



PEACE CORPS
Chief FOIA Officer Report
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Name and Title of Agency Chief FOIA Officer:

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Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

The guiding principle underlying the President's FOIA Memorandum and the Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness.

Describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA. To do so, you should answer the questions listed below and then include any additional information you would like to describe how your agency is working to apply the presumption of openness.

1. Did your agency hold an agency FOIA conference, or otherwise conduct training during this reporting period?

The Peace Corps' FOIA Office has provided training on the new guidelines at New Employee Orientation every other Monday. The FOIA Office has also established a point-of-contact with each office within the Peace Corps. FOIA staff has provided training on the new guidelines to the office point-of-contacts. Additionally, FOIA staff has provided training on the new guidelines at Supervisory Training.

Did your FOIA professionals attend any FOIA training, such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

The FOIA/Privacy Act Specialist attended 2 programs in OIP's "Director's Lecture Series" (June 20, 2012 and July 24, 2012) and 1 day of training by ASAP's national conference (August 3, 2012).

In his 2009 FOIA Guidelines, the Attorney General strongly encouraged agencies to make discretionary releases of information even when the information might be

technically exempt from disclosure under the FOIA. OIP encourages agencies to make such discretionary releases whenever there is no foreseeable harm from release.

2. Did your agency make any discretionary releases of otherwise exempt information?

Yes.

3. What exemptions would have covered the information that was released as a matter of discretion?

We have released records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 5.

4. Provide a narrative description, or some examples of, the types of information that your agency released as a matter of discretion.

Records which may contain exempt information are reviewed by the FOIA Officer. The Peace Corps' General Counsel reviews the FOIA Officer's determinations. The FOIA Officer also consults with the offices from which records originate to determine whether the records should be released. These reviews assure that the presumption of openness is routinely and consistently applied to the review of records under the FOIA. Examples are documents evaluating agency operations, such as volunteer survey reports, program reports, and internal communications about volunteer issues.

5. Describe any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied.

We have held meetings at the senior staff level to discuss our implementation of discretionary releases. We are reviewing several steps in the FOIA process (such as proactive posting of information online).

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

As the Attorney General emphasized in his FOIA Guidelines, "[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."

This section should include a discussion of how your agency has addressed the key roles played by the broad spectrum of agency personnel who work with FOIA professionals in responding to requests, including, in particular, steps taken to ensure that FOIA professionals have sufficient IT support.

Describe here the steps your agency has taken to ensure that its system for responding to requests is effective and efficient. To do so, answer the questions below and then include any additional information that you would like to describe how your agency ensures that your FOIA system is efficient and effective.

1. Do FOIA professionals within your agency have sufficient IT support?

Yes.

2. Do your FOIA professionals work with your agency's Open Government Team?

We keep in contact with the Open Government Committee on matters of common interest with respect to maintaining frank discussions about areas where the agency can expand its transparency.

3. Has your agency assessed whether adequate staffing is being devoted to FOIA administration?

Yes.

4. Describe any other steps your agency has undertaken to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively, such as conducting self-assessments to find greater efficiencies, improving search processes, streamlining consultations, eliminating redundancy, etc.

The Peace Corps' process for responding to requests follows:

- The FOIA specialist reviews the request, logs the request into the database, determines which office or offices have responsive documents and forwards the requests to the appropriate office(s).
- The office(s) return(s) the request to the FOIA/PA specialist with the responsive documents or certifies no records were found.
- The FOIA specialist reviews the responsive documents to ensure they are indeed responsive, consults with offices from which the documents originated, prepares a response letter and forwards the response letter and responsive documents to the FOIA Officer.
- The FOIA/PA Officer reviews the documents and approves or refers the documents to General Counsel for review if necessary.

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

Both the President and Attorney General focused on the need for agencies to work proactively to post information online without waiting for individual requests to be received.

Describe here the steps your agency has taken both to increase the amount of material that is available on your agency website, and the usability of such information, including providing examples of proactive disclosures that have been made during this past reporting period (i.e., from March 2012 to March 2013). In doing so, answer the questions listed below and 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 posted this past year. Examples are safety reports, annual volunteer surveys, and early termination data. Statistical information on Peace Corps Volunteers is available through www.peacecorps.gov/open.
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, such as soliciting feedback on the content and presentation of the posted material, improving search capabilities on the site, creating mobile applications, providing explanatory material, etc.?

Yes.

3. If so, provide examples of such improvements.

The Office of Communications uses Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media outlets to disseminate information about the Peace Corps.

4. Describe any other steps taken to increase proactive disclosures at your agency. We have held meeting at the senior staff level to discuss our application of discretionary releases. We are reviewing several steps in the FOIA process (such as proactive posting of information online).

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

A key component of the President's FOIA Memorandum was the direction to "use modern technology to inform citizens about what is known and done by their Government." In addition to using the internet to make proactive disclosures, agencies should also be exploring ways to utilize technology in responding to requests. In 2010 and 2011, agencies reported widespread use of technology in receiving and tracking FOIA requests and preparing agency Annual FOIA Reports. For 2013, as we did in

2012, the questions have been further refined and now also address different, more innovative aspects of technology use.

1. Can FOIA requests be made electronically to your agency?

Yes, we can accept FOIA requests by fax, e-mail and on-line form.

If your agency is decentralized, can FOIA requests be made electronically to *all* components of your agency?

The only component within Peace Corps that receives and processes FOIA requests is the FOIA Office. The FOIA Office has the capability to receive FOIA requests electronically.

Online tracking of FOIA requests:

2. Can a FOIA requester track the status of his/her request electronically?

Yes.

3. If so, describe the information that is provided to the requester through the tracking system. For example, some tracking systems might tell the requester whether the request is "open" or "closed," while others will provide further details to the requester throughout the course of the processing, such as "search commenced" or "documents currently in review." List the specific types of information that are available through your agency's tracking system.

Request is open. Request has been closed.

4. In particular, does your agency tracking system provide the requester with an estimated date of completion for his or her request?

No.

5. If your agency does not provide online tracking of requests, is your agency taking steps to establish this capability?

N/A.

Use of technology to facilitate processing of requests:

6. Beyond using technology to redact documents, is your agency taking steps to utilize more advanced technology to facilitate overall FOIA efficiency, such as improving record search capabilities, utilizing document sharing platforms for consultations and referrals, or employing software that can sort and de-duplicate documents?

Yes.

7. If so, describe the technological improvements being made.

The FOIA Office purchased commercially off-the-shelf FOIA software to increase tracking, responsiveness to requesters and processing capabilities. The system went live on December 11, 2012 and we are currently working to streamline the process. This new system will also help us identify trends and increase online posting.

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

The President and the Attorney General have emphasized the importance of improving timeliness in responding to requests. This section 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 and appeals. *For the figures required in this Section, please use those contained in the specified sections of your agency's 2012 Annual FOIA Report.*

1. 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. If your agency does not utilize a separate track for processing simple requests, answer the question below using the figure provided in your report for your non-expedited requests.

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

Yes.

- b. If so, for your agency overall, for Fiscal Year 2012, was the average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer?

The average number of days to process simple requests was 25 days.

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

N/A.

2. Sections XII.D.(2) and XII.E.(2) of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "Comparison of Numbers of Requests/Appeals from Previous and Current Annual Report – Backlogged Requests/Appeals," show the numbers of any backlog of pending requests or pending appeals from Fiscal Year 2012 as compared to Fiscal Year 2011. You should refer to those numbers when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report. In addition, Section VII.E, entitled "Pending Requests – Ten Oldest Pending Requests," and Section VI.C.(5), entitled "Ten Oldest Pending Administrative Appeals," from both Fiscal Year 2011 and Fiscal Year 2012 should be used for this section.

a. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2012, did that backlog decrease as compared with Fiscal Year 2011?

Yes. There was a backlog of agency requests at the close of FY 2012, i.e. 17 requests; however, it improves upon the backlog of agency requests at the close of FY 2011, i.e., 23 requests.

b. If your agency had a backlog of administrative appeals in Fiscal Year 2012, did that backlog decrease as compared to Fiscal Year 2011?

Yes. There were no pending appeals at the end of Fiscal Year 2012.

c. In Fiscal Year 2012, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2011?

No. Six requests among the oldest requests are still pending.

d. In Fiscal Year 2012, did your agency close the ten oldest administrative appeals that were pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2011?

Yes. There were no pending appeals at the end of Fiscal Year 2012.

3. If you answered "no" to any of the above questions, describe why that has occurred. In doing so, answer the following questions then include any additional explanation:

Request Backlog:

a. Was the lack of a reduction in the request backlog a result of an increase in the number of incoming requests?

No.

b. Was the lack of a reduction in the request backlog caused by a loss of staff?

No.

c. Was the lack of a reduction in the request backlog caused by an increase in the complexity of the requests received?

No.

d. What other causes, if any, contributed to the lack of a decrease in the request backlog?

There was a decrease in the backlog. We managed to close four of the ten oldest pending requests. The six pending requests are awaiting consults from another government agency.

Administrative Appeal Backlog:

a. Was the lack of a reduction in the backlog of administrative appeals a result of an increase in the number of incoming appeals?

No.

b. Was the lack of a reduction in the appeal backlog caused by a loss of staff?

No.

c. Was the lack of a reduction in the appeal backlog caused by an increase in the complexity of the appeals received?

No.

d. What other causes, if any, contributed to the lack of a decrease in the appeal backlog?

N/A.

4. OIP has issued guidance encouraging agencies to make interim releases whenever they are working on requests that involve a voluminous amount of material or require searches in multiple locations. By providing rolling releases to requesters agencies facilitate access to the requested information. If your agency had a backlog in Fiscal Year 2012, please provide an estimate of the number of cases in the backlog where a substantive interim response was provided during the fiscal year, even though the request was not finally closed.

Interim responses were provided in 9 of the 17 pending FOIA requests. Efforts are made to release material as processed with substantive interim responses.

Use of FOIA's Law Enforcement "Exclusions"

In order to increase transparency regarding the use of the FOIA's statutory law enforcement exclusions, which authorize agencies under certain exceptional circumstances to "treat the records as not subject to the requirements of [the FOIA]," 5 U.S.C. § 552(c)(1), (2), (3), please answer the following questions:

1. Did your agency invoke a statutory exclusion during Fiscal Year 2012?

No.

2. If so, what was the total number of times exclusions were invoked?

No.

Spotlight on Success

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2012 to increase transparency and improve FOIA administration, describe here 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.

Websites have become the most popular means of interacting with the public. We are paying attention to the dynamic potential for two-way communication. December 2012, we implemented a request tracking system which lets people submit requests via interface on the agency website. Moreover, it offers people a means for keeping track of progress, in addition to being a channel for messages about the request. March 2012, we consulted with OIP/OGIS about the quality of the e-FOIA reading room available online. It satisfied all requirements; additionally, we gathered ideas for making improvements which are now under consideration. We are pushing ahead with utilizing the agency website for enhanced FOIA performance.