M. Public Inspection of Returns, etc.

Some members of the public rely on Form 990, or Form 990-EZ, as the primary or sole source of information about a particular organization. How the public perceives an organization in such cases may be determined by the information presented on its returns.

An organization's completed Form 990, or Form 990-EZ, is available for public inspection as required by section 6104. Schedule B (Form 990, 990-EZ, or 990-PF) is open for public inspection for section 527 organizations filing Form 990 or Form 990-EZ. For other organizations that file Form 990 or Form 990-EZ, parts of Schedule B may be open to public inspection. Form 990-T filed after August 17, 2006, by a 501(c)(3) organization to report any unrelated business income, is also available for public inspection and disclosure.

Through the IRS

Use Form 4506-A to request:

- A copy of an exempt or political organization's return, report, notice, or exemption application;
- An inspection of a return, report, notice, or exemption application at an IRS office.

The IRS can provide copies of exempt organization returns on a compact disc (CD). Requesters can order the complete set (all Forms 990 and 990-EZ or all Forms 990-PF filed for a year) or a partial set by state or by month. For more information on the cost and how to order CDs, call the TEGE Customer Account Services toll-free number (1-877-829-5500) or write to the IRS in Cincinnati, OH, at the address in *General Instruction A.*

The IRS may not disclose portions of an exemption application relating to any trade secrets, etc. Additionally, the IRS may not disclose the names and addresses of contributors. See the Instructions for Schedule B (Form 990, 990-EZ, or 990-PF) for more information about the disclosure of that schedule.

Forms 990 or 990-EZ can only be requested for section 527 organizations for tax years beginning after June 30, 2000.

A return, report, notice, or exemption application may be inspected at an IRS office free of charge. Copies of these items may also be obtained through the organization as discussed in the following section.

Through the Organization

Public inspection and distribution of certain returns of unrelated business income. Section 501(c)(3) organizations that are required to file Form 990-T after August 17, 2006, must make Form 990-T available for public inspection under section 6104(d)(1)(A)(ii).

Public inspection and distribution of returns and reports for a political organization. Section 527 political organizations required to file Form 990, or Form 990-EZ, must, in general, make their Form 8871, 8872, 990, or 990-EZ available for public inspection in the same manner as annual information returns of section 501(c) organizations and 4947(a)(1) nonexempt charitable trusts are made available. See the public inspection rules for *Tax-exempt organization*, later. Generally, Form 8871 and Form 8872 are available for inspection and printing from the Internet. The website address for both of these forms is */www.irs.gov/charities/political/article/0,,id=109332,00.html*.

TIP *Note that a section 527 political organization (and an organization filing Form 990-PF) must disclose their Schedule B (Form 990, 990-EZ, or 990-PF). See the Instructions for Schedule B.*

The penalties discussed in *General Instruction K* also apply to section 527 political organizations (Rev. Rul. 2003-49, 2003-204 I.R.B. 903).

Public inspection and distribution of applications for tax exemption and annual information returns of tax-exempt organizations. Under Regulations sections 301.6104(d)-1 through 301.6104(d)-3, a tax-exempt organization must:

- Make its application for recognition of exemption and its annual information returns available for public inspection without charge at its principal, regional, and district offices during regular business hours.
- Make each annual information return available for a period of 3 years beginning on the date the return is required to be filed (determined with regard to any extension of time for filing) or is actually filed, whichever is later.
- Provide a copy without charge, (for Form 990-T, this requirement only applies to Form 990-T's filed after August 17, 2006) other than a reasonable fee for reproduction and actual postage costs, of all or any part of any application or return required to be made available for public inspection to any individual who makes a request for such copy in person or in writing (except as provided in Regulations sections 301.6104(d)-2 and -3).

Definitions.

Tax-exempt organization is any organization that is described in section 501(c) or (d) and is exempt from taxation under section 501(a). The term tax-exempt organization also includes any section 4947(a)(1) nonexempt charitable trust or nonexempt private foundation that is subject to the reporting requirements of section 6033.

Application for tax exemption includes:

- Any prescribed application form (such as Form 1023 or Form 1024),
- All documents and statements the IRS requires an applicant to file with the form,
- Any statement or other supporting document submitted in support of the application, and
- Any letter or other document issued by the IRS concerning the application.

Application for tax exemption does not include:

- Any application for tax exemption filed before July 15, 1987, unless the organization filing the application had a

copy of the application on July 15, 1987;
- In the case of a tax-exempt organization other than a private foundation, the name and address of any contributor to the organization; or
- Any material that is not available for public inspection under section 6104.

If there is no prescribed application form, see Regulations section 301.6104(d)-1(b)(4)(i).

Annual information return includes:
- An exact copy of the Form 990, or Form 990-EZ, filed by a tax-exempt organization as required by section 6033.
- Any amended return the organization files with the IRS after the date the original return is filed.
- An exact copy of Form 990-T if one is filed by a 501(c)(3) organization.

The copy must include all information furnished to the IRS on Form 990, Form 990-EZ, or Form 990-T as well as all schedules, attachments, and supporting documents, except for the name and address of any contributor to the organization. See the Instructions for Schedule B (Form 990, 990-EZ, or 990-PF).

Annual returns more than 3 years old. An annual information return does not include any return after the expiration of 3 years from the date the return is required to be filed (including any extension of time that has been granted for filing such return) or is actually filed, whichever is later.

If an organization files an amended return, however, the amended return must be made available for a period of 3 years beginning on the date it is filed with the IRS.

Local or subordinate organizations. For rules relating to annual information returns of local or subordinate organizations, see Regulations section 301.6104(d)-1(f)(2).

Regional or district offices. A regional or district office is any office of a tax-exempt organization, other than its principal office, that has paid employees, whether part-time or full-time, whose aggregate number of paid hours a week are normally at least 120.

A site is not considered a regional or district office, however, if:
- The only services provided at the site further exempt purposes (such as day care, health care, scientific research, or medical research); and
- The site does not serve as an office for management staff, other than managers who are involved solely in managing the exempt function activities at the site.

Special rules relating to public inspection.

Permissible conditions on public inspection. A tax-exempt organization:
- May have an employee present in the room during an inspection.
- Must allow the individual conducting the inspection to take notes freely during the inspection.
- Must allow the individual to photocopy the document at no charge, if the individual provides photocopying equipment at the place of inspection.

Organizations that do not maintain permanent offices. A tax-exempt organization with no permanent office:
- Must make its application for tax exemption and its annual information returns available for inspection at a reasonable location of its choice.
- Must permit public inspection within a reasonable amount of time after receiving a request for inspection (normally not more than 2 weeks) and at a reasonable time of day.
- May mail, within 2 weeks of receiving the request, a copy of its application for tax exemption and annual information returns to the requester instead of allowing an inspection.
- May charge the requester for copying and actual postage costs only if the requester consents to the charge.

An organization that has a permanent office, but has no office hours, or very limited hours during certain times of the year, must make its documents available during those periods when office hours are limited, or not available, as though it were an organization without a permanent office.

Special rules relating to copies.

Time and place for providing copies in response to requests made in-person. A tax-exempt organization must:
- Provide copies of required documents under section 6104(d) in response to a request made in person at its principal, regional, and district offices during regular business hours.
- Provide such copies to a requester on the day the request is made, except for unusual circumstances (see below).

Unusual circumstances. In the case of an in-person request, where unusual circumstances exist so that fulfilling the request on the same business day causes an unreasonable burden to the tax-exempt organization, the organization must provide the copies no later than the next business day following the day that the unusual circumstances cease to exist, or the 5th business day after the date of the request, whichever occurs first.

Unusual circumstances include:
- Requests received that exceed the organization's daily capacity to make copies;
- Requests received shortly before the end of regular business hours that require an extensive amount of copying; or
- Requests received on a day when the organization's managerial staff capable of fulfilling the request is conducting special duties, such as student registration or attending an off-site meeting or convention, rather than its regular administrative duties.

Agents for providing copies. For rules relating to use of agents to provide copies, see Regulations sections 301.6104(d)-1(d)(1) and (2).

Request for copies in writing. A tax-exempt organization must honor a written request for a copy of documents (or the requested part) required under section 6104(d) if the request:

1. Is addressed to, and delivered by mail, electronic mail, facsimile, or a private delivery service, as defined in section 7502(f), to a principal, regional, or district office of the organization; and
2. Sets forth the address to which the copy of the documents should be sent.

Time and manner of fulfilling written requests.

IF the organization . .	THEN the organization
Receives a written request for a copy,	Must mail the copy of the requested documents (or the requested parts) within 30 days from the date it receives the request.
Mails the copy of the requested document,	Is deemed to have provided the copy on the postmark date or private delivery mark (if sent by certified or registered mail, the date of registration or the date of the postmark on the sender's receipt).
Requires payment in advance,	Is required to provide the copies within 30 days from the date it receives payment.
Receives a request or payment by mail,	Is deemed to have received it 7 days after the date of the postmark, absent evidence to the contrary.

Receives a request transmitted by electronic mail or facsimile,	Is deemed to have received it the day the request is transmitted successfully.
Receives a written request without payment or with an insufficient payment, when payment in advance is required,	Must notify the requester of the prepayment policy and the amount due within 7 days from the date of the request's receipt.
Receives consent from an individual making a request,	May provide a copy of the requested document exclusively by electronic mail (the material is provided on the date the organization successfully transmits the electronic mail).

Request for a copy of parts of a document. A tax-exempt organization must fulfill a request for a copy of the organization's entire application for tax exemption or annual information return or any specific part or schedule of its application or return. A request for a copy of less than the entire application or less than the entire return must specifically identify the requested part or schedule.

Fees for copies. A tax-exempt organization may charge a reasonable fee for providing copies.

Before the organization provides the documents, it may require that the individual requesting copies of the documents pay the fee. If the organization has provided an individual making a request with notice of the fee, and the individual does not pay the fee within 30 days, or if the individual pays the fee by check and the check does not clear upon deposit, the organization may disregard the request.

Form of payment—(A) Request made in person. If a tax-exempt organization charges a fee for copying, it must accept payment by cash and money order for requests made in person. The organization may accept other forms of payment, such as credit cards and personal checks.

(B) Request made in writing. If a tax-exempt organization charges a fee for copying and postage, it must accept payment by certified check, money order, and either personal check or credit card for requests made in writing. The organization may accept other forms of payment.

Avoidance of unexpected fees. Where a tax-exempt organization does not require prepayment and a requester does not enclose payment with a request, an organization must receive consent from a requester before providing copies for which the fee charged for copying and postage exceeds $20.

Documents to be provided by regional and district offices. Except as otherwise provided, a regional or district office of a tax-exempt organization must satisfy the same rules as the principal office with respect to allowing public inspection and providing copies of its application for tax exemption and annual information returns.

A regional or district office is not required, however, to make its annual information return available for inspection or to provide copies until 30 days after the date the return is required to be filed (including any extension of time that is granted for filing such return) or is actually filed, whichever is later.

Documents to be provided by local and subordinate organizations.

Applications for tax exemption. Except as otherwise provided, a tax-exempt organization that did not file its own application for tax exemption (because it is a local or subordinate organization covered by a group exemption letter) must, upon request, make available for public inspection, or provide copies of, the application submitted to the IRS by the central or parent organization to obtain the group exemption letter and those documents which were submitted by the central or parent organization to include the local or subordinate organization in the group exemption letter.

However, if the central or parent organization submits to the IRS a list or directory of local or subordinate organizations covered by the group exemption letter, the local or subordinate organization is required to provide only the application for the group exemption ruling and the pages of the list or directory that specifically refer to it. The local or subordinate organization must permit public inspection, or comply with a request for copies made in person, within a reasonable amount of time (normally not more than 2 weeks) after receiving a request made in person for public inspection or copies and at a reasonable time of day. See Regulations section 301.6104(d)-1(f) for further information.

Annual information returns. A local or subordinate organization that does not file its own annual information return (because it is affiliated with a central or parent organization that files a group return) must, upon request, make available for public inspection, or provide copies of, the group returns filed by the central or parent organization.

However, if the group return includes separate schedules with respect to each local or subordinate organization included in the group return, the local or subordinate organization receiving the request may omit any schedules relating only to other organizations included in the group return.

The local or subordinate organization must permit public inspection, or comply with a request for copies made in person, within a reasonable amount of time (normally not more than 2 weeks) after receiving a request made in person for public inspection or copies and at a reasonable time of day.

In a case where the requester seeks inspection, the local or subordinate organization may mail a copy of the applicable documents to the requester within the same time period instead of allowing an inspection. In such a case, the organization may charge the requester for copying and actual postage costs only if the requester consents to the charge.

If the local or subordinate organization receives a written request for a copy of its annual information return, it must fulfill the request by providing a copy of the group return in the time and manner specified in the paragraph earlier, *Request for copies in writing*.

The requester has the option of requesting from the central or parent organization, at its principal office, inspection or copies of group returns filed by the central or parent organization. The central or parent organization must fulfill such requests in the time and manner specified in the paragraphs, *Special rules relating to public inspection* and *Special rules relating to copies* earlier.

Failure to comply. If an organization fails to comply with the requirements specified in this paragraph, the penalty provisions of sections 6652(c)(1)(C), 6652(c)(1)(D), and 6685 apply.

Making applications and returns widely available. A tax-exempt organization is not required to comply with a request for a copy of its application for tax exemption or an annual information return if the organization has made the requested document widely available (see below).

An organization that makes its application for tax exemption and/or annual information return widely available must nevertheless make the document available for public inspection as required under Regulations section 301.6104(d)-1(a).

A tax-exempt organization makes its application for tax exemption and/or an annual information return widely available if the organization complies

with the Internet posting requirements and the notice requirements given below.

Internet posting. A tax-exempt organization can make its application for tax exemption and/or an annual information return widely available by posting the document on a World Wide Web page that the tax-exempt organization establishes and maintains or by having the document posted, as part of a database of similar documents of other tax-exempt organizations, on a World Wide Web page established and maintained by another entity. The document will be considered widely available only if:

- The World Wide Web page through which it is available clearly informs readers that the document is available and provides instructions for downloading it;
- The document is posted in a format that, when accessed, downloaded, viewed, and printed in hard copy, exactly reproduces the image of the application for tax exemption or annual information return as it was originally filed with the IRS, except for any information permitted by statute to be withheld from public disclosure; and
- Any individual with access to the Internet can access, download, view, and print the document without special computer hardware or software required for that format (other than software that is readily available to members of the public without payment of any fee) and without payment of a fee to the tax-exempt organization or to another entity maintaining the World Wide Web page.

Reliability and accuracy. In order for the document to be widely available through an Internet posting, the entity maintaining the World Wide Web page must have procedures for ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the document that it posts on the page and must take reasonable precautions to prevent alteration, destruction, or accidental loss of the document when posted on its page. In the event that a posted document is altered, destroyed, or lost, the entity must correct or replace the document.

Notice requirement. If a tax-exempt organization has made its application for tax exemption and/or an annual information return widely available, it must notify any individual requesting a copy where the documents are available (including the address on the World Wide Web, if applicable). If the request is made in person, the organization must provide such notice to the individual immediately. If the request is made in writing, the notice must be provided within 7 days of receiving the request.

Tax-exempt organization subject to harassment campaign. If the Director EO Examination (or designee) determines that the organization is being harassed, a tax-exempt organization is not required to comply with any request for copies that it reasonably believes is part of a harassment campaign.

Whether a group of requests constitutes a harassment campaign depends on the relevant facts and circumstances such as:

A sudden increase in requests; an extraordinary number of requests by form letters or similarly worded correspondence; hostile requests; evidence showing bad faith or deterrence of the organization's exempt purpose; prior provision of the requested documents to the purported harassing group; and a demonstration that the organization routinely provides copies of its documents upon request.

A tax-exempt organization may disregard any request for copies of all or part of any document beyond the first two received within any 30-day period or the first four received within any 1-year period from the same individual or the same address, regardless of whether the Director EO Examination (or designee) has determined that the organization is subject to a harassment campaign.

A tax-exempt organization may apply for a determination that it is the subject of a harassment campaign and that compliance with requests that are part of the campaign would not be in the public interest by submitting a signed application to the Director EO Examination (or designee) for the area where the organization's principal office is located.

In addition, the organization may suspend compliance with any request it reasonably believes to be part of the harassment campaign until it receives a response to its application for a harassment campaign determination. However, if the Director EO Examination (or designee) determines that the organization did not have a reasonable basis for requesting a determination that it was subject to a harassment campaign or reasonable belief that a request was part of the campaign, the officer, director, trustee, employee, or other responsible individual of the organization remains liable for any penalties for not providing the copies in a timely fashion. See Regulations section 301.6104(d)-3.