

November 22, 2023

Submitted via pra.comments@irs.gov.

Andres Garcia
Internal Revenue Service, Room 6526
1111 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20224

Re: U.S. Tax-Exempt Income Tax Return, Form 990 Series OMB No: 1545-0047

To Whom It May Concern:

We thank the Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for this opportunity to submit comments on the Form 990 series. The comments that follow address ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of 990 information and reduce the burdens associated with accessing this important public dataset.

The groups and individuals submitting these comments are leading members of the tax-exempt community in the United States, working with the Nonprofit Open Data Collective convened by the Aspen Institute's Program on Philanthropy and Social Innovation.

These nonprofit organizations, donor groups, researchers, data scientists, and Form 990 platforms play a key role in taxpayer compliance by communicating with the public, particularly donors, through the provision and analysis of "open" 990 data and gathering data on trends in tax-exempt activities, finances, and governance.

Signatories include: Candid, Charity Navigator, GivingTuesday, Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Independent Sector, as well as prominent scholars of tax-exempt activity, such as Eugene Steuerle, Elizabeth Boris, Patrick Rooney and others writing in their individual capacities.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at the Aspen Institute's Program on Philanthropy and Social Innovation at cinthia.schuman@aspeninstitute.org.

Sincerely,



Cinthia Schuman Ottinger
Deputy Director for Philanthropy Programs
Program on Philanthropy and Social Innovation
Aspen Institute
2300 N Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20037

Comments on U.S. Tax-Exempt Income Tax Return, Form 990 Series

OMB Control Number: 1545-0047

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

We thank the Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for this opportunity to submit comments on the Form 990 series, focusing on ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected and reduce the burdens associated with accessing and using this important public dataset. The groups and individuals submitting these comments are members of the Nonprofit Open Data Collective — convened by the Aspen Institute — which brings together a cross-section of the Form 990 user community, including tax-exempt organizations, private foundations, leading Form 990 platforms for donors, scholars, and state charity regulators.

The Taxpayer First Act represents a major step forward with respect to the transparency, efficiency, and understanding of the tax-exempt sector. Through the mandatory electronic filing of tax-exempt returns and the timely release of this information by the IRS in a machine-readable format, accessing nonprofit information should be more efficient than ever before, creating a wealth of knowledge for nonprofit organizations, regulators, donors, and the public.

Such information has the potential to greatly improve compliance and oversight by providing the public and government officials with tools to detect and locate potential concerns more efficiently. Access to this knowledge is one of the primary reasons that Congress mandated transparency with respect to the Form 990 series. The recommendations summarized and detailed below support these efforts by the IRS to strengthen the public's ability to be informed about tax-exempt organizations and activities.

Maintain a Regular and Timely 990 Data Release Schedule

First, we appreciate the Tax-Exempt and Government Entities division's (TE/GE) release of almost a million 990 e-files via [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) in May 2023 and subsequent releases since then. Prior to May, the pandemic and staffing shortages at the IRS, followed by a series of technical problems, caused unprecedented delays in the release of Form 990 data. During this period, many tax-exempt organizations dutifully filed their annual information returns with the IRS, but the returns were not shared with the public for months, or even years. As a result, affected nonprofits were unfairly suspected of being out of compliance, donors were potentially misinformed, and many state charity regulators were deprived of an essential tool for investigating fraud. (See 2022 Comments to the IRS from the [National Association of State Charity Officials](#) and the [Nonprofit Open Data Collective](#)).

Thankfully, the IRS has remedied these issues, but, in all, the tax-exempt field experienced almost three years of significant delays in the posting of 990 data. While such problems are hopefully behind us, we cannot stress enough the importance of maintaining a regular and timely

990 data release schedule. We appreciate that TE/GE is now back on track in this regard and trust that it will continue to post 990 data frequently and systematically.

Address 990 Data Quality Concerns: Inconsistent and Missing Information Including Grants Data

In its [2022 report](#), the IRS Advisory Council (IRSAC) examined issues that practitioners face when obtaining 990 data from the IRS website. This was in response to a TE/GE request for IRSAC input on how it can fulfill its IRC Section 6104 obligations. Input was requested regarding “issues practitioners face in submitting information requests and obtaining data through TEOS, and areas for improvement on TEOS in general, accessibility, and what data is available on TEOS through both the search tool as well as raw data through bulk data downloads.”

IRSAC raised concerns that speak to the lack of timely, consistent, and complete Form 990 data posted by the IRS. Among its recommendations, the Council specifically calls on the IRS to “identify operational improvements to ensure all available data is uploaded and available on the website in a timely and consistent manner and information posted is a complete representation of filed documents.”

We concur with IRSAC’s recommendations regarding operational improvements for data quality, consistency, and completeness. **The tax-exempt community has encountered many difficulties with data quality, including one particularly alarming new problem: data - with information on billions of dollars in grants made by private foundations and other funders - is missing from Forms 990-PF and 990 XML files provided by the IRS.** We describe this and other data quality concerns in greater detail below and include steps that should be taken to address them.

Reduce Taxpayer Burden by Providing Basic Data Access Tools

We note that the [Tax Exempt & Government Entities \(TE/GE\) Fiscal Year 2024 Program Letter \(PDF\)](#) states that a “portion of our new funding will be used in FY24 to strengthen and update the systems you use to access taxpayer information and manage cases.” We welcome an updating of the systems used to access 990 data.

Such systems need basic tools that effectively organize and categorize open 990 data. Without them, it is nearly impossible for the public to make heads or tails of the information, and taxpayer burden is substantially increased. Other federal agencies provide “data dictionaries,” guides, indices, and additional tools (collectively known as “metadata”) to help the American public make use of important public data sets. The provision of such basic information is considered a standard data practice and is required by the [Open Government Data Act](#). We urge the IRS to consult with the Treasury Department’s Chief Data and Analytics Office, which posts information and reports on open data standards, including the federal government’s [Project Open Data Principles](#).

The following example illustrates how simple steps like providing an accurate listing of 990 postings, can enhance public access to taxpayer information:

Last year, the IRS made a significant change concerning the release of 990 information, stating that it would no longer update the Form 990 Series data on Amazon Web Services (AWS) and would instead post this information solely on IRS.gov. Prior to making this change, the IRS provided a simple index of the 990s it posted on AWS — an example of metadata that was helpful to the public for identifying Form 990 returns for specific organizations and tax years.

The IRS eventually provided versions of these indexes on IRS.gov; however, they were found to be incomplete and inaccurate. Now the public must download the *entire* 990 series on a regular basis (exceeding 1 terabyte of data) to discern which 990s have been most recently updated and to locate specific returns. This results in an extraordinary waste of time, resources, and bandwidth – and effectively limits access to the index file to only those with unlimited processing and storage capacity. Reverting to the approach previously used for indexing on AWS would significantly reduce taxpayer burden.

Improve Access to Information That Supports Compliance: Government Revenue and Reporting of Grants

In addition, we wish to highlight two ongoing problems with the Form 990 itself.

Tax-exempt organizations played a crucial role in serving on the frontlines of COVID-19 relief and continue to assist with economic and social recovery. Such work is often accomplished in partnership with government through the provision of grants and contracts. This is an especially important time to track government funding of tax-exempt organizations, but it is not possible due to changes that were made to the Form 990 in 2008. To remedy this, we have included a recommendation to improve the reporting of government revenue through minor modifications to instructions for Part VIII of the Form 990.

We demonstrate broad support for improving the reporting of government revenue from both the nonprofit and accounting communities and describe the necessity of such information for compliance purposes. In addition, a bipartisan bill in Congress, the [Nonprofit Stakeholders Engaging and Advancing Together \(Nonprofit SEAT Act of 2023\)](#) echoes this concern by calling for recommendations to change the way government grants, contracts, and reimbursements are reported on the Form 990. The bill also calls on the IRS to improve public access to Form 990 data generally.

The second issue concerns the reporting of grants information on the Form 990-PF, separate and apart from the missing grants data noted above.

Currently, there is a disparity in the reporting of grants information by *public* foundations/grant makers versus *private* foundations. Public foundations must report the name — and importantly, the EINs — of their grantees on Schedule I of Form 990. Thus, information on the funder-grantee network for public foundations can be easily tracked through EINs.

Constructing equivalent information for private foundations and their grantees is difficult because private foundations are *not* required to provide the EIN of their grantees on Part XIV(3)(a) and (3)(b) of Form 990-PF.

We suggest requiring the reporting of grantees' EINs on *both* Forms 990 and 990-PF, making the forms consistent in this regard. This would significantly enhance the ability of individual users to identify grantees, help track this information for compliance purposes, and further public understanding of private foundation grantmaking, totaling billions of dollars annually.

Continue to Make Essential SOI Data Publicly Available and Address 990-PF Gaps

Finally, we applaud the helpful role of the Statistics of Income division concerning tax-exempt organizations. We hope the IRS will continue to make this valuable research available while addressing gaps in the extracts for specific forms, such as the Form 990-PF. Such summary tables are critical to the understanding of the breadth and scope of the tax-exempt sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN DETAIL

In sum, the IRS should continue to follow through on positive steps towards data timeliness, quality, and accessibility. We urge it to make the following common-sense improvements with respect to the Form 990.

1. Recommendation: Take Steps to Improve Communication with the Public and Address Quality, Utility, and Accessibility of Data

1a. Maintain a regular 990 release schedule and web page. Recent releases of e-filed 990 XML data have provided a wealth of information, and we are grateful that the IRS is now releasing 990 XML data regularly. As described in the summary above, delays leave tax-exempt stakeholders in the dark, harming nonprofits, donors, and the public, all of which rely on this information to make funding, operational, and other decisions, including those related to compliance.

Maintaining a 990 data release schedule allows the public to plan and use this data more efficiently. In addition to a release schedule that is consistently followed, the IRS should consider employing a format like the Exempt Organizations Business Master File page on the IRS website pertaining to the e-filed 990s. This page would recap release specifics, such as record counts and posting dates, provide contact information for questions, and serve other communications functions.

1b. Ensure that published data is complete. As detailed below, we have encountered missing information on grants made by private foundations and other funders. For example, grantee information for at least 1,957 foundations representing over \$5 billion in grants is missing from Form 990-PF XML files provided by the IRS for FY 2021.

A review by Candid of a sample of individual filings revealed three patterns, which were seen across form types (990 and 990-PF forms), fiscal years, form years, and types of filings (paper and electronic):

- **Filings with missing grants schedules or attachments** (note that the funders may have provided the attachments to the IRS, but in a format that is difficult for the IRS to process and distribute): In these cases, funders reference an attachment in the relevant section of the form (Schedule I, Part II and/or III for 990 filers; Part XV or XIV, 3a and/or b for 990-PF filers), but no such attachment is available in the XML files.
- **Filings with partial grants lists:** In these cases, funders provide information for a few grants in the appropriate section but point to an attachment for the rest. Yet again, no such attachment is available, or at least not in a format that is accessible.
- **Filings with a single grant “recipient” listed as “See attachment,” “Schedule available,” “See Line 3A statement,” etc.:** As in the previous two cases, no additional information is available, or at least not in a format that is accessible in the XML data.

To provide details on the scope of this problem, Candid summarized the findings in the table below:

Form 990-PF Filings where recipient = "See attached" or similar variation		
Fiscal Year	# of funders	Total giving <i>(Disbursements for charitable purposes)</i>
2019	1,034	\$ 2,308,282,949.00
2020	1,202	\$ 4,328,810,513.00
2021	1,957	\$ 5,507,985,102.00

- In 2021, there were at least 1,957 foundations missing grants information totaling \$5.5 billion.
- In 2020, there were at least 1,202 foundations missing grants information totaling \$4.3 billion.
- In 2019, there were at least 1,034 foundations missing grants information totaling \$2.3 billion:

Candid’s research confirmed a similar pattern of missing grants information among funders that are public charities that file the Form 990: grant information for at least 64 funders representing over \$1.5 billion in grants was missing from Form 990 XML files provided by the IRS for FY 2021.

We suspect there are multiple reasons for these gaps in grants data, including challenges related to processing attachments outside of an official IRS schedule. IRS XML creation errors, issues having to do with the schema, or 990 filer errors (e.g., not submitting an attachment when indicating it had).

Our attempts to confirm these reasons by finding copies of 990s on funder websites proved difficult; in most cases we checked, the funder either did not have a website, or did not make their 990 available online. However, we did find cases in which funders submitted an attachment, but it was not in their corresponding XML file.

This reality underscores the critical importance of 990 data released by the IRS to the public. Often, these IRS 990 filings are the *only* source of information about charitable grantmaking. In the case of private foundations, which hold over \$1 trillion in assets, such grantmaking is considerable. It is also likely that larger foundations that distribute more grants will often submit their list of grantees via a separate attachment. The same can be said for many public charities that provide grants. In both cases, grants data may be crucial for determining legal compliance.

Thus, we urge the IRS to investigate and address these significant gaps in grants data, regardless of the cause. If this problem is related to the attachments themselves, the IRS may need to improve IRS XML data transmission and validation standards to require 990 software providers to upload grant listings and other detailed attachments/schedules in standardized, machine-readable formats. We are happy to organize a technical working group to discuss this issue further with the IRS.

We have also noted additional gaps, outside of grants data. For example, there are many filings that either have missing attachments detailing individual trustee/staff and their compensation in Part VII, or a mismatch between what is reported for total compensation in Part I and what is reported in the trustee/staff compensation in Part VIII.

All of this points to the need for further investigation and technical solutions by the IRS.

1c. Take steps to make data more accessible and usable, as follows:

- **Post Form 990 “metadata.”** The XML 990 files have proved to be challenging for even high-level data scientists, who have encountered such problems as multiple versions of the forms and the lack of documentation (“metadata”). The federal government’s [Project Open Data](#) states that data should be described fully so that consumers have sufficient information to understand and process it using “robust, granular metadata.” According to the [Open Government Data Act](#), which mandates that federal government data be as readily accessible as possible, the term “metadata” means “structural or descriptive information about data such as content, format, source, rights, accuracy, provenance, frequency, periodicity, granularity, publisher or responsible party, contact information, method of collection, and other descriptions.”

The 990 data on IRS.gov does not adhere to basic open data principles. At the very least, the IRS should make available basic descriptive information, such as a data dictionary, accurate indices, and updates that facilitate public use. For example, without a suitable working index, the public must download the *entire* 990 series to discern which 990s have been most recently updated. This results in an unnecessary waste of the public’s time and resources and adds to taxpayer burden.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers has urged action to remedy such waste. The [Nonprofit SEAT Act of 2023](#) includes a provision stating that the IRS shall “take steps to improve public access to 990 e-filed data, providing the schema and metadata necessary to facilitate public use.”

- **Clearly organize and label 990 XML data to improve access.** Because 990 data is released in “waves” or “batches,” at least one version of the bulk download page should be organized by chronological batch release date instead of tax year. Once a zipped batch file is released its contents should not be changed in the future.

Each zipped batch file would best be accompanied by a listing and description of the file contents, like the approach used by the IRS when 990 data was released through AWS. We strongly urge reverting back to this more efficient method of organizing/labeling information to reduce taxpayer burden.

- **Create/improve the consistency of the 990 indices.** The 990 index file needs to be consistent and accurate to be useful. As noted above, the 990 data files now being released solely on IRS.gov do not have useful indices, which are necessary for discerning the underlying data and significantly adds to taxpayer burden.

There are additional problems. Currently, the OBJECT_ID is not unique, it no longer matches the XML file name, and the submission date no longer appears on the index. The URL for the XML file or PDF should also be added to the index. See the Appendix for examples.

The lack of accurate and consistent information threatens the reliability of the data. The approach the IRS used when 990 data was released through AWS is much clearer and we suggest that the IRS go back to employing that method.

- **Provide an index to the URLs of 990 PDFs currently accessible via Tax Exempt Organization Search (TEOS) and continue to upload PDF images.** We are grateful that the IRS provides public access to scanned and printable 990s free of charge through its website. Currently, these .pdf files can be downloaded individually (through TEOS) or in bulk (through [a separate page](#) on the IRS website). There is no way, however, to link directly to the individual .pdf files hosted by the IRS. The existence of an index file that links EIN and tax period to a URL, as exists for machine-readable (XML) filings, has facilitated the use of the files. A similar index for the .pdf files would likewise broaden access to these essential public records. We also note that no PDF images have been uploaded since [July 2022](#), and we wish to underscore the value of regularly updating this information.

1d. Appoint a 990 technical liaison within the IRS.

Finally, the public would benefit from an IRS point person, or mechanism, for handling questions regarding the e-filed Form 990 data now on IRS.gov. Currently, there is no procedure or contact for addressing questions regarding the data as they arise, separate from the Customer Account Services line, which addresses filing concerns. This is not only inefficient and frustrating for tax-exempt stakeholders, but it deprives the Service of

feedback that could be used to make upgrades and corrections that are particularly important during the still early stages of the new e-filing/data release mandate.

2. Recommendation: Improve the Reporting of Government Revenue through Modifications to Part VIII of the Form 990

The government is one of the largest funders of nonprofit activity in the United States. In the current environment, information on government funding of the nonprofit sector is particularly relevant, both from a compliance and policymaking standpoint. In addition to tracking sources of revenue for individual nonprofits, it is vitally important to have a complete picture of the overall scope of government funding of the nonprofit sector, how this support has varied over the years, and what types of nonprofits and areas of the country are experiencing changes in this form of government support. Yet, today, it is impossible to determine the extent and details of government revenue due to modifications made to the Form 990 in 2008.

Many prominent voices have expressed concern and a need for this information, including members of Congress. As noted above, a [bipartisan federal bill](#) was recently introduced that would increase the clarity and utility of government revenue information on the Form 990. Independent Sector, a national membership organization encompassing the largest charities in America has endorsed this, and so has the National Council of Nonprofits. Even the [American Institute of Certified Public Accountants \(AICPA\)](#) addressed the need for change in Part VIII of the Form 990 (see pg. 5 of AICPA comments) in 2011, stating that “The AICPA thinks the reporting requirements with respect to governmental funding should be changed.” This statement was made in response to an IRS request for comments on reporting revenue from governmental units (See IRS Announcement 2011-36). Thus, despite calls for change, the Form 990 Part VIII Statement of Revenue continues to lack clarity with respect to the reporting of government revenue, confusing form users and likely resulting in inaccurate reporting.

In particular, two of the largest sources of government support to the nonprofit sector — voucher-type reimbursements such as Medicare and Medicaid, and government contracts — are combined with private payments for services. This is because, since 2008, the IRS has not asked nonprofits to separately report their revenue from Medicare, Medicaid, and other reimbursement payments. These payments, which reach a broad array of nonprofits beyond hospitals, are now generally aggregated with other “program service revenue,” obscuring the largest form of government support to the nonprofit sector.

We understand that Medicare and Medicaid are captured for hospitals on Schedule H, Part III. However, this schedule is only for hospitals, and Medicare and particularly Medicaid are available to many other health and human service providers. As Congress considers prospective changes in government programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, transparent and proper reporting of how government funds are distributed and utilized across the nonprofit sector becomes more important.

Similarly, although government contracts are a major and common source of nonprofit revenue, they are not separated on the Form 990. This leads to additional confusion, particularly because contracts may fall either under Part VIII, line 1(e) (government grants) if they benefit the public.

or within Part VIII, section 2 (program service revenue) if the contract primarily benefits a government agency. Nowhere on the form is the totality of government support reported. Nor can this totality be computed from elements of it that are reported, since some of the most sizable elements are buried. To avoid these problems, government revenue should be more clearly labeled and distinguished in the Form 990, as noted in the following proposed changes to the form.

2a. Create a dedicated line for government reimbursements (e.g., Medicare/Medicaid and Contracts) in Part VIII, line 2(a). As noted above, Medicare and Medicaid payments and other government reimbursements represent the largest source of government revenue to the nonprofit sector. However, the extent of these payments is now obscured due to changes to the Form 990 in 2008. This can be addressed without adding further lines to the form.

<p>Recommendation 2a: Clearly Label Government Revenue and Modify Instructions</p> <p>Insert “Government Reimbursements (e.g., Medicare/Medicaid/Contracts)” on existing line 2(a) of Part VIII of the current Form 990.</p> <p>Note: This change could be made without adding any further lines to the form since five (5) blank lines are already included on the existing form for organizations to list their “program service revenue.”</p>

2b. Recommendation: Clarify the distinction between grants and contracts that benefit the public versus those payments that serve the needs of a governmental unit

Many in the nonprofit sector have difficulty distinguishing between grants and contracts that benefit the public versus those payments that serve the needs of a governmental unit. The [2015 Advisory Committee on Tax Exempt and Government Entities \(ACT\) report](#) highlighted this problem, finding that it can result in “inconsistent reporting among seemingly comparable organizations” as well as errors in the computation of some organizations’ public support tests on Schedule A (see pgs. 136–137 of report). The [American Institute of Certified Public Accountants \(AICPA\)](#) also discusses the “inherent ambiguity” of this section in its 2011 comments. Given the significance of government revenue to the nonprofit sector, it is important that the IRS take steps to address this.

<p>Recommendation 2b: Clarify the Distinction Between Grants and Contracts that Benefit the Public Versus Those Payments that Serve the Needs of a Governmental Unit</p> <p>Clear up confusion regarding what constitutes government grants/contracts that are treated as contributions in line 1(e) by providing additional useful examples — beyond those listed in the current instructions to lines 1 and 2 — drawn from nonprofit experiences. Our organizations are happy to confer with nonprofits (such as Independent Sector, the National Council on Nonprofits, and state-level nonprofit associations, as well as associations of accountants) to determine typical</p>

use cases that would be most helpful to add to the instructions. In the meantime, possible examples might include:

- **Example 1:** A state department of social services enters a contract with a child welfare agency to provide a variety of services to children in need within the state. Since the contract benefits the public, not the government agency, it is considered a contribution and is reported on line 1e.
- **Example 2:** A government housing agency enters a contract with a nonprofit community development organization to construct moderate-income housing. The housing is for local residents, not government employees, so the funding should be noted as a contribution in line 1e.
- **Example 3:** A city council contracts with a nonprofit organization for services related to proper wastewater management at a city office building. Since the direct benefit of the funding is for the local government, not the public, it does not count as a contribution.
- **Example 4:** In a city, there are thousands of vacant government-held lots. The government provides a grant to a nonprofit to transform several of the vacant lots into community gardens. The grant should be considered a contribution on line 1e because the beneficiaries are community members who will use the garden.

3. Recommendation: Improve the Reporting of Grants Information by Adding EINs of Grantees to 990-PFs

Philanthropy is a cornerstone of the U.S. tax-exempt sector. Beyond having detailed data on individual foundations and grantees (via Forms 990-PF and 990), the public would benefit greatly from having complete data on the entire funder-grantee network — including from private as well as public grantmakers. Such data advances compliance efforts and ensures public understanding of the flow of billions of dollars throughout the U.S. tax-exempt sector.

Currently, there is a disparity in the reporting of information by *public* foundations/grantmakers versus *private* foundations. Public foundations are required to report the names (and, importantly, the EINs) of their grantees on Schedule I of Form 990. The funder-grantee network for public foundations and their grantees can thus be easily discerned.

However, constructing equivalent information for private foundations and their grantees is difficult because private foundations are not required to provide the EIN of their grantees on Part XIV(3)(a) and (3)(b) of Form 990-PF.

We suggest requiring the reporting of grantees' EINs on *both* Forms 990 and 990-PF, making the forms consistent in this regard. Form 990-PF currently asks private foundations to provide the name and address of their grant recipient in Parts XIV(3)(a) and (3)(b). We propose making this section equivalent to the Form 990 by asking private foundations to provide the EIN of their grant recipients in this section, as well.

4. Recommendation: Continue the Valuable Work of Statistics of Income (SOI) Division with Respect to Tax-Exempt Organization Data Files, Including Publishing Revenue Transaction Files for 990-PFs 2017 -2019 and 2022

As the IRS states on its website, the Revenue Act of 1916 mandated the annual publication of statistics related to “the operations of the internal revenue laws” as they affect:

- Individuals
- All forms of businesses
- Estates
- Nonprofit organizations
- Trusts
- Investments abroad and foreign investments in the United States

The IRS Statistics of Income (SOI) division fulfills this function by collecting and processing data and sharing this information with other governmental bodies and the public.

The work of SOI is extremely valuable with respect to nonprofit data and research. For decades, SOI has collected microdata from a sample of filed Forms 990, 990-PF, and 990-EZ. The returns in the sample are subject to extensive cleaning, testing, research, and reallocation. The microdata files, which pull in several thousand data fields from Forms 990 and 990-PF, include the largest charities and private foundations. These files are made available to the public, at no cost, on the IRS website. In addition to downloading microdata files, users can access the SOI Bulletin, annual and time-series tables based on the Form 990-series, and other research publications.

The SOI tax-exempt data files remain an indispensable source of high-quality nonprofit data. While the release of e-filed Form 990 data under the Taxpayer First Act is of tremendous benefit to the public, there is still a need for the high-quality information that SOI researchers gather, analyze, and publish. We, therefore, express our support and appreciation for SOI’s work and hope that the IRS will continue its support of the production and release of SOI’s tax-exempt organization files.

4a. Regularly publish revenue transaction files (RTFs) and provide missing RTFs of Form 990-PF returns processed in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2022.

Notwithstanding our strong support for the work of SOI, we wish to raise concerns regarding the annual Revenue Transaction File (RTF) extracts of Forms 990, 990-EZ, and 990-PF. This information has not only been critical for the basis of the New Consumer Classification System “Core Files,” but it also has served, in the past, as the only available open source of data for 501(c) organizations that file by mail — the so-called “paper filers.”

The annual RTFs represent every 990, 990EZ, and 990-PF return processed by the IRS during the year. SOI-weighted samples normally lag RTF data by a full year and are based on a small number of organizations selected by size alone. SOI samples are mainly useful for national estimates but do not sufficiently account for different types of organizations or for regional, state,

or local variations. Annual RTF extracts have become increasingly important to policy and research communities. Consequently, the reinstatement and consistent release of 990-PF RTFs is imperative to understanding a critical source of nonprofit funding representing \$1 trillion in assets.

We applaud the SOI division's publication of Forms 990, 990-EZ, and 990-PF returns processed during 2020 and 2021. SOI's stated commitment to finally publish Form 990-PF returns processed during the *prior* three calendar years remains unfulfilled, however, as does its publishing of these returns for 2022. We strongly support and urge all efforts to close this gap of missing RTF extracts of Form 990-PF returns processed in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2022. There has been no comprehensive public source of private foundation data for these years, and we cannot overstate the importance of these data to public understanding and oversight.

Conclusion

We urge the Internal Revenue Service to continue to work with the nonprofit sector to address the important concerns noted in this letter. Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions, please contact Cinthia Schuman Ottinger at cinthia.schuman@aspeninstitute.org.

Sincerely,

Aspen Institute's Program on Philanthropy and Social Innovation

Miguel Barbosa, CitizenAudit.org*

Jon Bergdoll, Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University*

Elizabeth T. Boris

Kirsten Bullock, University of Illinois at Chicago*

Candid

Charity Navigator

Nathan Dietz, Do Good Institute, University of Maryland, College Park

Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy

Jonathan Durnford, President/CEO, DataLake Nonprofit Research

Alejandro Enamorado, ReFED*

Helen Flannery, Institute for Policy Studies*

Brad Fulton, Indiana University*

Karen Gano, Gano Nonprofit Services LLC*

GivingTuesday

Nathan J. Grasse, Carleton University*

Kirsten Gronbjerg

Teresa Harrison, Drexel University*

Independent Sector

Russell James, Texas Tech University*

Brian Mittendorf, The Ohio State University*

Pamela Paxton, University of Texas at Austin*

Chris Prentice, University of North Carolina Wilmington*

Louis Shekhtman, Loyola University Chicago, Bar-Ilan University*

Eugene Steuerle, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Tax Analysis*

Patrick Rooney, Professor Emeritus, IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy*

*The opinions expressed herein are solely the individual's and not to be attributed to any of the organizations with which she/he/they are associated.

APPENDIX

AVOID INCONSISTENCIES: RETURN TO APPROACH USED WHEN DATA WAS RELEASED ON AWS

SEE EXAMPLES BELOW

AWS:

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TAXPAYER_NAME BERNARD M AND CARYL H SUSMAN FOUNDATION
 EIN 208068788
 FILING_TYPE xxx
 RETURN_TYPE 990PF
 TAX_PERIOD 201012
 SUB_DATE xxx
 SUBMITTED_ON 2011-10-31
 LAST_UPDATED 2016-03-21T17:23:53
 RETURN_ID xxx
 DLN 93491216002181
 OBJECT_ID 201132169349100218
 URL https://s3.amazonaws.com/irs-form-990/201132169349100218_public.xml

201132169349100218 # OBJECT ID
 201132169349100218_public.xml # URL FILENAME

IRS.GOV

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TAXPAYER_NAME FARMINGDALE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FUND COMPANY INC
 EIN 112614312
 FILING_TYPE EFILE
 RETURN_TYPE 990EZ
 TAX_PERIOD 202109
 SUB_DATE 2022
 SUBMITTED_ON xxx
 LAST_UPDATED xxx
 RETURN_ID 19670869
 DLN 93493041009192

OBJECT_ID 202240419349300000
 URL xxx

TAXPAYER_NAME WIXIM MINISTRIES INC
 EIN 330933946
 FILING_TYPE EFILE
 RETURN_TYPE 990
 TAX_PERIOD 202012
 SUB_DATE 2022
 SUBMITTED_ON xxx
 LAST_UPDATED xxx
 RETURN_ID 19670871
 DLN 93493041009392
 OBJECT_ID 202240419349300000
 URL xxx

OBJECT_ID NO LONGER MATCHES FILENAME
 202240419349300000
 202103219349100800_public.xml

OBJECT ID IS NOT EVEN UNIQUE
 OBJECT_ID 202240419349300000 # EIN: 112614312
 OBJECT_ID 202240419349300000 # EIN: 330933946