



NACTP Guideline Booklet for Portals

This resource and other NACTP publications are available at nactp.org

Letters of Intent (LOI), MeF, and Forms Approval Processes

1. Introduction

This booklet provides recommended guidelines for revenue agencies that use online portals to gather Letters of Intent (LOIs), Modernized e-File (MeF) approvals, and/or Forms approvals from software partners. The objective is to ensure that portals are user-friendly, transparent, streamlined, and aligned with both industry standards and individual jurisdiction requirements. While NACTP does not prescribe requirements, this document provides best practices to support a productive and successful working relationship between revenue agencies and software partners.

2. General Portal Functionality

- **Copy/Paste Compatibility:** Fields (e.g., phone numbers, emails, contact names) should allow copy/paste from other applications such as Word without requiring special formatting. This is especially important for phone numbers, where copy and paste sometimes only pastes the first 3 digits of the phone number, rather than the full ten digits, requiring the remainder to be keyed manually.
- **User Hierarchy & Access:** Portals should support a Master User who can set up and manage sub-users with various levels of access.
- **Multiple User Access:** Portals should allow multiple logins so different users from the same company can access and manage submissions. This allows one person to fill out the LOI while others (such as legal, executive, MeF certification, and forms approval teams) review and provide necessary internal approvals.
- **Historical Access:** If possible, portals should retain access to a minimum of three (3) prior years' communications and submission history to allow software partners to reference past approvals and feedback.
- **Communication Standards:** Jurisdictions should explicitly state whether they will utilize the portal's internal messaging system or continue using email for official correspondence.

3. Letters of Intent (LOI) Best Practices

- **Legal Review Readiness:** Jurisdictions should provide a blank template of the LOI for download prior to the user filling it out, allowing software partner legal and compliance teams to review the language outside of the portal.
- **Printed/PDF Copies:** If possible, submitted LOIs should be printable as PDFs within the system, containing all provisions and all data entered by the software partner.
- **Professional Formatting:** Any PDF generated as a copy of the filled-out LOI should look like a formal paper copy of the document.

- **Clear Limitation/Product Selection:** The jurisdiction portal interface for selecting limitations or supported forms should be intuitive. Complex, multi-step workflows that make it difficult to determine which products are being approved or excluded should be avoided.
- **Contact Information:** Jurisdictions should provide sufficient fields for all LOI contacts: Regulatory, Substitute Forms, MeF, Leads/Fraud, SES Access, etc.
- **Deadlines:** If the LOI is completed within the portal, LOI due dates and testing deadlines should be displayed clearly within the LOI section of the portal.
- **Draft Mode:** If possible, enable LOI preparation in draft mode without requiring immediate final submission.
- **Supporting Document Attachments:** For jurisdictions where supplemental documentation may be required as part of the LOI process, portals should provide the ability for software partners to attach supporting documents (PDFs, Word documents, Excel files, etc.) directly to their LOI submission within the portal. This eliminates the need to send a separate email with attachments, keeping all LOI-related materials in one accessible location.
- **Data Carry-Forward:** If possible, in addition to copy/paste functionality, LOIs should come pre-populated with the prior year's information to facilitate efficiency and review to prevent re-keying static information.
- **Amendments/Revisions & Operational Continuity:**
 - If possible, allow amendments to LOIs post-submission (e.g., add/remove form support).
 - Amending an LOI **must not lock** the account or prevent the software partner from posting submissions and forms. Business operations must continue uninterrupted while an administrative amendment is processed.
 - Require a "Reason for Amendment/Revision" field consistent with the LOI template.
 - **LOI Editing:** When creating a new amended LOI, allow editing of the previously filed LOI (from either original or prior filed amended LOI) rather than requiring the software partner to start an amended LOI from scratch. Also, carry forward any attachment files and allow for attachments to be removed if necessary.
 - **Draft Saving & Preview:** Allow the amended LOI draft to be saved before finalization and printed as a draft prior to submission.
 - **Version History:** Maintain a version history of all finalized amended LOIs filed, including the date each version was submitted.
- **Structured Contact Entry:** If possible, use specifically labeled inputs to gather contact information (name, phone, email, etc.) for SES contacts to avoid missing or mistyped data.

4. Usability & Accessibility

- **Status Dashboard:** If possible, provide a centralized dashboard where software partners can quickly see the real-time status (e.g., Pending, Under Review, Approved) of all LOI, Form, and MeF submissions. The dashboard should also include specific portal guidelines and instructions for the Forms approval process and MeF testing process, so that software partners have clear, accessible reference material within the portal itself.
- **Automated Notifications:** If possible, the portal should automatically generate notifications when submissions are received or status changes occur. This eliminates the need for vendors to constantly log into the portal to check for activity, saving significant time and reducing the risk of missed updates. These should be sent to an external email address designated by the user. Clear instructions on how to configure these external notification preferences must be included in the portal documentation.

- **Notification Preferences (Granular Control):** If possible, the portal should allow for granular control over notifications. Users should have the ability to mute specific notifications or opt-out of email alerts if they are not the intended recipient (e.g., legal teams do not need MeF technical alerts, and MeF certification teams do not need Forms approval alerts).
- **Contextual Feedback:** If possible, jurisdiction feedback should be easy to locate and clearly associated with a specific submission. Avoid generic feedback loops where software partners cannot distinguish which file or submission ID an error message refers to.
- **Agency Contact Directory:** The portal should provide a visible, accessible directory of agency contacts for each submission type (LOI, forms, MeF) so software partners do not need to search for that information externally.

5. Modernized e-File (MeF) and Forms Approvals

Separation of Modules

- **Distinct Areas:** It is strongly recommended that portals maintain a clear separation between Forms Approval and e-File/MeF testing.
- **No Forms in e-File:** The portal should **not** require or house forms for approval inside the e-file area. These are distinct processes and should be managed in separate modules to prevent confusion. For example, including forms within the e-file area creates confusion for vendors managing separate submission workflows.

Forms Submission Process (Including Substitute/Reproducible Forms)

- **Clear Instructions:** Jurisdictions should provide detailed, step-by-step guidance on how software developers can upload or post forms within the portal for approval. This applies both to jurisdiction-provided PDF forms requiring approval and to substitute/reproducible forms created by the software developer.
- **Formatting Rules:** Instructions should include accepted file formats (PDF only), rules for individual vs. combined files, naming conventions, and file size limits.
- **Review Process:** If possible, the portal should outline the timeline for acknowledgment of receipt, barcode review, and content review.
- **Vendor Expectations:** If possible, software partners should know exactly what communication to expect at each step and within what timeframe (e.g., "Feedback within 10 business days").

MeF Submission Process via Portals

- **Clear Submission Instructions:** Jurisdictions should provide explicit documentation on how they expect to receive Submission IDs (e.g., manual entry field, bulk listing). Each test case entry field within the portal should be clearly labeled with a test case number or description that matches the identifiers used in the MeF transmission system. Without clear labeling, vendors cannot reliably determine which Submission ID corresponds to which test case — for example, if a portal shows five unlabeled entry fields, vendors have no way to confirm they are entering the correct Submission ID for each specific test.
- **Submission Workflow:** Software developers submit tax returns to the IRS through the MeF system and, upon acceptance, post the resulting Submission IDs in the portal to notify the jurisdiction. XML files are never uploaded directly to a jurisdiction portal.
- **Review Trigger & Workflow Clarity:** The jurisdiction should provide clarity on their review process to ensure all parties are aligned on ATS submissions, reviews, and approvals. Specifically:

- **Review Timing:** Are submissions reviewed automatically as they come in from the IRS (ATS environment) regardless of portal posting? Or, does the jurisdiction only review the submission once the software developer has formally posted the ID through the portal? And will they review each return separately or await the full package of Submission IDs to be posted?
- **Notification:** Once IDs are posted/reviewed, the jurisdiction should describe their process for feedback.
- **Targeted Feedback:** Feedback on testing should be directly linked to the Submission ID provided.
- **Timelines:** Software partners should be informed about expected timelines (e.g., "Submission ID feedback within 3-5 business days").

Overall Approval & Completion

- **Final Approval Confirmation:** To avoid ambiguity, jurisdictions are expected to provide a clear "Overall Approval" notification once all testing requirements are met. This notification may be delivered via email or through a portal message, and at minimum should clearly state that the software partner is approved and authorized to begin live e-filing. The preferred best practice is a formal notification on jurisdiction letterhead.
- **Communication Method:** This confirmation should be distinct from piecemeal approvals of individual forms or test cases and can be communicated via a comprehensive status message or an official completion letter/email.