



National Contact Center

1 (800) FED INFO

GSA's National Contact Center (NCC) serves as a single point of contact for citizens who have questions about Federal agencies, programs, and services. The NCC has brought together information from hundreds of Federal offices so people get the help they need right away. A single toll-free call, e-mail or chat connects the American public to this one-stop source of information about the Federal government.

Frequently Asked Questions

What can citizens expect from the NCC?

Trying to find an answer to a question about the Federal government can lead to a merry-go-round of referrals, and getting an answer to the difficult ones may seem impossible. The NCC's information specialists can answer these questions, or guide you to the person who can. The trained staff is eager to help and has great information at its fingertips about the agencies, programs, and activities that make up the Federal government. The NCC answers 1.8 million calls, e-mails, and chat sessions a year — that's about 7,000 questions a day. Anyone in the U.S. or Canada can call toll-free to **1 (800) FED INFO** (that's 1 (800) 333-4636) between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. eastern time M-F to talk to the agents. Information specialists answer questions in English or Spanish and direct callers to an appropriate contact for more detailed answers as needed. Recorded information on frequently requested subjects is available around the clock.

The public can e-mail its questions about the Federal government too — in English or Spanish — by going to **USA.gov** and clicking on "E-mail Us" at the top of the page. All questions will receive an e-mail response within two business days.

For those who prefer the immediacy of live chat, the NCC offers this channel for questions in English. Chat information specialists are available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. eastern time M-F. Go to **USA.gov** and click on "Chat" at the top of the page.

The NCC agents use a knowledge base of government information to help them respond to public inquiries. This gold mine of information is available to the public at **answers.usa.gov**. Or go to **USA.gov** and click on "FAQs" at the top of the page. About 7 million visitors find answers at our FAQs every year.

What are the questions most frequently asked by the American public?

1 (800) FED INFO callers ask about every aspect of government. Questions about foreign travel, visas, and passports; about immigration and naturalization; and about Federal loans and grants are common. Other popular topics include Federal jobs, Social Security, buying surplus government property, and how to contact your Senators or Representative. These are old favorites, but the NCC fields questions on new and topical items of interest too: recent stimulus packages, the latest decennial census, scheduled launches of NASA shuttles and rockets, and the perennial seasonal favorite, IRS/Tax Refunds.

How do agents find the right answer?

Providing the public with timely, accurate information is what the NCC is all about. The NCC pays close attention to emerging government issues and topics. It searches for new information published by Federal agencies and organizations as a result of their service enhancements, new legislation, or changes in public programs. Timely and relevant new information becomes a part of the comprehensive FAQ knowledge base that the NCC information agents use to answer the public. And for those who want to search for themselves, the same information is available online by going to **USA.gov** and clicking on "FAQs" at the top of the page.

As an added feature, the NCC now includes access to other agencies' information in its own FAQ search tool. This shared FAQ service allows a citizen to search the FAQs or knowledge bases of multiple Federal agencies simultaneously. When users enter a term in the "Search FAQs" field on USA.gov's FAQ page, they can expect answers not only from the NCC's knowledge base, but also from other government agencies like the Social Security Administration, the Department of State, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

How long has the NCC been in existence?

Since 1966, Americans have been contacting the NCC (previously known as GSA's Federal Information Center) to get answers to their questions about the government. Initially the service was available only in person or via local telephone numbers in key metropolitan areas. In 1990, the NCC began to respond to public inquiries via a nationwide toll-free telephone number. In 2003, the NCC added e-mail as an inquiry channel. And, eager to meet the public's changing needs, the NCC expanded service to include web chat in 2006.

What else does the NCC do?

Although the fundamental goal of the NCC is to simplify access to the Federal government and to government-related information by serving as a single, initial point of contact for the public, it also works with individual Federal agencies and programs to respond to more specialized public inquiries. Here are some examples.

The NCC answers calls on behalf of the Department of State in response to public concerns about overseas travel, status of Americans overseas, international child abduction, international child adoption, and related issues. The public has called this invaluable service on **1 (888) 407-4747** during many crises, starting a month after the events of September 11, 2001. Among the other crises that affected Americans outside the country and led to increased calls about American relatives were the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the London transit system bombing of 2005, the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, the earthquake in Haiti 2010, the political unrest in Egypt in 2011, and the recent events in Japan in the wake of a disastrous earthquake and tsunami.

Also, the NCC works with the Federal Citizen Information Center to distribute publications through the Government Printing Office distribution center in Pueblo, Colorado, by taking orders for special offerings announced in Parade Magazine and Dear Abby columns.

In addition, the NCC assists the US Fish and Wildlife Service responds to telephone requests on **1 (800)344-WILD** (that's 1 (800) 344-9453) for basic information on visiting national wildlife refuges and acquiring various permits and on referrals to state fish and game agencies for questions related to fishing and hunting licenses and other state matters.

What assistance can the NCC offer Federal agencies?

The NCC can work with Federal agencies to assist in their responses to public inquiries. Sometimes agencies receive phone calls and e-mail inquiries that have nothing to do with that agency's mission. The NCC encourages these agencies to redirect these inquiries to the NCC, who will either answer the questions directly based on website or knowledgebase content, or will furnish citizens with the contact information needed to secure an answer (name of agency having jurisdiction over the issue, phone number, website URL, etc.). There is no cost to the agency for this service.

How does GSA assist agencies that want to obtain task orders for their own contact centers?

With decades of the NCC's public service behind it, GSA decided to tap this valuable well of contact center experience for other agencies. Using the NCC's task order as a model, it created a streamlined, cost-efficient means for other Federal agencies to acquire contact center services. In 2004 it offered the first contract vehicle for contact center services (FirstContact) and Federal agencies quickly awarded 15 task orders against this IDIQ. In 2008, on the heels of FirstContact's success, GSA issued USA Contact -- a follow-up IDIQ contract with even broader scope -- and 5 task orders were awarded against USA Contact within the first six months. There is no charge for using USA Contact. For more information on this contract's possibilities, see www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104739

For More Information on the National Contact Center and Related Programs

If you are interested in obtaining additional information or want to explore working with the National Contact Center, please call **Henry Lai** at **(202) 821-7226** or e-mail him at henry.lai@gsa.gov