

Department of Tax Administration

LOB #110:

CASHIERING

Purpose

The Revenue Collection Division Cashiering Section functions as an integral part of DTA's service delivery for the collection and accurate posting of taxes and other miscellaneous revenues. DTA places great emphasis on providing quality customer service in meeting the needs of Fairfax County citizens. Cashiering staff are tasked with ensuring citizens are provided the highest level of customer service and, further, that the revenue collected is handled in accordance with established secure cash management controls and correctly posted. DTA meets its mission to collect County revenue, provide high quality customer service and promote an empowered, well-informed community.

Description

Cashiering staff are cross-trained to understand and explain the tax assessment requirements and process payments for real estate, personal property, and business taxes. They provide taxpayer assistance with tax accounts and are empowered to help citizens with tax assessment issues, such as proration and vehicle valuation matters, as well as payment and collection issues. This supports DTA's goal to provide a "One Stop Shopping" experience. In addition to processing taxes such as real estate and personal property, Cashiering staff process a host of other transactions such as the collection of fees for dog licenses and transient occupancy taxes. Staff assists citizens with state income tax questions and serves as expansion capacity for DTA's main Call Center to help reduce long wait times on the telephones as necessary.

The cashiering counter provides internal services to County agencies by processing petty cash reimbursement vouchers. In an effort to accommodate those citizens unable to visit during normal business hours, DTA extends its hours to 6:30 p.m. each Thursday.

Due to the various tax due dates, the volume of taxpayer traffic peaks several times throughout the year. Cashiering staff must ensure that customer service standards remain high during these periods. Due to increased volume in payment transactions during each peak, it is essential that great attention be given to the accurate and timely posting of payments.

For years, DTA has successfully administered its Smiles campaign to handle the significant increase in both the number of transactions and volume of citizens coming to pay as a result of the October 5 personal property tax due date. To accomplish this, temporary and express counters are created and staffed by other sections of DTA. Extended evening and Saturday hours are implemented during this time to assist citizens unable to come during normal business hours.

Benefits

The Cashiering Counter operation is part of the Revenue Collection Division and provides County taxpayers with the option to receive in-person assistance. The counter is a full service operation which accepts all payment types, makes adjustments to tax accounts, provides state income tax assistance, issues dog tags, and processes other miscellaneous transactions. In the receipt of payments and adjustment of tax accounts, this LOB fully embodies the County vision elements of Exercising Corporate Stewardship.

This LOB is of particular importance to citizens with cash transactions, those in need of language assistance, seniors and people with disabilities who prefer and/or require personal assistance and individuals who wish to have face-to-face interaction. DTA's Cashiering Counter often provides a "face to Fairfax County" and as such supports the vision element of Connecting People and Places.

Petty cash handling and coordination with the Department of Finance relative to balancing and deposits also provides an important internal service.

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Mandates

This LOB is fully mandated. It reflects the agency's mandated duties in performance of revenue collection. The functions performed support the requirements for the role of the Constitutional Office of the Treasurer and the Assessor. These mandates are found in Virginia Code § 58.1 and in Chapter 4 of the Fairfax County Code.

A full service Cashiering Counter is one of several mechanisms used to fulfill this mandated activity. While the duties are mandated, the level of customer service is not. The current staffing structure is deemed to be the minimum necessary to provide quality customer service. Given past experience with customer service delays and complaints, the Board of Supervisors has prudently provided DTA with sufficient resources with which to serve the public. It should be noted that DTA's Cashier Counter operations and DTA's main Call Center were reduced as part of the FY 2010 Lines of Business process by eliminating 19 merit positions and 4 Exempt Limited Term positions.

Trends and Challenges

In recent years, the changes in demographics have challenged staff to become better equipped in serving a diverse citizenry. Over the past three years, the most significant growth rate for a demographic group has occurred in the senior population. In addition to the growth of the senior population, citizens who are foreign born and/or speak a language other than English at home, make up an increasing percentage of the County population. Providing transparency, explaining complicated processes in simple terms on a mass scale is challenging in light of a growing population. The growth in these two segments, coupled with the overall population growth over the past five years, pose a continual challenge to provide exceptional service to the public as well as maintaining best business practices for payment processing and financial reporting activities.

The Cashiering Counter operation is highly impacted by demands for service from a diverse population. The transient nature of the population requires an ongoing educational effort. Management recognizes that the demographics of citizens coming to this office for assistance may need specialized support and must train staff to handle these situations.

Advancements in banking technology allow for the electronic deposit of monies resulting in quicker fund availability. This LOB works closely with the Department of Finance and DIT to ensure compliance with both banking and information security concerns related to banking activities. DTA will continue to work with those agencies to take full advantage of emerging technologies.

Trends in banking have been influenced by the use of electronic delivery channels for accepting payments. In an attempt to mitigate fraudulent credit card use, the US credit card payment industry is moving to the use of payment transaction encryption technology. As a result, in FY 2016 DTA is purchasing new hardware to accommodate this change.

The application of new technologies and service delivery methods has aided DTA in keeping pace with the ever-changing landscape of citizens and development. The tremendous growth in the use of technology has resulted in significant efficiencies for both the public and DTA staff. Service trends remain focused on technology which promotes convenience, security, and ease of customer transactions. DTA is tasked with staying focused on the technological environment, to ensure the most suitable, user-friendly, and secure technology is employed. However, the use of such technology can require significant investments. The cost of licensing fees, maintenance contracts, updated software versions, and new innovative products, are currently absorbed within DTA's budget. For a number of years, DTA has employed internal belt-tightening measures and when necessary, held vacant positions open to cover the cost of new technology. This will continue to be a challenge in the future.

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Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #110: Cashiering			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$999,368	\$1,037,248	\$1,126,005
Operating Expenses	145,196	140,044	124,429
Total Expenditures	\$1,144,564	\$1,177,292	\$1,250,434
General Fund Revenue	\$106,001	\$102,621	\$104,149
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$1,038,563	\$1,074,671	\$1,146,285
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	14 / 14	14 / 14	14 / 14
Total Positions	14 / 14	14 / 14	14 / 14

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Walk-in transactions	74,748	73,078	75,363	75,400	75,400
Average customer rating of DTA Service (4.0 scale)	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.0
Mail payment transactions	253,724	232,767	169,268	169,300	169,300
Phone calls answered	25,253	22,980	22,898	22,890	22,665

During FY 2015, the Revenue Collection Division was able to reduce the number of backroom mail transactions processed by cashiering staff by shifting more workload to DTA's bank lockbox processor. Prior to FY 2015, the lockbox processor handled only straightforward payments sent by citizens through the mail. Payments not containing sufficient account information were returned to DTA for "exception processing." These payments had to be manually researched and processed by cashiering staff. Through the use of imaging technology, the cashiering staff are now able to conduct routine research and immediately transmit the check back to DTA's lockbox for processing. This has proven to be a much more efficient process, increasing the speed of deposits, smoothing staff workload peaks, and enabling greater capacity for cashiering staff to assist with other workload bottlenecks (such as with call volume).

Working with the Office of Public Affairs, DTA actively tries to promote e-commerce which also helps counteract workload increases elsewhere. Nonetheless, the results of taxpayer surveys from citizens served at DTA's cashiering counters show a high degree of customer satisfaction.