

Memo

To: USCIS Agency Leadership Team

From: TELI Team Birch: Ravi Bala, Anirma Gupta, Ann Lewis, Shelina Taki, Rogers Weed, Julie Yarosh

CC: White House

Date: November 6, 2020

Re: Using Videoconferencing Technology to Accelerate the Rate of Naturalizations

USCIS should adopt video teleconferencing (VTC) technology to increase the rate of naturalization adjudications and eliminate backlogs that impact agency morale and stymie millions of legal permanent US residents. Videoconferencing is already used by many Federal government agencies and successfully piloted in a few USCIS field offices. A phased adoption will enable the agency to regain throughput under COVID restrictions, then gain flexibility to match applicant demand and adjudication supply, both within offices and across geographies.

- Phase One adoption, to begin immediately, should focus on using VTC *within* existing field offices to allow adjudicators to sit in a separate room from the applicant and their representatives, ensuring a safer experience for all.
- In Phase Two, the technology should allow an applicant in one field office to be interviewed by an adjudicator in a different field office, enabling greater flexibility in matching demand and supply across geographies.
- In Phase Three, adjudicators should be able to conduct interviews from secure locations outside of USCIS offices, while applicants would still be required to be present at a USCIS location. This additional adjudicator flexibility could help reduce sick days and personal time off triggered by childcare requirements as well as increase adjudicator retention by enabling a work-from-home option as a benefit for adjudicators that can meet security and privacy requirements.

The implementation plan has four key components

1. **Definition:** Process and technical changes required in each phase should be specified, minimized and should NOT require elimination of all paper.

2. **Preparation:** Skills needed should be identified, training developed and delivered, and job descriptions updated.
3. **Communication/Engagement:** Communication to adjudicators should include program goals, benefits, and which job aspects will change. The implementation team should listen and adapt as the program rolls out.
4. **Longevity/sustainability:** VTC needs to be embedded in the agency's culture. Champions who can advocate for the new technology and celebrate successes should be identified.

The key metric of success overall will be an increased interview rate per adjudicator, without an increase in errors. Phase two and three metrics will include a schedule buffer decrease as assignments become more fluid between offices. Morale and retention should increase as backlogs decrease and work from home becomes an option.

There are several key risks. The technology must be reliable and easy to use so it does not compromise the adjudicator's ability to assess applicants effectively or increase applicant stress. Adequate network capacity and hardware systems are needed.

Employees must be well-trained and have on-call technical support. Organizational dynamics between offices should be managed carefully in phase two because field offices will have interdependencies that did not exist previously. Funding can hopefully be managed within existing budget cycles by leveraging existing equipment and capacity, and careful targeting of investments.

Millions of eligible people have applied to be United States citizens. The interview step of the process (including scheduling) is time consuming, stressful, and where most people are currently stuck. VTC can reduce COVID's impact on interview throughput and position the agency for greater efficiency in the long run.