



PEACE CORPS  
Chief FOIA Officer Report  
March 2015

**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.

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.

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

**It is 50%. (50% of our FOIA professionals attended training. 100% of our FOIA points-of-contacts attended FOIA training provided by the FOIA Office.)**

3. In the 2014 Chief FOIA Officer Report Guidelines, OIP asked agencies to provide a plan for ensuring that core, substantive FOIA training is offered to all agency FOIA professionals at least once each year. Please provide the status of your agency's implementation of this plan.

- Include any successes or challenges your agency has seen in implementing your plan.

**We have a staff of two FOIA professionals. Staff is encouraged to attend DOJ trainings, seminars and conferences.**

**Discretionary Releases:**

4. Does your agency have a distinct process or system in place to review records for discretionary release?

**Yes. 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.**

5. During the reporting period, did your agency make any discretionary releases of information?

**Yes.**

6. What exemption(s) would have covered the material released as a matter of discretion? For a discussion of the exemptions that allow for discretionary releases, please see OIP's guidance on implementing the President's and Attorney General's FOIA Memoranda.

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

7. Provide a narrative description, as well as some specific examples, of the types of information that your agency released as a matter of discretion during the reporting year.

**Examples are documents evaluating agency operations, such as Peace Corps volunteer survey reports, program reports, and internal communications about volunteer issues.**

8. If your agency was not able to make any discretionary releases of information, please explain why.

**N/A.**

**Other Initiatives:**

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

N/A.

- If any of these initiatives are online, please provide links in your description.

N/A.

**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." 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 your management of your FOIA program is effective and efficient. You should also include any additional information that that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

**Processing Procedures:**

1. For Fiscal Year 2014, 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 2014 Annual FOIA Report.

**Peace Corps did not adjudicate any requests for expedited processing during Fiscal Year 2014.**

- Please note here if your agency did not adjudicate any requests for expedited processing during Fiscal Year 2014.

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.

**Requester Services:**

3. Does your agency notify requesters of the mediation services offered by the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at the National Archives and Records

Administration? See OIP Guidance, "Notifying Requesters of the Mediation Services Offered by OGIS." (July 9, 2010)

**Yes.**

4. When assessing fees, does your agency provide a breakdown of how FOIA fees were calculated and assessed to the FOIA requester? For example, does your agency explain the amount of fees attributable to search, review, and duplication? See OIP Guidance, "The Importance of Good Communication with FOIA Requesters 2.0: Improving Both the Means and the Content of Requester Communications." (Nov. 22, 2013)

**Yes. We provide a full itemized breakdown of fees which includes hourly and categorical breakdowns.**

5. If estimated fees estimates are particularly high, does your agency provide an explanation for the estimate to the requester? See id.

**Yes.**

**Other Initiatives:**

6. If there are 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, eliminating redundancy, etc., please describe them here.

**The Peace Corps' process for responding to requests follows:**

- **The FOIA/PA Specialist reviews the request, logs the request into the database, determines which office or offices have responsive documents and forwards the request 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/PA 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 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.

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.

#### **Posting Material:**

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

**No.**

2. Does your process or system involve any collaboration with agency staff outside the FOIA office? If so, describe this interaction.

**No.**

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

**This process is done case-by-case. If we receive three requests asking for the same information, that information is considered for posting by the FOIA Officer and GC.**

4. 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/](http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/policies/docs/)). Additionally, statistical information on Peace Corps Volunteers is available. (See [www.peacecorps.gov/open](http://www.peacecorps.gov/open).)**

#### **Other Initiatives:**

5. If there are any other steps your agency has taken to increase proactive disclosures, please describe them here.

**N/A.**

## 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.

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.

### **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?

- Steps can include soliciting feedback on the content and presentation of posted material, improving search capabilities on your agency website, posting material in open formats, making information available through mobile applications, providing explanatory material, etc.

**Yes.**

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

- If your agency is already posting material in its most useful format, please describe these efforts.

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

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

**No.**

4. If so, please briefly explain what those challenges are.

N/A.

### **Other Initiatives:**

5. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2014?

**No.**

6. 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 2015.

**The reports were not completed in a timely manner. The FOIA Officer is working to resolve this issue.**

7. Do your agency's FOIA professionals use e-mail or other electronic means to communicate with requesters whenever feasible? See OIP Guidance, "The Importance of Good Communication with FOIA Requesters 2.0: Improving Both the Means and the Content of Requester Communications." (Nov. 22, 2013) If yes, what are the different types of electronic means are utilized by your agency to communicate with requesters?

**Yes. Email is the primary method of electronic communication.**

8. If your agency does not communicate electronically with requesters as a default, are there any limitations or restrictions for the use of such means? If yes, does your agency inform requesters about such limitations? See id.

**No.**

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

The President and the Attorney General have emphasized the importance of improving timeliness in responding to requests. This section 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 2014 Annual FOIA Report and, when applicable, your agency's 2013 Annual FOIA Report.*

**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 2014, 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 2014 that were placed in your simple track.

**It is 73%.**

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 2013 and Fiscal Year 2014 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 2014, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2013?

No.

- 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

**All of these factors had direct effect on performance. 1. Peace Corps experienced an increase in the number of FOIA requests. 2. Normally we have a summer intern work throughout the summer (June -- August). The intern would assist with simple requests and help with repetitive redactions and help relieve the FOIA/PA specialist of routine non-complex duties. This year we were unsuccessful in obtaining a summer intern. Additionally, we did not have a fall Federal Work Study student who, ordinarily, would help with administrative duties and closing out requests at the end of the Fiscal Year. 3. We received 27 complex requests in FY 13 and we received 59 complex requests in FY 14.**

6. 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 2014. If your agency did not receive any requests in Fiscal Year 2014 and/or has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."

- To calculate your agency's percentage, you must divide the number of backlogged requests reported in Section XII.A. of your Fiscal Year 2014 Annual FOIA Report by the number of requests received in Fiscal Year 2014, which can be found in Section V.A. of your Annual FOIA Report. Once divided, you can multiply that number by 100 to get the percentage.

**It is 45.4% (132 in Section XII.A and 291 in Section V.A. of the Annual FOIA Report).**

## **BACKLOGGED APPEALS**

7. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2014, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2013?

**No.**

- If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:
  - An increase in the number of incoming appeal
  - A loss of staff
  - An increase in the complexity of the appeals received

**We had one instance of a pending administrative appeal which exceeded 20 working days. The Chief FOIA Officer responded by email to the requester, however, we did not provide an "official" response until day 22.**

8. 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 2014. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2014 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

- To calculate your agency's percentage, you must divide the number of backlogged appeals reported in Section XII.A. of your Fiscal Year 2014 Annual FOIA Report by the number of appeals received in Fiscal Year 2014, which can be found in Section VI.A. of your Annual FOIA Report. Once divided, you can multiply that number by 100 to get the percentage.

**It is 25%. (We had 1 appeal in Section XII.A and 4 appeals in Section VI.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 2013 and Fiscal Year 2014 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

## TEN OLDEST REQUESTS

9. In Fiscal Year 2014, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2013 Annual FOIA Report?

**No.**

10. 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 2013 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

- For example, if you only had seven requests listed as part of your "ten oldest" in Section VII.E. and you closed six of them, you should note that you closed six out of seven "oldest" requests.

**We closed 7 out of 10.**

11. 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?

**N/A.**

## TEN OLDEST APPEALS

12. In Fiscal Year 2014, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2013 Annual FOIA Report?

**Yes.**

13. 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 2013 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

- For example, if you only had seven appeals listed as part of your "ten oldest" in Section VII.C.(5) and you closed six of them, you should note that you closed six out of seven "oldest" appeals.

**N/A.**

## TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS

14. In Fiscal Year 2014, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2013 Annual FOIA Report?

No.

15. 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 2013 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

- For example, if you only had seven consultations listed as part of your "ten oldest" in Section XII.C. and you closed six of them, you should note that you closed six out of seven "oldest" consultations.

**We had one consultation pending.**

**Additional Information on Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations & Plans:**

16. Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2013.

N/A.

17. 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.

18. 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 2015.

**Peace Corps is contracting with a vendor who provides FOIA specialists. Our goal is reducing and eliminating the FOIA backlog with their assistance.**

**Use of the FOIA's Law Enforcement Exclusions**

Did your agency invoke a statutory exclusion, 5 U.S.C. § 552(c)(1), (2), (3), during Fiscal Year 2014?

No.

If so, please provide the total number of times exclusions were invoked.

N/A.