

# Department of Tax Administration

---

LOB #106:

## **CENTRAL TELEPHONES AND CENTRAL FILES**

### **Purpose**

This LOB is responsible for the DTA Customer Service Call Center handling the bulk of calls coming in to DTA. This is often the first contact taxpayers have with DTA and calls include request for information and assistance with personal property, BPOL, real estate, dog licenses, parking tickets, and certain collection matters. Types of calls range from assessment matters, billing questions, payment information, requests for waivers of penalty and interest charges, and more.

This LOB is also responsible for the DTA Mail Room which handles all incoming mail. Further, this LOB is also tasked with the files and records management, principally for personal property records. Given that DTA assesses approximately 1 million vehicles per year and maintains files for a six-year period, file management is not inconsequential.

### **Description**

DTA's main telephone Call Center handles all incoming calls between 8:00am-4:30pm daily. In addition to having excellent customer service skills, staff must be able to answer questions on all tax types (real estate, personal property and BPOL) as well as parking tickets and dog licenses. Situations that are handled include assessments, payments, penalty and interest charges and more. Knowledge of state and local tax laws is important in order to be able to properly assist callers with their questions.

Other sections of DTA assist in handling overflow call volume as workload demands. This includes expansion capacity in the Real Estate Records Management Section and the Revenue Collection Division, along with other parts of the Personal Property Division.

Central Files handles all incoming mail. Staff is responsible for sorting and delivering mail to the various divisions in DTA. Staff is also responsible for collecting and handling mail from the various divisions in DTA. Staff is also responsible for the careful handling of all payments that come in the mail and promptly delivering them to DTA's vault for processing. Central Files is also responsible for the sorting and filing of all documents that need to be kept in accordance with the Library of Virginia archiving statutes.

### **Benefits**

DTA's main Call Center serves as one of the most visible public faces of DTA. The impressions taxpayers get from the experience are likely to have a lasting impact in terms of their view of DTA and their County government.

Although DTA strives to empower taxpayers to use online services which are available 24/7, DTA's main Call Center is designed to give Fairfax County taxpayers a way to get in personal touch with County staff. Citizens are able to speak directly with a staff member to receive answers to their tax related questions. This also helps improve the accuracy of tax records as DTA routinely adjusts accounts based on interactions with the public.

Central Files provides critical mail handling capabilities that allow DTA to keep track of important tax documents and the arrival of tax payments. This is especially critical around the tax payment due dates.

# Department of Tax Administration

---

## Mandates

This Line of Business is partially mandated.

File retention of tax documents is mandated by the Library of Virginia retention rules. This requires DTA to maintain organized and easily accessible tax documents. Such documents must also be stored in a secured location with limited staff access for a specific number of years.

Although the Call Center is not directly mandated by law, to fulfill the County vision elements of Connecting People and Places and Exercising Corporate Stewardship, DTA must be accessible and responsive to the public. This is also essential to ensuring accurate billing records. Nonetheless, the Board of Supervisors did make staff reductions to the Call Center as part of the FY 2010 LOB process. DTA accommodates this reduction through the expansion capacity in other sections of DTA and through the promotion of e-commerce.

## Trends and Challenges

Providing great customer service to Fairfax County taxpayers continues to evolve as more and more County citizens do business with DTA using online services on their own schedule. With technology becoming increasingly critical in daily lives, taxpayers expect to be able to go online and take care of business at the time and day of their choosing. DTA's challenge will continue to be meeting and exceeding the ever changing demands of citizens. The launching of the MyFairfax secure web portal has helped DTA to stay in line with citizens' expectations. For the first time ever, citizens have more control over the information they can access online. A good example is getting tax payment information for income tax purposes. In the past, taxpayers' only choice was to call or email DTA requesting that information. With MyFairfax, taxpayers are able to go online and get that information without having to call or send emails. Having additional online capabilities may also reduce call volume in the main Call Center.

DTA is always challenged trying to minimize call wait time. At present, the average wait time is three minutes, but this can spike quickly to exceed 10 minutes or more. At such times, staff from other sections throughout DTA are added in a moment's notice as expansion capacity to DTA's main Call Center. This immediately relieves the excessive wait time. Using technology, staff in other sections throughout DTA join the Call Center from their desk through the press of a button. While this flexible expansion capacity is critical to DTA providing quality customer service, it does create workload stress in those sections that must stop what they are doing and assist with the overflow call volume. This is a continual balancing challenge to DTA, but it is more efficient and economical than trying to staff to maximum peak workload (a cycle which fluctuates throughout the year).

Fairfax County is a very diverse jurisdiction. This diversity, combined with the County's enormous population, also presents significant challenges in the delivery of customer service. For example, DTA offers a Spanish hotline where Spanish speaking staff are available to assist citizens for whom English presents a challenge, especially when discussing complicated tax matters. As the County becomes more culturally diverse, DTA's challenge will be to provide customer service in other languages. Fortunately, DTA itself is a diverse organization with employees fluent in many different languages.

# Department of Tax Administration

## Resources

| Category  | FY 2014 Actual     | FY 2015 Actual     | FY 2016 Adopted    |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>LOB #106: Central Telephones and Central Files</b> |                    |                    |                    |
| <b>FUNDING</b>  |                    |                    |                    |
| <b>Expenditures:</b>                                  |                    |                    |                    |
| Compensation  | \$1,507,003        | \$1,554,925        | \$1,455,132        |
| Operating Expenses                                    | 271,033            | 280,088            | 204,419            |
| <b>Total Expenditures</b>                             | <b>\$1,778,036</b> | <b>\$1,835,013</b> | <b>\$1,659,551</b> |
| General Fund Revenue                                  | \$129,751          | \$125,069          | \$127,205          |
| <b>Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund</b>             | <b>\$1,648,285</b> | <b>\$1,709,944</b> | <b>\$1,532,346</b> |
| <b>POSITIONS</b>                                      |                    |                    |                    |
| Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)     |                    |                    |                    |
| <b>Positions:</b>                                     |                    |                    |                    |
| Regular   | 28 / 28            | 28 / 28            | 23 / 23            |
| <b>Total Positions</b>                                | <b>28 / 28</b>     | <b>28 / 28</b>     | <b>23 / 23</b>     |

## Metrics

| Metric Indicator                               | FY 2013<br>Actual | FY 2014<br>Actual | FY 2015<br>Actual | FY 2016<br>Estimate | FY 2017<br>Estimate |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Phone Calls Answered in DTA's main Call Center | 291,897           | 265,628           | 264,675           | 264,587             | 261,984             |
| Cost per Phone Call Answered                   | \$2.35            | \$2.61            | \$2.69            | \$2.69              | \$2.69              |
| Average Wait Time on Phone (minutes:seconds)   | 4:09              | 3:42              | 3:12              | 3:10                | 3:05                |

The metrics in this LOB show stable call volume and a slight decrease in average wait times. When combined with the expansion capacity in other sections, DTA receives almost 345,000 calls per year through the department's main number, 703-222-8234, of which approximately 89 percent are answered with an average wait time of approximately three minutes. Of the calls answered in FY 2015, approximately 87 percent, or 264,675 were answered by staff in the main Call Center of this LOB. Calls that go unanswered (i.e., "dropped" calls) may occur for various reasons, but particularly spike when the call wait times become excessive.

When such spikes occur, the main Call Center contacts staff who provide expansion capacity in other DTA sections and they immediately join into the main Call Center system to bring the call wait time down. Customer service agents in the main Call Center of this LOB are recorded in their telephone calls so that management can investigate taxpayer complaints and provide additional training as necessary.

DTA is hopeful that continuing use of technology will help manage call volume and continue the trend of shorter wait times. A good example of this is the launching of the secure web portal, [MyFairfax](#) in FY 2016. For example, [MyFairfax](#) enables citizens to obtain for themselves a history of taxes paid in the prior year, which is often the subject of telephone inquiries around income tax time. Given the large and diverse population of Fairfax County, there will always be a significant segment that prefers to address tax matters by speaking directly with a staff member over the phone. Improving technology offers this LOB a means of addressing the eventual workload increases associated with a growing population.