

## Rebate Processing Software

### Interview

Russ Steven, Energy Solutions Manager  
Central Iowa Power Coop (CIPCO)

[www.cipco.net](http://www.cipco.net)



### Project Overview

CIPCO hired Alliance Technologies to create a software application to help manage processing and tracking of energy efficiency programs provided for their member organizations. CIPCO is Iowa's largest cooperative energy provider serving 13 rural electric cooperatives and associations throughout Iowa. CIPCO is headquartered in Cedar Rapids, with offices in Creston, Des Moines, Montpelier and Wilton.

### Rebate Management Process

CIPCO's member cooperatives submit data for energy efficiency rebates on behalf of their customers. The process for submitting this information had consisted of using a mix of paper forms that were mailed and database files that were emailed to CIPCO.

There were 3 cooperatives and 15 municipalities that were strictly using paper forms which were submitted to CIPCO at the end of each month. Another 9 cooperatives were entering the collected data into database files that were emailed and imported into the main database managed by CIPCO. Additionally, the coops using database files were required to submit paper forms for several new programs that were added in 2010.

Once everything was collected at CIPCO, summary information from the paper and database forms were entered into an excel file for monthly processing while all of the data collected on paper forms were later entered and merged into the main database by CIPCO staff. This entire process involved several steps and was error prone. Also, if there was ever a change to the structure of how the data was to be collected, all 9 database files had to be updated individually. In addition, the databases were housed on a platform that was becoming unsupported, was limited in terms of number of fields and could be affected by an upgrade to the computer Operating Systems.

### Choosing Alliance Technologies

The main reasons why CIPCO chose Alliance Technologies for this project:

- The turnkey software programs available for their industry were not flexible enough and were not designed to handle the volume of transactions that CIPCO had to manage.

- CIPCO wanted to customize a system to be **simple** for the cooperatives to use. They wanted to minimize the number of steps for logging in and submitting the rebate request and associated data.

## Key Benefits and Quotes

Russ Steven, Energy Solutions Manager, CIPCO

### Manageable Workload:

“Rather than waiting until month end and dealing with stacks of paper and sorting through larger data files in a short time period , we can now process a manageable amount of information on a day to day basis.”

### Reduced paper consumption, increased efficiency:

“By processing online we no longer have to wait to receive faxes and forms in the mail and a lot less paper is consumed. Instead of storing forms and supporting documents in files and boxes, everything can be found on the computer. When you consider that duplicate documents are typically stored at both the cooperative offices and at CIPCO, the effect of this is doubled.”

### Speeds up the time for turnaround of rebate requests:

“The processing of rebate requests has reduced from up to 2 months down to about 1 week -- sometimes within 1 day. Our cooperatives can typically cut a check to their members a week after submitting the online forms --knowing that the request has been approved for payment from us.”

### Accuracy of the data has been greatly improved:

“We can now accurately match what’s been paid back to the system.”

### Improved Tracking and Data Retrieval

“If someone from one of our cooperatives calls CIPCO about a particular member or rebate request, we can both pull it up on the system and review the same information while on the phone - before we had to dig through stacks of paper to retrieve information and then give them a call to discuss the matter.”

”Alliance has shown a genuine interest in trying to understand our industry and our organization. This has allowed them to respond to our needs and provide us with a good software solution that is both simple and efficient.”