

TAS Technology

As discussed earlier in this report, the National Taxpayer Advocate has recently learned the IRS does not plan to complete the Taxpayer Advocate Service Integrated System (TASIS), which was halted in March 2014 after \$20 million was spent on it.¹ TAS is working to ensure the foundational elements of TASIS are incorporated into the broader IRS enterprise case management (ECM) project. While TASIS was in limbo, TAS proactively sought out, and in many cases funded, innovative technology solutions to address some of its business needs TASIS would have fulfilled. These efforts include:

- Pursuit of TAMIS digital document attachments;
- Dynamic data reporting through the Tableau platform;
- Use of SharePoint for business process efficiencies; and
- Participation in the IRS's Taxpayer Digital Communications (TDC) pilot project.

Pursuit of Taxpayer Advocate Management Information System (TAMIS) Digital Document Attachments

TAS is pursuing the digital document attachment capabilities in TAMIS, which will simplify case management. Specifically, digital document attachments will reduce the manual paper-processing burden for both TAS and IRS employees, reduce cycle time in resolving cases for taxpayers, and support the IRS "Future State" vision of electronic communication. Despite these savings, Information Technology (IT) initially denied TAS's request, citing lack of funding or restating the restrictions that bind IT support solely for legislative enhancements. After the National Taxpayer Advocate elevated this issue for reconsideration to the IT Chief Information Officer and IRS Commissioner, IT has agreed to fund the endeavor.

Dynamic Data Reporting Through the Tableau Platform

TAS is using Tableau, a data analytics software platform, to provide data reporting and advanced visualization capabilities. Tableau can interface with some of TAS's systems such as TAMIS and the Systemic Advocacy Management System, allows user interaction with large volumes of data, and displays the results as dynamic, interactive reports. As an example, Tableau can create reports that highlight data for the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC), which makes the data easy to understand and enables pattern recognition and analysis.

Use of SharePoint for Business Process Efficiencies

TAS continues to leverage the capabilities of SharePoint to promote business process effectiveness and efficiencies through seamless collaboration opportunities to share, organize, and manage data. This includes the creation of new workflow processes to streamline and automate items such as the Reports to Congress, employee suggestions, training and spending requests, and outreach events. TAS also plans to use SharePoint for future workflow processes including IRS research information requests, the Taxpayer Advocacy Panel, recruitment needs, National Taxpayer Advocate congressional testimony, Business Performance Reviews, and the Quality Review Program, thereby eliminating manual tracking and reminders and creating audit trails.

1 See Area of Focus: *While the IRS Has Made Encouraging Progress on Its Enterprise Case Management (ECM) Project, Much Work Remains to Be Done for the Project to Succeed*, *supra*.

Participation in the IRS's Taxpayer Digital Communications (TDC) Pilot Project

TAS is participating in a TDC pilot project, which began in the third quarter of fiscal year 2017. This project offers taxpayers the ability to communicate and share information with TAS's case advocates using a secure, web-based portal without the need to mail or fax documents. Taxpayers will be able to access the system from anywhere that they have an internet connection, including a smartphone, tablet, or computer to assist in resolving their case. This pilot project is taking place in four TAS offices, with taxpayer participation by invitation only, and includes Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and levy cases. TAS plans on participating in the pilot for no less than six months.

The launch of this new communications system was done in stages with each site receiving face-to-face training and then launching that following week. The first site received training the week of March 17, 2017 in Dallas, and began offering this option to qualified taxpayers on April 5, 2017. Nashville training was the week of April 3, 2017, with a launch the week of April 10, 2017. New Orleans training was the week of April 17, 2017, with a launch the week of April 24, 2017, and the final site, Cleveland, received the training the week of April 24, 2017 and launched May 1, 2017.

TAS also created an interim guidance memorandum outlining rules and procedures for working these types of cases using the new system. It was made available to the public on April 13, 2017.²

The pilot is designed to test whether TDC enhances communication and information sharing between TAS employees and taxpayers. The goal of testing EITC cases is to see if taxpayers can create online accounts and clear the IRS's multi-factor verification process, which will be necessary for all digital communication with the IRS. Of those taxpayers who can create an online account, TAS is gathering more details about their experience and seeks information to answer the following questions:

- Were taxpayers able to access their accounts in a timely manner?
- Were taxpayers able to use their accounts as intended?
- Did taxpayers communicate well through this system?
- Did taxpayers respond and provide documentation through the portal? and
- Were taxpayers unwilling to use the portal and why?

Taxpayer participant responses and those who are declining system use for case resolution are currently being captured. The National Taxpayer Advocate anticipates having this data by the end of 2017, which will shed light on the ability of TAS's taxpayers to participate in the IRS's "Future State" vision of online digital communications.³

2 IRS, Internal Guidance Memorandum *Taxpayer Digital Communications (TDC) Pilot*, https://www.irs.gov/pub/foia/ig/spder/tas_13_0417_001_tdc_igm_.pdf.

3 IRS, *About EITC*, <https://www.eitc.irs.gov/EITC-Central/abouteitc> (last visited Dec. 31, 2016).