

## VI. Integrated TAS Technology

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### A TAS IS STRIVING TO BRING ITS SYSTEMS INTO THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

An adequately funded, staffed, and skilled IRS Information Technology (IT) function underpins all IRS and TAS activities. IT resources are the common denominator for providing core IRS functions including taxpayer service, prompt issuance of refunds, selection and assignment of compliance work, and protecting taxpayers and the public from refund fraud and identity theft. If the IT workforce is not appropriately skilled and staffed, the IRS will not be able to bring itself into the 21<sup>st</sup> century much less meet its everyday work demands. Cost overruns will occur if the IRS does not have the skilled staff to undertake the necessary strategic planning or provide adequate project and contract oversight.

For fiscal years (FY) 2014 and 2015, the IRS is focusing its IT resources on three main areas: implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA); implementation of the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA); and implementation of the 2015 filing season, including the delivery of various legislative provisions and extenders. All other requests for IT resources are subordinate to these three “heavy lifts.” While the National Taxpayer Advocate understands the importance of each of these areas to tax administration, at current funding and staffing levels the IRS will not be able to deliver on these programs and also improve or correct core processes and systems. The negative impact to taxpayers of not funding everyday improvements to IRS taxpayer service, revenue protection, and compliance activities is significant.

Because the IT workforce is stretched so thin, it slows the already glacial pace of the IRS’s move into a 21<sup>st</sup> century technology environment. The IRS’s inability to provide taxpayers with online access to their accounts and to digitally communicate with taxpayers places the IRS far behind other international tax administrations and the financial services sector. The slowdown or shutdown of IT support also compounds the impact of taxpayer service funding reductions, by driving taxpayers to make numerous telephonic or correspondence contacts with the IRS just to get information about their accounts. Moreover, it forces the IRS to continue using archaic compliance methods like correspondence examinations, when a “virtual” face-to-face audit would bring about better and more accurate results in terms of taxpayer response, issue resolution, and taxpayer education.

The Taxpayer Advocate Service has keenly felt this IT shortfall, when work on its once-in-a-generation revision of its case management system stopped short on March 31, 2014, due to a lack of available funds. The work stoppage was based on the IRS’s need to prioritize its IT projects and direct all available resource to the three key priorities — ACA, FATCA, and the 2015 filing season.

Over a decade ago, TAS began a major redesign effort of its case management and case assignment system, which soon expanded to include all of TAS’s activities, including systemic

advocacy and research. This effort will culminate in the release of the Taxpayer Advocate Service Integrated System — TASIS.

As part of a strategic plan to develop an integrated system that allowed for seamless movement and access to cases, projects, research, and archives, over the last decade TAS instituted time-reporting, case complexity factors, and developed a data-driven formula for case assignment. We wanted an easy-to-use method for our case advocacy employees to identify and elevate systemic issues that they encounter in the cases, and we wanted to have a sophisticated method of searching our rich repository of information so that projects and data are easily identified and retrieved. Thus we created a library of key terms (metadata) that is applied to both cases and projects.

In recommending an integrated design, TAS emphasized electronic document management, *i.e.*, storage within the system for case files, communications, and research findings and the reduction of paper files.<sup>1</sup> This capability is needed because paper records pose efficiency and reliability problems, including time-consuming file retrieval, opportunity for loss, and limited ability to share information between offices.

We developed and staffed an Intake Advocate (IA) position, to ensure that TAS cases would be as fully developed as possible at the first contact with the taxpayer for assignment to the appropriate case advocate and eliminating the delays associated with reassigning cases. We developed procedures for identifying instances where, with a little guidance from the IA, the taxpayer could actually resolve the problem him or herself. With the IA position in place, the new TAS system would be designed to facilitate the initial interview and related case-building, including automatically retrieving relevant information from other IRS systems.

We knew we wanted to communicate digitally with taxpayers — both receiving and sending information and documents, and sending automated reminders to taxpayers or IRS employees as needed to keep cases on track toward resolution. Taxpayers would be able to submit electronic requests for TAS assistance, and they could check on the status of their cases online without having to call their case advocate for an update. Finally, we wanted to move into a paperless environment. All significant materials would be converted to digital files, promoting ease of access and sharing, and eliminating costs of document storage, shipping, archiving, and retrieval. All of these features were designed to minimize the time spent on duplicative keystrokes and data entry, and manual retrieval or requests for information from other functions, so that TAS employees' precious time could be spent on direct communication with and advocating for taxpayers rather than clerical tasks.

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<sup>1</sup> Reliance on paper files and documents requires storage and handling of 50 to 60 documents for each TAS case, or approximately 12.5 million documents each year. This includes hard copies as well as records kept on employees' local hard drives. TAS incurs repeated copying and shipping costs for transfers, work reviews, and collaboration. The use of virtual documents will almost eliminate costs associated with paper document-handling and storage, allow immediate access for collaboration, and improve TAS's ability to reference the products or conduct research.

In summary, TASIS is a sophisticated case, project, and work assignment system that has already been identified by the IRS's Chief Technology Officer as a potential foundation for an Enterprise Case Management System for the IRS. The IRS currently has about 167 case management systems used by different IRS units. This diversity of systems is one reason it is so difficult for IRS employees and taxpayers to find out precisely what the IRS is doing when an issue crosses different IRS functional units. There is no "integrated" or "enterprise-wide" system. Thus, TASIS could be a key component in the IRS's Business Modernization Strategy.

TASIS was approved by the IRS in 2007. In FY 2011 and 2012, TAS collaborated with the IRS's IT organization to successfully document over 4,400 system requirements for TASIS (*i.e.*, statements that explain the desired functionality of the system). The requirements reflect the future state of how TAS will operate with the creation of TASIS. TAS arrived at these requirements by asking each of TAS's 2,000 employees to describe what they needed from the system that they interact with for at least eight hours each work day. TAS accumulated those "wish lists" and incorporated them into the business requirements for TASIS. Thus, TASIS is a system that has been designed, in large part, by the needs of the users and the end beneficiaries — the taxpayers.<sup>2</sup>

IT then analyzed the most efficient way to build the foundation of TASIS to ensure the integrated system will meet TAS's needs. IT's analysis resulted in the recommendation to use a commercial off the shelf (COTS) product, rather than building the application from scratch or using another existing platform. The recommendation was based on the finding that the COTS product would cost less and take less time than these other options.<sup>3</sup> The IRS estimated that using the COTS product would cost \$10 million to develop TASIS, as compared with \$50 million for modifying IRS's Account Management System (AMS) to include the same functionality as MicroPact's Entellitrak. In March 2014 IT reported in its FY 2014 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Investment Report to the Ominbus Appropriation Committee that the total estimated Development, Enhancement and Modernization (DME) costs to develop TASIS are now estimated to be \$19.5 million. This is almost double the original cost estimate to develop the COTS project, largely because IT did not sufficiently understand the sophistication of the system's requirements, and did not adequately map the custom requirements to the COTS product.

In FY 2013, the first version of TASIS was developed. In early FY 2014, TAS and IT began testing the application using high-level TAS business scenarios. This round of testing began in December 2013 and was expected to conclude in mid-April 2014. Meanwhile

<sup>2</sup> TAS established 21 teams to include over 170 TAS Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who actively participated in all aspects of the TASIS build cycles. As noted, in the infancy of TASIS, all TAS employees had the opportunity to submit ideas for consideration. TASIS project leaders assessed all such ideas and where feasible made them part of the requirements. TAS also held routine meetings over the past four years to gain executive strategic input on improving daily operations and program effectiveness, so we can develop the system to the satisfaction of all functions within TAS.

<sup>3</sup> Entellitrak is a data tracking and management platform that appears to have the capability to extend its out-of-the-box functionality to incorporate and meet all of TAS's requested requirements. Entellitrak can be configured continuously throughout the design, development, and maintenance phases by adjusting model workflows and business processes without additional programming.

TAS notified the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) about the roll-out of TASIS, then scheduled for December 2014, and conducted briefings and discussions on impact and implementation.

All of this activity came to a screeching halt on March 31, 2014, when the National Taxpayer Advocate was informed that the IRS had pulled all funding for TASIS testing and deployment activities. Contractors were released or moved off of the project; IT personnel were reassigned. The National Taxpayer Advocate was not consulted about this decision.

Moreover, it appears that IRS leadership did not have an adequate understanding of the scope of the project, the amount spent on the program, the amount necessary to complete FY 2014 activity, and the amount of progress made on the project (*i.e.*, on track for deployment and engagement with NTEU). Nor did leadership consider that the IRS must now incur substantial cost to shore up TAS's obsolete case management system, which is scheduled to be retired in April 2015.

Since the onset of the work stoppage, the National Taxpayer Advocate and her staff have negotiated a continuation of one aspect of work, which will ensure that all defects that have been identified through testing to-date are described in a pristine set of technical requirements, and that there is an accurate schedule of testing and deployment activities if development resumes on October 1, 2015. At this time, we have been given a tentative deployment date of November, 2015, fully 21 months after the initial estimate, and 11 months after the deployment date in place before the work stoppage. This tentative deployment date is contingent upon full project resumption on October 1, 2014.

We do know that once funds are secured, the first release will include approximately 40 percent of requested system requirements, focusing on Case Advocacy and including an intake process, partial automation of workload distribution, and support of virtual case resolution and storage.

Specifically, the first release will contain the following:

- Intake Advocates will be able to conduct a comprehensive interview with the taxpayer. They will have the tools to perform research, document the contact, and efficiently build the case during these initial interviews.
- Once the case is built, TASIS will quickly match the taxpayer with a TAS office based on where the taxpayer lives. A manager will then manually assign the case based on availability, skill, and workload of the Case Advocate, all of which TASIS will provide. The full automation of workload routing and case assignment will be delivered in later releases.
- The system will have the ability to store electronic documents, *i.e.*, storage within the system for case files, communications, and research findings.
- The system will support electronic collaboration between TAS employees and IRS operating divisions.

## **B. TESIS Will Incorporate Modern Technological Advances That Will Provide Significant Benefits to Taxpayers, Employees, and Partners in Tax Administration.**

TAS's current systems, which TESIS was designed to replace, have not kept pace with rapid innovations in technology and the surge of online interaction capabilities for TAS employees and their customers. This lack of modernization leaves TAS employees with strict limitations on electronic avenues in which to communicate and collaborate with other IRS employees and taxpayers. Current TAS and IRS systems were designed and developed in a stand-alone fashion, sharing little if any information electronically. TESIS will link all TAS applications within a single integrated system. This is the most significant technical innovation in the 30-year history of TAS and its predecessor, the Problem Resolution Program.

*TESIS will automate work processes and research activities, eliminate manual and redundant steps, and allow TAS employees to spend more time on their core mission of advocating for taxpayers.* TESIS will allow employees to obtain automated information from IRS systems, sparing hours of researching, updating, and monitoring taxpayer accounts and records. This will free Case Advocates and Intake Advocates to focus on direct interaction with taxpayers and resolution of taxpayer issues, increasing employee engagement while satisfying customers.

*TESIS will support interaction between TAS employees and external customers via email, text, and fax.* TAS will ensure these interactions operate within guidelines that place the highest priority on the security of taxpayer data.

*TESIS will both improve and provide new avenues for the process of seeking assistance from TAS.* Taxpayers will still have the current options of contacting TAS by phone, correspondence, and walk-in, with the added choice of seeking help via the Internet for the growing number who prefer to conduct business electronically. This option will allow for an initial interaction through a series of prompts that will help taxpayers identify issues, find self-help when appropriate, access IRS contact information, and request TAS assistance.

*TESIS will support electronic collaboration between TAS employees and IRS operating divisions.* The system will include a secure area for the operating divisions to electronically receive and respond to Operations Assistance Requests (OARs) from TAS. This will reduce the need to mail or fax such requests and provide an automated history of case interactions.

### **C. TASIS Will Improve and Streamline the Acceptance and Assignment of Work.**

Taxpayers who seek help by phone or online will communicate directly with a TAS Intake Advocate, as opposed to the current paper referral and subsequent callback. The Intake Advocate will conduct a comprehensive interview with the taxpayer to:

- Identify underlying issues;
- Share options for resolution;
- Describe what to expect from TAS;
- Build the case; and
- Sometimes resolve the issue while talking to the taxpayer.

TASIS will provide Intake Advocates with tools to conduct research, document the contact, and efficiently build the case during these interviews. After this initial process, TASIS will quickly match the taxpayer with a Case Advocate based on where the taxpayer lives (predominantly matching taxpayers with advocates in their home states), and the availability, skill, and workload of the employee. The raw number of cases in the advocate's current inventory will no longer determine assignments. Instead, new assignments will consider complexity, the time and steps needed to resolve similar issues, the skills and abilities of case advocates (including the employee's need for training, development, or experience), and the case advocate's availability (including scheduled training or annual or sick leave). TASIS will replace the existing manual assignment process that often involves interoffice transfers of cases and causes delays. TASIS will also allow us to systemically and immediately reroute cases to other offices in the event of a national disaster or other local work stoppage, ensuring ongoing taxpayer assistance.

#### **D. TASIS Will Improve Online Document Collaboration and Storage.**

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Moving toward a paperless environment, TASIS will offer document collaboration tools to gather and track edits, reviews, and approvals from remotely located users resulting in increased productivity. It will also manage supporting documentation and reference materials associated with documents and offer access to earlier reports and research. Finally, TASIS will provide tools to map project delivery documents so participants and oversight users can see upcoming deadlines, assignments, and progress on the delivery of a finished product. Document collaboration and a centralized document repository will make content searchable and improve its usefulness.

## E. TESIS Will Enhance TAS Case Management (Intake and Case) Procedures.

To prepare for the rollout of TESIS, TAS must review and revise approximately 40 Internal Revenue Manual (IRM) sections. Some may only need minor changes, but most require extensive edits and additions. TAS case processing IRMs contain procedures for the following phases of casework:

- Receiving and adding cases to TAMIS;
- Assigning cases;
- Transferring cases;
- Taking initial actions and making initial contacts with taxpayers and representatives;
- Making subsequent contacts with taxpayers;
- Communicating case information and progress to taxpayers;
- Documenting case actions on TAMIS;
- Referring cases for advice from technical advisors *e.g.*, attorney advisors, management, or in some cases the NTA.
- Obtaining case direction from the Internal Technical Advisors (ITAP) team;
- Submitting Operations Assistance Requests (OARs) to other IRS units, with written expectations for following up on those requests and elevating disagreements over recommended actions;
- Issuing Taxpayer Assistance Orders (TAOs) to the IRS, and the TAO appeal process; and
- Closing cases, including requirements for the content of closing contacts with taxpayers, and documents to be kept in the case file.

TESIS will impact all of these procedures. While some policies and expectations will remain the same, enhanced capabilities under TESIS will eliminate or simplify certain manual tasks or actions and will require new policies and procedures. Additionally, TESIS will enable IRS operating divisions to record responses to OARs and TAOs, eliminating the need for TAS employees to manually enter information from OAR paperwork and TAO responses into the system. Guidance regarding the transmission and elevation of OARs and TAOs must be modified to reflect how TAS and the IRS will record interactions. IRS access to TESIS for purposes of responding to OARs and TAOs creates the need for TAS to not only renegotiate our Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the operating divisions, but to train employees who will have access to TESIS.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> TAS establishes Service Level Agreements with each IRS operating division and function to outline the procedures and responsibilities for processing TAS casework when the authority to complete case transactions rests outside of TAS.



With about 40 IRM sections affected, the IRM review process will take months because each section will undergo a rigorous review that includes solicitation of reactions and suggestions from TAS employees, TAS leadership, and other stakeholders (including the operating divisions.) Training for TASIS, therefore, must include training on IRM changes.

## **F. TAS and IT Partners Continue Toward Deployment of Release 1 Despite Funding Cessation.**

In October 2012, many efforts began to materialize for the successful production of Release 1. The first substantive step was MicroPact being awarded the contract to use Entellitrak as the foundation for TASIS development.

Release One was constructed through several build-cycles, in which MicroPact hosted virtual meetings to interview TAS SMEs to clarify and confirm they have a clear understanding of a pre-determined set of system requirements. Simultaneously, MicroPact configured or built TASIS using those clarified requirements. Meanwhile, a Lockheed Martin contractor worked with the SMEs to create test cases, documented scenarios to walk through specific business processes from beginning to end. TAS employees then accessed TASIS and walked through each build-cycle to ensure the system met the requirements. The project then moved on to the next cycle until all were complete.

Once the build-cycles were complete, testing began. In December 2013, TAS and IT started testing the application by using a pre-determined set of business scenarios. The testing was planned for two weeks but was delayed due to the large number of defects identified, and the need for re-testing once MicroPact corrected the problems.

In January 2014, TAS TASIS team leads and Program Management Office (PMO) personnel participated in a Customer Technical Review (CTR) led by MicroPact. This was an opportunity to see the application first-hand, walk through high-level business scenarios, validate the product meets the requirements, pose questions, and provide input. In February 2014, a similar review was conducted with TAS executives, Senior Managers, and core TAS PMO personnel. This Executive Technical Review (ETR) was also led by MicroPact and was the first opportunity for this group to see the application end to end. TAS analyzed the findings from CTR and ETR and concluded all the findings can be tied to unmet requirements. MicroPact has agreed to correct all findings prior to the deployment of Release 1.

On March 31, 2014, the TASIS project experienced a funding pause for development and support activities. The National Taxpayer Advocate and the IRS Chief Technology Officer (CTO) immediately began discussions about how to continue progress on TASIS during this period. Those discussions resulted in TAS initiating a \$1.8 million transfer to IT, but due to Chief Financial Officer rules, TAS could only send over \$1.5 million, to align and clarify TAS original business requirements in alignment with the Entellitrak software solution. These funds and resources allowed the creation of a cross-organizational Requirements Tiger Team that is supporting activities through the end of the fiscal year.

These efforts will validate the schedule and the budget estimates to support the FY 2015 budget request. In addition, TAS will collaborate with IT to continue to prepare for the new system and detail the plans for the business transition. These efforts will assist in prioritization of development activities and continue the preparations for training and testing on the current design. This initiative will set priorities supporting the full project resumption in October 2014.

### **Business Transition**

TAS has a business transition strategy that addresses the migration of critical in-process case work; training that leverages the new tool for increased advocacy; accommodation of downstream business transitions; and collaboration with Operating Divisions. The TAS PMO oversees these activities to ensure a seamless transition to TASIS and to guarantee all business processes are considered and protected during the transition.

### ***Data Migration***

To serve taxpayers in critical need of assistance, TAS partnered with IT in defining detailed mapping to guarantee that the transfer of taxpayer case data in the retiring TAMIS system will convert accurately to TASIS. Data migration parameters include but are not limited to:

- The move of all data from TAMIS to TASIS.
- Ownership of the case remaining static to protect the established relationships between the taxpayer and assigned Case Advocate.
- A full history of actions taken while the cases were in TAMIS so the Case Advocate has a clear case history in TASIS.

### **TAS Will Deliver Extensive User Training**

To implement a smooth and successful transition to TASIS, users will receive timely and comprehensive training that enables them to move to the new system quickly, with no negative impact on their advocacy services with their customers and taxpayers. The scope of training encompasses TAS employees as well as IRS users.

TAS has an extensive training plan to address employees' training needs based on their work responsibilities and their assigned roles in TASIS. Training will include pre-classroom activities and communications and classroom instruction designed to:

- Raise employee awareness and manage expectations by letting employees know what they can expect in Release 1 and future releases;
- Increase employees' level of comfort with the conversion to TASIS;
- Create an understanding of how TASIS will better support TAS's advocacy and enable us to work more effectively and efficiently; and
- Ensure continuation of TAS's advocacy efforts with and for taxpayers by enabling users to move seamlessly into the TASIS environment.

While much of the training content will center on system features and functionality, it will also include changes to work processes and procedures that make use of TASIS' enhanced functionality. The overall training plan will introduce these case processing changes to employees before they receive formal classroom instruction.

Other pre-classroom training activities will include on line demonstrations, videos, and communications highlighting TASIS features that will improve employees' quality of work life and enhance TAS advocacy. TAS executives, senior managers, and TASIS experts will deliver key messages up to, and through, system deployment.

Classroom training will teach TAS and IRS employees how to access and maneuver within TASIS. This provides a venue for users to learn firsthand the benefit of having a state of the art application at their fingertips that will enhance their advocacy efforts. Classes will be delivered virtually and face-to-face where feasible. Students will also receive job aids, student user guides, and hands-on practice to acclimate them to the new application.

### Downstream Business Transitions

Many of the downstream business transitions include positive changes in case management and maintenance. For example, the labor-intensive process of including closing paper information will become electronic. Laborious efforts of maintaining paper case files, filing, interfiling, and associating will no longer be required; nor will the space those cases files occupied. Because of this access to electronic case files, TAS will be able to provide quicker and more accurate updates to the taxpayer. The following are just a few of the downstream business improvements:

- Interface with other IRS systems, eliminating key entry. As just one example, Powers of Attorney previously had to be manually entered into TAMIS even though they existed on the IRS's Centralized Authorization File. TASIS will pull the data automatically.
- Increased, timely cooperation with other business units.
- Recordation of non-TAS work previously handled outside TAMIS, *e.g.*, telephone calls to a local TAS office regarding SSA issues, mailing address, requests for state information, and many others. (A bonus here is the ability to understand this work and take steps to handle it efficiently.)
- Reduced taxpayer burden since documents will be scanned and retained, providing ease of access and eliminating duplication.
- New abilities to quickly take the best actions to resolve a taxpayer problem and to identify new approaches.

## G. Future Release Schedule and Delivery

IT, TAS, and MicroPact began initial discussions in the second quarter of FY 2013 to determine how the remaining 60 percent of system requirements (beyond the 40 percent in Release 1) will be distributed and delivered throughout future releases. All agreed that since TAS already provided a prioritized list of processes, that the next step is for IT and MP to analyze the most efficient manner in which to segment the remaining requirements and provide alternatives where appropriate for TAS consideration.

TAS is greatly concerned that although initial discussions began in early 2013, IT and MicroPact have not shared any information concerning their analysis since, and have asked to suspend those talks. The recent funding cessation complicates these issues further. Future releases rely upon the IT and MicroPact analysis and recommendations; without them, the project cannot move forward.

Future releases will enable taxpayers and their representatives to submit issues and request TAS assistance via the Internet. For TAS to fully realize the benefits of its modernized intake and case management processes, the second release must include full implementation of TAS's case assignment and inventory system. Future releases also will include other components of TAS's advocacy, allowing employees to identify and refer systemic issues within an open case. TAS is currently exploring how much of this latter work can be done with other products, including Sharepoint (discussed below), which can be integrated into TASIS on an ongoing basis.

## H. Project Risks

TASIS is a complex system and because it is user-driven, it presents certain challenges, not the least of which is marrying the two cultures of TAS and IT. All critical activities, and their known dependencies, are tracked and monitored for timely completion via a Risk Review Board (RRB) which is comprised of and chaired by TAS and IT senior management. The board documents and monitors risks and mitigation strategies are at the earliest stages to maximize the most efficient resolution. Known risks include, but are not limited to:

- The cessation of project funding on March 31, 2014.
- IT created a master project plan to outline critical activities that must be met by pre-determined dates for TASIS to deploy. That initial plan projected deployment in the second quarter of FY 2014. However, it did not include all critical activities and dependencies, nor did it consider realistic timeframes to complete those activities. This resulted in the deployment date slipping several times, as well as the creation of several new versions of the plan. The most recent version lists a deployment date of December 19, 2014, although it is glaringly obvious that this date will also change due to the lapse of funding. In the minute chance that we secure funding in the very near future and the December deployment date is still on the table, deploying a new system on the Friday before one of the most popular leave periods for employees is not advantageous. That date also falls just a few short weeks before the beginning of the next filing season. More importantly, TAS does not have much confidence in the plan as it still does not include realistic timeframes. For example, Functional Unit Testing that was scheduled to span two weeks actually took 18 weeks. If similar discrepancies in testing timeframes materialize, we will have to adjust the deployment date again. Any more slippage will impact W&I support of the NTA toll-free line and require training both TAS and W&I employees during filing season. If IT does not update the master project plan to include realistic timeframes for each activity, the deployment date risks additional delays with direct impact on TAS and W&I.
- We discovered a large number of defects during testing and high-level reviews. Though MicroPact has agreed to fix all of them prior to deployment of Release 1, as of early April 2014, less than 40 percent have been fixed thus far. Failure to resolve all of them could cause significant harm to taxpayers and undermine the usefulness of TASIS.
- If we continue to find this many defects in future testing, such as System Acceptance and User Acceptance Testing, we may need to extend their timeframes to allow MicroPact to fix the problems.
- Conversations continue at the highest levels of IT to ensure the project is fully funded for things planned for Release 1. Future releases also are not planned or funded, which creates an additional risk to delivering the full scope of the project.

## Fostering Online Collaboration and Business Process Enhancements via SharePoint 2010

TASIS will integrate with Microsoft SharePoint 2010 (SP 2010), a web-based application used on the IRS intranet for content management and document collaboration. In 2009, TAS identified SP 2010 as a tool to:

- Address critical needs in document storage and management;
- Streamline collaboration and approval processes;
- Connect and empower project teams;
- Reduce and control costs; and
- Respond rapidly to business needs.

The IRS began implementing SP 2010 in late 2011. TAS has since decided to integrate SP 2010 with TASIS. On a daily basis, TAS employees search past advocacy documents, job aids, Annual Reports, and other materials for specific information. Existing search tools have been ineffective, which often forced the employee to attempt an extremely inefficient manual search. Now, however, TAS can maximize the capabilities of SP 2010 with predefined key terms called metadata to locate specific information. When a user adds a document in SP 2010, the system asks him or her to select specific terms to classify the data. This allows the search feature to return all matching content, eliminating the need for a secondary search.

With the integration of SP 2010 in TASIS, TAS is positioned to take full advantage of the new features and benefits and abilities of seamless online collaboration. By virtue of an extensive knowledge of the software, TAS has already established many new capabilities such as workflows that automate key business processes and user-defined key words to find documents faster and more efficiently. This technological leadership has allowed TAS to join with the IRS's IT organization and chart the best course of action for sharing knowledge, and establishing information management policies and governance, across the IRS.

TAS decided SP 2010 could meet critical business needs not being addressed in the early releases of TASIS (discussed above) while simultaneously reducing the future burden on IT. TAS has already implemented several automated workflows that eliminate anywhere from a few to many manual steps from the processes they replaced. These workflows allow users to focus on substantive advocacy, while the system keeps up with the actual process.

In addition to the gains in efficiency, the automation reduces or eliminates human error, increasing the quality of the output. Many current processes support the development of the Annual Report to Congress and the Objectives Report to Congress, semi-automate document reviews and comments, and enhance approval and tracking of IRS-wide collaborative efforts. All of the business processes targeted for replacement rely heavily on document collaboration. Some of these efforts, and the steps automated by SP 2010, are listed below:

- Annual and Objectives Report to Congress workflows:
  - Topic solicitation and approval
  - Generation, collaboration, review, and approval of topic synopsis, narratives, and executive summary
  - Research and Information Requesting routing and approval
- Internal Management Document (IMD) workflow changes to IRM sections, policy statements, forms, etc.
  - Automated receipt
  - Collaborative review
  - Consolidated feedback
- Collaborative efforts to identify and track recommendations by cross-functional teams and the IRS Executive Steering Committee.
- Creation and implementation of SP 2010 reporting metrics
- Elevated issues
- Workflow requests
- Continuous Learning requests

TAS continues to define, refine, and implement additional automated workflows to further lessen the burden on TAS's employees.

One of the biggest challenges facing TAS, W&I, SB/SE, LB&I and most of the other BODs is that IT does not consider SP 2010 a mission-critical application. As a result, the SharePoint Project Office is consistently underfunded and often lacks the necessary resources or technical expertise to maintain the SP 2010 environment.

To mitigate the risk associated with the non-mission critical level of support and funding, TAS and other BODs are investigating the possibility of migrating to the Department of Treasury's SP 2010 environment. This environment is stable, with well-defined processes, more capacity, and many times the number of supporting staff than the IRS.

TAS will continue to leverage the document collaboration and business process automation capabilities of SP 2010 to meet current and future business requirements whenever possible.

### *Welcome Screen*

TASIS will include a SharePoint portal, the Welcome Screen, as an entry point to provide employees direct access to numerous sources of information in a single view. This Welcome Screen will show users a monthly calendar allowing them to see planned tasks and better organize and plan their work. For more urgent actions, a task box will provide

a consolidated view of activities that are due or coming due in the next few days. The Welcome Screen will also serve as a communications portal, allowing a single view for the delivery of important messages such as: alerts about office closures and system outages, regular communications (*e.g.*, the weekly e-newsletters for employees and managers), as well as announcements and guidance from the National Taxpayer Advocate. TAS will be able to target these communications to specific segments of employees and require them to read important messages. Lastly, the Welcome Screen will provide direct access to the many systems TAS uses for advocacy and other daily operations. This consolidated, user-centric approach is critical to enabling our staff to provide more efficient and timely advocacy for taxpayers.