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NCOALink™ File Preparation Guidelines

The success of the NCOALink process is heavily dependent on the accuracy and format of the Name and Address information contained on the Client file submitted for processing.

NCOALink uses very strict matching algorithms with the objective of insuring that all "matches" to the COA database are accurate. The Postal Service™ would prefer that we fail to make a valid match rather than matching to the wrong record and incorrectly changing an address. The success of the NCOALink process is heavily dependent on the completeness, accuracy and format of the input file. Be sure to provide an accurate file layout. A quality file with accurate and complete name and address information will yield the greatest number of NCOALink hits.

The U.S. Postal Service® would prefer that we fail to make a match rather than make an invalid one and misdirect your mail piece. They conduct regular audits of all Licensees to monitor the accuracy of the matching process. The Licensee must run Audit files through the NCOALink process and return the results to the Postal Service within 24 hours. At least once every two years, representatives of the Postal Service will arrive at the License location to audit license compliance. In part, they verify that we have all Postal Acknowledgement Forms (PAF) and other documentation required by our License Agreement.

The USPS® staff scores the audit results and if the Licensee makes even a single incorrect match they can fail the audit. The audit procedures ensure that the software being used by the Licensee conforms to the accuracy standards set out by the Postal Service.

The point is that the logic used in matching the Client file to the NCOALink database is fairly strict and requires that both the Client and the NCOALink data be as complete and as accurate as possible. Virtually all Name and Address data should be present and properly identified in order to insure the best possible results.

PERSONAL NAME

The Individual Name is a key component in the matching process. The NCOALink database contains three types of moves, "Business Moves", "Family Moves" and "Individual Moves". It is important to note that NCOALink uses both First/Middle and Last names to match to all records, even Family Moves. This provides a greater degree of reliability in the matching process. If the COA is for a Family move (everyone in the Family has moved from the old address to the same New Address) and the First/Middle names do not match then the only component of the name that is used in the matching process is the Surname (last name). The first and middle names are ignored as are generation suffixes such as "Jr." and "Sr."



When the NCOALink record is marked as an "Individual" move it means that only this individual has changed their address, and the remainder of the "family" still resides at the old address. When we attempt to match a Client record to an individual move all name elements are used in the process. The fully spelled out first name, middle initial as well as generation suffix will come into play in the matching process. This match can be on either the first or middle name with an initial match on the other. It may also be the first name with the middle initial to first name only. List owners that have converted first names to initials only will not match to any individual moves. When the NCOALink record is marked as a "Business" move it means that the Company has changed their address (or possibly gone out of business).

Our research has shown that many people that operate a business from their home address will file a COA under their own name, but not that of the business. When we attempt to match a Client record to a Business move, we attempt to match using the Business Name and Address first, but failing to match using the Business Name, we will try to match the Individual Name and Address and identify a quantity of additional Address Changes.

COMPANY NAME

The NCOALink database includes Change of Address information on Businesses as well as Individuals and Families. When a company changes address NCOALink processing can provide the New Address. The match to "Business" records on the NCOALink file requires that we match on Company Name in preference to Individual name. It is strongly suggested that the Company Name be presented in a specific field that will either contain a Company Name, or will be blank.

ADDRESS DATA

Virtually all address components can potentially impact the NCOALink process and all address components should be included in the record presented for NCOALink processing. Generally speaking, the address that is used for delivery of mail is all that is required for NCOALink processing, and is probably the only address information contained on the database. It is critical to include both the Primary and Secondary (e.g. Apartment Numbers, etc.) address information.

Some records may contain data that falls outside of the USPS definition of the "Delivery Address". Some examples include "Care Of the Jones Family", "Business Title", "Department Name", etc. Care should be taken to know your data and understand what data should be carried forward with the new address and what data should be dropped. When applying NCOALink results to your file it is important to understand that neither the Standardized version of the Input Address nor the New Address fields will contain data other than the USPS Delivery Address.

Some file structures may include an abbreviated version of the address that is used in addressing mail pieces when there isn't enough room to include each and every address element. If there is a "long" and "short" version of the address, it is suggested that the "long" version be provided for NCOALink processing; however, this is something that should be discussed with your TCS representative prior to file creation.

Care should be taken to be certain that address data is presented clearly for "City" style addresses (House Number/Street Name) as well as "non-City" style addresses. If the address is "RR 3 BOX 255" then both the "Route" and the "Box" are necessary to insure accurate processing. If the address is a PO Box address then it is best to present the address as "PO Box 123" and not "Box 123".

ADDRESS STANDARDIZATION

The first step in the NCOALink process is to “Standardize” the address following the guidelines issued by the U.S. Postal Service (Postal Addressing Standards) and available in USPS Publication 28. “Pub 28” is available to Mailers through the National Customer Support Center in Memphis, TN 1(800)238-3150. It may be helpful to become familiar with the Postal Addressing Standards in order to gain insight into the proper construction of address information.

The “address standardization” process attempts to verify the accuracy of the address components and make corrections where possible. It assigns ZIP+4® Codes and Carrier Route Codes and verifies, or if possible, corrects ZIP Codes. It will also apply the standard abbreviations to Street Suffix (Street to St., Avenue to Ave.) and Secondary Address Unit Designators (Apartment to Apt., Suite to Ste.). Sometimes the address standardization process can even add missing address components such as Directionals.

The address standardization process essentially prepares the address for the match to the NCOALink database and it is the “standardized” version of the Client address that is actually used to match to the NCOALink file.

The NCOALink database has been standardized so the standardization of the Client addresses makes for a more accurate matching process.

PRESENTATION OF NAME AND ADDRESS DATA – TRADITIONAL VS. PARSED

NCOALink Vendors can accept the name and/or address information in the “traditional” format or in a “parsed” format.

The traditional format presents the data in a set of fields organized, as the information would be printed on a label or mail piece.



For example:

FIELD NAME	LEN	CONTENT	COMMENTS
PNAME	30	ROBERT J MOORE JR	Personal Name
CNAME	30	DM CONSULTANTS INC	Company Name
ADDR1	30	SUITE 7144	Secondary Address
ADDR2	30	123 N MAIN ST	Primary Address
CSZ	30	TAMPA FL 33609	City, State and ZIP Code

Ideally, as in the above example, each field is correctly labeled with the specific type of information in the field – (e.g. “COMPANY” contains Company name only and is otherwise blank). This is not the case on many files, however, where the placement of data is frequently inconsistent. This is an important consideration when selecting an NCOALink vendor. If the vendor is unable to search multiple fields to properly identify the various name and address components, and your file lacks consistency, then your results will be negatively affected.

You should make sure that you understand exactly how they are going to process your file (next page please).



Parsed data might look like this:

FIELD NAME	LEN	CONTENT	COMMENTS
FIRST	15	ROBERT	First Name
MIDDLE	1	J	Middle Initial
LAST	20	MOORE	Last Name
NAMESFX	6	JR	Name Suffix
PRIMNUM	10	123	Primary Number
PREDIR	2	N	Pre-Directional
STREET	28	MAIN	Street Name (see notes)
STSFY	4	ST	Street Suffix
POSTDIR	2		Post Directional
UNITDES	10	SUITE	Unit Designator
UNITNUM	8	7144	Unit Number
CITY	20	TAMPA	City Name
STATE	2	FL	State Code
ZIP	5	33609	ZIP Code

When dealing with a parsed address it is critical to communicate the field content for different address types. One good approach for “non-City style” addresses is to place the entire Street Address (excluding Secondary Address data) into the Street Name field. Another approach might be to place the PO Box number into the PRIMNUM field and “PO BOX” into the Street Name field. The danger in doing this is that the address might be converted as “123 PO Box” instead of “PO Box 123”. The most important things are to clearly communicate exactly how these address types are formatted in a set of parsed fields, and to be consistent in your format.

Also note that it is acceptable to mix “traditional” and “parsed” data within the same record, but not within the same field. For instance, your format might have a parsed name, traditional street address and parsed City, State and ZIP. You should never have some records with parsed addresses and others with traditional addresses mixed on the same file.

QUALITY CONTROL

We want your experience with NCOALink and TCS to be as successful and beneficial as possible. Please do not hesitate to give us a call to ask questions about the preparation of your input file.

All AUTO-MOVE Client file formats will be thoroughly tested prior to going into “live” production. Input files of Clients not using AUTO-MOVE will be manually reviewed by a TCS Technician and compared to the file layout that you supply. We will convert these files into our “standard” processing format and will make every effort to identify and rectify (as possible) inconsistencies on your file.

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