



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Fact Sheet

June 17, 2004

BACKLOG ELIMINATION STRATEGY

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is streamlining the way immigration benefits are delivered. By working smarter and eliminating redundancies, USCIS is bringing a business model to government. We will eliminate the backlog and, at the same time, enhance national security. USCIS will deliver the right benefit to the right person in the right amount of time, while ensuring that the wrong individual does not access immigration benefits. It is this fundamental mission that guides USCIS as it faces the challenges associated with eliminating the backlog.

The backlog isn't new. What's new is the strategy and initiatives USCIS is using to tackle this issue head-on. This new approach represents a focused effort that will eliminate the backlog and ensure a six-month or less processing time by the end of 2006.

The USCIS backlog elimination plan focuses on three objectives:

- Achieving a high-level of performance by establishing clear, concrete milestones and actively monitoring progress towards these milestones;
- Transforming business practices by implementing significant information technology improvements and identifying processing improvements to transform the current way of doing business; and
- Ensuring integrity by instituting comprehensive quality assurance measures.

Based upon a cycle time of up to six months (the amount of time needed to process an immigration application), the USCIS backlog at the end of FY 2003 was 3.7 million cases and included all cases that exceed their cycle time. Each year, USCIS receives roughly six million applications.

During the next three years, USCIS will eliminate the 3.7 million backlogged cases by changing the culture through which immigration services and benefits are administered. The USCIS efforts are already paying dividends. Since December 2003, USCIS has reduced the backlog by more than 360,000.

GOOD GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

New Management Tools

- **Measure Progress Against Milestone Projections**
Each month USCIS managers receive detailed reports highlighting the number of new applications. This information is allowing USCIS managers to react to current trends and use resources in a more constructive, concerted effort.



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➤ **Resource Allocations**

The USCIS Headquarters Backlog Elimination Taskforce – staffed by highly experience senior staff members - will work to achieve the rapid adjudication of severely backlogged applications while ensuring the integrity of immigration services. USCIS will work to identify areas of greatest needs for resources to make sure that all offices are supported to meet monthly backlog elimination goals.

➤ **Project Ingenuity**

USCIS actively encouraging employees, supervisors and managers at every level to critically look at our day-to-day operations and then share their ideas about how we can improve business and eliminate the backlog. The tremendously popular InfoPass initiative is just one example of how this “bottom-up thinking” is helping shape the backlog elimination strategy.

Better Technology

➤ **Managing Risk with Technology**

USCIS is providing guidance that will allow adjudicators to identify low-risk cases primed for fast-track processing. This will allow USCIS to use both modern technology and trend analysis to reduce the number of pending cases while maintaining high security standards.

➤ **Electronic Biometrics**

USCIS will use the latest in modern technology allowing for the storage of fingerprints, photographs and signature information. This will reduce the workload at USCIS facilities tasked with capturing this information. Additionally, it will eliminate the redundancy associated with recapturing information as new or subsequent applications for a service or benefit are filed.

➤ **Online Customer Services**

○ **E-Filing**

This simple and friendly to use system allows customers to go online to apply for certain immigration benefits. The eight forms currently available account for more than 50% of the total volume of benefits applications USCIS receives annually. E-Filing began with two of the most frequently filed forms last year. By the end of fiscal year 2006, E-Filing will support 12 forms that represent over 90% of the applications for benefits received yearly.

○ **InfoPass**

InfoPass is an innovative customer service initiative that allows customers to make an appointment with an Immigration Information Officer online instead of waiting in long lines at a USCIS District Office. InfoPass began in Miami and is currently in Los Angeles, and Dallas. By October 1, USCIS plans to offer InfoPass nationwide.

○ **Case Status Online**

Customers can check the status of their case for an immigration benefit on the USCIS website and build a portfolio of up to 100 receipted applications. Customers may also choose to receive updates from USCIS via e-mail whenever the status of their case changes.



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Improve Policies and Procedures

➤ **Decision At First Review**

USCIS has issued guidance that will eliminate the practice of unnecessarily requesting additional evidence from applicants for immigration services and benefits. This guidance insures, that when possible, USCIS adjudicators will make their decisions based upon the information included with the application.

➤ **Employment Authorization Validity Period**

USCIS is proposing a regulation removing the one-year mandatory expiration of Employment Authorization Documents (EADs). This would allow USCIS to issue EADs for up to five years and eliminate the redundant step of re-adjudicating individuals eligible for long-term issuance.

➤ **Pilot Projects**

USCIS has also launched a number of pilot projects at locations across the United States. These projects allow USCIS to test and evaluate various initiatives or production enhancements to determine their effectiveness in reducing the backlog. If successful, USCIS could expand these pilots to a national level.

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On March 1, 2003, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services became one of three legacy INS components to join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. USCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing our nation's security.