



**Peace Corps**

**2021 Chief FOIA Officer Report**

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Chief Freedom of Information Act Officer**

**March 2021**



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## **Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness**

The guiding principle underlying DOJ's FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness.

Please answer the following questions in order to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA. You may also include any additional information that illustrates how your agency is working to apply the presumption of openness.

### **A. FOIA Leadership**

1. *The FOIA requires each agency to designate a Chief FOIA Officer who is a senior official at least at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level. Is your agency's Chief FOIA Officer at or above this level?*

Yes.

2. *Please provide the name and title of your agency's Chief FOIA Officer.*

Francisco Reinoso, Associate Director, Office of Management. Mr. V. Clark Presnell served as the Acting Chief FOIA Officer from August 2019 to February 2021.

### **B. FOIA Training**

3. *The FOIA directs agency Chief FOIA Officers to ensure that FOIA training is offered to agency personnel. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(j)(2)(F). Please describe the efforts your agency has undertaken to ensure proper FOIA training is made available and used by agency personnel.*

The agency's FOIA Officer conducts virtual face-to-face training twice a month with all incoming federal personnel as part of the New Employee Orientation program. Topics covered include an introduction to the FOIA program, and the legal responsibility to comply with a FOIA records search. Additionally, all federal personnel and contractors take an online mandatory Privacy training course, which includes a section on the FOIA. The FOIA Officer also provides virtual in-person in-briefs to all senior leadership members and all new political appointees. The FOIA Officer reviews and updates all training material and slide presentations so it is relevant and current.

4. *Did your FOIA professionals or the personnel at your agency who have FOIA responsibilities attend any substantive FOIA training or conference during the reporting period such as that provided by the Department of Justice?*

Yes.

5. *If yes, please provide a brief description of the type of training attended or conducted and the topics covered.*

FOIA staff members attended the Department of Justice's Virtual Introduction to FOIA (topics covered included FOIA Procedural Requirements, an overview of FOIA Exemptions, FOIA Resources, and the FOIA Requests Start to Finish), FOIA Best Practices, Advanced FOIA Seminar (in person), Virtual Annual FOIA Report Training, Virtual Litigation Workshop, Virtual Exemption 1 Workshop, Virtual Exemption 4 Workshop, Virtual Exemption 5 Workshop, Artificial Intelligence Seminar (virtual), and Virtual Privacy Considerations mini session. Staff also attended the American Society of Access Professionals seminar, FOIA Court Case Update, and the FOIA Exemption 5 and SCOTUS update. A new office member took the online FOIA training for Professionals (three hours) presented through Joint Knowledge Online. The new office member also took the agency's foundational FOIA and Privacy Act Training Modules for two weeks, instructed by the FOIA/Privacy Act Officer.

6. *Please provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals and staff with FOIA responsibilities who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.*

100 percent.

7. *OIP has directed agencies to "take steps to ensure that all of their FOIA professionals attend substantive FOIA training at least once throughout the year." If your response to the previous question is that less than 80% of your FOIA professionals attended training, please explain your agency's plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals receive or attend substantive FOIA training during the next reporting year.*

Not Applicable (N/A).

### **C. Outreach**

8. *Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue, and, if applicable, any specific*

*examples of how this dialogue has led to improvements in your agency's FOIA administration.*

Our FOIA professionals participated in the Federal FOIA Advisory Committee meetings, the Chief FOIA Officers' Council Meeting, American Society of Access Professionals, as well as briefing new agency staff members that they can submit a FOIA or Privacy Act request as a private "Other" category requester. The FOIA Office also proactively notified requesters of the FOIA Office's transition from in-person to remote work in response to the Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

In general, the FOIA Office encourages requesters to contact us if there is a question about the final release decision, or an aspect of the final response, especially regarding withheld information or the search result for records. This is intended to help the public achieve a better understanding of the FOIA process. A dissatisfied requester can also coordinate with the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS), to mediate with the FOIA Office. An individual can submit an appeal if there is still disagreement after OGIS mediation, or submit an appeal without engaging OGIS.

#### **D. Other Initiatives**

*9. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under the FOIA. In particular, please describe how often and in what formats your agency provides FOIA training or briefings to non-FOIA staff.*

The agency FOIA Officer provides virtual face-to-face FOIA training twice a month to all new staff members as part of the New Employee Orientation (NEO) program using a slide presentation and electronic handout material. Training includes the law's purpose, legal and procedural requirements, including the responsibility of each staff member to cooperate with a FOIA records search, and common FOIA request topics. We also train each department's FOIA Point of Contact who facilitates the FOIA records search as part of a collateral duty. The FOIA Officer also provides specialized training for political appointees, leaders, and the Chief FOIA Officer. The Peace Corps FOIA/Privacy Act Office also hosts a mandatory annual online training course for all staff members with a section dedicated to the law and responsibilities under the FOIA. The FOIA Office hosts an intranet FOIA Resource Center page to provide relevant information, web links, and documents to Peace Corps personnel across the U.S. and over 60 international Post stations serving over 65 countries.

The FOIA Officer continues to distribute the performance standards and measures for FOIA support positions to all departmental FOIA Points of Contacts, as outlined in the Department of Justice memo, “Ensuring Compliance with Freedom of Information Act and Open Government Directive Requirements in Employee Performance Appraisal Records and Work Plans.” This provides supporting staff with the details for the annual performance plan outlining performance standards, measures, as well as general responsibilities and duties in support of the FOIA. The FOIA Office also shared the web links to the original memorandum, dated October 2, 2015, and to OIP’s web posting highlighting this matter, dated January 7, 2016.

<https://www.justice.gov/jmd/file/789236/download>

<https://www.justice.gov/oip/blog/doj-stresses-importance-foia-and-open-government-through-performance-standards-employees>

10. *Optional -- If there are any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied, please describe them here.*

New FOIA personnel are thoroughly trained to use the “presumption of openness” as a standard and guiding principle in administrative case processing. The FOIA Officer reinforces this during staff meetings, final case reviews, and feedback correspondence.

## **Section II: Steps Taken to Ensure that Your Agency Has an Effective System in Place for Responding to Requests**

DOJ’s FOIA Guidelines emphasize that “[a]pplication of the proper disclosure standard is only one part of ensuring transparency. Open government requires not just a presumption of disclosure, but also an effective system for responding to FOIA requests.” It is essential that agencies effectively manage their FOIA program.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the management of your FOIA program is effective and efficient. You should also include any additional information that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. *For Fiscal Year 2020, what was the average number of days your agency reported for adjudicating requests for expedited processing? Please see Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report.*

One day.

2. *If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, according to Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.*

N/A.

3. *During the reporting period, did your agency conduct a self-assessment of its FOIA program? If so, please describe the methods used, such as reviewing Annual Report data, using active workflows and track management, reviewing and updating processing procedures, etc.*

*Note: In September 2017, OIP released a FOIA Self-Assessment Toolkit as a resource for agencies conducting a self-assessment of their FOIA program. The Toolkit is available on OIP's website for all agencies to use.*

The FOIA Officer created procedural guidance and detailed workflow documents to standardize the administrative case process. The main FOIA Office also conducts an internal annual assessment to track the agency's overall workflow for responding to FOIA records searches. The purpose is to identify gaps, and reduce the overall case time, procedural steps, and the time involved for personnel. Internal record search results have been standardized to provide only records in digital format, even before COVID-19. This saved resources and time for the office providing records to the FOIA Office, as well as for the Government Information Specialist who processes the material. The FOIA Office also runs weekly metrics and monthly reports to identify backlog cases and to follow up on overdue record searches.

4. *Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Having SOPs can improve the consistency and quality of an agency's FOIA process. In addition, describing an agency's standard practices for handling FOIA requests on agency FOIA websites can help requesters better understand how their request will be handled.*

a) *Does your agency have SOPs that outline general processes for handling FOIA requests and appeals?*

Yes.

b) *If not, does your agency have plans to create FOIA SOPs?*

N/A

*c) If yes, how often are they reviewed/updated to account for changes in law, best practices, and technology?*

The FOIA Officer created the program SOP in the last two years; it will be reviewed annually to remain relevant. It was recently revised to outline requirements to fulfill security controls in National Institute of Standards and Technology Special Publication 800-53 for our online case management system, and for reference to the Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-21-04, "Modernizing Access to and Consent for Disclosure of Records Subject to the Privacy Act."

*d) In addition to having SOPs, does your agency post or otherwise describe your standard processes for handling requests on your website?*

Our FOIA website provides guidance for submitting a FOIA or a Privacy Act request, and refers to the agency's FOIA regulations. It does not describe our standard processes for handling requests, such as procedural actions.

*5. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires additional notification to requesters about the services provided by the agency's FOIA Public Liaison. Please provide an estimate of the number of times requesters sought assistance from your agency's FOIA Public Liaison during FY 2020 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number).*

Ten.

*6. Does your agency frequently receive common categories of first-party requests? If so, please describe the types of requests and if your agency has explored establishing alternative means of access to these records outside of the FOIA process?*

The Peace Corps receives first-party requests regarding Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) records, applicant records, former staff member records, and those involved in a particular event. RPCVs can now request their medical records through an online request portal that is managed by the Medical Records Office.

*7. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 required all agencies to update their FOIA regulations within 180 days. Has your agency updated its FOIA regulations in accordance with the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016? If not, what is your agency's plan to update your regulations?*

Yes, our FOIA regulations were updated to reflect the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016.

8. *Please explain how your agency worked to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on FOIA processing. Examples could include, but are not limited to: altering workflows, implementing new technology, providing notices and instructions or otherwise communicating directly with requesters.*

We took the following steps to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the FOIA/Privacy Act programs:

- The agency added an orange notification banner to all agency webpages explaining the limited resources available at the office headquarters.
- We prepared and had available full-time telework agreements for all FOIA staff to ensure a smooth transition to remote working after March 13, 2020.
- We notified many FOIA requestors of the transition from in-person to fulltime telework, and that a short-term delay may occur.
- We adjusted our closing FOIA letter statements to explain we only take electronic appellate submissions; we removed any reference to our fax number.
- We used video conference calls to continue weekly team meetings.
- The Acting Agency Records Officer, Virginia Burke, recommended all Posts scan paper records to ensure digital access during the pandemic.
- We created workflow case guidance to further define processing steps.

9. *Optional -- Please describe:*

- *Best practices used to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively and*
- *Any challenges your agency faces in this area.*

The FOIA office staff meets on a weekly basis to discuss events, specific case questions, FOIA updates, and to share best practices. The FOIA Office provides the Chief FOIA Officer with weekly metrics. The FOIA Officer places a high priority on communication to ensure the mechanism of the FOIA process is understood and runs smoothly, from the early stage of a record search, to the final legal review. We categorize all requests based on search topics or themes to help identify identical or similar requests within our online FOIA database. The central FOIA inbox is also carefully monitored to provide timely responses to case status inquiries. Challenges include closing our top ten oldest cases and working with overseas staff members who may be delayed or unable to respond to record searches because they are away from the original source of the records.

### **Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures**

The Department of Justice has long focused on the need for agencies to work proactively to post information online without waiting for individual requests to be received.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to increase the amount of material that is available on your agency websites. In addition to the questions below, you should also describe any additional steps taken by your agency to make and improve proactive disclosures of information.

1. *Provide examples of material that your agency has proactively disclosed during the past reporting year, including records that have been requested and released three or more times in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)(D). Please include links to these materials as well.*

The Peace Corps FOIA Office posts its annual FOIA log on its FOIA Library: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open-government/foia/#library>

The Peace Corps also posts country impact studies, policies, reports and statistical information on its Open Government page. A visitor can organize these into categories based on Report Type, Report Topic, Year, and Countries. The Peace Corps website also makes thousands of pages of general material accessible through the search tool located at the top right of every webpage. A key word or term must be entered for a query result. <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open-government/reports/>

2. *Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useful to the public, especially to the community of individuals who regularly access your agency's website?*

Yes.

3. *If yes, please provide examples of such improvements. In particular, please describe steps your agency is taking to post information in open, machine-readable, and machine-actionable formats, to the extent feasible. If not posting in open formats, please explain why and note any challenges.*

The Peace Corps posts its statistical information, country impact studies, survey summaries, policies, and reports on its Open Government page. The information is machine-readable when possible (XML or CSV files). This is led by the agency's Chief Data Officer. The Records Management Officer also gives guidance on machine-readable format in the annual file plan training and written policy. Online material is

made available in a timely manner. The Open Government pages are separate from the agency's general website search that is available to the public.

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open-government/>

The Office of the Inspector General posts its reports on a separate webpage:

[https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/inspector-general/reports/?\\_ga=2.147505343.92273694.1586781029-1246879747.1577728713](https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/inspector-general/reports/?_ga=2.147505343.92273694.1586781029-1246879747.1577728713)

4. Optional -- *Please describe:*

- *Best practices used to improve proactive disclosures and*
- *Any challenges your agency faces in this area.*

The Peace Corps is very proactive in routinely posting agency record releases, as seen when searching the website for a topic of interest. The FOIA Officer makes records of interest available to the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) community and to the public.

#### **Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology**

A key component of FOIA administration is using technology to make information more accessible. In addition to using the internet to make proactive disclosures, agencies should also be exploring ways to utilize technology in responding to requests.

Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is utilizing technology to improve its FOIA administration and the public's access to information. You should also include any additional information that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. *Please briefly describe the types of technology your agency uses to support your FOIA program. In addition, please highlight if your agency is leveraging or exploring any new technology that you have not previously reported. If so, please describe the type of technology. .*

The FOIA office uses an online FOIA case management system to facilitate efficiency, which also provides a Public Access Link (PAL). PAL allows the public to submit a FOIA request, track the status of one's own case, and receive responsive records. All records are provided in digital format, a standard even before COVID-19. The agency has the ability to conduct e-discovery searches in Outlook emails, but there is not an

e-discovery records search tool to leverage across the agency's electronic records, platforms, and collections.

2. *OIP issued guidance in 2017 encouraging agencies to regularly review their FOIA websites to ensure that they contain essential resources and are informative and user-friendly. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA website(s) during the reporting period to ensure it addresses the elements noted in the guidance?*

The FOIA website has been reviewed and is in compliance with the OIP's guidance, "Agency FOIA Websites 2.0."

3. *Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2020?*

No.

4. *If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports, with information appearing on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2021.*

It is difficult to get one of our component's quarterly numbers, as FOIA is a collateral duty.

5. *The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires all agencies to post the raw statistical data used to compile their Annual FOIA Reports. Please provide the link to this posting for your agency's Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report.*

Fiscal Year 2019:

[https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/foia\\_annual\\_report\\_fy19.csv](https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/foia_annual_report_fy19.csv)

Fiscal Year 2020:

[https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-governement/Peace\\_Corps\\_Raw\\_Data\\_FY\\_2020\\_Annual\\_FOIA\\_Report.csv](https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-governement/Peace_Corps_Raw_Data_FY_2020_Annual_FOIA_Report.csv)

6. *Optional -- Please describe:*

- *Best practices used in greater utilizing technology*
- *Any challenges your agency faces in this area*

The FOIA Office has used the online case management system, FOIAXpress, since mid-2018. The OIG FOIA Office has started to implement this, but has not fully integrated all of its cases. The online case management system is linked to the online FOIA request portal, Public Access Link (PAL). A member of the public can access PAL on the FOIA.gov page as well as through the Peace Corps' FOIA webpage. The Peace Corps ensures that all electronic records are maintained in secure network file

servers or in secure online systems. All computer user profiles are set up to restrict users from saving or storing files on their local C Drive. All file storage services are directed to secure network file servers. The Peace Corps network file servers have redundancy built in to ensure data integrity and availability. The FOIA office coordinates with the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Office of General Counsel to conduct email searches using Exchange E-Discovery in response to a FOIA request. Additionally, our Records Management email policy fully enforces the email record retention, to include the use of Capstone emails, based on the National Archives Records Administration's General Records Schedule 6.1, Email Managed under a Capstone Approach (<https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/grs/grs06-1.pdf>). Under Capstone, government email is categorized for retention or disposal based on the title or position of the email sender. The Peace Corps utilizes a preservation-in-place method of email record retention and Capstone officials cannot delete email records. Email accounts designated as Capstone are permanent records to be transferred 15 years after separating from the agency. All non-Capstone staff emails are treated as temporary records and destroyed seven years after separating from the agency. Other key technical best practice is use of the internal FOIA and Privacy Act Resources pages for agency-wide use, and setting up online training modules for all staff members through our Office of Staff Learning and Development. The Peace Corps continues to update its electronic Records Management program this past year in support of OMB Memo M-19-21, "Transition to Electronic Records," which is essential for a healthy FOIA program. Challenges for the FOIA program include the low number of staff members who fulfill both FOIA and Privacy Act Programs. We continue to work on improving our response times through the advantages of the technological features described herein.

## **Section V: Steps Taken to Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests and Reducing Backlogs**

The Department of Justice has emphasized the importance of improving timeliness in responding to requests. This section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report addresses both time limits and backlog reduction. Backlog reduction is measured both in terms of numbers of backlogged requests or appeals and by looking at whether agencies closed their ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations.

For the figures required in this Section, please use the numbers contained in the specified sections of your agency's FY 2019 and 2020 Annual FOIA Reports.

## **A. Simple Track**

Section VII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "FOIA Requests – Response Time for All Processed Requests," includes figures that show your agency's average response times for processed requests. For agencies utilizing a multi-track system to process requests, there is a category for "simple" requests, which are those requests that are placed in the agency's fastest (non-expedited) track, based on the low volume and/or simplicity of the records requested.

*1. Does your agency utilize a separate track for simple requests?*

Yes.

*2. If your agency uses a separate track for simple requests, according to Annual FOIA Report section VII.A, was the agency overall average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer in Fiscal Year 2020?*

No.

*3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020 that were placed in your simple track. Please use the following calculation based on the data from your Annual FOIA Report: (processed simple requests from Section VII.C.1) divided by (requests processed from Section V.A.) x 100.*

85 percent.

*4. If your agency does not track simple requests separately, was the average number of days to process all non-expedited requests twenty working days or fewer?*

N/A.

## **B. Backlogs**

Section XII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "Backlogs of FOIA Requests and Administrative Appeals" shows the numbers of any backlogged requests or appeals from the fiscal year. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

## BACKLOGGED REQUESTS

5. *If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2020, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.A, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2019?*

No.

6. *If not, according to Annual FOIA Report Section V.A, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2020 than it did during Fiscal Year 2019?*

Yes, the number of processed requested doubled (207 for FY2020; 101 for FY2019).

7. *If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2020, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:*

- *An increase in the number of incoming requests.*
- *A loss of staff.*
- *An increase in the complexity of the requests received. If possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase.*
- *Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.*

The FOIA Office received more complex requests related to the agency's response to COVID-19 and media-related interests. Additionally, the main FOIA Office has two federal personnel who also serve to fulfill the agency's Privacy Act's program responsibilities, including the Forms Management program with its Paperwork Reduction Act duties.

8. *If you had a request backlog please report the percentage of requests that make up the backlog out of the total number of requests received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged requests from Section XII.A) divided by (requests received from Section V.A) x 100. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."*

50 percent.

## **BACKLOGGED APPEALS**

9. *If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2020, according to Section XII.A of the Annual FOIA Report, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2019?*

N/A.

10. *If not, according to section VI.A of the Annual FOIA Report, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2020 than it did during Fiscal Year 2019?*

N/A.

11. *If your agency's appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2020, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:*

- *An increase in the number of incoming appeals.*
- *A loss of staff.*
- *An increase in the complexity of the requests received. If possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase.*
- *Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.*

N/A.

12. *If you had an appeal backlog please report the percentage of appeals that make up the backlog out of the total number of appeals received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged appeals from Section XII.A) divided by (appeals received from Section VI.A) x 100. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2020 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."*

N/A.

## **C. Backlog Reduction Plans**

13. *In the 2020 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2020 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did you agency implement a backlog reduction*

*plan last year? If so, describe your agency's efforts in implementing this plan and note if your agency was able to achieve backlog reduction in Fiscal Year 2020?*

We did not have a backlog of over 1,000 requests.

*14. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2020, what is your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2021?*

N/A. We did not have a backlog reaching this number.

#### **D. Status of Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations**

Section VII.E, entitled "Pending Requests – Ten Oldest Pending Requests," Section VI.C.(5), entitled "Ten Oldest Pending Administrative Appeals," and Section XII.C., entitled "Consultations on FOIA Requests – Ten Oldest Consultations Received from Other Agencies and Pending at Your Agency," show the ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

#### **OLDEST REQUESTS**

*15. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest pending perfected requests that were reported in Section VII.E. of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?*

No.

*16. If no, please provide the number of these requests your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.E of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.*

Four.

*17. Beyond work on the ten oldest requests, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending requests.*

We have reviewed the more complex cases with a larger volume of pages to ensure the record content is responsive to the request. We continue to dialogue with requestors to seek clarification on broad requests, and to reduce the scope, if possible.

## **TEN OLDEST APPEALS**

18. *In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in Section VII.C.5. of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?*

N/A.

19. *If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.*

N/A.

20. *Beyond work on the ten oldest appeals, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending appeals.*

N/A.

## **TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS**

21. *In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?*

N/A.

22. *If no, please provide the number of these consultations your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.*

N/A.

## **E. Additional Information on Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations & Plans**

23. *Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2019.*

The top ten oldest requests that are still open have voluminous responsive records, require the identification and removal of duplicate email chain records, and two cases required that we issue e-discovery email record searches.

24. *If your agency was unable to close any of its ten oldest requests because you were waiting to hear back from other agencies on consultations you sent, please provide the date the request was initially received by your agency, the date when your agency sent the consultation, and the date when you last contacted the agency where the consultation was pending.*

N/A.

25. *If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, or consultations, please provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those “ten oldest” requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2021.*

We are tracking the progress of each of the ten oldest requests in an effort to close these cases, with bimonthly status reports to the FOIA Officer and to the Chief FOIA Officer.

## **F. Success Stories**

*Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2020 to increase transparency and improve FOIA administration, please briefly describe here at least one success story that you would like to highlight as emblematic of your agency’s efforts. The success story can come from any one of the five key areas, but should not be something that you have reported in a prior year. As noted above, OIP will highlight these agency success stories during Sunshine Week. To facilitate this process, all agencies should use bullets to describe their success story and limit their text to a half page. The success story is designed to be a quick summary of key achievements. A complete description of all your efforts will be contained in the body of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.*

Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer is a life-changing experience. Those who serve become part of a global service community spanning six decades since the Peace Corps' inception. These are our Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs). Many requests are submitted by RPCVs who use FOIA as a means to monitor Peace Corps developments, gather historical records of interest, further academic study, and provide services to other RPCVs.

One FOIA success story is that we closed twice the number of cases compared to the previous year. We increased our closures to meet the public's high interest in Peace Corps activities during the pandemic. Many of these new requests were from RPCVs who are both private citizens and media members. It was important that we be transparent to the public and our extended Peace Corps community spread across the world. Another success story is our reduction of the case backlog by 35 percent compared to the previous year. We ended FY2020 with a backlog of 87 cases, compared to 134 cases in FY2019.