



PEACE CORPS
Chief FOIA Officer Report
March 2017

Name and Title of Agency Chief FOIA Officer:

William L. Stoppel
Acting Associate Director
Office of Management

Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

FOIA Training:

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

- Such training or events can include offerings from OIP, your own agency or another agency or organization.

Yes.

2. If yes, please provide a brief description of the type of training attended and the topics covered.

Staff attended the Freedom of Information Act training for Attorneys and Access Professionals.

Topics covered:

- **Overview of the FOIA's procedural requirements and exemptions**
- **Individual FOIA Exemptions**

- **Basic principles for processing FOIA requests from start to finish**
- **The FOIA's proactive disclosure requirements**
- **The interface between the FOIA and the Privacy Act**

3. Provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals and staff with FOIA responsibilities who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.

We estimate that 100% of our FOIA professionals attended.

4. 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.

N/A.

Outreach

5. OPTIONAL: Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA?

No.

Other Initiatives

6. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under the FOIA?

The FOIA Office provides training to new employees through the New Employee Orientation (NEO). We inform FOIA points-of-contact with a one-to-one introduction, as well as group training. Additionally, we conduct annual supervisory training.

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

No.

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

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Processing Procedures

1. For Fiscal Year 2016, 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 2016 Annual FOIA Report.

N/A.

2. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, 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. OPTIONAL: 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.

Yes. An analysis on the composition, timing/frequency, and cost/time burden of FOIA requests to the agency was conducted.

4. Please provide an estimate of how many requests your agency processed in Fiscal Year 2016 that were from commercial use requesters. If your agency is decentralized, please identify any components within your agency that received a majority of their requests from commercial use requesters.

Five.

Requester Services

5. OPTIONAL: Does your agency provide a mechanism for requesters to provide feedback about their experience with the FOIA process at your agency? If so, please describe the methods used, such as making the FOIA Public Liaison available to receive feedback, using surveys posted on the agency's website, etc.

No.

6. 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 how often requesters sought assistance from your agency's FOIA Public Liaison.

Zero.

7. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires agencies to make their reference material or guide for requesting records or information from the agency electronically available to the public. Please provide a link to your agency's FOIA reference guide.

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

Other Initiatives

8. If there are any other steps your agency has undertaken to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively, such as improving search processes, eliminating redundancy, etc., please describe them here.

We reviewed our existing SOP, and made a variety of changes. One staff person, for example, keeps track while a response moves along the stages of internal review; it supports timeliness. Another staff person, for example, while logging requests, makes sure to close duplicates or to combine wherever appropriate; it minimizes redundancy.

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

Posting Material

1. Describe your agency's process or system for identifying "frequently requested" records that should be posted online.

If we receive three requests asking for the same information, that information is considered for posting by the FOIA Officer.

2. Does your agency have a distinct process or system in place to identify other records for proactive disclosure? If so, please describe your agency's process or system.

Yes. There is an agency-wide initiative under the Open Government umbrella that identifies mission-critical program material for ongoing proactive disclosure.

3. Has your agency encountered challenges that make it difficult to post records you otherwise would like to post?

No.

4. If so, briefly explain those challenges and how your agency is working to overcome them.

N/A.

5. Provide examples of material that your agency has proactively disclosed during the past reporting year, including links to the posted material.

Because of the agency's mission, which is to field volunteers serving overseas, we anticipate strong public interest in the volunteers.

Examples of such material are volunteer safety reports, annual volunteer surveys, and early termination data. (See www.peacecorps.gov/about/policies/docs/). Additionally, statistical information on Peace Corps Volunteers is available. (See www.peacecorps.gov/open.)

6. Did your agency use any means to publicize or highlight important proactive disclosures for public awareness? If yes, please describe these efforts.

No.

Other Initiatives

7. If there are any other steps your agency has taken to improve proactive disclosures, please describe them here. For example, has your agency engaged requesters in determining how and what to post? Has your agency used web analytics to inform your proactive disclosures?

N/A.

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

Making Material Posted Online More Useful:

1. 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.

2. If yes, please provide examples of such improvements.

The agency is taking steps toward expanding the Open Government component (and there is a public input form on the website soliciting ideas).

Other Initiatives

3. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2016?

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 2017.

The reports were not completed in a timely manner. The FOIA Officer has tasked staff to handle posting the report.

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

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 so, for your agency overall in Fiscal Year 2016, was the average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer?

No.

3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2016 that were placed in your simple track.

Percentage is 81.3 (i.e., 209/257).

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.

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 2015 and Fiscal Year 2016 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 2016, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2015? If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog.

Yes.

6. If not, 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.

N/A.

7. 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 2016.

Percentage is 43% (i.e., 86/193).

BACKLOGGED APPEALS

8. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2016, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2015? If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able reduce backlog.

N/A.

9. If not, 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.

10. 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

2016. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2016 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

N/A.

Status of Ten 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 2015 and Fiscal Year 2016 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

TEN OLDEST REQUESTS

11. In Fiscal Year 2016, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report?

No.

12. 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 2015 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

Closed 6 out 10.

13. Of the requests your agency was able to close from your ten oldest, please indicate how many of these were closed because the request was withdrawn by the requester. If any were closed because the request was withdrawn, did you provide any interim responses prior to the withdrawal?

None of the requests were closed because the request was withdrawn.

TEN OLDEST APPEALS

14. In Fiscal Year 2016, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report?

N/A.

15. 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 2015 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

N/A.

TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS

16. In Fiscal Year 2016, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

17. 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 2015 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

N/A.

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

18. Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2015.

The main obstacles we faced were the complexity of ten oldest requests and limited staff resources available to diligently work on the backlog.

19. 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.

20. 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 2017.

We have hired two temporary FOIA specialists to help eliminate our backlog. The ten oldest requests are priority.

