



CONNECTICUT TAX

Project Highlight

I couldn't be prouder of the people who work for us, who pulled us through. Our staff rolled up their sleeves, jumped in, and said 'there's no room for failure here—we will succeed.'

– John Biello, Deputy Commissioner

In the years leading up to 2020, the Connecticut Department of Revenue Services (DRS) was looking toward the future, and they were concerned about what they saw. While DRS staff could not foresee the worldwide pandemic that would entirely change the way they worked, they did see another huge workforce shift on the horizon. Many of the agency's employees were rapidly approaching retirement age, and recent policy changes would only hasten the retirement rate. With vast numbers of experienced staff leaving, new staff needed to be trained in their place, and quickly.

Concurrently, the nearly 20-year-old tax software used by DRS was also rapidly approaching its own retirement age. For DRS to raise a new generation of staff, they would need to invest in a next-generation tax system to support them.



Front Row: Mallory Davis, Beth Souza, Michael Romeo, Kristin Greener, Michael Fiore, Philip Soucy, Logan D'Auria, David Cushman, John Biello
Back Row: Charlie Morris, Matthew Watson, Matthew McDonald, Ryan Mosenkis, Andrew Wykowski, Dylan Neff, Elliot Hagan, Alexander King, Sam Lange, Josh Diamond, Ryan Cook, Sarah Enoch

A Fresh Start

To Connecticut Department of Revenue Services (DRS) staff, it was clear that it was time for a new system. “We knew that our current system was on its last leg,” said Michael Romeo, Tax Division Chief for Audit. Jason Purslow, Tax Operations Assistant Chief, agreed, “Every time we ran into an issue with our system, we were saying ‘well, maybe it’s run its course.’ We got close to 20 years out of it—it was time, it was dated.”

“When we implemented our legacy software, it was already an older system,” said Michael Fiore, Systems Oversight Manager. DRS’s legacy system was inflexible, necessitating workarounds and one-off changes to keep up with the agency’s evolving needs. Over time, these changes caused increased complexity and maintenance overhead. Michael Romeo

said, “We over-customized our old system to the point where it became unmanageable.” Eventually, it became clear that replacement was the only option to move forward.

Implementing a new system would allow DRS to start fresh and move to a more sustainable platform, while also

providing them an opportunity to take advantage of more modern technologies. “The legacy system did not have the external capabilities that taxpayers expect from an agency like ours,” said John Biello, Deputy Commissioner. Improving usability for both taxpayers and DRS staff was a major focus for the new system. Ryan Cook, Tax Operations Supervisor for Compliance and

Support, said, “This was part of moving the state forward into a new generation of how we do taxes, and making everything easier for taxpayers.”



Michael Fiore and Michael Romeo

Adapt, Overcome, Repeat

DRS partnered with Fast Enterprises (FAST) starting in May 2019 to replace their legacy system as part of the CTax project. Less than a year later, the COVID-19 pandemic erupted as the project approached its first rollout. “It happened in an instant. We were in the office, we knew that this virus was out there, and suddenly we were all sent home. We thought we’d go home and then we’d be back in a couple weeks when this all blows over,” said Becky Lorenzo, Research Analyst Supervisor. A few weeks passed, and it became clear COVID-19 was here to stay. Becky continued, “We knew we didn’t have a choice—we had a rollout coming and we had to make it happen.”

To make this and subsequent rollouts happen, the CTax project team faced and overcame challenge after challenge. DRS staff transitioned to work from home, where they had to learn how to communicate and work in a fully virtual workplace. “There was a whole learning curve for remote work on top of the learning curve for the new system,” said Jason Purslow, Tax Operations Assistant Chief. As they adapted to new work environs, CTax project staff also had to balance the immediate needs of DRS and Connecticut taxpayers. Amnesty programs,

pandemic initiatives, an attempted cyberattack, and impending retirements all threatened to derail the CTax project. Vinnie Pinchera, Tax Operations Assistant Chief for Financials, said, “While we were trying to build the future, we were also trying to change things on the fly.”

DRS and CTax project staff improvised, adapted, and overcame each potential roadblock. “We made it through a lot. We had very successful rollouts despite the incredible number of challenges we were navigating,” said FAST Project Manager Sarah Enoch. Each team member’s poise and determination ensured that problems were resolved efficiently and collaboratively. Tax



Operations Division Chief Beth Souza said, “It was like firefighters—you just react and get the job done.” While each challenge required some adjustment to the overall roadmap, staff remained focused on the destination—finishing the project. Becky said, “I don’t think people lost sight of the target—it became ‘how do we get there?’ We did our best to make sure things were running as normally as they could.”

“This agency is resilient. The people who work here are resilient. We were able to overcome the challenges and be successful.”

John Biello, Deputy Commissioner



Benefits



"When someone is making an online purchase or doing online banking, that's the type of experience that people expect. We wanted to bring that same experience here for our customers. All indications are that we have achieved that—the feedback has just been overwhelmingly positive about how easy the system is to use." – John Biello, Deputy Commissioner



"The system includes efficiencies for taxpayers—like seeing all their accounts online and filing their returns in one location—this makes it easy for them to stay in compliance." – Michael Romeo, Tax Division Chief for Audit



"Taxpayers can just attach a file. It's so much easier than trying to send stuff through the mail." – David Cushman, Tax Operations Assistant Chief for Corrections



"It gives taxpayers more avenues to answer their own questions without having to pick up the phone. I think we've seen a lot of benefit from that already." – Becky Lorenzo, Research Analyst Supervisor



"We have more features, and we have more information at our fingertips now than we did before." – Ryan Cook, Tax Operations Supervisor for Compliance and Support

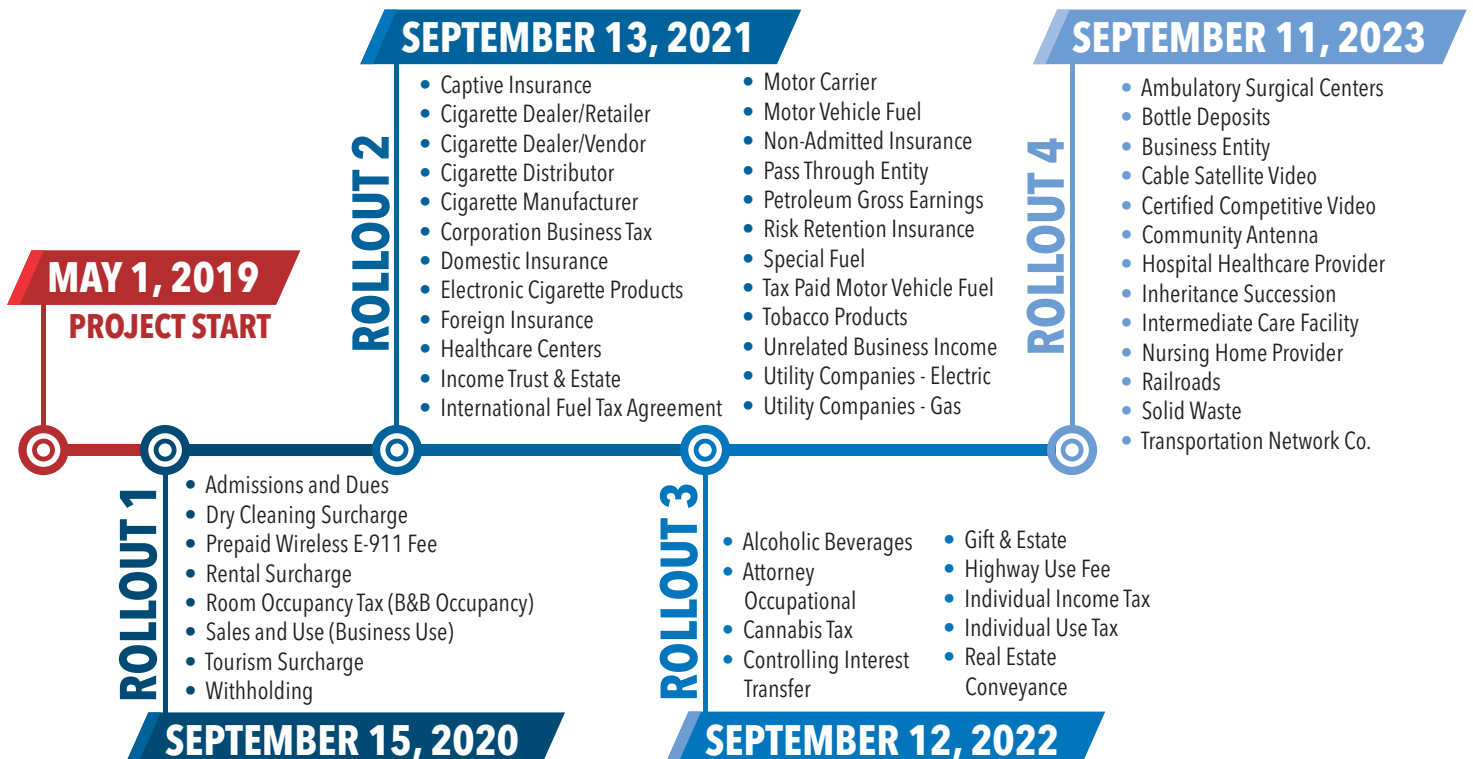


"You had all this manual work that wasn't worth doing. The automation that came with CTax has really helped us." – Beth Souza, Tax Operations Division Chief



"The system is going to be updated whenever new technology comes out. I think the people of Connecticut got a great value for their buck." – Vinnie Pinchera, Tax Operations Assistant Chief for Financials

Project Timeline





Passing the Torch

The CTax project gave DRS staff the tools to succeed, via a new and easy-to-use system, and the knowledge to do so, via formal and informal learning opportunities. During the project, newer DRS staff were brought in to work directly on the project team, and more experienced staff supported them throughout the process. “It set up an opportunity for us to build relationships with more experienced DRS staff and gain their knowledge along the way. There were tons of learning opportunities and I think everyone benefitted from it,” said Becky Lorenzo, Research Analyst Supervisor.

Throughout the project, experienced DRS staff shed light on agency business processes and provided insight they had gained working on legacy system implementations. “I think it helped that many of us have been here so long. This is our third implementation of a tax administration system. You can’t measure the value of the technical experience and the knowledge that we have gained through those,” said John Biello, Deputy Commissioner. This wisdom helped DRS avoid potential pitfalls during the CTax project, including excessive customization. “In meetings, I would say that we had to stick to core as best as possible. This will help us in the future—the less we customize, the easier our upgrades will be,” said Beth

“I personally poured my heart into it. I wanted to make sure that we were doing the best for the agency as a whole.”

Becky Lorenzo,
Research Analyst Supervisor

Souza, Tax Operations Division Chief. Newer staff also helped with testing, training, and verification, encouraging further knowledge transfer. Michael Fiore, Systems Oversight Manager, said, “I think the project was really good for the agency. It got more people involved and that’s going to benefit the agency down the road.”



Beth Souza, Kristin Greener, Ryan Cook

Project Name

CTax

Project Type

GenTax

Project Dates

May 1, 2019 to
September 11, 2023

Agency Name

Connecticut Department
of Revenue Services (DRS)

DRS Mission

*To instill public confidence
in the integrity and
fairness of tax collection;
achieve the highest level
of voluntary taxpayer
compliance; continuously
improve agency
performance; contribute
to the fiscal and economic
well-being of the state;
and provide a positive and
professional workplace.*

CT Population

3.6 Million

State Name Origin:

*Quinnehtukqut —
Mohegan word for
“Long River Place” or
“Beside the Long
Tidal River”*

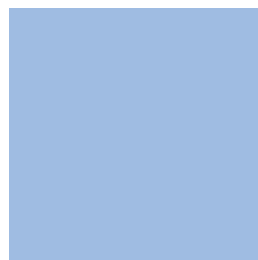




Beth Souza



David Cushman



Jason Purslow



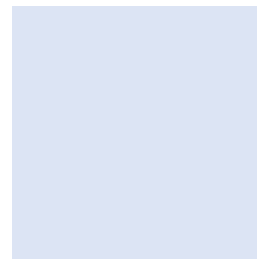
Kristin Greener



Vinnie Pinchera



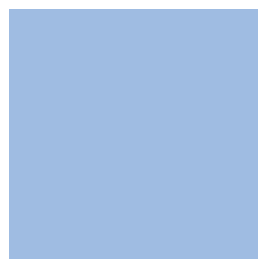
John Biello



Mark Boughton



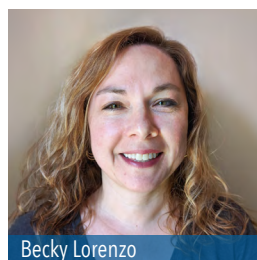
Michael Fiore



Michael Romeo



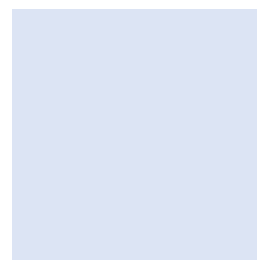
Ryan Cook



Becky Lorenzo



Philip Soucy



What's Next

The CTax project successfully completed in September 2023, and DRS has since settled into the new system. “You have to get comfortable with it. Stabilize yourself first and then you can see what you can expand on,” said Philip Soucy, Operations Bureau Chief. As staff have grown comfortable with the new system, they have found room for innovation. “I have a lot of plans that I’m constantly pitching,” said Kristin Greener, Revenue Services Tax Supervisor for Collections. DRS leadership also has plans to take advantage of the new system’s capabilities. “We’re very interested in analytics and AI. I think there are efficiencies there that we can leverage,” said Commissioner Mark Boughton. Deputy Commissioner John Biello added, “From an operational perspective, we’re also looking at what else we do where we can have taxpayers interact with us electronically.” As DRS continues to look toward the future, they also recognize the success they’ve already achieved. Mark explained, “Look at the enhanced technology we brought here. Look at where we were and where we are now—it’s an incredible change.”

“I think the project itself put the agency in a better position organizationally as well as system-wise.”

Philip Soucy,
Operations Bureau Chief