CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

MARCH 2013

This report is submitted by Frank Bartholf, Managing Counsel, General Law Service Center and USPS Chief FOIA Officer, in response to Attorney General Holder's directive to Agency Chief FOIA Officers to review and to report each year to the Department of Justice on their progress in improving transparency.

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." The Postal Service is "an independent establishment of the executive branch" of the government, created by the Postal Reorganization Act, (PRA), 39 U.S.C. §§ 101, et seq., and directed to conduct its operations in accordance with sound business principles.

The Manager, Records Office, who reports to the Chief FOIA Officer, is responsible for the Postal Service's compliance with the FOIA, except for records independently maintained by the Postal Inspection Service and the USPS Office of Inspector General (OIG). The Office of the General Counsel (OGC) is responsible for FOIA appeals for the Postal Service and the Postal Inspection Service. This report represents responses from the following FOIA program offices:

- U.S. Postal Service (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

The USPS, OIG, and Postal Inspection Service offices serve as FOIA Requester Service Centers.

Overview of Fiscal Year 2012

The Postal Service responded to a historically high number of FOIA requests since FY 2002 and it received the second-most highest number of requests since FY 2002. Not only did USPS increase the number of requests it processed in FY 2012, but a new study by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) found that among the bigger departments, the Postal Service had the largest decrease (-57 percent) in their FOIA suits. The study compared the last two years of each administration: Obama (FY2011 – FY 2012), Bush (FY2007 – FY 2008).

Fiscal Year	Number of Requests Received	Number of Requests Closed
2012	2434	2460
2011	2504	2415
2010	2008	2018
2009	2346	2450
2008	1919	1908
2007	1608	1579
2006	1765	1828
2005	1652	1698
2004	1144	1258
2003	1311	1313
2002	1164	1119

Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

Under the direction of the Chief FOIA Officer for the Postal Service, the Manager, Records Office, is responsible for the overall administration of the USPS FOIA Program. The Records Office is part of the USPS General Law Service Center ("GLSC"). The Managing Counsel of the GLSC acts as the Chief FOIA Officer.

The USPS FOIA program is decentralized. 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 USPS Headquarters departments and each of the Area and District offices across the country. The FOIA Coordinators, an ad-hoc position, provide procedural guidance on the FOIA to records custodians within their area of responsibility. OIG and Postal Inspection Service FOIA programs are centralized.

The 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 Records Office 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 2012 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.

1. Did your agency hold an agency FOIA conference, or otherwise conduct training during this reporting period? Did your FOIA professionals attend any FOIA training, such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

   Not only did USPS FOIA professionals attend training, but components conducted training sessions for FOIA Coordinators and other agency personnel. Guidance concerning the FOIA was communicated to agency personnel through various formal and informal communications throughout the year. FOIA professionals met regularly with records custodians, subject matter experts, FOIA Coordinators and other agency officials to ensure they understood the intent of the Act and their role in the process.

   The Records Office is responsible for the development and delivery of FOIA training to FOIA Coordinators, records custodians, and other agency personnel. The Records Office conducted two training sessions for field FOIA Coordinators. In each training session, it was re-emphasized that the Postal Service is to "adopt a presumption in favor of disclosure" and that the "foreseeable harm" standard is to be applied when withholding agency records. Attendees were also informed that exempt information may be disclosed as a matter of discretion if that disclosure is not prohibited by law and would not cause any foreseeable harm.

   An interactive, on-line training presentation, titled "FOIA Overview Training" is posted in the USPS Enterprise Learning Management system for easy access by employees. It describes USPS FOIA regulations, identifies roles and responsibilities of employees in complying with the FOIA, and provides resources to help with processing FOIA requests for any USPS records custodian. In 2012, 96 employees completed the training course.

OGC continued to work on a one-to-one basis with its clients throughout the agency to ensure that they understand the agency's obligations under the FOIA and to support the presumption of openness articulated in the President's FOIA Memorandum and the Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines. Particular attention was directed at assisting senior executive managers, many of whom came from the private sector and were unfamiliar with the obligations imposed by the FOIA.

In addition, OIG provided training to complete implementation of appeals conversion to an electronic FOIA processing system; provided training to its Office of General Counsel employees on methods for redacting videos for release to the public; and provided training to audit staff on agency implementation of eFOIA initiatives.

FOIA training was attended by all agency components. One or more representatives from the Records Office attended all DOJ FOIA conferences. One staff member attended FOIA/Privacy Act, USDA Graduate School, and FOIA for Attorneys and Access Professional Training, Department of Justice. OIG personnel attended OIP Director's Lecture Series: OIP Introduction, private provider annual training and FOIA and PA for Entry Level. Inspection Service employees attended Department of Justice Holding Sunshine Week Celebration, Fifth Annual Freedom of Information Day Celebration. The vendor of the FOIA Tracking System provided on-site training to all agency components concerning software upgrades and new functionality of the System. In addition, all agency components were represented at the vendor's user group meeting. OGC staff attended FOIA training provided by the Department of Justice and by the American University School of Law.

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?

    In cases where there was no foreseeable harm, USPS and OGC released records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 5. In addition, USPS and OGC were able to release records originally withheld on the basis of commercial sensitivity (under FOIA Exemption 3 and 39 U.S.C. 410(c)(2)) where the passage of time has significantly decreased such sensitivity or the subject matter records concern a program or technology that is obsolete. Consideration is given to any public interest that may exist. USPS continues to regularly release records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 2. There has been a significant reduction in the use of Exemption 2 by the agency over the last five years.

Fiscal Year	Number of Times Exemption 2 Applied
2012	16
2011	62
2010	50
2009	116
2008	149

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

    The Chief FOIA Officer is a formal advocate for the presumption of openness, and in particular with regard to the more complex FOIA issues that arise. The Records Office has consistently underscored the importance of the presumption of openness to agency components and postal employees at all levels of the organization. When coordinating the processing of records, the Records Office has diligently applied the presumption of openness, paying particular attention to the "foreseeable harm" standard articulated in the Attorney General's Guidelines. USPS continued to regularly release records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 2, and in cases where there is no foreseeable harm, we release

records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 5. USPS has been able to release records originally withheld on the basis of commercial sensitivity (under FOIA Exemption 3 and 39 U.S.C. 410(c)(2) where the passage of time has significantly decreased such sensitivity or the subject matter records concerns a program or technology that is obsolete. Consideration is also given to any public interest that may exist.

Examples of the type of information released as a matter of discretion by the OGC are:

- Customer satisfaction survey results for convenience of the mail collection pick up schedule and location records were released. The data is gathered to help the USPS evaluate its delivery services to the public, and is used to make strategic decisions regarding service and product offerings. Accordingly, it constitutes "information of a commercial nature" that would be withheld by private business. OGC released the records originally withheld under FOIA Exemption 3, in conjunction with 39 U.S.C. 410(c)(2).
- Records consisting of revenue and sales data for philatelic services were released. Typically, revenue and sales data is withheld pursuant to FOIA Exemption 3, in conjunction with 39 U.S.C. 410(c)(2), because it is the type of information that our competitors could use to provide services similar to those offered by the USPS. Since the financial data was solely for philatelic services, however, it was disclosed.
- The official record associated with administrative proposals to close particular Post Office facilities was released. In as much as this type of record consists of deliberative information likely to change upon the issuance of the final discontinuance study, it would qualify for protection under FOIA Exemption 5. Nevertheless, the USPS released these records, with a notation that the final study would be available at a later date.

OIG assembled and released data from investigative databases that depicts agency wide efforts, while protecting privacy (6 and 7C) interests. OIG FOIA professionals conducted case-by-case analyses of requests involving open investigations to assure that the 7A exemption is used as the basis for withholding records only when the harm of releasing can be articulated (not presumed).

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

In January of this year, the Chief FOIA Officer sent a memo to each Headquarters Officer reminding them of the Postal Service's approach to transparency and of their requirement to proactively disclose records. The Chief FOIA Officer, Records Office and OGC continue to work with senior management and organizations throughout the Postal Service to underscore the importance of the FOIA and of the agency's responsibility to fully comply with its provisions. In particular, they worked to educate newer members of postal management regarding the Postal Service's obligations as to the FOIA. Furthermore, the Records Office works closely with Corporate Communications in responding to news media inquiries. In many instances, Corporate Communications is able to provide news media outlets with information about the Postal Service without a written FOIA request. OIG increased communications with postal audit stakeholders about segregating and releasing certain performance and product information contained in OIG audit reports in an effort to maximize disclosure while properly protecting the Postal Service competitive position.

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

The Chief FOIA Officer is responsible for overseeing Postal Service compliance with the FOIA, making recommendations to the Postmaster General regarding the FOIA Program, and monitoring and reporting on FOIA implementation and performance for USPS. USPS has three FOIA Requester Service Centers in which requesters may submit requests – USPS, OIG and Inspection Service. USPS FOIA processing is decentralized; OIG and IS have centralized processing. Each RSC has a FOIA Public Liaison to receive concerns of requesters and to ensure service-oriented responses to requests are made.

With over 32,000 facilities at which records are maintained, USPS FOIA processing remains a collateral duty in most offices. Records custodians or their designees are primarily responsible for processing and responding to USPS FOIA requests. USPS RSC staff regularly works with FOIA Coordinators within each Headquarters department, area office, and district office. FOIA Coordinators are responsible for coordinating FOIA requests referred to or received by a functional or geographical area; providing procedural guidance to records custodians; and assisting the manager of the Records Office with national records management activities, such as annual reporting of local FOIA activities. FOIA Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that requests referred to them for processing are properly tracked and accounted for, and that all reporting requirements are met.

All agency components utilize the same FOIA Tracking System, a comprehensive web-based commercial-off-the-shelf application for electronically processing FOIA requests and appeals. The FOIA Tracking System manages the entire lifecycle of a FOIA request from initial request to final delivery of documents, including request management, correspondence management, document management, fee/payment management, document review and redaction, and reporting.

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?

   USPS does not have an established Open Government Team.

3. Describe the steps your agency has taken to assess whether adequate staffing is being devoted to FOIA administration.

   FOIA workload and staffing are continuously monitored and reviewed by all agency components. USPS provides weekly reports to management on the status of FOIA request volume and makes recommendations for its consideration. OGC monitors its workload and available resources and regularly advises senior management of resource challenges. In the past year, OGC lost three FOIA professionals from its staff – two attorneys and one paralegal; OGC has since filled one position and is in the process of seeking to fill the other two positions.

4. Describe any other steps your agency has undertaken to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively.

   Regular system upgrades to the FOIA Tracking System are made. All FOIA professionals are trained on software upgrades and enhancements to the System. USPS RSC staff may utilize the USPS e-discovery technology tool for processing complex, voluminous records, such as email records. OGC works with the Chief FOIA Officer to ensure the smooth, effective operation of the USPS FOIA Program.

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

All agency components posted new material to the website this past year. In the past year, nearly 7,500 updates or additions were made to USPS.com. The USPS website, found at _www.usps.com,_ is one of the most frequently visited government sites averaging more than a million visitors each day. USPS provides a significant amount of information to the public through its website. It 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. Our about.usps.com website _(www.about.usps.com)_ provides corporate information, such as USPS history, along with the latest news and information on the Postal Service. _About.usps.com_ helps keep the public and the news media informed about what the Postal Service is doing with regard to mail service updates, sustainability, corporate structure, and how we impact the world around us.

Information from Corporate Communications was posted in the _about.usps.com_ site where the public has access to corporate information, such as financials, information for mailers, our network realignment, careers, leadership bios, sustainability initiatives, and information on doing business with the Postal Service. The Board of Governors posted audio casts of Open Session Board meetings. Quarterly financial web conference calls with the Chief Financial Officer were posted.

USPS continued to publish online a number of reports that are responsive to different legislative requirements. These reports provide stakeholders with an accounting of our activities and results. The Office of Strategic Planning publishes and posts online major documents including the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRO) mandated Five-Year Strategic Plans, Annual Performance Plans, and the Postal Comprehensive Statements that draws on the work of the entire organization. The 2012 Annual Report to Congress was posted.

The USPS is continually improving efficiency by making better use of space, staffing, equipment and transportation when processing the nation's mail. This practice has become increasingly important as we have experienced a significant reduction in the amount of single-piece First-Class Mail that enters our system. As the Postal Service continued to face financial challenges, important testimony, broadcasts, news releases and other informational media were posted online to keep the public up to date about the future network of the Postal Service, including the Winter 2013 Facilities Consolidation List. Area mail processing studies, presentations and other materials that have been used in public meetings were also posted online. In July 2011, USPS announced the concept of the Village Post Office as a way to continue providing convenient access to postal products and services in more rural communities across the nation. The USPS continued to update its site devoted to the Village Post Office (VPO) www.villagepostoffice.com, by providing business owner information on how to open a VPO and by providing customer information about location and services available at VPOs.

The Historian's Office added names and starting dates of thousands of postmasters and officers-in-charge, by Post Office; as well as dates that hundreds of Post Offices were converted to Remotely Managed Post Offices under the POStPlan. It also added historical lists of postmasters for dozens of Post Offices, and it updated postal history for postage rates and historical statistics. The Historian's office also updated "Postal Facilities Dedicated by Congress in Honor of Individuals" with information on laws passed by the 112th Congress naming postal facilities after individuals, including brief descriptions of the honorees, and it updated "Longest-Serving Postmasters."

Stamp Services posted Community Connection Updates, Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee Updates, and new stamp, stationery and philatelic product offerings. Supply Management posted several Supplier Newsletters (a source for supplier-related news and information from the USPS). USPS Leased Facilities & Land and USPS Owned Facilities & Land were updated. A description of the Customer Experience Measurement Survey and Survey results for the most recent Quarter was posted. USPS also posted real-time mail service updates - designed to make mailers aware of service suspensions at Post Offices for any reason, including natural disasters, such as floods or fires.

New information was also posted to the RIBBS website (*www.ribbs.usps.gov).* The RIBBS website has site indexes that are searchable from A to Z or by topic. RIBBS provides mailers online access to an excellent 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. RIBBS users may also post questions and receive answers concerning postal products and services. RIBBS is geared toward business mailers but is open to anyone seeking information about the Postal Service. The RIBBS Area Focus Group page is used to track and detail information about area focus group meetings held around the country. Industry and postal presentations shared at each event are posted and a schedule of upcoming events and contact information is posted.

Postal performance and operations are subject to review not only in the marketplace, but also by a variety of other organizations and stakeholders, including Congress, the Government Accountability Office, the Postal Regulatory Commission, and the USPS Office of the Inspector General. Relevant reports on the Postal Service are available on the websites of those organizations. This oversight adds to the transparency of Postal operations, increases the accountability and helps build confidence and trust in Postal performance.

The USPS FOIA Reading Room contains a link to the Postal Regulatory Commission's website (*www.prc.gov*). The Postal Regulatory Commission (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. The PRC's online Library contains an array of information about USPS of interest to the public. The PRC's online Library includes dockets, PRC reports and studies, USPS periodic reports, and USPS mail classification schedule

The Postal Bulletin, published every two weeks, is the official source of updates to Postal Service policies and procedures. Available to the public online or by subscription, the Bulletin contains a section titled "USPS.com" to inform the public of "*what's new on USPS.com.*"

USPS.com continued to add many enhancements in 2012, including easier-to-find tools and information. In January, USPS launched Premium Forwarding Service (PFS) Online. Customers can now enroll, modify, or cancel their request without going to a Post Office. Also, a new Online Shipping Tools page has been added to provide shippers with information on all of the Postal Service options available online.

Effective April 2012, the Postal Service rebranded the Shipping Assistant desktop application as Click-N-Ship for Business to improve the customer experience and increase efficiencies for both domestic and international services while simultaneously building upon the current capabilities available for permit imprint and meter users. The "Find USPS Locations" option (PO Locator) on the USPS Mobile app for Android, Blackberry and iPhone has been updated to include approved postal provider locations, pickup service locations, and specific hours for special services such as Passport services. Over 8 billion additional tracking events were posted on Track and Confirm for customer access.

OIG posted audit reports, press releases, white papers, Semiannual Reports to Congress, new Hotline poster, Discover the Office of Inspector General brochure, OIG Five-Year Strategic Plan (FY 2011 – FY 2015), and OIG Congressional Justification (FY 2013 Budget Plan).

The Postal Inspection Service posted new information on procedures that will assist customers victimized by reshipping scams via the mail, procedures to help customers comply with new and complex regulations related to mailing items overseas (export issues), information about National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) to raise awareness for victims of crime, information about National Police Week to commemorate and honor fallen officers, statistical information related to its investigations, 2011 Annual Report, updated version of Publication 166, *Guide to Mail Room Security*, approximately 25 new wanted or reward posters, and 31 videos of radio broadcasts titled "Don't Fall for It!" hosted by the Inspector in Charge of the Chicago Division, which offer wise counsel to postal customers on how to avoid being victimized by fraudulent scams, and a crime alert was posted to warn postal customers about bogus email scams purportedly sent by the Postal Service.

With thousands of fans and friends online, USPS is more social than ever. USPS is active on a variety of social media sites. Currently, there is a corporate presence on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and *LinkedIn*. USPS Stamps also utilizes several social media platforms including *Facebook* and *Twitter*, as well as *Pinterest*, *Tumblr*, *Instagram*, *Google+* and the *Stamp of Approval* blog. *Careers@USPS* on *Facebook* alerts jobseekers to open positions and upcoming career fairs. Customers can find a variety of information and interactive content on the social media platforms. Recent social media outreach during Winter Storm Nemo and the six-day package delivery announcement are examples. In both situations, multiple updates and links to additional information were posted on USPS accounts to provide an immediate response. The OIG also uses social media to provide information and solicit feedback from the public. OIG and postal-related information is posted to the OIG's *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts regularly and both are accessible from the website. The Postal Inspection Service offered consumer-awareness videos, fraud-protection tips, and a forum to collect and respond to feedback from postal customers through *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Youtube*.

As it has throughout history, the Postal Service continues to bind the nation together and play an indispensable role in America's economy and society. USPS has a long history of successfully adapting to the changing needs of the nation, even as technology has changed the way people communicated and did business. Many customers prefer the convenience of alternate access choices that include self-service kiosks, online access or mobile devices. We have improved the usps.com website and our mobile applications. Consumers and small businesses can obtain information, and purchase postage online, by phone, mail or fax. They can order supplies and purchase philatelic items, arrange package pickups and print labels. Customer comments from postal surveys included requests for 24/7 access. USPS has embarked on an ambitious effort to expand customer access to our services across digital and alternative channels and to ensure that each customer experience is a great one — whether the customer is a residential online shopper, a small business mailer, a national e-commerce retailer or large financial mailer. In 2012, more USPS.com options were made available in Spanish and Simplified Chinese.

OIG updated its website, enhancing the search capability and making information easily obtainable for the public. The OIG began using GovDelivery, a digital communication service that allows the department to maximize direct connections with the public via email and social media channels. From its website and social media accounts, the public can sign up to receive email updates when new information is posted to the OIG website.

The Postal Inspection Service has developed a business plan to redesign its website, with improvements to be implemented in stages over the next year. The plan will increase the usability of the site for users who need immediate alerts about ongoing scams and will better ensure that members of the public seeking remedies for serious criminal concerns or other critical communications find an immediate and professionally delivered response. The site will also undergo a complete restructuring to more accurately target and respond to specific stakeholder groups and will provide search capabilities.

USPS Corporate Communications will continue to regularly work cross-functionally with other postal departments to identify and produce materials for posting on USPS.com. Groups within Corporate Communications – including Public Relations, Field Communications, Multi-Media Communications/Events and Public Affairs – will continue to work closely together to develop multi-media materials for web posting.

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

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

   Yes. All agency components receive requests electronically. All components receive requests by facsimile, and two components (OIG and Inspection Service) receive requests by email. In addition, requests can be submitted online at *https://pfoiapal.usps.com/palMain.aspx*, and the OIG has an automated web form found at *www.uspsoig.gov*.

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

   Yes.

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

   FOIA requesters have the ability to track FOIA requests over the internet through the USPS FOIA website.

4. If so, describe the information that is provided to the requester through the tracking system.

   The system provides a temporary and permanent FOIA tracking number and the status of the request. The following status information is provided to requester:

   - Received - Your request has been received by the FOIA Agency.
   - Assigned for Processing - Your request has been assigned to FOIA Analyst(s) for processing it further.
   - In Process - Your request is being processed by the FOIA Agency.
   - On Hold - Pending Clarification - Your request has been put on hold by the FOIA Agency due to lack of adequate request information sought by you.
   - Cost Estimate Sent - The processing cost estimated on your request has exceeded the amount you have indicated and you have to confirm the new processing fees before the FOIA Analyst can further process your request.
   - Canceled - Your request has been canceled due to lack of sufficient information to process it or due to fees related reasons or any other appropriate reason which the FOIA Agency deems fit.
   - Closed - Processing has been completed on your request and the requested documents will be delivered to you shortly.
   - Documents Delivered - Documents have been dispatched to you through your chosen delivery mode at the time the request was made.
   - Delivery Failure - Documents Delivery operation has failed via E-mail.

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

   No, the system does not provide an estimated date of completion for the request.

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

   Not applicable.

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

   Yes.

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

   Postal Service Information Technology (IT) is deploying a new USPS computing environment. Outdated equipment used by USPS and OGC FOIA professionals will be replaced with new and improved workstations to provide better efficiency, more productivity, and improved processing times.

   USPS IT staff works closely with USPS and OGC FOIA professionals in performing efficient database record searches. Additionally, IT is able to search, sort and de-duplicate email records from electronic searches, and it may provide data transfer services for the exchange of electronic files.

   In FY 2012, USPS FOIA staff was granted approval to utilize the USPS eDiscovery tool for processing complex requests, such as voluminous email records containing multiple attachments in various file formats.

   OIG is studying systems that may assist in searching, sorting, and de-duplicating documents.

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

1. Multi-track processing/response times

    a. USPS utilizes a multi-track system for processing FOIA requests - simple, complex, and expedited.

    b. Yes. In Fiscal Year 2012, the average number of days to process simple requests was 15, less than 20 working days.

    c. Not applicable.

2. Backlog

    a. The backlog of requests decreased by 15 (FY 2012 – 53, FY 2011 - 68).

    b. The backlog of appeals increased by 4 (FY 2012 – 5, FY 2011 – 1).

    c. Eight of the ten oldest requests that were pending as of the end of FY 2011 were closed. One requester received a partial response. The other request was closed at the beginning of this year.

    d. One of OGC's ten oldest administrative appeals from FY 2011 remained open in FY 2012. A partial response to the appeal was issued in FY 2012. As part of that response, some material was disclosed on a discretionary basis.

3. Request Backlog:

    a. Not applicable.

    b. Not applicable.

    c. Not applicable.

    d. Not applicable.

Administrative Appeal Backlog:

    a. Not applicable.

    b. Yes, OGC lost three experienced FOIA professionals in the past year.

    c. Yes.

    d. Not applicable.

4. If your agency had a backlog in Fiscal Year 2012, 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.

   USPS provided an interim response to one of its oldest, pending requests. OGC provided a substantive, interim response in one of its five backlog appeals in FY 2012.

   Use of FOIA's Law Enforcement "Exclusions"

1. USPS did not invoke a statutory exclusion during FY 2012.

2. Not applicable.

Spotlight on Success:

In January 2011, the Manager, Supply Chain Management (SCM) Strategies was designated as the Postal Service's Competition Advocate by the Vice President, Supply Management. The Competition Advocate is responsible for promoting competition in the sourcing process to obtain best value for the Postal Service. The FY 2011 Competition Advocate Report – our first such report, was posted on USPS.com in 2012. The report covers the Competition Advocate role; summary of competitive and noncompetitive contracting actions executed in the contract systems from April 1, 2011 to September 30, 2011, and contains: 1) a summary of noncompetitive purchase requests over $1M that were reviewed and commented on by the Competition Advocate; 2) actions taken to promote competition in FY 2011; 3) barriers to competition in FY 2011; and, 4) planned actions to promote competition in FY 2012. Noteworthy in the first report, there were 52 requests with a total value of $1,842,446,300 sent for Competition Advocate review and comment.