



Meeting Notes

November 19, 2009

Collaboration Session: External Data Interface Standards

Background

USCIS hosted the first of multiple collaborative information exchange sessions on Thursday, November 19, 2009, to discuss a new method for electronic filing which involves the transfer of data directly through a system-to-system interface. The purpose of this first session was to introduce the initiative and discuss the role of stakeholders in the development and implementation of the External Data Interface Standards, or "EDIS." Posted below is a summary of this event, as well as links to additional information regarding EDIS.

Event: EDIS Exchange Information Session
Date: Thursday, November 19, 2009, 1:00-3:00pm
Participants: The meeting was open to the public, and attendees included approximately 30 members from the private sector, representing many industries including case management system providers, software developers, immigration attorneys and representatives, financial institutions, and trade associations.

Purpose/Objectives

- Introduce the USCIS Transformation effort
- Introduce the External Data Interface Standards (EDIS) required to transmit benefit request data from system-to-system as part of USCIS Transformation
- Discuss stakeholders' key role in the development of these standards including the type of input needed and a plan to work together moving forward

Agenda

- Setting the context for EDIS: What is USCIS Transformation?
- Overview of EDIS
- Technical Examples for Stakeholder Input
- Questions & Answers

Questions and Answers

Following the presentation, attendees participated in an open question and answer session with USCIS representatives. Below is a summary of the Q&A:

Q: Are you saying the forms will be redone? So instead of filling out certain forms, you will just let us know which data fields you need and it will populate the right form with the right data?

A: Yes, USCIS will let you all know what data fields we need, and it is up to the third party system to decide how a particular form or workflow function is rendered on the user's screen. USCIS Transformation is not just converting all the current paper forms to an electronic format. We will use new technology such as guided input "wizards" via the e-Filing portal to help you fill out forms. It will be smarter. Basically, you will be asked a series of questions, and the system will know where to populate this data. In the "Transformed" state, you will not simply be filling out forms online. We all know that the fillable forms used today do not allow you to save and retrieve benefit request information at a later time. With an account-based system, you will be able to log into your account and pull up your personal information. Transformation is going to be comprehensive and will cover all the lines of business from immigration to citizenship and so on. We plan to be engaged with you all throughout the whole process to continually collect your input.

Q: Are you looking for third parties to build "data cleansing" capabilities into their products?

A: Yes, we will be letting you know what data and processing requirements we have, and it is up to you to create the user interfaces and processes to comply with these requirements. Think of it something like "Turbo Tax".

Q: Do you have an estimate on when the draft standards will be published?

A: We will hold these collaborative EDIS Exchange sessions over the next few months to discuss the details and to get your input. Draft standards will be published some time mid 2010 with system testing late 2010 or early 2011. Then the plan is to implement the e-Filing interface in mid 2011.

Q: Is there a plan to retroactively convert existing paper and forms to electronic format?

A: No, not at this time. There have been discussions but it is not currently economically feasible nor most efficient. We are planning "day forward" operational enhancements, and it would not be efficient to go back and scan old documents.

Q: How do you envision original documents being handled in the future, for example only being physically brought to interviews?

A: This will depend on the eventual business requirements; in some cases, original documents may be submitted electronically, in others, the physical documents may still be necessary.

Q: It sounds like you will be working with other government agencies. Will you be interfacing with other agencies for information sharing, for example concerning labor certifications with the Department of Labor?

A: Yes, absolutely. Labor certifications, name validations, FBI interactions and many more. We will be working with many other agencies to share information.

Q: Will requirements concerning images and other content attachments be coming out and discussed in the future meetings?

A: Yes, business rules and requirements will be discussed and translated into technical requirements for content attachments within e-Filing scenarios.

Q: So paper filings will continue to be an option?

A: Yes, paper and electronic will both be options for now. There are some forms that USCIS is considering to make mandatory electronic, such as those used in premium processing situations.

Q: When is the next session?

A: The next session is expected to be scheduled for mid-January. You should receive notice of the next session with topics to be discussed by early December. In the meantime, if you have questions, email Mary Herrmann (mary.herrmann@dhs.gov) and she will forward to Transformation; or directly email Transform.EDIS@DHS.gov.