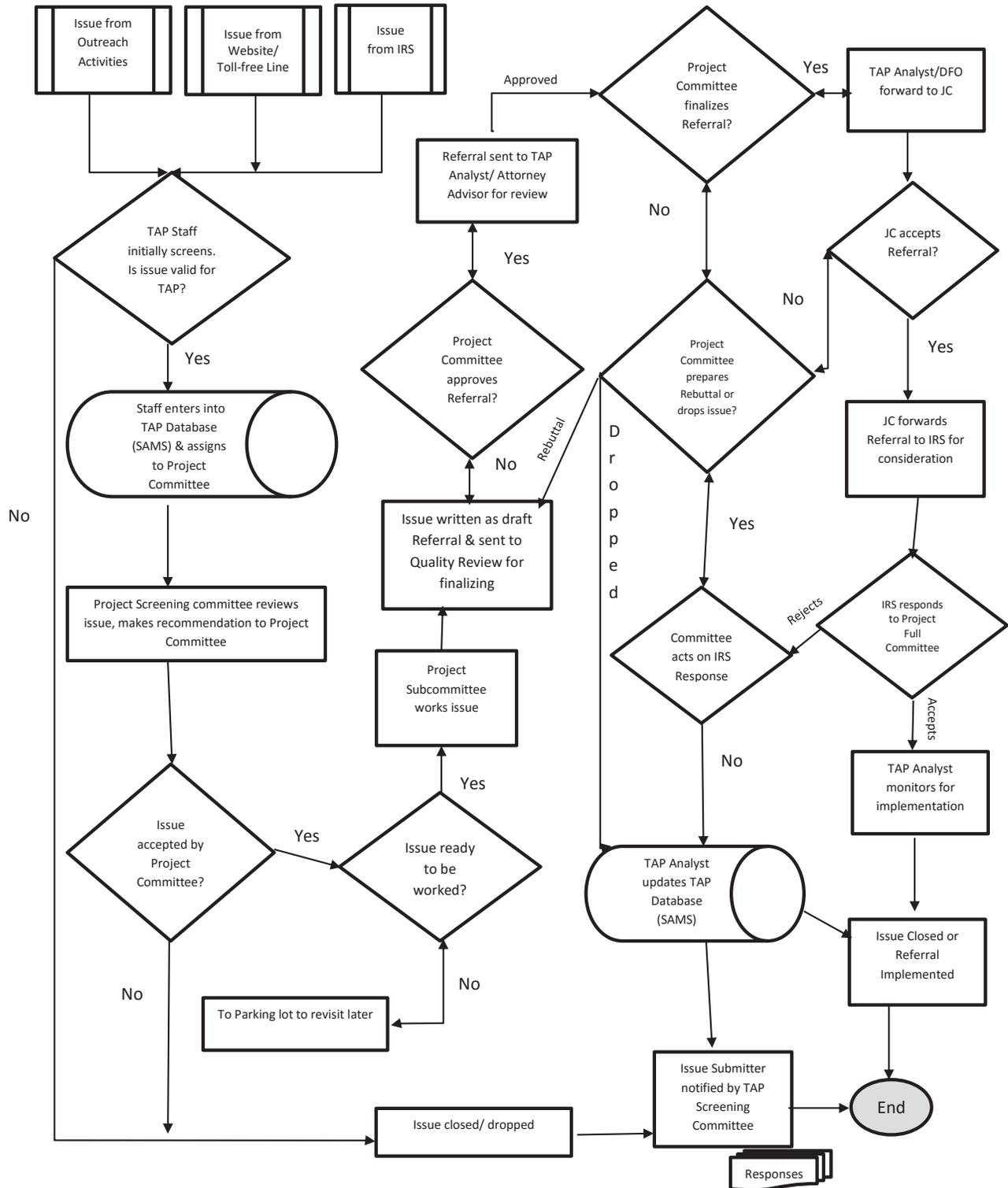
During 2015, IRS staff put out general calls to the entire TAP membership for assistance with brief special-purpose projects from time to time. These projects ranged from testing an application being developed for use on IRS.gov, review of revised correspondence proposed by the Taxpayer Advisory Service (TAS), and similar efforts. Members also volunteer annually to serve as mentors for new panel members, regardless of their committee assignment, as well as participating on interview panels for prospective new TAP members.

Members were also encouraged to volunteer for ad hoc internal committees, regardless of their core project committee assignment. Included in the ad hoc internal committees seeking assistance were the annual report committee and the annual face-to-face meeting committee.

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# TAP Issue Processing Flow Chart – How TAP works Issues

## TAP ISSUE PROCESSING WORKFLOW CHART



## TAP Issue Processing Flow Chart – Narrative

Issues for Taxpayer Advocacy Panel (TAP) consideration come from outreach by member activities, the public, and concerns from the IRS. TAP considers only issues that improve the experience or process for large numbers of taxpayers. Screening steps throughout the process ensure TAP volunteer time is devoted only to those issues that fit within the TAP goal and mission.

### **IS ISSUE VALID FOR TAP WORK?**

**YES:** If it is valid, a TAP Analyst performs additional research, assigns it to a Project Screening Committee, and tracks it in the Systemic Advocacy Management System (SAMS) database.

**NO:** If the issue is not a valid TAP issue, it is dropped and issue submitter notified.

**ISSUE GOES TO PROJECT SCREENING COMMITTEE.** Issue goes to the Screening Committee of the appropriate Project Committee. The Screening Committee reviews the issue, determines if more information is needed, and recommends whether the Project Committee should accept or reject the issue.

### **ISSUE ACCEPTED BY PROJECT COMMITTEE?**

**YES:** The Project Committees break up into Subcommittees to work issues received. The entire Project Committee meets monthly to vote on recommendations from its Screening Committee.

**NO:** The Issue submitter is notified and the SAMS database is updated.

### **IS PROJECT COMMITTEE READY TO WORK ISSUE?**

**YES:** The Project Subcommittee works with its TAP Staff Analyst to research the issue's background, arrange meetings or briefings with IRS Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and/or undertake other necessary activities.

**NO:** The Project Subcommittee may decide to place the issue into the Project Committee's "parking lot" to be worked when time is available.

**PROJECT SUBCOMMITTEE WORKS ISSUE.** Project Subcommittee meets monthly to discuss the information gathered in order to begin the process of creating a Referral. The TAP Project Referral form includes project and goal statements, proposed solutions, background research, analysis, benefits/barriers, and summary. The Project Subcommittee forwards it to the Project Committee's Review Subcommittee for proofing and editing. After final approval by the Project Subcommittee, the Referral is presented to the full Project Committee for approval.

**FULL PROJECT COMMITTEE APPROVES ISSUE REFERRAL?** Once the Project Committee, by vote at its monthly teleconference, approves the Referral, it is sent to the Systemic Advocacy (SA) and attorney advisors for their comments. If the advisors recommend changes, these must be implemented by the Subcommittee and approved by the Project Committee before the process can continue.

**YES:** After the above referenced parties give final approval, TAP staff places the Referral on the agenda, at least a week in advance, for Joint Committee consideration at its next meeting.

**NO:** The Full Project Committee may reject the Referral, in whole or in part, or make recommendations and suggestions, which the Project Subcommittee then addresses.

**JOINT COMMITTEE (JC) ACCEPTS REFERRAL?** The JC has the responsibility to review the recommendations on all Referrals; it makes the final determination regarding elevating to the IRS.

**YES:** The Referral is forwarded to the IRS for its consideration and action.

**NO:** Project Committee prepares a rebuttal or drops the issue. TAP Analyst updates SAMS database.

**IRS REVIEWS AND RESPONDS TO FULL COMMITTEE.** The IRS has 60 days to respond to the Referral, unless an extension of time is requested and granted.

**IRS ACCEPTS REFERRAL IN WHOLE OR IN PART OR REJECTS IN ENTIRETY?**

**YES:** A TAP Project Screening Committee member notifies the issue submitter the results and TAP staff updates the SAMS database. The TAP Analyst monitors the Referral for implementation.

**NO:** The Project Subcommittee may accept the IRS response, or may prepare a rebuttal, in whole or in part. In the case of a rebuttal, the same process for developing the initial Referral is followed. The SAMS database is updated and a TAP Project Screening Committee member notifies the issue submitter.

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## Project Committee Chair Reports

### Notices and Correspondence Committee

#### Chair

David W. Hayes, Tennessee

#### Members

John Slough, West Virginia (Vice Chair)  
Tabatha Butler, Montana  
Philessia Edwards, Texas (Resigned)  
Eugene Goldfarb, New York  
William Green, Delaware  
Kathleen Jenks Harm, Vermont  
Zafrulla Khan, Kentucky (Resigned)  
Roger Paquette, Rhode Island (Resigned)  
Joan Prober, New Jersey  
Angela Spain, California  
Andrew VanSingel, Illinois  
Stephen Webber, California

#### Designated Federal Officer

Susan Jimerson, Chief, TAP West, Seattle, WA

#### IRS Program Owner

Office of Taxpayer Correspondence (OTC)  
Wage and Investment (W&I)

#### Staff

Theresa Singleton, Program Analyst, Washington, DC  
Annie Gold, Management Assistant, Houston, Texas

#### Committee Work Scope and Referrals

The Notices and Correspondence Committee focused its efforts on ways to reduce the burden on taxpayers, either in time, money, or frustration. During this TAP year two subcommittees worked on 16 issues and made suggestions on how to improve clarity, readability, and format of notices and correspondence. Much of this effort dealt with the plain language approach.

#### Issues Referred to Another TAP Committee:

**Issue 32714** suggested the IRS not use a complete taxpayer identification number on any documents, thus helping reduce identity theft; issue was referred to the Special Projects Committee.

**Issue 33267** requested that IRS complete its review during the 60-day period stated in its routine correspondence or change the number of days in its correspondence; issue was referred to the Toll-Free Phone Lines Committee.

**Issue 33469** suggested that IRS require producers of forms to provide that personal information, such as Social Security numbers, be redacted; issue was referred to the Special Projects Committee.

**Issues Currently in Committee:**

**Issue 30197** deals with IRS not using the same correspondence dates and reference numbers when dealing with the same matter. The committee has gathered information and will be developing a Referral.

**Issue 32879** argues that language in Notice CP 161, *Notice of Unpaid Balance Due*, is ambiguous. The committee is performing further research and gathering information for possible future recommendations to include in a Referral.

**Issue 17399** seeks to have IRS clarify in its forms, notices, correspondence, and publications, reference Date Due or Due Date mean that payment must be received at IRS by that date, not merely mailed. The committee 'parked' this issue at the end of the year in order to include it in a future Referral.

**Issue 32880** requests that language be added to Notice CP 87D explaining that interest and penalties may accrue while a matter is being reviewed by the IRS. The Referral is undergoing committee quality review prior to elevation to the Joint Committee.

**Issues Currently Referred for Joint Committee (JC) Review and Approval:**

**Issues 32317, 32318 and 32319** dealt with Letters 5043, 5044, and 5045, *Income Reporting Verification Notices*. These issues were responses to requests from the IRS to have TAP review proposed letters dealing with reporting discrepancies on Form 1099-K reports.

**Issues Currently Being Reviewed by IRS:**

**Issue 24894** deals with wording in Notice CP 2000 and proposes changes to make it easier to understand and agree with similar wording on related forms.

**Issue 29543** suggests that taxpayers be advised when electronically filing form 4868, *Application for Automatic Extension of Time to File*, that no further action is required from them.

**Issues to be Carried into the 2016 TAP Year:**

**Issue 33387** suggests that certain small amounts of taxes due may be the result of rounding or similar errors during tax preparation. If these amounts are *de minimus*, the IRS should be able to ignore them, saving valuable time and effort.

**Issue 33451** suggests that steps be taken within IRS to make certain that any instructions given orally to taxpayers by employees agree with instructions on the same topic mailed to taxpayers.

## Special Projects Committee

### Chair

Nancy Dery, New Hampshire

### Members

Catherine Jeppson, California (Vice Chair)

Elizabeth Chaney, Michigan

Kirk Chartier, Georgia

Patricia Dossall, Alabama

Jamelda Fulton, Mississippi

Francesca Hary, Ohio

Paul Lubell, Maryland

Shelby Lyon, Switzerland

Merry Mattson, Minnesota

Sophia Sakoff, Oregon

Michael Swartz, Texas

### Designated Federal Officer

Susan Jimerson, Chief, TAP West, Seattle, WA

### IRS Program Owner

Wage and Investment (W&I), Ogden, UT

### Staff

Kim Vinci, Program Analyst, Sacramento, CA

Donna Powers, Program Analyst, Plantation, FL

Annie Gold, Management Assistant, Houston, TX

### Committee Work Scope and Recommendations

The Special Projects Committee (SPC) was established in 2015 to address issues not covered by another established committee. Two issues initially proposed for attention were the tax consequences of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and assistance for U.S. citizens and U.S. lawful permanent residents working, living, or doing business abroad or in a U.S. territory, who must meet U.S. tax obligations. The committee initially created two subcommittees for Identity Theft and International Issues and, as the year continued, added a third subcommittee called Quality of Service.

### Issues and Referrals Completed During the Year:

**Issue 32454**, handled by the International subcommittee, concerned the need of international taxpayers to obtain low-cost/no-cost tax information to assist them in meeting their tax obligations. Many U.S. taxpayers living abroad do not realize they have a filing and paying requirement and/or have difficulty procuring information. All overseas IRS tax offices are now closed, leaving the embassies to try to handle these issues. The subcommittee developed four recommendations: (1) have a two-page summary sheet outlining basic international tax information available at U.S. Embassies and Consulates; (2) reinstate an updated Publication 4732, either as a printed version or a PDF version; (3) enter into agreements with the State Department and U.S. Postal Service to include a notice with new or renewed passport

applications; and (4) encourage organizations that communicate with Americans who live abroad to distribute tax related information. This Referral was approved at the November 2015 Joint Committee meeting and has been forwarded to the IRS for consideration.

**Issue 33297**, handled by the Quality of Service subcommittee, addressed a concern about the type of service received by taxpayers interacting with the IRS via the telephone. Currently, there is no formal procedure to assure that taxpayers receive quality service during a telephone interface with a customer service representative (CSR). A failure to provide quality service could occur when a CSR fails to respond to customer requests, fails to return telephone calls, or behaves unprofessionally. It is important that any adopted solution allow for commendations as well as complaints about customer service. The following improvements were suggested: (1) have the CSR repeat their name and badge number at the conclusion of the call; (2) add a drop-down box to the IRS website titled "Commendations and Complaints;" (3) while the taxpayer is waiting on hold, have the recording suggest obtaining the CSR's name and badge number; (4) offer taxpayers the opportunity to participate in a short survey following the call; and (5) initiate the collection of statistics concerning the number of complaints and commendations and their resolution. Knowing there is an easy way to communicate complaints and commendations regarding CSR actions might improve taxpayer satisfaction with the IRS communication process. This Referral was approved at the November 2015 Joint Committee meeting and has been forwarded to the IRS for consideration.

#### **Other Activities and Achievements during the Year:**

The Identity Theft Subcommittee (IDT) discussed several concerns regarding identity theft. The subcommittee conducted research on several possible solutions including additional ways the IRS can eliminate or reduce the processing of fraudulent returns with fake EIN's, BOT Detection use, and the use of Completely Automated Public Turing Test to Tell Computers and Humans Apart (CAPTCHA). The subcommittee's research showed the IRS has been working diligently to incorporate several safeguards to try to prevent identity theft. The IDT made no specific recommendations in 2015, but they will continue to explore avenues to reduce taxpayer burden regarding identity theft issues.

SPC members attended an Identity Theft Webinar administered by IRS. This webinar provided a foundation about future identity theft issues and potential recommendations.

A SPC member attended the IRS Tax Forum in San Diego, CA in August 2015, and solicited and received a number of issues to be reviewed and considered for future TAP projects.

#### **Plans for the Coming Year:**

The 2016 TAP year will be filled with many projects for the SPC. The International subcommittee is already working on additional issues involving taxpayers living abroad. With a member living outside the continental U.S., the committee is aware of continuing issues facing U.S. citizens living and working abroad.

## Tax Forms and Publications Committee

### Chair

Mary Kautzman, Florida

### Members

Eric Butler, Tennessee (Vice Chair)  
Kent Anderson, Utah  
Joe Cardona, Puerto Rico  
Carolyn Gould, Connecticut  
Page Moore, Nebraska  
Mahendra Patel, Pennsylvania  
Angie Trottier, North Dakota  
Elena Tscherny, District of Columbia  
LeAnna Wilson, Kansas  
Shirley Xu, Virginia

### Designated Federal Officer

Cedric Jeans, Chief, TAP East, Memphis, TN

### IRS Program Owners

Wage and Investment (W&I)

### Staff

Donna Powers, Program Analyst, Plantation, FL  
Rose Babb, Management Assistant, Brooklyn, NY

### Committee Work Scope and Recommendations:

The Tax Forms and Publications (TF&P) Committee's mission is to evaluate IRS tax forms and publications in collaboration with the relevant IRS Program Owner in order to recommend improvements. TF&P Committee members occasionally participate in focus groups and provide feedback on IRS' new ideas and proposed tax law changes. One example was a request by Wage and Investment, Research & Analysis, for four to eight TAP members to participate in a focus group relative to facilitating taxpayer movement to more efficient, effective, and less labor-intensive channels, such as online at IRS.gov, from telephones or at walk-in offices. The results of the focus group are still pending and the committee is awaiting feedback on possible implementations.

### Issues and Referrals Completed during 2015

The TF&P committee completed reviews of various forms and publications, which resulted in multiple adopted recommendations. Below are summaries of Referrals completed this year:

**Issue 32114** – Form 8965, *Health Coverage Exemptions, and Instructions* – Committee members were asked by IRS to participate in a focus group, working the computations on the form and discussing potential issues with the form as well as the instructions. The committee submitted a briefing paper to the IRS.

**Issue 32123** – Publication 17, *Your Federal Income Tax (For Individuals)*, www.IRS.gov and e-pub application – Committee members participated in a focus group utilizing iPads, iPhones, and laptops to access the online version of Publication 17. The Committee recommended printing Publication 17 for the public.

**Issue 32076** – Review Form 8621, *Return by Shareholder of a Passive Foreign Investment Company, or Qualified Electing Fund* and Instructions. TF&P was asked by IRS to review Form 8621 and provide IRS program owners with feedback. The Committee reviewed Form 8621 and its instructions; however, the committee had no substantive recommendations to make regarding this form. Overall, the committee felt the Form 8621 and its Instructions were fairly well written and functional, plus provided enough information for a taxpayer to understand the purpose and use.

**Issue 32077** – At the request of the IRS, the committee reviewed Form 1139 and Instructions, *Corporation Application for Tentative Refund*. Eight recommendations on clarity and readability of the form and instructions were submitted to the IRS, of which four were accepted.

**Issue 32122** – At the request of the IRS, the committee reviewed Form 4797, *Sale of Business Property and Instructions* to determine whether or not the form was user friendly and consistent with the applicable instructions. TF&P also analyzed other relevant forms and publications referred to in the Form 4797 and its instructions. The committee made 12 recommendations on the user friendliness of this form. The IRS accepted two of the recommendations and partially accepted one.

The accepted recommendations pertained to the need for more specific instructions, plus more clarity in the form and its instructions. IRS also agreed to review the portion of the 4797 instructions describing the property and clarify and/or add references to the related Publication 544, *Sales and Other Dispositions of Assets*, where examples can be included

**Issue 33015** – The IRS Wage and Investment (W & I), Media and Publications, asked the Committee to review Publication 974, *Premium Tax Credit (PTC)* and provide IRS program owners with feedback. There were 14 recommendations submitted to the IRS. Six of the recommendations were adopted by IRS and two are currently under consideration as the publication goes to the next printing.

Six issues pertaining to the Form 1040 and instructions were combined into a single Referral that was forwarded to the Joint Committee in November, 2015. The six issues that were elevated to the IRS in December, 2015 included:

- **Issue 32387** – 1040 Healthcare Check Box – Make the Healthcare Check Box prominent to ensure all taxpayers can readily indicate their full year or partial year healthcare coverage.
- **Issue 32408** – Form 1040 Instructions Taxability of Social Security Disability Benefits - There are no clear directions in the instructions for Form 1040 or 1040 A regarding the taxability of Social Security disability benefits, which are paid to the recipient through the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program.

- **Issue 32409** – Schedule A Instructions, Deductibility of Nutritional Supplements and Nicotine Patches – Provide a clear statement in the Schedule A Instructions on the eligibility of prescribed “Nutritional Supplements” and “Nicotine Patches” as deductible medical expenses.
- **Issue 32861** – Form 1040 V- Reword the instructions for Forms 1040-V/1041-V to make it clear that taxpayers are to send the voucher, return and payment to the address provided. Also, the Forms 1040-V /1041-V need to be clearer and more readily available.
- **Issue 26887** – Form 1040 Instructions, Earned Income Credit Bullet – State the non-eligibility of Earned Income Credit (EIC) filers in a more prominently featured area of the 1040 Instructions.
- **Issue 29897** – Add Worksheets to Form 1040 Instructions Table of Contents and Index  
Add location of worksheets to Form 1040 Instructions and Index.

**New Issues with current project committee just beginning and will be continuing on to the new committee for completion:**

- Issue 21611 – Third Party Prep – Check Box Authority
- Issue 26656 – Form 3115, *Application for Change in Accounting Methods*
- Issue 28544 – Publication 5074-A, *Protect Your Tax Refund*, Revision Needed
- Issue 28746 – Form 5227, *Split-Interest Trust Information Return*
- Issue 29364 – Qualified Dividends & Capital Gains Tax Worksheet
- Issue 29425 – Publication 560 – *Retirement Plans for Small Business*
- Issue 29552 – Create a Tax Disclosure Form
- Issue 29800 – Form 1040, Schedule K-1 – Too Many Forms
- Issue 29946 – Form W-9, *Request for Taxpayer Identification Number & Certification*
- Issue 30906 – Form 3115 Requirements
- Issue 31225 – Head of Household
- Issue 31231 – Form 8938, *Statement of Specified Foreign Financial Assets*
- Issue 31400 – Foreign Tax Withheld on Form 1099
- Issue 31580 – Form 1099
- Issue 32143 – Head of Household Disallowed on Form 2441, *Child and Dependent Care Expenses*
- Issue 32240 – Special Business Forms Can’t File Electronically
- Issue 32241 – Alternative Minimum Tax Assistant is Incorrect
- Issue 32436 – Form 8888, *Allocation of Refund – Split Refund*
- Issue 32507 – Sales Tax Deduction Calendar
- Issue 32542 – Return Processing Refund Delays
- Issue 32587 – Health Care Coverage
- Issue 32699 – Create Line for Mutual Funds
- Issue 32789 – ID Theft Suggestion for Form 1040
- Issue 32915 – 944 vs 941
- Issue 32946 – 1040 Instructions Issue 33172 – Form 1040 NR
- Issue 33260 – Form 1040ES
- Issue 33325 – Form 2441, Child and Dependent Care Expenses
- Issue 33353 – Form 1098, *Mortgage Interest Statement*
- Issue 33562 – Insolvency Questions Form 1099©

Issue 33624 – Focus Group  
Issue 33657 – Amended Return  
Issue 33722 – Ad Hoc E-File Acknowledgement Project  
Issue 33727 – Form 2848, *Power of Attorney* (Deceased Taxpayer)  
Issue 33729 – Form 2848, *Power of Attorney* (Not Enrolled Agent or CPA)  
Issue 33751 – Tax Due Statements for Form 1099's to Corporations  
Issue 33781 – Form 1040 – Adding Box to Received Forms  
Issue 33801 – Readability of Fill-In Form 4419, *Application for Filing Information Returns Electronically (FIRE)*  
Issue 33916 – Application for Automatic Extension of Time to File Certain Business Income Tax Information and Other Returns.

## Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements Committee

### Chair

Allan Goldberg, New York

### Members

Francis Grinnan, New York (Vice Chair)

Josiah Berry, Indiana

Richard Christensen, Idaho

David Donathan, Kentucky (Resigned)

Robert Phillips, Texas

Alphonse Piard, Florida

David Thies, Illinois

Sallie Mullins Thompson, New York

Mary Jo Thomson, Oklahoma

Pamela Trafford, Massachusetts

Scott Wallace, Nevada

### Designated Federal Officer

Cedric Jeans, Chief, TAP East, Memphis, TN

### IRS Program Owners

Wage and Investment (W&I)

### Staff

Otis Simpson, Program Analyst, Washington DC

Rose Babb, Management Assistant, Brooklyn, NY

### Committee Work Scope and Referrals

The Taxpayer Assistance Center (TACs) Improvements Committee primarily provided recommendations to the IRS on ways to improve the service to taxpayers who elect to use the TACs and on methods to deliver better service at the TACs. In addition to following up on three Referrals completed in 2014, the committee conducted a major survey of TAC managers across the country to gauge the level of demand and learn how face-to-face services can be improved and procedures modified to mitigate the reduced staffing and funding levels currently present at IRS facilities.

Based on the survey results, the committee initiated, authored, and forwarded to the Joint Committee six major Referrals for consideration aimed at benefitting taxpayers needing assistance at the nearly 400 TACs across the nation. Reduced staffing and funding at these Centers has created major challenges for the IRS, accelerating the importance of finding satisfactory alternatives to the limited face-to-face assistance available while still recognizing the need of some taxpayers whose situation requires personalized or customized service.

### Tax Preparation Guidance and Training Material for IRS Stakeholder, Partnership, Education and Communication (SPEC)

The IRS no longer prepares tax returns at its TAC offices and relies on Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) partners to prepare income tax

returns for millions of eligible individuals. The IRS asked the committee to review the nationwide training guides and other material it publishes and provides to tax preparation site counselors and other volunteers and offer recommendations for improvement to these various documents. The committee identified 24 areas where clearer guidance would assist VITA/TCE volunteers in their tax preparation efforts. The IRS accepted a portion of the suggestions for implementation in tax year 2015 and beyond.

### **Enhancing IRS Support for VITA/TCE Grant Programs**

The TAC Improvements Committee developed a series of proposals designed to improve the tax preparation grant partnership programs of VITA and TCE. The three separate proposals for improvement were put forward to address the following separate areas of the grant partnership programs:

**Recruitment of VITA/TCE Volunteers** – The committee prepared a Referral with a series of recommendations to increase IRS involvement in recruiting and retaining grant partner volunteers.

**Training and Support for VITA/TCE** –The committee prepared another Referral with a series of recommendations to improve IRS support and training to enable the grant programs to operate more effectively.

**Expanding the Scope of VITA/TCE Assistance** –The committee prepared a Referral with a series of recommendations to widen the scope of the VITA/TCE free tax preparation programs to enable these grant programs to service more taxpayers.

### **Assisting Taxpayers to Find Alternatives to Face-to-Face Service at TACs**

Taxpayers are significantly inconvenienced when staffing and budget limitations at TACs limit the timeliness and availability of services. To meet this critical challenge, the TAC Improvements Committee developed an easy-to-understand publication entitled, “Hate to Wait” that taxpayers can use as a reference to find alternative resources to enable them to resolve a problem or have a question answered rather than enduring a long wait or, worse, being advised they cannot be served that day due to excess demand. In addition to developing the new publication, the committee offered additional recommendations on placement and promotion of the new publication.

### **Ensuring Taxpayers Benefit from the IRS Transition from Walk- In Service to Appointment-Only Functionality at TACs**

The IRS announced, after a test period, that over the next several years all TACs will operate on an appointment-only basis. The TAC Improvements Committee identified some important factors to be considered as the IRS implements this significant changeover. Careful planning is imperative to ensure that taxpayers are not negatively impacted during the transition and that the new functionality works seamlessly for taxpayers. The committee Referral with recommendations for IRS consideration as it implements this policy change was a key contribution from the committee for this TAP year.

## **Engaging with Other TAP Committees**

A member of the TAC Improvements Committee worked with members of the Special Projects Committee on Issue 33297, which addressed concerns about the quality of service received by taxpayers interacting with the IRS via the telephone. This type of collaborative effort recognizes that many IRS functions are related and the interplay between them could assist in reducing repeat calls by taxpayers.

## Taxpayer Communications Committee

### Chair

Gina Jones, Louisiana

### Members

Jerome Bell, North Carolina (Vice Chair)

Dawn Basciano, California

Steven Belec, Massachusetts

Ralph Bennett, Washington

Ralph Boyea, Hawaii

Stephanie Campbell, Missouri

Suze Kanack, Wyoming

Jeanne Matthews, Pennsylvania

Gail Reese, Arizona

Theresa Watson, Arkansas

Walter Webster, New Mexico

### Designated Federal Officer

Susan Jimerson, Chief TAP West, Seattle, WA

### IRS Program Owners

Small Business/Self Employed (SB/SE)

### Staff

Janice Spinks, Program Analyst, Seattle, WA

Antoinette Ross, Program Analyst, Washington, DC

Annie Gold, Management Assistant, Houston, TX

### Committee Work Scope and Referrals

The Taxpayer Communications Committee (TCC) is charged with addressing all issues concerning communications with taxpayers that are not addressed by another TAP committee. The TCC can also act as a focal point where issues and recommendations cross committee boundaries. For a voluntary tax compliance system to be effective, it is critical that any interaction with taxpayers, both to and from the IRS, be straightforward, convenient, easy to navigate and timely. When written communications are difficult to understand, do not provide a way to obtain clarification, or fail to identify a resource to resolve a problem or question, taxpayers seek out personal interaction with IRS personnel to resolve their issues. Given IRS budget constraints on staffing; this results in even less effective communications and increases delays in problem resolution.

The TCC exists to examine, research, and make suggestions to improve or enhance communication between the IRS and taxpayers. The TCC acknowledges traditional barriers such as security, costs and/or personnel constraints, but it also seeks out solutions already in use in other areas of government or private industry that have resolved time and cost constraints while maintaining security to help the IRS develop a 21st century communications structure.

The TCC submitted 20 new recommendations in connection with four issues to the IRS in 2015, along with two requests for reconsideration for Referrals submitted in 2014.

**Issue 32775, Form 433-F, Collection Information Statement.** The IRS asked that Form 433-F be evaluated from a taxpayer and practitioner perspective and that TCC make suggestions on ways to make the form easier to complete and to reduce taxpayer burden. The Project Referral included nine specific recommendations for changes and improvements to Form 433-F. This issue was accepted by the Joint Committee consideration on November 25, 2015 and forwarded to the IRS for consideration.

**Issue 32776, Schedule C Compliance.** The IRS asked for suggestions on ways to encourage voluntary Schedule C reporting compliance. A primary focus of the committee was a means of reaching individuals who may not realize they are actually “operating a business” and therefore have reporting requirements. The Project Referral included a brightly colored, eye catching brochure which can be printed and/or be made available in digital format for education and marketing purposes to reach current and potential sole proprietors who are attempting to earn, or supplement, their livelihood by rendering services for compensation.

The Referral also included an extensive list of potential affiliations for distribution. Those affiliations included organizations and locations external to normal IRS partnerships and stakeholders that may have direct or indirect contact with entrepreneurs and others desiring to earn additional monies outside of their regular employment. This issue was approved for elevation to the IRS on September 17, 2015 and a follow up email was sent on November 20, 2015. IRS approved the Referral on December 15, 2015, with a proposed implementation date of June 1, 2016.

**Issue 32780, Interactive Tax Assistant (ITA).** The IRS requested that the functionality of the ITA be reviewed and feedback provided that improves the taxpayer experience. This was an interactive project for the committee. Individual members worked through every question in each category within the ITA to assess ease of use, functionality, content, and subject matter. As the categories were reviewed, results were forwarded to the IRS program owner(s). The IRS responded with comments and disposition for each item. The Referral included seven specific recommendations for changes and additions to the ITA for the 2016 tax filing season. This issue was approved for elevation to the IRS on October 28, 2015. The IRS response has not yet been received.

**Issue 31082, Mail Tracking.** This issue was derived from an outreach activity indicating taxpayer frustration when items mailed to the IRS, with confirmed delivery, could not be located. The original issue pertained to documents sent by certified mail, with proof of delivery via returned receipt. The TCC’s research determined that proof of delivery is provided by the US Postal Service, indicating only that the item was delivered to the Submission Processing (SP) center of the IRS. The delivery confirmation does not track any further processing of the item. The Project Referral included two specific recommendations to improve the tracking and accountability of incoming mail, and to follow its assignment to a particular department for processing. This issue was approved by the Joint Committee on November 25, 2015.

**Issue 26834, Itemized Deductions Link.** In late 2014, a Referral regarding the appropriate placement of a link for itemized deductions was elevated to the IRS. On April 20, 2015, the IRS notified TAP that Issue 26834 had been resolved prior to elevation. The writers of the Referral felt that the issue had not been sufficiently resolved and was still in need of corrective action. A request for reconsideration was elevated on July 2, 2015, but no response has been received.

**Issue 29847, Online Tool for American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC).** In November, 2014, IRS rejected this Referral due to funding constraints, though noting that the recommendation had merit. In January, 2015, the committee submitted a request for reconsideration including additional information not submitted with the original Referral regarding the cost-effectiveness of an online tool to show previous year(s) education credits allowed per student. The request for reconsideration was approved by the IRS, with implementation subject to priority within their budget.

#### **Other Activities and Achievements:**

**Issue 32774, Reduce Taxpayer Burden by Improving the Taxpayer Experience.** The IRS requested advisory feedback regarding the reduction of taxpayer burden in meeting the obligations of compliance with federal tax law. The original request seemed extraordinarily broad and too generic for immediate focus. Through several meetings with program owners and subject matter experts, TCC's suggestion was to concentrate on an approach for IRS employees to use in considering the taxpayer experience with compliance issues. The IRS asked for identification of specific areas that are particularly ripe for changes along with suggestions that could potentially reduce the compliance burden and improve the taxpayer experience. This issue will be worked in the 2016 TAP year with the goal of identifying a limited number of specific instances where the taxpayer burden could be decreased.

This committee will continue to monitor the Referrals and requests for reconsideration submitted in 2015 for which no response has been received. The TCC will also continue to consider ways to enhance communications with taxpayers. Due to the continuing budget cuts imposed by Congress, the IRS continues to be challenged to provide the services and information taxpayers need to satisfy their filing and payment obligations. It is imperative that needed information be clear and readily accessible via multiple venues, such as face-to-face contact, the IRS website, social media and printed materials, if voluntary compliance with the United States tax system is to be maintained.

The TCC has recommended the following issues be considered in 2016:

- Issue 29056, Appropriate IRS Contact Information for Notices Received by Taxpayers (this issue may be addressed as part of Issue 32774);
- Issue 30817, Online "Where's My Refund" for 1045 status;
- Issue 31289, Exams not following Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR);
- Issue 31299, Section 32(k) Ban on EITC for 2 Years;
- Issue 31418, Accurate IRS Contact Information for Taxpayers in Collection (may be addressed as part of Issue 32774);
- Issue 32449, Midnight Deadline for Timely Online Payments;
- Issue 32833, 1099-B Forms Not Received Timely from Broker (although at time of reporting this issue is being researched to determine if it is an isolated circumstance or a systemic issue and a proper matter for TCC consideration).

## **Toll-Free Phone Lines Committee**

### **Chair**

Gretchen Cooney, Iowa

### **Members**

Dan Halleman, Colorado (Vice Chair)  
Lonnie Mayer, South Dakota  
Gilberte Mayo, Maine  
Sean McPhilamy, Alaska  
Larry Meade, California  
Joan Ogden, Utah  
Daniel Persons, New York  
Keith L. Robinette, Missouri  
Jacqueline Scott Bailey, South Carolina  
Angela Veal, Georgia  
Dawn Welles, Wisconsin

### **Designated Federal Officer**

Cedric Jeans, Chief, TAP East, Memphis, TN

### **IRS Program Owner**

Wage and Investment (W&I)

### **Staff**

Linda Rivera, Senior Program Analyst, Washington, DC  
Rose Babb, Management Assistant, Brooklyn, NY

### **Committee Work Scope and Referrals**

The Toll-Free Phone Line Committee began its efforts to reduce the burden placed on taxpayers due to the reduction in IRS services resulting from the Congressional budget cuts during the past five years.

Nearly 50 IRS issues related to reduction in services were received. The committee made suggestions on how to enhance and improve the Nationwide Toll-Free lines, the Practitioner Priority Phone Lines, and the EITC Audit Transcript Phone Line Services. The committee was specifically requested by the IRS to look at the process and script for the EITC Audit phone line in order to make it more understandable and user friendly.

Throughout 2015, the committee received issues to be screened. Many issues related to the reduction in services (RIS). Even though many of those issues cannot be resolved at this time, the committee is maintaining a record of RIS issues so that a better understanding can be obtained in the future of the magnitude of the effect of RIS.

In the cases where issues could be resolved, taxpayers bringing the issues forward were contacted by a committee member. The result, for the most part, was positive in that the taxpayers felt heard by the IRS. Those contacts were success stories for the TAP mission and renewed our members' resolve to make a difference.

## **Issues and Referrals Completed during 2015**

**Issue 32848** – The IRS requested that the Toll-Free Phone Line Committee review and provide input for any enhanced changes or improvements to the taxpayer experience for EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit) Audits. This Referral addressed the need to inform taxpayers of office hours and the availability of a live examiner. The Referral was accepted by the IRS.

**Issue 32849** – At the request of the IRS, the committee reviewed the entire script related to the EITC audit phone line. The script is designed to assist taxpayers who call following the receipt of an EITC audit letter, often requiring additional information. Several suggestions were made to make the script more understandable for the average taxpayer. The Referral was elevated to the IRS with some recommendations being accepted and some being declined. The committee is in the process of resubmitting the Referral for reconsideration by the IRS.

## **Issues Currently in Process:**

**Issue 33490 – Long Wait Time and RIS (Reduction in Service) Phone Tree Messaging System:** Long wait times and “courtesy disconnects” have resulted in decreased taxpayer service and satisfaction. Wait times need to be reduced and phone calls need to be accepted and processed to completion.

The committee will be recommending an enhanced callback feature for the Toll-Free Phone Line that could result in increased taxpayer and practitioner satisfaction. In addition, the committee will be suggesting that the IRS adopt Authentication Retention (AR) technology for use on the Nationwide Toll-Free Phone Line. This technology will allow taxpayers to provide identifying information to the IRS only once per call to authenticate or verify personal identity while still protecting taxpayer privacy. AR technology should help reduce time spent on each call.

**Issue 31974 – Problems with the Practitioner Priority Helpline:** Excessive wait times have resulted in increased costs to taxpayers in tax return preparation fees. Again, the enhanced callback feature, which will be recommended for this line also, should result in more efficient use of the practitioners’ time and increase the satisfaction of the taxpayers they serve.

This call back system would also incorporate the AR technology discussed above.

## **Proposed Committee Projects for 2016**

1. Continue to work on Referrals for the callback system and authentication retention technology.
2. Investigate the possibility of expanding hours of operation of the toll-free phone lines.
3. Review after-hours phone greeting script for possible customer service opportunities, such as providing public service announcements (PSAs) about current issues including identity theft or people posing as IRS personnel on the phone.
4. Encourage development of PSAs to be played during wait times in place of the music currently used.

## **Proposed Issues to be Potentially Developed in 2016:**

**Issue 31391** – Wait Time

**Issue 28106** – Return Preparer Fraud Hotline

## Internal Communications Committee Report

### Chair

Jeanne Matthews, Pennsylvania

### Members

Dan Halleman, Colorado (Vice Chair)

Ralph Bennett, Washington

Tabatha Butler, Montana

Nancy Dery, New Hampshire

Suze Kanack, Wyoming

Sallie Mullins Thompson, New York

Mary Jo Thomson, Oklahoma

Stephen Webber, California

LeAnna Wilson, Kansas

### Designated Federal Officer

Susan Jimerson, Chief, TAP West, Seattle, WA

### Staff

Janice Spinks, Program Analyst, Washington, DC

Antoinette Ross, Program Analyst, Washington, DC

Kevin Brown, Management Assistant, Washington, DC

### Committee Work Scope and Recommendations

The Internal Communications Committee (ICC) consists of up to two representatives from each of the six Project Committees and is the last committee to be formed. Prior to 2015, ICC prepared the TAP Annual Report.

A major focus of the ICC in 2015 was to timely complete and distribute the monthly TAP newsletter. With the addition of a sixth Project Committee, it was difficult to fit committee news in a one-page report. After discussion with and approval from the Joint Committee (JC), the newsletter was changed to a two-page format to allow inclusion of all project committees, outreach, and TAP Chair information. The newsletter is disseminated to TAP members and posted on TAPSpace, the member's intranet tool, and Facebook after it has been reviewed and approved.

The ICC was asked to update the TAP Brochure (Speak-Up Brochure) which is distributed to the public. This tri-fold brochure had not been updated since it was first published ten years ago; consequently, the committee had to start from scratch. The colors were changed to red, white, and blue, and the language was revised to include updated facts. The TAP Brochure was reviewed and approved by the JC and is scheduled for printing in early 2016 for TAP members to use in their outreach activities.

The ICC was tasked with reviewing and updating the 2004 version of the Pocket Guide. The committee changed the multi-folded document to a more user-friendly two-sided card to help TAP members prepare/review for outreach events. The Pocket Guide has been reviewed and approved and is scheduled for publication in 2016. The finished size will be 3.5" X 6" and can be laminated for durability.

Finally, while continuing work on the newsletter, TAP Brochure, and the Pocket Guide, the ICC was asked to update the Outreach Toolkit, which was composed of 20 documents with outdated information. Every ICC member was assigned at least one document to evaluate, test links, and revise. Two additional documents were added to the toolkit. After the ICC completed final edits, instead of emailing 22 documents to the JC, only the web page link was circulated for easy review. The JC approved the updated Outreach Toolkit, which is now posted to TAPSpace for all TAP members to use as needed.

### **Ongoing Work:**

To minimize delays in producing the monthly newsletters, IRS Staff recommended the ICC identify a returning TAP member to be trained in the publishing function. A member is now in place to perform that function in 2016.

Further, during 2016, the ICC will:

- add additional pertinent documents to the Outreach Toolkit;
- review and update other TAP print materials;
- administer the TAP Facebook page, adding and/ or deleting requests; and
- recommend that TAPSpace be overhauled to be more user-friendly and to allow for documents, projects, and news to be found more easily.

## Appendix A: Taxpayer Advocacy Panel Members

Member	State	Project Committee
Anderson, Kent*	Utah	Tax Forms and Publications
Basciano, Dawn	California	Taxpayer Communications
Belec, Steven*	Massachusetts	Taxpayer Communications
Bell, Jerome	North Carolina	Taxpayer Communications
Bennett, Ralph	Washington	Taxpayer Communications
Berry, Josiah	Indiana	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Boyea, Ralph	Hawaii	Taxpayer Communications
Bramowitz, Marsha*	Pennsylvania	Taxpayer Communications
Bulter, Eric	Tennessee	Tax Forms and Publications
Bulter, Tabatha	Montana	Notices and Correspondence
Campbell, Stephanie	Missouri	Taxpayer Communications
Cardona, Joe*	Puerto Rico	Tax Forms and Publications
Chaney, Elizabeth	Michigan	Special Projects
Chartier, Kirk	Georgia	Special Projects
Christensen, Richard	Idaho	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Cooney, Gretchen	Iowa	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Dery, Nancy	New Hampshire	Special Projects
Donathan, David*	Kentucky	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements

Member	State	Project Committee
Dosdall, Patricia	Alabama	Special Projects
Edwards, Philessia*	Texas	Notices and Correspondence
Fulton, Jamelda	Mississippi	Special Projects
Goldberg, Allan	New York	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Goldfarb, Eugene	New York	Notices and Correspondence
Gould, Carolyn	Connecticut	Tax Forms and Publications
Green, William	Delaware	Notices and Correspondence
Grinnon, Francis	New York	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Halleman, Dan	Colorado	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Hary, Francesca	Ohio	Special Projects
Hayes, David	Tennessee	Notices and Correspondence
Jenks-Harm, Kathleen	Vermont	Notices and Correspondence
Jeppson, Catherine	California	Special Projects
Jones, Gina	Louisiana	Taxpayer Communications
Kanack, Suze	Wyoming	Taxpayer Communications
Kautzman, Mary	Florida	Tax Forms and Publications
Khan, Zafrulla*	Kentucky	Notices and Correspondence
Kindred, Samuel	Ohio	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements

Member	State	Project Committee
Lubell, Paul	Maryland	Special Projects
Lyon, Shelby	Switzerland	Special Projects
Matthews, Jeanne	Pennsylvania	Taxpayer Communications
Mattson, Merry	Minnesota	Special Projects
Mayer, Lonnie	South Dakota	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Mayo, Gilberte	Maine	Toll-Free Phone Lines
McPhilamy, Sean	Alaska	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Meade, Larry	California	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Moore, Page	Nebraska	Tax Forms and Publications
Ogden, Joan	Utah	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Paquette, Roger*	Rhode Island	Notices and Correspondence
Patel, Mahendra	Pennsylvania	Notices and Correspondence
Persons, Daniel	New York	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Phillips, Robert	Texas	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Piard, Alphonse	Florida	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Prober, Joan	New Jersey	Notices and Correspondence
Reese, Gail	Arizona	Taxpayer Communications
Robinette, Keith	Missouri	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Rousseau, Clarence**	Texas	Tax Forms and Publications

Member	State	Project Committee
Sakoff, Sophia	Oregon	Special Projects
Scott-Bailey, Jacqueline*	South Carolina	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Slough, John	West Virginia	Notices and Correspondence
Spain, Angela	California	Notices and Correspondence
Swartz, Michael	Texas	Special Projects
Theis, David	Illinois	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Thompson, Sallie Mullins	New York	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Thomson, Mary Jo	Oklahoma	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Trafford, Pamela*	Massachusetts	Tax Forms and Publications
Trottier, Angie	North Dakota	Tax Forms and Publications
Tscherny, Elena	District of Columbia	Tax Forms and Publications
VanSingel, Andrew	Illinois	Notices and Correspondence
Veal, Angela	Georgia	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Vetter, William	Texas	Tax Forms and Publications
Wallace, Scott	Nevada	Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements
Watson, Theresa	Arkansas	Taxpayer Communications
Webber, Stephen	California	Notices and Correspondence
Webster, Walter	New Mexico	Taxpayer Communications

Member	State	Project Committee
Welles, Dawn	Wisconsin	Toll-Free Phone Lines
Wilson, LeAnn	Kansas	Tax Forms and Publications
Xu, Shirley	Virginia	Tax Forms and Publications

\* Resigned during the TAP year

\*\* Alternate converted to member during TAP year

The list of members in this Appendix A may exceed the number of Treasury authorized members in the TAP Geographic Committee Map (Text Version), due to resignations and other changes in membership during a TAP year.

Treasury authorized TAP to have 75 volunteer panel members for 2015. Appointed members serve a three-year term from December 1 through November 30. Every effort is made to name an alternate member for each appointed member. Should a member be unable to complete their appointment, or choose to resign from the TAP, an alternate member may replace them during the year or at the start of the next succeeding TAP year.

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## Appendix B: Taxpayer Advocacy Panel Staff

Name	Position Title	Location
Sheila Andrews	TAP Director	Indianapolis, IN
Kevin Brown	Management Assistant	Washington, DC
Steve Berkey	Senior Program Analyst	Plantation, FL
Lisa Billups	Senior Program Analyst	Dallas, TX
Kudiratu Usman	Analyst	Washington, DC
<b>TAP East</b>		
Cedric Jeans	TAP Program Manager	Memphis, TN
Rose Babb	Management Assistant	Brooklyn, NY
Donna Powers	Program Analyst	Plantation, FL
Linda Rivera	Senior Program Analyst	Washington, DC
Otis Simpson	Program Analyst	Washington, DC
<b>TAP West</b>		
Susan Jimerson	TAP Program Manager	Seattle, WA
Annie Gold	Management Assistant	Milwaukee, WI
Theresa Singleton	Program Analyst	Washington, DC
Antoinette Ross	Program Analyst	Washington, DC
Kim Vinci	Program Analyst	Sacramento, CA

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Appendix C: IRS Designated Federal Officers

Designated Federal Officer Assigned TAP Committee	Location
<b>Cedric Jeans, Chief, TAP East</b>	Memphis, TN
Tax Forms and Publications	
Taxpayer Assistance Center Improvements	
Toll-Free Phone Lines	
<b>Susan Jimerson, Chief, TAP West</b>	Seattle, WA
Notices and Correspondence	
Special Projects	
Taxpayer Communications	

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## Appendix D: Acronyms

CSR	Customer Service Representative
DFO	Designated Federal Officer
EITC	Earned Income Tax Credit
FACA	Federal Advisory Committee Act
ICC	Internal Communications Committee
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
JC	Joint Committee (TAP)
LTC	Local Taxpayer Advocate
NCC	Notices and Correspondence Committee
PSA	Public Service Announcement
SPC	Special Projects Committee
SA	Systemic Advocacy
SAMS	Systemic Advocacy Management System
SB/SE	Small Business/Self Employed
SME	Subject Matter Expert
TAC	Taxpayer Assistance Center
TAP	Taxpayer Advocacy Panel
TAS	Taxpayer Advocate Service
TCC	Taxpayer Communications Committee
TF&P	Tax Forms and Publications
Treasury	Department of the Treasury
VITA	Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
W&I	Wage and Investment

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