

ITG News
Keeping First Nations Informed

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Message from the Director

We recently released our FY 2007 Work Plan which details the goals and objectives of the office of Indian Tribal Governments for the current year. In keeping with our mission to raise the level of voluntary compliance, the Plan presents a balance of compliance checks, outreach, education, and examination activity.

It is important to understand that each of these activities serves a specific purpose. For example, Compliance Checks represent an opportunity to determine any areas where a tribal entity may be experiencing difficulties and affords them the opportunity to effect remedies at minimal risk. Outreach and Education are designed to afford tribal entities the opportunity to receive specialized training or information on current areas of concern so that they are better positioned to be fully compliant with relevant areas of federal tax law and/or the Bank Secrecy Act.

Examinations are the final part of our balanced approach to compliance. Although Tribes have many unique tax issues, the Internal Revenue Service has responsibility and authority to administer the federal tax laws for all types of entities, including governments. This includes the examination of books and records which affords the opportunity for an in-depth assessment of compliance. If a tribal entity has adhered to the requirements of the law, then an examination will likely not result in a tax change. If an error is discovered, then the ITG Specialist will propose a change in the entity's tax liability. The Specialist may also make recommendations for changes in future practices to avoid further

problems in subsequent tax periods.

While we attempt to limit our examinations to areas that we believe have likelihood for error, the mere fact that we conduct an examination does not mean that an error is present. In fact, approximately one in every six examinations we conduct does not result in a tax or filing change.

We know that an examination is often worrisome, but I hope you understand the importance it has in ensuring compliance and helping to identify errors before they grow into major problems. Information on the examination process is available on our web site at www.irs.gov/tribes.

Christie Jacobs

What is a Nontaxable General Welfare Payment?

One of the most common issues we encounter is the question of taxability of support programs offered by tribes to their members. This issue has become increasingly common as tribes have developed economic enterprises that provide them with funds necessary to create these programs. Common examples are housing assistance, scholarships, medical care, transportation, and nutrition. As these programs are developed, it is important to determine the potential tax consequence to the recipients. Unfortunately, there is a general lack of understanding of what constitutes a nontaxable general welfare payment.

As a starting point, it is important to realize that there is no statutory exemption of welfare payments from federal taxation. The Internal Revenue Service, with tacit approval from Congress and the courts, has administratively created a concept known as the General Welfare Doctrine. This doctrine has been used to exempt from federal income taxation any payments made to, or for the benefit of, individuals that are based on "need." This can be financial need, health need, economic need, educational need, etc.; but the program must define the need and the criteria employed to determine the eligibility of recipients.

It is insufficient to simply designate a program as being "need-based," or to fund it from the percentage of net gaming revenue designated for general welfare under an approved Revenue Allocation Plan and assume that will make it nontaxable. The Internal Revenue Service is the sole governmental agency that can rule on the federal tax consequence of support programs.

In creating these programs, there are several factors that should be employed to properly determine the potential federal tax impact on recipients:

- What is the “need” that will be met by the program?
- Is the “need” one that routinely would be considered by various levels of government to be a necessary item that the public would support for funding from a public source?
- Does the program have clear qualifying criteria as well as screening and evaluative mechanisms to ensure that recipients meet the criteria?
- Is there an existing ruling from the Internal Revenue Service that addresses the federal tax consequence of an essentially similar program?
- Has the responsible tribal governing body officially enacted the program?

Numerous Private Letter Rulings that address various governmental programs are available for review on our web site under the Published Guidance page at www.irs.gov/tribes. If so desired, a Tribe can request its own Private Letter Ruling on its particular program.

Remember, the General Welfare Doctrine is an administrative creation of the Internal Revenue Service. In order for a support program to qualify for exemption from federal taxation, a Tribe needs to ensure it has fully addressed the issue of “need.” Use of the term “general welfare” or the fact that the program is funded by the “general welfare” component of a Revenue Allocation Plan is insufficient to make the payments nontaxable.

Questions concerning the tax consequence of an existing or planned program or the method to secure a Private Letter Ruling should be directed to your ITG Specialist.

Am I Required to File Form 8027?

Form 8027, Employer’s Annual Information Return of Tip Income and Allocated Tips, is an annual information return required to be filed by “large food and beverage establishments.” A “large food and beverage establishment” is defined at IRC Section 6053 as any trade or business, (A) which provides food or beverages, (B) where tipping is customary, and (C) where there are more than 10 employees who work more than 80 hours on a typical business day.

Ten or more employees mean the total employees at all of the employer’s establishments who provide services in connection with the provision of food and beverages--not just the directly tipped employees. Therefore, the hostess, wine stewards, cooks, kitchen help, etc. would be considered together with the directly tipped employees (waiters, beverage servers, etc.) in determining whether or not you are required to file Form 8027.

A separate Form 8027 is required for each food and beverage establishment operated by the employer. In addition, one Form 8027 is required for each venue

in the same building where the customers occupy a separate area for the activity and where the gross receipts for the activity are recorded separately for that food and beverage activity. For instance, a casino that has a beverage service, a buffet, and two restaurants, generally would be required to file four (4) Forms 8027.

The Form 8027 requires an allocation to tipped employees when the establishment has reported tips of less than 8% of gross receipts. The instructions for Form 8027 give detailed information on how to make the allocation. If you are in a tip agreement with the IRS and your reported tips are less than 8%, the allocation is reported only on the W-2s of those employees who are not participating (not reporting tips at or above the agreed tip rate) in the tip agreement.

Form 8027 is due the last day of February (by March 31st if filing electronically) for the preceding calendar year. Form 8809, Application for Extension of Time to File Information Returns, can be used to file for extension but must be filed before the due date for filing Form 8027. See the instructions for Form 8027 and Form 8809 for where to file.

If you are an establishment participating in a Gaming Industry Tip Compliance Agreement (GITCA) with the IRS, you do not have to file Form 8027 as long as you maintain the data in a comparable format and provide the data to the ITG Tip Coordinator by the Form 8027 due date. A suggested format for this purpose is available through your ITG Specialist or the ITG Tip Coordinator. Participants in a Tip Rate Determination Agreement (TRDA) must file the Form 8027 with the IRS, Cincinnati, Ohio 45999 and send a courtesy copy to the ITG Tip Coordinator, at IRS—attn: Julia Reese, 12600 West Colfax Avenue - Suite C-300, Lakewood, Colorado 80215, by the due date.

Employee Tip Income Program Questions

ITG has a full-time Tip Coordinator to assist you with any questions about tip reporting agreements. If you are interested in securing a Tip Agreement, have questions concerning your existing agreement, or have received a notice about tip reporting responsibilities that is unclear, please contact Julia Reese at (303) 231-5250, extension 236.

IRS Provides Guidance on Per Diem Expense Reimbursements Paid By Employers

The Internal Revenue Service has issued guidance emphasizing the need for employers to track the amount of expense reimbursement allowances paid to employees on a per diem basis. Revenue Ruling 2006-56 tells employers that if

they routinely pay per diem allowances in excess of the federal per diem rates, but do not track the allowances and do not require the employees either to actually substantiate all the expenses or pay back the excess amounts and do not include the excess amounts in the employee's income and wages, then the entire amount of the expense allowances is subject to income tax and employment tax.

Generally, amounts employers pay employees to reimburse them for substantiated business expenses are not subject to income tax or employment tax. For reimbursements of expenses for meals and other incidentals associated with business travel, employees get this exclusion for reimbursements for each day of travel up to the federal per diem rates without having to actually substantiate the amounts of the expenses. However, if an employer pays expense allowances that exceed the federal per diem rates, the excess amounts are subject to income tax and employment tax if they are not repaid to the employer unless the employee actually substantiates all of the expenses covered by the per diem allowance.

The revenue ruling illustrates when a per diem allowance arrangement that fails to track the excess amounts and does not include the unsubstantiated, unrepaid excess amounts in the employee's income and wages constitutes a pattern of abuse of the rules for tax-free expense reimbursements. The finding that the arrangement is abusive causes all allowances paid under the arrangement to be subject to income tax and employment tax, not just the excess amounts. While the revenue ruling uses a scenario in the trucking industry because of the industry's widespread use of per diem allowances, the analysis in the revenue ruling applies to any employer in any industry that uses per diem allowances to reimburse employee expenses.

Revenue Ruling 2006-56 is effective immediately. However, the IRS recognizes that employers may need some time to adjust their systems so they can track excess allowances and account for them correctly. As a result, the IRS has instructed agents not to apply the results under the revenue ruling for taxable periods ending on or before December 31, 2006 in the absence of intentional noncompliance.

Update on Customer Satisfaction Survey

As we prepare for issuance of this edition of ITG News, we are just finalizing our analysis of the feedback from the recent survey. We will be posting a summary report on the web site at www.irs.gov/tribes in the near future and will also post a listing of specific actions we will undertake to address any concerns that surfaced. Our thanks to everyone who participated in this important annual undertaking.

Reporting Abuses/Schemes

We continue to work with tribes and tribal officials to address financial abuses and schemes being promoted in Indian country. Working together can help ensure the integrity of tribal finances and eliminate the threats posed by individuals with schemes that appear “too good to be true” and often are. If you are aware of financial impropriety or of a promoter advocating a scheme that appears highly suspect, contact:

ITG Abuse Detection and Prevention Team at (716) 686-4860
or
via e-mail at tege.itg.schemes@irs.gov.

How to Avoid an Averaged Failure to Deposit (FTD) Penalty

The best way to avoid an averaged FTD penalty is to provide a complete and valid record of Federal tax liability (ROFT) with the return. The ROFT is a record of the dates and dollar amounts of payments or wages that were paid and is used to verify the timeliness of deposits. Form 941 semi-weekly schedule depositors report their ROFT information on Schedule B (Form 941), Employer's Record of Federal Tax Liability. Form 945 semi-weekly schedule depositors report their ROFT information on Form 945A, Annual Record of Federal Tax Liability. Whereas monthly schedule depositors report their monthly ROFT information on the ROFT section of the return.

The ROFT is not accepted for processing if a negative liability amount is entered or if the total of the liability amounts entered on the ROFT does not equal the total amount of tax reported on the return. When the ROFT information is deemed invalid, it is excluded from the return processing and a CP 207 notice is issued with a blank ROFT that must be completed and returned. If the corrected ROFT is not returned on or before the date requested, an averaged FTD penalty is computed by averaging the total tax amount reported on the return and distributing those amounts equally throughout the tax period. Your deposits will be considered late when applied to the averaged ROFT amounts because the averaged ROFT amounts and dates figured will differ from your actual tax liability amounts and incurred dates for which you made your deposits. The penalty rate used to calculate the penalty increases according to the number of days the tax liability remains unpaid. The averaged liability amounts not properly or timely deposited will be charged at the penalty rates shown below:

- 2 percent for deposits made 1 to 5 days late.
- 5 percent for deposits made 6 to 15 days late.

- 10 percent for deposits made 16 or more days late but within 10 days of the date of the first notice we sent you asking for the balance of tax due.
- 10 percent for deposits made at unauthorized financial institutions.
- 10 percent for amounts subject to electronic deposit requirements but not deposited using EFTPS.
- 15 percent for amounts still unpaid more than 10 days after the date of the first notice we sent you asking for the balance of tax due.

Remember to follow the steps below when completing the tax liability schedule:

- Report each tax liability (not your deposits) on the tax liability schedule.
- Verify that the total amount reported on your tax liability schedule equals your total tax liability shown on your return.
- Do not show negative amounts on the tax liability schedule. If a prior period tax adjustment results in a decrease in your tax liability, reduce your liability for the same day you discovered the error and by the amount of the tax decrease resulting from the error, but not below zero. Apply any remaining decrease to subsequent liabilities on the schedule.

Pub 4268—Employment Tax Guide for Tribes

Our on-line Employment Tax Guide was updated in October 2006. You can download this comprehensive guide from a link on our landing page at www.irs.gov/tribes.

Self-Assess Your Federal Tax Compliance Risks

Tribal entities can now self-assess their federal tax compliance and work with ITG to address any problems they uncover. Entities electing to participate receive a fillable template from ITG, and are provided with the name of a local ITG Specialist who will serve as their resource during the process.

Information on the program, as well as an on-line request form, is available through the “Enhancing Federal Tax Compliance” link on the right-hand side of the ITG web site landing page at www.irs.gov/tribes, or you can make an inquiry about the program via email to tege.itg.tefac@irs.gov

VITA Program Still a Success After 35 Years

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) has been around for 35 years as a result of the Tax Reform Act of 1969. In recent years, Native American communities have begun participating in the VITA program. This has allowed free tax help to be available for tribal members and others who

could not afford professional tax assistance, or whose income is less than \$40,000. Returns are transmitted electronically (e-file) which is the fastest way to receive a refund! With e-file you get your refund in two weeks compared to four to six weeks with a paper return. And the electronic process is more accurate with a less than one percent error rate in the electronic returns compared to 20-percent with the paper returns.

During Fiscal Year 2006, VITA Program sites were involved in the preparation of over 2 million tax returns, with about 1.9 million being e-filed. Over the past five years, there has been steady growth in program participation and an increase in the number of returns prepared by Native American VITA sites.

The IRS established and implemented a number of initiatives and processes that have resulted in improvements in the VITA Program. They include:

All VITA volunteers, regardless of professional background or experience, are now required to pass a tax law examination to be certified to prepare tax returns. IRS guidelines require VITA volunteers, prior to engaging in the tax return preparation process, to demonstrate that they have received an appropriate minimum level of training by passing a tax law examination. To “pass” an examination, the VITA volunteer must earn a score of 70 percent or better.

VITA volunteers are now required to sign a rules of conduct statement. VITA volunteers are required to sign a Standards of Conduct Volunteer Return Preparation Program (Form 13615) that includes a commitment to apply the tax laws equitably and accurately to the best of their ability and to prepare tax returns only within the scope of their training and experience.

Training is concentrated on areas identified as deficiencies in prior reviews. New minimum required training topics were identified for all VITA volunteers to ensure the Program training included tax issues most common to the Program’s customer base. In addition, several key topics in the VITA Program volunteer training material were enhanced with interview tips and decision trees to affect learning. The revised training topics covered adjustments to income and tax computation, filing status, dependents, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), and the use of reference materials.

If your tribe would be interested in having a VITA site in your community, please call Michelle Risk at 520-5022, or e-mail her at Michelle.L.Risk@irs.gov.

Visit the IRS Web site at www.irs.gov, and type in the IRS Keyword, Community Network, to learn about these programs and more. To obtain the location, dates and hours of the volunteer site closest to you, call the IRS toll -free at 1-800-829-1040.

Southwest Indian Tribal Government Specialists

The Southwest ITG Specialists are listed below with their assigned tribes and pueblos. If you have a question and your assigned Specialist is not available, please contact Anita Gentry, Southwest Acting Group Manager, at (505) 837-5573. or e-mail her at Anita.D.Gentry@irs.gov.

Aaron Coleman
Aaron.H.Coleman@irs.gov
(602) 207-8751

Arizona: Ak-Chin Indian Community, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Havasupai Tribe, Kaibab-Paiute Tribe, Navajo Chinle Agency, Yavapai-Apache Nation, Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe

Utah: Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah

Theresa Nosie
Theresa.S.Nosie@irs.gov
(602) 207-8734
Arizona: Navajo Nation, White Mountain Apache Tribe

Utah: Skull Valley Band of Goshutes

Suzanne Perry
Suzanne.V.Perry@irs.gov
(602) 207-8254

Arizona: Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Tonto Apache Tribe

Utah: Ute Indian Tribe of Utah

Michelle Risk
Michelle.L.Risk@irs.gov
(520) 205-5022

Arizona: Cocopah Indian Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort Yuma-Quechan Indian Tribe, Gila River Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Arizona, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation

Anita Gentry
Anita.D.Gentry@irs.gov
(505) 837-5573

New Mexico: Isleta Pueblo, Jicarilla Apache Tribe, Laguna Pueblo,

Mescalero Apache, San Felipe Pueblo, Sandia Pueblo, Santa Ana Pueblo, Zuni Pueblo

Lounette Graham
Lounette.L.Graham@irs.gov
(505) 837-5536

New Mexico: Acoma Pueblo, Eastern Navajo Agency, Jemez Pueblo, Picuris Pueblo, San Juan Pueblo, Santa Clara Pueblo, Santo Domingo Pueblo, Tesuque Pueblo, Zia Pueblo

Catherine St. Gregory
Catherine.M.StGregory@irs.gov
(505) 986-5260 ext. 243

New Mexico: Cochiti Pueblo, Nambe Pueblo, Pojoaque Pueblo, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Taos Pueblo

Colorado: Southern Ute Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

Texas: Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo

Federal Tax Calendar for First Quarter 2007

January 2007

January 4, Thursday - *Make a deposit for 12/27-12/29

January 5, Friday - *Make a deposit for 12/30-1/2

January 10, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 1/3-1/5. Employees report December tip income to employers if \$20 or more.

January 12, Friday - *Make a deposit for 1/6-1/9

January 16, Tuesday - **Make a deposit for December if under the monthly deposit rule.

January 18, Thursday - *Make a deposit for 1/10-1/12

January 19, Friday - *Make a deposit for 1/13-1/16

January 24, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 1/17-1/19

January 26, Friday - *Make a deposit for 1/20-1/23

January 31, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 1/24-1/26

NOTE: Issue W-2s and 1099s to recipients by January 31st.

February 2007

February 2, Friday - *Make a deposit for 1/27-1/30

February 7, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 1/31-2/2

February 9, Friday - *Make a deposit for 2/3-2/6

February 12, Monday – Employees report January tip income to employers if \$20 or more.

February 14, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 2/7-2/9

February 15, Thursday - **Make a deposit for January if under the monthly deposit rule.

February 16, Friday - *Make a deposit for 2/10-2/13

February 22, Thursday - *Make a deposit for 2/14-2/16

February 23, Friday - *Make a deposit for 2/17-2/20

February 28, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 2/21-2/23

NOTE: File W-2s with SSA and 1099s with IRS by February 28th

March 2007

March 2, Friday - *Make a deposit for 2/24-2/27

March 7, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 2/28-3/2

March 9, Friday - *Make a deposit for 3/3-3/6

March 12, Monday – Employees report February tip income to employers if \$20 or more.

March 14, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 3/7-3/9

March 15, Thursday - **Make a deposit for February if under the monthly deposit rule.

March 16, Friday - *Make a deposit for 3/10-3/13

March 21, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 3/14-3/16

March 23, Friday - *Make a deposit for 3/17-3/20

March 28, Wednesday - *Make a deposit for 3/21-3/23

March 30, Friday - *Make a deposit for 3/24-3/27

NOTES: * = Make a Payroll Deposit if you are under the semi-weekly deposit rule.

** = Make a Monthly Deposit if you qualify under that rule.

NOTE: Deposits made through EFTPS must be initiated at least one day prior to the due dates listed above in order to be timely.

Return Filing Dates

January 2nd

-File Form 730 and pay the tax on applicable wagers accepted during November 2006.

January 31st

-File Form 941 for the 4th quarter of 2006 If all deposits paid on time and in full, file by February 12th.

-File Form 940 for 2006 if liable for Federal Unemployment Tax (not participating or current with state unemployment tax). If all deposits paid on time and in full, file by February 12th.

-File Form 730 and pay the tax on applicable wagers accepted during December.

-File Form 945 for 2006. If all deposits paid on time and in full, file by February 12th.

-File Form 943 for 2006 (agricultural entities). If all deposits paid on time and in

full, file by February 12th.

February 28th

-File information returns for all payments reported to recipients on Forms 1099, 1098, 5498, and W-2G, using Form 1096 as a transmittal. If filing these forms electronically, file by March 31st.

-File Form W-3, along with copy A of Forms W-2 you issued for 2006. File by March 31st if filing electronically.

-File Form 730 and pay the tax on applicable wagers accepted during January.

-File Form 8027 if you are a large food and beverage establishment. File by March 31st if filing electronically.

March 31st

-File Form 730 and pay the tax on applicable wagers accepted during February.
