

## VII Integrated TAS Technology

### A. TAS Is Striving to Bring its Systems into the 21st Century

TAS's current systems have not kept pace with rapid innovations in technology and the explosion 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. The linking of all TAS applications within a single integrated system has been a part of TAS's plans for over a decade. Now, advancing technology and the obsolescence of TAS's primary system for tracking cases make this integration essential. The Taxpayer Advocate Service Integrated System (TASIS) is the prescribed solution. It will be the most significant technical innovation in the 30-year history of TAS and its predecessor, the Problem Resolution Program.

Further evidence of the need for innovation is that current TAS and IRS systems were designed and developed in a stand-alone fashion, sharing little if any information electronically. TAS employees must:

- Access and retrieve data from numerous TAS and IRS applications, resulting in repetitive key strokes, analysis, and documentation.
- Manually cut and paste or re-type information from one system to another.

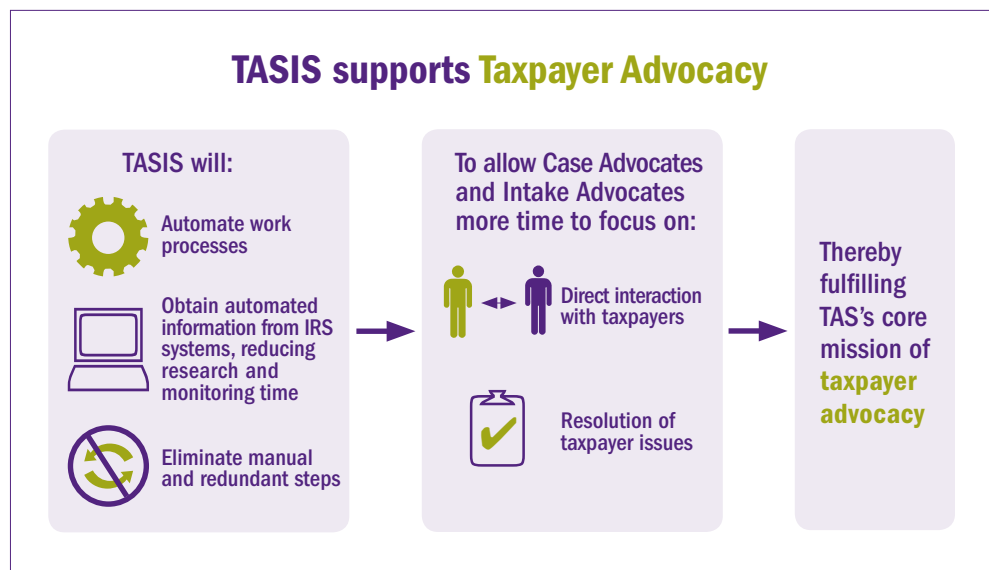
This requires additional time and resources while increasing both the risk of inaccuracies and the time spent to resolve cases. TASIS will integrate the stand-alone systems into one and automate the exchange of information with other IRS systems. TAS and IRS leaders enthusiastically supported the TASIS concept and championed the project, which received initial funding in 2010.

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

*TASIS will automate work processes, eliminate manual and redundant steps, and allow TAS employees to spend more time on their core mission of advocating for taxpayers.* TASIS will allow employees to obtain automated information from IRS systems, sparing laborious 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.

*TASIS 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.

TASIS 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 options for self-help when appropriate, access IRS contact information, and request TAS assistance.



TASIS 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 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. Intake Advocates 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 in some instances 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 initial 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 and the time and steps needed to resolve similar issues. TESIS will replace the existing manual assignment process that often involves interoffice transfers of cases and causes delays.

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

In recommending an integrated design, systems analysts emphasized electronic document management, *i.e.*, storage within the system for case files, communications, and research findings. 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.

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

Moving toward a paperless environment, TESIS will offer document collaboration tools to gather and track edits, reviews, and approvals from remotely located users. It will also manage supporting documentation and reference materials associated with documents and offer access to earlier reports and research. Finally, TESIS 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. IRS Information Technology Recommends Entellitrak for the Base of the TESIS Platform**

In FY 2011 and 2012, TESIS took the first step toward an integrated system by collaborating with the IRS's Information Technology (IT) organization to successfully document over 4,400 system requirements for TESIS (*i.e.*, statements that explain the desired functionality of the system). The requirements reflect the future state of how TESIS will operate with the creation of TESIS.

IT extensively analyzed the most efficient way to build the foundation of TESIS to ensure the integrated system will meet TESIS's needs. This analysis resulted in the recommendation to utilize MicroPact's commercial off the shelf (COTS) product, Entellitrak, rather than building the application from scratch or using another existing platform. The recommendation is based on the finding that Entellitrak will cost less and take less time

than these other options. 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 requiring additional programming.

#### **F. TAS and IT Agree Upon TESIS Release One Content and Delivery Expectations**

IT plans to release TESIS in several phases until the entire application is fully deployed, and collaborated and agreed with TAS on the content to be delivered in release one. The current deployment schedule projects this first release for the second quarter of FY 2014. As of this publication, IT has submitted a proposed new release date for review and approval that will move deployment into the early part of the third quarter of FY 2014.<sup>1</sup> It 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.

Of the requirements highlighted and described above, 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, TESIS 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 TESIS 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.

#### **G. TAS and IT Establish Separate TESIS Project/Program Management Office (PMO) to Ensure a Smooth and Complete Deployment**

An immense amount of preparation is necessary for the successful deployment of TESIS. TAS and IT have very distinct activities involving the development, design, and the implementation of TESIS that must be completed prior to deployment of release one and future

<sup>1</sup> The expected change to delivery date is based on several factors, *i.e.*, change in architecture design, power shutdown and related issues, and sequestration.

releases. In the first quarter of FY 2013, IT ramped up resources and development activities, and established an IT TESIS Project Management Office (PMO). The IT PMO coordinates project activities through the TAS Business System Planning (BSP) office, IT partners, and outside contractors to handle the technological breadth and scope of the project.

Since then, TAS has established its own PMO to oversee the planning, internal management, and oversight of the project within our respective functions, as well as with internal and external customers impacted by the changes expected with the first release. This group will oversee the evolution of TAS business processes and prepare staff for the impact of all TESIS releases and the decommissioning of the Taxpayer Advocate Management Information System (TAMIS) in release one. The group is identifying, coordinating, and executing the changes required to business processes and procedures to leverage the new tool capabilities and to ensure continuity of operations. The group is also charged with creating a learning environment to guide and support employees prior to, during, and after the transition to TESIS, including an environment that will equip employees with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to perform successfully in TESIS. Most importantly, once employees can use the full range of TESIS functionality, they will be able to put more of their energy and focus into our core mission of advocacy as the new system automates work processes and eliminates time-consuming manual or redundant steps. The TAS PMO will create and support the model developed for incremental releases until full deployment of TESIS.

#### H. TESIS Functionality Will Change TAS Case Processing Procedures

To prepare for the rollout of TESIS, TAS must review and revise at least 40 IRM sections. Some may only require 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 to technical advisors *i.e.*, attorney advisors, management, or even the NTA for technical advice;
- Obtaining case direction from technical advisors;
- Submitting Operations Assistance Requests to other IRS units, including expectations for following up on those requests and elevating disagreements over recommended actions;

- Issuing Taxpayer Assistance Orders 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.

TASIS will impact all of these procedures. While some policies and expectations will remain the same, enhanced capabilities under TASIS will eliminate or simplify certain manual tasks or actions and will require some new policies and procedures. Additionally, TASIS 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 will require modification to reflect how TAS and the IRS will record interactions. IRS access to TASIS 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 develop and provide training for employees who will have access to TASIS.<sup>2</sup>

With 40 IRM sections impacted by TASIS, the IRM review process will take months to complete because each IRM 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.

## I. TAS Employee and Leadership Participation Ensures Product Satisfaction

TAS has played a very active role in the design and development of TASIS. Both TAS leaders and frontline employees have a voice on the design and functions of the system. TAS established 21 teams to include over 170 TAS Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who actively participated in all aspects of the TASIS build cycles. Early in the infancy phase of TASIS, all TAS employees were afforded the opportunity to submit their design and business process improvement ideas for consideration. TASIS project leaders assessed all such ideas and made them part of the requirements where feasible. TAS also held routine meetings over the past three years to gain executive strategic input on improving daily operations and program effectiveness, so the system is developed to the satisfaction of all functions within TAS. As the primary user, TAS continues to take a very hands-on approach in the design process to ensure that

- The system meets our needs;
- Is user-friendly and intuitive; and
- Incorporates some of the most appealing user interface options that other modern applications offer.

<sup>2</sup> TAS established 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.

The National Taxpayer Advocate hosts town hall meetings across the country with TAS employees to spread the word of the impact TESIS will have on their daily lives. Her message is that their voices were heard, their suggestions acted upon, and that they have played an essential role in building TESIS. TAS recorded and shared with all employees a town hall in Portland, Oregon where the National Taxpayer Advocate gave a detailed description of exactly how the life of a case advocate would change with the inception of TESIS.<sup>3</sup>

Since the project received funding three years ago, the National Taxpayer Advocate has also hosted five summits with key TAS TESIS team representatives, stakeholders, and senior management. The primary purpose and focus of each summit is to give incremental status updates on TESIS progress and afford all attendees an opportunity to comment on and approve new business processes, functionality, and the look and feel of the system.

The last summit differed from previous summits because attendees also included key project leaders from IT and MicroPact. This opportunity to meet with the IT partners and outline the expectations of TESIS gave IT a clear understanding of the expectations the National Taxpayer Advocate has for TESIS. Portions of the town hall meeting in Portland were also shared to give a better idea of precisely how much TAS employees, IRS employees, and taxpayers would be positively affected by TESIS.

### **J. TAS and IT Partners Take Strides Toward Deployment of Release One**

In October 2012, many efforts began to materialize for the successful production of Release One. The first substantive step was MicroPact being awarded the contract to use Entellitrak as the foundation for TESIS development. MicroPact, under the management of IT, is using an iterative process to design TESIS along with the cross-coordination of TAS SMEs to ensure all system requirements are delivered as expected.

Release one is being constructed through six build-cycles. Each build-cycle is comprised of MicroPact hosting 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 configures or builds TESIS using those clarified requirements while a Lockheed Martin contractor works with the SMEs to create use cases. Use cases are documented scenarios created to walk through specific business processes from beginning to end. TAS employees then access TESIS and walk through each use case to test the application to ensure the system meets the requirements to their satisfaction. Each build-cycle takes approximately 35 days. Once a cycle is complete, the project moves on to the next cycle until all are complete.

3 Audio portions of the Portland town hall meeting are included in a "State of TESIS" video that was sent to all TAS employees.

## K. Future Release Content 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 will be distributed and delivered throughout future releases. All agreed that since TAS already provided a prioritized list of TAS processes over a year ago, that the next step is for IT and MP to perform an analysis of the most efficient manner in which to segment the remaining system requirements and provide alternatives where appropriate for TAS consideration. TAS has great concern that although initial discussions began several months ago, IT and MicroPact have not shared any information concerning their analysis since. Future releases rely upon their analysis and recommendations; without either, the project cannot move forward. Future releases will incorporate the ability for taxpayers and their representatives to submit issues and request TAS assistance via the Internet. These releases will include other components of TAS's advocacy service, allowing employees to identify and refer systemic issues within an open case. Future releases will also allow real-time identification and analysis of systemic problems. TAS and its partners have not determined approximately how long it will take to fully deploy the application and allow TAS employees and customers to reap the rewards of a fully integrated system. Additional meetings for planning future releases must be conducted immediately or there will be a direct impact on IT's ability to deploy future releases with transparent succession. Failure to include TAS, a highly educated, aware, involved end-user, and customer, in these discussions will guarantee that the system will not meet our needs.

## L. 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, must be tracked and monitored for timely completion. Risks and mitigation strategies are documented and monitored at the earliest stage to maximize the most efficient resolution. Known risks include, but are not limited to:

- IT created a master project plan to outline critical activities that must be met by pre-determined dates for TASIS to deploy in the second quarter of FY 2014. However, the plan does not include all critical activities and dependencies, nor does it consider realistic timeframes to complete those activities. This has resulted in the deployment date slipping several times. Any additional slippage beyond the second quarter of FY 2014 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 all critical activities and dependencies and assign realistic deadlines for each activity, the deployment date risks additional slippage with direct impact on TAS and W&I.
- Approximately 30 percent of the business requirements are scheduled for completion in the sixth and final build cycle, which is the largest set of requirements planned for



any cycle to date. If MicroPact does not complete those remaining requirements prior to the scheduled end date of build cycle 6, then IT will have to revise the master project plan which may cause another delay in deployment.

- TAS can submit comments on each build cycle in MicroPact's Product Tracking System (PTS), the formal tracking mechanism used to capture TAS concerns and ensure all feedback is resolved to TAS satisfaction. There are 100 to 200 feedback items awaiting disposition by MicroPact and this particular activity is not included in the master project plan to indicate when it will be completed. If MicroPact does not address all feedback to TAS's satisfaction before beginning the official testing process, there is a risk that the agreed-upon requirements will not be delivered in Release One, resulting in significant harm to taxpayers and undermining TASIS' usefulness for TAS employees.
- The MicroPact contract does not provide for the creation and delivery of any training products or services to assist users on accessing, configuring, and navigating TASIS. These essential deliverables that must be secured to effectively train TAS and W&I staffs; however, the services must be opened to the public for bidding since the current contract has reached its funding ceiling. If a new contract is awarded to a vendor that has not been involved with the development of TASIS, the master project plan must be adjusted to incorporate additional time for that vendor to become familiar with the system.

### **M. Fostering Online Collaboration and Business Process Enhancements via Sharepoint 2010**

Microsoft SharePoint is a web-based application used on the IRS intranet for content management and document collaboration. The IRS is upgrading to the SharePoint 2010 platform (the latest available). In 2009, TAS identified SP 2010 as a tool to address critical needs in document storage and management, in streamlining collaboration and approval processes, connecting and empowering project teams, reducing and controlling costs, and responding rapidly to business needs.

On a daily basis, TAS employees search through past advocacy documents, job aids, Annual Reports, and other materials for specific information to fulfill advocacy tasks and address Congressionally-mandated objectives. Existing search tools have been ineffective, which often resulted in the employee attempting an extremely inefficient manual search. Now, however, TAS can maximize the capabilities of the new software with predefined key terms called metadata to locate specific information. When a user adds a document to SharePoint, 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.

TAS is positioned to take full advantage of the new features and benefits of SP 2010. By virtue of an extensive knowledge of the software, TAS has already leveraged many new

capabilities such as workflows<sup>4</sup> that automate key business processes and user-defined keywords to find documents faster and more efficiently. This technical leadership has allowed TAS to join with the IRS's Information Technology organization and chart the best course of action for sharing knowledge, and establishing information management policies and governance, across the IRS.

TAS decided to leverage the new SP 2010 platform to meet critical business needs not being addressed in the early releases of TESIS (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 current business processes they replaced. These workflows allow users to focus on completing more substantive advocacy work while the system keeps up with the actual process.

In addition to the gains in efficiency, the automation also reduces or eliminates human error, increasing the quality of the output. Many current processes support the development of the Annual Report to Congress and 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, are listed below:

- Annual Report to Congress report generation 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 for 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.

TAS is continuing to define, refine, and implement additional automated workflows. These will support the Objectives Report to Congress, Annual Report to Congress related processes, generation of internal communication requests, and the tracking of operational priorities, among others. The implementation of these additional processes will further lessen the burden on TAS's employees.

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<sup>4</sup> A pre-defined set of steps or actions associated with a work object.

Moreover, TAS has also completed significant work in managing its information and document storage in a systematic way, using predefined key words or terms that allow more intuitive document search and retrieval. TAS will maintain these key words as the foundation for our system of identifying documents and files on SP 2010. Consistency in this area is critical to ensure the new search capabilities enhance TAS's ability to complete its mission.

While TAS has already started to reap the benefits of the new software, there is more work to be done. TAS continues to relocate thousands of documents and other content to the new software and to partner with IT and other business units in hopes that the IRS will similarly embrace the new software. This should ultimately lead to much-needed collaboration and consistency across the IRS.

In FY 2014, TAS will:

- Create and implement SharePoint reporting metrics;
- Continue to identify and automate appropriate business processes;
- Update and maintain current functionality based on lessons learned and industry best practices; and
- Continue advocating for the use of SharePoint across the IRS.

#### N. Integrated Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Technology: Grant Solutions

To meet the President's Management Agenda, electronic government initiative, and Public Law 106-107 requirements for the selection and implementation of a comprehensive grants management system, the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Program Office selected Grant Solutions, a system developed by the Department of Health & Human Services. The initial phase, which was deployed during FY 2013, included:

- Online processing of grant applications and non-competitive continuation requests.
- Electronic issuance of funding announcements and the Notice of Grant Award.

The LITC Program Office anticipates completion of the final phase during FY 2014 and will take steps to test and implement the new system as well as informing and training users. In preparation

#### LITC program automates grants application process in FY 2013



Online processing of grant applications and non-competitive continuation requests.



Electronic issuance of funding announcements and the Notice of Grant Award.

for the final phase of Grant Solutions, the Program Office will undertake an aggressive communication plan that will:

- Announce the rollout of the final phase of Grant Solutions in the 2014 Publication 3319, *LITC Grant Application Package and Guidelines*. The instructions will guide applicants on using the system, and direct them on when to use the Grant Solutions system once they are selected for a grant.
- Present information at the LITC Annual Grantee Conference about the release of the final phase and how it impacts grantees.
- Post information and instruction for grantees about the deployment of the final phase in the online LITC Toolkit.

### Testing and Review of Grant Solutions

In preparation for the deployment of the final phase of Grant Solutions, the Program Office will test and review the system to ensure the program requirements have been incorporated and are working. The final release will include the following features:

- Grantees will be able to complete reporting forms and amendments online.
- LITC staff will have immediate access to data reported by grantees, allowing for better and timelier oversight.
- LITC staff will be able to timely and effectively review submissions and close out a grant year.

### Training and Implementation of Grant Solutions

As a final step, the LITC Program Office will work with the vendor to create and schedule training for grantees and staff on the new features and how to use them. This will include face-to-face classroom training for local LITC staff, and virtual sessions for grantees and remote staff.

The Grant Solutions system will streamline LITC processes by eliminating the need to maintain paper records and greatly reducing the need for LITC program staff to input data. In conjunction with the LITC performance measures in the reports, the new system will allow the Taxpayer Advocate Service to improve oversight of the LITC grant program.