

## UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE CHIEF FOIA OFFICER'S REPORT FOR 2016

The United States Postal Service (USPS or Postal Service), which is “an independent establishment of the executive branch of Government of the United States,” 39 U.S.C. § 201, submits this report in response to the Attorney General’s directive to Chief FOIA Officers to review and to report each year to the Department of Justice on their progress in improving transparency. Since May 23, 2014, the Postal Service’s Chief FOIA Officer has been Michael J. Elston, Associate General Counsel and Chief Ethics & Compliance Officer.

The Postal Service’s mission is to provide the nation with reliable, affordable, universal mail service. The basic functions of the Postal Service were established in 39 U.S.C. § 101(a): “. . . [T]o bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people.” USPS is required to conduct its operations in accordance with sound business principles.

For the past few years, the Postal Service has faced unprecedented financial challenges. In its most recent annual financial report, USPS reported a net loss of \$5.06 billion for Fiscal Year 2015 (<http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/annual-reports/fy2015.pdf>). This follows losses of approximately \$5 billion in FY2014 and FY 2013. *Id.* At the end of Fiscal Year 2014, there were only 219 pending requests, but the number of overdue responses had risen to 132. This situation was, of course, unacceptable, and this office immediately began taking steps to try to address the backlog. The Postal Service implemented a number of low-cost initiatives designed to reduce the backlog, including a new emphasis on the FOIA’s importance to the basic structure of our form of government and its relationship to the Postal Service’s bottom line.

These initiatives included a new Chief FOIA Officer’s Award to recognize outstanding contributions to USPS’s FOIA compliance efforts, an escalation procedure designed to address situations in which custodians or coordinators fail to timely report the status of a response to a FOIA request, online FOIA training for custodians and coordinators as a “Strategic Training Initiative” for Fiscal Year 2015, and establishment of a group goal in USPS’s pay-for-performance evaluation system. That goal is a 35% reduction in the backlog at the end of Fiscal Year 2015.

Through these initiatives, and with the sustained hard work and sincere effort of the USPS’s FOIA professionals, USPS made great strides toward better FOIA compliance. For example, at the end of FY2015 there were only 58 responses overdue – a 56% reduction in the number of overdue responses in just one year.

### ***Organizational Structure and Other Background Information:***

The USPS Deputy Chief FOIA Officer, Privacy and Records Office, reports to the Chief FOIA Officer through the Chief Privacy Officer. The Deputy Chief FOIA Officer is responsible for the overall administration of the Postal Service’s FOIA Program and its compliance with the FOIA, except for records independently maintained by the Postal Inspection Service and the USPS Office of Inspector General (OIG). The Privacy and Records Office is a part of the Ethics & Compliance Group. The Federal Compliance section of the Ethics and Compliance Group is responsible for FOIA appeals for the Postal Service and the Postal Inspection Service.

This report represents responses from the following FOIA program offices:

- USPS FOIA Program
- USPS General Counsel (appeals for USPS and Postal Inspection Service)
- USPS OIG FOIA Program (initial requests and appeals)
- U.S. Postal Inspection Service FOIA Program (initial requests)

The USPS FOIA program is decentralized. OIG and Postal Inspection Service FOIA programs are centralized. USPS has two FOIA Requester Service Centers (RSCs) to track and coordinate all FOIA requests received. FOIA requests for Postal Service Headquarters controlled records; Supply Management or Facilities controlled records including contracts, building leases, and other real estate transactions; and employee listings are tracked and coordinated by the FOIA RSC-Headquarters. The FOIA RSC-Field supports the tracking and processing of FOIA requests for Postal Service records maintained at area offices, district offices, Post Offices, or other field operations facilities (FOIA RSC-Field). The Postal Service has nearly 32,000 facilities throughout the country at which records are maintained. FOIA Coordinators have been designated to assist records custodians in each of the USPS Headquarters departments and each of the Area and District offices across the country. The FOIA Coordinator, an ad-hoc position, provides procedural guidance on the FOIA to records custodians regarding requests that fall within their areas of responsibility.

The Privacy and Records Office is responsible for developing a program and framework to assist records custodians in processing FOIA requests. As such, it issues detailed instructions to records custodians on the FOIA (see 39 Code of Federal Regulations § 265 and USPS Handbook AS-353, *Guide to Privacy, the FOIA, and Records Management*). The FOIA RSC staff is available to assist FOIA Coordinators and records custodians or their designees throughout the organization with record release determinations and other FOIA matters. The General Counsel's office at Postal Service Headquarters and the Law Department's Area Law Offices provide advice to records custodians regarding the FOIA, including the applicability of exemptions.

It is USPS policy to make its official records available to the public to the maximum extent consistent with the public interest. In its commitment to the "Presumption of Openness" concept as it carries out its FOIA responsibilities, Postal Service policy requires a practice of full disclosure subject only to the specific exemptions required or authorized by law. This policy had been in place for some time prior to the issuance of President Obama's FOIA Memorandum and was affirmed in our 2015 Annual Report to Congress, which states, "It is Postal Service policy to promote transparency and accountability by adopting a presumption in favor of disclosure in all decisions involving the FOIA..." Postal Service regulations provide that a custodian may disclose exempt information as a matter of discretion if that disclosure is not prohibited by law and would not cause any foreseeable harm.

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

### **FOIA Training:**

1. Did your agency conduct FOIA training during the reporting period for FOIA professionals?

Yes.

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

To address the need to provide more training, more efficiently, to FOIA coordinators and records custodians, USPS FOIA professionals developed two new e-learning FOIA training courses as a “Strategic Training Initiative” in Fiscal Year 2015. These courses (Freedom of Information Act and FOIA for Managers of FOIA Coordinators) were made mandatory for certain employees. A description of all USPS online FOIA courses and the number of employees that completed them in the last year follows:

Course Title: FOIA for Managers of FOIA Coordinators

Number of participants: 589

Course description: A short informational video for those who supervise or manage FOIA coordinators. In this short talk, the Chief FOIA Officer discusses with the audience why the FOIA is important, who is responsible for responding to FOIA requests, and other important information to ensure USPS managers understand their role in making sure that requests are responded to promptly and appropriately.

Course Title: Freedom of Information Act

Number of participants: 2,299

Course description: This course, intended for FOIA coordinators, familiarizes the learner with processing a simple and a complex FOIA request.

Course title: FOIA Overview

Number of participants: 303

Course description: Provides an overview of the FOIA, describes Postal Service FOIA regulations, identifies roles and responsibilities of postal employees in complying with the FOIA, and provides resources to help with FOIA requests.

To supplement the online FOIA courses, USPS conducted three FOIA-related webinars for area and district FOIA coordinators. The webinars covered the following FOIA topics: 1) Analyzing a FOIA Request, 2) How to Assess Fees, and 3) FOIA Exemptions 3 and 6.

The USPS FOIA Forum held on December 4, 2015, was attended by USPS, USPIS and OIG employees, including several FOIA coordinators from USPS Headquarters offices. A guest speaker from the Office of Information Policy, U.S. Department of Justice, provided an overview of the Administration’s FOIA policies. USPS speakers gave an overview of the USPS FOIA Program and discussed issues and results from Fiscal Year 2015. A question and answer period followed with closing remarks from the Chief FOIA Officer.

USPIS held three “lunch and learn” sessions to discuss updates to the Department of Justice Guide to the FOIA concerning FOIA Exemptions 6, 7C and 7D.

OIG held monthly meetings with all FOIA staff and discussed a wide range of topics, to include FOIA guidance changes over the years, current FOIA requests and how they were handled, best practices, and relevant case law.

Federal Compliance worked regularly with records custodians throughout the Postal Service to help them better understand their responsibilities under the FOIA and to ensure strict compliance with its

requirements. In addition, Federal Compliance developed and presented training for attorneys in other components of the Law Department to help them fulfill their responsibilities associated with processing initial FOIA requests themselves or in providing advice and guidance to internal client groups. Federal Compliance also prepared and provided specialized training for the Postal Inspection Service Office of Counsel regarding its responsibilities pertaining to referral, consultation, and coordination with other agencies. Finally, Federal Compliance provided internal training on the interplay of the FOIA and the Privacy Act of 1974.

3. If no, please explain why your agency did not hold training during the reporting period, such as if training offered by other agencies was sufficient for your agency's training needs.

N/A

4. Did your FOIA professionals attend any FOIA training or conference during the reporting period such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

Yes. Two employees attended the Department of Justice Advanced FOIA Seminar; one person attended the 2007 Annual National Training Conference held by the American Society of Access Professionals (ASAP). All FOIA professionals attended or participated in at least one or more internal training initiatives as described in response to Question 2.

5. 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%

6. 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:**

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

Yes. On December 4, 2015, the Chief FOIA Officer for the Postal Service held a FOIA Forum. Along with the Chief FOIA Officer, the USPS Chief Privacy Officer and Manager of the USPS Privacy and Records Office, and the Chief, FOIA Compliance Staff, Office of Information Policy, U.S. Department of Justice, co-chaired the panel. The FOIA Forum was open to postal employees and the public. The Forum provided attendees an overview of the Administration's FOIA policies, an overview of the USPS FOIA program, a recap of Fiscal Year 2015 issues and results, and the focus of the FOIA Program for Fiscal Year 2016. At the end of the presentation, the panel held a question and answer period. The event was advertised on the USPS FOIA website. For those members of the public that were unable to attend the forum, an email address was provided in which questions about the USPS FOIA Program could be submitted. In 2016, we plan to use the material developed from the forum for a video "Q&A" that will be posted on the USPS FOIA website.

8. If you did not conduct any outreach during the reporting period, please explain why.

N/A

**Discretionary Releases:**

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

Postal Service policy provides that a records custodian may disclose exempt information as a matter of discretion if that disclosure is not prohibited by law and would not cause any foreseeable harm. In practice, this means that records should be reviewed for mandatory and discretionary release simultaneously. The USPS FOIA Program is decentralized. This policy applies to all Postal Service components. Agency components do not have separate, distinct processes or systems in place to review records for discretionary disclosure.

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

Yes.

11. What exemption(s) would have covered the material released as a matter of discretion?

Exemptions 3, in conjunction with 39 USC § 410(c)(2); 5; 7(D) and 7(E).

12. 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.

The more common type of information released as a matter of discretion consists of contractual provisions generally eligible for protection pursuant to FOIA Exemption 3, in conjunction with 39 USC § 410(c)(2). Certain data that may have originally been commercially sensitive, and thus, protectable, may safely be released after the passage of time.

USPS has been able to release exchanges between agency officials eligible for withholding under FOIA Exemption 5.

USPIS released confidential statements that would fall under the protection of Exemption 7(D) because the individuals that provided statements were deceased at the time of disclosure.

OIG released information that falls under Exemption 7(E) because the investigative techniques were not specific enough to cause harm.

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

N/A

**Other Initiatives:**

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

- To promote compliance with FOIA, the Postal Service continued its internal process whereby FOIA requests that are pending are escalated to management-, executive-, and officer-level employees to ensure that proper attention is being paid to responding to FOIA requests within the statutory timeframes. These strategies are intended to promote the importance of FOIA throughout the organization. This process proved successful in helping the agency reduce its backlog in Fiscal Year 2015.
- USPS submitted seven FOIA-related Smart Business Moments to the USPS Law Department's Ethics Team for consideration. The Smart Business Moments initiative promotes a culture of compliance with postal policy, business objectives, federal regulations and criminal laws. These messages reinforce to employees a postal policy, rule, practice, business goal, or law to help ensure their compliance. Each Smart Business Moment also explains why following the rule or business goal results in smart business for the Postal Service. Managers are to include Smart Business Moments in certain meetings and other settings.
- USPS continued the Chief FOIA Officer's Awards program to recognize the contributions and efforts of non-FOIA professionals. FOIA professionals can nominate individuals for a Chief FOIA Officer's Award. Recipients are individually recognized in the *USPS News LINK*, an internal, online publication that is distributed daily throughout the organization, and a copy of the letter and certificate is included in the employee's official personnel file.
- Federal Compliance provides guidance regarding agency obligations under the FOIA in connection with virtually every administrative appeal it considers – as well as in its role as in-house counsel to records custodians and managers across the Postal Service.
- The Inspection Service National Leadership Team was apprised of the updated USPIS FOIA process that came out of a Kaizen (Lean Six Sigma) FOIA project.
- OIG holds periodic meetings to educate investigative staff participating in the OIG New Leadership Development Program about FOIA best practices, processing, and records production.
- Federal Compliance is sponsoring a Lean Six Sigma project to identify ways to streamline processes in an effort to improve the timely processing of administrative FOIA appeals.
- USPS Publication 550, *For the Record*, is a pamphlet that is made available for distribution to new postal employees. The pamphlet describes the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act, and includes employees' rights and responsibilities under the Acts.

15. 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

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

### ***Processing Procedures:***

1. For Fiscal Year 2015, what was the average number of days your agency reported for adjudicating requests for expedited processing?

5.37

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. If your agency has a decentralized FOIA process, has your agency taken steps to make the routing of misdirected requests within your agency more efficient? If so, please describe those steps.

USPS has a system in place for handling the routing of misdirected requests efficiently. USPS FOIA RSCs electronically transfer and reassign misdirected FOIA requests from within the FOIA Tracking System. FOIA professionals at each of the RSCs regularly consult with one another to ensure that requests are directed to the proper FOIA RSC when a request has been misdirected. FOIA Coordinators throughout the agency are knowledgeable about the proper procedures to follow if a FOIA request has been misdirected to them. To aid requesters in submitting their FOIA request, the USPS FOIA website lists the proper addresses to which FOIA requests should be sent. To further improve FOIA request processing and to ensure that all requests are tracked at the time of receipt, on July 29, 2015, USPS amended its FOIA regulations (see Federal Register, Volume 80, No. 145) to require that all requests be sent to one of four RSCs.

4. On July 2, 2015, OIP issued new guidance to agencies on the proper procedures to be used in the event an agency has a reason to inquire whether a requester is still interested in the processing of his or her request. Please confirm here that to the extent your agency may have had occasion to send a "still interested" inquiry, it has done so in accordance with the new guidelines for doing so, including affording requesters thirty working days to respond.

USPS developed a sample "still interested" letter for use by USPS personnel to determine whether a requester remains interested in the continued processing of his or her request. The sample letter provides a 30-day response time for the requester and includes blank fields to fill in appropriate contact information. The letter template was added to the FOIA Tracking System for use by FOIA professionals.

### ***Requester Services:***

5. Agency FOIA Requester Service Centers and FOIA Public Liaisons serve as the face and voice of an agency. In this capacity they provide a very important service for requesters, informing them about how the FOIA process works and providing specific details on the handling of their individual requests. The FOIA also calls on agency FOIA Requester Service Centers and FOIA Public Liaisons to assist requesters in resolving disputes. Please explain here any steps your agency has taken to strengthen these services to better inform requesters about their requests and to prevent or resolve FOIA disputes.

There have been no recent changes in the organizational structure of the USPS FOIA Program, which already has in place four RSC's, each having a designated FOIA Public Liaison. Contact information for the RSCs and FOIA Public Liaisons are posted online. With more than 30,000 facilities throughout the

country at which records are maintained, FOIA Coordinators in each of the USPS Headquarters departments and each of the Area and District offices across the country play a key role in responding to inquiries from FOIA requesters about their requests. Also, requesters are informed in writing of any subsequent referral of their request and provided contact information.

***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.

- During the reporting year, Federal Compliance worked with the Privacy and Records Office on a Lean Six Sigma (LSS) project in an effort to improve timely processing of administrative FOIA appeals. As a result of the process, USPS is currently considering ways to streamline FOIA processes to improve its ability to meet the needs of the requester community.
- FOIA backlog reduction goals were established for USPS FOIA professionals for Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016 in USPS's pay-for-performance system. Weekly backlog and productivity reports are provided to management and FOIA RSC staff to stay on track with backlog reduction goals.
- FOIA professionals attend team meetings regularly to discuss ways to improve the FOIA Program and to discuss challenges that are presented in processing some of the more complicated requests received.
- A Fiscal Year 2016 goal for the USPS FOIA Program is to survey FOIA coordinators to determine what tools, information and resources are needed that will assist them with their FOIA processing duties. The survey results will be used to begin development of a FOIA Toolkit resources page. The survey is in development and is expected to be completed by the end of Quarter 2, Fiscal Year 2016.
- USPIS assigned a Postal Inspector/Attorney and a Postal Inspector to assist the USPIS FOIA RSC in the handling of requests. For instance, these individuals are able to advise the FOIA RSC staff on how the Inspectors conduct their work, where certain documents are kept, and how certain information is captured in USPIS databases. USPIS FOIA professionals are better able to communicate with FOIA requesters about the records maintained by the USPIS.



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

#### **Posting Material:**

1. Describe your agency's process or system for identifying "frequently requested" records required to be posted online under Subsection (a)(2) of the FOIA. For example, does your agency monitor its FOIA logs or is there some other system in place to identify these records for posting.

Each records custodian is responsible for determining which of its records are required to be made publicly available, identifying additional records of interest to the public that are appropriate for public disclosure, and posting such records to the Postal Service's website.

In addition to providing records in response to FOIA requests, USPS often voluntarily provides supplemental or explanatory information about the records subject in order to increase transparency and to respond in a spirit of cooperation. In particular, FOIA professionals work with Corporate Communications and stakeholders in coordinating responses to news media requests.

The FOIA Tracking System alerts FOIA professionals when the same or similar FOIA requests are received and logged into the tracking system. It is the responsibility of each USPS records custodian to ensure that records processed and disclosed in response to a FOIA request, and are likely to become the subject of subsequent requests for substantially the same records, be made available in the Postal Service's Electronic FOIA Reading Room.

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.

Responsible agency personnel are reminded of the requirement to proactively disclose records through formal and informal communications, and through training efforts. Corporate Communications works cross functionally with other postal departments to identify and produce materials for posting on *USPS.com* and to develop multi-media materials for web posting. This group also supports business units and functions throughout USPS to help improve external communications.

3. When making proactive disclosures of records, are your agency's FOIA professionals involved in coding the records for Section 508 compliance or otherwise preparing them for posting? If so, provide an estimate of how much time is involved for each of your FOIA professionals and your agency overall.

FOIA professionals are typically not involved in coding records for compliance with Section 508 requirements. Postal policy provides that all functional organizations have the responsibility for Section 508 compliance. As such, USPS does not have the amount of time for the agency overall in coding documents for Section 508 compliance. Information about USPS policies pertaining to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act is available online at: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/legal/section-508/welcome.htm>.

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

No.

5. If so, please briefly explain those challenges.

N/A

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

The USPS website, found at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com), is one of the most frequently visited government sites and provides customers quick and easy access to Postal Service information, products, and services, as well as links to both OIG and Postal Inspection Service websites. The Postal Service offers [usps.com](http://www.usps.com) in Spanish and Simplified Chinese. The Postal Service website is an online Post Office at your fingertips, and is open for business 24/7. The Postal Service's smart-phone apps make it even quicker to use the most popular functions on [usps.com](http://www.usps.com), anytime and anywhere.

The USPS FOIA Reading Room, <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/foia/readroom/welcome.htm>, includes links to records previously released that have been or are likely to become the subject of multiple requests. It also contains links to Purchasing Protest Decisions, Judicial Office Administrative Decisions, Board of Contract Appeal Decisions, and Business Disagreement Decisions, all of which are popularly requested records. There is also a link to the Postal Regulatory Commission's (PRC) website ([www.prc.gov](http://www.prc.gov)). The PRC is an independent establishment of the Executive Branch that exercises regulatory oversight over the Postal Service. The PRC proactively publishes information of interest to the mailing community and general public. For example, the PRC's Reports/Data page, <http://www.prc.gov/reports>, includes dockets, PRC reports and studies and USPS periodic reports.

Our [about.usps.com](http://about.usps.com) website provides corporate information, such as USPS history and the latest news and information on the Postal Service. [About.usps.com](http://about.usps.com) helps keep the public and the news media informed about what the Postal Service is doing with regard to mail service, sustainability, corporate structure, and how we impact the world around us.

USPS continued to publish online a number of reports that are responsive to different legislative requirements. The *FY2015 Annual Performance Report* and *FY2016 Annual Performance Plan* present an array of metrics the Postal Service uses to measure performance across the organization - <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/annual-reports/fy2015.pdf>. These metrics provide visibility across the following critical functions: delivery service, financial performance, workplace environment and customer experience. *The FY2015 Comprehensive Statement on Postal Operations* provides a more detailed description of the key organizational developments during last fiscal year and the key initiatives underway that support the corporate goals for the next fiscal year.

Legislation and regulation require the Postal Service to disclose operational and financial information beyond that demanded of federal government agencies and private sector companies. The financial reports available at <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/welcome.htm> and include:

- Form 10-Q showing financial conditions and results.
- Quarterly Statistics Reports (QSR) presenting statistics on mail activity and focusing on estimates of Postal revenue, volume, and weight by mail category and transit time estimates for selected items.
- Annual reports and Form 10-K Annual Reports, and Integrated Financial Plans.
- Cost and Revenue Analysis Report showing revenue, cost and contribution by mail class, subclasses, and key special services.
- The Cost Segments and Components Report shows U.S. Postal Service estimates of costs attributable to mail classes, subclasses, and key special services, summarized by cost segment and by major cost components. The report is generated annually.
- Revenue, Pieces, and Weight Reports (RPW) presenting official estimates of revenue, volume and weight by class, subclass, and major special service.
- The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) mandated Five-Year Strategic Plans.
- Combined Postal Comprehensive Statements and Annual Performance Plans drawing on the work of the entire organization.
- Periodic reports developed throughout each fiscal year.

Highlights of some of the other updated or new information posted this past reporting period, including links to where this material can be found online, are summarized below.

Corporate Communications - <http://about.usps.com/news/welcome.htm> - proactively and routinely makes a wide variety of documents available for public viewing based on the public's and media's interest in Postal Service issues. These documents are available on the *about.usps.com* pages and include the Newsroom, with links to all national and local USPS press releases on postal products, consumer and business issues, financial results and other issues of great public interest. Included in the Newsroom are:

- National News - <http://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/welcome.htm#>
- Local News - <http://about.usps.com/news/state-releases/welcome.htm>
- Electronic Press Kits - <http://about.usps.com/news/electronic-press-kits/welcome.htm>
- Testimony & Speeches - <http://about.usps.com/news/testimony-speeches/welcome.htm>
- Broadcast Downloads - <http://uspsvideo.com/>
- Audio Downloads - <http://about.usps.com/news/audio/welcome.htm>
- Events Calendar - <http://about.usps.com/news/events-calendar.htm>
- Service Alerts - <http://about.usps.com/news/service-alerts/welcome.htm> - This page provides information to consumers, small businesses and other business mailers about postal facility service disruptions due to weather-related and other natural disasters or events.
- A live twitter feed display was added to the Newsroom homepage to provide greater exposure to Postal Service tweets on a wide range of topics of public interest - <http://about.usps.com/news/welcome.htm>

Holiday newsroom: <http://about.usps.com/holidaynews/> - Provides a wide range of information about Postal Service holiday issues, including domestic and military mailing deadlines.

Statements: <http://about.usps.com/news/statements/welcome.htm> - Provides the Postal Service's position on controversial issues and other subjects of public interest.

*Postal Bulletin*: <http://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/welcome.htm> - The Postal Bulletin, one of the oldest federal publications still in print, has been the official chronicler for USPS since 1880. Published every two weeks, it is the official source of updates to Postal Service policies and procedures and is available to the public online or by subscription.

USPS Privacy Policy (updated) - <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/privacy-policy/welcome.htm>.

USPS Supply Management maintains a "Suppliers" web page on USPS.com which contains general supplier information, what we buy and who buys what, and how to become a USPS supplier. Some of the items posted this reporting period include:

- Highway Contract Routes – <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/foia/FY-2016-Q1-HCR-Listing.xlsx>
- New issues to the Supplier Newsletter: - <http://about.usps.com/suppliers/forms-publications.htm>
- Supplying Principles and Practices (updated)- <http://about.usps.com/suppliers/forms-publications.htm>
- Fiscal Year 2015 Goals for the Supplier Diversity Program- <http://about.usps.com/suppliers/diversity-program.htm>

USPS Facilities posts the following national listings:

- Leased postal facilities: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/foia/leased-facilities/report.htm>
- Owned postal facilities: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/foia/readroom/ownedfacilitiesreport.htm>
- Postal properties for sale: <http://www.uspspropertiesforsale.com/>

USPS Office of Sustainability Green News can be found at: <http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/welcome.htm>. The Office of Sustainability posted the January 2015 OMB Scorecard on Sustainability/ Energy at <http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/pdf/omb-scorecard-2015.pdf>.

The USPS Historian's Office added new historical information, as follows:

- Postmaster finder: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postmasterfinder/welcome.htm>
- List of Postmasters General: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/list-of-postmasters-general.pdf>
- Post Offices with Valentine's Day Names: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/valentine-post-office-names.pdf>
- Christmas Holiday Stamps: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/christmas-holiday-stamps.pdf>
- Rates for Domestic Letters since 1863: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/domestic-letter-rates-since-1863.pdf>
- Rates for Stamped Cards and Postcards: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/postcard-rates.pdf>
- Number of Postal Employees since 1926: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/employees-since-1926.pdf>
- Delivery Points since 1905: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/delivery-points-since-1905.pdf>
- Pieces of Mail Handled since 1789: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/pieces-of-mail-since-1789.pdf>
- First-Class Mail Volume since 1926: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/first-class-mail-since-1926.pdf>
- Postal Facilities Dedicated by Congress: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/dedicated-facilities.pdf>
- New Deal Art in Post Offices: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/new-deal-art.pdf>

The Historian's Office also revised and expanded:

- Telegraph: Early Postal Role: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/telegraph.pdf>
- Women of Postal Headquarters: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/women-at-headquarters.pdf>

Judicial Officer – <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/judicial/welcome.htm> - The Judicial Officer Department is a neutral, impartial forum within the Postal Service comprised of the Judicial Officer, the Office of Administrative Law Judges, and the Postal Service Board of Contract Appeals. Administrative Decisions of the Judicial Officer Department from 1957 through the present are accessible online. New decisions typically are added to this website on a monthly basis.

- The new Board of Contract Appeals report allows individuals to see the entire docket, including cases that may never have a decision posted on the decision website - <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/judicial/board-contract-appeals-decisions/welcome.htm>.
- Decisions issued by the Office of Administrative Law Judges and Judicial Officer Department can be read at <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are-/judicial/admin-decisions/welcome.htm>.
- Report of active Board of Contract Appeals Cases - <https://uspsjoe.justware.com/JusticeWeb/Reports>

Board of Governors – since March 2015, upcoming meetings of the Temporary Emergency Committee of the Board of Governors are posted to <http://about.usps.com/welcome.htm>, when practicable, in addition to being posted in the Federal Register.

USPS Address Management oversees the Rapid Information Bulletin Board System (RIBBS) at <https://ribbs.usps.gov/index.cfm?>. The RIBBS site is designed to provide the mailing community with the most up-to-date information regarding postal products and information but is open to anyone seeking information about the Postal Service. The home page is designed so that visitors can easily locate resources on a specific topic. The home page will change periodically to provide the visitor with current topics of interest and the most recent update and announcements available. It provides mailers online access to a variety of downloadable Postal Service information such as Customer Support Rulings, Federal Register notices, weather and natural disaster condition reports, just to name a few. Other RIBBS features include:

- A search feature allows the visitor to locate specific reference and documents related to a word search.
- A new feature allows the user to subscribe to RSS feeds (Rich Site Summary) that notifies the user when information relevant to the user's interest has been posted.
- RIBBS "USPS Locators & Lookups" help visitors to easily find other Postal organizations they may wish to contact.
- RIBBS "Updates" menu reports the most recent changes made to any page or document available on RIBBS. The *Updates* page reports two months of update history.
- An "ALL" tab provides an alphabetical listing of RIBBS resources.

OIG posted audit reports and management advisories in full or with modest redactions: [www.uspsig.gov/document-library](http://www.uspsig.gov/document-library).

USPIS updated and posted new information, as follows:

- News Releases: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/pressroom/pressreleases.aspx>
- USPIS Fiscal Year 2015 Report: [https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/radDocs/pubs/2015\\_AnnualReport.pdf](https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/radDocs/pubs/2015_AnnualReport.pdf)
- Inspectors in the News: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/pressroom/inspectorsnews.aspx>
- Wanted Posters: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/pressroom/wanted.aspx>

- Scheme Alerts: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/pressroom/schemealerts.aspx>
- An alert providing a warning to postal customers to not to disclose personally identifiable information to callers purportedly from the USPS with a package delivery: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/radDocs/consumer/CrimeAlert-DoNotTakeTheBait.pdf>.

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

Yes.

USPS Corporate Communications uses social media to increase public awareness of Postal Service products, services and issues, including through the USPS Corporate blog (Postal Posts): <http://uspsblog.com/>. Through *Postal Posts*, the public can learn about USPS products, services, technological innovations, history, customers and employees – including real-life postal heroes who go above and beyond the call of duty every day. In 2015, a live twitter feed display was added to the Newsroom homepage, <http://about.usps.com/news/welcome.htm>, to provide greater exposure to Postal Service tweets on a wide range of topics of public interest.

USPS also uses other social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, to publicize and highlight proactive disclosures.

Registered users of the eSourcing website receive the USPS Supplier Newsletter via email once the new issue becomes available.

Consumers may subscribe to Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds that notify the user when information relevant to the user's interests has been posted to the USPS RIBBS website.

USPS Consumer Advocate John Budzynski appeared on several TV and radio news shows during peak season, offering consumers packaging tips, reminders about shipping deadlines and other useful information. Mr. Budzynski also touted the MyUSPS.com package-tracking app and the new "How To: Shipping Tips" videos.

USPS Human Resources provides information about career opportunities through *LinkedIn*, *Dice.com*., *The Ladders.com*, *Careerbuilder.com*, *Monster.com*, *Salesjobs.com*, *Lawjobs.com*, *Facebook*, *Twitter.com/USPSON Campus* and *Twitter.com/USPSCareers*.

**Other Initiatives:**

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

In addition to website postings and social media, Corporate Communications proactively discloses information through other means, such as through media events and public events, webinars, mailings and other forms of communication.

USPS is continuing to help customers find answers to their mailing and shipping questions. The latest videos in the Postal Service's "How To: Shipping Tips" address topics such as wedding announcements, holding mail, military mail and returning merchandise through USPS. The new videos are available on the Postal Service's *YouTube channel* <https://www.youtube.com/user/uspstv>.

The Postal Service showcased its latest innovations at the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. The services highlighted include door-to-door package tracking and free parcel delivery options for shippers. Recent improvements in customer service also were showcased. The Consumer Electronics Show allows USPS to meet with customers from across the globe to show them how the

Postal Service is leveraging technology and our infrastructure to better meet their needs. The Consumer Electronics Show draws more than 150,000 attendees each year, along with 6,000 reporters, bloggers and other members of the news media. A team of employees from across the Postal Service participated in the event, which was held on January 6 – 9, 2016.

The Historian's Office completed its long-term loan of "Railway Mail Service, 10<sup>th</sup> Division: Schedules of Mail Trains" (12 volumes), to Railway Mail Service Library (RMSL) for digitization purposes, increasing the availability of this information to the public.

The Historian's Office continued its long-term loan of microfilm copies of the *United States Official Postal Guide, 1874–1954* to the American Philatelic Research Library for digitization and posting on [www.uspostalbulletins.com](http://www.uspostalbulletins.com).

## Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

### ***Making Material Posted Online More Usable:***

1. Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useable 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 USPS Postal Supplier Council is used by the Supply Management Department to assist with determining the type of information that suppliers may be interested in having access to and provides feedback on the content provided to the supplier community.
- Enterprise Analytics conducts studies on the moving population to determine what information is useful to them before, during, and after the move process. Materials are provided on the MoversGuide online website based on the study results.
- The address change service product and service documentation has been improved by adding a "Change Log" that identifies the new, modified, or deleted information from previous versions.
- Information Technology periodically contacts functional users and works with the USPS.com team to ensure that documentation is useable and up to date.
- Corporate Communications regularly reviews page visit metrics to the material it posts to determine interest level of the materials. Documents are made available in multiple formats, including html and pdf to offer the public options for best viewing and printing. Corporate Communications is also actively pursuing processes to make the content of the material posted more mobile-friendly.
- OIG has posted a number of audit reports using dynamic reporting models to enhance user interaction with the data.

3. Have your agency's FOIA professionals interacted with other agency staff (such as technology specialists or public affairs or communications professionals) in order to identify if there are any new ways to post agency information online?

Yes. USPS FOIA professionals met with Retail and Customer Service Operations and Supply Management staff to determine if addition information could be posted online. USPIS met with their Management Analysis and Planning Group to determine if certain statistical information could be proactively disclosed. The OIG Dynamic Reporting team is part of the Chief of Staff office, which handles public affairs and communications.

### ***Use of Technology to Facilitate Processing of Requests:***

4. Did your agency conduct training for FOIA staff on any new processing tools during the reporting period, such as for a new case management system, or for search, redaction, or other processing tools.

Yes.



Several agency employees attended basic training on the FOIA Tracking System provided by a supplier. The basic training course consists of two days of intensive classes that cover the full lifecycle of a FOIA request and many of the primary features and functions of the software solution.

FOIA professionals attended a conference held by the software provider of the USPS FOIA Tracking System. A widely attended event with attendees from more than 50 different government agencies, USPS FOIA professionals took part in a discussion about FOIA software, best practices, and emerging issues. During the event, the vendor announced the upcoming release of the FOIA software package that will include a new graphical user interface (GUI) dashboard design for user-friendly usability as well as several other new features.

5. Beyond using technology to redact documents, is your agency taking steps to use 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? If yes, describe the technological improvements being made.

As part of an ongoing Lean Six Sigma project to review and seek solutions to improve appeals processing and response times, redaction technology and electronic storage solutions that can be implemented nationally for initial FOIA request processing are being considered.

USPS FOIA professionals use a document review tool to assist in filtering out duplicate and non-responsive documents for requests that involve voluminous records.

The USPS Information Catalog Office (ICP) and IT professionals provide required support and assistance in conducting electronic records searches. ICP sorts and de-duplicates email records and may provide data transfer services for the exchange of electronic files.

Regular software upgrades are made to the FOIA Tracking System.

OIG is exploring the option of purchasing a system to automatically search for electronic records.

6. Are there additional tools that could be utilized by your agency to create further efficiencies?

As mentioned above, an ongoing Lean Six Sigma project is looking at how technology may be leveraged across the agency to improve FOIA processing.

***Other Initiatives:***

7. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2015?

Yes.

8. 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 2016.

N/A

9. 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 that are utilized by your agency to communicate with requesters?

Yes. FOIA professionals routinely communicate with requesters via e-mail, when appropriate. In addition to e-mail, the Postal Service utilizes a public access link portal to communicate electronically with requesters. Requesters can log into their accounts to check on the status of their request.

10. If your agency does not communicate electronically with requests 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?

USPS components do not respond to FOIA requests by e-mail when the response to the request contains confidential information, such as a response to a first-party requester for their own records, because of security concerns and USPS Information Technology policies. In addition, USPS has a size restriction on attachments that can be sent by e-mail. Requesters are informed of these limitations on a case-by-case basis.

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

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

Yes.

2. If so, for your agency overall in Fiscal Year 2015, was the average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer?

Yes.

3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2015 that were placed in your simple track.

89%.

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

### **BACKLOGGED REQUESTS**

5. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2015, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2014?

Yes.

6. If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

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 2015.

3%.

### **BACKLOGGED APPEALS**

8. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2015, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2014?

Yes.

9. If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able reduce backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

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 2015. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2015 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

6.5%

***Backlog Reduction Plans:***

11. In the 2015 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2014 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 2015.

Even though USPS did not have a backlog of over 1,000 requests, we implemented a backlog reduction plan. Among other things, the General Counsel and the Chief FOIA Officer established a group goal in USPS's pay-for-performance evaluation system. The Fiscal Year 2015 backlog reduction goal of 35% was not only met, but exceeded with a 56% reduction.

12. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2015, what is your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2016?

N/A.

**TEN OLDEST REQUESTS**

13. In Fiscal Year 2015, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2014 Annual FOIA Report?

No.

14. 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 2014 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

USPS closed 4 of the 10 oldest requests reported pending in the USPS Fiscal Year 2014 Annual FOIA Report during Fiscal Year 2015.

15. 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?

This information is not available due to a system limitation.

**TEN OLDEST APPEALS**

16. In Fiscal Year 2015, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2014 Annual FOIA Report?

No.

17. 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 2014 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

USPS closed 8 of the 10 oldest appeals reported pending in the USPS Fiscal Year 2014 Annual FOIA Report during Fiscal Year 2015.

### **TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS**

18. In Fiscal Year 2015, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2014 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

19. 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 2014 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

N/A

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

20. Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2014.

The increase in the number of incoming requests was the primary obstacle faced in Fiscal Year 2015 and a position was vacant during part of the year. In addition, most of the oldest pending requests involve voluminous records or require cross-functional coordination among a number of stakeholders. As such, these types of requests are put on a slower processing track (complex) based on the amount of work and time involved in processing the request.

The General Counsel's office experienced an increase in the number of administrative appeals received. Although only 8 of the 10 oldest pending FOIA appeals were closed in Fiscal Year 2015, the other 2 have since been closed.

21. 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

22. 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 2016.

The Postal Service will continue to work with requesters to satisfy their requests in the most efficient way. USPS will continue to utilize a supplier to provide FOIA processing services to assist in processing the oldest pending requests and to provide other program support.

The General Counsel's office is in the process of filling a vacant FOIA specialist position.

As part of a realignment of the Ethics & Compliance Group, two FOIA specialist positions will be reassigned from the Federal Compliance (appeals) group to the Privacy and Records Office. This realignment of FOIA professionals will permit greater flexibility in allocating available resources in responding to both FOIA requests and appeals.

### ***Interim Responses:***

23. Does your agency have a system in place to provide interim responses to requesters when appropriate? See *OIP Guidance*, "The Importance of Good Communication with FOIA Requesters." (Mar. 1, 2010)

There is no formal system in place for providing interim responses to requesters. USPS practice is to make interim response determinations and the practice is done on a case-by-case basis.

24. If your agency had a backlog in Fiscal Year 2015, please provide an estimate of the number or percentage of cases in the backlog where a substantive, interim response was provided during the fiscal year, even though the request was not finally closed.

This information is not tracked, and thus no estimate is available.

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

1. Did your agency invoke a statutory exclusion, 5 U.S.C. § 552(c)(1), (2), (3), during Fiscal Year 2015?

No

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

N/A

## Success Story

### Reducing the FOIA Backlog

During the reporting period, USPS implemented the four-point plan to reduce its backlog of overdue responses to initial FOIA requests set out in the Chief FOIA Officer's Report for 2015. The four components were as follows:

- An escalation procedure designed to address situations in which custodians or coordinators fail to timely report the status of a response to a FOIA request.
- The Chief FOIA Officer's Award program to recognize outstanding contributions to USPS's FOIA compliance efforts.
- Online FOIA training for custodians and coordinators as a "Strategic training Initiative" for Fiscal Year 2015, which resulted in the training being mandatory for certain employees.
- An aggressive backlog-reduction goal (35%) incorporated into the pay-for-performance evaluation system goals for all USPS FOIA professionals.

At the end of Fiscal Year 2015, the USPS's outstanding FOIA professionals had exceeded the group goal and achieved a 56% reduction in the number of overdue FOIA responses, thereby substantially improving the Postal Service's compliance with the FOIA. These efforts are important to the Postal Service not only because the FOIA makes it possible for Americans to effectively exercise basic constitutional rights, such as the right to speak freely, to vote, and to petition the government, but also because FOIA requesters are our customers. The Postal Service's future depends on our customers continuing to trust us with their letters and packages – and FOIA compliance is an important part of maintaining that trust.

### Raising Awareness - The Inspectors

As one of our country's oldest federal law enforcement agencies, the Postal Inspection Service has a proud and successful history of fighting criminals who attack the nation's postal system and misuse it to defraud, endanger, or otherwise threaten the American public.

The Postal Inspection Service is serving as the official programming resource for a new television series, *The Inspectors*. Set in Washington, D.C., the series is inspired by compelling real cases handled by the Inspection Service and its efforts to fight crime and protect the mail. Each week, the show features a real-life case from the Inspection Service files. The show educates viewers on how to guard themselves from identity theft, mail fraud and consumer scams, and other postal-related crimes.

Postal Inspectors say more consumers have become familiar with the agency's work since the TV series debuted last year. Most CBS stations air the show Saturdays at 10:30 a.m., although times may vary so viewers should check local listings. Additional information related to the episodes, mail schemes or to report a crime can be found online at: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/the-inspectors/>.