



*United States Department of Justice
Immigration & Naturalization Service
Office of the Executive Associate Commissioner
Policy and Planning*

*425 I Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20536
Phone: 202-514-3242 / Fax: 202-305-0134*

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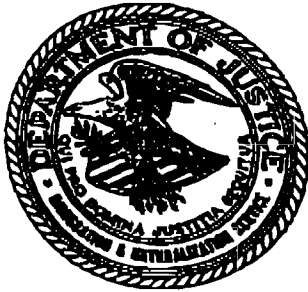
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Naturalization Accomplishments

7/15/98

- o We welcome the number of new citizens and the number of people applying for citizenship, which remains at an historically high level.
- o The growth has caused problems and exacerbated inefficiencies in the long-standing system for processing naturalization applications. Fixes are required, including reengineering, technology, and government/community partnerships.
 - o Application Support Centers: INS has established more than 100 new offices specially designed to serve naturalization applicants, located in sites convenient to applicants in neighborhoods around the country.
 - o Fingerprints: INS is piloting a process to send fingerprints to the FBI electronically. The goal is to learn the best ways to implement this process more broadly and reduce turnaround time.
 - o Direct Mail: Applicants now mail their applications to 4 centralized service centers instead of to district offices around the country. This brings them into an automated environment that speeds initial data entry and helps ensure accurate processing. Relieved of this administrative burden, district staff can focus on interviewing applicants and closing a greater number of cases.
 - o Backlog reduction: INS has engaged in office-by-office analysis to identify chokepoints and inefficiencies and to promote standardization. Solutions are being tailored to each office, whether it's increased authorization of overtime, more space for interviews, or application of new technology.
- o Much more remains to be done, but we are committed to fulfilling the ambitions of people to become full participants in our civic life by becoming citizens. The government should meet them with service and integrity when they step forward to become citizens.

INS-Naturalization



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425 I Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20536

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TO: Leanne Shimalukow **Date:** 2-19-98
OFFICE: Domestic Policy **Room:** _____
Phone No.: 456-5574
Fax No.: 456-7828
FROM: Robert Bach
Office of the Executive Associate Commissioner,
Policy and Planning
Room - 6038
Phone No.: (202) 514-3242
Fax No.: (202) 305-0134

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U.S. Department of Justice
IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE
Washington, DC 20536



Contact: Media Services
Office of Public Affairs
(202) 514-2648 Fax: (202) 514-1776
Internet: www.ins.usdoj.gov

NEWS RELEASE

February 9, 1998

INS/Coopers & Lybrand Unveil Proposal for Dramatic Re-engineering Of Naturalization System to Improve Integrity and Customer Service

WASHINGTON – The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the consulting firm of Coopers & Lybrand L.L.P. today unveiled a long-term "Blueprint for the New Naturalization Process," a proposal that would dramatically overhaul the citizenship program over the next several years.

Developed in coordination with INS' Office of Naturalization Operations (ONO), the new Coopers & Lybrand proposal will strengthen the integrity of the system, as well as improve customer service by standardizing and automating naturalization procedures nationwide. The Department of Justice awarded the consulting firm a two-year contract to assist in the naturalization re-engineering effort in March 1997.

The proposal recommends several changes that will significantly reduce the chance for ineligible applicants to be granted citizenship, including:

- Applicants will complete a new "eligibility worksheet" to self-screen their applications against key eligibility requirements before entering the process;
- Interviews will no longer be scheduled until a confirmed response to a criminal background check has been received from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI);
- An INS-wide search for applicant information will be conducted prior to the final interview to ensure that all relevant information has been incorporated into a single, comprehensive file, allowing INS to conduct a more comprehensive adjudication;
- Each applicants' fingerprints will be taken electronically during key steps in the naturalization process to verify the applicants' identity;
- Key data such as fingerprints and test scores will be maintained by INS throughout the process to eliminate the potential for tampering;
- Testing will be completed at the beginning of the application process, further screening out ineligible applicants and reducing the overall workload; and
- All test scores will be sent electronically to INS instead of the current practice of providing the applicants with certifications of completion.

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INS Continues Naturalization Re-engineering Process

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Building on Recent Progress

The long-term proposal represents both a continuation of the improvements INS has made to the naturalization process since May 1997 and a preview of the dramatic changes the Service will implement in the future. Components such as the newly opened Application Support Centers (ASCs), which are currently taking electronic fingerprints, will be integral to the long-term re-engineering strategy. However, there are a number of additional structural and procedural changes that are new to the way INS does business, as detailed below.

The Proposed Blueprint

- **Information Packet:** An information packet available in five to 14 languages—which is not currently offered by INS—will help applicants understand the process from the start. The packet will contain a new “eligibility worksheet” to guide applicants through a series of questions that will determine their eligibility for naturalization and allow them to self-screen before entering the process. For example, those not meeting the residency requirements will immediately know they are ineligible. This will both help prospective applicants avoid wasting time and money by applying if they know they are ineligible and INS to provide better service to qualified applicants by reducing its overall workload.
- **Telephone Center:** There will be a telephone information and service center dedicated solely to naturalization issues. This will provide applicants with one number to call for answers to all citizenship-related questions, including updates on the status of their applications through a connected automated system. The center will be responsible for creating an electronic file for each applicant and for updating information in the file over the course of the naturalization process. After helping a prospective applicant affirm their eligibility, the center will send out a test authorization form, the requirements for the English and civics exams, study guides, testing site locations, and information on test registration. Applicants will present their test authorization form, which includes key biographical data and a bar code, when they arrive at a testing center, the next step in the process. Developing an electronic file at this point will allow INS to better forecast naturalization receipts, predict changes in application patterns, and adjust its resources accordingly.
- **English and Civics Test:** Instead of testing applicants later in the process (as is currently the case), applicants will be tested at the beginning, further screening out ineligible applicants and reducing the overall workload. For example, reviews of the 1.27 million naturalization applications in 1996 found that 126,000, or about 10 percent, were denied because they failed the English and history and civics exam. On a scheduled date, pre-qualified applicants will go to a test center and present the test authorization form. To ensure their identity, applicants will be required to present two forms of identification, including their alien registration card. Center personnel will also take a two-digit electronic fingerprint to verify the identity of

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each applicant. A change from the current system, the fingerprint will serve as a foolproof biometric identifier throughout the naturalization process. Applicants who pass their tests will have their scores submitted electronically, further enhancing the system's integrity, as data will be maintained in a secure central INS database.

- **Pre-printed Application:** Once applicants have passed their test, INS will update the electronic files and send applicants a naturalization application form personalized with an individual's bar-coded data. The pre-printed form will include customized instructions tailored to the recipient's category of eligibility. For example, instructions for the two-to-three percent of applicants with unusual circumstances will be sent only to them. Customization will make applying easier and improve the quality of applications received. In contrast to the existing system, this fully electronic process will help eliminate lost forms and facilitate the combination of multiple files. It also will help make the processing of easy cases routine, give more information to those needing it and help INS adjudicators plan their workload for interviews. In FY 1996, more than 66,000 applications were rejected because they were incomplete; INS made manual corrections to 133,000 others.
- **Fingerprinting:** The personalized form sent to applicants will include a notice instructing them to go to a fingerprint site in their area on a specified date to be fingerprinted and photographed digitally and to pay the application fee. Paying the application fee in person will eliminate one of the most common causes of application delays—submission of an incorrect fee accompanying a mailed form. In contrast to fingerprinting procedures that used paper and ink, with submission through the mail, the digital fingerprints will be batched and transmitted electronically to the FBI, which will be able to respond within days after completing a criminal background check.
- **Send Application:** Once the fingerprints and photograph are taken and the correct fee paid, the applicant will be instructed to complete the application form, provide the required supporting documentation, and submit the package to an INS Service Center. This supporting documentation will be specified in advance to ensure the correct documents are submitted. In FY 1996, the processing of 300,000 cases was delayed for lack of appropriate supporting documents.
- **Service Center Review:** A series of quality-control checks will take place at the Service Center, marking the first time there will be a comprehensive process for application review in one location. Applications passing these checks will be scanned into the existing electronic file using the bar code, automatically triggering a series of independent verification requests sent to other agencies (e.g., to ensure the applicant's social security number is correct). Once the application is successfully processed, a separate system will automatically schedule interviews and generate appointment notices that will be mailed to applicants. The current system has no automatic third-party verification or scheduling functions.

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- **Interview:** When applicants appear for an interview with an INS adjudicator, they will have their two-digit fingerprint scanned once again to verify their identity against a computer display of the applicant's electronic file and digital photograph. Where available, applicants completing the interview will have the option of scheduling either a "same-day" oath ceremony or waiting to participate in a future ceremony. Their digital photograph will be used to develop an example of their naturalization certificate, and they will be asked to verify the information it contains. Applicants cannot currently verify the information on their certificates before they are produced. In addition, hard-copy photographs are currently pasted on to each application. The proposal would eliminate this labor-intensive process. In FY 1996, 1.4 million certificates were manually produced, many of which contained errors that could have been corrected earlier in the process.
- **Oath Ceremony:** At the oath ceremony, applicants will be required to check in using the two-digit fingerprint, and will also be required to check out using this system after they are sworn in and before picking up their naturalization certificate. The use of biometric identifiers will once again make sure that the same person is checking in to the ceremony and has taken the oath. The system will then automatically close out the case and direct that the alien file be sent to the Federal Records Center (FRC). The current system has no method to close out processed cases automatically or direct that files be sent to the FRC where they can be electronically archived.

Steps for Implementing the New Process

Implementing this proposal to re-engineer the Service's naturalization process is a significant long-term task. But INS expects to begin seeing many benefits this year as the new fingerprinting procedures are fully implemented and the CLAIMS 4.0 computer software system is installed nationwide. Automation enhancements are expected to continue through 1999, as all of the redesign benefits are achieved.

In addition, Coopers & Lybrand and ONO have developed a comprehensive new structure within INS to better manage the elements of the naturalization process. ONO will create five "project teams" that will be responsible for reviewing and managing individual components of the process, including: 1) preparation and service; 2) development of a standard testing program; 3) information management; 4) adjudications and ceremonies; and 5) implementation support. Based on the overview and recommendations of these integrated teams, INS will not only be able to identify and fix problems identified, but will facilitate the evolution of the citizenship process over the long term.