Instructions for Form W-12

(Rev. October 2015)

Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service

IRS Paid Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN) Application and Renewal

Section references are to the Internal Revenue Code unless otherwise noted.

Future Developments

For the latest information about developments related to Form W-12 and its separate instructions, such as legislation enacted after they were published, go to *www.irs.gov/w12*.

Reminders

Annual Filing Season Program. This voluntary program is designed to encourage unenrolled paid tax return preparers (paid tax return preparers who are not attorneys, certified public accountants (CPAs), or enrolled agents (EAs)) to complete continuing education courses for the purpose of increasing their knowledge of the law relevant to federal tax returns. To participate in the program, an individual must obtain a PTIN and meet certain continuing education requirements for a specific tax year.

For further information regarding the program, visit *www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Annual-Filing-Season-Program*.

Voluntary Inactivating/Reactivating PTIN. An individual who no longer practices before the IRS and who no longer prepares any federal tax returns for compensation may request his or her PTIN be placed in inactive status at any time. For more information on voluntarily inactivating or reactivating your PTIN, see *Voluntarily Inactivate PTIN*, later, or review information available at *www.irs.gov/ptin*.

Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications. The IRS has launched a public listing on the IRS website of PTIN holders who are attorneys, CPAs, EAs, enrolled retirement plan agents, enrolled actuaries, as well as individuals who successfully completed the requirements to participate in the Annual Filing Season Program. The searchable listing includes the individual's name, city, state, and zip code. The city and state of the business address you enter on line 5a of this form will be the address reflected in the online Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications if you meet the qualifications for inclusion. If you have more than one business location, enter your primary business location address. See the line 12 instructions for the definitions of professional credentials and select qualifications, later.

Telephone help. If you have questions about completing this form or the status of your application or renewal, you may call the following phone numbers. If calling from the United States, call 1-877-613-PTIN (7846). For TTY/TDD assistance, call 1-877-613-3686. If calling internationally, call +1 915-342-5655 (not a toll-free number). Telephone help is generally available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central time.

Photographs of Missing Children

The IRS is a proud partner with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Photographs of missing children selected by the Center may appear in instructions on pages that would otherwise be blank. You can help bring these children home by looking at the photographs and calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) if you recognize a child.

General Instructions

Purpose of Form

Use this form to apply for or renew a PTIN.

Use and Availability of Information on This Form

The Freedom of Information Act requires that certain information from this application be made available to the general public. This includes, but may not be limited to, the following information.

- Name.
- Business Name.
- Business Address.
- Business Phone Number.
- Business Website Address.
- Email Address.
- Professional Credentials.

Who Must File

Anyone who is a paid tax return preparer must apply for and receive a PTIN. EAs also must obtain a PTIN. The PTIN must be renewed annually. For purposes of determining who must obtain a PTIN, a tax return preparer is any individual who is compensated for preparing, or assisting in the preparation of, all or substantially all of a tax return or claim for refund of tax.

How To File

Online. Go to the webpage *www.irs.gov/ptin* for information. Follow the instructions to submit Form W-12 and pay the fee. If you submit your application online, your PTIN generally will be provided to you immediately after you complete the application and pay the required fee.

By mail. Complete Form W-12. Send the form along with a check or money order for the fee to:

IRS Tax Pro PTIN Processing Center
104 Brookeridge Drive #5000
Waterloo, IA 50702

Note. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for processing of paper Forms W-12.

Specific Instructions

It is important to follow these instructions. If your application is incomplete, the IRS will request that you supply the missing information within a specified time. The IRS will be unable to process your application if you do not provide the missing information.

Line 1. Enter your legal name. This entry should reflect your name as it appears on your tax return and as it will be entered on tax returns that you are paid to prepare. If you are renewing your PTIN, enter the PTIN you received after you first filed Form W-12.

Voluntarily Inactivate PTIN. An individual who does not expect to prepare federal tax returns for compensation for a full calendar year may request to be placed in an inactive status.

If you reactivate your PTIN later, you must pay the renewal fee for the year of reactivation.

You can inactivate your PTIN by accessing your online PTIN account at *www.irs.gov/ptin* and selecting the *Inactivate PTIN* function under the *Manage My PTIN Account* section. You can reactivate your PTIN within three years by selecting the *Reactivate PTIN* function in your online PTIN account.

If you do not have an online account, you may call the number listed under the *Telephone help*, earlier, for additional assistance.

TIP *EAs must maintain a current PTIN in order to maintain their EA credential and should not inactivate their PTIN unless they retire.*

Line 2. If you are applying for a new PTIN after October 1, you must indicate whether you want your PTIN to be valid for the **current** calendar year or the **next** calendar year. If you select the current calendar year, your PTIN is valid until December 31 of the current year. If you select the next calendar year, your PTIN will not be valid until January 1 of the next calendar year.

Note. If you do not select a calendar year, then your PTIN application will be processed for the current calendar year.

Prior-Year Renewals. If you checked the "Renewal application" box in line 1 **and** need to renew for a prior calendar year, you must indicate this by entering the year (YYYY format) in the "Prior year" box and listing each prior calendar year in the space(s) provided. Complete a single Form W-12 for multiple calendar years, but you must attach a separate payment for each calendar year for which you are applying for a prior-year PTIN.

If your PTIN has been in an expired status for more than one full calendar year, you must renew for each previously expired year unless you were inactive during any one of those calendar years.

If you were inactive during any one of those prior calendar years but did not place your PTIN into voluntary inactive status, you can retroactively do so by following the instructions under *Voluntarily Inactivate PTIN*, earlier.

CAUTION *If your PTIN has been inactive or expired for more than three consecutive years, you must submit a new registration application and pay the applicable fee to obtain an active PTIN.*

Line 3. Enter your social security number (SSN) and date of birth. Applicants must be at least 18 years of age to apply.

Applying without an SSN. If you do not have an SSN because you are either a U.S. citizen who is a conscientious religious objector or a foreign individual, you will need to complete and submit an additional form along with Form W-12. Also, because of the documentation that must accompany the submission, you must send the additional form and documentation by mail. See below for additional requirements.

U.S. citizen who is a conscientious religious objector. If you are a U.S. citizen who does not have an SSN because you have a conscientious religious objection to having an SSN, you must complete an additional form as part of the PTIN application process. The form you must complete is Form 8945, PTIN Supplemental Application For U.S. Citizens Without a Social Security Number Due To Conscientious Religious Objection. On Form 8945, you will verify information about your identity, citizenship, and conscientious religious objection. See Form 8945 for instructions on completing and submitting the form and the required documents.

Foreign persons. If you are a foreign person who does not have an SSN, you must complete an additional form as part of the PTIN application process. A *foreign person* is an individual who does not have and is not eligible to obtain an SSN and is neither a citizen of the United States nor a resident alien of the United States as defined in section 7701(b)(1)(A). The form you must complete is Form 8946, PTIN Supplemental Application For Foreign Persons Without a Social Security Number. On Form 8946, you will verify information about your foreign status and identity. See Form 8946 for instructions on completing and submitting the form and the required documents.

CAUTION *Line 2 of Form 8946 must contain a non-U.S. physical address. This address cannot be a P.O. box. If a P.O. box is listed on line 2a of the Form 8946, your application will be rejected and returned to you.*

Renewing without an SSN. You do not need to resubmit Form 8945 or Form 8946. You are, however, required to enter your date of birth on line 3 of Form W-12.

Line 4. Enter your complete personal mailing address and phone number.

TIP *If the U.S. Postal Service will not deliver mail to your physical location, enter the U.S. Postal Service post office box number for your mailing address. Contact your local U.S. Post Office for more information. Do not use a post office box owned by a private firm or company. Most PTIN correspondence will be sent to your email address. However, any paper PTIN correspondence will be sent to the personal mailing address listed on line 4.*

Line 5a. Enter your business address if it is different from the address entered on line 4. Entering the business phone number is optional.

Note. The business address listed on line 5a will be reflected in the online Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications if you meet the qualifications for inclusion. If you have more than one business location, enter your primary business location address.

Line 5b. If you are self-employed or an owner, partner, or officer of a tax return preparation business, enter your applicable identification numbers. Make sure to enter any letters that are part of your Centralized Authorization File (CAF) number. If you have multiple Employer Identification Numbers (EINs) or Electronic Filer Identification Numbers (EFINs), enter the number that is used most frequently on returns you prepare. Entering the business website address is optional.

Line 6. Enter the email address we should use if we need to contact you about matters regarding this form.

We will also send PTIN related emails with general information, reminders, and requirements. Any valid email address that you check regularly for PTIN communications is acceptable.

Line 7. You are required to fully disclose any information concerning prior felony convictions. A felony conviction may not necessarily disqualify you from having a PTIN. However, generally, an individual who is currently incarcerated for any felony conviction will not be permitted to obtain or renew a PTIN.

Use the space in line 7 to provide details of your prior felony conviction(s). All facts and circumstances will be considered. You will be contacted if additional information is needed.

CAUTION *Providing false or misleading information on this form is a criminal offense that may result in prosecution and criminal penalties.*

Line 8. If you have an SSN and are requesting a PTIN but have never filed a U.S. federal income tax return, see below for additional requirements.

Never filed a U.S. federal tax return. If you have an SSN and are applying for a PTIN and any of the statements below apply to your current U.S. situation, then you must submit a paper PTIN application along with two identity verification documents. See *Required Supporting ID Documentation* below.

1. You have never filed a U.S. federal income tax return.
2. You have not filed a U.S. federal income tax return in the past 4 years.
3. You do not have a U.S. federal income tax filing requirement (such as certain individuals from Puerto Rico).

Required Supporting ID Documentation. When filing a paper Form W-12, you must submit an original or certified copy of your social security card along with an original or certified copy of one other government-issued document that contains a current photo ID. Examples of acceptable supporting documents are listed below. All documents must be current (not expired), an original or certified copy, and must verify your name. If you submit copies of documents that display information on both sides, copies of both the front and back of the document(s) must be submitted with the paper Form W-12 application along with the appropriate application processing fee.

Examples of acceptable supporting documents.

- Passport/Passport Card.
- Driver's License.
- U.S. State ID Card.
- Military ID Card.
- National ID Card.

TIP *To avoid any loss of your original documents, it is suggested you do not submit the original documentation.*

Submitting copies of the document along with Form W-12. You can submit original documents or certified copies. A **certified copy** is a document that the original issuing agency provides and certifies as an exact copy of the original document and contains an official seal from the issuing agency. All certifications must stay attached to the copies of the documents when they're sent to the IRS. Certified documents have a stamp and/or an ink seal (may or may not be raised). Any copy certified by a foreign official must be issued by the agency or official custodian of the original record. The foreign certification must clearly certify that each document is a true copy of the original. All certifications must stay attached to the copies of the documents when they are sent to the IRS.

CAUTION *If submitting Form 8945 or Form 8946 with the Form W-12, refer to those form instructions for required documentation.*

Where to send the completed PTIN application. Send the completed Form W-12 with the required documentation and the applicable processing fee to the mailing address listed under *How To File*, earlier. If your application is not complete and you do not supply the required information upon request, the IRS will be unable to process your application.

Line 9. If you filed your most recent individual income tax return more than 4 years ago, see the line 8 instructions above for information on how to submit Form W-12 and the supporting identification documents that must accompany your submission.

CAUTION *Skip line 10 if you are an attorney, CPA, or EA.*

Line 11. Taxpayers are required to be in full compliance with federal tax laws, including filing all returns and paying all taxes, or making payment arrangements acceptable to the IRS. The filing of a tax return and the payment of the tax liability associated with that return are two separate and distinct requirements under the Internal Revenue Code, which must be satisfied within the periods specified for each taxable period in which you have a legal obligation to file.

Use this space in line 11 to provide the details of any noncompliance, including the steps you have taken to resolve the issue. Providing false or misleading information on this form is a criminal offense that may result in prosecution and criminal penalties. In addition, providing false or misleading information is a separate ground to deny your application for a PTIN or terminate it after it has been assigned. All the facts and circumstances as related in your explanation will be considered. You will be contacted if additional information is needed.

If you have never filed a U.S. individual income tax return because you are not required to do so, check the “Yes” box.

Line 12. Check the appropriate boxes to indicate your professional credentials. Check all boxes that apply. **Do not** check any professional credentials that are currently expired or retired. Retired or expired credentials are those that are not valid or active at the time of the application. Include the licensing number, jurisdiction, and expiration date. If the expiration date is left blank or incomplete, that specific credential will not be added during the processing of your application. Select **only** from the professional credentials listed below. There is **no** write-in option. If you do not have any professional credentials, check the “None” box.

Recognized professional credentials include the following.

Attorney. An *attorney* is any individual who is licensed to practice law by the bar of the highest court of any state, territory, or possession of the United States, including a commonwealth, or the District of Columbia.

Certified Public Accountant (CPA). A *CPA* is any individual who is duly qualified to practice as a CPA in any state, territory, or possession of the United States, including a commonwealth, or the District of Columbia.

Enrolled Agent (EA). An *EA* is any individual enrolled as an agent who is not currently under suspension or disbarment from practice before the IRS. EAs are licensed by the IRS.

Enrolled Actuary. An *enrolled actuary* is any individual who is enrolled as an actuary by the Joint Board for the Enrollment of Actuaries.

Enrolled Retirement Plan Agent (ERPA). An *ERPA* is any individual enrolled as a retirement plan agent who is not currently under suspension or disbarment from practice before the IRS.

State Regulated Tax Return Preparer. A *state regulated tax return preparer* is any individual who remains current with certain state-based tax return preparer programs. Tax return preparers who are registered with the following will fall into this category.

- Oregon Board of Tax Practitioners.
- California Tax Education Council.
- Maryland State Board of Individual Tax Preparers.
- State of New York.

Note. The above list of participating state programs is subject to change. For the most up to date information on participating states, visit *www.irs.gov/ptin*.

Certifying Acceptance Agent (CAA). A *CAA* is an individual or entity (college, financial institution, accounting firm, etc.) that has entered into a formal agreement with the IRS that permits them to assist alien individuals and other foreign individuals with obtaining Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers. A CAA cannot verify documents in order for individuals to obtain a PTIN. CAAs should enter either their EFIN or the eight-digit office code assigned to them via the CAA application process.

Note. Once you complete the requirements to participate in the Annual Filing Season Program, the IRS will add this to your PTIN account. See more information about the program listed under *Reminders*, earlier.

Line 13. Payment of the appropriate application processing fee(s) must accompany this form or it will be rejected.

PTIN Registration/Renewal Fees.

- If you are applying for a PTIN in order to prepare federal tax returns for calendar year 2016, the registration/renewal fee is $50.00.
- If you are registering or renewing a PTIN for 2015 or a prior calendar year, the PTIN application processing fee is a different amount. The registration fee for 2015 and/or prior calendar years is $64.25. The renewal fee is $63.00.
- **PTIN fees are nonrefundable.**
- A separate PTIN fee/check must be submitted for each calendar-year PTIN indicated on the form.
- Make checks or money orders payable to "IRS Tax Pro PTIN Fee."
- Do not paper clip, staple, or otherwise attach the payment to Form W-12.

CAUTION *Remember to sign and date your check, and ensure the correct dollar amount is spelled out and matches the numerical amount of the check. If the check is not complete, the check will be voided and the application will be returned to you.*

Signature. The completed Form W-12 must be signed and dated by the applicant.

Privacy Act and Paperwork Reduction Act Notice. We ask for the information on this form to carry out the Internal Revenue laws of the United States. This information will be used to issue a Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN). Our authority to collect this information is found in section 3710 of the Internal Revenue Service Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 and Internal Revenue Code section 6109. Under section 6109, tax return preparers are required to provide their identification numbers on what they prepare. Applying for a PTIN is mandatory if you prepare U.S. tax returns for compensation. Providing incomplete information may delay or prevent processing of this application; providing false or fraudulent information may subject you to penalties.

You are not required to provide the information requested on a form that is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act unless the form displays a valid OMB control number. Books or records relating to a form or its instructions must be retained as long as their contents may become material in the administration of any Internal Revenue law. Generally, the information you provide on this form is confidential pursuant to the Privacy Act of 1974, and tax returns and return information are confidential pursuant to Code section 6103. However, we are authorized to disclose this information to contractors to perform the contract, to the Department of Justice for civil and criminal litigation, and to cities, states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. commonwealths and possessions for use in their return preparer oversight activities and administration of their tax laws. We may also disclose this information to other countries under a tax treaty, to federal and state agencies to enforce federal nontax criminal laws, to federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies to combat terrorism, or to the general public to assist them in identifying those individuals authorized by the IRS to prepare tax returns or claims for refund.

The time needed to complete and file this form will vary depending on individual circumstances. The estimated burden for those who file this form is shown below.

Recordkeeping	6 hr., 56 min.
Learning about the law or the form	35 min.
Preparing and sending the form	44 min.

If you have comments concerning the accuracy of these time estimates or suggestions for making this form simpler, we would be happy to hear from you. You can send us comments from *www.irs.gov/formspubs*. Click on *More Information* and then click on *Give us feedback*. Or you can send your comments to the Internal Revenue Service, Tax Forms and Publications Division, 1111 Constitution Ave. NW, IR-6526, Washington, DC 20224. **Do not** send Form W-12 to this address. Instead, see *Where To File*, earlier.