Executive Summary

August 30, 2010

USCIS Transformation Customer and Advocate Feedback Sessions

Background

The USCIS Transformation program is an initiative to move from a paper-based business model to a new electronic system using improved technologies and re-designed business processes. These changes will create a more transparent, efficient, and user friendly U.S. immigration system. Transformation will streamline the mechanics of applying for and delivering benefits, enabling the Agency to receive and process six to eight million benefit requests and petitions every year. Customers will have the ability to manage their Immigration Account online and can access account information on their time including: real-time tracking of application status, online notification of important benefit actions, and a secure way to instantly change personal information.

In March and April 2010, The Office of Transformation Coordination and Office of Public Engagement hosted a series of "feedback sessions" with customers, attorneys, and community-based organizations (CBOs). The purpose of the feedback sessions is to help USCIS shape its future electronic operations. These sessions were held in Chicago, Philadelphia, Miami and Los Angeles and offered stakeholders an opportunity to provide input on aspects of USCIS Transformation initiative. Each session focused on six key topics, including: technology access and use among immigrant communities, access to information about USCIS, online account preference and security, third party accounts, filing a benefit request electronically, and online customer support.

Principal Themes

Technology access and use within USCIS customer communities
Participants indicated that most attorneys and community-based organizations have adequate access to technology to support greater electronic interaction with USCIS, but noted that not all customers have access to technology. Customers were receptive to using kiosks in USCIS offices as an alternative option for filing benefit requests electronically. However, this would require USCIS to provide sufficient time, support, space and privacy for kiosk users.

Customer access to information about USCIS services and operations
Participants reacted positively to the option of customizing and updating online account preferences. Account preferences allow individuals to personalize the type of information they receive from USCIS. Suggestions for customizing Agency communications included specifying

the frequency (e.g., daily, weekly, never, etc.), type (e.g., case-specific information versus general Agency operations) and method (e.g., mail, email, a combination, etc.) of information delivery. Additionally, participants urged USCIS to better distinguish its website from fraudulent immigration websites and to offer some protection from fraudulent emails.

The importance of securing customers' personal information in an electronic environment
External stakeholders expressed trust that USCIS will protect their personal information, but still had concerns about the safety of personal information online. Participants recommended several security measures for USCIS to consider if it conducts more business electronically. This included allowing account holders to receive notifications about account activity. Stakeholders also requested that USCIS consider implementing security measures, including personal security questions,

Representatives' online accounts and their relationship to client accounts
Participants recommended that attorneys be given full access to their clients' online accounts, but only after their credentials have been validated by USCIS. Additionally, attorneys and customers both requested the right to terminate online relationships, immediately ceasing access to information. Some participants recommended that clients be given the ability to limit attorney access to account information that is not directly related to a specific case.

Improved options for filing a benefit request electronically
Attorneys and customers universally cited enhanced case status information and faster processing times as significant incentives to establish online accounts and file applications electronically with USCIS. When submitting a benefit request online, customers noted they would like to be able to view and edit data before the benefit request is submitted, attach supporting documentation electronically, sign benefits electronically (using an e-signature), pay for the benefit request online, and receive more specific receipts and case status.

Online customer support as a part of USCIS operations
Participants expressed frustrations with current USCIS customer support, but almost all agreed that telephone support should be an option for online users. Other suggested customer support options include online chat, separate support structures for technical help versus application help, and providing online images or video in support of written instructions.

Follow Up

The Office of Transformation Coordination and the Office of Public Engagement thank everyone that participated in the feedback sessions for sharing their time and perspectives. The responses provided by external stakeholders are invaluable to the Transformation program and help inform decisions on how USCIS will conduct business in the future. USCIS will hold future feedback sessions throughout the country to inform and prepare the Agency for this exciting transition. We encourage stakeholders to participate in these and other feedback opportunities with USCIS.