

With the new requirement to have "Traceable Mail" implemented for all passport applications by October 1, please answer the following questions:

At the rate of a minimum of \$5 per envelope, per day (one for regular processing and one for expedited service) and no increase in service fees is it still worth it to process passports?

Are you the only processing center in your city?

Any ideas on how to make this work for the processing offices?

Please respond to Marilyn Gillette at mgillette@co.tooele.ut.us.

RESPONSES FROM NACRC MEMBERS

Jim Martin, Clerk of Court, Bienville Parish, La.

I have suspended passports in my office. The nearest locations to me are approximately 15 miles. Unless the fee structure changes, I do not plan to resume the sale of passports.

Chris Rich, Ada County, Idaho

Effective October 1, Ada County will no longer process passports. They are too time-consuming and it looks like the Passport Service will be adding additional conditions to accepting passports. We have had cutbacks in our office and we need to focus on county responsibilities and let the feds take care of their own work.

Deborah R DeLong, Clerk, Malheur County, Ore.

We are the only agent in Vale, Ore. There is only one other agent in Malheur County which is 9,926 square miles and population of 31,620. We have already been sending passports cert mail at no extra cost to the customer. I believe for us to continue this service we need to receive a larger fee, perhaps \$35 per application.

Donna Giles, County Clerk-Treasurer, Pershing County, Nev.

Due to problems we had a number of years ago, we started sending our passports out Certified Mail Return Receipt. So we already incur a cost that wipes out any real financial benefit. If the passport is expedited, the applicant must pay the additional mailing costs. We do not absorb that.

I did send an email to our passport representative that we would continue to accept passport applications and mail them Certified RR and we would e-mail the certified mail number to them and they could trace the envelope if they so choose as we did not have the time to trace passport applications through the U.S. Mails. Our local post office has not accepted passport applications to this point. I also told the passport office that as a service to our residents (we are 65 miles from the nearest post office that does accept applications) we would continue to accept passports under the above condition unless they told us no. To this point we have not heard back.

I know that other Clerks in Nevada have advised our passport representative that they will no longer be accepting passport applications as of October 1. It appears the cost is one thing, but tracking them daily is a totally different issue with excessive demands on already busy offices.

Isn't it strange that one governmental agency does not trust another semi-governmental agency to get the mail to its destination safely.

It would be interesting to see the statistical results of your question.

Cindy Gray, Muscatine County, Iowa

Yes it is still worth it to process passports. Our customers find it very handy to apply at our office. Our local post office also processes passport applications but they are by appt only and are located on the other side of town.

We are not having any problems with processing

Unknown

At the rate of a minimum of \$5 per envelope, per day (one for regular processing and one for expedited service) and no increase in service fee's is it still worth it to process passports? It is really going to be a detriment to the county, but I do not see us not doing passports for the community.

Yes, we are the only processing center in our city.

We are going to type the certified cards in advance and at 2:00 every day we are going to do transmittal form for the passports we have received in for that day or after 2:00 the following day. Then when we get the white and the green cards back we will attach that to the transmittal form. Then we will go online and make sure it has been received then the transmittal form will be filed away. We are not sure yet if we will hold the expedited passports and do them at 2:00 every day or not.

Nancy Blankenship, Clerk, Deschutes County, Ore.

Our past president for the Oregon Association of County Clerks, Linda Smith, forwarded your survey to county clerks in Oregon. Thank you for the inquiry.

Without those new provisions, we find that we are spending about \$500-600 more a month than what we take in. We accept on average of 59 passports per month. A great deal of time is spent with customers on the phone in preparation of coming in to submit a passport. Some of these customers never do come in to our office to purchase a passport. Identity and citizenship issues are becoming more complicated for staff to address. More information is required for staff to submit with the passport application creating larger passport applications packages.

We are located in Deschutes County, Central Oregon, and the only other passport acceptance agent is the USPS in our same town, Bend. It is my understanding the USPS has certain times frames in which they accept passport applications.

As with most counties, funding is an issue. It was a significant blow to have the fee reduced from \$30 to \$25 just after the busiest and probably most difficult seasons of accepting passports (when the new laws went into effect in 2007). The agency continues to request more and more from our offices - although I understand the need for correct information - without acknowledgement of the consequences to the acceptance agencies like counties seems like a course of action to reduce the number of counties able to provide this valuable service to the public.

It is my understanding that the reduction in acceptance fees was based on a survey of only the USPS which leads me to believe that there was no information requested from or provided by other acceptance agents. There needs to be a way for counties to increase the acceptance fee or authorize other fees for the counties to cover the cost of service provided.

We are carefully following this issue to determine a course of action and appreciate being able to participate in the survey.

Kevin Mauzy, Harris County, Texas

In Harris County, Texas, our office does not process passport applications; with a U.S. passport office located here in Houston and a number of post offices accepting passport applications, it really isn't necessary for us to offer that service.

Bonnie Rehder, County Recorder, Clary County, Minn.

It depends on the volume. We process about 10-12 passports per day on average so I think it is still cost effective for us. Clay has a population of 55,000. We have two other acceptance facilities in the Fargo/Moorhead area (about 150,000 population total). Each is about 1.5 miles from us. I think the reason we still do a reasonable volume is because we take photos but charge about half of what the PO charges. We don't have waiting lines which both POs have. We are also a "one stop shop" if the person was born in MN and needs their birth cert. Of course we think we give better service but we're not objective.

Bunny Johnson, Recorder/Treasurer, Morrison County, Minn.

Yes, it is still a service to do passports

It is a great customer service and it doesn't take that long. We also do the photos which bring in revenue.

We already have to mail in a large envelope which costs \$1.56 to mail, Go online and order your large envelopes, and the confirmation request then become free, which you can track, the is now about \$3.50 to extra, It is a cost to the county, but you make \$23.44 from the passport fee, which you wouldn't have otherwise, besides being a FRIENDLY agent giving customer service, and if you take photos, you are doing an extra service and bringing in a little more profit.

Jack Arrowsmith, Clerk & Recorder, Douglas County, Colo.

We are using a Pre-paid priority mail envelop with delivery confirmation slips. We order them on-line and it costs us \$4.75 per envelope. We can submit between 9 and 10 standard passport applications in each envelope. Some days one and some days 10 depending on that day's business, but generally more than one. We then enter the confirmation receipt number on the transmittal sheet and use that to log onto USPS web site to track the shipments.

We are the only processing center in Castle Rock, but there are other centers within a 20 minute drive.

In addition we offer passport photos and a high number of our citizens opt for the photos - we charge \$8 and that has enabled us to also offset expenses.

Larry Loutzenhiser, Personnel/Public Information Officer, Lucas County, Ohio

Yes it is worth processing passports. The postage for the year would be \$3,750. For YTD ending 9.25.09 we have taken in \$52,250. This is a monthly average of \$5,805. For 2008 we took in \$71,485. This is a monthly average of \$5,957. As we used to say in the Tax Department, "this is some serious coin". We have no additional labor costs and net over \$65,000.

We have three branch offices of our Automobile and Watercraft Title Division in Lucas County and all process passport applications and do the photographs as well using digital photography to the standards of the United States Dept of State. Additionally, selected United States Post Offices process as well.

Processing will be easy. We will attach the certified form, from the Post Office, onto the envelope and send to the courthouse for mailing.

JoAnn Evans, Chief Deputy Clerk, Duchesne County, Utah

We have wondered if it is worth it. However we are the only one around in our county and we don't feel we can abandon our citizens.

If they would allow us to have the customer take it to the Post Office and mail it themselves it would save us the extra fee.

Luann Adams, Clerk/Recorder, Box Elder County, Utah

We are going to continue, but if there are any more fees or it does not work out, we will quit. We are it in Box Elder County.

Kathy Nickolaus, Clerk, Waukesha County, Wisc.

I believe the number of envelopes going out daily will decrease. Instead wait until we get a good handful of applications.

Donna J. Seddon, Clerk, Marquette County, Wisc.

No, it is not worth it.

Yes, we are the only processing center in our city.

Charge the customer a fee for mailing.

Pam Weber, Deputy Clerk, Washington County

In Washington County there is also a passport processing center at the post office. The post office will process only by appointment at various days and times. As for the traceable cost of sending passports, we have been doing that for over 15 years. We mail certified (\$2.80) plus return receipt (\$2.30) plus postage. We have always been able to keep track of our passports when we receive the return receipt. We attach both the Certified Mail receipt and the Certified form, which has the signature of the passport agent accepting the envelope, to the Transmittal form. We get the Certified Mail Receipt the same day the mail is picked up and the Certified form, with the signature, in about 10 days. This has been working for us quite well.

Dee Berman, Clerk, Crook County, Ore.

My response to your question is no it is not worth it and I would discontinue processing applications in a heartbeat if there was another place in my county that people to go to for passport applications....there is not so I am stuck!

The only way I've thought of to keep this as cost effective as possible for the county is to hold all passports until the end of the day and send all regular in one envelope and the expedites in another....minimizing the postage as much as possible. If anyone has a better idea, I'd love to hear about it.

We are a very small office of three and therefore will track them as we have time....if at the end of the day we haven't had time to track USPS they will simply have to wait until there is time.

Dana Jenkins, Clerk, Lincoln County, Ore.

No it is not worth it.

Yes, we are the only processing center in our city?

Increase the processing fee by at least \$5.

Donna Adams, Recorder/Clerk of County, Billings County, N.D.

Billings County Clerk's office is honored to give the public this service as we are a small county with elderly population and so I feel that this is a great advantage for our people not to have to drive so far to get their passports.

We also process the photos here so they can do everything right away. We do charge a mailing fee of \$5 and this stays with the county general fund.

Linda Culbertson, Chief Communications Officer, Palm Beach County, Fla.

I hope the information below is helpful. As you can see, we have added a passport photo service in our offices to generate additional revenue. Here is a link to the Passport page on our Web site: <http://www.mypalmbeachclerk.com/passports.aspx>

Response from Branch Director Kim Collins:

From Jan – Aug of this year we processed 837 passports which generated \$20,6225 in revenue. We generated an additional \$1799.85 in revenue from Photos.

The additional fee per envelope to track the envelopes that we already are required to send is \$.69 per envelope to mail them "traceable mail." We have always paid the \$4.95 to send these envelopes to the passport agency.

No, we are not the only processing center. USPO has an appointment only processing center.

Unknown

At this point in time, it is hard to determine if it will still be worthwhile to continue processing passports. We had a large influx of applications during June/July but they seem to have tapered off now that the high volume season is passing. We are paying \$4.80 per envelope which includes delivery confirmation. Our local post office set us up with Click-N-Ship through USPS which allows us to handle everything online at a slightly discounted price.

There are several post offices and City Clerk offices that process applications in our area.

My first thought would be that they should reinstate the processing fee to \$30 which was lowered to \$25 in 2008. They also need to reevaluate the execution fee for acceptance applications altogether to ensure that the charge meets the actual cost of the services provided.

Cherrie George, Clerk-Treasurer, Mineral County, Nev.

This office is the only acceptance agency in rural Mineral County, Nevada.

It is NOT cost effective for us to process applications due to staffing levels, increased processing requirements and increase in postal fees.

HOWEVER, if we do not continue to provide this service, our residents would have to travel at least 57 miles to another county. This is not convenient for working residents.

We will continue to process applications ONLY because it is a convenience and benefit to our local citizens.

Kathleen Bernier, Clerk, Chippewa County, Wisc.

I believe it is still worth it, although with budgets being so very tight, my revenues will be decreased significantly, due to the cost of postage and copies of ID, therefore the County Tax Levy will be affected.

Yes! We are the ONLY processing center in the City of Chippewa Falls and only 1 of 3 in the entire county of 60,000! We also get a number of customers from our neighboring county of 85,000. They only have a couple of acceptance agents.

I hate to answer a question with a question, but do the passport centers use certified mail when returning the passport to the customer?

We have never had a problem with our envelopes getting lost in the 4 years we have executed passports, so is the requirement an overreaction to one or two situations.

It appears rules are implemented for everyone when a few errors are made. I believe communication with the particular agent should occur before new rules for everyone are implemented.

Jill Munns, Licensing Lead, Pierce County, Wash.

I am the lead in the Passport, Marriage, Business and Pet Licensing department. In response to your email regarding the implementation of traceable mail for passport applications we are not incurring any additional costs due to this new requirement. We were already mailing our passport applications in a priority mail envelope and the charge is \$4.95 with a \$0.70 savings per envelope. We have a metered mail machine through Pitney Bowes and the delivery confirmation charge is not an additional expense that we pay. We have started mailing our passport applications with delivery confirmation.

We are also not the only office in our city to process passports. There are several post offices and local cities that process passports near us.

One suggestion I have for you to check into is the attachment that I received from a privately owned firm called Confirmdelivery.com. You may also have received the same attachment. We are currently checking into this to see if they would be able to save us any additional money.

Rose Wiegert, Clerk of the District Court, Jefferson County, Neb.

Yes it is worth it to continue this service in our office. Our county gets \$25 for each application. We usually send several applications in each envelope at the costs of \$4.95. (Still a VERY GOOD profit for the county)

Yes, we are the only processing center in our city, also the only one in our entire county.

It works well for us to use the "Shipping Assistant" on the USPS Web site.

1. Get the Flat Rate Envelopes from the Post Office at no charge.
2. Print the shipping labels on the Shipping Assistant at no charge.
3. Add postage of \$4.95 per envelope and mail.
4. Check online any time for delivery status and print confirmation if we want.

We had two passport applications get lost a few years back. It is real hassle. We have not had any problems with this new way.

It is time saving and in fact we save \$.70 per envelope as we used to go to the post office for the confirmation information to be scanned.

Susan Vande Kamp, Recorder & Registrar of Vital Records, Story County, Iowa

After visiting with my county attorney's office, I am going to charge an additional \$2 per application and hope that it evens out in the end.

I was forced to cut my budget substantially this year and postage was a line item that took a hit.

I did email customer service to inquire whether this was a federal rule – or just their own rule – and didn't get a reply.

Julie Kalkbrenner, Recorder, Kandiyohi County

MACO Passport Chairperson

This certainly cuts into any profits the county was making. Our office takes passport photos and charges \$14 for them. We do have a profit margin with the photos, but many offices DO NOT take pictures. In most cases we are still covering our costs if we are taking their pictures, but there are several other places in town that take pictures for less. With little or no profit most of us are looking at it as more of a "customer service" to our residents. But with budgets so tight, I see that many may make the decision to discontinue passport services. This would be a county by county decision.

We are the only processing center in our city (Willmar), however, there are two other acceptance offices (post offices) in the county.

Based on each office's volume of daily passports, most of the small offices who are only processing a few passports daily, are going the "cheaper route" by sending USPS Certified Mail (\$2.80 + postage). Larger, busier offices will be using the priority mail. There is an "online" option for the priority mail that saves .85 cents. I have attached information on this and printing labels information as well as sample screen shots with directions that I sent out to all MN county acceptance agents.

Cheryl Reed

After the initial correspondence/directive from Passport Services, we corresponded with Passport Services in Seattle to clarify some questions we had regarding their new required procedures. We worked with our mail room to see what would work best for them, and then determined our new procedures for mailing Passport applications. All personnel will still accept and process applications. We have decided to put one person in charge of mailing passport applications each day. This responsibility will rotate on a monthly basis.

Once the clerk has completed their applications and receipted payment, the application is double checked for accuracy by either the supervisor or the lead worker. After they are double checked and returned to the processing clerk, the application/applications are ready to be mailed. We now have a cutoff time for completed, routine, applications of 3:30 pm daily. All completed and double checked applications will be put into a basket for mailing. The designated Passport person will then type up a transmittal sheet, and have each person who processed an application initial the name/names they are responsible for on the transmittal. We also have decided to use the signature required tracking method for sending the routine applications. That way we have a name in the event a box/package is not accounted for on their end. Routine applications not in the designated basket by 3:30 pm will be held over until the next business day.

After everyone has initialed the daily transmittal sheet, the Passport person will take the completed applications, the transmittal, and the return signature receipt to our mail

room. The correct size of mailing envelope or box will be determined at that time, the applications and transmittal put into the envelope or box, a mailing label and the return signed receipt attached.

Our mail room will take the box or envelope to the Post Office on their 4:30 mail run, and return the stamped receipt showing the package has been mailed to the Los Angeles receiving station.

Our designated Passport person will check the tracking number online to insure receipt of the package in Los Angeles. Once we have confirmation, we'll print out the receipt and attach it to the transmittal that we keep for our records.

Our current routine for Expedited Passport applications will not change.

Lynette Fisher, Pierce County, Wash.

Yes it is still worth it, although we are trying to use a minimum of 2 envelopes a day for the outgoing applications.

No, there are quite a few post offices and other government offices that do process passports by appt only or during limited hours of their operation. We process passports Monday thru Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm and this is much more convenient to the public. We also provide photos at \$12 a set.

Providing services during convenient times for the public helps, also taking pictures on site will add to your revenue. We advertise in our voter pamphlet and also place inserts in other mailings such as processed pet mail that we are sending out to the customers. We have also implemented quarterly Saturdays that we are open to accept

Joe Camposeo, Manchester, Conn.

We still find it very worthwhile. We are batch processing our applications and send all in one mailing daily. We are not the only agent in town. The local post office, as well as our musical customer service center, are agents as well. I suggest trying to batch process the mail and invest in a camera to do the photos. We charge \$10 for the photos and find it to be very lucrative.