

# **U.S. Department of State**



# **Customer Service Plan**

**October 24, 2011**

## Executive Summary

The Department of State is responsible for carrying out the nation's foreign policy, protecting U.S. citizens, representing the United States, promoting U.S. business, ensuring U.S. border security, telling America's story to the world, and providing the platform from which all U.S. government agencies operate abroad. It is essential that we take every opportunity to improve our interactions with the public as we do this vital work on its behalf, consistent with existing authorities and Executive Order 13571, Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service. The Department undertakes reforms to simplify existing requirements when consistent with Federal law, with close attention to the views of the public.

The ways in which the Department interacts and communicates internally, with other agencies and organizations, and the general public have changed significantly with the development of new technologies and social media. Reflecting this new era, we recognize the importance and the need for the Department to improve the customer experience, modernize and streamline processes, reduce costs, accelerate delivery, and identify ways to advance customer service through innovative technology.

In accordance with Executive Order 13571, State's Customer Service Plan defines specific actions and initiatives that simplify customer service interactions and streamline related processes, making them more efficient. Since the Department provides services in the U.S. and worldwide that extend far beyond the initiatives described in this plan, it is important to note that the plan's focus is on the improvement of services operated and managed domestically.

The Department's plan includes a signature initiative and two key services that affect millions of customers ranging from the general public seeking passports and requesting the authentication of official documents to be used overseas, to commercial and industrial entities involved in the manufacture, export and brokering of defense articles and services:

- ***Signature Initiative: Passport Card Application Pilot***  
The Bureau of Consular Affairs has developed a functional Passport Card Application Pilot that demonstrates the Passport Services Directorate's ability to accept, adjudicate and archive an online application for a passport card. The Passport Card Application Pilot will enable applicants who possess a current, fully valid U.S. passport book to upload an acceptable digital photograph to the internet and make an online payment to apply for a U.S. passport card online. The Pilot will assist the Department in determining if accepting electronic signatures would be feasible for customers while also maintaining the integrity of the U.S. passport as evidence of U.S. citizenship. Accepting electronic signatures and payments should reduce processing times, overall costs, and ease the application process for U.S. citizens traveling by land and sea to Mexico, Canada, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.

This initiative will be implemented within the next three months.

- ***Service 1: Official Document Authentication***

The Office of Authentications, Bureau of Administration is responsible for signing and issuing certificates of authentication under the seal of the Department of State for, and in the name of, the Secretary of State (22 CFR, Part 131). The Office certifies for U.S. citizens and foreign nationals the correctness of records or documents that will be used overseas. The documents accepted for authentication include, but are not limited to: company bylaws, powers of attorney, trademarks, diplomas, transcripts, distributorship agreements, child adoptions, articles of incorporation, good standing certificates, home studies, letters of reference, etc.

This initiative will be implemented within the next 18 months.

- ***Service 2: Electronic Payment of International Traffic in Arms Regulations Registration Fees***

The Directorate of Defense Trade Controls (DDTC), Bureau of Political-Military Affairs administers the International Traffic in Arms Regulations ([ITAR, 22 CFR Parts 120-130](#)) and collects an annual registration fee as part of the ITAR registration process for industry. Up until very recently, that fee was payable to the Department of State by a corporate check drawn from a U.S. bank. In order to improve services, DDTC developed a rule that allows the public to pay ITAR registration fees electronically.

This initiative simplifies the collection and verification of payments, eliminates the need to manually process and collect returned payments, and eliminates the possibility of lost payments. **Effective September 26, 2011 electronic payment became the sole means of [registration fee submission](#).**

The Customer Service Plan was developed by a team of Department employees led by the Office of Management Policy, Rightsizing and Innovation, under the direction of the Under Secretary for Management. The working group is composed mainly of subject matter experts from the Bureaus of Consular Affairs, Administration, and Political-Military Affairs.

This plan will be available to the public on the Department's internet site at [www.state.gov/open](http://www.state.gov/open).

## SIGNATURE INITIATIVE

**Overview:** The Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs has developed a functional Passport Card Application Pilot (“Pilot”) that demonstrates the Passport Services Directorate’s ability to accept, adjudicate and archive an online application for a passport card.

The Pilot will begin during the last quarter of 2011 and will run for 90 days. It will enable applicants who possess a current, fully valid U.S. passport book to upload an acceptable digital photograph to the internet and make an online payment in U.S. dollars via [Pay.gov](http://Pay.gov) to apply for a U.S. passport card online.

**Quick and Convenient:** Applying online is easy. Applicants will save time because they will be able to apply from the comfort of their home, 24 hours a day/seven days a week/365 days a year. Also, they can save money because they will not have to pay postage fees to mail a renewal application.

**A Versatile Document:** In addition to serving as a compliant travel document at land-border crossings and sea ports-of-entry under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, the wallet-sized passport card can be used when an individual wants to apply for state and federal benefits, needs to prove employment eligibility, or needs access to federal buildings.

### **The Passport Card**

The passport card is a wallet-sized travel document that meets the requirements of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative and has the same validity as the traditional passport book: ten years for adults and five years for minors under 16 years of age. Travel on the passport card is limited to land border crossings and sea ports-of-entry between the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda. The passport card may not be used for international travel by air.

The passport card is a more convenient and less expensive alternative to the passport book. The Department of State began issuing passport cards to the public in July 2008. As of September 2011, 4.5 million passport cards have been issued to U.S. citizens.

The passport card uses state-of-the-art security features to prevent the possibility of counterfeiting and forgery. Additionally, it utilizes vicinity-read radio frequency identification (RFID) technology which enables Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) inspectors to access photographs and other biographical information stored in secure government databases.

### **The Pilot**

Applications for passport cards will be accepted online in hopes of identifying potential benefits to both the Department and its customers. The Pilot will assist the Department in assessing the use of electronic signatures in passport applications. Accepting electronic signatures and payments should reduce processing times, overall costs, and ease the application process for traveling U.S. citizens. In order to capture customer feedback on the pilot, a solicitation and email address are included on the final confirmation page of the application. All customer feedback will be processed with data collected from the Pilot and used for lessons learned to identify areas for improvement.

The Pilot will demonstrate that:

- [Pay.gov](http://Pay.gov) can be used successfully with the Department's systems to capture payment;
- An online application process will not have an adverse effect on fraud or application suspense rates, will improve the customer experience, and will reduce the paperwork burden;
- Electronic photo collection can be successful without increasing application suspense rates; and
- An online application process can integrate externally collected applicant data into passport systems without compromising passport system data and structural integrity.

The acceptance of electronic signatures and payments for this Pilot provides the potential to establish additional online services, such as renewals for passport books and reporting lost or stolen travel documents. Any process or form available for U.S. citizens who possess a valid passport book could be bolstered with an online version of the standard paper form process. The online process, as a whole, could become the framework for applications on mobile devices.

### **Risk Assessment**

Early in the planning stages of this initiative, inherent security risks were identified. One such risk is that the Pilot will not require the applicant to submit his or her existing passport book. The applicant's passport book is normally required to verify the physical possession of the passport book and that it is not substantially damaged. For the purposes of the Pilot, a set of questions based on information that can only be found in the physical passport book must be answered to establish possession. Typically, if a passport book submitted with a renewal application is damaged, it would be retained by the processing office, and the applicant would have to reapply in person and pay an additional execution fee. This risk was considered minimal based on the limited scope of the Pilot. Furthermore, if the applicant should attempt to travel on a damaged passport book, our partners in CBP would address the situation accordingly.

Another, and more substantial, security risk is the lack of a traditional "wet" signature. Not only does the "wet" signature play a significant role in the Department's fraud detection measures, but it also impacts the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's (DS) prosecutions for fraudulent applications. The fraud detection portion of the risk was addressed by conducting a Risk Assessment and creating a set of questions with answers only the true bearer would know. Upon conclusion of the Pilot, findings will be shared with DS to assist with identifying any new training expressly for cyber-based crimes.

The impact on identity verification was the most significant security risk. The same tools passport specialists currently use for identity verification, including comparison of the photo submitted to earlier applications, will be available for the Pilot. The Department anticipates that the Pilot will provide insight into additional means of verifying identity online for potential future initiatives.

### **Next Steps**

Steps to be taken after completion of the Pilot will depend upon the findings and data collected. Should the benefits of providing an online service prove viable, the Department will look to refine this Pilot and reestablish it as a full time option to the traveling public. Furthermore, the Department will explore options for an online alternative for other manual services and processes. Conversely, should the risks prove to outweigh the benefits, the Department will discontinue the online initiative until such time that the risks can be better managed or eliminated.

To date, the Department has produced a project charter defining the scope and objectives of the Pilot, drafted the formal business requirements document defining all essential functional and non-functional requirements, completed the development of the web application and incorporated the necessary modifications to existing systems.

In September 2011, the Department responded to questions from OMB regarding our request for approval of the Pilot. The Department anticipates OMB's approval in October 2011.

This Signature Initiative will be implemented by the Department within the following timeframe:

- August – October 2011: Obtain OMB approval of Pilot (Form DS-82, U.S. Passport Renewal Application for Eligible Individuals).
- October – December 2011: Commence Pilot

**SERVICE 1: OFFICIAL DOCUMENT AUTHENTICATION**  
*Bureau of Administration, Office of Authentications*

**Overview:** The Office of Authentications is responsible for signing and issuing certificates of authentication under the seal of the Department of State for and in the name of the Secretary of State (22 CFR Part 131). The Office certifies for U.S. citizens and foreign nationals the correctness of records or documents that will be used overseas. The documents accepted for authentication include, but are not limited to: company bylaws, powers of attorney, trademarks, diplomas, transcripts, distributorship agreements, child adoptions, articles of incorporation, good standing certificates, home studies, letters of reference, etc.

We anticipate full implementation by the end of 2012.

**Key Customer Groups:** The Office receives a variety of documents from commercial organizations, private citizens, and officials of federal and state governments. The primary customers consist of members of the general public planning to travel, work, study, or conduct business abroad. A smaller group of customers include other federal agencies, state governments, and foreign embassies.

**Challenges:** Challenges include lengthy document processing times and the ability to provide timely status information to clients for documents in process. Much of the process is manual and while the staffing level has remained unchanged, the number of incoming documents has increased exponentially as countries continue to increase security requirements post-9/11. Limited resources to upgrade computer programs and hire additional staff to handle the increasing workload have led to backlogs. Sensitivity to potential security breaches from external sources and the protection of personally identifiable information makes web-based access for clients the biggest challenge. Once the process improvements cited below are in place, the customer experience will be significantly enhanced primarily via access to real-time status of documents in process, with future improvements in areas like check scanning, introduction of new technologies, and increases in self-service initiatives further enhancing that experience.

**1. Increase Feedback from Customers**

The Department will undertake the following initiatives to increase interaction with Authentications customers:

- Increase customer awareness by notifying customers at the completion of every stage during the authentication of their documents. The proactive notification during the authentication process should help to alleviate customers' concerns before they arise.
- Solicit customer feedback at the conclusion of every authentication request. At the conclusion of the authentication process, the customer will receive notification that the Department has processed his/her request. The notification will further provide a link for a customer satisfaction survey (which will have been approved by OMB), allowing the Department the opportunity to analyze customer feedback and conduct process improvement.

## **2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience**

The Department will undertake the following initiatives to adopt best practices for improving the customer experience:

- Re-engineer and redesign the entire information system used to process document authentications. The redesign will incorporate business process management (BPM) software as the new information technology platform. BPM software is designed to streamline and maximize efficiencies within a business workflow. Increases in workflow efficiencies will allow the staff to spend more time assisting customers and authenticating documents.
- Enable customers to conduct their own initial data entry via self-service kiosks when hand-delivering documents to the customer service center. This increases the time available for departmental staff to conduct authentications, while also decreasing the potential for data entry errors when transferring information from hand-written forms into the database. Any improvements to the customer lobby relative to this action item will be Section 508 compliant to ensure accessibility for all customers.
- We will incorporate improvements to the existing business process, which have been identified via formal study, into the new automated work flow process.

## **3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards**

The Department will undertake the following initiatives to develop, communicate, and use customer service metrics and targets:

- Utilizing BPM software allows the Department to track performance times between each stage of the authentication process. Tracking the performance time between every stage of the process allows for immediate identification of potential “bottlenecks” in the process, where re-engineering might be required in order to further enhance the customer experience and expectations in a positive manner. Additionally, tracking the performance times between each stage identifies areas where the Department might need to reallocate resources to improve and further streamline the overall process time. Lastly, tracking the performance times between each stage allows customers to realize how much time is required on average from beginning through the completion of an authentications request.
- Generate immediate multiple performance dashboards, populated with real-time, live data. The dashboards will provide metrics, allowing decision makers to quickly assess whether or not the authentications process is meeting desired performance standards.
- Customer service-related metrics such as document processing time and customer waiting times, compared to established performance goals, will be posted on the website and in the customer waiting area, as will Authentications Office contact information, to ensure this information is readily available to the public.

- We will utilize the primary tracking metrics of document processing turnaround time for mail-in documents and customer wait-time (for walk-in documents) to evaluate the success of business process improvements.

#### **4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery**

The Department will streamline processes to reduce costs and accelerate delivery to customers through the utilization of BPM software, as described below:

- We will maximize business workflow efficiencies via implementation of BPM software. Specifically, when the existing antiquated information system that conducts and tracks authentications is re-engineered, we will quickly identify inefficiencies, which will allow the Department to remove or reduce the inefficiencies from the re-engineered business process development effort. Further, the staff will be able to identify performance times between every stage of the workflow process, constantly assessing potential inefficiencies that might occur regardless of the environment.
- Automating status updates to customers, inter-office coordination within the workflow and introduction of e-forms into the process will eliminate/minimize some functions currently performed manually, further improving the customer service experience. Department staff will no longer spend time generating customer updates (as the system will automatically generate and distribute updates), but will increase the time spent conducting the actual authentications. The result is quicker turnaround time for the customer.
- We will implement workplace and procedural changes quickly and with flexibility, allowing even faster, more efficient and more thorough customer support. For example, if new legislation requires a change in the authentications process, the staff will be able to incorporate necessary changes 30 to 40 percent faster into the process compared to the current system.
- Automating the system will allow customers real-time access to the current status of in-process documents without delays due to the necessity of contacting the staff via telephone, fax or email which can be very cumbersome, especially during periods of peak demand. This single improvement will meet customer expectations for a service that is technologically robust, responsive to changing requirements and sensitive to customer needs.
- The security risk factors of moving from a highly interpersonal process to a self-service system will be mitigated through the use of continuously updated firewall and standard Department e-security technologies in combination with the appropriate level of oversight and periodic cybersecurity training of the staff. These safety measures will mitigate, if not eliminate, security breaches and preserve the privacy and integrity of customers' personal information.

## **SERVICE 2: ELECTRONIC PAYMENT OF ITAR REGISTRATION FEES**

*Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Directorate of Defense Trade Controls*

**Overview:** The Directorate of Defense Trade Controls (DDTC) administers the International Traffic in Arms Regulations ([ITAR, 22 CFR Parts 120-130](#)) and collects an annual registration fee as part of the ITAR registration process for industry. Up until very recently, that fee was payable to the Department of State by a corporate check drawn from a U.S. bank. In order to improve services, DDTC developed a rule that allows the public to pay ITAR registration fees electronically.

This initiative simplifies the collection and verification of payments, eliminates the need to manually process and collect returned payments, and eliminates the possibility of lost payments. **Effective September 26, 2011, electronic payment became the sole means of [registration fee submission](#).**

**Key Customer Groups:** U.S. industry involved in the manufacture, export, and brokering of defense articles and defense services as defined in the ITAR and foreign entities involved in brokering as defined in the ITAR.

**Challenges:** The Department of State received all ITAR registration payments via paper checks drawn from a U.S. bank. Fees for registration range from \$2,250 (for brokers, new companies, and companies who do not export) to over \$500,000 (for major U.S. defense companies). The fees are based on the annual licensing activities of registered companies. There are currently more than 10,000 companies registered with the Directorate, each of which must renew their registration annually. It is often difficult for foreign brokers to obtain a check drawn on a U.S. bank in order to submit their registration fee and U.S. companies have reported problems with their Chief Financial Officers in obtaining checks for such payments. Furthermore, the process within the Department to accept, deposit and receive credit for the payment involved multiple offices and was often time consuming.

### **1. Increase Feedback from Customers**

A proposed rule to allow for electronic payment of ITAR registration fees through the Department of the Treasury was published in the Federal Register on February 24, 2011. During the comment period, the Department of State received no pertinent comments and therefore decided to move forward to adopt the proposed rule as final. DDTC prepared the final rule for publication and it went into effect 30 days later.

This initiative will benefit both industry and the Department by simplifying and streamlining the ITAR registration payment process. Based on informal feedback received during the comment period, industry is supportive of an electronic payment process for ITAR registration fees.

### **2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience**

Prior to publication of the proposed rule, DDTC conducted limited testing of the electronic payment process with several U.S. companies as well as with several foreign brokers.

- Based on the feedback received during the limited testing, the draft instructions were revised and published on the Directorate's website after publication of the final rule.
- The instructions and regulations for the electronic payment process will be modified as necessary and as part of our commitment to continuous service improvement.

**3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards**

As part of the plan, the electronic payment process would go into effect 30 days after publication of the final rule.

- Customers can expect immediate improvements in the processing of ITAR registrations as the applicants will no longer have to cut, account for, and track delivery of check payments.
- DDTC will no longer have to submit paper checks for deposit, handle checks returned for non-payment, return checks drawn on foreign banks, or return checks related to incomplete registration packages.
- A customer service metric that can be used to gauge success of the electronic processing procedure is the improvement in processing time.
- The number of incomplete registration packages returned to industry because of problems with payment will greatly diminish. There remains the likelihood of a company electronically paying the incorrect amount. However, procedures and instructions will be reviewed to determine what adjustments may be required to decrease such occurrences.

**4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery**

- The Department of State will benefit from the electronic payment process by not having to handle paper checks for ITAR registration fees.
- The electronic process uses a Department of the Treasury program to accept electronic payments on behalf of U.S. government agencies. This process will not require additional resources within the Department of State.
- Through electronic processing, DDTC will have the ITAR registration fees available for use of authorized activities sooner than paper processes allow.
- The risks associated with paper checks are eliminated (e.g., checks lost in the mail, collecting on bounced checks, etc.).