Transformation Roundtable Discussion with Customers

As a part of its ongoing public outreach efforts, USCIS recently hosted two roundtable discussions in Washington, D.C. to obtain feedback about upcoming changes to the Agency's business processes.

The September 23 Transformation Roundtable Discussion involved direct feedback from a group of USCIS customers regarding the development of electronic accounts. Ultimately, these accounts will form the basis for USCIS Transformation, which is a multi-year effort to create a more transparent, effective, and customer-focused organization.

Posted below is a summary of this meeting, as well as a link to additional customers' comments and suggestions. USCIS plans to host more of these sessions in the future and will post details for those interested in participating as meetings are scheduled.

Event: Transformation Roundtable Discussion (Customers)

Date: Sept. 23, 2009

Purpose/Objectives:

- Gather feedback and input on proposed ideas around setting up online accounts

- Gather and understand customers' questions and concerns around online accounts

Agenda:

- Introduction

- Overview of Transformation

- Overview of Proposed Online Account Concepts

- Information and Questions Regarding Four Key Topics:

    1) Access to Online Channels

    2) Preferences and Considerations for Using Online Channels

    3) Data Collection for Account Set-up

    4) Third Party Access to Accounts

Participants:

- 13 customer participants (anonymous)

Executive Summary of Feedback

1) Participants were receptive to the idea of accounts as a way to create meaningful electronic communication with USCIS

2) Major trends focused on the following issues:

   - Customers want meaningful, consistent case information or status updates

   - The customers would like the ability to submit all documents necessary for an application by scanning and electronically submitting them to USCIS

   - Customers want more customer service channels

   - Customers want more transparency in relation to case processing

   - Customers want to submit documents and applications only to the people who will actually adjudicate their case and want to be able to contact that person for status updates

   - Customers want the ability to print important notices such as receipt notices or approval notices so that if they are lost, they are not as difficult to reproduce

   - Customers expect that by interacting with USCIS online, their case will be processed significantly faster and with greater transparency and increased communication

3) All participants shared their experiences with USCIS and were willing to provide additional time or information to help USCIS become more prepared to meet customers' needs

Introduction:

Customers were presented an overview of how information could be set up in an account to present a single view of how an individual participates in the immigration process. The participants did not have any questions about the idea of an account.

Topic 1: Understanding the Audience:

Question #1: *What type of access do you have to the internet and email for personal use? What concerns do you have about using email for correspondence with USCIS?*

Summary of Responses:

   - Every participant has access to the Internet for personal use, including access at the office and at internet cafes

- Regardless of ability to access the internet to setup online accounts and file applications, customers would like to have alternatives, such as paper filing and going to a USCIS office

- Concern exists regarding the security of the USCIS website for entering information

- The use of e-mail for corresponding with USCIS is more convenient, but does not address the perception that when one submits correspondence or evidence, it goes into a "black hole" (i.e., there is no confirmation of submission or personalized communication back from USCIS)

- Customers want the name and email address of a specific individual at USCIS with whom they can correspond about their account/case; several customers desired to have contact information for their case adjudicator

- USCIS may want to look at the tracking and status capability of USAJobs.gov for an example of how an organization successfully keeps users informed during the application process

- Notices should be e-mailed and sent via regular mail to customers

- Participants expressed no issue with general communication via email, as long as the email does not contain sensitive (personal) information

- Concern exists over the privacy in correspondence with USCIS using a work e-mail address

- A question was posed as to whether senior employees at USCIS will communicate with customers via e-mail for purposes of a specific case

Question #2: *What is your experience with kiosks and scanners?*

Summary of Responses:

- Agreement that kiosks are user friendly

- Customers would like added security measures at kiosks so that multiple forms of identification are needed, such as a credit card and biometrics

- Between one third and one half of the customers present had access to scanners and use them to e-mail documents to themselves that they want to save to their computers (such as letters of recommendation, vehicles registration)

- Several customers mentioned the desire to be able to download documents once submitted, so as to reduce their paperwork by allowing USCIS to "hold it" for them to access and download as needed (for example, if they want a copy of a notice or piece of evidence submitted, they can download it from the USCIS website)

- The customers did not identify any concerns using scanners

<u>Topic 2: Benefits, Preferences, and Considerations in Doing Business Online with USCIS</u>

Question #1: *How would you like to do business with USCIS in the future?*

Summary of Responses:

- The customers would like the ability to submit all documents and photos necessary for an application by scanning and electronically submitting them to USCIS; this would allow for immediate confirmation of successful receipt

- The ability to upload photos that do not require 6-month updates would be preferred

- Sending information to a single mailbox concerns customers because of the lack of information about when/if the application reaches the right hands

- Customers want to be able to send their case directly to the person who will adjudicate it to ensure it reaches them

- Customers want to be able to obtain meaningful, consistent case information or status updates:

    - When someone checks their status online, it should explain exactly where in the process the customer is

    - If a customer files a case online, the customer should instantly see that the case was received

    - Status should be updated every time something new happens in a customer's case

    - Every call center operator, call center supervisor, and employee inside a USCIS office should see and provide the same information to customers

    - Automated letters sent to a customer after calling customer service are not helpful

- - Providing customers with contact information for the person adjudicating their case would reduce time wasted talking to people who have no information about their cases

- Customers want additional customer service channels, such as a real time web chat feature to walk a customer through the online process while they are logged into a session and submitting information

- Providing customers with reasonable expectations on case adjudication timing, such as how many cases USCIS has pending overall, and where their specific case is "in queue," would reduce the burden of multiple calls, Infopass appointments, and application submissions

- Customers want more transparency in relation to case processing

  - Customers believe that cases or applications should be processed "first in-first out"

  - Customers should not have to worry that cases at some service centers get processed more quickly than others; everyone who files on a certain day should be treated equally, especially due to visa number availability as determined by the Department of State

  - There was a general concern that in-process and paper files will be "lost" and online files will take precedence and receive faster service once the online capability is introduced

  - Four or more of the participants expressed concern regarding a lack of transparency with respect to when green card applications can be filed or will be adjudicated

  - Customers want clarity around the process for adjudicating their benefit type and the average duration of each step

- Customers want the ability to print important notices such as receipt notices or approval notices so that if they are lost, it is not as difficult to reproduce them

  - If customers can print these items, they want assurance that the person printing it is the customer for whom it is intended, so perhaps customers would need to enter a PIN to print

- Customers want access to their complete "A-File" without the need to file a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request

- Customers also expressed interest in having consulates more closely linked to USCIS

- If USCIS issues an approval notice (for example of an H-1B visa petition) and then the customer goes to a foreign consulate to obtain the visa, the customer does not want to have to bring duplicate copies of everything he has already provided and his original approval notice with him to the consulate

- Customers also would like consulates to have standard requests for information so that the required documents you need to provide to obtain a certain visa do not change based on the consulate through which you apply

Question #2: *What should USCIS consider to set up online accounts?*

Summary of Responses:

- Setting up an account online would be easier than doing it some other way such as by phone or by paper

- Because not everyone has online access, there should be options available for those that do not have online access, including going to a USCIS office to set up an account, receiving assistance at a community based organization, or requesting that USCIS set up an account

Question #3: *What can USCIS do that would incentivize people to file using online accounts?*

Summary of Responses:

- Shorter processing times

- Discount application fee if you electronically file from your account

- The provision of more immediate status updates

- Increased transparency about the process and USCIS performance in general

- The provision of electronic processing underneath (for example, if you file something electronically now, there is no way to see what happens underneath)

- Ability to update or change your information online

- More friendly, personal customer service

- Visibility to track documents sent to you by USCIS

Topic 3: Information that Is Needed to Setup an Account Enabling you to Submit Applications or Exchange Information with USCIS

Question #1: *What are your concerns about setting up an account and presenting information online?*

Summary of Responses:

- Customers want standardized data elements

- Customers are comfortable with submitting online payments as long as they receive a receipt for payment

- Sometimes "first name" or "last name" do not translate well and will cause mistakes or confusion; USCIS should ask for "complete name" rather than "name" and provide enough space in the name field for multi-word foreign names

- Allow for "none" to be an answer to the question of "country of citizenship" in case someone is a refugee

- Refugees may not want to recognize their country of citizenship (for example, if someone lived in a refugee camp their whole life)

Topic 4: Third Party Access to Accounts:

Question #1: *How comfortable are you with an attorney or representative having access to information about the application they filed on your behalf?*

Summary of Responses:

- Customers would want attorneys having access to their accounts and applications filed as long as the client could also view the account

- Sometimes a sponsor of a customer needs access to an account and applications filed because the sponsor has legal obligations to support the customer (beneficiary)

- If you are helping your friend (for example, translating), you may need access to your friend's account

- If you no longer want someone to have access to your account, you should be able to change passwords or somehow indicate to USCIS that the relationship with the individual has been severed, and then that person would no longer have access to your account

- Customers should be able to grant different levels of access to different people; for example, if an attorney is assigned to you, you may not want that attorney to have access to all of your applications or account information

- If an attorney is representing someone, the attorney and the person he represents should get copies of all notices

- If an employer is a sponsor, the sponsor should not have access to all of a customer's (beneficiary's) application and account information