

U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs

BIOMETRIC BORDER CROSSING CARDS INCREASE SECURITY ALONG THE WORLD'S BUSIEST BORDER

According to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, the U.S.-Mexico border is the world's busiest with over 1 million people crossing daily for business, shopping and tourism. Of course Mexican citizens want a minimum of fuss when entering the U.S., but the United States also benefits from border crossings that are as efficient as possible while ensuring that security concerns are addressed.

For many years, Border Crossing Cards have been basic documentation for Mexican citizens making short visits to the U.S. In 1997 the U.S. Congress mandated that the old Border Crossing Cards (BCCs) be replaced – more than 6 million of them. In 1998, the U.S. State Department awarded the contract for this daunting challenge to DynCorp, which was acquired by CSC in March 2003.

BUILDING THE BCC PROCESS FROM SCRATCH

There were good reasons for issuing new BCCs. The old cards had no expiration date, and consequently, many of the cards' photographs and bearer information were significantly out of date. As a result, it was necessary to manually check the cards at the border. In addition, the old cards did not incorporate the latest counterfeit-resistant features.

The new BCCs are called laser visas -- machine-readable, credit-card-sized documents with digitally encoded biometric data, including the bearer's photograph and fingerprint. Their embedded features make them nearly impossible to counterfeit. They expire every 10 years, more frequently for children. But the cards themselves were only part of CSC's task.

The contract included all aspects of replacing the millions of BCCs in circulation, including receiving and processing applications from Mexican citizens, capturing and verifying biometric identifiers, and operating the facilities in which this work was done.

The contract team created six processing facilities in Mexico -- at Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros -- across from American cities with heavy cross-border traffic. The team was required to design, build, equip and staff the sites, as well as to install all IT infrastructure.

COMPLETING THE BCC LOOP

The BCC staff fingerprinted and photographed applicants, and entered biographic data into a database. An electronic check verified the data and ensured the applicant had not previously been denied a visa. A State Department officer then interviewed the applicant. Data files for approved applications were then forwarded to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) of the Department of Homeland Security, where a new laser visa was produced.

Under a separate task order, CSC also played a central role in the delivery of the new BCCs. New cards were sent to the CSC Card Sorting Task (CST) team at the Tijuana facility, where they were sorted by shipping destination and scanned into a data file. An electronic manifest was created to track the delivery. The cards were shipped by controlled courier service to one of 11 Consulates/Sites throughout Mexico, for distribution to applicants. At the peak of the program, the CST operation processed as many as 12,000 cards a day.

MILLIONS OF SUCCESS STORIES

As of June 2004, the six CSC-operated sites had processed over 4 million cards, which constituted the majority of the more than 7 million BCC's processed at all sites in Mexico. Recruitment and training of Mexican employees for the processing facilities was so successful that most of them were hired by the local U.S. Consulates. (The U.S. State Department routinely employs foreign nationals to support its operations abroad.) CSC is pleased to count itself one of the first companies to successfully perform work abroad for the State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs.

TRANSITION OF BCC OPERATIONS TO STATE DEPARTMENT

Once the bulk of BCCs had been replaced, BCC production slowed significantly, and CSC's primary task then became one of transitioning BCC operations over to the State Department. Working closely with State Department managers, CSC developed a comprehensive plan for transferring its facilities, equipment and personnel to the U.S. Mission in Mexico. CSC facility leases were concluded and new ones negotiated by State early enough to allow a smooth transition. Non-expendable property at each site was identified, inventoried and assumed by State. All IT and telecommunications operations were transferred to State without a hitch.

Finally, the State Department determined how many additional employees it would need at each location to continue BCC operations, and then mounted a campaign to recruit CSC employees. The campaign met State's staffing needs by the target date. Those CSC employees not hired by State were separated with full benefits under Mexican labor law.

By the end of June, transition of BCC operations was completed thanks to the full cooperation between the State Department and CSC. Not one day of card processing was lost to the transition. When all was said and done, CSC's involvement in the BCC program resulted in processing over four million cases at the six CSC facilities, and processing more than five million cards through the card sorting facility.