



# ECHO Interviews 2023

Researcher: Nick Zedlar

Version: 1.4



# ECHO Interviews 2023

Researcher: Nick Zedlar

**Twelve interviews** with a variety of users, from Immigration Services Officers to supervisors, investigate how USCIS professionals process **Notice to Appear (NTA)** letters across the country.

The ECHO system is the backbone of immigration correspondence generation. It is showing its age and needs modernization and improvement. The following user accounts address numerous areas, such as formatting, system messaging, forms, automation, help systems and more.

Links to the interviews, together about 13.5 hours long, are included.



# ECHO Interviews 2023

Researcher: Nick Zedlar

This research reifies the findings of REVERB project predecessors [see [Synthesis](#) or [Kickoff](#) from April] and confirms initial recommendations by this researcher, specifically the need to overhaul lists coupled with a better WYSIWYG/PDF preview functionality.

Read on to learn more about the participants, their locations, skill levels and roles. Their standout quote is included, as well as an exhaustive list of their observations and insights regarding not just shortcomings, but also solutions to make ECHO a better product. Most of these are seasoned pros with years of valuable experience in the field. The design team is grateful for their kind and eager assistance.

See also the “one-pager” summary of this document at [Interview Outcomes - Round 1 - NTA and Letter Generation.docx](#).



Two-thirds mentioned formatting, usually in the context of broken or inconsistent line-breaks, wrapping, whitespace, font attributes and the like. Other frustrations include:

- ambiguous error messaging and difficulty finding the fields to fix in order to pass validation;
- confusing labelling and placement of UI elements;
- ECHO isn't "smart" in that it doesn't understand context; if it did, it could lighten the user's workload considerably with dynamic UI, prepopulated fields, filtered lists, etc.;
- spellcheck is weak and irksome.



# NTA Interviewee P01

Interview Date: 05/26/23



**BLH**  
Officer, Potomac  
Advanced Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**BLH** knows ECHO well. NTAs are few in number and appear sporadically: he may process six or seven one month, then none the next. He pastes in text from MS Word, where he stores all the case info he's amassed. His feedback was copious, enthusiastic and detailed.



**These errors are  
never that helpful.**





**BLH**

Officer, Potomac

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Under *Applicant/Beneficiary*, the Country field defaults to “United States,” but it is a mailing address in the U.S., so should be left blank.
- Users, particularly new ones, confuse I-213 (charges) and I-862 (allegations) data, due to how they are presented in the interface.
- It would be useful to have, say, the top five allegations surface to the top of the dropdown list, since they are used most frequently.
- Formatting for allegations should be automatic.
- For a given allegation, the appropriate charge should automatically be inserted by the system.
- Could ECHO use the home address from the 485 to automatically look up the appropriate jurisdiction rather than manually referencing the EIOR?



**BLH**

Officer, Potomac

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Under *Applicant/Beneficiary*, it would be useful to have another Country of Citizenship field for dual citizen scenarios.
- Under *Applicant/Beneficiary*, it would be useful to have the ability to add more fields for multiple child scenarios.
- He has lost data in the past due to ECHO's lack of autosave.
- It's often unclear to new ECHO users that Date of Last Entry under *Immigration Information* is "not the actual last entry into the U.S."; rather it's the date "we admitted them as residents."
- Place of Last Entry under *Immigration Information* is difficult to use because of the sorting by odd three-letter codes.
- There is no feedback from ICE to determine if ISOs are doing things correctly regarding NTAs in ECHO.



**BLH**

Officer, Potomac

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Under *Criminal Record*, instead of the Narrative text area, separate dedicated fields, such as Arrest Date, Statute, Disposition, Disposition Date, Judicial Outcome and Law Enforcement Agency, would be useful.
- Error messages are not always helpful in finding *where* the error is. For instance, errors can exist in the *Applicant/Beneficiary* section, which is accessible through the Edit Contact Info button that opens a window.
- Variables are not clearly marked—for example, with yellow highlighting—to help locate them within the blocks of snippet text.
- On the finalized document, the Examining Officer's name is always the same as the approving supervisor, so ECHO should auto-populate both.
- Commas are missing between the different parts of the address when combined in the PDF.
- Changes made in ECHO are not reflected in ELIS or the ENFORCE Alien Removal Module (EARM).





**KLJ**  
Officer 3, Nebraska  
Trainer Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**KLJ** has since retired, but her legacy as a widely acknowledged ECHO and NTA expert endures in those she trained and the influence she exerted as a supervisor. She feels strongly that NTA should never have been integrated into the ECHO platform.



**Transmit *all* of the data.\***

\*see next page for details





**KLJ**  
Officer 3, Nebraska  
Trainer Level  
[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Transmit all the data quote in its entirety:

“Global only sends A-number [Alien Registration Number], first and last name, and one charge. We have multiple charges. So, all of the charges, all of the 213 narrative data, in my opinion, should transmit as well. We shouldn't be constricted to what they used to send and what EOIR [Executive Office for Immigration Review] had a moratorium so they wouldn't develop to accept more.

“So, for example, if we have a criminal charge and a terrorist charge, they're both bad. I want the person that's going to encounter them to know about both of them. I don't want him to just know about the EWI [Entered Without Inspection] charge because that was the first charge. I want them to know about everything.”

# NTA Interviewee P03

Interview Date: 06/01/23



**GLJ**

Contractor, Nebraska

Level Not Applicable

[Watch Video](#)

**GLJ** is a night owl. He does not build letters, he prints them—up to 2,400 daily in 80 batches or so. He sorts them and performs quality assurance checks. Including courtesy copies, he prints about 10,000 sheets of paper a day.



It'd be really nice if we could recreate a batch without having to download and save it.





**GLJ**

Contractor, Nebraska

Level Not Applicable

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Wonky line-wrapping is the bane of his existence, because things like long URLs throw off the margins and layout in horrendous ways.
- One should be able to ring up callup sheets without touching the letter.
- How callup sheets work with letter callup dates needs to be rectified.
- In case of an infrequent printing problem—such as when a computer crashes, paper jams, or the toner runs out—one should be able to recreate a batch without having to manually download and save it.
- With some frequency, RFP letters slip through to Central Printing that are missing headers and other important components and need to be sent back.

# NTA Interviewee P04

Interview Date: 06/05/23



**CAB**

Supervisor, California

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

**CAB** is no stranger to either ECHO or NTAs. However, as is the case with others, few NTAs have come across her desk lately. There were nine last month and only two the month before that.



I just would hope that [ECHO] would become more user-friendly.





**CAB**

Supervisor, California

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Mentioned an interest in transitioning to wholly electronic signatures.
- Multiple aliases cause formatting problems in the final document.
- Spell check can be bypassed but should be more strictly enforced.
- Suggests Word-like collaboration tools between supervisor and officer which would allow them to “mark up the document” with a “remarks area” and perhaps a mechanism to approve or reject others’ edits.
- There are multiple formatting issues in the final document.
- Champions the idea that she herself could fix small spelling or punctuation errors without rejecting and sending back to the ISO.

# NTA Interviewee P05

Interview Date: 06/06/23



**TMN**  
Officer, California  
Advanced Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**TMN** has been doing Notice to Appear letters since well before it was an ECHO feature, so she is very experienced. Currently she does NTAs about once a week. Her frustrations are minor.



**If there's any way that you can remove that, that would be good.\***

\*U.S. addresses having "United States" country added automatically





**TMN**

Officer, California

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Uses local standard operating procedure (LSOP) PDF to copy and paste text, which imports odd line wrapping.
- Under *Applicant/Beneficiary*, the Country field defaults to “United States,” but it is a mailing address in the U.S., so should be left blank.
- Under *Immigration Court Info*, the address does not always update.
- Could ECHO use the home address from the 485 to automatically look up the appropriate jurisdiction rather than manually referencing the EIOR?
- It would be easier to type in a few characters and filter the Place of Last Entry dropdown.
- Under *NTA Information*, it would be good if the Date of Action field automatically populated with the current date on NTA creation. Thereafter it would persist, but be editable by the user.
- Font attributes are inconsistent in the final letter form.



# NTA Interviewee P06

Interview Date: 06/07/23



**MPM**  
Officer, California  
Novice Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**MPM** has had NTA training, but he typically works with I-130s and has limited ECHO experience overall. This dynamic offered an interesting perspective, including a glimpse into how other letters are built.



**[More helpful error messages] would be cool.**





**MPM**  
Officer, California  
Novice Level  
[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Shortening lists of items with filters would be handy.
- Error messages are sometimes ambiguous and not very helpful.

# NTA Interviewee P07

Interview Date: 06/16/23



**NCC**  
Officer, Nat Benefits  
Advanced Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**NCC** is an adept ECHO user and is experienced with NTAs. These days, as is quite common among her peers, she does very few. For example, for the entire month of May, she did only three.



**There's nothing on that third page!\***

\*showing a completely blank page with an empty narrative area





**NCC**

Officer, Nat Benefits

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Under *Applicant/Beneficiary*, if the address must be changed after the NTA has already been submitted for supervisor approval, the officer must go all the way back to “Draft” status to make the change, then resubmit to their supervisor.
- It might be useful if the user’s location defaulted to the one in their ECHO profile, but the user could choose a different one at will.
- On the finalized document, the Examining Officer’s name is always the same as the approving supervisor, so ECHO should auto-populate both.
- On the finalized document, positional formatting for City, Province (State) and Country of Birth in the Narrative section is very odd.
- On the finalized document, there are huge blank spaces in the narratives for no apparent reason.
- Under *Edit Contact Info*, the “c/o” for minors does not show on the 862, so the workaround is to “c/o c/o” to force it to appear.

# NTA Interviewee P08

Interview Date: 06/12/23



**MJD**  
Officer, Vermont  
Novice Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**MJD** has had ECHO NTA training and is quite familiar with NTAs, but he last did one over a year ago. A sole colleague of his is taking care of the few NTAs that come through.



**It would be great if [ink signatures] would change [to electronic signatures].**





**MJD**

Officer, Vermont

Novice Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Snippets sometimes end up in the wrong place, since the user must click after the last “;” in the Allegations field. This is a common problem.
- Child windows are not modals, so it is possible to move on to a different part of the workflow and have an open window hidden in the background. Having the window close automatically after inserting the snippet(s) may remedy this scenario.
- If there are multiple courts in the same city, there is no way to distinguish between them in the Immigration Court Address dropdown.
- Why doesn’t ISO’s name and title populate from the ECHO profile?
- Spell check parses variable codes as well as regular text, which is laborious to click through.
- Would like to see electronic signatures implemented across the board.
- Inexplicable spaces in the formatting are frustrating.

# NTA Interviewee P09

Interview Date: 06/13/23



**TCN**  
Officer, California  
Advanced Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**TCN** hasn't done an NTA in a while, but she's had her mandatory training within the last six months. She preps each case's details in a Word document and copies that text into ECHO.



You know how ECHO is. Even one [out-of-place] space and then you're just sitting there, scratching your head, wondering what you did wrong.\*

\*describing troubles with variables and editing snippets





**TCN**  
Officer, California  
Advanced Level  
[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Fields that fail validation are not clearly marked for correction.
- Snippet codes that fail validation are not clearly marked for correction.
- Child windows are not modals, so it is possible to move on to a different part of the workflow and have an open window hidden in the background.



# NTA Interviewee P10

Interview Date: 06/22/23



**JMS**  
Officer 3, Nebraska  
Advanced Level  
[Watch Video](#)

**JMS** knows ECHO and NTAs well. Like many of her colleagues, she copies and pastes from external word-processing programs... with lackluster results. She considers NTAs more difficult than other letter types.



**[It] is not obvious... that this is where all the integral information happens.\***

\*showing how distant the “NTA Data Entry” link is from the main workspace





**JMS**

Officer 3, Nebraska

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Copying from Word breaks line-wrapping and sometimes font size. The workaround is copying from Notepad.
- The only rich text formatting that she uses is paragraph indentation, bullets, numbers, bold, italics, underlining and tables. Anything else is extraneous, except for maybe super- and sub-script. No images, no colors. Printing is in grayscale.
- Checkbox “Attached is a list of organization and attorneys which provide free legal services” [sic] should be automatically checked by ECHO—or at the very least be made required by the system.
- After data has been entered into the EOIR section, the button that reads “Add EOIR Info” should instead read “Edit EOIR Info.”

# NTA Interviewee P11

Interview Date: 07/10/23



**YRL**

Supervisor, FOD

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

**YRL** has been doing NTAs since before ECHO. She says in many ways it was easier in those days, because ECHO is difficult to navigate. She is a supervisor, but does all the NTAs herself on behalf of her officers to avoid problems.



**There should be a straight-forward template that we don't even have to hardly manipulate.**



# NTA Interviewee P11

Interview Date: 07/10/23



**YRL**

Supervisor, FOD

Advanced Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Long snippet names—in this case, Allegations—that are cut off with horizontal scrollbars are a real problem, because, in her words, “We don’t work with this. We don’t know this by heart.”
- Templates should be “preloaded” with the appropriate charge; for her, 751 NTAs always use “Termination of Conditional Residence,” so having to scroll through all the ones relevant to 485s is bothersome.
- Ponderous list: USCIS does not issue criminal NTAs, ICE does, so the list should be limited to only those that ISOs can submit to the courts.
- It’s often unclear to new ECHO users that Date of Last Entry under *Immigration Information* is “not the actual last entry into the U.S.”; rather it’s the date “we admitted them as residents.” ICE uses the opposite date.
- She wants to see the letter formatting well before the Build phase.
- She reiterated that first NTA template should be the 751.

# NTA Interviewee P12

Interview Date: 06/30/23



**EDB**

Regional Officer, SE  
Intermediate Level

[Watch Video](#)

**EDB** is familiar with NTAs but does not use ECHO for them. His opinion of ECHO's NTA interface using different text boxes for letter sections was favorable versus methods used with other letter types.



**It's just like one giant blob of text and paragraphs.\***

\*explaining editing other letter types without separate fields





**EDB**

Regional Officer, SE  
Intermediate Level

[Watch Video](#)

## Complaints and Recommendations

- Using sections and fields to break up the letter into manageable parts “instead of one giant letter” would be useful.
- Error messages are sometimes ambiguous and unhelpful.