



SEP 28 2012

120/9.8

## Memorandum

TO: All Asylum Office Staff

FROM: Ted Kim, Acting Chief

SUBJECT: Asylum Division National Customer Access Standards

### I. Purpose

These guidelines standardize procedures for receiving and responding to customer requests for information. This national plan provides Asylum Division customers throughout the country with multiple means to obtain information and assistance while ensuring that their confidentiality is protected under 8 C.F.R. §208.6. These procedures apply to information requests concerning all adjudications, screenings, and services performed by the Asylum Division.

These procedures should be implemented in the first quarter of FY 2013.

### II. Receiving Inquiries – Minimum Requirements

Asylum Offices are required to establish certain means of receiving customer inquiries, as outlined below. However, individual Asylum Offices will have broad latitude in implementing these requirements. It is important to note that these procedures represent minimum requirements and do not prevent Asylum Offices from offering additional means of customer communication.<sup>1</sup>

1. E-mail Address: Asylum Offices must establish a dedicated e-mail box and staff it appropriately.
2. Telephone Number: Asylum Offices must establish and staff a dedicated telephone number.
3. Letters: Asylum Offices must continue to respond to written inquiries in a timely manner.
4. Walk-In Hours: Asylum Offices must hold walk-in hours at least 4 hours each week.
5. Service Request Management Tool (SRMT) Inquiries: SRMT inquiries are created when customers (including applicants and their attorneys or representatives) call the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) number (1-800-375-5283). A copy of the SRMT User Guide

<sup>1</sup> Additional requirements may be instituted by HQASM at a later date.

and list of Frequently Asked Questions is available on the RAIO Virtual Library (RAIOVL).<sup>2</sup> Asylum Offices must review SRMT every day for new inquiries, especially as there may be requests for expedited handling.

### III. Protection of Confidentiality Under 8 C.F.R. Section 208.6

Asylum Offices must ensure that they protect confidentiality under 8 C.F.R. §208.6 and do not improperly disclose information contained in or pertaining to any asylum application or records pertaining to a credible fear or reasonable fear determination to any third party.<sup>3</sup> Improper disclosure may include confirming or denying that a particular individual filed for asylum or received a credible fear or reasonable fear review. Regardless of inquiry type, Asylum Offices must verify the identity of the individual requesting information and ensure that they are responding to either the applicant or an attorney or accredited representative with a properly completed G-28 on file. If the individual requesting information is not the applicant or attorney/representative with a signed G-28, then Asylum Offices must receive a confidentiality waiver from the applicant before providing a response.

### IV. Responding to Inquiries

Asylum Offices may use any of the following modes to respond to inquiries. Asylum Offices shall copy the applicant's attorney or accredited representative with a signed G-28 on file on all responses.

1. **E-mail and Telephone Inquiries:** When it is possible to verify the identity of the caller or the e-mailer, Asylum Offices may respond to the inquiries by telephone or e-mail. If it is not possible to verify the identity of the caller or the e-mailer, Asylum Offices will respond to the inquiries by mailing a written response to the last address of record. Offices should routinely check e-mail accounts and strive to provide a substantive response to e-mail inquiries within 2 weeks.
2. **Letter Inquiry:** Asylum Offices will respond to letter inquiries by mailing a written response to the last address of record.
3. **In Person Inquiry:** Asylum Offices may provide a response in person after verifying the inquirer's identity. If it is not possible to verify the person's identity, Asylum Offices will respond to inquiries by mailing a written response to the last address of record. Asylum Offices will inform the person submitting the inquiry that they are unable to verify the person's identity and therefore they are unable to either confirm or deny the existence of an asylum application.
4. **SRMT Inquiry:** Offices must check SRMT on a daily basis and respond to all SRMT inquiries by the established deadlines.<sup>4</sup> As part of the overall commitment of USCIS to ensure customer service, HQASM will receive monthly Service Request Timely Completion reports from the Customer Service Directorate (CSD), review them for timeliness, and will provide a monthly workload report to the Asylum Offices. The monthly workload reports will be saved on the RAIOVL with a companion guide that explains the reports.

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<sup>2</sup> These documents should be used for training purposes only.

<sup>3</sup> See 8 C.F.R. §208.6(a).

<sup>4</sup> Current deadlines ("target days") are established by USCIS Customer Service Directorate. They include five days to respond to a change of address request and seven days to respond to disability accommodation requests.

**V. Tracking And Record Keeping**

To ensure accountability, all inquiry responses shall contain a unique identifier (e.g., the AO number) so that management can identify who responded to the inquiry. Offices are not required to provide individual contact information for management, Supervisory Asylum Officers, Asylum Officers, or other staff to inquirers.

A copy of all e-mailed and written communication will be stored on the record side of the A-file. Oral communication will be documented in a log that tracks the date the inquiry was received, the unique identifier of the person responding to the inquiry, and the date the response was provided.

**VI. Communication Plan**

Instructions for contacting the Asylum Offices using the methods described above will be posted on [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov), consistent with these guidelines. Offices must also post the communication methods in a public area in the office.

**VII. Appendix – Templates**

The following templates should be used as applicable and at management's discretion. The Standard Phone, E-mail, and In Person Inquiry Response explains that due to confidentiality regulations the offices are unable to provide information about I-589 and I-881 applications unless they are able to verify the identity of the individual and explains how the information will be provided. The Inquiry Response is a template that applicants may complete to request information on the status of their application adjudication.

1. Standard Phone, E-Mail, and In Person Inquiry Response Template
2. Inquiry Response Template

**VIII. Questions**

Contact the Asylum Operations Branch with questions regarding this memo and attachments.

Attachments: (2)