

Immigration Information

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2.7 Knowledgeable Service.

This section will first define what it means to be knowledgeable about your job and then explain how to be knowledgeable with applicants.

You should be knowledgeable about all aspects of your job so that you can provide technically proficient and answer an applicant's questions with information that is correct and current. In addition, every applicant who interacts with USCIS has a set of expectations about the application process, and he or she will judge the service received based on whether it meets these expectations. You can meet some of these expectations simply by being courteous and professional. You can also help manage the applicant's expectations and reduce their anxiety by responding to the applicant's questions and providing accurate information regarding the next steps in the process. \ 8

Do: (1) Know your job. Understand the laws, regulations, policies, procedures, and local guidelines that apply to the applications you will be adjudicating. Only by understanding these critical elements will you be able to perform your job effectively and make the correct decisions. Moreover, when you are interacting with an applicant or with anyone else, you should be able to provide sound and knowledgeable guidance.

(2) Understand the material in an applicant's file. You will base your decisions, in part, on the information in the applicant's file. Each of these documents and papers is important; therefore, understand what they contain, how to interpret them, and what actions they might require you to take.

(3) Clearly explain your actions. An applicant may be confused about why you are asking certain questions or taking certain actions. If the applicant feels that you are singling him/her out, he or she may get defensive. However, if you explain the reasoning behind your actions and/or the need to establish eligibility, you can help keep the situation calm.

(4) Clearly explain your decisions. You should clearly explain your decision (either verbally or in writing) to the applicant. If you do not give clear explanations, your decisions can seem arbitrary. In some cases, when you issue denials that are mailed to the applicant after the interview is completed, you are legally required to provide a written decision. Regardless of the manner in which the decision is conveyed, your decision should

- be based in the laws and regulations that govern the benefit being sought,
- be grounded in the material within the applicant's file, and
- be clearly explained to the applicant.

(5) Communicate clearly and accurately about the next steps in the application process. Whenever you meet with an applicant, you should clearly explain to the applicant the next steps in the application process. For example: If the applicant needs to return to be re-tested in English/Civics and Government, you should explain that the applicant will receive an appointment letter in the mail with a date and time for the interview during which they will be re-tested. Or, if you are approving an application, you should explain the next steps in the process.

the applicant will receive a letter in the mail with the date, time and location of the oath ceremony. If applicant will be attending the oath ceremony that day, you should explain when and where the ceremony take place and where the applicant should wait.

(6) If relevant, clearly explain any additional actions that are required of the applicant. In cases where applicant needs to take additional actions, clearly explain to the applicant what he or she needs to do. For example, if you are continuing a case to seek more documents, explain both verbally and in writing (using Form N-14, I-72, or other appropriate form):

- exactly which documents you will require,
- by what date the applicant must respond,
- that you will adjudicate the application based on the record if the response is not received timely.

(7) Answer the applicant's questions about the process. An applicant may ask you other questions about the application process. You should willingly provide the information or, if necessary refer the applicant to a more informed source. Do not attempt to give legal advice about whether a specific person is eligible for a benefit which is not the application or petition you are presently adjudicating, or if a person should or should not apply for a benefit other than the one presently being adjudicated. Also, at the end of the interview you should ask the applicant if he or she has any further questions concerning his/her application or about the benefit sought.

(8) If you are running noticeably behind on your interview schedule, tell the applicant approximately how long you will get to his/her case. If you are able, it may be helpful to tell applicants if you are running noticeably behind on your interview schedule. Not knowing how long one will have to wait for service is very frustrating. Communicating with the applicant about your schedule can help calm the situation.

(9) Obtain necessary training. You should work with your supervisor to ensure that you receive all necessary training.

Don't: (1) Don't provide answers to questions for which you don't know the answer. If you don't know something or are not authorized to provide certain information, don't make up the answer. Instead, refer the applicant to a more informed source, or if possible, find out the answer for the applicant.

(2) Don't provide legal advice. You are not a lawyer for the applicant and your job is not to provide legal advice. Rather your job is to administer immigration law. As such, you should not advise applicants what they should or should not do under the law. However, it is appropriate to explain to the applicant what the law requires.

(3) Don't act frustrated or angry if the applicant asks questions. USCIS application processes can be complex, and an applicant will be discouraged from providing additional information to you if your response to his/her questions is hostile.

(4) Don't unfairly raise or lower an applicant's hopes. Don't provide information that would unfairly raise or lower an applicant's hopes. For example, if you know that a continued case won't be reviewed for another month, don't give the applicant the impression that the review will occur next week.

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