

FY 2017-2021

USCIS Strategic Plan

November 16, 2016



U.S. Citizenship and
Immigration Services

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) fulfills one of our government's most noble missions: to secure America's promise as a nation of immigrants by uniting families, providing refuge, fostering economic prosperity, promoting citizenship, and protecting our nation. The 2017-2021 USCIS Strategic Plan represents longstanding national values while highlighting areas of focus to strengthen and effectively administer the immigration services system over the next five years.

This USCIS Strategic Plan describes the agency's goals and objectives and the strategies it will undertake to achieve them. This strategic plan was created in a collaborative manner through multiple engagements with USCIS leadership. Led by Deputy Director Lori Scialabba, the planning process was participative and inclusive, drawing upon approximately 90 different leaders and subject matter experts from across USCIS.

As the USCIS Director, I am very pleased to present the USCIS Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years (FYs) 2017-2021.



León Rodríguez

INTRODUCTION

More than 13 years have passed since the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created on March 1, 2003, following the passage of the Homeland Security Act of 2002. As one of seven operational components to emerge from the reorganization of more than 20 federal agencies within DHS, USCIS has evolved in significant ways and contributed to the further maturation and identity of the homeland security enterprise. Our strategic plan aligns with the DHS strategic plan, which in turn, operationalizes the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review. This strategic alignment is a significant achievement that advances the unified vision of a homeland that is safe, secure, and resilient against terrorism and other hazards—where American interests, aspirations, and way of life can thrive.

Our plan identifies five goals with supporting objectives and strategies informed by our changing environment. For each goal, we have identified outcomes that will help us to identify success and indicators of progress that will help us gauge progress toward what we seek to achieve. In collaboration across our organization, partnership with other agencies, engagement with public stakeholders, and leadership from each and every USCIS employee, we will work over the next five years to strengthen and effectively administer the immigration services system by:

1. Identifying, addressing, and mitigating national security and fraud risks to the immigration system;
2. Delivering consistently high quality services;
3. Enabling our workforce to excel in a dynamic environment;
4. Promoting the importance, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship; and
5. Enhancing our interactions with customers, stakeholders, and the general public.

As a federal benefits-granting agency, we are charged with making adjudication decisions based on the law and the facts. Equipping USCIS officers to make quality determinations requires a cohesive policy framework and operational infrastructure so that decisions are informed by relevant guidance and corresponding training, are made in a timely manner, and further the integrity and goals of the immigration system. Additionally, we must be responsive to changes in global migration patterns, the geo-political and economic climate, and our nation's immigration law and policy and the resulting fluctuations in the demand for our services both domestically and overseas.

Over the coming years, real and potential changes to immigration law, policy, and global migration patterns will continue to significantly change demand for USCIS services. In whatever iteration these changes occur, we are mindful that fluctuations in service demand will continue to impact our organization. In addition, we must regularly respond to new management requirements, requests from oversight organizations, and legislative mandates. We are committed to expanding innovative operational practices that enable greater flexibility in meeting changing demands for our services, developing a workforce able to apply their diverse

perspectives and competencies in new ways, and expanding partnerships that enhance efficient service delivery.

As a quality organization, we are also careful stewards of resources. USCIS requires a complex infrastructure to adjudicate the nearly 7 million applications and petitions it receives each year. In addition, we are making a series of technology investments in our agency's future. Most notably, this involves our continued and steady transformation from a paper-based to an electronic, online environment—a move that will improve efficiency and customer service over time. Such investments will increase the quality of our service delivery, reduce risk to the immigration system, improve customer engagement, and enable us to manage and operate in more innovative ways. For example, access to more sophisticated and extensive information will help us to better understand customer needs and manage performance and workload. Similarly, reduced dependence on paper files and outdated technology will allow for more flexible allocation of work across geographic areas. As USCIS continues to implement new technologies, we will strengthen management capabilities that facilitate successful acquisition, procurement, and sound fiscal stewardship; expand innovative operational practices that enable greater flexibility in how we meet changing demands for service; strengthen analytic capabilities that help us understand our environment; and empower customers and stakeholders to interact with us and conveniently access the information they need.

Our agency's core funding is not through appropriations but through the fees that filers pay for immigration benefits. As such, we are mindful that individuals who seek our services range from the most fortunate to those most vulnerable and in need. We consider this reality when we make our budget decisions and commit ourselves to administering the immigration benefits system in ways that are fiscally sound and safeguard national security while maintaining the public's access to our programs.

At the same time, we recognize that there will always be some individuals and organizations who seek to exploit our nation's immigration system. Since the creation of USCIS, we have made a sustained commitment to addressing such national security and fraud risks. We have enhanced document security, strengthened the consistency of screening, and developed analytic capabilities that further strengthen our ability to make risk-informed, data-driven decisions. We also have engaged with our government partners to share information, provide training, and participate in numerous task forces in order to mitigate risk across the immigration system. Looking to the future, we will remain vigilant by continually adapting our approaches to changing risks. We are committed to building upon existing investments and strengthening capabilities that enable collaboration across USCIS and with our government partners to better detect, understand, and address these risks, especially as they pertain to immigration benefit fraud, an area where we have unique expertise.

Our continued success as an immigration agency depends on working with and understanding people from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Therefore, in all that we do, we recognize that the most valuable resource we have is our people. We will continue to cultivate a diverse and talented workforce. The broader and richer base of experiences that comes with our

diverse workforce will continue to foster USCIS' ability to solve problems, reach sound decisions, and improve our operations. As we look ahead, we will welcome new generations of employees who believe in the USCIS mission and bring diverse expertise to bear on the range of work before our agency. Additionally, opportunities for employees to take on leadership roles will increase as approximately one-third of the agency's current managers and supervisors become eligible to retire. We will focus on developing a workforce able to apply their talents in new and innovative ways. We will also invest in developing leaders able to shape and lead our evolving organization.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF USCIS

Every day, USCIS employees fulfill the promise of our organization. On an average day:

- More than 335,000 people visit our Web site.
- We process 256 refugee applications around the world, and grant asylum to 55 people already in the United States.
- We answer 56,551 phone calls to our toll-free customer service line.
- We ensure the employment eligibility of more than 83,000 new hires in the United States.
- We fingerprint and photograph 15,000 applicants at our 138 Application Support Centers.
- We provide immigration services, engage in fraud prevention and detection, and serve as government liaisons in 24 international field offices in 22 countries.
- We complete 31,212 applications for various immigration benefits.
- We process 3,541 applications to sponsor relatives and fiancées.
- We help American parents adopt 46 foreign-born orphans.
- We process 2,414 petitions filed by employers to bring workers to the United States.
- We grant permanent residence to 4,081 people and issue 8,159 Permanent Resident Cards.
- We welcome 2,911 new citizens. Typically 30 of them are already serving their adopted country in the United States Armed Forces.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the past several years, USCIS has continued to evolve as an organization and has made significant strides to better position itself to deliver on its mission as well as to implement the specific policy and operational priorities of the Department of Homeland Security and the Obama administration.

To use best industry practices and approaches in our mission, we are moving forward with the USCIS Transformation Program. The USCIS Transformation Program is making the processing of immigration benefit documents more efficient, effective, and secure. Through the Transformation Program, USCIS will transform the nation's immigration process from a mostly paper-based system to a fully electronic environment.

To reduce national security risks to the immigration system, USCIS enhanced the scope and frequency of national security vetting of applicants for immigration benefits, including in the Refugee Admissions Program. Security vetting now encompasses a broader array of government databases and is conducted upon initial review of an application and, in cases of particular importance, again immediately before extending the benefit.

To promote citizenship to the more than 8 million individuals eligible to apply for naturalization, USCIS created the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program. In addition, USCIS promotes an awareness of the rights, responsibilities, and importance of U.S. citizenship and provides free naturalization preparation resources to permanent residents and immigrant-serving organizations. We have also established partnerships with all four branches of the armed services to incorporate naturalization into basic training to ensure expedited service for military members and conclude their citizenship process before graduation.

To increase use of E-Verify, an online tool allowing businesses to determine the eligibility of their employees to work in the United States, USCIS leverages new tools and technologies to enhance the availability, usability, and integrity of the E-Verify program. Additionally, in our efforts to combat identity fraud, we gained access to the Department of State's passport photograph holdings, launched state-level partnerships to access departments of motor vehicles, and developed and launched E-Verify Self-Check, allowing users to check the accuracy of their information in government records before seeking employment. The very high accuracy and user satisfaction rates are testament to the success of these enhancements.

To promote good governance and make the agency more accessible and responsive, USCIS also launched an unprecedented, agency-wide, and top-to-bottom review of policies to ensure consistency and rigor in the agency's application of immigration law. Further, USCIS fosters regular stakeholder engagements on initiatives, solicits comments and feedback on policy proposals, and listens to community concerns—all to ensure that local realities and community needs inform our policy-making and operational processes. As a further step, to help protect those who might fall victim to immigration fraud, we launched the Unauthorized Practice of Immigration Law (UPIL) initiative, a nationwide collaborative effort with federal, state, and

municipal agencies and enforcement authorities to combat notario fraud and other unscrupulous practices that undermine the integrity of the immigration system.

To foster organizational excellence internally and enhance the quality and consistency of our adjudications, over the past several years USCIS has opened several new field offices and processing centers. In addition, the USCIS structure has been realigned to more accurately reflect and serve key priorities throughout our offices and facilities worldwide.

FRAMEWORK

The goals, objectives, and action strategies in this plan align with the DHS mission and strategic direction.

DHS Vision: A homeland that is safe, secure, and resilient against terrorism and other hazards—where American interests, aspirations, and way of life can thrive.

DHS Mission: We will lead efforts to achieve a safe, secure, and resilient homeland. We will prevent terrorism and enhance security, secure and manage our borders, enforce and administer our immigration laws, strengthen the security and resilience of cyberspace and critical infrastructure, and strengthen national resilience. We will accomplish these missions while maturing and strengthening DHS and the homeland security enterprise.

Goal 3.1 of the DHS Strategic Plan, *Strengthen and Effectively Administer the Immigration Services System*, directly frames our activities as an agency as we seek to:

- Promote lawful immigration;
- Effectively administer the immigration services system; and
- Promote the integration of lawful immigrants into American society through increased awareness of, and access to, U.S. citizenship.

USCIS Mission: USCIS secures America’s promise as a nation of immigrants by uniting families, providing refuge, fostering economic prosperity, promoting citizenship, and protecting our nation.

Goals, Objective, and Strategies, Outcomes, and Indicators

Our goals describe what we seek to achieve through the work in this plan. Each goal in turn is supported by a number of objectives which describe discrete components of the goal. The strategies then identify the work we plan to do through specific activities, tasks, and projects to accomplish each objective over the next five years. The strategies complement one another in support of an objective, just as the objectives complement one another in support of a goal.

We have also defined outcomes and indicators of progress for each goal. Outcomes represent the changed behaviors, conditions, or capabilities that we anticipate as we pursue the goals.

Indicators of progress are broad measures that can be used to help us gauge progress toward our desired outcomes.

CORE VALUES

Integrity

We will always strive for the highest level of integrity in our dealings with our customers, our fellow employees, and the citizens of the United States of America. We review each case before us on its own merit and reach decisions that are based on the law and facts. We will be ever mindful of the importance of the trust the American people have placed in us to administer the nation's immigration system fairly, honestly, and correctly.

Respect

We will demonstrate respect in all of our actions. We will ensure that everyone we affect will be treated with dignity and courtesy regardless of the outcome of their case. We will model this principle in all of our activities with each other, our customers, and the public. Through our actions, USCIS will become known as an example of respect, dignity, and courtesy.

Innovation

As we meet the challenges to come, we will strive to find the most effective means to accomplish our goals. We will use innovation, resourcefulness, creativity, and sound management principles to strive for world-class results. We will approach every challenge with a balance of enthusiasm and wisdom in our effort to fulfill our vision.

Vigilance

In this era of increased global threats and security challenges, we will remain mindful of our obligation to provide immigration services in a manner that strengthens and enhances our nation's security. We will exercise vigilance as we perform our mission. We will carefully administer every aspect of our work to uphold the security and integrity of the immigration system so that new immigrants and the public can hold in high regard the privileges and advantages of lawful presence in the United States.

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USCIS MISSION

The USCIS mission represents long-standing national values:

USCIS secures America’s promise as a nation of immigrants by uniting families, providing refuge, fostering economic prosperity, promoting citizenship, and protecting our nation.

1.1.1 Summary of USCIS Goals and Objectives

Our commitment to this mission motivates us to continually seek better ways to achieve on behalf of the American people, who entrust us with the responsibility to uphold our nation’s immigration laws, and the customers who seek our services. To that end, this 2017-2021 Strategic Plan identifies changes and enhancements for continued mission success.

The plan consists of five goals with supporting objectives and strategies. Each of the five goals requires cross-organizational engagement. Figure 1 depicts the plan’s mission, goals, and objectives.

USCIS Mission				
USCIS secures America’s promise as a nation of immigrants by uniting families, providing refuge, fostering economic prosperity, promoting citizenship, and protecting our nation				
Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5
<p>Identify, address, and mitigate national security and fraud risks to the immigration system</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>1.1 Enhance understanding and collaboration across USCIS about national security and fraud risk management</p> <p>1.2 Strengthen intergovernmental sharing and use of information to minimize national security risks and facilitate effective case processing</p> <p>1.3 Advance a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the detection and mitigation of fraud risks across the immigration system</p>	<p>Deliver consistently high quality services</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>2.1 Continue to build a shared culture of quality</p> <p>2.2 Deliver clear and timely guidance</p> <p>2.3 Strengthen the flexibility of USCIS service delivery</p> <p>2.4 Strengthen program management, acquisition management, and financial management</p>	<p>Enable our workforce to excel in a dynamic environment</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>3.1 Promote a shared understanding of the meaning and importance of the USCIS mission</p> <p>3.2 Develop agency leaders to shape and lead and evolving organization</p> <p>3.3 Develop a workforce prepared to address changing needs</p>	<p>Promote the importance, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>4.1 Increase immigrants’ understanding of civics, citizenship, and the naturalization process</p> <p>4.2 Highlight the importance of citizenship to immigrants and our nation</p>	<p>Enhance our interactions with customers, stakeholders, and the general public</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>5.1 Strengthen our understanding of customer and stakeholder needs</p> <p>5.2 Provide an enhanced experience across all customer and stakeholder interactions</p>

Figure 1: USCIS Mission, Goals, and Objectives

We have also defined outcomes and indicators of progress for each goal. Outcomes represent the changed behaviors, conditions, or capabilities that we anticipate as we pursue the goals. Indicators of progress are broad measures that can be used to help us gauge progress toward our desired outcomes.

Goal 1: Identify, address, and mitigate national security and fraud risks to the immigration system

Immigration-related national security and fraud risks require our concerted focus and action through close collaboration and information sharing. The scope of our immigration responsibilities positions us to identify information about fraud that can be shared to inform our own risk management practices and those of our government partners. In addition, our government partners share information that enables us to detect national security and fraud risks during our screening efforts. We are committed to building upon existing investments and strengthening capabilities that enable us to detect, understand, and address these risks, especially as they pertain to immigration benefit fraud, an area where we have unique expertise.

Outcomes

By pursuing this goal, we strengthen our ability to deliver the following outcomes:

- USCIS contributes to identifying and addressing national security risks to the immigration system;
- USCIS contributes to detecting, deterring, and dismantling fraud schemes that seek to undermine the integrity of the immigration system;
- USCIS has effective risk-based case management; and
- Government partners recognize USCIS, the custodian of the federal immigration record, as the authoritative source for immigration-related information in efforts to address national security and fraud risks.

Objective 1.1: Enhance understanding and collaboration across USCIS about national security and fraud risk management

Because national security and fraud risks can impact all aspects of our operation, we have a responsibility to manage these risks in a collaborative manner. We will continue to enhance practices to detect and mitigate risk in our processes and further integrate these practices across the organization. We will strengthen our ability to rapidly share information about changing risks and mitigation approaches with one another. To facilitate collaboration across the organization, we will develop and refine common definitions and practices and expand technologies for detecting and acting on national security and fraud risks.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Create opportunities and capabilities that foster collaboration, communication, and knowledge across the organization about national security, fraud, and insider threats;
- Strengthen channels for real-time, rapid communication between Headquarters and the field, and directly between field offices, regarding fraud and national security issues, investigations and priorities;

- Develop and refine our national security and fraud detection capabilities to eliminate potential gaps, clarify roles of headquarters and field offices, and expand the use of common definitions, integrated data management, and shared practices and technologies; and
- Regularly review the alignment of our national security practices with our government partners.

Objective 1.2: Strengthen intergovernmental sharing and use of information to minimize national security risks and facilitate effective case processing

Our responsibility to screen and vet individuals who seek immigration benefits places us on the front line for identifying potential threats. Much of the information needed to make such determinations comes through partnerships with other agencies in DHS, as well as with national and international law enforcement and national security organizations. To manage risk while adjudicating benefits effectively, we will take a multi-pronged approach. We will improve our screening and vetting process by reducing redundancy in system checks, improving data integrity, enhancing system interoperability, and automating manual checks. We will also enhance our approaches to case management based on a more refined assessment of risk.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Enhance and streamline screening and vetting practices;
- Strengthen technology capabilities to automate system checks, and improve system interoperability and data sharing across USCIS, DHS and other government systems;
- Improve data integrity by implementing a data integrity review board within USCIS to strengthen accuracy of data within USCIS and shared with stakeholders;
- Enhance and refine policies, processes, and technologies that enable risk-informed case management based on maturing intelligence/national security capabilities; and
- Review and refine agency participation in interagency task forces and partnerships, including collaboration with law enforcement agencies.

Objective 1.3: Advance a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the detection and mitigation of fraud risks across the immigration system

USCIS has expertise in identifying immigration benefit fraud, and we will continue to enhance our analytic capabilities to detect and understand emerging fraud patterns across our operations. Fully addressing fraud risks requires collective action across a broad set of government partners within and outside DHS. Therefore, we will enhance capabilities to more systematically detect and share insights with our government partners about trends and patterns of malfeasance so that they can appropriately adapt and respond. We also will remain vigilant about internal threats that can compromise the integrity of the immigration system.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Improve the quality and accessibility of data to inform risk and fraud decision making;
- Enhance our technological and analytical capabilities to identify non-obvious relationships and patterns of malfeasance related to immigration benefit fraud and communicate insights to our government partners;
- Examine existing models for interagency fraud referrals and explore alternate referral opportunities;
- Continually review processes for security checks and fraud detection procedures to ensure agency use of up-to-date vetting tools, decrease duplication of efforts, and ensure that security checks continue to add value to adjudications;
- Develop and implement an external communication and education campaign about immigration benefit fraud; and
- Increase internal awareness and understanding of insider threats and expand insider threat detection and mitigation practices.

Indicators of Progress

As we implement this strategic plan, indicators such as the following can help us gauge progress toward our desired outcomes:

- Improved capabilities to identify national security risks and detect complex patterns of fraud and systematic exploitation of USCIS programs; and

USCIS actions following an identification of a national security risk, a finding of fraud, or new derogatory information, which may involve denials and referrals for investigation, prosecution, removal, or establishing innovative partnerships with law enforcement agencies.

Goal 2: Deliver consistently high quality services

Our customers, stakeholders, and the general public rely on a range of USCIS services. Delivering these services well requires the engagement of our entire organization. Our ability to adjudicate benefits, verify immigration status, and provide information in an accurate, consistent, and timely manner is dependent upon well-functioning internal services, such as technology and infrastructure, hiring and training, and acquisition. Therefore, we must work together in continuing to build a quality workplace that reflects our shared commitment to the mission and to one another. We will identify opportunities to continually improve the quality of our services even as we adapt to fluctuations in service demand. Finally, we will continue to enhance the management capabilities necessary to realize the full value of the investments we make as careful stewards of financial resources.

Outcomes

By pursuing this goal, we strengthen our ability to deliver the following outcomes:

- USCIS internal and external customers receive accurate, consistent, and timely services;
- USCIS implements a comprehensive approach to quality across the organization that considers how all levels of the organization, directorates and offices contribute to providing quality services to our internal and external stakeholders; and
- USCIS management and operational practices enable more flexible responses to changes in service demand.

Objective 2.1: Continue to build a shared culture of quality

A shared culture of quality provides a foundation for the consistent delivery of accurate, consistent, and timely services. For USCIS, this culture is characterized by a personal commitment and collaborative approach to addressing customer needs and proactively identifying opportunities to improve how we work. Accordingly, we will expand opportunities to engage the workforce in identifying, building commitment to, and implementing changes that improve our external and internal service delivery.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective.

We will:

- Emphasize a culture of professionalism that promotes respectful interactions with all internal and external stakeholders;
- Provide comprehensive training and mentoring to build a shared culture of quality, develop an understanding of the interdependence of our work, and strengthen capabilities to deliver and manage quality services;
- Strengthen continuous improvement of process and procedures through feedback loops that allow programs, directorates, and offices to quickly share and resolve process issues;
- Expand opportunities for our workforce to engage in the agency's quality improvement efforts, interact and share best practices with other components, DHS, and other agencies, and strengthen communications about our integrated approach to quality; and
- Prioritize and expand quality management, and associated evaluation practices, to additional internal and external business processes.

Objective 2.2: Deliver clear and timely guidance

The USCIS workforce must understand and apply an ever-evolving, complex set of legal and policy requirements to deliver quality internal and external services. To do so, they must have access to timely, consistent, and accurate guidance. We will review and refine our governance practices and associated capabilities to rapidly deliver, explain, and maintain the guidance we all need to perform our roles successfully.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Refine and communicate our governance practices for the development of guidance, so that we bring the best expertise and practices to bear and finalize our guidance in a timely manner;
- Refine how we communicate, train, and maintain guidance, both internally and externally, to facilitate understanding, timely and consistent implementation, and ease of access.

Objective 2.3: Strengthen the flexibility of USCIS service delivery

Successfully meeting the needs of our customers in a dynamic environment requires us to have flexible and cost-effective means of reacting to changing conditions. In recent years, we have enhanced our operational flexibility by, among other things, providing mobile immigration services to remote underserved communities, enabling telework for employees, and implementing agile methodologies for technology development. We will build upon these efforts, with a particular focus on the proactive management practices and adaptable operations made possible by our long-term shift from paper-based to electronic benefits processing. We will also explore how these innovations can reinforce our culture of quality.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Enhance our capability to capture and analyze data about our work to better understand and measure performance, recognize and anticipate changes in demand, and work more flexibly;
- Explore and implement operational performance, process, and workload management practices and staffing models that enhance operational flexibility; and
- Identify and begin to address the long-term opportunities presented by new technologies, such as improvements to our resource utilization, organizational structure and culture, and technical and physical infrastructure and footprint.

Objective 2.4: Strengthen program management, acquisition management, and financial management

Our ability to deliver services efficiently and effectively in a dynamic environment requires technology and support services from the private sector. We must continue to strengthen our program and acquisition management capabilities to realize the full value of such investments for our mission. Similarly, sound stewardship of the funds we receive requires us to manage these resources in an effective and accountable manner. To that end, we will expand the tools and resources we provide our workforce to strengthen our financial management capabilities.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Strengthen USCIS program and acquisition management capabilities to reap additional benefits from our investments; and
- Enhance tools and resources to facilitate fiscal accountability in the management of USCIS operations.

Indicators of Progress

As we implement this strategic plan, indicators such as the following can help us gauge progress toward our desired outcomes:

- Adoption of integrated quality management practices throughout the agency, with continuous discussion and review of measures to ensure they support a quality program throughout the agency;
- Service accuracy, consistency, timeliness, resource utilization, cost efficiency, and customer satisfaction; and
- Improved capabilities to understand and prepare for changes in demand.

Goal 3: Enable our workforce to excel in a dynamic environment

USCIS takes pride in the diversity of our workforce, a cadre of professionals charged with delivering an important mission. We work in an environment where changing conditions rapidly affect demand for our services. To improve our flexibility, we are changing how we do our work, enhancing our approaches to managing quality and performance, and using technology in new ways. The diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of our workforce are key assets to our agency as we work together to deliver services. We have continued to build a quality workplace so that employees consistently find value and meaning in their work and have the necessary tools to reach their full potential. Unifying us in this endeavor is our shared understanding of, and commitment to, the importance of the mission. As our organization continues to evolve, we must develop a workforce able to apply their diverse capabilities and perspectives in new and innovative ways. We will accomplish this by focusing on five key areas: mentoring, supervisory skills, rewards and recognition, teamwork, and career growth and development. We will also invest in developing leaders able to effectively guide our agency into the future.

Outcome

By pursuing this goal, we strengthen our ability to deliver the following outcome:

- USCIS continues to build a quality workplace where employees apply their diverse capabilities and perspectives to achieve our agency's mission in a dynamic environment.

Objective 3.1: Promote a shared understanding of the meaning and importance of the USCIS mission

Every day, USCIS executes a mission that is of vital importance to immigrants and our nation. We unite families, provide refuge to people fleeing persecution, foster economic prosperity, promote citizenship, and protect our nation. Whether our respective role is to adjudicate benefits, respond to customer requests, develop new technology systems, or prepare the annual budget, we all contribute to these noble aims. The power of our mission to inspire us individually, connect us to one another, and guide our collective efforts depends on each of us understanding the relationship of our work to this mission. Promoting that shared understanding and commitment to our mission is even more important as we welcome new employees and expand alternative workforce models, such as telework, part-time work, and team based models.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive, ongoing approach to promote a shared understanding of the meaning and importance of the USCIS mission, both within and outside of DHS and the wider immigration community, and our roles in it;
- Develop among all employees a comprehensive understanding of how their specific role supports the USCIS mission, as well as how the other positions in USCIS support the mission; and
- Identify and promote opportunities that strengthen understanding of the interdependence of roles in the delivery of mission outcomes.

Objective 3.2: Develop agency leaders to shape and lead an evolving organization

As we look to the future, our leaders, including managers, supervisors, and individuals who lead without formal title, will have the opportunity to shape an evolving organization. We anticipate that demand for our services will continue to fluctuate, our approaches to managing quality and performance will continue to be honed, and more of our employees will be able to take advantage of flexible work arrangements. At the same time, the composition of our workforce will change as we continue to welcome new generations of employees who may have different backgrounds and expectations for the work place and the use of technology. Additionally, opportunities for employees to take on formal leadership roles will expand, as approximately one-third of the agency's current managers and supervisors become eligible to retire. These factors call us to develop a cadre of leaders prepared to effectively shape and lead a diverse, multi-generational agency into the future. We will focus on identifying the next generation of leaders and providing our current and future leaders with the knowledge and skills they need.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Identify the competencies we will need to lead an evolving organization;
- Implement comprehensive succession planning to identify and develop future leaders across the organization;
- Capture and transfer knowledge from retiring leaders; and
- Refine the training, tools, and other development opportunities we provide to prepare individuals to lead a diverse and evolving organization.

Objective 3.3: Develop a workforce prepared to address changing needs

The success of our mission rests with a diverse and committed workforce able to apply a wide array of competencies and perspectives to anticipate, adapt, and flexibly respond to change. We will focus on building a quality workplace that fosters a continuous learning environment and promotes shared responsibility between employees and managers for career development. We will also develop more collaborative, team-based approaches to our work. Finally, we will explore and adopt new approaches to recognize achievement outside of the annual performance cycle, encourage innovation, and evaluate and reward employee performance.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Identify workforce competencies needed to promote agility and address changing organizational needs;
- Strengthen and implement programs to ensure that USCIS continues to hire the most qualified individuals for all positions within the organization;
- Build a continuous learning environment that fosters opportunities to strengthen workforce capabilities, including in-house training and mentoring to continuously support employees working in a transformative environment;
- Identify and implement more collaborative, team-based approaches to addressing cross-cutting responsibilities;
- Identify and eliminate barriers to effectively performing in our dynamic environment;
- Establish continuous communication loops between supervisors, employees and colleagues so that all levels of USCIS are provided with regular, accurate performance feedback; and
- Explore and adopt new ways to recognize achievement, encourage innovation, and evaluate employee performance.

Indicators of Progress

As we implement this strategic plan, indicators such as the following can help us gauge progress toward our desired outcomes:

- Alignment of workforce competencies with organizational needs;
- Training and development opportunities address workforce needs;
- Workforce satisfaction with, and use of, development opportunities;

- Employee engagement;
- Implementation of technology to support identified workforce needs; and
- Impact of development opportunities on agency effectiveness.

Goal 4: Promote the importance, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship

Citizenship through naturalization is the greatest privilege of our immigration system, providing the common bond that unites all Americans and enabling immigrants to participate as full members of our nation. As the agency responsible for granting of citizenship, USCIS has a unique responsibility to foster immigrant civic integration by promoting the importance, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship to immigrants and our nation. Accomplishing this requires engaging immigrants, the communities in which they live, and the general public. Over the coming years, we will continue to expand our network of partners, including government agencies and other immigrant-serving organizations. This will help our efforts to inform individuals about the opportunities of citizenship, equip aspiring citizens with tools to support their citizenship journey, and highlight the significance of citizenship to immigrants and the nation.

Outcomes

By pursuing this goal, we strengthen our ability to deliver the following outcomes:

- Immigrants understand the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of citizenship;
- Immigrants are prepared for successful citizenship;
- Immigrant-serving partner organizations have access to USCIS citizenship information and training resources about citizenship rights and responsibilities; and
- The importance of citizenship to both immigrants and the nation is celebrated and more widely recognized.

Objective 4.1: Increase immigrants' understanding of civics, citizenship, and the naturalization process

Our efforts to promote citizenship are intended to support immigrants on their journey to citizenship, and to prepare them to exercise their rights and meet their responsibilities as citizens who contribute to our nation. To more effectively accomplish this task, we will continue to expand the capacity of our network of partners who work with immigrants and their communities. We will also continue to provide immigrants with materials that foster a deeper understanding of U.S. history, civics, and the meaning of citizenship.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective.

We will:

- Expand our network of partners supporting U.S. citizenship;

- Proactively deliver information about citizenship and the naturalization process to the public;
- Support organizations that prepare immigrants for citizenship through grants, training resources, and technical assistance;
- Provide preparation materials and information to prospective and new citizens; and
- Use research to better understand factors influencing decision-making about citizenship and assess and evaluate programs.

Objective 4.2: Highlight the importance of citizenship to immigrants and our nation

Citizenship unites us as Americans by fostering a common civic identity and enabling full participation in civic life. We are committed to highlighting the importance of citizenship to both immigrants and the nation. We will also identify opportunities to recognize the contributions of naturalized citizens who have demonstrated their commitment to our nation. And we will infuse naturalization ceremonies with the stature and meaning such a life-changing event merits.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Celebrate and recognize naturalized citizens who make significant contributions to our nation;
- Enhance naturalization ceremonies to consistently convey the honor and importance of U.S. citizenship;
- Distribute literature about citizenship at the beginning of the immigration lifecycle and renew at key points throughout the immigration process to continually interact with lawful permanent residents regarding the availability and process of citizenship;
- Expand opportunities to celebrate citizenship among the USCIS workforce; and
- Expand USCIS' role in fostering welcoming communities.

Indicators of Progress

As we implement this strategic plan, indicators such as the following can help us gauge progress toward our desired outcomes:

- Expansion of the USCIS network of partners fostering understanding of U.S. citizenship, including libraries and cities;
- Effectiveness of educational programs and materials;
- How well the naturalization ceremony conveys the meaning and importance of citizenship; and
- Standardized process for recognizing outstanding Americans by Choice and prominently displaying them in outreach materials.

Goal 5: Enhance our interactions with customers, stakeholders, and the general public

To accomplish our mission, USCIS interacts and engages in different ways with a broad array of customers, stakeholders, and members of the general public. Our stakeholders include Members of Congress and a network of partners, including government agencies and non-government organizations working with immigrants and their communities. The interactions and engagements we have with these constituencies provide opportunities to better understand their needs and refine our approaches to serving them, whether in person, online, or through other channels.

Outcomes

By pursuing this goal, we strengthen our ability to deliver the following outcomes:

- Provide a respectful and professional service experience in all interactions;
- Provide customers and stakeholders with a range of opportunities to interact with the agency, tailored to meet their needs; and
- Provide an understanding of the agency's roles in the immigration system to USCIS customers, stakeholders, and the general public.

Objective 5.1: Strengthen our understanding of customer and stakeholder needs

Our ability to serve our customers and stakeholders effectively rests on how well we understand their needs and expectations. It also depends on their understanding our role in the immigration system, so that they know when to interact with us. Our ongoing enhancements to customer and stakeholder engagement present opportunities to gain insight about the policy issues that affect immigrants and their communities and the needs of those interacting with us. In turn, this information will inform decisions we make about how we can better deliver services to meet customer needs. We can also use these opportunities to strategically communicate and reinforce customer and stakeholder understanding of the USCIS mission and role.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Use enhanced engagement models and analytic capabilities to better understand customer and stakeholder needs, preferences, and policy perspectives;
- Communicate the USCIS mission and responsibilities in the nation's immigration system in a manner that is readily and widely understood; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of USCIS outreach and partnership efforts.

Objective 5.2: Provide an enhanced experience across all customer and stakeholder interactions

USCIS interacts with the public in many different ways, whether receiving inquiries for information, processing requests for benefits, verifying eligibility information, responding to case status inquiries, or delivering any other service we provide. Guided by our understanding of customer and stakeholder needs, we will take a multi-pronged approach to enhance these interactions. We will make the information we provide more clear, transparent, and consistent. We will provide customers and stakeholders with a range of opportunities to interact with us and obtain the information they need in the manner most convenient for them. Finally, we will expand our capacity to inform and prepare customers by strengthening our relationships with stakeholders and partners who work with immigrants and their communities. Regardless of the context or means of interaction, we are committed to providing a respectful experience for those we serve.

During the coming years, USCIS will pursue the following strategies to meet this objective. We will:

- Make our communications more accessible through use of plain language and the promotion of multilingual engagements and materials;
- Coordinate field outreach among all directorates and program offices to ensure consistent and accurate messaging;
- Expand and enhance opportunities for USCIS interactions in a way that is tailored to customer and stakeholder needs (such as customer accounts, web chat, call centers, and social media);
- Improve the accessibility of case status information; and
- Expand the network of stakeholders that inform and prepare customers to interact with USCIS.

Indicators of Progress

As we implement this strategic plan, indicators such as the following can help us gauge progress toward our desired outcomes:

- Expansion of the USCIS network of stakeholders that inform and prepare customers to interact with USCIS;
- Customer ease of access to general and case status information;
- Efficient resolution of customer issues raised to USCIS;
- Completeness of applications and petitions received; and
- Customer and stakeholder satisfaction with USCIS interactions and communications.

Plan Development and Moving Forward

As noted at the beginning of this document, the 2017-2021 USCIS Strategic Plan describes what the agency plans to achieve during the next four years and how it intends to achieve it. In developing this plan, we were informed by a number of sources. These include planning documentation, legislative proposals, agency workload and staffing data, information about current initiatives and investments, and the insights of agency leaders and subject matter experts who participated in a series of planning meetings and workshops.

As described in the high-level tasks below, the plan will be used to guide agency direction and set the parameters for more detailed implementation planning that annually identifies the specific initiatives that we will undertake to address the goals, objectives and strategies.

Manage Implementation of the Plan

This plan identifies a set of multi-year strategies that USCIS will implement in order to achieve the overarching goals and outcomes. Strategies will be implemented through specific activities, projects, and initiatives. The annual USCIS performance planning process provides an opportunity to identify and prioritize these discrete initiatives and their associated resources, and to assign responsibility for their execution. As sound fiscal stewards, we will be mindful of financial impacts as we select the initiatives for implementation. Monitoring execution of these initiatives will provide an opportunity to determine tasks and progress and identify where additional changes are needed.

Progress Indicators

This plan identifies a number of indicators that help track where progress is being made and identify where the agency may need to adapt the approaches taken. All of the indicators are general statements about the types of information that would suggest progress. The indicators are not intended to be exhaustive; in fact, some of the strategies specify the need for new indicators in particular areas. It is anticipated that USCIS will continue to develop and refine its approach to measuring and managing progress throughout this four-year period. This may result in the addition or deletion of individual indicators. For indicators for which USCIS already has a baseline and measures and captures performance data, the agency can set annual targets as part of its annual performance planning process. USCIS will need to translate other indicators into established measures and operational definitions and begin managing performance. Operational definitions will need to specify elements to be measured, data required to measure those elements, and frequency and method of data collection analysis, and reporting to establish baselines, set targets, and report and manage performance over time.