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# STATE OF INDIANA

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DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE



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## Phase II Vendor Certification Frequently Asked Questions *UPDATED: November 25, 2009*

1. **Q. If a vendor is certified in one county, why does it need to be certified in others?**
  - A. Phase II tests the county-wide installation of the software. Because each county has a unique operating system, each county's system must be tested for functionality. This allows the Department to get a total picture of the county's system and to pinpoint problems in the workflow.
2. **Q. Whose responsibility is it to pay?**
  - A. The county is responsible for paying for the certification process.
3. **Q. If five (5) counties have a single unified software system, why does each one need certification?**
  - A. Phase II tests the county-wide installation of the software. Because each county has a unique operating system, each county's system must be tested for functionality. This allows the Department to get a total picture of the county's system and to pinpoint problems in the workflow.
4. **Q. What is the cost of Phase II Certification?**
  - A. This is going to vary from provider to provider. A list of providers is available at <http://www.in.gov/dlgf/7698.htm>.
5. **Q. Since this is an administrative rule and not statute, can't the Department postpone the deadline?**
  - A. To allow counties maximum flexibility in budgeting for this expense as well as identifying a third-party tester, the Department extended the deadline to June 30, 2010. Counties must have a contract in place for the third-party testing by December 31, 2009.
6. **Q. Do you know how many providers will come forward to be certified?**
  - A. As of this writing, there are 6 authorized third-party testing firms, including a consortium of county officials and information technology employees.
7. **Q. How soon do we need to be on the calendar?**
  - A. The Department recommends contracting with a provider and scheduling testing as soon as possible. Please keep the Department updated with your plans.
8. **Q. There has been talk in the past of allowing county officials in other counties to act as independent testing teams. Is this still being considered?**
  - A. Yes, there is a county consortium of officials and information technology staff that will comprise several testing teams. This group has been approved as valid third-party testers. Contact information for the group can be found on the Department's Phase II website (<http://www.in.gov/dlgf/7698.htm>)
9. **Q. What is an "independent" tester?**
  - A. An independent tester should be an entity that does not have a stake or interest in the outcome of the certification. This means that a county employee cannot test the system of his or her home county. The Department will review each tester on a case-by-case basis to identify these conflicts before they happen and address them accordingly.

- 10. Q. Does the DLGF have to be a party to these contracts?**
- A. No – the Department does not need to be party to these contracts. The Department issues a letter of designation to each approved third-party tester authorizing the tester to act on our behalf. When contracting with a third-party testing firm, make sure they have received a letter of designation from the Department – if they don't have one, they are not an approved tester.
- 11. Q. Our county may be changing vendors. What should we do?**
- A. When selecting a new vendor, it is important to remember that the deadline for Phase II certification is June 30, 2010. Any software provided must be certified through the Phase I process. Please call the Department with specific questions.
- 12. Q. We will have to do this on a production or test site? How long will the system have to be down?**
- A. This will have to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. If a county doesn't have the capability of establishing a test environment, they should talk to their vendors about how to move forward. Testing is estimated to take approximately two days from start to finish, depending upon how smoothly the test runs and the size of the county.
- 13. Q. It seems to make more sense for some counties to test a taxing district rather than a single parcel. What do you think?**
- A. This would be acceptable under the certification tests.
- 14. Q. Will there be a model contract to contract for these services?**
- A. Since this engagement is between the county and the independent tester, and the Department is not a party to the contract, we will not have a model contract per se. In one instance, an Independent tester did present its model contract to the Department for review. We will certainly extend that same courtesy to any other tester who wishes it; further, if a county has a problem or concern with a third party testing contract, the Department will be glad to review the concern. Please contact staff attorney Charles Traylor at [cstraylor@dlgf.in.gov](mailto:cstraylor@dlgf.in.gov) or by phone at 317-233-2709.
- 15. Q. If the tester causes a problem in the data, do we have rights?**
- A. The Department recommends entering language in the third-party contract to codify any consequences and responsibilities of the third-party tester if they do something that causes a problem with live data or systems. The Department will work with vendors to make them aware them of our expectations. See page two of the Feb. 2 memo, which gives information on this. This memo is available at [http://www.in.gov/dlgf/files/090202\\_Volz\\_Memo-Phase\\_II\\_Vendor\\_Certification.pdf](http://www.in.gov/dlgf/files/090202_Volz_Memo-Phase_II_Vendor_Certification.pdf).
- 16. Q. Can some or most of the certification tests be performed at the vendors' locations, or other central location, rather than the county site?**
- A. The Department is reviewing this concept to see if it can be conducted. The bottom line is that we will allow a certain degree of latitude to counties, vendors, and testers, so long as the central mission of Phase II integration testing is still achieved.
- 17. Q. Our system is integrated. Auditor, Treasurer, and Assessor data are available for all to view and each area has designated responsibilities. I would hope that instructions will be very clear when dividing those responsibilities and not contrary to State law in any form.**
- A. We are sensitive to ensuring that all appropriate statutory rules are followed. Each office has a distinct role in the property tax billing process. Regardless of whether the system is integrated there are still requirements that must be met. A system that does not follow the law will face higher scrutiny and will have to explain why they work the way they do. The Department will decide if these "exceptions" are allowable under the statute, and will act accordingly (requiring fixes and retesting, if need be).

- 18. Q. Our assessor has a different software company than we do. Will we have to purchase new software in order to integrate with each other? Our problem with values right now, is that the Assessor's software company is not sending the correct format to our software company. We have been trying for a couple of weeks now to pass values. So how will the integration work?**
- A. This concern has been brought to our attention in many mixed-use counties, and we are glad that we now have the opportunity to see the problem in practice. Each component of a certified system is required to fulfill its individual role in the system for the entire system to be certified. The tests clarify which system is required to maintain and process the information, and allow the tester to identify where the problem lies. When the responsible software is identified, a fix will be required to ensure compliance with the rule.
- 19. Q. I imagine each county has different ways to enter data and why not let the county decide who will maintain what data? As long as there is one database what does it matter who shall do what? Our office, according to state law is supposed to create the splits and plats. So are we going to leave the location field empty when we create splits and plats?**
- A. The tests are designed to ensure that each office has control over the data that it is statutorily required to maintain. The advantage of designating these roles is that it allows a uniform, statewide approach that allows for quick identification of problems and quick solution. We are open to suggestions on how to make the tests better and more reflective of the "real world" applications in the office; however, we must be sure that we are in compliance with appropriate statutes.
- 20. Q. I am looking at a new tax vendor. This company was certified by the DLGF, but will they be integrated with all the other vendors?**
- A. Each vendor should integrate with each other, and the first phase of the testing is designed to test whether the software is capable of working together according to our guidelines. Phase II ensures that each system integrates with one another in actual practice. If a problem can be identified and a particular system or vendor is the issue, then that system or vendor will be required to fix the issue and ensure that they are in compliance with the certification standards.
- 21. Q. Can vendors reorder the test scenarios to better suit the process flows of their systems, or must the testing scenarios be run in order?**
- A. Yes. The test scenarios may be ordered in the way that makes the most sense, so long as all testing scenarios are completed.
- 22. Q. Can a vendor utilize different copies of the testing database to simulate different points in the tax cycle process?**
- A. No. The Department has concerns that this method would not provide a true test of the integration of the system.
- 23. Q. In constructing the testing data, what year should be used?**
- A. Counties should use either 2008-pay-2009 or 2009-pay-2010 datasets.
- 24. Q. What is acceptable in terms of the software vendor controlling the computer during testing?**
- A. Recognizing that in many counties, software vendor technical representatives can and do perform some of the system tasks, the Department would deem it acceptable so long as it is representative of the regular workflow process in the county. We will rely upon the observations and judgment of the independent tester and their recommendations as to whether the use of a vendor technical representative skews the results of any testing scenarios.