



National Contact Center

1 (800) FED INFO

GSA's National Contact Center (NCC), part of its Office of Citizen Services, serves as a single point of contact for citizens with 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 1.5 million calls, e-mails, and chat sessions a year — that's about 6,000 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 their 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" 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. Live 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 same knowledgebase of answers used by the NCC agents is available to the public too. Citizens who want to plumb this information goldmine themselves can do so at **answers.usa.gov**. Or go to **USA.gov** and click on "FAQs" at the top of the page. About 5 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 Senator or Representative. These are old favorites, but the NCC fields questions on new and topical items of interest too: the \$787 billion stimulus package, the 2010 Census, and the perennial seasonal favorite, IRS/Tax Refunds.

For those searching answers.usa.gov themselves, favorite topics include "Saving Money," "Government Grants and Loans for Individuals," "College Tuition and Student Loans," "USCIS," and "SSA." Recent short-duration FAQs that enjoyed popularity were "NASA's Launch Schedule" and "Olympics."

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 knowledgebase that is used by the NCC information agents

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' FAQ databases in its own FAQ search tool. This shared FAQ service allows a citizen to search multiple Federal agencies' FAQ knowledgebases simultaneously. When a user enters a term in the Search field on USA.gov's FAQ page, he can expect answers not only from the NCC's knowledgebase, but also from other government FAQ systems like Social Security, U.S. Census, and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol.

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. But starting in 1990 the NCC was contracted out and began responding to public inquiries via a nationwide toll-free telephone number, and has done so ever since. In 2003, they added e-mail as an inquiry channel. And, eager to meet the public's changing needs, they expanded service to include live web chat in 2006.

What assistance can the NCC offer Federal agencies?

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.

The NCC works with individual Federal agencies and programs to respond to more specialized public inquiries. For example, on behalf of the Department of State, the NCC answers calls in response to public concerns about overseas travel and related issues. Available by calling 1 (888) 407-4747, the public has found this service invaluable. The NCC helped during many crises: Americans caught in the South-east Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004, in the London transit system bombing of July 2005, in the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India in November 2008 and most recently, during the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010. But the most memorable crisis, and the beginning of this relationship, was the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001. In the weeks that followed, the National Contact Center answered thousands of calls from Americans in the States and overseas, concerned for their own safety and for that of their family and friends.

The NCC handles requests for the free quarterly Consumer Information Catalog, and takes phone orders at **1 (888) 8 PUEBLO** (that's 1 (888) 878-3256) for hundreds of government publications available from the Government Printing Office distribution center in Pueblo, Colorado. This long-term and popular activity includes special offerings promoted through Parade Magazine and Dear Abby columns.

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.

With decades of public service behind it, the National Contact Center has emerged as a true Federal government success story. GSA's Office of Citizen Services 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 <http://www.citizenservices.gov>.

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) 501-0854** or e-mail him at **henry.lai@gsa.gov**.