

Information for IRS Approved Continuing Education Providers
Provided via conference call September 22, 23, 24, 2014

Renewals for 2015

- Renewal screenshots were sent with your invitation confirmation – please refer to them as we discuss. In the third bullet on the first page at the top, the date should be Jan 31, 2015, not Jan 31, 2014.
- There are no major changes for renewal except that you must make a determination for EACH individual program in your account . You will need to determine whether you intend to carry the program over in 2015, you want to edit and make changes to the existing program, or you don't plan to offer the program in 2015.

Note: Please read the important note on page 1 which states that no AFTR courses will show up in your program grid to renew. The AFTR course outline will change each year and you MUST get a new program number every year once the new annual course outline becomes available.

- Last year most providers retained all of their programs without analyzing whether they really should be carried over, which resulted in IRS needing to use significant resources in making calls to those with old program numbers to ensure they were still being used. This also created an invalid inflation of our program numbers. Please consider carefully when renewing whether you actually need to retain each program for 2015.
- As a reminder - you cannot “carry over” a program number if the content has changed. It would no longer be the same program, so you must get a new program number. Only minor inflationary amounts could be changed without a new program number.
- If you're not sure if you will be using a program in 2015, you can carry it over – but please delete them once you find they are no longer needed and all PTINs have been submitted. Because you individually have to tell us about each program, it may be easier to do the analysis during renewal rather than having to login to your account to delete later.
- As last year, any program edited will receive a new program number. If you choose to carry it over when appropriate, it will retain its previous year program number.

- The best way to handle this renewal process is to print out (export to Excel) your current 2014 program listing. Since there are no program descriptions in the renewal table, the export of your current program listing will be very helpful in assisting you in determining what programs should be carried over to 2015. On the main screen of your CE provider account, scroll down to the listing of 2014 programs and in the right hand corner above it you will be able to “export to Excel” those 2014 programs.
- You should review your entire renewal application prior to signing/submitting to ensure everything is correctly recorded. Once programs are deleted, it is not easy to get them back. As a reminder – if you will still continue reporting PTINs for a 2014 program in 2015, please retain the program. We originally said as long as they were in your prior year account(s), they would upload. However, we have since noticed that the way the system is built requires a program to be in your current account to take completion dates during the current year. Again: if all PTINs have been uploaded and you will not be offering the program nor submitting PTINs in 2015, you can safely delete at renewal.
- *Reminder:* please remember to carry over programs if you have offered them to students to complete in 2015, even if you are no longer offering to new students in 2015.
- If you are adding new programs during renewal, you can only add them for 2015. If you’d like to add a 2014 program to be given Oct. – Dec. 2014 (including an AFTR course), you will need to come back in after you renew where you will then get an opportunity to select from a drop down menu whether it’s a 2014 or 2015 program. You will have a choice of 2014, 2015, or “both”.
- Your Renewal letter will be placed in your secure mailbox at the top of the messages screen. You will want to ensure everything is listed that you input or carried over during the renewal process. As a reminder – as you add programs after renewal, they should “append” to your renewal letter with the appropriate date stamp. You should always be verifying that all programs, including those you add, are included on your renewal letter as “approved” programs.

Hot Topics

- With the news of the 2015 – AFSP, timely uploading of correct PTIN records will be even more important! Those preparers who want a 2015 AFSP -

Record of Completion will need to have the continuing education (including the AFTR course) in their PTIN accounts before they will be eligible for their AFSP – Record of Completion. Please ensure records are timely uploaded. As a reminder – the timing for the Oct.-Dec. timeframe is within 10 business days. If the information isn't timely reported, you will be getting calls from your students wanting to know why the programs are not there. The PTIN system screen does say to allow up to 4 weeks (to cover the off-peak times of quarterly), but it also tells preparers to call CE Providers if that timeline isn't being met. They will be getting anxious at the end of the year to have their AFSP – Record of Completion, so please timely submit those records!

- We have gotten many requests to delete PTINs/programs that were inadvertently set to us either multiple times, by mistake, or with the wrong information. This has put a lot of undue stress on the program & management analysts on the CE team, as well as on providers where this has occurred! Therefore, we are announcing a new feature that should be in place by Oct 6 (we will send you a letter to your secure mailbox when the new feature is ready). If you send an incorrect record, you can then send a “ZERO credit hour” record with the exact same information as the first submission and it will “delete” the record from the PTIN account. Again – this will work for any incorrect submission or duplicate – just send the EXACT (I can't emphasize that enough!) same record, with the only difference being 0 in the credit hours box. This will automatically delete the record in the PTIN system once the record is transmitted from the CE vendor to the PTIN system. We are very excited about this new feature and hope you will find it helpful, too!
- We have recently posted 3 updates to FAQs. As a reminder, we display the date the FAQ is posted or changes, so it's easy to find those that changed since the last time you reviewed.
 - The first one on 9/16/14 was about instructor hours (#2 under recordkeeping & upload). We are finding that some providers are not working jointly with their instructors to understand whether they need instructor hours reported. Remember – the maximum is 4 for an unenrolled preparer and 6 for an EA on an annual basis. You must understand if the preparer has already received the maximum hours reported in the instructor category, either through you or another CE

Provider where they instruct. If so, we ask that it not be reported. Instructors get instructor credit only; students get regular CE credit only.

Recordkeeping and Upload

2. Whose responsibility is it to compute and report instructor hours – the CE Provider or the instructor? (posted 9/16/14)

It is a joint responsibility – the instructor gets instructor credit as long as he/she has not already earned his/her annual maximum amount of CE credit per Circular 230, Section 10.6. It is the instructor's responsibility to discuss the need for instructor credit with the CE Provider so the CE Provider knows what to report, if required.

- The second FAQ is around the AFTR course requirements for self-study. This clarifies the rules around review questions (can be included for the word count formula), but exam questions are separate from the course and cannot be counted when calculating the 6 hours for the AFTR course. This is #6 under Provider AFTR Course Approval and Review Process and is #6 revised on 9/4/14. This is different than the current NASBA/CTEC standard on self-study programs, so please pay close attention if you're offering an AFTR course.

Provider AFTR Course Approval and Review Process

6. What rules apply to an AFTR course and related comprehension test? (revised 9/4/14)

Unless specifically noted otherwise in CE provider [Standards No.5 and No.7](#) rules for the typical self-study programs apply with regard to the Annual Federal Tax Refresher Course test itself; If language is silent with regard to a specific area, the expectation is that industry standards for tax-related continuing education for self-study testing are followed. All delivery methods for the Annual Federal Tax Refresher Course must include a comprehensive test at the end of the course. Review questions are not required but, if utilized, can be used in the computation for the Word Count Formula. However, test questions CANNOT be included in the word count as the test is considered separate from the AFTR course material when calculating the 6 hours of CE.

- The third FAQ is #9 in that same category was updated on 9/4/14. This clarifies that paper tests cannot be given except when the test is given in person and a proctor is monitoring time not to exceed 3

continuous hours. Paper tests are not allowed for self-study AFTR courses because there is no timing mechanism.

9. I offer an AFTR self-study course in one format, but attendees take the comprehension test in another. What delivery method should I choose? (revised 9/4/14)

If the program material is in PDF format and accessed via the internet or a taped webinar which can be viewed by participants individually at the time of their choosing, but the comprehension test is taken and timed online, you should select self-study.

For further clarification, you should select the online group delivery method if you offer a webinar or live broadcast streamed to a large group of participants' computers at diverse, remote locations and the participants are viewing the program, including the speaker and any text, in real time. Because the AFTR requires a test with all delivery methods, there would need to be a way for preparers to take the test after viewing the live webinar.

Note: paper tests can only be given with in-person AFTR courses if a proctor is monitoring the test. Otherwise, paper tests should never be given as there is no mechanism to monitor the maximum timeframe of 3 continuous hours.

- Please refresh yourself on FAQ #22 under “What programs qualify for IRS approval?” We are reaching out to some providers because they have duplicate records for PTIN holders. As a reminder, we want you to review this FAQ.

22. Sometimes the same program is presented at multiple events. What should we do if we know that some preparers will attend the same program and receive credit for a program they have already attended? (revised 3/12/12)

We understand that this may occur and we will be monitoring this practice. As a general rule, preparers should not repeat a program with the same enrollment cycle. However, we do understand that a preparer may have a reason to take a program again if they feel they need a refresher on the subject matter.

2015 AFSP

- Even if you're not offering the AFTR, you are most likely participating in offering CE to unenrolled preparers, so everyone needs an awareness of the following information.
- Our communication with tax preparers has begun! Our Director, Carol Campbell, placed a statement about AFSP on the RPO Facebook page. In addition, we “tweeted” the announcement of the program and a link to the AFSP information on irs.gov. There was an e-News for Tax Professionals sent out that included AFSP on Fri, Sept 12 (Issue #2014-37). We also are getting ready with letters to uncredentialed preparers via e-mail, delivered

by the PTIN system, but the preparer doesn't have to log in to get the message. One will announce the AFSP and a second one will follow after we get the exempt records from the states/ACAT to tell a preparer they are exempt.

- As for the AFTR course requirements, please look at the FAQs posted on www.irs.gov/taxpros/ce. There are specific FAQs about the AFTR course, as well as the course outline and test parameters. If you are offering an AFTR course, please make sure you understand and follow the requirements. . !
- We are doing AFTR course reviews of each AFTR course/provider. If you haven't been contacted, you will be soon. Please ensure you have your course material, test, and test answer key ready for us when we contact you. Now to share some of the issues we are uncovering as we review these courses:
 - This is a BASIC level refresher course, covering BASIC level 1040 individual tax topics for tax year 2014. A provider should not have anything in their AFTR course about corporations, partnerships, or advanced level items not pertaining to a basic level course. 2013 tax law should only be referred to when 2014 is unknown.
 - Since there is a requirement of a "timed" test (3 hours continuous), you will not be able to administer a paper test unless it's in person and the provider has an instructor monitoring the time. All providers have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the test, which includes not allowing a student to print or receive a paper copy via mail. If a provider is offering a paper test in a non-in person setting and has not been in contact with a review tax analyst, please send us an e-mail at rpo.ce@irs.gov so we make contact with you on options.
 - We expect that each provider display text on the screen before the preparer takes the test telling the student that the test is a timed 3 hour test; how they will know the time left (clock will display or whether it's behind the scenes and what the expectation is for ending the 3 hour timeframe); that the passing score is 70% or better, and the number of test questions (100). Again, this is a 3 hour "continuous" test, so the expectation is that the student is ready to take the entire exam for no longer than 3 hours and in one sitting.
 - Self-study AFTR courses are NOT allowed to be taken for lengthy periods that extend beyond year's end – remember, the deadline for

the 2015 AFTR course is 12/31/14. We will not be accepting participant PTIN uploads with a completion date after 12/31/14, so please notify your students that they must complete the AFTR course by 12/31/14 (and any other relevant CE for the 2015-AFSP Record of Completion).

- ALL topics on the AFTR course outline must be presented and tested (unless noted otherwise noted in the outline).
- Please ensure your potential customers know that the CE is pro-rated for this year, especially if you are trying to “bundle” the AFTR course with the other CE a preparer needs. Please see the new AFSP chart on www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Annual-Filing-Season-Program to ensure you’re communicating to your students correctly. Also visit the web site to ensure you know who is EXEMPT from the AFTR course. We just added MD to the list as they will begin their testing on Oct 2, but NY isn’t scheduled to roll out their test until 2015 so NY preparers are not exempt for the 2015 AFSP – Record of Completion AFTR course.
- Review the CE FAQs for the AFTR course – it is important to ensure you are providing a correct testing experience by not offering an abundance of true/false questions and having an adequate size of test bank based on the number of times preparers can take your exam if they fail to pass.
- In order to protect the integrity of the test, no evaluative feedback should be given for incorrect or correct responses for the final examination. Notification of pass/fail (or % correct) is preferred.
- Make it easy for both your students and the IRS tax analysts when they review your course to follow it. You should be ensuring not only you are addressing every topic in the course outline, but you should make sure that the topics are easy to recognize in your course material. Both parties want to easily understand whether your course matches the course outline topics.
- If you are offering your AFTR course via self-study, you must make sure your material is sufficient to prove the 6 hours of credit. You can do this by following our FAQs and utilizing the Word Count formula or pilot testing. Remember, the test is NOT part of the course and cannot be counted in the word count formula per updated FAQ mentioned earlier. You may include review questions

if you have them (although not required) in the word count, but review questions are not a substitute for content in your program material. Review questions are intended to reinforce learning after having reviewed your course material.

- If you have gotten an AFTR course number and have decided not to participate (for instance - maybe you couldn't provide anything other than a paper test and couldn't partner with another vendor who offers electronic testing), please send an email to rpo.ce@irs.gov to let us know so we can ensure the course is safely deleted and all PTIN completion records are reported correctly (if you offered the program to preparers). This will also ensure the online CE system and the public listing accurately reflect which providers are truly offering AFTR programs.
- AFTR courses should be built to follow the course outline – pulling pieces from various CE programs you already have makes it difficult for both the student and the IRS review analysts to determine if all areas of the AFTR course outline are followed.
- Again, read the FAQs on our web site at www.irs.gov/taxpros/ce and ensure you are well-educated on both the AFSP Record of Completion and the AFTR course.

If you have questions about renewals or AFSP/the AFTR, please send a follow-up e-mail to rpo.ce@irs.gov.