U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Executive Summary

January 3, 2010

USCIS Transformation Customer and Advocate Listening 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 September and October 2010, The Office of Transformation Coordination and Office of Public Engagement hosted a series of "listening sessions" with customers, attorneys, and community-based organizations (CBOs). The purpose of these listening sessions is to help USCIS shape its future electronic operations. These sessions were held in Dallas, Boston, Atlanta, and San Francisco and offered stakeholders an opportunity to provide input on aspects of USCIS Transformation initiative. Each session focused on several key topics (varying based on the group of attendees), including: online accounts, online applications, customer/attorney homepages, e-wizards, secure log-in, representative authorization, and USCIS support of CBOs.

Principal Themes

Online account comfort, set-up, and management

Customers indicated that they would feel comfortable creating and using online accounts but others in their community might struggle with creating online accounts due to language and technology barriers. Both CBOs and attorneys expressed a need for organizational accounts in order to allow staff members who are not attorneys or accredited representatives access to the online system. In general, most attendees agreed that customer accounts should never close, while attorney/representative accounts should close after a warning is received and the user does not take action. Attendees agreed that users should be automatically logged out of the system after a period of inactivity but information should be auto-saved.

System Confidence and likelihood to file applications online

Participants expressed concern about using an online payment system, submitting linked filings in the online system, and electronically submitting supporting documents and evidence.

Attorneys and accredited representatives indicated that if attendees have the opportunity to file one form online and the other on paper for a client, they would file both by paper. Attendees would feel more confident that the forms would be processed together if both files were sent in together by paper; there would need to be a time or financial benefit to do otherwise.

Customer and attorney account homepage usability

Customers differed in terms of which account homepage they preferred but agreed that case status is the most important aspect of the site and suggested some design and content changes. Attorneys and accredited representatives found the attorney homepage useful but emphasized that the focus should be on the status of cases and that they would also like to be able to sort, export to a spreadsheet, manipulation, and print this data.

Electronic Wizard and system assistance features

Customers indicated that, in addition to an E-Wizard, they would also like to be able to get live support through either a Live Chat or Live Calling feature. Attorneys, accredited representatives, and CBOs would like to have the opportunity to bypass the E-Wizard. Attorneys, accredited representatives, and CBOs expressed some concern that the E-Wizard might mistakenly guide applicants to incorrectly file for a specific benefit or that "notarios" would use the E-Wizard take advantage of customers. Many participants emphasized that the E-Wizard needs to be flexible enough to take into account exceptions and atypical answers to standard questions.

Secure log-in and establishing a relationship in the system

Most participants saw receiving and using a token every time you log into the system as excessive and thought that it might deter applicants from using the system. Many participants thought that users should be given an option of how they receive their token but also suggested alternative secure log-in processes that they found more preferable. Although most participants agreed that they are more likely to meet in person to review and sign an application and G-28, they also thought that USCIS should adopt both proposed methods for electronic application/G-28 submission. Attorneys and accredited representatives and customers expressed concern about the degree of control over the application process between benefit seekers and their representation, as well as the system's ability to recognize a change in a client/attorney relationship.

USCIS support of CBOs throughout Transformation

CBOs suggested that USCIS provide support by assisting them with addressing the gap in technology resources and knowledge among clients.

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.