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Remote Immigration Interview System

Using videoconferencing technology to accelerate the rate of naturalizations

PROBLEM

In recent years, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has faced a mounting backlog in processing N-400 applications, the form eligible green card holders use to apply for naturalized citizenship. Surges in application numbers, changes to interview requirements, and reduced staffing have all contributed to protracted wait times. In March 2020, over 700,000 applications were pending review. Compounded with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic — which further strained staffing and led to nationwide USCIS office closures — the agency is dealing with extraordinary challenges. **How might we increase the naturalization rates of eligible green card holders?**

FOCUS

The naturalization interview is the longest step of the process for the vast majority of citizenship applicants. Unequal caseload distribution among USCIS offices where interviews take place can contribute to disproportionate backlogs in certain locations. Interviews are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic more than any other step in the naturalization process. USCIS needs innovation to address the growing backlog of citizenship applications and provide more resiliency for the agency moving forward.

SOLUTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic provoked exploration of non-traditional interview methods as in-person interviews became impossible. To facilitate remote interviews, many USCIS offices deployed video-conferencing technology (VTC) with positive reviews from USCIS employees and administrators alike. USCIS should expand the use of video-technology interviews across its offices to even caseloads and alleviate difficulties in hiring and training new employees in talent-scarce locations.

This project proposes a three-phased approach to expand existing VTC use within USCIS for longterm agency-wide adoption. A phased approach minimizes disruption during the ongoing COVID crisis while increasing flexibility to meet applicant demand.

- **Phase One:** USCIS focuses on using VTC within each field office to allow adjudicators to sit in a separate room from applicants and their representatives, ensuring a safer experience for all.

- **Phase Two:** VTC allows an applicant in one field office to be interviewed by an adjudicator in another field office, enabling greater flexibility in matching supply and demand across geographies.

- **Phase Three:** Adjudicators employ VTC to conduct interviews from secure locations outside of USCIS offices, while applicants are still required to be present at a USCIS location. This increases adjudicator work-from-home flexibility, for example, to manage childcare requirements. It might therefore also increase adjudicator retention while meeting security and privacy requirements.

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ABOUT TELI

This project was completed as part of the pilot Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI), a skills-building initiative to prepare experienced technology leaders to engage effectively with public sector challenges. Each team was given the opportunity to tackle one of two policy challenge prompts. Over the course of eight weeks, the teams conducted research, narrowed their focuses to particular aspects of the prompts, and proposed solutions. Learn more at aspentechpolicyhub.com/teli.

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