USCIS FYs 2023-2026

LEARNING AGENDA

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EVALUATION OFFICER

I am proud to share the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Learning Agenda for fiscal years 2023 to 2026. This Learning Agenda will help us to build evidence to better achieve USCIS' mission of upholding America's promise as a nation of welcome and possibility with fairness, integrity, and respect for all we serve.

The Learning Agenda is an evidence-building roadmap to enable us to achieve our strategic goals and objectives. It outlines priority learning questions that we identified in collaboration with stakeholders. These questions center on access to the legal immigration system; fair, efficient, and humane adjudications; naturalization promotion and process improvement; security and integrity in the legal immigration system; and investing in the USCIS workforce. When answered, these questions about programs, pilots, and policies will help USCIS learn how to achieve its strategic goals and objectives more efficiently and effectively, better manage enterprise risks, and ultimately fulfill its mission.

USCIS is committed to evidence-based policymaking in alignment with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 ("Evidence Act") and Department of Homeland Security policy. Evidence-building is critical to bridging gaps in knowledge about the complex issues and challenges facing the agency, as well as to achieving the agency's strategic goals and objectives. As such, we have developed this Learning Agenda to outline USCIS' plan to use its evidence-building capabilities to ensure that the agency makes sound policy, budgetary, operational, and management decisions.

Evidence-building in support of the Learning Agenda is already underway. The USCIS workforce has long used data and analytics, performance measures, and policy research to make decisions. Over the past two years, we have continued building on this success by developing the agency's program evaluation capacity, allowing us to address questions of effectiveness and impact. In answering these questions, we will determine where additional evidence is needed so that we continue to answer emerging questions, make pressing decisions, and address high-priority functions. These evidence-building efforts will support decision-makers at all levels of the agency.

We look forward to the work ahead to better serve our customers and to strengthen our capabilities by building and using evidence in service of our mission to uphold America's promise as a nation of welcome and possibility with fairness, integrity, and respect for all we serve.

In service,

Brittany J. Borg
Chief Evaluation Officer

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U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

MISSION STATEMENT

USCIS upholds America's promise as a nation of welcome and possibility with fairness, integrity, and respect for all we serve.

INTRODUCTION

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for administering the nation's lawful immigration system. USCIS has the responsibility to deliver decisions about immigration service requests to individuals while ensuring the security of our nation. The work of USCIS employees makes the possibility of the American dream a reality for immigrants, the communities and economies they join, and the nation as a whole.

The USCIS Learning Agenda is part of a broader effort across the federal government to incorporate evidence into decision-making per the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act). It is part of USCIS building a culture of evidence-based decision-making. The Learning Agenda will also help USCIS share insights and knowledge with stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, and other government agencies, to advance the understanding of immigration programs and policies and inform future research.

The Learning Agenda

A Learning Agenda is a roadmap that guides an organization's learning and knowledge generation efforts. It is a set of questions that outlines the key knowledge gaps and research needs of an organization or program, and how these gaps will be addressed. It is a tool that helps organizations systematically plan and prioritize their research and evaluation efforts to support evidence-based decision-making.

The standards for a Learning Agenda were established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in M-19-23 and M-21-27 memos. According to these memos, a Learning Agenda should:

1. Be informed by strategic goals and priorities of the organization.
2. Identify priority questions.
3. Clearly articulate the types of evidence needed to answer the questions.
4. Include specific plans for how evidence will be used to inform decisions.
5. Be updated periodically to reflect changes in the organization's priorities and emerging research needs.

A priority question, in the context of a Learning Agenda, is a question that is particularly important for the organization to answer in order to improve its programs or policies. Priority questions are identified based on the strategic goals and priorities of the organization, as well as input from stakeholders and experts. These questions are specific, answerable, and have the potential to generate new insights that will inform decision-making. By identifying and prioritizing these questions, the organization can focus its research and evaluation efforts to maximize their impact.

For USCIS, the Learning Agenda serves as a strategic tool to help the agency achieve its mission of securing America's promise as a nation of immigrants. The Learning Agenda will be used to identify gaps in knowledge and evidence that need to be addressed to improve program and policy outcomes and effectiveness. The document is focused on answering priority questions that align with the priorities and goals of USCIS published in the FYs 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. These questions can be investigated through a range of evidence-building activities such as program evaluations, performance measurement, policy analysis, economic analysis, and others.

The Learning Agenda is organized according to the strategic goals and objectives of the FYs 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. The FYs 2023-2026 Strategic Plan lays out three goals:

1. Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System: Ensure that immigration policies, regulations, strategies, processes, and communications support a strong legal immigration system with integrity that promotes integration, inclusion, and citizenship;
2. Invest in Our Workforce: Attract, recruit, train, and retain a diverse, flexible, and resilient workforce that drives high-quality organizational performance; and
3. Promote Effective and Efficient Management and Stewardship: Enhance organizational capability for efficient and effective use, management, and sharing of key resources entrusted to the agency, and to evaluate and balance competing demands and priorities to serve the agency's mission.

The USCIS Learning Agenda directly supports Goal 3 'Promote Effective and Efficient Management and Stewardship' by documenting the agency's priority questions for FYs 2023-2026. Goals 1 and 2 provide the framework for USCIS' priority questions. In the next section, the Learning Agenda priority questions are aligned with objectives of Goals 1 and 2.

USCIS has developed this Learning Agenda to promote the use of evidence to inform policy and program decision-making and the effective delivery of the USCIS mission. USCIS will update the Learning Agenda annually with new evidence-building activities and new priority questions. Results will be published on the USCIS website, and findings will be used to inform policy and program decisions as well as long-term strategy.

USCIS LEARNING AGENDA PRIORITY QUESTIONS

A. Access to the Legal Immigration System

Access to the legal immigration system includes immigration policies, regulations, and guidance to support and expand legal immigration pathways, improving access to immigration benefits, strengthening the asylum system, and effectively supporting the resettlement of refugees.

Filing

To help all people who need USCIS' services obtain them, USCIS aims to reduce undue barriers to access to filing for benefits. USCIS employs strategies such as increasing access to e-filing while maintaining the availability of paper forms to bridge "the digital divide."

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities about online filing and other efforts aimed at reducing the complexity of the filing process and increasing access. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

1.1. Have strategies such as the move to e-filing reduced barrier to access for applicants?

1.2. What strategies work to encourage people to e-file?

1.3. What is the price sensitivity of potential filers to different types of immigration benefits?

1.4. How do fee waivers affect filing behaviors?

Customer Experience

To ensure USCIS is accessible and inclusive in the delivery of our services, USCIS will ensure that applicants have myriad channels for timely, respectful, and meaningful access to assistance.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence building activities about the USCIS customer experience. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

1.5. How do the drivers of experience across dimensions of simplicity, speed, transparency, and effectiveness affect customer satisfaction?

1.6. What strategies are effective for improving the customer experience?

Public Awareness

To increase public awareness about how to apply for immigration benefits, USCIS is strengthening communication through additional community partnerships and communication channels. USCIS is also exploring pathways to strengthen and implement more consistent engagement with stakeholders to both distribute information and collect valuable insights and feedback.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to support increasing public awareness about how to apply for immigration benefits. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

1.7. What indicators, data, and methods can USCIS use to understand the effectiveness of communications and outreach?

1.8. What strategies are most effective to increase public awareness about how to apply for immigration benefits?

Humanitarian Programs

USCIS administers several humanitarian programs, domestically and abroad, to assist individuals seeking protection from persecution or torture, survivors of trafficking, domestic violence, or other serious crimes, individuals fleeing disasters, or other temporary and urgent circumstances. USCIS aims to administer these programs efficiently while ensuring equity, fairness, and integrity in adjudication.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to support humanitarian programs. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

1.9. How have changes in policy, statute, or regulation impacted adjudication process timelines for humanitarian programs?

B. Fair, Efficient, and Humane Adjudication

Fair, efficient, and humane adjudication includes reducing the net pending caseload and processing times to a reasonable and sustainable level, improving the efficiency of casework processes, strengthening partnerships to inform process improvement and equity and fairness in adjudication, enhancing information delivery and the experience of those we serve, and providing sufficient resources for staffing, information technology (IT), and infrastructure for high quality performance.

Application Processing

USCIS aims to use all available regulatory, policy, and operational tools to reduce backlogs and processing times. Examples of this include the expansion of premium processing and providing timely access to employment authorization documents. Identifying and implementing greater efficiencies across processes will speed up adjudications while ensuring the integrity of the legal immigration system.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to help reduce the backlog and case processing times. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

2.1. What strategies are most effective to reduce the backlog and case processing times?

2.2. What are the drivers of Requests for Evidence (RFEs) and what strategies are most effective to reduce them?

Technology

USCIS continues to strategically deploy technology to improve efficiencies and reduce the backlog. These improvements will increase the efficiency and thoroughness of assessments for eligibility, better detect and disrupt fraud, and further expand screening for national security risks. This will strengthen security, accountability, and improve efficiency of administrative tasks performed during the adjudicative process. Additionally, modernized communications equipment and capabilities provide USCIS greater flexibility in managing adjudication workflows. These improvements enable managers to direct resources where needed to conduct interviews and other office work that is necessary to adjudicate applications and petitions, while reducing the risk of human error in important integrity processes. USCIS expects that these strategies will result in a reduced pending caseload, greater efficiency in processing applications and petitions, and free-up officer capacity that can be re-allocated to where it is most needed.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities about leveraging technology to improve efficiencies and reduce the backlog. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

2.3. How have recent initiatives to leverage technology including the move to e-filing, digitization of paper forms, and the use of video-facilitated interviews impacted processing times, the need for Requests for Evidence, decisional outcomes, identification of fraud or fraud referrals, and customer and employee experiences, when compared to traditional processes?

C. Naturalization Promotion and Process Improvement

Naturalization promotion, and process improvement includes expanding citizenship education and promotion efforts through a whole-of-society approach that leverages federal, state, and local partnerships and collaboration; reducing undue barriers throughout the naturalization process through policy, operational, and other improvements; and ensuring equitable and timely access to naturalization by addressing net pending caseload and processing times. USCIS encourages naturalization through citizenship education and awareness, by building capacity and expanding partnerships, and by reducing undue barriers throughout the naturalization process.

Barriers and Facilitators to Naturalization

In order to develop the best strategies to promote naturalization, USCIS must first understand the existing barriers and facilitators to naturalization.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to encourage naturalization and decrease barriers. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

3.1. What are the characteristics of people who naturalize?

3.2. What barriers to naturalization are identified in existing literature?

Strategies to Encourage Naturalization

USCIS deploys many strategies to encourage naturalization including but not limited to partnerships, education, awareness, and grantmaking.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to assess and improve the effectiveness of these strategies. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

3.3. What strategies work to encourage naturalization?

3.4. To what extent and in what ways do USCIS' grant programs successfully prepare eligible populations for Naturalization?

D. Security and Integrity in the Legal Immigration System

Security and integrity in the legal immigration system includes developing and enhancing processes and systems in the legal immigration system administered by USCIS that identify, resolve and prevent national security, public safety, and fraud concerns. USCIS' work includes identifying and mitigating national security, public safety, and fraud concerns during the adjudication process.

Risk-Based Strategies to Mitigate Fraud

By implementing a risk framework analysis model applicable to different form types to evaluate historical filings to identify significant trends, USCIS strengthens the agency's capability to baseline and predict risk. This enables USCIS to focus mitigating measures on vulnerable form types where fraud is most frequently found. The expected result is strengthened risk management, improved data for use in adjudication processes and decision-making, and more efficient and effective allocation of fraud-prevention resources.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to assess the effectiveness of risk-based strategies to mitigate fraud. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

4.1. To what extent and in what ways have risk-based anti-fraud strategies achieved their desired effects?

Fraud and National Security Resolution Processes

Approaches to streamline the resolution process for adjudicative determinations will include establishing improved criteria, documentation, data access, and coordination in fraud and national security detection, referral, and resolution processes. They will also help ensure USCIS officers consider material and actionable findings of potential fraud, public safety, and national security concerns as they make decisions on immigration applications and petitions, with an objective to not unnecessarily delay adjudications through completion.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to help strengthen the fraud and national security resolution processes. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

4.2. To what extent and in what ways, have changes to filing processes (including documentation criteria, data access, and coordination) affected fraud and national security identification, referral, and resolution processes?

E. Investing in the USCIS Workforce

The abilities, expertise, and agility of USCIS' workforce are the foundation of USCIS' success. To meet the ever-growing complexity of today's challenges and opportunities, USCIS aims to recruit and hire the best talent and provide employees the resources and workplace flexibilities they need to thrive and succeed.

Employee Engagement

USCIS aims to increase employee engagement by empowering employees to improve work processes, involving employees in decisions that affect their work, and increasing transparency through enhanced leadership communication.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to help improve employee engagement. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

5.1. What indicators, data, and methods can USCIS use to understand what drives employee engagement?

5.2. What strategies are effective for improving engagement?

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

USCIS aims to assess existing culture and develop and implement plans that embed inclusive diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) principles into agency decisions and daily mission activities.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to support DEIA strategies. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following: What indicators, data, methods, tools, and frameworks can USCIS use to increase the diversity of its workforce and improve equity, inclusivity, and accessibility?

5.3. What indicators, data, methods, tools, and frameworks can USCIS use to increase the diversity of its workforce and improve equity, inclusivity, and accessibility?

5.4. What are the barriers to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at USCIS?

5.5. What strategies are effective for advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at USCIS?

Training and Development

USCIS is modernizing its training curriculums to develop a skilled employee cadre that understands our underlying immigration laws, policies, and procedures and that can successfully interact with the diverse set of customers we serve. Through established development pathways for leaders, managers, officers, and non-officers, USCIS will support its employees through continuous learning opportunities that will produce quality and consistency in all we do.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to help improve employee training and development. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

5.6. To what extent and in what ways has the transition to online training modalities achieved its intended effects or caused unintended effects?

Attrition

USCIS aims to reduce employee attrition rates in order to retain high-performing employees at all levels, while removing barriers to ensure equal employment opportunities.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to help reduce attrition. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

5.7. What factors drive employee attrition? Does this vary by employee job type, functional area, or demographic?

5.8. What strategies are effective for reducing employee attrition?

Workplace and Work Schedule Flexibilities

Based on guiding principles of employee health and safety, mission accomplishment, and work-life balance, USCIS will maximize, update, and formalize work schedules and workplace flexibilities that fit operational needs, that support qualified employees at all levels, and that promote work life balance and wellness for all employees.

Priority Questions

USCIS will conduct evidence-building activities to help reduce attrition. Priority questions include but are not limited to the following:

5.9. What effects has the adoption of maximum telework flexibilities had on the USCIS mission and support for the USCIS mission? What subgroups of the USCIS workforce benefit the most/least from telework flexibilities?

APPENDIX A.
PLANNED EVIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Automation to predict adjudication actions*

Background

The eight million requests for immigration benefits received by USCIS annually arrive unevenly across the year, creating surges that challenge the inelasticity of USCIS workforce, facilities, and budgets. USCIS is working towards greater transparency in its operations, reductions in application backlogs, and revised methods of estimating completion times for all application types. Automating adjudication processes across the immigration benefits portfolio would allow USCIS to be more responsive to customer demand. These improvements would provide applicants, employers, and communities a much-needed sense of economic and social stability. Automation could result in reallocation of resources to more valuable workloads, or, for example, prevent need for increasing costs while simultaneously decreasing the length of time an applicant waits for their results, thus reducing barriers to immigration.

USCIS will examine which factors, if any, in the immigration benefit life cycle can be used as the basis of a model for predicting case approvals, specifically. An assumption in this research is that denials should be handled by humans. The analysis will use only those data which affect the legal evaluation of a case. For example, individual characteristics such as country of birth are valid because they are required to know if a visa is available for entry, whereas data on race or eye color are not relevant. The evidence-building aims to test if currently available data and analytical systems are sufficient to perform the research; thus, no new data collection is anticipated.

Estimated Start & Duration: Study will begin in FY23 and last one year.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.2 Fair, Efficient, and Humane Adjudication

Additional Information

Priority Question: 2.1 What strategies are most effective to reduce the backlog and case processing times?

Data Sources: Secondary data sources: USCIS administrative data, data including case factors (such as preference category or relationship to US sponsor) and contextual factors such as risk indicators (such as TECS /National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and other systems hits or known associations with fraud, national security, and public safety concerns). No new data collection is anticipated.

Methods/Approach: Foundational fact finding. Analytic approaches may include descriptive and inferential statistics, advanced data mining and analytics, and network analysis.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

None

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* This project has also been published in the DHS 2022-2026 Learning Agenda, or a DHS Annual Evaluation Plan, all available at evaluation.gov

Citizenship and Integration Grant Program (CIGP): Citizenship Instruction and Naturalization Application Services (CINAS) Grant and Community and Regional Integration Network Grant (CARING) Program Evaluation*

Background

The goal of the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program (CIGP) is to expand the availability of high-quality citizenship preparation services for immigrants across the nation and to provide opportunities for immigrants to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate into the fabric of American society. The Citizenship Instruction and Naturalization Application Services (CINAS) grant is for public or nonprofit organizations that prepare immigrants for citizenship by offering both citizenship instruction and naturalization application services. The Community and Regional Integration Network Grant (CARING), (formerly known as the Refugee and Asylee Integration Services Program or RAIS) is for organizations that provide extended integration services to vulnerable immigrant populations who entered the United States through USCIS' humanitarian programs or benefitted from those programs while already in the United States. These groups often experience unique challenges with civic, linguistic, economic, cultural, and institutional integration when resettling in the United States, which may impact their progress toward full civic integration.

USCIS plans to conduct a process/implementation evaluation to assess whether the CINAS and CARING Program are being implemented as intended, including deviations and root causes of deviations from the grant recipient implementation plan, toward identifying challenges with implementation.

Estimated Start & Duration: Study will begin in Q4 FY23 and end in FY25.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.3 Naturalization Promotion and Process Improvement

Additional Information

Priority Question: 3.4 To what extent and in what ways do USCIS' grant programs successfully prepare eligible populations for Naturalization?

Data Sources: Primary data sources: USCIS CINAS and CARING program staff, grant recipient staff, and CINAS and CARING program participants.

Secondary data sources: grant recipient administrative/operational data reported to USCIS, which include data on grant recipients' implemented activities, services provided, and individual participants; CINAS and CARING program administrative data, including original proposals and required progress reporting; and USCIS Electronic Immigration System, USCIS Computer Linked Application Information Management System, and Central Index System data, mainly collected in Form I-485 (Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status), Form N-400 (Application for Naturalization), and Form G-28 (Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative).

Methods/Approach: Process/Implementation evaluation of an existing program.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

Gaps in data access or quality could be a challenge to conducting the evaluations, particularly surrounding the CARING program with a small volume of recipients and participants.

Characteristics of people who naturalize*

Background

The U.S. immigration system must be responsive to the flow of demand from around the world while safeguarding security and prosperity of the Nation. USCIS provides customer-oriented immigration benefits and information services at home and abroad that promote rights, responsibilities, and importance of citizenship. A seven-agency Interagency Working Group is currently developing a comprehensive national strategy to promote naturalization for qualified noncitizens. The intended result is more noncitizens lawfully reaching their potential in the U.S. through naturalization.

On a periodic basis, USCIS reports on characteristics of people who naturalized, describing demographic and socio-economic characteristics of lawful permanent residents (LPR) that naturalized in a particular timespan (typically, five years). USCIS also reports trends in naturalization rates describing naturalization for immigrants who obtained LPR status by immigrant cohort, region and country of birth, and class of admission. The statistics produced from this priority question will support future updates and provide new information for expanding these reports.

USCIS plans to conduct statistical analysis to describe group characteristics of people who naturalize and a statistical comparison of characteristics and outcomes of different LPR cohorts. An analysis of time-to-event (event being naturalization) will estimate and describe the naturalization-eligible population and identify factors that increase probability to naturalize.

Estimated Start & Duration: Study will begin in FY22 and last one year.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.3 Naturalization Promotion and Process Improvement

Additional Information

Priority Question: 3.1 What are the characteristics of people who naturalize?

Data Sources: Secondary data sources: USCIS administrative data, Data from the USCIS Electronic Immigration System, USCIS Computer Linked Application Information Management System, and Central Index System data, mainly collected in I-485 and N-400s forms, provide information on individual, socioeconomic, and case characteristics. Individual and socioeconomic characteristics include region and country of birth, age, gender, marital status, education attainment, and income. Case characteristics includes years in LPR status and class of admission. No new data collection is anticipated.

Methods/Approach: Foundational fact finding. Analytic approaches may include descriptive and inferential statistics.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

None

Characteristics of people who online file compared to paper file for immigration benefits*

Background

The U.S. immigration system must be responsive to the flow of demand from around the world while safeguarding security and prosperity of the Nation. USCIS has established electronic filing procedures for a select number of application and petitions for immigration benefits that provides information needed to make immigration decisions to appropriate agencies electronically and in real-time, yet only 30-60 percent of those applications are filed online. Increasing the proportion of online filers improves public access to government information and services, and government efficiency in adjudication of applications and petitions for immigration benefits.

USCIS plans to conduct a study involving statistical analysis to describe group characteristics and statistical comparison of people who do and do not online file.

Estimated Start & Duration: Study will begin in FY23 and last one year.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.1 Access to the Legal Immigration System

Additional Information

Priority Questions:
1.1 Have strategies such as the move to e-filing reduced barrier to access for applicants?
1.2 What strategies work to encourage people to e-file?

Data Sources: Secondary data sources: USCIS administrative data, such as USCIS Electronic Immigration System, USCIS Computer Linked Application Information Management System, and Enterprise Citizenship and Immigration Services Centralized Operational Repository (eCISCOR). These existing administrative/operational data contain information on individual and socioeconomic characteristics and application or petition type. Individual and socioeconomic characteristics include region and country of birth, age, gender, marital status, education, and income. No new data collection is anticipated.

Methods/Approach: Foundational fact finding. Analytic approaches may include descriptive and inferential statistics.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

None

E-Verify NextGen Program Evaluation*

Background

E-Verify is a web-based system that allows enrolled employers to confirm the employment eligibility of newly hired employees by electronically matching information provided by employees on Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, against records available to the Social Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Employees and employers complete Form I-9 and employers retain Form I-9 for every person they hire. Currently, for employers who are enrolled in E-Verify, a case is created by the employer based on the information taken directly from the form. In the proposed enhancement to E-Verify referred to as 'NextGen,' the employer initiates the case and then the employee receives an invitation to securely upload their personal data into the system. If the case receives a Tentative Non-Confirmation (mismatch), the system generates a notification to the employee, and the employee may choose to resolve the mismatch and respond through the secure system.

These changes are intended to enhance the E-Verify process by allowing the employee to have control of their own information, with direct access to E-Verify, rather than relying on the employer to transmit that information. The intent is to provide easier, faster, and more accurate results requests for employment authorization verification and to improve employer and employee use of the E-Verify system.

USCIS plans to conduct a formative evaluation of enhancements that will be made to E-Verify as part of the demonstration project pilot, to examine outcomes, such as Form I-9 burden, false mismatches, mismatch resolution times, and customer experience with and perceptions of the process.

Estimated Start & Duration: Study will begin in FY24 and last for 20 months.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.2 Fair, Efficient, and Humane Adjudication

Additional Information

Priority Question: 1.6 What strategies are effective for improving the customer experience?

Data Sources: Primary data sources: employer and employee users. Secondary data sources: E-Verify system data.

Methods/Approach: Formative evaluation of a pilot.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

Although E-Verify NextGen system data is available and of a good quality, the primary data collection from employers and employees using the E-Verify NextGen system might represent some challenges.

Naturalization Outreach Evaluation*

Background

USCIS estimates that there are 9.1 million people who may be eligible to naturalize that have not taken steps to become U.S. citizens. USCIS has not historically conducted outreach with individuals that may be eligible to naturalize. USCIS plans to conduct naturalization outreach to the population that may be eligible to naturalize and rigorously test the impact of the outreach on individuals filing for naturalization. With the outreach, USCIS hopes to increase the likelihood of lawful permanent residents (LPR) applying for naturalization and naturalizing.

USCIS plans to conduct a randomized control trial (RCT) (behaviorally informed intervention) to identify the effect of direct communication towards Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) on: (1) their likelihood of applying for naturalization (i.e., submitting the N-400 form) and (2) submitting an online N-400 submission. As a secondary and longer-term outcome, we may examine whether the direct communication increases the likelihood of successful naturalization. The primary approach will be to mail a letter to LPRs who are likely eligible for naturalization. This letter addresses various behavioral barriers by including: a fresh start motivator (framing moments in time as new beginnings), the benefits of US citizenship, a checklist of next steps and a social motivator (information on peer behavior).

Estimated Start & Duration: Study will begin in FY23 and last one year.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.3 Naturalization Promotion and Process Improvement

Additional Information

Priority Question: 3.3 What strategies work to encourage naturalization?

Data Sources: Secondary data sources: USCIS administrative data such as gathered from USCIS Electronic Immigration System, USCIS Computer Linked Application Information Management System, and Enterprise Citizenship, Immigration Services Centralized Operational Repository (eCISCOR), and Form AR-11 (Alien's Change of Address Card). No new data collection is anticipated.

Methods/Approach: Experimental impact evaluation of a behaviorally informed intervention.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

The study may have implementation challenges associated with accurate address information and tracking successfully delivered mail. This could affect the interpretability of the results.

Encouraging the use of USCIS' online services*

Background

The USCIS online account and filing options offer several benefits to customers, including the ability to track case status, view personalized processing times (for some forms) for various case milestones and overall completion, send a secure message to the USCIS Contact Center, and instantly receive and respond to Requests for Evidence online rather than waiting for mail correspondence. This results in faster processing times for Requests for Evidence to support a case decision. The use of online services also reduces costs and burdens on the agency.

A priority for USCIS is increasing the number of customers who use these online services. Customers may underutilize online tools for a variety of reasons, including a lack of awareness that they exist, a (mis) belief that such tools are not secure, or a perception that online tools are complicated or cumbersome. For example, only around 60 percent of those who file to replace or renew their green card do so online.

The planned study is an impact evaluation of a behaviorally informed intervention to identify the effect of different messages on the likelihood of using online services.

Estimated Start & Duration: : Study will begin in FY23 and last one year.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.1 Access to the Legal Immigration System

Additional Information

Priority Question: 1.2 What strategies work to encourage people to e-file?

Data Sources: Secondary data sources: USCIS administrative data, such as gathered in Form I-485 (Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status) and Form I-90, and managed in USCIS Electronic Immigration System, USCIS Computer Linked Application Information Management System, and Enterprise Citizenship and Immigration Services Centralized Operational Repository. No new data collection is anticipated.

Methods/Approach: Experimental impact evaluation of a behaviorally informed intervention.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

The findings may have limited generalizability. The findings of the study cannot be applied or used to make decisions related to other USCIS programs, due to the narrow scope of the evaluation.

Variability in USCIS utilization and completion rates at USCIS field offices*

Background

USCIS adjudicates about eight million requests for immigration benefits a year, and variability exists across adjudicative staff, at USCIS field offices and Service Centers, and across workload streams. USCIS regularly assesses adjudication efficiency metrics such as the utilization rate (the percentage of officer work time devoted to adjudication) and completion rate (the time it takes to adjudicate each benefit type, on average). This information is critical for determining optimal agency staffing, staffing needed to address the backlog, and new or changing workloads.

USCIS plans to conduct statistical analysis of benefit adjudication to include a comparison of utilization and completion rates across adjudicative staff and field offices by application/petition form types. Adjudication milestones and workload effort will also be reviewed to understand variation in efficiency metrics and correlation with other operational factors that may affect these rates.

Estimated Start & Duration: Study will begin in FY23 and last one year.

Strategic Plan:
Goal 1 Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System
Objective 1.2 Fair, Efficient, and Humane Adjudication

Additional Information

Priority Question: 2.1 What strategies are most effective to reduce the backlog and case processing times?

Data Sources: Secondary data sources: USCIS administrative data, from the USCIS Electronic Immigration System, USCIS Computer Linked Application Information Management System, and eSTAT. Policy, guidance, and other information will be gathered and reviewed as needed to identify relevant operational factors, such as individual-level data entry practices or office-level management practices that may be needed to fully understand sources of variability. No new data collection is anticipated.

Methods/Approach: Foundational Fact Finding. Analytic approaches may include descriptive and inferential statistics and advanced data mining and analytics.

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

Data collection and quality may be limited based on existing systems.