

Non Profit News For Nonprofit Organizations | Nonprofit Quarterly | (<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2016/08/24/commissioner-k-bring-back-the-exempt-organizations-link-on-irs-gov/>)

The Case of the Disappearing Exempt Organizations Link on IRS.gov

By MARTY MARTIN | 4 hours ago



([https://nonprofitquarterly.org/wp-](https://nonprofitquarterly.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/56/files/2016/08/IRS-Logo-e1472047123865.jpg)

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Google “IRS.” Do you see anything on the main IRS landing page (<http://www.irs.gov>) about nonprofit or exempt organizations?

What does this absence of a direct and prominent link to nonprofit and exempt organizations say about the integrity of an IRS Commissioner’s affirmative commitment and precedent—especially in response to a recommendation and direct request from the IRS Advisory Committee on Tax Exempt and Government Entities (ACT) that would be to the benefit of the public, nonprofit sector, and the IRS Exempt Organizations division (EO)?

The IRS Exempt Organizations’ gateway homepage and its related webpages (<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits>) are the most important resource for small and mid-sized exempt organizations for compliance information. Yet a highly visible direct link to EO’s gateway home page was removed from the IRS main landing page and now is buried on the site. EO’s web pages are effective, efficient, available 24/7, and

better than the alternatives. After all, it isn't likely one can call an IRS 800 number and get an answer in their lifetime...that is to say, quickly!

The 2012, 2013, and 2014 IRS Advisory Committee on Tax Exempt and Government Entities' Exempt Organization subcommittee spent countless hours reviewing the IRS and Exempt Organization's web pages. A common theme across our reports was the need for the IRS to commit resources ("human, financial, and technical") to develop its web based technology to benefit the nonprofit sector particularly for small and mid-sized nonprofits for which IRS web pages are their primary resource of accurate information.

The 2012 report "Exempt Organizations: Form 1023-Updating It for the Future (https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/tege_act_rpt11.pdf)" recognized:

"The IRS should expedite the internal processes and commit the necessary resources (human, financial, and technical) to transform Form 1023 to an interactive Web-based Form e-1023 that can be filed electronically and stored, transmitted, and disseminated in an electronic database format. This information will serve as the electronic gateway for IRS knowledge about tax-exempt organizations."

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the implementation of the Form 1023-EZ application, the IRS now processes nearly 70 percent of new applications through this online form. Having recently lowered its application fee, this percentage likely will increase.

The 2013 "Leveraging Limited IRS Resources in the Tax Administration of Small Tax-Exempt Organizations (https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/tege_act_rpt_12.pdf)" stated:

*"The IRS should continue to revise its website and improve its accessibility to individuals engaged in managing small exempt organizations. This should include **the creation of prominent links beginning with the IRS main web landing page (www.irs.gov** (<http://www.irs.gov>)) and the addition of links that visitors can use to report problems and that offer visitors guidance for navigating resources available on the site."*

This report recognized the significant value to the sector and the IRS by providing information to the public through the web and the use of open electronic data reporting.

The IRS reorganized EO's home landing page and began the process of reorganizing EO webpages to become more customer friendly. In addition, the IRS now provides Form 990 forms in an electronic database format through Amazon Web Services (<https://aws.amazon.com/public-data-sets/irs-990/>). We will begin to see benefits from the sector's ability to analyze these large electronic databases. In the meantime, it is a significant step in transforming the IRS EO's ability to flow information electronically into, through, and out of its databases as envisioned by these reports.

The 2014 "Exempt Organizations: Analysis and Recommendations Regarding Unrelated Business Income Tax Compliance of Colleges and Universities (https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/tege_act_rpt13.pdf)" recommended:

"The IRS should continue to leverage its use of its electronic database and web based resources to improve and enhance its communications, education, and training. The IRS should continue to improve, update, and enhance the public and tax professional's access to the IRS materials and information available on its website."

The IRS provides educational online webinar programs, which replaced a successful in-person training program for small and mid-sized nonprofits that built much goodwill for the IRS among its participants. As the IRS reorganizes its knowledge management capabilities, the public and nonprofit sector will benefit from ready access to its Knowledge Networks (K-Nets) and similar electronic resources.

The IRS EO and IT staff should be publicly acknowledged and congratulated for making this progress in trying times. Citing both the 2013 and 2014 recommendations, however, the 2016 IRS ACT report "Exempt Organizations: Stewards of the Public Trust: Long-Range Planning for the Future of the IRS and the Exempt Community (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4344.pdf>)" highlighted that their efforts remain a work in progress.

"We acknowledge that a recommendation that the IRS update its website is not a new idea. As part of this report, the ACT continues to recommend that the IRS undertake a review of its website to assess and analyze its ease of use by the nonprofit community, especially by smaller nonprofits that may not have the resources to engage professionals to provide advice on their activities and reporting."

But one 2016 recommendation is distressing! The ACT's recommendation can and should be implemented immediately!

"At a minimum, as has previously been suggested by the ACT, the IRS home page should have a link to the EO home page to make it easy for an organization to jump from www.irs.gov (<http://www.irs.gov>) to the EO portion of the website."

The 2013 ACT Exempt Organization subcommittee didn't just suggest! We made it happen by directly asking IRS Commissioner Werfel to put a highly visible and direct link to "jump" directly to EO's landing page from irs.gov during our ACT September 2013 public hearing before him.

Recognizing an easy win for the IRS, the ACT, and, most importantly, the nonprofit sector, Commissioner Werfel responded immediately, positively, and personally to the ACT's simple request!

You're right! Before the end of the day there will be a link to EO's home page from irs.gov.

True to his word, a highly prominent and direct link appeared before the close of business on the center tab section of irs.gov to the EO home page—likely the fastest implementation ever of an ACT recommendation! EO traffic began to increase. The link remained there until sometime in 2014, when the link began to appear intermittently. Finally, the IRS buried it from this prominent and visible location with easy direct access and unceremoniously placed it in its current location. This act was a small but highly symbolic loss to the nonprofit sector and to EO in its interagency struggles.

So why (and, perhaps, who) quietly countermanded Commissioner Werfel's specific directive by removing this direct link? I doubt it was Commissioner Koskinen's decision. He has been focused on other issues.

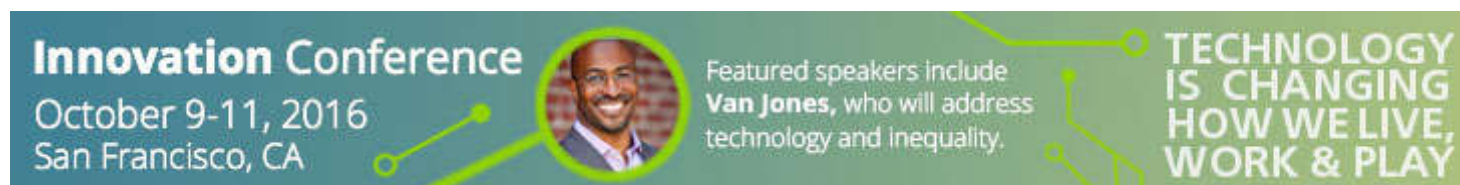
Commissioner Werfel and his successor, Commissioner Koskinen, share a common bond: They both graduated from Duke University—a fact noted in good humor by this University of North Carolina alum during our ACT public hearings. They have watched Hall of Fame Coach K lead their Duke Blue Devil basketball teams to many wins, including NCAA basketball championships and the occasional win over the UNC Tar Heels.

Coach K just returned from leading the 2016 U.S. Olympic basketball team to its third consecutive gold medal and his successful ten-year journey to rebuild Team USA basketball. Coach K knows wins and building a solid program require integrity, commitment and consistency of purpose by leadership. He also recognizes that some wins are easier than others.


Commissioner K, here's your opportunity for an easy win that

- fulfills the IRS mission,
- acknowledges multiple ACT report recommendations,
- upholds the IRS Commissioner's public precedent, and
- is low-cost and very customer friendly!

Will you please bring back the direct Exempt Organization link on irs.gov?



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