

## ACEing Tax Collections

By Missy Siwik

Imagine if workers had to log on to 13 different systems to answer your customer's question, "How much do I owe you?" Or what if determining whether a refund should be mailed or applied to an outstanding balance required querying the same 13 systems? That was the situation in Arlington County, Va., where an array of separate systems had cropped up over the years.

We initiated a project to replace the county's disparate tax systems by implementing a single integrated Assessment Collection and Enterprise (ACE) system for all the county's taxes. We accomplished that using commercial off-the-shelf software.



Like Arlington County, many localities operate a variety of siloed systems. Such organizations should strongly consider the productivity enhancements they can gain by integrating legacy systems.

### Project Particulars

ACE is a joint project of the Arlington County Department of Technology Services and the offices of the Commissioner of Revenue and the Treasurer. Replacing five aging mainframe systems and an array of third-party Microsoft Access and Microsoft Excel-based systems, our new software integrates multiple data sources and system processes into one system that brings all of a customer's records under one account to provide a single view of each customer.

The ACE system fully integrates and allows for management of the assessment, billing and delinquency processes of 10 county taxes and dozens of additional receivables, including utilities, parking tickets and delinquent payments to various county agencies. In addition, it automates more than 50 interfaces to and from other county systems and external service providers.

The benefits of the integrated ACE system also extend to the web, where customers can review and manage their accounts and file and pay taxes and other receivables using the Customer Assessment and Payment Portal. CAPP ensures that customers can query their accounts and perform transactions whenever and wherever it's most convenient for them.

Additional benefits of the integrated ACE system include:

- An automated, controlled and auditable refund process, which increases efficiency and accuracy, reducing interest payments by the county by about half and decreasing the likelihood of fraud;
- Direct integration with the Electronic Records Management System, where tax filing documents and check images are stored, significantly reducing return and payment research time from hours to minutes;
- The ability to process payments prior to assessment posting, reducing errors and saving up to four days of payment reconciliation effort each month;

- Fully automated interfaces with other systems and external service providers, which include intelligent automated error handling. This automation reduces time-consuming manual effort and errors and significantly speeds the processes and enhances accuracy;
- Greatly improved accuracy, timeliness and accountability of receivables, revenues and cash. For the first time in the county's history, receivables, the general ledger and bank accounts can be accurately reconciled against one another to the penny — and on a daily basis — in an automated fashion; and
- Identification of additional delinquencies, netting tens of thousands of dollars in additional revenue in just the first several months of operation.

Arlington County's introduction of the ACE system shows that integrating legacy systems reaps great rewards. ACE provides the county with an integrated view of all customer tax balances and related activities, reduces data redundancy and errors, increases accounting accuracy and timeliness, introduces new efficiencies and processes, and most important, improves customer service.

*Missy Siwik is a senior program manager for the Department of Technology Services in Arlington County, Va.*