CBP and Trade Automated Interface Requirements

ACS Requirements

June 28, 2013

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

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Requirements

The Automated Commercial System (ACS) ABI module permits qualified trade participants to interface directly with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Data Center in order to transmit data pertaining to merchandise being imported into the United States. Qualified trade participants include brokers, importers, port authorities, and computer service centers.

The system is voluntary and is designed to use standard technology available to both large and small businesses. Companies who are not automated can submit data through a service bureau, which provides the capability to communicate with the CBP Data Center in the same way as automated companies.

The basic eligibility requirements for participation are:

- The ability to demonstrate a reputable background and the basic skills for performing entry services.

- The ability to make a commitment for sending not less than 90 percent of entry/entry summary volume electronically.

- The ability to satisfactorily complete all of the qualification testing phases as outlined in this chapter.

- The ability to maintain operational standards for data quantity and quality.

- The ability to maintain timely updates.

Letter of Intent

The letter of intent is a written statement of a company's desire to participate in ACS/ABI. It must set forth a commitment to develop, maintain, and adhere to CBP performance requirements and operational standards. The letter must include:

- A brief description of the company's current or planned hardware, data communications and entry processing system.

- A list of all the offices that will communicate with ACS indicating the location, CBP district/port number, filer number, average monthly volume of formal and informal entries per district/port. The corporate headquarters must be specified and the approximate start-up time for each office indicated.

- The names and telephone numbers of the principal management and technical contacts for operations, applications program development, and computer data communications and operations. If the system is being developed or supported by a data processing company, include the name, contact person, and telephone number.

- The estimated completion date of the programming.

The letter is sent to:

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Office of International Trade
ACE Business Office
ATTN: Beauregard, Room A-314-1
7681 Boston Blvd.
Springfield, VA 20598

Upon receipt of the letter of intent, a CBP Client Representative is assigned to serve as a technical advisor during development, testing, and implementation.

Communications

Communications provide the means to transfer data to, and receive data from, the CBP Data Center. All ACS users transmit data directly to the CBP central processor.

Communications access is monitored by internal program controls using account numbers and passwords assigned by CBP to each user participant. Authorized users are further restricted to processes which permit the transmission and receipt of data files only applicable to functions which they are authorized to perform.

Potential ACS users are required to develop or acquire programs to send and receive data related to entry processing. This program is referred to as the Communications Interface Program.

Data Transmission

The user's Applications Support Program must build a file that the Communications Interface Program transmits to the CBP Data Center.

ABI users must use a data transmission protocol agreed upon between the user and CBP. CBP provides basic means of communication as follows:

- Cisco VPN/MQ Series Solution via a client provisioned Internet Service Provider (ISP)
- Sprint Frame Relay/MQ Series Solution
- Service Center
- VPN via toll free dial-up where an ISP is not accessible

Procurement of Equipment and Software

Based on communications needs, the participant is responsible for ordering the necessary hardware and software. This information is best obtained through each participant's approved software vendor.

If the decision is to use the Sprint Frame Relay/MQ Series Solution, the participant must adhere to CBP's criteria by referencing the MQ Series/Frame Relay Enterprise Solution handbook that is accessible on www.cbp.gov or through a client representative office.

When the trade participant completes equipment and software procurement, the trade participant must contact their assigned client representative and request a participation enrollment form. Once this form is complete it is returned to the client representative who will facilitate the flow of the documentation to the proper personnel at the CBP Data Center.

Data Center personnel will establish a ticket that will identify the request for a new network definition. The ticket will proceed as follows:

- Network Management Branch will establish and test IP connectivity
- Middleware Branch will establish queue names and test MQ channel connectivity
- Client Representative will verify data transmissions to the ABI application

Once the ticket has completed this process and all phases of the ticket are successful, the ticket is closed.

CBP Pre-Test Responsibilities

Client Representative Branch personnel create the necessary client files in the CBP database in preparation for the communications interface test. These include files for the user, data processing site, and filer code. CBP's final pre-test responsibility is to verify the accuracy of information in the client files.

Communications Testing

CBP data center personnel including the Network Management Team and Middleware Branch will work to resolve communications problems encountered during the initial interface attempt between the new client and the ABI application. Once application testing commences, the client representative will facilitate any problems encountered.

Software Development

A program system is comprised of numerous elements. A potential ACS user must have a clear understanding of these requirements prior to any programming efforts. CBP Client Representatives are very knowledgeable in these areas and provide guidance through the developmental phase.

If a software package is being developed or purchased, these are some of the capabilities that need to be considered.

Data Storage Capacity: Consider the many thousands of lines of data needed to store the harmonized tariff numbers and related data with past, present, and future effective dates associated with the tariff numbers. Also, data retention of daily transactions for a suitable length of time is another serious storage consideration. The CBP cannot reject entry summaries after 10 working days following the presentation date for all errors, including Census errors. The only exception to these time frames is for all entry summaries subject to anti-dumping and/or countervailing duty cases (ABI and non-ABI). These summaries may be rejected up to 60 days without supervisory approval, and up to 90 days with Headquarters approval. CBP rejection policy for entry summary requires filers to be able to correct and retransmit entry summary data for at least five days after filing and payment of the entry summary.

Administrative Messages: The system must be able to receive and print messages sent to the user by CBP. These messages, which are often lengthy, include subjects such as quota, GATT, NAFTA, admissibility requirements and notice of enhancements to ACS.

Importer/Bond Queries and Importer/ Consignee File Add Transactions: The system must be able to query the CBP Importer/Bond file. This function works in conjunction with the CBP Form (CBPF) 5106 (Notification of Importer's Number, or Application for Importer's Number, or Notice of Change of Name or Address). This capability should be programmed early in the development process and, when properly utilized, will prevent many importer/bond errors. CBPF-5106 Add to the Importer file must be used for the purpose of updating (addition only, not for deletes or changes) the ACS Importer file.

General Rules: Unused fields, which are defined as numeric, should not be zero filled. These fields should be space filled or data errors may result.

Data should not be placed in fields defined as filler. If data is present in filler fields, an error message may be system generated.

When transmitting data to ACS, all letters must be upper case. While some applications may not return specific error messages when detecting lower-case letters, CBP cannot guarantee the consistency of processing results for data transmitted in lower case. For example, if *tw* is transmitted instead of *TW* as the country of origin code for Taiwan on an entry summary transaction (EI), the error 381, ORIGIN COUNTRY INVALID - UNKNOWN is system generated. Transmitting lower-case letters may result in delays of shipment releases and receipt of other important information obtained through ACS/ABI.

Entry Numbers: ACS users should ensure through their system controls that no entry number is duplicated and that the check digit is properly computed. Appendix E contains additional information on the construction of a valid entry number and computation of the check digit.

Line Item Numbers: A line item refers to a commodity listed on an entry summary or entry document which includes a net quantity, entered value, harmonized tariff number, charges, rate of duty, and other pertinent information. Some line items, however, may actually include more than one tariff number and value. For example, most items found in Chapter 99 of the *Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States Annotated* (HTS) require more than one tariff number.

Each entry summary transaction must start with *1* for the first line item and be incremented by one for each additional line item. The line item number must also correspond to the line number on the CBP Form (CBPF) 7501 (Entry Summary). This facilitates locating errors in the CBPF-7501 when error messages relating to line item data are system generated to the user.

Harmonized Tariff Number: The information associated with a harmonized tariff number is essential and the placement of the proper calculation of duties, taxes, fees and other charges on the CBPF-7501 must be accurate.

Harmonized Tariff Number Edit Criteria: The edit codes for harmonized tariff numbers, value, quantity, and date/country restrictions are listed elsewhere in this document. In some cases, the edit criteria is provided by the CBP. User-developed programs must contain the necessary logic for utilizing these edit criteria and their related logical editing when preparing entry summaries.

File Query: The programming system must be capable of performing the various queries necessary for the accurate preparation of entry documents.

Courtesy Notices of Liquidation: The CBP provides courtesy notices of liquidation to ACS users through the automated system provided the user's system is programmed to receive them.

Error Correction Capabilities: The user's system must be designed to transmit replace, correct, and delete transactions for previously transmitted data.

If a software vendor or service bureau is being used, CBP suggests that the chosen system take advantage of all of the ACS capabilities. These include statement processing, Automated Clearinghouse (ACH), extract reference files, courtesy notice, and currency rates of exchange.

Documents that are printed by a user's system must be in accordance with existing CBP directives, and in all instances, the printed data must reflect the electronic data that was transmitted through ACS.

It is essential that, on a timely and ongoing basis, the user be able to implement necessary changes that are made to software to prevent repetitive errors.

While the above are examples of the developmental issues that need to be addressed when designing software or purchasing a software package, they are listed as discussion points, rather than as a complete list of the system requirements.

Applications Testing

Upon satisfactory completion of the initial communications testing, there are specific application abilities, which must be demonstrated. The capability to properly handle these applications is the prerequisite to entering the qualifications testing phase.

Initially, during applications testing, the ACS participant queries the ACS Importer/Bond file. If the importer is not in the ACS file, it must be added using the CBPF-5106 add transaction. Throughout this period, the ACS participant should utilize all of the available query capabilities of the ACS system.

The data transmitted during this phase must represent the ACS participant's normal business transaction mix. Any errors should be discussed with the CBP Client Representative, corrected and retransmitted, as appropriate, through ACS. Volume must be increased to at least 90 percent of the participant's monthly entry summary filing volume and the overall error rate must be less than 10 percent of the transactions transmitted. Unresolved, repetitive errors will preclude a move to the qualifications testing phase.

The final step of applications testing is the completion of a test provided by the CBP Client Representative. The test must be taken by the actual participant (not the service bureau or the vendor) and must be passed with 100 percent accuracy. Anyone developing new software may be required to submit hard copies of the CBP Forms 7501 (Entry Summary) corresponding to those test questions, which pass the ACS edits.

Qualifications Testing

The qualification testing period is a minimum of 10 days. Transmissions during this period are expected to consist of the participant's actual entry summary filings. Any repetitive or fatal error will be cause for restarting the 10-day count, as will any day in which the day's error rate exceeds five percent of the user's volume. Fatal errors are those which do not allow an entry summary to be processed, such as a duplicate or invalid entry number.

Upon successful completion of qualifications testing, the CBP Client Representative makes a final review of the participant's testing results and coordinates the move to operational status. The CBP Client Representative also discusses with the participant development and testing of other system capabilities.

Note: As new ACS capabilities become available, previously qualified users may be subject to retesting to ensure that operational standards for quality and volume of data are maintained.

Operational Status

Operational entry summary status is achieved when the qualification testing period is satisfactorily completed. An operational participant must follow policies and maintain minimum standards. It is the participant's responsibility to uphold the policy that transmitted data and document information is accurate. The following is a list of standards to be maintained:

- A minimum of 90 percent of total entry summary volume on a monthly basis must be transmitted electronically to ACS.

- Less than a 10 percent error rate must be maintained on transmitted data.

- System-identified errors must be corrected and retransmitted prior to printing and presentation of the entry summary documents.

- Transmitted data and printed data must correspond exactly.

These standards must be maintained to remain an operational client. CBP monitors operational participant's work and failure to maintain these standards will result in losing operational status.

Cargo Release Testing

Once a user becomes operational on entry summary processing in a given port, cargo release testing in the same port can begin.

During testing for cargo release, a volume of data is transmitted that represents normal business for a minimum of three days with an error rate of less than 10 percent and no repetitive errors. These test transmissions must reflect both entry and certification transactions.

Users must be capable of keeping updated files with cargo release information and subsequent examination and release (selectivity) information. No document should be printed until a certified message is received.

Statement Processing Testing

Statement processing is an optional feature and those ACS participants who wish to participate in the daily batch statement feature must demonstrate the ability to print the appropriate statement information as provided in the Daily Statement chapter of this document. In order to test the client's ability to produce a statement, the following steps must be taken.

- CBP transmits entry summary sample data to the participant, which generates a preliminary statement and a final statement. This data is used to test the filer's statement print programs and conditions such as totaling duties and fees.

- The ACS participant sends the preliminary and final statements printed using the participant's software to the CBP Client Representative. If the statement contains errors, this process must be repeated.

Computer Security

Computer security is designed to protect CBP information while it is processed, stored, and disseminated. Protection of vital information processed by our system is vital. Users of CBP automated systems are key guardians and defenders of information integrity.

If circumstances arise which you feel may threaten your organization's computer security; you should consider changing your password. Coordinate all password changes with your Client Representative.