

## **BCIS Customer Service Line (*National Customer Service Center*) handling of Service Requests from customers with pending applications**

### **Overview**

With respect to pending cases, in addition to scheduling certain kinds of appointments, the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) plays a critical problem identification role. Customers call concerned about processing times, or because they believe a problem has occurred in the processing of their case. The NCSC answers questions, and identifies case processing issues so processing sites can take appropriate action.

With respect to cases processed at BCIS service centers, the purpose of automated case status by web and phone is simply to give a customer the ability to confirm a case's general processing status, not to let them try to monitor every discrete step as their case is processed.<sup>1</sup>

NCSC customer service representatives have access to exactly the same information about the general processing status of a case that is available direct to customers. They also use current processing times<sup>2</sup> and information from a customer to determine when to take a service request.

For a service center case that is within the projected processing time, the NCSC will take a service request for things such as change of address, not getting a receipt within a certain time, and errors in the information on the receipt notice.

The NCSC will also take a service request if a customer doesn't receive a decision or update within the current projected processing time. In this respect the test is simple – if a case is outside the current projected processing time and the customer has not received a request for evidence (RFE) or other update with respect to processing time, then the NCSC will initiate a case status referral, which is one type of service request.

Processing times can change over time. That's the reason for the emphasis on current processing time. So how does this work in terms of a referral? Let's say a customer files a case and the receipt says processing will take up to thirty days. If the customer doesn't get a decision or update within that 30 days, we encourage him or her to call for an update. We'll check the current processing time. If it has changed, we'll give them the revised processing time. If the case is older than the current processing time, we'll take a referral. However, if a case is within the current case processing time, then a case status referral isn't appropriate.

The NCSC takes most kinds of service requests directly, and passes the request to the processing site for research. These are called 'referrals'. Where this happens the processing site will respond direct to the customer.

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<sup>1</sup> Projected processing time takes into account the number of cases already awaiting processing that must be processed first, and thus it is normal for a case to show as 'pending' for almost all the processing time.

<sup>2</sup> With respect to service center cases, projections of current processing times are provided by each service center every two weeks, so this is the most current information available.

However, due to the nature of some kinds of service requests, the role of the NCSC is to explain to the customer how to make their request direct to the processing site. These are called ‘assistance services’.

### Referral Service Requests

Referrals are taken as described below. If a case is within a timeframe described below, remind the customer to check again if the process isn’t completed within the projected timeframe.

Referral categories	Service Centers	Local Offices
1. Non-receipt referral	X	-
2. No automated information referral	X	-
3. Non-delivery referral	X	-
4. Case status referral	X	X
5. Dept. of State review of J-1 nonimmigrant foreign residence waiver request referral	X	NA
6. Appointment rescheduling request referral	NA	X
7. Change of Address referral	X	N-400 only
8. Typographic error correction referral	X	-
9. Change in pending I-129 beneficiaries/consulate	X	NA

#### ① Non-receipt referral (Service Center filings only)

- Referral taken if customer mailed their application to a service center more than **30** days ago and has not received receipt notice.

#### ② No automated information referral (Service Center filings only)

- Referral taken if the customer has a valid receipt number which doesn’t work in the automated on-line and telephone systems

#### ③ Non-delivery referral (Service Center filings only)

- Referral taken if case status online indicates that the service center mailed a notice or document to the customer more than **30** days ago but the customer has not received it. This category covers the non-receipt of any notice or document other than the actual receipt.

#### ④ Case status referral

- Referral taken if:
  - case is **outside** the processing site’s current processing time for that type of case, **and**
  - the customer has not received an update within past **60** days or earlier referral not answered within referral processing timeframe (**30** days).

(Note 1: For N-400's since the local office is the destination office, that office’s processing time is what is relevant, and any case status referral will go to that local office, not to the Service Center.)

(Note 2: In this context the customer service representative’s role isn’t to simply repeat information a customer just heard. Instead it’s on giving an update on processing times, what that means in terms of timeframes until an application will be completed, and determining whether it is appropriate to take a service request..)

⑤ **Department of State review of J-1 nonimmigrant foreign residence waiver request referral** (Service Center filings only)

- Referral taken if no notice received from Service Center within **60** days after an interested Government agency, a Health Department of a U.S. State, or a 'no objection' letter from a foreign government was sent to a Service Center to waive the 2 year foreign residence requirement for a J-1 nonimmigrant.

⑥ **Appointment rescheduling request referral**

- Referral taken if customer has a scheduled appointment at a local office and claims an emergency prevents them from appearing

**Notes:**

- Not available for Application Support Center (ASC) appointments. (ASC appointment notices give instructions for alternate appearance times.)
- Customer to be reminded that:
  - making such a request can delay eligibility for any relevant interim benefits; and
  - making request does not itself relieve customer of responsibility for appearing, and that if local office doesn't find that there was good cause they may deny the request, and, if the applicant didn't appear as scheduled, the application.

⑦ **Change of Address referral** (N-400, Application for Naturalization, and Service Center filings only)

- Referral taken if customer has already moved, not if customer going to move.

**Note:** N-400 Change of Address requests use a special verification and collection system. For other cases filed at Service Center, the NCSC will collect the relevant information and refer it to the Service Center for action. The NCSC will also remind customers of the separate Form AR-11, Change of Address Form, process.

⑧ **Error correction referral** (service center filings only)

- **Typographical error on service center issued notice and/or associated I-94, Arrival/Departure Record-** Referral taken if customer claims that receipt notice or other Service Center notice and/or associated I-94 has typographic errors.
- **Typographical error or quality control problem on a BCIS document -** NCSC will instruct customer to file a new application, and to submit the erroneous document with the error along with an explanation of the problem, and to submit using procedures for requesting special handling.

**Note: Typographical error on I-94 arrival/departure record issued when customer entered the U.S.** – customer will be told they must go on a walk-in basis to their local office and request correction by Bureau of Customs and Border Protection.

⑨ **Change in I-129 beneficiaries/consulates** – A Form I-129, Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, can include multiple beneficiaries. Occasionally a petitioner or representative needs to delete a beneficiary, or request that a different consulate or Port of Entry be notified.

- Referral will be taken if the petitioner or authorized representative calls and indicates the need to make these kinds of changes with respect to an I-129.

**Note:** The NCSC will collect info about the caller and petition receipt number so that the service center can call the caller back to follow up and get specifics about the requested changes.

### Assistance services

Many customers have service requests that do not fall into the above referral categories. For the following service requests the NCSC explains to the customer how to submit their request direct to the service center.. The following procedures ensure that the NCSC provides the necessary information linkage to facilitate communication between an SC and it's customers on matters short of a referral, and to ensure that the channels for those communications are discrete from general correspondence.

It is essential that we clearly distinguish these from referrals in our customers' minds because referrals carry clear expectations in terms of quick response time. These requests, while important, either do not require such priority, or cover procedures where the Service Centers have determined that they need the additional controls associated with written communication, rather than using the NCSC as a clearinghouse.

Assistance service categories	Service Centers	Local Offices
1. Request for return of original documents after decision	X	-
2. Asserts incorrect decision or RFE	X	-
3. Request for special processing or expedite	X	-
4. Representative change of address	X	-

For each of the above each Service Center will set up a special mail address or envelope notation both in terms of normal mail and overnight mail so they can be readily distinguished from more general correspondence. At the option of Service Center Operation, they may also accept categories 2 and 3 by facsimile (fax). The regular mail, overnight mail and any fax number used for this will be listed in the Service Center's profiles, available on the internet and through the NCSC.

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① **Request for return of original documents after application approved or denied** –this relates to items such as original birth or marriage certificates, Permanent Resident cards and naturalization certificates, submitted with applications that were processed by the Service Center.

- The NCSC will tell callers how to submit a Form G-884 and copy of the receipt or approval notice direct to the Service Center.

② **Asserts incorrect decision or Request for Evidence** - this relates to cases where a customer asserts that there is a clear technical error, such as receiving a request for evidence where the requested evidence was submitted with the application, or denial for lack of prosecution when they believe they responded timely.

- The NCSC will tell callers in these circumstances how to write or fax the service center.
- The NCSC will also advise customers of existing appeal or motion procedures.

③ **Request for special processing or expedite** - the program for local offices does not accept requests for expedites or other special processing because in that situation the safety valve is that the customer can go to the local office and directly lay out the basis for their request. That's not possible with the Service Centers. Service Center Operations will standardize the criteria for special processing and expedite requests, and this will be reflected on the Service Center profiles available on the internet and from the NCSC.

- The NCSC will tell callers in these circumstances how to write or fax the service center.

**Note:** No request for special handling/expedite will be accepted where premium processing is available.

④ **Representative change of address** – Like customers, attorneys and other authorized representatives sometimes move.

- The NCSC will tell explain how a representative can write to an Service Center directly to provide the new address, with instructions to include a list of pending applications at that service center for which it has a Form G-28, Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Representative, on file.

**Note:** If a representative or customer inquires about how to notify the Service about a change in representation, such as the addition, dropping or change of representatives, the NCSC will instruct them to mail a new G-28 and explanation direct to the processing site.

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**Referral form**

The referral form has two pages. The first is the *Referral Research and Action* page; the second is a formatted letter the Service Center will use to respond back to the customer with the results of their research and findings.

The first page contains the data collected by the NCSC with respect to the request. The customer response page has summary data to minimize the open circulation of core customer data, and to ensure that the focus is on the bureau's response.