



IT Program Assessment

CBP - Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) (2010)

Review

The DHS CIO conducted a comprehensive program review of the CBP - Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) program on March 19, 2010. ESTA is a Congressionally mandated program under the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, which requires DHS to develop an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) for Visa Waiver Program (VWP) travelers and gives DHS the option of implementing a fee for ESTA through a separate rule-making action. DHS published an Interim Final Rule (IFR) in the Federal Register on June 9, 2008 which amends DHS regulations to implement ESTA, delineates the data fields DHS has determined will be collected by the system, announces mandatory use of ESTA for VWP travelers, and addresses criteria for eliminating the current I-94W requirement.

Non-United States citizens of Visa Waiver countries traveling to the U. S. under the VWP must now apply for and receive ESTA authorization prior to departure for travel to the U. S., providing the required information to receive advance ESTA approval. Key points regarding the ESTA program include:

- ESTA provides a public Internet-based application, operating 24x7 to provide those desiring to travel to the U.S. under the VWP the capability to enter applications for authorization to travel to the U.S., and provides feedback regarding the CBP disposition of the application.
- ESTA integrates on the back-end with CBP Vetting, Automated Targeting System – Passenger (ATS-P), TECS and the Airline Passenger Information System (APIS) for application vetting and communication of application disposition to air carrier industry.
- ESTA implementation eliminates the necessity for paper Form I-94W (in progress), resulting in cost avoidance of \$10M per year.
- Principal ESTA Customers (Users) are foreign citizens wishing to travel to the U.S. under the VWP (average applications received: over 880,000 per month).
- ESTA Web-site is available in 22 languages to serve VWP Applicants from 35 VWP Countries.
- Over 95% of applications received are adjudicated without human involvement with disposition available to applicant in near real time.
- ESTA plans to move to fee-based operation as soon as possible, given the time required to do rulemaking to institute the ESTA fee. The ESTA program is currently in “Sustain” status with significant funding issues for FY2010, pending rulemaking to implement the ESTA fee.
- ESTA is unfunded in the FY2010 OMB passback, although the program is Congressionally mandated. Implementation of the ESTA fee following the rulemaking process will cover ESTA costs beginning in FY 2012, but significant funding issues persist for FY 2010 and 2011.

Assessment

The DHS CIO found the program to be well managed and structured, and to be performing well in delivering required capabilities. No significant shortcomings or risks were found with program execution of management, with the exception of the funding issues to ESTA to be addressed in FY 2010 and 2011, pending authority to impose a fee for ESTA. The score below is based on the risk of the ESTA program being able to continue operations over the FY 2010 and 2011 time frame, pending resolution of the funding issue discussed above.

Score: 4