

Fact Sheet for SPEC Partners

SPEC Certifying Acceptance Agent Initiative



April 2013

Key Messages:

- The commitment of SPEC and its partners is critical to the success of the SPEC Certifying Acceptance Agent (CAA) Initiative. .
- SPEC and the ITIN Program Office (IPO) are collaborating to address and resolve any identified barriers in the CAA application process as it relates to SPEC partners.
- SPEC will build on its existing relationship with partners to increase availability of ITIN services at VITA/TCE sites.
- SPEC CAA partners contribute in shaping policies and processes based on actual experience.

These talking points were developed to assist potential SPEC CAAs. These are intended for external audiences and can be shared with SPEC partners.

SPEC seeks Certifying Acceptance Agents

For the upcoming tax filing season, the Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication (SPEC) function of the IRS is working collaboratively with community based organizations and non-profits to recruit more Certifying Acceptance Agents (CAA). The goal is to increase the availability of Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) services throughout the nation and within local communities. To that end, SPEC has formed a CAA Initiative Team. The SPEC CAA Initiative entails a more streamlined application process for SPEC VITA/TCE partners to become approved CAAs.

What are Acceptance Agents and Certifying Acceptance Agents?

An **Acceptance Agent** (AA) is a person, business or organization (college, accounting firm or financial institution) authorized by the IRS to help immigrants and other foreign people get an Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) or Employer Identification Numbers (EIN), if they are ineligible to receive a Social Security Number.

A **Certifying Acceptance Agent** (CAA) is an Acceptance Agent who can provide even more help with the ITIN application process. CAAs verify the applicant's claim of identity and foreign status by reviewing required supporting documents to ensure ITIN application requirements are met. This facilitates the ITIN application process for the applicant, since original documents are immediately returned to them, and eliminates the potential for lost documents during IRS processing. CAAs retain copies of the original documents and are required to maintain the documentation for three years after the ITIN has been assigned. The CAA submits Form W-7, *Application for IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number*, Form W-7 (COA), *Certificate of Accuracy for IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number*, copies of authenticated documents, and a federal income tax return or documents proving exception to the tax return requirement to the IRS. Once the ITIN is issued, the CAA receives notification of the applicant's number directly from the IRS.

Why should you consider becoming a Certifying Acceptance Agent?

The SPEC CAA Initiative stresses the benefits of SPEC partners serving as CAAs. The end result leads to better one-stop service and a cost savings for taxpayers. Benefits include the following:

- CAAs are not required to mail original documentary evidence with the ITIN application and federal tax return.
- CAAs have direct telephone access to the ITIN Operations to check the status of applications and,
- CAAs can contact the ITIN Policy office for technical assistance and/or rejected applications.

Note: SPEC is actively recruiting current partners to serve as CAAs and is committed to ensuring partners accepted into the CAA program have a successful experience as a CAA. In that regard, SPEC HQ, Area Offices and local SPEC Relationship Managers will partner with SPEC CAAs in order to provide assistance wherever possible.

What is the Streamlined CAA Application Process for SPEC VITA/TCE Partners?

The following processes have been eliminated and/or adjusted for SPEC VITA/TCE Partners:

- Suitability/background checks have been eliminated*.

Note: Tax compliance checks will be completed on all partner organizations and individuals identified as an authorized representative on Form 13551, *Application to participate in the IRS Acceptance Agent Program*.

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**An applicant who has been assessed preparer penalties, been convicted of a crime, failed to file personal tax returns or pay tax liabilities, or been convicted of any criminal offense will have to attach a fingerprint card for an FBI background check.*

What are the requirements for SPEC Partners to become a Certifying Acceptance Agent?

SPEC partners interested in becoming CAAs must meet the following requirements:

- Have a valid EIN.
- Be an established VITA/TCE site with two or more years of experience or a partner that actively engages in supporting the preparation of tax return and is highly recommended by the SPEC Territory Manager. This could possibly include banks, credit unions and government entities.
- The responsible officer identified by the organization must be a permanent employee (volunteers do not qualify) at least 18 years of age.
- Individual identified as the responsible officer in block 5 of the application must be a legal resident of the U.S. If a non-resident, you must reside outside the U.S.
- The organization and designated employee must pass a tax compliance check and be current in filing and paying any tax liability.
- SPEC VITA/TCE partners need only be open year-round to answer questions and provide service to people for whom they previously prepared Form W-7. They must also provide a permanent address where correspondence can be sent.
- Adhere to SPEC Site and Quality Requirements.

What are the required steps for SPEC partners to become a Certifying Acceptance Agent?

New and renewing applicants must take the following steps before submitting an application:

- Take the Mandatory Acceptance Agent training located on irs.gov. **All** new and renewing applicants (authorized representatives) for the IRS Acceptance Agent Program are required to complete the mandatory training before submitting Form 13551, *Application to Participate in the IRS Acceptance Agent Program* for approval.
- Complete Form 13551 and attach the fingerprint card (if applicable).
- Attach the training certification form for each authorized representative (person listed in block 5 of the application).

Note: Applications received without the certification form will not be processed.

Are there any tips for SPEC VITA/TCE partners regarding completion of Form 13551, Application to Participate in the IRS Acceptance Agent Program?

The following are tips for completing Form 13551, *Application to Participate in the IRS Acceptance Agent Program*:

- Write across the top of the application in bold red print “**VITA/TCE Partner**”.
- Attach the Mandatory Acceptance Agent Training certification.
- Check the applicable boxes (“New” and “Certifying Acceptance Agent”) to indicate the type of Acceptance Agent.
- Block 1- Check the box to indicate the Applicant’s professional status. If not listed check “Other” and write in “VITA/TCE Partner”.
- Block 2 - List only the organization’s “Legal Name of Business”. The IPO only acknowledges the legal entity name that is associated with the IRS assigned Employer Identification Number (EIN). If a different name is used for SPEC purposes, capture that name in Block 11.
- Block 3 - The “Business EFIN” must be associated with the EIN provided.
- Block 4 - Provide the applicant’s Employer Identification Number (EIN). Organization’s EIN must match master file.
- Blocks 5 -10 pertain to the authorized representative. The authorized representative must be an employee of the organization and at least age 18.
U.S. Resident Aliens must attach a copy (front and back) of their unexpired green card **Note:** Individuals not authorized to work in the U.S. will not be approved.
- Nonresident Aliens must attach a copy of their work visa.
- If block 10 is check “yes” you will need to provide an explanation and attach a fingerprint card.
- Block 11 – “Doing Business As” (DBA) Name. Provide the VITA/TCE Site name or name used for SPEC purposes, if different from the legal name provided in Block 2.
- Block 12 - A permanent business. The business address cannot be a P.O. Box.
- Block 13 - A business telephone number and email address is required. Fax number is optional.
- Block 14 - A mailing address is required. Note this is the address where all IPO communications will be sent. Addresses should be detailed as possible (i.e. include specific mail stops or departments, ATTN: etc.) to ensure mail is directed to the proper party once it reaches the organization.
- Block 15-Check “Yes”
- All fields on the application should be completed. If not applicable, place a N/A in the field. That does not apply to block 15a. You must indicate an anticipated number of W-7 that will be submitted in a year
- Blocks 16 and 17 - Primary and alternate contacts are recommended. (Individuals can check the status of W-7 applications and contact IPS for assistance.
- Organizations activity in block 18 should be “**VITA/TCE**” **or** “**Tax Preparation**”.
- Block 20 and 21 - Application must be signed by an officer/owner/president of the organization and the employee.

- Mail Form 13551, Application to Participate in the IRS Acceptance Agent Program, to the IRS along with a completed fingerprint card if applicable, and certification of mandatory training to:

Internal Revenue Service
3651 S. IH 35
Stop 6380AUSC
Austin, TX 78741