

TELEPHONE AND IN-PERSON SERVICE

Despite Improvements in Its Service Levels, the IRS Still Does Not Provide Taxpayers and Tax Professionals With Adequate, Timely Telephone and In-Person Service

WHY THIS IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR TAXPAYERS

When taxpayers call the IRS, they expect and deserve quality service without suffering long wait times.¹ In 2023, telephone service was considerably better; however, it is still not providing the level of service that taxpayers and tax professionals need throughout the year. And based upon its Level of Service (LOS) measurement, the IRS is not able to accurately determine how to best provide that quality service.

The IRS's LOS metrics tell taxpayers nothing about how many calls the IRS transferred, whether taxpayers had to call multiple times, and whether the taxpayer ultimately received the information they needed. The IRS LOS does not measure whether customer service representatives (CSRs):

- Provide dependable and accurate assistance;
- Provide responsive assistance;
- Provide knowledgeable and courteous service; or
- Have the ability or training to answer taxpayer questions at the initial point of contact.

Although the IRS significantly improved phone service over the past year, the way the IRS calculates LOS paints a picture far more optimistic than the reality of the taxpayer's experience when calling for assistance and does not address "quality service." Tax professionals have been frustrated with the wait times and low LOS, incurring unnecessary costs due to IRS delays or CSRs' inability to answer questions.

¹ See Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TBOR), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/taxpayer-rights> (last visited Dec. 15, 2023). The rights contained in TBOR are also codified in IRC § 7803(a)(3).

Taxpayers who need face-to-face service can make an appointment to visit Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TACs) for free tax help to address their tax questions and receive support if they face language barriers. Although TACs exist throughout the United States, several states have just one TAC location, and many are not fully staffed or operate on a limited schedule causing challenges for taxpayers. Many TACs do not meet the needs of taxpayers who live too far away or can't make an appointment at a time that works for them.

EXPLANATION OF THE PROBLEM

When taxpayers need assistance meeting their federal tax return filing and payment obligations, they obtain service through two of the IRS's primary service channels: telephone help lines and TACs.² Taxpayers and tax professionals unable to get their questions answered experience increased burden or may not be able to resolve their issues. When taxpayers cannot reach the IRS by phone or in person, it not only harms them but also the IRS by creating costly, multiyear negative impacts on IRS processing when taxpayers turn to paper correspondence to communicate with the IRS.³

The IRS reports CSR LOS as a key indicator of how well it is providing phone service. As it directs increasing numbers of taxpayers to self-service options, the IRS needs better measures of the taxpayer experience to ensure that those who need to speak with a live assistor can reach one and resolve their issue. The CSR LOS the IRS reports suffers from these deficiencies:

- CSR LOS accounts for about 77 to 85 percent of the total call volume the IRS receives, but it excludes important phone lines, such as those that taxpayers call with questions about balances owed and requests for help making payment arrangements, where LOS in fiscal year (FY) 2023 was 53 percent;⁴
- CSR LOS doesn't measure whether the IRS resolved the caller's issue; and
- Without a comprehensive measure of service, CSR LOS hinders the IRS from making effective decisions on allocating taxpayer services resources.

Taxpayers seeking face-to-face assistance at a TAC may experience difficulties. Some taxpayers do not live or work close to a TAC location or can't receive service at a suitable time. Some taxpayers can't get assistance from TACs because TAC standard operating hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Other taxpayers couldn't get an appointment because of staffing shortages (*e.g.*, the IRS couldn't open 43 TACs during the 2023 filing season), and it had 230 TACs not fully staffed.⁵ As of September 2023, 266 of the 363

2 See IRS, Service to Taxpayers (Apr. 14, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/service-to-taxpayers>.

3 See Most Serious Problem: Processing: Ongoing Processing Delays Burden and Frustrate Taxpayers Awaiting Refunds and Other Account Actions, *supra*.

4 IRS, Joint Operations Center (JOC), Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot, Enterprise Total; IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Accounts Management (weeks ending Sept. 30, 2020; Sept. 30, 2021; Sept. 30, 2022; Sept. 30, 2023). Net Accounts Management (AM) attempts divided by net Enterprise attempts for FY 2020, FY 2021, FY 2022, and FY 2023 produced percentages of 82 percent, 85 percent, 82 percent, and 77 percent, respectively. IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Product Line Detail (week ending Sept. 30, 2023). The IRS's formula for determining LOS is more complex than just number of calls received divided by number of calls answered. The LOS formula is: (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages)) divided by (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages) + Emergency Closed + Secondary Abandons + (Add either Calculated Busy Signal or Network Incompletes) + (Add either Calculated Network Disconnects or Total Disconnects)).

5 See Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), Ref. No. 2023-IE-R010, *Inflation Reduction Act: Assessment of the IRS's Efforts to Deliver Expected Improvements for the 2023 Filing Season* (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-09/2023ier010fr.pdf>.

TACs (73 percent) were less than fully staffed, limiting service appointments available to taxpayers.⁶ The IRS's inability to fully staff all TAC locations emphasizes the need to provide alternative methods of service. It must scale up alternative face-to-face service options to meet taxpayer needs, including offering service during non-standard hours, hosting service pop-up events in rural areas, and assisting taxpayers via videoconferencing.

Despite improvements during FY 2023, taxpayers still lack quality service due to the following issues:

- The IRS makes critical resource allocations to achieve a benchmark LOS on phones instead of focusing on improving the taxpayer experience, including whether and how easily taxpayers resolved their issue;
- Antiquated technology limits the ability of CSRs to assist callers; and
- TACs do not offer more options and times for taxpayers to use their services.

ANALYSIS

Calls for improved taxpayer service have come from both the legislative and executive branches, and Congress has issued the IRS a mandate to improve taxpayer service.⁷ The Taxpayer First Act requires the IRS to develop and implement strategies to improve taxpayers' experiences with the IRS. During the past year, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding provided the IRS the ability to hire additional CSRs, increase LOS, and improve IRS customer service.⁸

IRS Level of Service Metrics Do Not Measure How Many Taxpayers Had Their Issues Resolved

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) designated IRS as one of 25 high-impact federal service providers and issued guidance to manage customer experience and improve service delivery.⁹ OMB guidance identifies seven factors that affect how customers experience federal services, none of which the IRS addresses in its CSR LOS measure.¹⁰ These factors include:

- Satisfaction (whether the customer is satisfied with service received);
- Confidence/trust (whether the interaction increased confidence in the federal program/service or the ability to serve its relevant population);
- Effectiveness/quality (whether the customer's need was addressed or issue was resolved);
- Ease/simplicity (whether it was easy to complete what needed to be done);
- Efficiency/speed (whether it took a reasonable amount of time to complete what needed to be done);
- Equity/transparency (whether the customer was treated fairly/understood what was being asked of the customer throughout the process); and
- Employee helpfulness (whether employees the customer interacted with were helpful).

6 Janet L. Yellen, Sec'y of the Treasury, Remarks at the IRS Facility in New Carrollton, Maryland (Sept. 15, 2022), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0952>; IRS response to TAS fact check (Dec. 12, 2023). Fully staffed TACs means having all available workstations in a TAC filled with the appropriate type of face-to-face employee.

7 Taxpayer First Act, Pub. L. No. 116-25, 133 Stat. 981 (2019); an Act to Provide for Reconciliation Pursuant to Title II of S. Con. Res. 14, Pub. L. No. 117-169, 136 Stat. 1818 (2022) [hereinafter referred to as the "Inflation Reduction Act"]; OMB, Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget, Circular No. A-11, Section 280 (July 10, 2020).

8 Taxpayer First Act, Pub. L. No. 116-25, 133 Stat. 981 (2019); Inflation Reduction Act, Pub. L. No. 117-169, 136 Stat. 1818 (2022).

9 OMB, Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget, Circular No. A-11, Section 280 (July 10, 2020).

10 According to OMB, it developed the factors using leading practices from the private and public sectors, including Fortune 500 companies, market research institutions, and international organizations.

The IRS surveys a fraction of callers who receive live assistance to assess these metrics, but that information is not publicly reported or combined with CSR LOS.¹¹ Basic customer surveys may only reveal that taxpayers are unhappy with a service without providing insight into why and what actions leaders can take to improve. Government agencies such as the Veterans Health Administration use human-centered design research to identify the top pain points for its customers.¹² Human-centered design creates products and services around the needs, wants, perspectives, and behaviors of people. It uses empathy and understanding to meet the needs of users, looking more at the nuances of individuals' behaviors and experiences than opinions. A core component of human-centered design is to learn what customers need using qualitative research methods such as interviews, firsthand observation, and focus groups.¹³ To comply with the OMB guidance to manage the customer experience and improve service delivery, the IRS needs a focused approach to improve the taxpayer experience, as some segments of the taxpaying population face unique challenges in getting access to the information and services needed to comply with their tax obligations.¹⁴

In 2022, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen set ambitious goals for 2023 “to transform the IRS into a 21st century agency” and set even higher goals for 2024, focusing on achieving a CSR LOS of 85 percent and reducing average call wait times to five minutes or less.¹⁵ The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) performed a study to assess how the IRS performed during Filing Season (FS) 2023 in meeting the expectations laid out by Secretary Yellen.¹⁶ It found that the IRS met only two of the Secretary's five expectations, one of which was improving CSR LOS on the Accounts Management (AM) toll-free phone lines during FS 2023 from approximately 15 percent to 85 percent and the other of which was reducing the average wait time from nearly 30 minutes to 15 minutes.¹⁷ Taxpayers generally contact the AM telephone lines seeking assistance with tax law questions and account inquiries and checking on the status of their tax return or tax refund.

Achieving the staffing levels necessary to reach an 85 percent CSR LOS inevitably leads to idle time for CSRs between calls. From January through April 22, 2023, CSRs spent 3.73 million hours staffing telephones to achieve a CSR LOS in excess of 85 percent; however, CSRs spent 1.27 million of those hours waiting to receive calls.¹⁸ The IRS makes significant resource allocations with their associated costs to achieve a benchmark CSR LOS. However, the CSR LOS metric is not a measurement of the quality of service the IRS provides to taxpayers or the overall taxpayer experience; rather, it is a metric on answering calls.

11 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

12 See NADZEYA SHUTAVA, ET AL., PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE, DESIGNING A GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE (2022), <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/designing-a-government-for-the-people/>.

13 *Id.*

14 See IRS, Pub. 5426, Taxpayer First Act Report to Congress (Jan. 2021), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5426.pdf>.

15 Janet L. Yellen, Sec'y of the Treasury, Remarks at the IRS Facility in New Carrollton, Maryland (Sept. 15, 2022), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0952>; Janet L. Yellen, Sec'y of the Treasury, Remarks at IRS Headquarters in Washington, D.C. (Nov. 7, 2023), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1888>.

16 TIGTA, Ref. No. 2023-IE-R010, *Inflation Reduction Act: Assessment of the IRS's Efforts to Deliver Expected Improvements for the 2023 Filing Season* (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-09/2023ier010fr.pdf>; Janet L. Yellen, Sec'y of the Treasury, Remarks at the IRS Facility in New Carrollton, Maryland (Sept. 15, 2022), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0952>. The five goals were resolving the backlogs of paper-filed tax returns and other tax account inventory; staffing the IRS's TACs to full capacity; improving the level of telephone service from approximately 15 percent to 85 percent and reducing the average wait time from nearly 30 minutes to 15 minutes; automating the scanning of millions of individual paper-filed tax returns to expedite the processing of tax returns and issuance of refunds; and providing taxpayers with the ability to receive and respond to notices online.

17 TIGTA, Ref. No. 2023-IE-R010, *Inflation Reduction Act: Assessment of the IRS's Efforts to Deliver Expected Improvements for the 2023 Filing Season* (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-09/2023ier010fr.pdf>; see also National Taxpayer Advocate 2021 Annual Report to Congress 66, 73 (Most Serious Problem: Telephone and In-Person Service: Taxpayers Face Significant Challenges Reaching IRS Representatives Due to Longstanding Deficiencies and Pandemic Complications), https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ARC21_MSP_03_Telephone.pdf (where TAS recommended the IRS should be staffed to answer at least 85 percent of taxpayer calls).

18 IRS, Ready Agent Hours (RAH) Report (Jan. 1, 2023, through Apr. 22, 2023); see Most Serious Problem: Processing: Ongoing Processing Delays Burden and Frustrate Taxpayers Awaiting Refunds and Other Account Actions, *supra*.

Approximately 35 phone lines reside within the IRS's Wage and Investment AM function, which typically accounts for about 77 to 85 percent of the total call volume the IRS receives.¹⁹ As shown in Figure 2.4.1, CSRs answered 27.3 million taxpayer calls in FY 2023 with live assistance, 5.6 million more calls compared to FY 2022.²⁰

FIGURE 2.4.1, IRS Enterprise Phone Lines: Call Attempts, Calls Answered, Calls Answered by an IRS Employee, and Total LOS, FYs 2020-2023²¹

IRS Enterprise Phone Lines	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Enterprise Total Call Attempts	100.5 mil	281.7 mil	173.3 mil	92.9 mil
Enterprise Total Calls Answered	47.5 mil	72.2 mil	51.8 mil	44.3 mil
Enterprise Calls Answered by a Live Assistor	24.2 mil	32.0 mil	21.7 mil	27.3 mil
Enterprise LOS	51%	21%	21%	51%
Enterprise Calls Answered by a Live Assistor	24%	11%	13%	29%
Enterprise Calls Answered With Automated Assistance	23%	14%	17%	18%

Although the IRS reported a 51 percent CSR LOS in FY 2023, live assistors answered only 29 percent of the total calls. Automated responses answered 18 percent of the total calls, and the IRS did not answer the rest, or the caller disconnected. The improvements in CSR LOS from 21 to 51 percent between FY 2022 and FY 2023 came with a sharp decrease in the number of IRS-initiated disconnects, which occur when the IRS connects calls to sites that are closed or unable to provide service due to high demand. The IRS initiated a disconnect on over 74 million calls in FY 2022 and reduced that number to 16.3 million in FY 2023.²² That reduction is a significant improvement, but the IRS is still disconnecting far too many calls.

The IRS uses AM's CSR LOS as a primary indicator of how well the IRS is meeting caller demand; however, it does not reflect the percentage of total calls that live assistors answered. CSR LOS reflects only calls directed to the IRS's AM telephone lines and serviced by live assistance and calls where prerecorded responses provided taxpayers information. Live assistors answered only one of every four calls on AM lines while the remaining taxpayer calls were completed using automated self-service options or reflected disconnected calls.²³

Taxpayers who speak with a CSR may not resolve their issue because the CSR lacks the information or the tools to help them do so. CSRs are the frontline employees who answer calls on IRS phone lines. They provide general tax information, furnish updates on the status of taxpayer returns/refunds/accounts, and adjust taxpayer accounts, when appropriate. Often CSRs are the IRS's first, and sometimes only, contact with a taxpayer. The IRS trains CSRs to communicate with taxpayers and be knowledgeable about tax law and IRS operational procedures. As of July 30, 2023, there were 14,460 trained CSRs working independently.²⁴

19 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot, Enterprise Total; IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Accounts Management (weeks ending Sept. 30, 2020; Sept. 30, 2021; Sept. 30, 2022; Sept. 30, 2023). Net AM attempts divided by net Enterprise attempts for FY 2020, FY 2021, FY 2022, and FY 2023 produced percentages of 82 percent, 85 percent, 82 percent, and 77 percent, respectively.

20 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot (week ending Sept. 30, 2023).

21 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot, Enterprise Total (weeks ending Sept. 30, 2020; Sept. 30, 2021; Sept. 30, 2022; Sept. 30, 2023). "Percentage of Enterprise Calls Answered by a Live Assistor" is calculated by dividing "Enterprise Calls Answered by a Live Assistor" by "Enterprise Total Call Attempts." "Enterprise Total Call Attempts" refers to all calls across all IRS phone lines. The IRS's formula for determining LOS is more complex than just number of calls received divided by number of calls answered. The LOS formula is: (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages)) divided by (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages) + Emergency Closed + Secondary Abandons + (Add either Calculated Busy Signal or Network Incompletes) + (Add either Calculated Network Disconnects or Total Disconnects)).

22 IRS response to TAS information request (Nov. 16, 2023).

23 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot (week ending Sept. 30, 2023).

24 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

During FY 2023, AM hired 5,626 new CSRs, and as of August 26, 2023, about 71 percent had completed training.²⁵ Although the IRS has significantly improved the availability of phone service, much of its resources have gone toward restoring more than 10,000 positions that have been depleted over the past decade.²⁶ During FY 2023, the IRS spent \$800 million of the \$3.2 billion provided for taxpayer services in the IRA on expenses such as hiring additional CSRs to enhance LOS and reduce the paper backlog.²⁷ The IRS anticipates exhausting all IRA taxpayer services funding in just four years.²⁸

The IRS's attrition rate is nearly 26 percent higher than the average for federal agencies, and in the next five years, about 63 percent of IRS employees will be eligible for retirement.²⁹ That means any plan to improve phone and in-person service must rely on improving the quality of each interaction rather than relying on an ever-increasing number of employees to improve service levels. The IRS plans to improve service delivery by increasing self-service options for taxpayers by 50 percent over the next three years to reduce demand for live service, reducing taxpayer frustration through feature-rich customer callback enhancements, and enhancing assistor services through multichannel agent desktop and automation.³⁰

Since 2019, the IRS has expanded use of callback technology to improve the taxpayer experience. Customer callback options are now available on 116 taxpayer-facing applications, covering up to 95 percent of taxpayers calling the IRS for toll-free live assistance.³¹ The IRS's callback technology lets taxpayers provide their callback number, hang up, and move on with other activities while awaiting a call back once an assistor becomes available. In January 2023, the IRS switched to a more advanced callback system that offers more dynamic scheduling and reporting and future optional expansion features, such as text alerts.³² The IRS uses four performance metrics to evaluate the callback system: number of callers offered callback, percent of callers electing callback, success rate in reconnecting, and taxpayer time saved.³³

Although the IRS improved telephone service throughout FY 2023 compared to FY 2022, CSR LOS declined after the filing season once the IRS reallocated resources, averaging only 51 percent over FY 2023.³⁴ The IRS deserves credit for the improvement in phone service, but its reported metrics can be misleading. When the IRS reports an 85 percent CSR LOS, it does not mean that 85 percent of taxpayers who called one of the IRS's 102 phones lines received assistance and does not reflect how many callers were satisfied with their experience.

To determine whether IRS telephone lines are operational and whether the IRS affords taxpayers simple, fast, and accessible customer service, TIGTA made test calls to all 102 telephone lines in service during FS 2023 (85 lines that provide live assistance and 17 that provide automated assistance through recorded messages) and identified that the IRS needs to improve to ensure that taxpayers receive top quality service when contacting

25 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

26 IRS, Pub. 5530, Fiscal Year 2024 Budget in Brief (Feb. 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5530.pdf> (explaining that staff levels fell because of unfunded inflation increases, growing needs for expanded information technology systems, and various legislative mandates).

27 IRS, Pub. 5530, Fiscal Year 2024 Budget in Brief (Feb. 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5530.pdf>.

28 *Id.*

29 *Id.*

30 IRS, Strategic Development Executive Steering Committee Governance Baseline (Aug. 17, 2023).

31 U.S. Dep't of the Treasury, Filing Season 2023 Report Card: IRS Delivered Significantly Improved Customer Service (Apr. 17, 2023), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1421>.

32 IRS, Wage and Investment (W&I) Business Performance Review (BPR) Q1 FY 2023, at 7 (Feb. 23, 2023).

33 IRS, W&I BPR Q3 FY 2023, at 21 (Aug. 16, 2023).

34 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot for Enterprise Total, Accounts Management, and Consolidated Automated Collection Service data (week ending Sept. 30, 2023).

IRS customer service telephone lines.³⁵ The test calls revealed that calls to 21 IRS phone lines resulted in hold times exceeding 30 minutes, five lines where assistance was unavailable due to staffing shortages, and two where the IRS initiated a disconnect.³⁶

There are 62 telephone lines that comprise the IRS's agencywide telephone "Enterprise." Among the top ten Enterprise lines by call volume, two (installment agreement/balance due lines and the Taxpayer Protection Program line) are not included in the CSR LOS measure the IRS reports publicly. Of the 92.9 million total call attempts the IRS Enterprise phone system received in FY 2023, live assistors and automation answered 44.3 million (48 percent) calls.³⁷

FIGURE 2.4.2, Top Ten IRS Enterprise Telephone Lines by Volume of Calls, FY 2023³⁸

Telephone Product Lines	Net Attempts	Assistor Calls Answered	Percentage of Calls Answered by a Live Assistor	Total Calls Answered (Live and by Automation)	LOS
Refund Hotline – Automated Only	16.2 mil	0.3 mil	0%	11.6 mil	65%
Individual Income Tax (Primary Line for Individual Taxpayers)	13.7 mil	4.1 mil	30%	5.0 mil	69%
Installment Agreement/Balance Due	8.4 mil	4.4 mil	52%	4.4 mil	53%
Business and Specialty Tax Services	7.0 mil	2.6 mil	37%	2.6 mil	49%
Practitioner Priority Service	6.7 mil	1.9 mil	29%	1.9 mil	34%
TAC Appointment Scheduling	5.7 mil	1.9 mil	34%	1.9 mil	49%
Taxpayer Protection Program	5.4 mil	1.6 mil	29%	1.6 mil	31%
Refund Call Back	4.0 mil	0.8 mil	21%	2.3 mil	58%
Wage and Investment – Individual Master File (IMF) Customer Response	3.4 mil	1.0 mil	29%	1.6 mil	61%
Business Master File (BMF) Customer Response	2.5 mil	0.7 mil	27%	0.7 mil	31%
Total	73.0 mil	19.3 mil		33.6 mil	

35 TIGTA, Ref. No. 2024-IE-R001, *Actions Are Needed to Improve the Quality of Customer Service in Telephone Operations* (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-11/2024ier001fr.pdf>.

36 *Id.*

37 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot for Enterprise Total, Accounts Management, and Consolidated Automated Collection Service data (week ending Sept. 30, 2023). All numbers in Figure 2.4.2 are rounded; however, the percentage change is calculated on the actual numbers.

38 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Product Line Detail (week ending Sept. 30, 2023). "Percentage of Enterprise Calls Answered by a Live Assistor" is calculated by dividing "Enterprise Calls Answered by a Live Assistor" by "Enterprise Total Call Attempts." "Enterprise Total Call Attempts" refers to all calls across all IRS phone lines. The IRS's formula for determining LOS is more complex than just number of calls received divided by number of calls answered. The LOS formula is: (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages)) divided by (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages) + Emergency Closed + Secondary Abandons + (Add either Calculated Busy Signal or Network Incompletes) + (Add either Calculated Network Disconnects or Total Disconnects)).

The IRS routed 73 million (79 percent) of the calls it received to ten telephone lines in the IRS Enterprise based on the taxpayers' issue. The remaining 20 million calls (21 percent) were spread across the IRS's remaining 52 telephone lines in varying volumes.³⁹ "Net Attempts" reflect the attempts made to reach each of the ten highest volume telephone lines. "Assistor Calls Answered" reflect the number of calls that reached a live assistor while "Total Calls Answered" refers to all calls answered live and via automated assistance. These measures are useful for measuring the demand on IRS phone lines but not the taxpayer experience when taxpayers call the IRS for assistance.

While the IRS reported a 69 percent LOS on the Individual Income Tax line, LOS was much lower on other lines. Taxpayers calling the Installment Agreement/Balance Due line received only a 53 percent LOS. Assistors working the Balance Due line answer questions about balances owed and help taxpayers make payment arrangements. Taxpayers who cannot reach the IRS through this line risk becoming subjects of enforced collection actions, such as bank and wage levies and the filing a Notice of Federal Tax Lien. Taxpayer representatives calling the Practitioner Priority Service line experienced only a 34 percent LOS. When representatives cannot reach a CSR, it impedes their ability to help the taxpayers they represent.

The IRS created a new measure – Level of Service (Automation) (LOS(A)) – to capture the combined number of taxpayers who call seeking assistance from the IRS and receive a response to their inquiry by an assistor or through automated interactions based on taxpayer responses to prompts, such as the Where's My Refund? or Where's My Amended Return? lines. LOS(A) was 39.3 percent in FY 2022 and 66 percent in FY 2023.⁴⁰ While IRS service has improved according to its own LOS and LOS(A) measurements, taxpayers do not get to interact with live or automated assistance in more than a third of all calls. Callers captured in the LOS measurement still may not receive an answer to their question or resolve their issue. The IRS should modify its measure of LOS on telephones to factor in the quality of the experience of callers, including measuring whether taxpayers received the information requested, whether they needed to speak with multiple IRS employees, and whether the IRS provided additional information such as links to materials or videos.⁴¹ This data would allow the LOS to better reflect the caller's experience.

Figure 2.4.3 shows the IRS uses additional metrics to measure phone service, including the number of Assistor Calls Answered; Average Speed of Answer, the average time that customers waited in an assistor queue before the IRS connected them to an agent; and Average Handle Time, the average amount of time an assistor spent helping the customer (includes talk time, hold time, and after-call work called wrap time).⁴² What these numbers don't indicate is whether callers who spent 26 minutes total call time had their question answered or issue resolved.

39 IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Product Line Detail (week ending Sept. 30, 2023); IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot (week ending Sept. 30, 2023). All numbers are rounded; however, the percentage change is calculated on the actual numbers.

40 IRS, Pub. 5530, Fiscal Year 2024 Budget in Brief 1 (Feb. 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5530.pdf>; IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

41 The IRS's formula for determining LOS is more complex than just number of calls received divided by number of calls answered. The LOS formula is: (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages)) divided by (Assistor Calls Answered + Automated Calls Answered (Info Messages) + Emergency Closed + Secondary Abandons + (Add either Calculated Busy Signal or Network Incompletes) + (Add either Calculated Network Disconnects or Total Disconnects)).

42 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

FIGURE 2.4.3, Phone Service Metrics, FY 2023⁴³

Telephone Line	CSR LOS	Assistor Calls Answered	Average Speed of Answer	Average Handle Time	Total Call Time
Enterprise	51%	27,257,751	13.3 minutes	15 minutes	28.3 minutes
Accounts Management	52%	17,934,696	10 minutes	16 minutes	26 minutes

IRS Level of Service Metrics Do Not Adequately Measure Taxpayer Satisfaction With IRS Phone Tree Choices

Callers cannot indicate whether they prefer to receive automated assistance. A phone tree greets callers to the AM lines. Depending on the options a taxpayer selects, the phone system determines whether to direct the caller to a live assistor or one of its automated offerings. During FY 2023, 15.7 million callers were greeted by a phone tree, then selected an application to resolve tax account issues, obtained tax information, or otherwise directed themselves to the appropriate source of assistance.⁴⁴ It is important for the IRS to analyze whether its phone tree system meets the needs of the taxpaying public and whether automated assistance resolves taxpayer issues. Not all IRS units have a public phone number that taxpayers can dial directly. For example, a taxpayer calling to inquire about the location of their passport submitted to obtain an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number may not be able to reach a live assistor by navigating the phone tree. Taxpayers deserve to reach a live assistor when necessary to resolve their issue, and the IRS must provide appropriate staffing to meet taxpayer demand.⁴⁵ We recommend the IRS measure satisfaction with IRS phone tree choices when it conducts toll-free customer satisfaction surveys.

The IRS continuously selects and invites some toll-free callers to participate in customer satisfaction and experience surveys. It uses an automated Interactive Voice Recognition system to invite select callers to take a survey immediately after speaking with a CSR. The objective of the survey is to identify what AM Toll-Free staff and managers can do to improve customer service and to track callers' satisfaction with AM phone service attributes over time.⁴⁶ Callers who only interacted with the automated telephone system are not eligible to participate in the survey.⁴⁷ Thus, the IRS has no way of measuring whether callers routed to automated assistance would have preferred the IRS route them to a live assistor, potentially generating additional follow-up calls to the IRS.

Figure 2.4.4 shows taxpayers are most dissatisfied when they need to make multiple calls to resolve their issues, with 34 percent of survey respondents in the first quarter of FY 2023 having called five or more times and 68 percent having called more than once.⁴⁸

⁴³ IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

⁴⁴ IRS, W&I Comprehensive Data Dictionary (2024); IRS, JOC, Snapshot Reports: Enterprise Snapshot (week ending Sept. 30, 2023).

⁴⁵ See National Taxpayer Advocate Fiscal Year 2020 Objectives Report to Congress vol. 1, at 6-8 (Introduction: *The National Taxpayer Advocate's Remarks on the Role of Trust and Taxpayer Advocate Service in Fostering Tax Compliance*), https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/JRC20_Volume1.pdf.

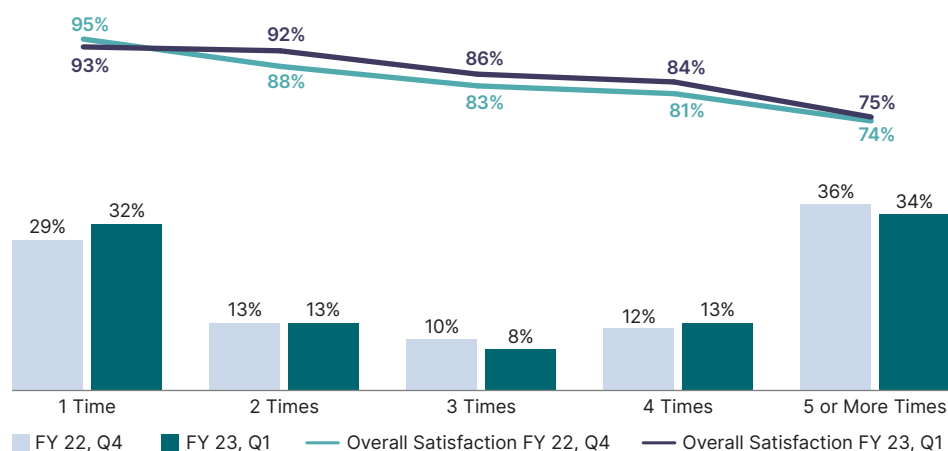
⁴⁶ IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

FIGURE 2.4.4⁴⁹

**Number of Times Called by Quarter and Overall Satisfaction
FY 2022, Q4 and FY 2023, Q1**



Note: There are no significant differences between FY 2022, Q4 and FY 2023, Q1 for these questions.

Note: Overall Satisfaction percentages are those who chose "Agree" or "Somewhat Agree."

Overall satisfaction decreases as the number of calls increases, with approximately an 18-point decrease in satisfaction from those who called once to those who called five or more times. The IRS can address one-call resolution by 1) using operational data to identify the specific call reasons; 2) conducting interviews with taxpayers to develop the "worst case" journey maps of how the first and subsequent calls unfold and the source of pain points; and 3) commissioning a study of best practices among like institutions with similar complex issues to learn process, people, or technology solutions to improve the customer experience.⁵⁰

Customer Service Representative Training Cannot Overcome Limitations of Antiquated Technology

CSRs answering calls need to be prepared to encounter a wide variety of issues. A CSR is considered trained after successful completion of classroom training and on-the-job training.⁵¹ Taxpayers who speak with a CSR may not resolve their issue because the CSR lacks the information or the tools to help them do so. For example, CSRs on AM phone lines cannot view all notices and letters the IRS has mailed the taxpayer, which can limit the CSR's ability to provide information about the taxpayer's specific circumstances.

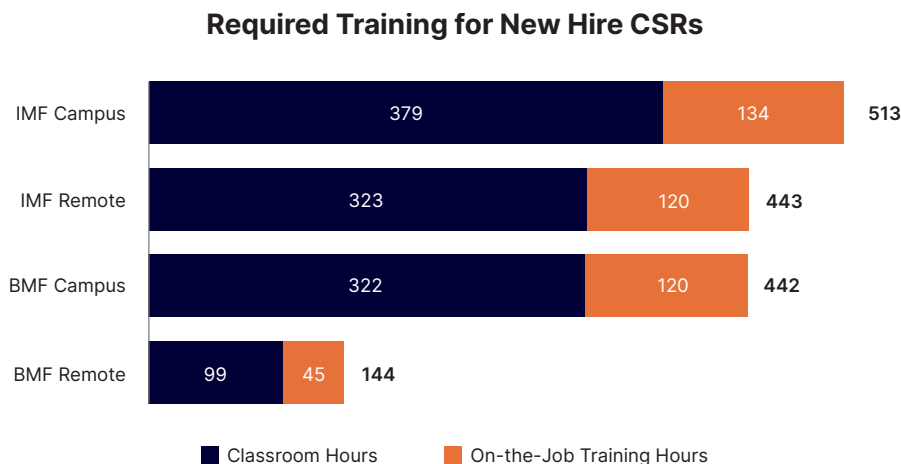
Figure 2.4.5 shows that CSRs working at campus locations responsible for answering IMF calls and paper processing must complete 513 hours of training before working the full scope of telephone and inventory duties independently, which takes 15 weeks to complete. CSRs answering only BMF calls remotely do not complete training on paper processing and thus have the fewest number of training hours at 144.⁵²

49 There are no significant differences between FY 2022 Q4 and FY 2023 Q1 for these questions. Overall satisfaction percentages are those who chose "agree" or "somewhat agree."

50 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

51 *Id.*

52 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

FIGURE 2.4.5⁵³

A background in tax is not a requirement for new CSRs, and even after completing the necessary training to answer incoming taxpayer calls independently, CSRs may not be able to answer all taxpayer questions. Similar to any new job position, it is not unusual for new CSRs to spend time in the position before they gain the experience to provide correct and useful information. CSRs provide a valuable service and have a wide range of information to provide to taxpayers and tax professionals, and training is key to their success.

Additional obstacles, such as limited space for in-person training and delays in procuring computers and peripheral equipment, can delay onboarding of new CSRs.⁵⁴ The IRS Strategic Operating Plan includes initiatives to improve the availability and accessibility of taxpayer services by ensuring employees have the right tools to perform their work.⁵⁵ The IRS provides CSRs with the tools necessary to perform their job, but they suffer from a common flaw. They are all based on antiquated systems that manage individual and business taxpayer accounts and distribute taxpayer data across the IRS. The IRS's processing system has been the backbone for core tax processing for millions of taxpayer accounts since the 1960s and is one of the oldest systems in the government. To put that in context, the IRS has been using the same information system as the foundation for all its taxpayer information data management since before the invention of push-button telephones.⁵⁶ Even experienced, highly knowledgeable CSRs can only work as fast as the technology with which the IRS equips them. Because of limitations in the technology of the IRS's core processing systems, CSRs cannot view the correspondence a taxpayer or professional has submitted or received from the IRS, further limiting their ability to help callers resolve their issues. A taxpayer can provide a CSR with a notice or letter number, and a CSR can provide general information about the purpose of the correspondence but cannot specify what specific documentation the taxpayer needs to provide to resolve the issue as they cannot view the letter sent to the taxpayers. CSRs can see some tax account data; however, to effectively assist all callers, CSRs need a holistic view of taxpayers' accounts in real-time during live phone calls to address the taxpayers' issues, including viewing correspondence sent to or received from the taxpayer and information discussed during a voicebot interaction.

⁵³ IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

⁵⁴ IRS responses to TAS information request (Sept. 26, 2023; Oct. 3, 2023).

⁵⁵ IRS, Pub. 3744, IRS Inflation Reduction Act Strategic Operating Plan (Apr. 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3744.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Associated Press, *President Starts Countdown for Fair*, THE GETTYSBURG TIMES, Apr. 23, 1963, at 11.

The IRS Must Leverage Taxpayer Interactions With Voicebots to Improve Live Assistance

In addition to live assistors, the IRS provides phone service to taxpayers using bots and other automated assistance. The IRS used bots to increase self-service capabilities for general taxpayer inquiries in English and Spanish so those with more complex issues could get through to live assistors on the phone.⁵⁷ Voicebots are software powered by artificial intelligence that allow a caller to navigate an interactive voice response system. For taxpayers calling with common questions, voicebots can provide quick answers and help free up CSRs to concentrate on more complex inquiries. The IRS deployed voicebots to the Economic Impact Payment and Advance Child Tax Credit lines to offer self-assistance on general procedures and tax law issues without requiring taxpayers to authenticate their identity for assistance based on their personally identifiable information.⁵⁸ The IRS deployed the first voicebot on Balance Due lines in January 2022.⁵⁹ In June 2022, the IRS expanded voicebot capabilities, allowing taxpayers with a balance due to create installment agreements after completing an identity verification procedure – without needing to speak with a CSR.⁶⁰ The voicebot answers taxpayer inquiries about payments, collection notices, and general collection issues. Voicebots handled more than 2.7 million calls in FY 2023, and 48 percent were contained within the voicebot without the need to escalate to a live assistor.⁶¹

When a taxpayer interacts with a voicebot, the IRS measures quantitative data, such as total calls, the number and percent of calls the voicebot answers, and the number and percent transferred for live assistance.⁶² However, the IRS is doing little to measure customer satisfaction with the assistance taxpayers receive from voicebots. The IRS has not been able to implement a survey to measure customer satisfaction with the assistance taxpayers receive from voicebots. IRS executives are prioritizing updates, including a customer satisfaction survey, for updates to the voicebot platform in the upcoming fiscal years.⁶³

When taxpayers cannot resolve their issue after interacting with a voicebot, they can continue to wait for a live assistor. For the 52 percent of callers who interact with a voicebot but ultimately need to speak with a live CSR, the IRS is unable to leverage the information from the bot interaction to support the work of the CSR due to its current system's limitations. When the taxpayer must provide the same information a second time, it unnecessarily wastes the time of the taxpayer and CSR, and longer calls mean CSRs can assist fewer taxpayers. Bots can contribute to an omnichannel service model by identifying the issue that prompted the taxpayer to call and helping CSRs better prepare to assist the taxpayer in resolving their issue.

Taxpayers may also seek self-assistance by interacting with a chatbot on IRS.gov. Chatbots simulate human conversation through web-based text interaction that uses artificial intelligence-powered software to respond to natural language prompts.⁶⁴ Taxpayers unable to resolve their issue with a chatbot can request to connect to a live assistor during regular business hours. After the taxpayer interacts with a chatbot, the IRS asks a single yes/no question to evaluate their experience: “Was the information presented helpful?”⁶⁵ Although voicebots and chatbots are new technologies for the IRS, the IRS should prioritize implementing comprehensive measures of the taxpayer experience when interacting with voicebots and chatbots.

57 See IRS, Using Voice and Chat Bots to Improve the Collection Taxpayer Experience (Sept. 29, 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/about-irs/using-voice-and-chat-bots-to-improve-the-collection-taxpayer-experience>.

58 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

59 See IRS, Using Voice and Chat Bots to Improve the Collection Taxpayer Experience (Sept. 29, 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/about-irs/using-voice-and-chat-bots-to-improve-the-collection-taxpayer-experience>.

60 *Id.*

61 IRS response to TAS information request (Nov. 16, 2023).

62 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

63 IRS response to TAS fact check (Dec. 12, 2023).

64 IRS News Release, IR-2022-56, IRS Unveils Voice and Chat Bots to Assist Taxpayers With Simple Collection Questions and Tasks; Provides Faster Service, Reduced Wait Times (Mar. 10, 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-unveils-voice-and-chat-bots-to-assist-taxpayers-with-simple-collection-questions-and-tasks-provides-faster-service-reduced-wait-times>.

65 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

Face-to-Face Service Hours at Taxpayer Assistance Centers Do Not Meet Taxpayer Needs

The IRS provides face-to-face taxpayer assistance at local TAC offices across the country, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.⁶⁶ TACs are staffed by IRS employees trained to provide services such as:

- Account inquiries (help with letters, notices, and levies on wages or bank accounts);
- Adjustments (changes to tax account information or payments);
- Basic tax law assistance (answers related to individual federal tax returns);
- Acceptance of cash payments or creation of payment arrangements;
- Authentication of the identity of individuals identified as potential victims of tax-related identity theft;
- Ordering of transcripts and tax forms; and
- Information on IRS.gov resources and tools.⁶⁷

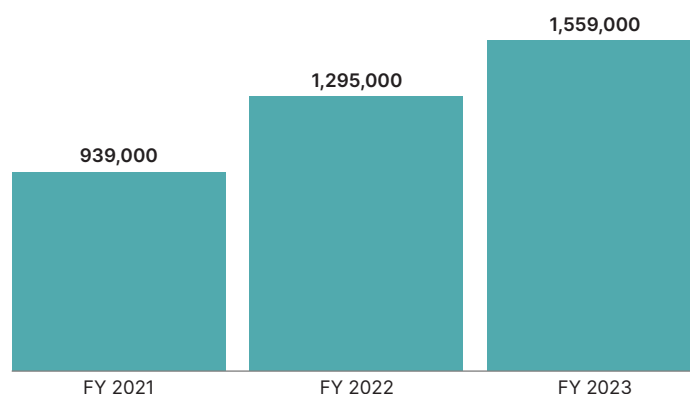
Taxpayers seek help at TACs for many reasons; the top five issues in FY 2023 were Taxpayer Protection Program identity verification, transcripts, refund inquiries, non-cash payments, and balance due/installment agreements/collection notices.⁶⁸ Since 2011, the number of TAC locations has declined from 401 to 363,⁶⁹ and the IRS has no plans to open or close any new TACs in FY 2024.⁷⁰

Customer satisfaction surveys of taxpayers assisted at TACs indicate that shortcomings in IRS service are based on the availability of service rather than the quality of service provided. Taxpayers serviced at TACs rate the quality of their service 88 percent or higher.⁷¹ The highest proportions of agreement among taxpayer experience components were for the helpfulness of employees and professionalism of the representative.⁷²

Figure 2.4.6 shows the increase in taxpayers who received assistance at a TAC in the aftermath of the pandemic.

FIGURE 2.4.6⁷³

Taxpayers Who Received Assistance at a TAC, FYs 2021-2023



⁶⁶ IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

⁶⁷ IRS News Release, IR-2023-127, IRS Continues Reopening Closed Taxpayer Assistance Centers; Begins Special Series of Community Assistance Visits to Help Taxpayers in 8 States to Expand Service for People Who Aren't Near Agency Offices (July 14, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-continues-reopening-closed-taxpayer-assistance-centers-begins-special-series-of-community-assistance-visits-to-help-taxpayers-in-8-states-to-expand-service-for-people-who-arent-near-agency-offices>.

⁶⁸ IRS response to TAS fact check (Dec. 12, 2023).

⁶⁹ IRS, W&I Inventory Report (week ending Apr. 15, 2023).

⁷⁰ IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

While the IRS exceeded the number of taxpayers it assisted in the prior years in FY 2023, it still fell short of Secretary Yellen's directive to fully staff the TACs.⁷⁴ The IRS defines full staffing at a TAC location as having all available workstations in a TAC filled with the appropriate type of face-to-face employee.⁷⁵ For a TAC to be open with less than full staffing, the IRS must have at least one trained employee permanently assigned to the TAC to provide service to taxpayers.⁷⁶ During FY 2023, the IRS reopened 16 TACs it had closed since the beginning of the pandemic, and it opened four new TACs in Puerto Rico and one new TAC in Mississippi.⁷⁷ Despite funding provided in the IRA and the IRS's agreement to a 2022 National Taxpayer Advocate recommendation to fully staff all TACs, the IRS fully staffed fewer than 100 TAC locations (27 percent) during FY 2023.⁷⁸

Employee attrition affects staffing levels at TACs. While the IRS wants to expand and fill new positions, it first needs to fill the positions associated with individuals leaving the agency or business unit. For example, during the period from October 1, 2022, to April 30, 2023, 344 TAC employees either separated from the IRS or moved to another position within the IRS.⁷⁹ Therefore, the hiring of 576 new employees during that period only resulted in a net gain of 232 employees to staff the TACs during FS 2023.

The IRS Must Expand Taxpayer Assistance Center Service Hours to Include Weekends

Recognizing the importance of providing face-to-face assistance to taxpayers outside of normal business hours, the IRS expanded its hours for certain TACs one Saturday a month during the filing season to allow taxpayers to receive assistance without an appointment.⁸⁰ About 2,800 IRS and TAS employees volunteered to work at 93 TAC locations that participated in the IRS's "Taxpayer Experience Days" focused around FS 2023.⁸¹ Although a welcome relief for many taxpayers in some cities, taxpayers experienced difficulties due to the high volume of participants and the IRS's inability to timely service these taxpayers, leaving some frustrated. Saturday walk-in events relied on IRS employees who volunteered to meet staffing needs and thus did not have consistent hours or frequency.

Taxpayers demonstrated a desire for Saturday service, though the IRS scheduled Saturday events only once a month during the filing season and relied on IRS volunteers to meet staffing needs. As shown in Figure 2.4.7, only 2,313 taxpayers in FY 2021 received walk-in assistance at a TAC Saturday event while 17,914 taxpayers in FY 2022 and 16,534 taxpayers in FY 2023 received assistance at Saturday events. Taxpayers should be able to receive Saturday TAC service year-round.

74 TIGTA, Ref. No. 2023-IE-R010, *Inflation Reduction Act: Assessment of the IRS's Efforts to Deliver Expected Improvements for the 2023 Filing Season* (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-09/2023ier010fr.pdf>.

75 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

76 *Id.*

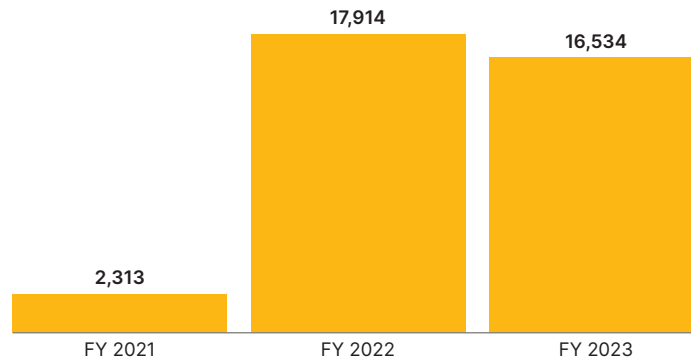
77 The reopened TAC locations are Casper, WY; Binghamton, NY; West Nyack, NY; Overland Park, KS; Longview, TX; Santa Fe, NM; Queensbury, NY; Charlottesville, VA; La Crosse, WI; Cranberry Township, PA; Colorado Springs, CO; Joplin, MO; Jackson, TN; Augusta, ME; Bellingham, WA; and Trenton, NJ. The new TAC location is Greenville, MS; TIGTA, Ref. No. 2023-IE-R010, *Inflation Reduction Act: Assessment of the IRS's Efforts to Deliver Expected Improvements for the 2023 Filing Season* (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-09/2023ier010fr.pdf>.

78 TAS Recommendations and IRS Responses, TAS Recommendation 4-1 (2022), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/directory-entry/2022-msp-04-telephone-and-in-person-service/>; IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

79 TIGTA, Ref. No. 2023-IE-R010, *Inflation Reduction Act: Assessment of the IRS's Efforts to Deliver Expected Improvements for the 2023 Filing Season* (2023), <https://www.tigta.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-09/2023ier010fr.pdf>.

80 See IRS News Release, IR-2023-66, Special Saturday Help From IRS Available Without an Appointment on April 8 at Multiple Taxpayer Assistance Centers (Apr. 3, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/special-saturday-help-from-irs-available-without-an-appointment-on-april-8-at-multiple-taxpayer-assistance-centers>.

81 IRS response to TAS fact check (Dec. 12, 2023).

FIGURE 2.4.7⁸²**Taxpayers Receiving Assistance During Taxpayer Experience Days**

Secretary Yellen has made a goal for FS 2024 to increase TAC hours of in-person assistance to over 8,000 more hours than last filing season.⁸³ Consistent with Secretary Yellen's goal, the IRS plans to launch a pilot to test the feasibility of offering appointments before and after normal business hours in selected locations during the next filing season.⁸⁴ This is a positive and critical step toward meeting taxpayer needs.

The IRS Must Expand Virtual Taxpayer Assistance Center Appointments

In addition to servicing taxpayers in a face-to-face environment, the IRS also assists taxpayers virtually by using Virtual Service Delivery (VSD) or Web Service Delivery (WebSD); both programs allow taxpayers to interact with IRS employees in real time. VSD allows a taxpayer to receive face-to-face assistance via IRS-provided videoconferencing equipment at a community partner location, such as a public library. The IRS offers VSD at 13 locations and held 166 virtual appointments in FY 2022 and 191 appointments in FY 2023.⁸⁵ While VSD requires taxpayers to travel, WebSD allows taxpayers to meet with IRS representatives in a virtual conference using personal devices over the internet. The IRS assisted 7,239 taxpayers through WebSD in FY 2022 and 11,102 in FY 2023, far more than VSD during the same period.⁸⁶ WebSD Pilot 2 virtual conferencing began March 15, 2022, and will end on December 31, 2023. Virtual conferencing grants access to TAC services for taxpayers who can't visit a TAC office in person. The IRS should continue to offer options for virtual appointments at TACs permanently.

The IRS Needs to Expand Access to Service by Increasing the Number of Community Assistance Visits

Following a 2021 National Taxpayer Advocate recommendation, the IRS relaunched its Community Assistance Visit (CAV) program in June 2023 for the first time post-pandemic, with events in nine cities between June and September 2023.⁸⁷ The National Taxpayer Advocate is appreciative of the IRS's efforts to conduct and staff CAVs (pop-up TACs) to expand their reach and assist taxpayers. CAVs act as temporary TACs that provide outreach to underserved communities and taxpayers living in rural communities identified

⁸² IRS response to TAS fact check (Dec. 12, 2023).

⁸³ Janet L. Yellen, Sec'y of the Treasury, Remarks at IRS Headquarters in Washington, D.C. (Nov. 7, 2023), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1888>.

⁸⁴ IRS response to TAS information request (Sept. 28, 2023).

⁸⁵ IRS response to TAS information request (Nov. 16, 2023).

⁸⁶ IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023). IRS response to TAS fact check (Dec. 12, 2023).

⁸⁷ TAS Recommendations and IRS Responses, TAS Recommendation 3-6 (2021), <https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/directory-entry/2021-msp-03-telephone-and-in-person-service/>; IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023).

as traditionally underserved, generally in areas over 120 minutes driving distance from the nearest TAC.⁸⁸ Generally, pop-up TACs operate for three days to offer walk-in one-on-one assistance to individual and business taxpayers with similar services as TACs.⁸⁹ When selecting locations for CAVs, the IRS considers many factors, including number of Form 1040 filers, number of late-filed or balance due returns, number of identity theft notices, population size of limited English proficiency taxpayers, population size of those self-identifying as belonging to a Native American/American Indian tribe or an Alaskan Native Corporation, locations with social vulnerability based on demographic and economic factors, and proximity to current TAC locations.⁹⁰

At one CAV event in 2023, IRS Field Assistance partnered with the Lihue Public Library to host a CAV in the city of Lihue on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. Kauai Island does not have a TAC, and the CAV allowed local taxpayers to receive services without traveling by plane or boat to the next closest TAC in Honolulu, on Oahu Island, nearly 100 miles away.⁹¹ CAVs provide a critical component of the IRS's taxpayer service model by providing access and meeting taxpayers where they are. The IRS should expand its efforts to secure public facilities through partnership with local businesses and city officials and provide frontline assistance to bring in-person service to taxpayers located remotely.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The IRS's plan for improving service delivery includes increasing self-service options for taxpayers by 50 percent over the next three years to reduce demand for live service, reducing taxpayer frustration through feature-rich customer callback enhancements, enhancing assistor services through multichannel agent desktop and automation, and improving in-person contact management and scheduling functionality at TACs.⁹² While ensuring more taxpayers can connect to a live person for assistance when needed, the IRS must also focus on the quality of a taxpayer's experience when contacting the IRS for assistance and collect meaningful data to allow it to evaluate the quality of service on all channels, including self-assistance options.

Administrative Recommendations to the IRS

The National Taxpayer Advocate recommends that the IRS:

1. Adopt alternate measures of service on telephones that combine the existing CSR LOS calculation with the seven customer experience factors outlined in OMB Circular No. A-11, Section 280, by the end of FY 2024.
2. Add questions to the toll-free customer satisfaction surveys to measure satisfaction with IRS phone tree choices by the end of FY 2024.
3. Provide CSRs with a holistic view of taxpayers' accounts in real time during a phone call, including correspondence sent to or received from the taxpayer, information discussed during a voicebot interaction, and tax account data by the end of FY 2025.
4. Implement comprehensive measures of the taxpayer experience when interacting with voicebots and chatbots by the end of FY 2024 and allow taxpayers to provide feedback to identify ways to improve the technology and determine core reasons for the requests to elevate the call to a live person.

88 See IRS, Pub. 5426, Taxpayer First Act Report to Congress (Jan. 2021), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5426.pdf>.

89 CAVs can assist taxpayers with making payment arrangements but cannot accept payments. IRS News Release, IR-2023-127, IRS Continues Reopening Closed Taxpayer Assistance Centers; Begins Special Series of Community Assistance Visits to Help Taxpayers in 8 States to Expand Service for People Who Aren't Near Agency Offices (July 14, 2023), <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-continues-reopening-closed-taxpayer-assistance-centers-begins-special-series-of-community-assistance-visits-to-help-taxpayers-in-8-states-to-expand-service-for-people-who-arent-near-agency-offices>.

90 IRS response to TAS information request (Oct. 3, 2023). IRS response to TAS fact check (Dec. 12, 2023).

91 IRS, W&I, The Insider, Hawaii: FA Volunteers Resolve Taxpayers' Concerns During Community Assistance Visit (last visited Nov. 15, 2023) (on file with TAS).

92 IRS, Strategic Development Executive Steering Committee Governance Baseline (Aug. 17, 2023).

5. Increase availability of TAC in-person assistance to ensure taxpayers can obtain an appointment within seven days and extend hours of operation beyond 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, including regular Saturday hours, by the end of FY 2025.
6. Establish a metric to measure the number of hours TACs were available for in-person service.

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