BIR taps IT community to develop innovative taxpayer services

The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) today launched the Hackatax, an innovation challenge to the IT and software development community—from students to individual or professional developers—to develop frontend applications that will address taxpayer pain points when transacting with the BIR. Hackatax is part of BIR’s digital transformation drive that aims to improve ease of doing business, and make taxpayer services more convenient, reliable, and transparent.

The innovation challenge seeks to address current taxpayer pain points by simplifying tax forms, streamlining processes, and serving taxpayer needs, particularly the self-employed individuals which include micro and small enterprises and professionals. Hackatax participants are expected to develop solutions that integrate new innovations to their proposed solutions and integrate sound business model and go-to-market strategy.

Today, taxpayers must visit a BIR office just to change their registration details. Self-employed individuals like sole proprietors and professionals go through the inconvenience of filling out and filing long and complex tax forms, in addition to paying corresponding taxes over the counter at select authorized agent bank branches.

Meanwhile, the Philippines has a tech savvy population, with over 134 million mobile subscriptions¹ and over 69% of the population using smartphones². According to social media firms Hootsuite and We Are Social, Filipinos are the world’s heaviest internet users, spending 10 hours online daily. Filipinos are also the global leader in time spent on social media. The average time spent on social media platforms is 4 hours and 12 minutes daily, with 67 million accounts on Facebook and another 10 million on Instagram. Mobile internet is the preferred mode of access by Filipinos who spend almost 5 hours on their mobile phone to access the world wide web.³ Through Hackatax, the BIR will introduce mobile apps to deliver taxpayer services catering to the country’s tech savvy population.

Interested IT students, individual software developers and technology startups can submit their entries describing their proposed solutions on or before November 15, 2019. Shortlisted parties to be announced in November can develop their prototype mobile apps until end of December. Designated mentors and resource persons will be

¹ Globe Telecoms and PLDT Group/Smart Communications 2018 Report
available for consultation throughout the development period. Participants will pitch their mobile apps in January 2020, when the top 3 apps will be declared as winners. Winners are entitled to cash prizes, enrollment into the Tax Software Provider (TSP) certification system of the BIR, and admission to partner startup incubator programs. All participants can monetize their solution by marketing directly to taxpayers. The BIR expects to launch the winning solutions before the April 15 deadline for filing and paying annual income taxes. For detailed hackathon mechanics, interested parties can visit www.hackatax.ph or follow official HackataxPH social media accounts.

The BIR is adopting an open system IT strategy through application programming interfaces (APIs) to encourage third-party software developers to come up with innovative taxpayer solutions. Through APIs, third-party solutions can interface with BIR’s backend IT infrastructure, enabling a seamless and digital taxpayer experience. The BIR is developing APIs to enable its offline eBIRForms as well as tax forms developed by third-party tax software providers (TSPs) to interface with BIR’s integrated tax information system facilitating real-time posting of tax returns filed and paid.

Hackatax is supported by the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) through its E-PESO Project, and is co-organized by the Developers Connect Philippines (DEVCON).