



## Rhode Island auditors take matters into their own hands with a little help from SAS, RSI

### Industry

Financial Services

### Business Issue

Contribute to the State of Rhode Island's effort to improve tax collections by quickly, accurately discovering which taxpayers to audit – without adding staff.

### Solution

SAS® Enterprise Guide® on top of RSI's DiscoverTax auditing software.

### Benefits

Reports in seconds, not weeks; improved accuracy and better insights lead to improving tax collection rate; small IT staff sees productivity gains – all without increasing staff.

### Partner

Revenue Solutions Inc. (RSI) is a SAS partner that specializes in data warehousing and business intelligence for tax and revenue agencies.

State governments feel the pinch of economic decline as do the taxpayers who fund them. As corporate and family incomes decline, so do tax proceeds. In good times and bad, not all taxpayers file accurate returns, while some fail to file at all. As a result, tax revenues fall, forcing state legislators to make tough decisions on where to cut funding and which important public initiatives to delay – just to maintain services at existing levels.

The State of Rhode Island deploys its auditors judiciously to ensure that citizens and businesses pay the right amount of tax, enabling government to deliver much-needed services, and that honest taxpayers do not suffer the headaches of unwarranted scrutiny.

With help from SAS® Business Intelligence, states such as Rhode Island gain strong, easy-to-learn reporting capabilities that help them quickly and accurately prioritize audit candidates and report on audit success criteria.

#### Audit reports in a snap

The Rhode Island Department of Revenue (DOR) added SAS reporting to its technology repertoire on recommendation from SAS partner Revenue Solutions (RSI). RSI's proprietary DiscoverTax software gathers, organizes and standardizes endless taxpayer data from multiple agencies into a single source of accurate information. With this information combined into a single, easily accessible database, users can then use the SAS reporting system to build audit reports – in a snap.

Those reports help the team more accurately see which taxpayers to flag for audits and manage current audit workloads. And that's an important step toward helping the state improve its tax collection rate and departmental efficiency.

“One example of the value derived from this new reporting system is that we are able to easily identify instances of taxpayers claiming credit for a single payment in two different sections of a return,” says Steve Cobb, Chief of the state's Audit Office. “Without SAS, we don't have that visibility.” Once these identifications are made, the department is able to bill the taxpayer and collect that money easily – money that wouldn't have otherwise been available to the state.

#### A taxing situation

Before implementing SAS, the Rhode Island DOR's auditors endured a cumbersome, though workable, reporting process that eroded the time and resources of both the accounting and IT staffs, explains Aaron Stibel, RSI's Data Warehousing Project Manager, who works on-site with the Rhode Island DOR. The accountants lacked the ability to see audit reports when they needed to see them; thus they had to wait several weeks while the department's busy IT staff prioritized and processed their requests.

“The problem from an IT perspective was that we have a small staff,” explains Brian Cote, Developer and IT Analyst for the Rhode Island DOR. “So when



THE  
POWER  
TO KNOW.

“Not only did SAS help us here in the Audit Program, but it’s helping the IT section as well through our efficiency and less dependence on them.”

**Steve Cobb**

Chief of Audit Office, Rhode Island DOR

the auditors requested data, it often took several weeks before we could get around to it.”

Now, the auditors can generate – in mere seconds – the reports from their own desktops without IT support. And they can generate those reports just as soon as they need them. “The most valuable part of adopting SAS into our work is that it gives the power of the data to the people who need it without requiring them to go through a lengthy IT process,” Stibel says. “It’s a usable tool for just about anybody.”

### **Less really can be more**

Despite a lack of additional funding for staff, the Rhode Island DOR can accomplish more work – better and faster – with help from SAS and RSI. “Since the auditors have the ability to gather data and make their own reports with SAS,” Cote says, “they have helped IT considerably by relieving some of our workload, which gives us time to work on other assignments.”

The increased speed with which the auditors can generate reports has had

a positive impact on their relationship with taxpayers. “Because it shortens the time it takes to get information back, that in turn shortens the time it takes for us to respond to the taxpayer, making the whole process more efficient. We can get to more taxpayers in less time,” explains Cobb.

And the simple concept of putting the power of reporting directly into the hands of those who use the reports has led to insights and best practices for the audit staff. “When you supply the auditors with a tool that gives them access to the data, they become more knowledgeable of it and become better at their jobs,” says Steve Hatch, a Rhode Island DOR Field Auditor. “Being closer to the data helps you to understand it more. It leads to better efficiencies on how you’re going to use that data now that you know what that data is and where it came from.”

### **‘Even an accountant can use it!’**

RSI’s Aaron Stibel, Manager of the Rhode Island DOR’s Data Warehouse Project, says that his company recommended SAS for its accuracy, ease of

use and ability to plow through mountains of data without hesitation.

“This is by far the best experience I’ve had with integrating a query tool with our DiscoverTax software because it was so easy for the Rhode Island auditing staff to learn how to use SAS® Enterprise Guide®,” he adds. “In no way, shape or form could someone take over another query-building program as quickly as this team took over SAS. It’s unthinkable.”

Even members of the Rhode Island DOR auditing staff – accountants, not computer programmers or software developers – admit they were surprised at how quickly they were up to speed and taking control of their own reporting needs.

“It’s so easy even an accountant can use it!” Cobb says. “The more we use SAS, the more we discover how we can get even more creative with it so that we can get even better information from it. We’ve seen that SAS is really easy to learn, and I know we’ll continue getting more and more out of it.”



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