



*To Embrace and Uphold
America's Tradition
as a Nation of Immigrants*

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Homeland Security on the Web: the Good and the Not-So-Good

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September 30, 2009 - Posted by Maurice Belanger

We've had **75** ideas so far. See the [discussion across all 5 mission areas...](#)

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|--|---|
| <p>Counterterrorism</p> <p>Q: Please review and give us your feedback on the goals, objectives and outcomes for "Counterterrorism and Domestic Security Management":</p> <p>18 IDEAS SO FAR</p> <p>Read the goals, objectives and outcomes</p> | <p>Borders</p> <p>Q: Please review and give us your feedback on the goals, objectives and outcomes for "Securing Our Borders":</p> <p>21 IDEAS SO FAR</p> <p>Read the goals, objectives and outcomes</p> |
| <p>Immigration</p> <p>Q: Please review and give us your feedback on the goals, objectives and outcomes for "Smart and Tough Enforcement of Immigration Laws":</p> <p>17 IDEAS SO FAR</p> <p>Read the goals, objectives and outcomes</p> | <p>Disasters</p> <p>Q: Please review and give us your feedback on the goals, objectives and outcomes for "Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from Disasters":</p> <p>13 IDEAS SO FAR</p> <p>Read the goals, objectives and outcomes</p> |

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[Tell Congress to Fix our Broken Immigration System!](#)

It was not so long ago that the INS, now USCIS, was a paper-based organization. Records were kept on paper, got shuffled around among offices, and frequently were lost, leading to the great frustration of its customers, mostly immigrants and their families and employers. Last week, USCIS launched their [new Web site](#), putting more distance between the present and those paper file days of yesteryear.

The new site makes it easier to find the most commonly requested information. The home page is cleaner, with links to information on the various kinds of immigration benefits. There are multiple ways to access information, including a new "Where to Start" search function which lets you select whether you are a citizen, green card holder, etc. and what kind of action you want to take. (Unfortunately, in my first random test of that function, it brought me to the wrong information; it may take a while to work out some bugs.)

There is now a [parallel Spanish site](#), accessed by a link at the very top of the site. There, the most commonly requested information about immigration benefits can all be obtained in Spanish. There will be more in the future.

Applicants for immigration benefits can also get more information about what is happening with their case. Logging on to "My Case Status" will now give more than the basic information about their case status. An applicant can now get some important context as well, such as in what stage of the process their application is, where that step is in the entire process, and average processing times for that type of application.

For us immigration nerds, there are some immigration statistics available, by application type and local office, displayed in a nice graph and downloadable into a spreadsheet. ([Here](#), for example, is a display of trends in the processing of naturalization applications.)

In the future, there will be more Spanish content, more access to data, more instructional videos, and other improvements.

USCIS has published a number of fact sheets explaining various aspects of their new Web site. Among others, there is one with [highlights of the Web re-design](#), [an explanation of how "My Case Status" works](#), and [a comparison of features of the old and new site](#). You can obtain other materials explaining the new Web site [here](#).

Meanwhile, over at DHS, we might have an example of where the use of the Web has perhaps gone a little overboard. As we have noted in a [previous post](#), DHS has greatly expanded the use of the Web to get the public's input. One project DHS is currently in the midst of is the "Quadrennial Homeland Security Review." (This being Washington, it has an acronym—QHSR.) DHS has put up a [Web site](#) to allow "a broad range of opinions and ideas to inform the [review] process."

Anyone familiar with comments left on newspaper Web sites in response to any article on immigration knows that the discussion is not particularly illuminating.

There are six aspects of the DHS mission that are being discussed on the "national dialogue" Web site—counterterrorism, borders, immigration, disasters, risk assessment,

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and planning." Each section contains a set of goals, objectives and outcomes that are the product of a study group. The public can submit "ideas" relating to these aspects of the DHS mission. However, in the immigration section at least, the "ideas" may not have anything to do with the goals, objectives, or outcomes that are listed. The idea, "imagination law" (sic), for example, contains the misspellings and CAPITAL LETTERS typical of rants you see on newspaper Web sites.

It's hard to see how all this feeds into a serious review process, really.

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