



Peace Corps

2024 Chief FOIA Officer Report

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Chief Freedom of Information Act Officer**

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SECTION I: FOIA LEADERSHIP AND APPLYING THE PRESUMPTION OF OPENNESS

The guiding principle underlying the Attorney General's [FOIA Guidelines](#) is the presumption of openness. The Guidelines also highlight the importance of agency leadership in ensuring effective FOIA administration.

Please answer the following questions about FOIA leadership at your agency and describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA.

A. Leadership Support for FOIA

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. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(j)(1) (2018). 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 for Management.

3. *What steps has your agency taken to incorporate FOIA into its core mission? For example, has your agency incorporated FOIA milestones into its strategic plan?*

The Peace Corps Mission is comprised of three goals:

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

The FOIA Office has been an integral part in providing information to the public that demonstrates the Peace Corps Mission. We work with various offices, including the Chief Data Officer, to proactively release reports regarding our Volunteers in service and after service.

B. Presumption of Openness

4. *The Attorney General's 2022 FOIA Guidelines provides that "agencies should confirm in response letters to FOIA requesters that they have considered the foreseeable harm*

standard when reviewing records and applying FOIA exemptions.” Does your agency provide such confirmation in its response letters?

Yes.

5. In some circumstances, agencies may respond to a requester that it can neither confirm nor deny the existence of requested records if acknowledging the existence of records would harm an interested protected by a FOIA exemption. This is commonly referred to as a Glomar response. With respect to these responses, please answer the below questions:

a. In addition to tracking the asserted exemption, does your agency specifically track whether a request involved a Glomar response?

Yes.

b. If yes, please provide:

i. the number of times your agency issued a full or partial Glomar response (separate full and partial if possible);

1.

ii. the number of times a Glomar response was issued by exemption.

1.

6. If your agency does not track the use of Glomar responses, what would your agency need to do to track in the future? If possible, please describe the resources and time involved.

This is not applicable (N/A).

7. 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.

SECTION II: ENSURING FAIR AND EFFECTIVE FOIA ADMINISTRATION

The Attorney General’s FOIA Guidelines provide that “[e]nsuring fair and effective FOIA administration requires . . . proper training, and a full understanding of FOIA obligations by the entire agency workforce.” The Guidelines reinforce longstanding guidance to “work with FOIA requesters in a spirit of cooperation.” The Attorney General also “urge[s] agency Chief FOIA Officers to undertake comprehensive review of all aspects of their agency’s FOIA administration” as part of ensuring fair and effective FOIA administration.

A. FOIA Training

1. *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 Peace Corps FOIA Officer provides virtual face-to-face training twice a month to all incoming federal staff members as part of the New Employee Orientation program. Topics covered include an introduction to the law and the FOIA program, legal responsibility to comply with a FOIA records search, and our internal coordination process. The FOIA Officer also provides virtual in-briefs to all new political appointees or office leaders. Each briefing is tailored to the leader's responsibilities and subject matter. The FOIA Officer reviews and updates all training material and slide presentations to remain current.

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

Yes.

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

Staff attended the DOJ Exemption 1 and Exemption 7 training offered by OIP. The OIG FOIA Attorney attended OIP's Annual/Quarterly FOIA Report Training (September 20, 2023).

4. *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.*

All main office staff attended FOIA training. Approximately 90% of Peace Corps Staff attended FOIA training.

5. *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.*

Training slides and summary updates are shared with staff members who cannot attend a particular event.

6. *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; and if senior*

leaders at your agency received a briefing on your agency's FOIA resources, obligations and expectations during the FOIA process?

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 (POC), who facilitates the FOIA records search as a collateral duty. The FOIA Officer also provides specialized training for political appointees, leaders, and the Chief FOIA Officer. The FOIA Office hosts an intranet FOIA Resource Center page to provide relevant information, web links, and documents to Peace Corps personnel both domestically and overseas.

The FOIA Officer continues to distribute the performance standards and measures for FOIA support positions to all departmental FOIA POCs, 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 who have collateral FOIA duties, such as performing record searches, with the details for the annual performance plan outlining performance standards, measures, as well as general responsibilities and duties in support of the FOIA.

New Peace Corps senior leaders meet with the FOIA Officer for an in-brief on the FOIA statute, the agency's FOIA program and request process, their responsibilities, and the responsibilities of their staff members to respond to a record search and abide by the statute, the collateral duties of their designated staff members who conduct record searches, and the internal resource page.

B. Outreach

7. As part of the standard request process, do your FOIA professionals proactively contact requesters concerning complex or voluminous requests in an effort to clarify or narrow the scope of the request so requesters can receive responses more quickly? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue and, if applicable, any specific examples.

Yes, the FOIA Officer or the assigned analyst will proactively contact the FOIA requester to discuss complex requests to narrow the scope of the request for more efficient processing. For example, the FOIA Officer met with an academic researcher who asked for the raw data used to create the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Survey. After we explained the two different types of surveys and data collected, the requester

narrowed his request to only the quantitative data resulting in a quicker and satisfactory response to his FOIA request. In another example, the FOIA Officer has met with a media requester to provide updates to his requests and narrow the scope of some of the responsive records. The requester received interim responses while the Peace Corps awaits the records sent to other Federal agencies for consultation.

8. Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue, outside of the standard request process, 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 staff encourages FOIA requesters to contact either the assigned case specialist, or the FOIA Liaison, if there is a question about a pending closure, a final release decision, or clarification about an aspect of the final response, especially regarding withheld information or the records search results. 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) as a way of mediating 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.

9. 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 Fiscal Year 2023 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number).

Zero times.

C. Other Initiatives

10. Has your agency evaluated the allocation of agency personnel resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands? If so, please describe what changes your agency has or will implement.

Yes. Our agency will be contracting with a vendor to provide an e-Discovery solution. This will increase the efficiency of searching for e-mails and deduplicating responsive records.

11. How does your agency use data or processing metrics to ensure efficient management of your FOIA workload? For example, case management reports, staff processing statistics, etc. In addition, please specifically highlight any data analysis methods or technologies used.

The Peace Corps main FOIA Office prepares weekly metrics and monthly reports to identify backlog cases and to follow up on overdue record searches. It 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.

12. Optional -- If there are any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure fair and effective FOIA administration, please describe them here.

N/A.

SECTION III: PROACTIVE DISCLOSURES

The Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines emphasize that "proactive disclosure of information is . . . fundamental to the faithful application of the FOIA." The Guidelines direct agencies to post "records online quickly and systematically in advance of any public request" and reiterate that agencies should post records "in the most useful, searchable, and open formats possible."

1. Please describe what steps your agency takes to identify, track, and post (a)(2) proactive disclosures.

The Peace Corps routinely posts Surveys, Data, Strategic Plans, Policies and Procedures on our Open Government website. These records may be searched using keywords, document types, topics, countries, or years.

2. How long after identifying a record for proactive disclosure does it take your agency to post it?

This will vary depending on the Peace Corps component that creates the record. Once submitted to the Office of the Chief Information Officer, it is usually posted in 24 hours.

3. Does your agency post logs of its FOIA requests?

Yes

a. What information is contained in the logs?

Request number, Subject, Requester, Date Received, Date Completed, Final Disposition.

b. Are they posted in CSV format? If not, what format are they posted in?

No. Adobe PDF.

4. Provide examples of any 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 did not receive any requests that met the threshold for records requested and released three or more times. Our FOIA Library may be located here:

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

The Peace Corps webmaster posts country impact studies, policies, reports, and statistical information on our Open Government page when an office or department requests a record be posted for public access. An online 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. The online visitor must enter a key word or term for a query result.

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

5. 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.

6. 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. 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

7. Does your proactive disclosure process or system involve any collaboration with agency staff outside the FOIA office, such as IT or data personnel? If so, describe this interaction.

The FOIA Office coordinates with the Office of General Counsel and the Office of External Affairs to provide reviews of some of the agency records considered for proactive disclosure. The Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning collects data for the Peace Corps and proactively posts the results on our Open Government page.

8. Optional -- Please describe the 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.

SECTION IV: STEPS TAKE TO GREATER UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY

A key component of FOIA administration is using technology to make information available to the public and to gain efficiency in FOIA processing. The Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines emphasize the importance of making FOIA websites easily navigable and complying with the FOIA.gov interoperability requirements. Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is using technology to improve its FOIA administration and the public's access to information.

1. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA-related technological capabilities to identify resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands?

Yes.

2. Please briefly describe any new types of technology your agency began using during the reporting period to support your FOIA program.

No new types of technology were added. We are still working on adding an e-discovery tool to our FOIA record search process. We anticipate a contract award this calendar year.

3. Does your agency currently use any technology to automate record processing? For example, does your agency use machine learning, predictive coding, technology assisted review or similar tools to conduct searches or make redactions? If so, please describe and, if possible, estimate how much time and financial resources are saved since implementing the technology.

The FOIA Office continues to use the online case management system, FOIAXpress, in place since 2018. The online FOIA case management system is linked to our FOIA request portal, Public Access Link (PAL) and the National FOIA Portal. This

automatically populates incoming FOIA requests, which saves Peace Corps time manually entering requests.

4. 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 Peace Corps reviews the FOIA website throughout the reporting period. All links remain active and accessible. A new FOIA Officer was onboarded in June, and his information was immediately updated. A new FOIA Public Liaison for the Office of Inspector General was added to the FOIA website as well.

5. Did all four of your agency's quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2023 appear on FOIA.gov?

Yes.

6. If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2024.

N/A.

7. 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 2022 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2023 Annual FOIA Report.

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open-government/foia/#annual-reports>

8. In February 2019, DOJ and OMB issued joint Guidance establishing interoperability standards to receive requests from the National FOIA Portal on FOIA.gov. Are all components of your agency in compliance with the guidance?

Yes.

9. Optional -- Please describe the best practices used in greater utilizing technology and any challenges your agency faces in this area.

N/A

SECTION V: STEPS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO ACCESS, IMPROVE TIMELINESS IN RESPONDING TO REQUESTS, AND REDUCE BACKLOGS

The Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines instruct agencies "to remove barriers to requesting and accessing government records and to reduce FOIA processing

backlogs.” Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is removing barriers to access, improving timeliness in responding to requests, and reducing FOIA backlogs.

A. Remove Barriers to Access

1. *Has your agency established alternative means of access to first-party requested records outside of the FOIA process?*

Yes.

2. *If yes, please provide examples. If no, please indicate why not. Please also indicate if you do not know.*

We created an online portal for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. By creating an account, they may access their records upon completion of service.

3. *Please describe any other steps your agency has taken to remove barriers to accessing government information.*

N/A

B. Timeliness

4. *For Fiscal Year 2023, 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 2023 Annual FOIA Report.*

Eight days.

5. *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 2023 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.

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

Yes.

7. *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 2023?*

No; 42 days.

8. *If not, did the simple track average processing time decrease compared to the previous Fiscal Year?*

Yes. It decreased by 57%.

9. *Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2023 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.*

31%

10. *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.

C. Backlogs

BACKLOGGED REQUESTS

11. *If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2023, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.2, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2022?*

Yes.

12. *If not, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.1, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2022 than it did during Fiscal Year 2021?*

N/A.

13. *If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2023, 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:*

N/A.

14. *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 2023. 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. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."*

23.77%

BACKLOGGED APPEALS

15. *If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2023, according to Section XII.E.2 of the Annual FOIA Report, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2022?*

We did not have an appeal backlog at the close of Fiscal Year 2023.

16. *If not, according to section XII.E.1 of the Annual FOIA Report, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2023 than it did during Fiscal Year 2022?*

N/A.

17. *If your agency's appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2023, 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:*

N/A.

18. *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 2023. 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. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2023 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."*

N/A.

D. Backlog Reduction Plans

19. *In the 2023 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2022 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did your 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 2023?*

N/A. We did not have a backlog of more than 1,000 requests.

20. *If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2023, please explain your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2024.*

N/A. We did not have a backlog of more than 1,000 requests.

E. Reducing the Age of Requests, Appeals, and Consultations

TEN OLDEST REQUESTS

21. In Fiscal Year 2023, did your agency close the ten oldest pending perfected requests that were reported in Section VII.E. of your Fiscal Year 2022 Annual FOIA Report?

No, we did not close all of the ten oldest perfected requests reported for that year.

22. 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 2022 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

The Peace Corps closed seven of the top ten oldest pending perfected requests.

23. 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 some requestors to seek clarification on broad requests, and to reduce the scope, if possible.

TEN OLDEST APPEALS

24. In Fiscal Year 2023, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in Section VI.C.5 of your Fiscal Year 2021 Annual FOIA Report?

N/A.

25. 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 2022 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

N/A.

26. 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

27. In Fiscal Year 2023, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2022 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

28. 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 2022 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

The Peace Corps had 1 pending Consultation that was closed.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING TEN OLDEST

29. If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, or consultations, please explain why and provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those “ten oldest” requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2024.

The Peace Corps has a term-limit for most of its staff. A new FOIA Officer was onboarded in June and one Government Information Specialist departed in November. We are working to backfill that position and hire an Associate Privacy Officer to reduce the Privacy burden for the FOIA Officer. We are also planning to hire a new contractor team with extensive FOIA experience to process the voluminous backlog cases.

F. Additional Information about FOIA Processing

30. Were any requests at your agency the subject of FOIA litigation during the reporting period? If so, please describe the impact on your agency’s overall FOIA request processing and backlog. If possible, please indicate the number and nature of requests subject to litigation, common causes leading to litigation, and any other information to illustrate the impact of litigation on your overall FOIA administration.

No.