

U. S. POSTAL SERVICE
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

Fiscal Year 2009

This report is submitted 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. It is the policy of the Postal Service to make its official records available to the public to the maximum extent consistent with the public interest.

Under the USPS Chief FOIA Officer, the Manager, Records Office, is responsible for the Postal Service's compliance with the FOIA, except for records 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)
- US Postal Inspection Service FOIA Program

The USPS, OIG, and Postal Inspection Service offices serve as FOIA Requester Service Centers. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, the Postal Inspection Service and OIG FOIA Program operated as one unit, called the Joint Legal Services Center (JLSC). In 2010, the Postal Inspection and OIG began operating as two separate program offices.

I. Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

1. Description

Postal Service:

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 reports to the Chief Privacy Officer, who reports to the Chief FOIA Officer. The USPS FOIA program is decentralized. The Postal Service has over 37,000 facilities throughout the country at which records are maintained. FOIA Coordinators have been designated to assist records custodians in each one of the USPS Headquarters departments, and each one of the Area and District offices. The FOIA Coordinator, an ad-hoc position, provides procedural guidance on the FOIA to records custodians.

The Records Office is responsible for developing a program and framework to assist records custodians to process FOIA requests. As such, it issues detailed instructions to records custodians on the FOIA. The Records Office staff is available to assist FOIA Coordinators and records custodians or their designees throughout the organization with releasability determinations and other FOIA matters. The General Counsel's office at Postal Service Headquarters and the Law Department's field legal offices provide advice to records custodians on the FOIA, including the applicability of exemptions.

It is Postal Service policy to make its official records available to the public to the maximum extent consistent with the public interest. Postal Service policy requires a practice of full disclosure subject only to the specific exemptions required or authorized by law. 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. This policy has been in place for some time, prior to the issuance of President Obama's FOIA Memorandum.

All of the Records Office staff received training concerning the President's FOIA Memorandum and the Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines and is responsible in carrying out those responsibilities as they respond to FOIA requests. The Records Office is responsible for the development and delivery of FOIA training to FOIA Coordinators, records custodians, and other agency personnel. In the past year, three such training sessions were conducted for new FOIA Coordinators. These training sessions all covered the provisions contained in S.2488, the Open Government Act of 2007, and President Obama's Memorandum on the FOIA. In each training session, it was 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. The "New FOIA Coordinator" presentation is posted to the Records Office internal Web site as a resource tool for postal employees.

In addition, the Records Office has consistently underscored the importance of the presumption of openness to postal employees at all levels of the Postal Service 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. For example, we now regularly release records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 2, such as postal employee email addresses, and in cases where there is no foreseeable harm, we release records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 5.

Furthermore, the Records Office works closely with Corporate Relations in responding to news media inquiries. In many instances, Corporate Relations is able to provide news media outlets with information about the Postal Service without a written FOIA request.

General Counsel (OGC):

Immediately upon the issuance of the President’s FOIA Memorandum of January 21, 2009, the Office of General Counsel (OGC) provided copies of it to senior Law Department management, and underscored the significance of its issuance. When the Attorney General’s Guidelines were released on March 19, 2009, this Office prepared and presented a training session to senior Law Department officials – including the Deputy General Counsel – spelling out the agency’s responsibilities under the FOIA and the significance of the President’s and Attorney General’s action, paying particular attention to the reestablishment of the presumption of disclosure. (Similar, more informal briefings were also provided to the General Counsel and selected Managing Counsels.) In addition to briefing senior legal managers, OGC has consistently – and successfully – underscored the importance of the presumption of openness to its clients at all levels of the Postal Service organization – from custodians of documents on the “front lines” to senior Vice Presidents. Moreover, when deciding administrative appeals, this Office has diligently applied the presumption, paying particular attention to the “foreseeable harm” standard articulated in the Attorney General’s Guidelines. For example, we now regularly release records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 2. In addition, we have 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.

Office of Inspector General (OIG):

Working with the Office of Information and Privacy, the OIG provided specialized training to the entire Office of General Counsel on the Memorandum and Guidelines in January 2010. In addition, the OIG has a longstanding commitment to the principles reiterated in the Memorandum and Guidelines. As such, and having operated under the principle that the FOIA is a disclosure statute, the OIG has implemented only minor changes recently. As an illustration of the agency commitment to openness, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, the OIG FOIA Unit released in full records from responsive documents to 7 requests; released in part records from 41 other requests; and withheld records in only 13 cases, 8 of which presented substantial privacy issues. Examples of the OIG’s commitment to discretionary disclosures include the closer scrutiny given to potential withholdings under “low” 2; conformance with a recent court holding constraining Exemption b(3) concerning purported commercial information; and closer scrutiny to requests for investigative records from cases that, in name only, are open – open cases being not subject to discretionary disclosure.

The OIG FOIA Appeals Officer carefully reviews appeals. Appeals generally fall into three categories: challenging the withholding of documents while law enforcement proceedings have not concluded, challenging the redactions of privacy-related information, and challenging redaction of law-enforcement materials. The Appeals Officer balances non-discretionary law enforcement and privacy interests with the need for openness by supporting the segregability of information and by using remands (which preserve requestor appeal rights) when additional information can be segregated or when law enforcement actions have concluded.

Postal Inspection Service:

As a result of the combining of the Inspection Service and OIG FOIA offices under the Joint Legal Service Center (JLSC) in 2009, the first step taken to ensure a presumption of openness was the decision to release all information in its entirety to a first-party requester which had been submitted by that individual. In addition, the JLSC began reviewing documents with a presumption of openness and deliberated on documents that may have previously been withheld under FOIA Exemption 2 by applying the foreseeable harm standard. In those cases in which a foreseeable harm did not exist, the records were disclosed.

2. Disclosure Comparisons

Postal Service:

	Full Grants	Partial Grants	Full Denials
FY 2009	896	151	170
FY 2008	556	137	101

In FY 2009, the Postal Service made a full disclosure in 48.45% of the requests it responded to (896 full grants out of 1,849 requests processed). Fewer than 20% of the requests processed were denied in part or in full (321 out of 1,849 processed).

In FY 2008, the Postal Service made a full disclosure in 44% of the requests it processed (556 full grants out of 1,263 requests processed). Fewer than 20% of the requests processed were denied in part or in full (238 out of 1,263).

In FY 2009, 34% (632 out of 1,849) of the requests processed were closed for some other reason (e.g., no records, fee related reason, improper FOIA request, etc.), and in FY 2008 37% (469 out of 1,263) of the requests processed were closed for some other reason.

In FY 2009, out of the requests in which records were withheld in full or in part, FOIA Exemption 2 was cited in only 18.7% of those requests, compared to 26.4% in FY 2008. The Postal Service's substantial infrastructure and coordination with both private industry and other government agencies required the generation of schedules, manuals, and plans that could be used to circumvent a variety of legal requirements, including anti-terrorism laws. Discretionary disclosure is not appropriate in these instances.

In FY 2009, out of the requests in which records were withheld in full or in part, FOIA Exemption 5 was cited in 11.8% of those requests, compared to 15.1% in FY 2008.

In those cases in which records were withheld, the FOIA Exemption cited most often was FOIA Exemption 6 and the primary reason for withholding records was for personal privacy reasons. The Postal Service commonly protects personal information about its employees, customers or other individuals which would be a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. The type of information requiring protection to prevent the unwarranted invasion of an individual's personal privacy covered by FOIA Exemption 6 is typically not subject to discretionary disclosure.

General Counsel (OGC):

	Full Grants	Partial Grants	Full Denials
FY 2009	35	57	58
FY 2008	32	57	65

In FY2009, OGC received 154 appeals. Four appeals were closed after the requester did not respond to an interim request for clarification.

In FY2008, OGC received 162 appeals. Six appeals were closed after the requester did not respond to an interim request for clarification and two appeals were processed in 2009.

When compared to previous years, OGC has shown a notable increase in the number of appeals where records have been released in full or in part. In FY 2007, only 37% of 155 appeals resulted in the release of records. Following a change in management of the OGC's FOIA Appeals office in FY 2008, this number increased to 55% (out of 162 appeals). After the issuance of President Obama's FOIA Memorandum and Attorney General Holder's FOIA Guidelines in FY 2009, OGC released records in 60% of its 154 appeals. In FY 2010, OGC has released records in 75% of its appeals of which 51 have been decided to date.

Office of Inspector General (OIG):

The OIG and Postal Inspection Service FOIA offices were combined during FY 2009 (Joint Legal Services Center). For this reason, direct comparative data for that period is not available.

Postal Inspection Service:

The OIG and Postal Inspection Service FOIA offices were combined during FY 2009 (Joint Legal Services Center). For this reason, direct comparative data for that period is not available.

II. Steps Taken to Ensure that Your Agency has an Effective System for Responding to Requests

Postal Service:

The USPS Chief FOIA Officer is responsible for overseeing Postal Service compliance with the FOIA, making recommendations to the Postmaster General regarding the Postal Service's FOIA program, and monitoring and reporting on FOIA implementation and performance for the Postal Service. The Manager, Records Office, is responsible for managing the FOIA Requester Service Center (Center), establishing procedures and guidelines to ensure that record management practices comply with the FOIA, and providing procedural guidance to records custodians.

FOIA requests are received through the USPS FOIA Requester Service Center (Records Office). Upon receipt, requests are entered into the FOIA Tracking System and assigned a tracking number. An acknowledgement letter is sent to the requester advising of the receipt of the request and the tracking number. The request is then assigned to an analyst for review. If the request is lacking any information that is needed for processing (e.g., a proper description of the records sought, etc.), the analyst will contact the requester to seek the required information or clarification. Once the request has been perfected, the request is referred to the appropriate records custodian(s) for processing and response through the designated FOIA Coordinator(s). FOIA Coordinators ensure that the Center receives a copy of the final response sent to the requester. Once the final response is received, the analyst closes the case in the FOIA Tracking System. For requests that are coming up on their 20-day timeline, the analyst is alerted to follow up with the FOIA Coordinator with a reminder. Centralized tracking of requests received enables the Center to ensure that a final response is made to all requests received. The FOIA Tracking System has a robust report function. The report function allows the Center to accurately and timely produce required reports and management reports.

Letter templates and referral memoranda are stored electronically in the FOIA Tracking System. Each referral of a FOIA request to a Headquarters or field office is tracked. The FOIA Tracking System allows for requests to be referred electronically to the appropriate office.

For requests that are not received in the Records Office, Headquarters and field offices are instructed to promptly submit any FOIA requests received to the Records Office so that a FOIA tracking number can be assigned.

Under the Chief Information Officer, an information technology portfolio manager is assigned to work with the Records Office to ensure that necessary IT support is available for system maintenance and software updates for the FOIA Tracking System. Information technology also provides assistance in conducting searches for electronic records, such as e-mail communications.

FOIA Coordinators, located within each Headquarters department, area office, and district office, 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.

The Records Office is responsible for maintaining an external & internal Web site. Contact information for the Requester Service Centers is found on both external and internal Web sites, and contact information for all FOIA Coordinators is found on the internal Web site. Sample letters for responding to requests are available on the Records Office internal Web site. Links to other resource material (e.g., DOJ's FOIA Web site; the USPS AS-353 Handbook, Guide to Privacy, the FOIA & Records Management; 39 Code of Federal Regulations § 265, etc) can also be found on the internal and external Web sites.

General Counsel (OGC):

In considering appeals, and in providing assistance with the processing of initial FOIA requests, the OGC works regularly, and closely, with the Records Office and agency IT personnel to ensure all potential responsive records are identified. Moreover, the OGC took an important step toward increasing the efficiency of its practice – and thereby strengthening its ability to serve the requester community – by beginning its transition to the use of an automated processing system. OGC expects its transition to be completed in FY 2010.

Office of Inspector General (OIG):

The primary means for affecting a high-functioning OIG system has been to require conformance with federal statutory standards for 20-business-day-responses. OIG management has limited the percentage of requests that can be considered “complex” and has used the 20-day standard as an employee performance measure. As a result, for instance, in FY 2010, the OIG FOIA unit is maintaining 100% on-time response without resorting to classification of requests as complex.

In order to speed processing, the unit now concurrently searches and undertakes determination work while awaiting verification of identity. The unit has also reduced the number of cases in which identities need to be verified in order to receive a FOIA determination.

In searching for records, the OIG continues to provide speedy agency-wide responses to FOIA unit search requests; no current IT support issues are open. In processing, the unit continues to segregate information where possible, including within law enforcement records.

For appeals, as noted above, the OIG requires appeals decisions be promptly rendered, and conformance with these standards is part of employee performance measures.

Postal Inspection Service:

The current, automated FOIA Tracking System in place has proven to be an effective system that captures all the data needed to effectively and efficiently respond to requesters. It allows users to log in all requests, check for duplicate requests, assign a FOIA number for tracking purposes, review and process the responsive records electronically and supply them to the requester in the format they desire.

Under the Chief Information Officer, an information technology portfolio manager is assigned to work with the users of the FOIA Tracking System to ensure that necessary IT support is available for system maintenance and software updates for the FOIA Tracking System. Information technology also provides assistance in conducting searches for electronic records, such as e-mail communications. An IT specialist is assigned to the FOIA unit to provide routine hardware maintenance and support.

III. Steps Taken To Increase Proactive Disclosures

Postal Service:

The Chief FOIA Office sent a memo to all USPS Officers asking that a contact person for each department be appointed to work with the Records Office to identify records to proactively disclose on the Web. The Records Office continues to work with each USPS Department to identify additional records for posting online in advance of a public request. To meet this objective, the Chief FOIA Officer has reached out to other agency stakeholders to work with in identifying and implementing an enterprise system to digitize and to maintain an institutional repository that brings collections of information together into a cohesive and accessible Web-based environment. Such a system will provide easy and accurate online access by the public to USPS documents and publications. Using a single, digital collection management system will eliminate the need to purchase and support multiple software packages for different digital and or online collections.

The USPS FOIA Tracking System provides full-text search capability which can be used as a tool to identify records meeting the “frequently requested” standard.

The USPS currently provides a significant amount of information to the public through its Web site at www.usps.com. The USPS.com Group manages the overall direction and presentation of the USPS Web site, and coordinates the creation of organization-wide Web-based solutions. More specifically, USPS.com ensures that Web-based solutions launched on the corporate Web site serve key customer needs. Specific USPS.com initiatives include:

- Building capabilities to support the migration of additional retail transactions to USPS.com.
- Developing shipping solutions for key customer segments.
- Developing content, tools, and functionality for all USPS customers.
- Enhancing and improving the overall online user experience on USPS.com.
- Enabling value-added capabilities such as transaction history and account management.

The presence of the USPS on the Internet has moved beyond the provision of information, and now provides consumers and businesses with 24-hour-a-day access to enhanced USPS products, services, and transactions in the convenience of their homes and offices. A few of the main areas of USPS.com in which information is posted proactively without the need to submit a FOIA request are:

Online Tools

Find a Zip Code

Locate a Post Office

Track and Confirm

About USPS & News

Organization Information

News & Events

USPS Newsroom

Press Releases

Audio News Releases

Executive Speeches

Stamp Releases

Congressional Testimony

Postal Customer Insider

Board of Governors Press Releases

Postal Bulletins

Postal Customer Council (PCC) publication editions/issues

General Information

Postal Explorer – a virtual library of postal information designed for business mailers

Mailing & Shipping Guidelines

Forms and Publications

Quick Service Guides

Postal History

Public Auction Schedule

Customs Forms and Information

Serving the Community

Financials

Customer Service

Acronyms & Abbreviations

Glossaries

Product & Service Help

Government Services

Passport Application Information

USPS Careers

No Fear Act EEO Data

Reports

Compliance Act Report

Green Report

Strategic Planning Transformation Report

Strategic Planning Five-Year Report

Operations Reports

Annual Performance Plan

Household Diary Studies (nonprofit standard mail)

Customer Experience Measurement System

Financials

Quarterly Reports

- Financial Conditions & Results
- Revenue, Pieces & Weight Reports
- Quarterly Statistics Reports

Fiscal Year Reports

- Annual Reports
- Cost & Revenue Analysis Reports
- Cost Segments & Components Report
- Form 10K
- Comprehensive Statements on Postal Operations
- Revenue, Pieces & Weight Reports
- Integrated Financial Plans

Periodic Reports

Financial Public Releases

Senior Financial Code of Ethics

Other

Mailing & Shipping Guidelines

Stamp Collecting

Catalogs & Publications

Also found on the USPS Web site is a link to Postal Service “News & Announcements.” USPS news releases can be found under this Web site link. The “USPS Action Plan for the Future” and information about the USPS five-day delivery proposal can be found under the “Delivering the Future” link. The Action Plan includes a number of legislative and regulatory changes needed for the Postal Service to become a flexible, agile agency able to respond to change. To provide customers with details of that proposal, the USPS launched a new Web site - www.usps.com/communications/five-daydelivery. The Web site contains background information about the proposed change to five-day delivery, overviews and sections for business mailers and household customers, and answers to frequently asked questions.

The Postal Service’s new system to measure customer experience has produced its first report. The Customer Experience Measurement (CEM) system assesses customers’ end-to-end experience with the Postal Service. Customers provide ratings on four separate aspects of their total experience – receiving mail, sending mail, visiting the Post Office, and contacting the Postal Service for assistance. On March 25, 2010, the USPS made the results for the first quarter of FY 2010 available to the public at www.usps.com/communications/newsroom/2010/pr10_030.htm.

The USPS is actively looking into opportunities to increase efficiency by consolidating mail processing operations, allowing us to make better use of our resources. Area Mail Processing is a key element of this important effort. Current studies on consolidating mail processing operations can be found at www.usps.com/all/amp.htm.

On January 29, 2010, the USPS filed an update with the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) indicating that 162 offices remain under review for possible consolidation under the station and branch consolidation initiative. As part of the consolidation process, the USPS has filed periodic updates with the PRC identifying the retail stations and

branches that remain under consideration. The list of offices under review can be found at www.usps.com/communications/newsroom/stationbranchop.pdf.

On December 16, 2008, the USPS announced the enhanced Rapid Information Bulletin Board System (RIBBS) Web site: www.ribbs.usps.gov. The enhanced RIBBS has site indexes that are searchable from A to Z or by topic (www.ribbs.usps.gov/index). Improved print capabilities and drop-down menu navigation also provide easy access to the Postal Service's many products and services. For example, the site provides the public access to USPS Federal Register notices and the Postal Bulletin.

Proactive disclosures that have been posted to the USPS FOIA Reading Room since issuance of the new FOIA Guidelines are:

- Leased and owned postal facilities by state (updated)
- Purchase Card Holder List (updated)

The USPS FOIA Reading Room contains a link to the Postal Regulatory Commission's Web site. 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 the Postal Service of interest to the public. The PRC's online Library includes: dockets, PRC reports and studies, USPS periodic reports, mail classification schedule, and more.

Office of Inspector General (OIG):

For more than a decade, and in compliance with the e-FOIA Amendments of 1996, the OIG has posted Congressional testimony, audits reports, performance and strategic plans, news releases and semiannual reports to Congress, on www.uspsig.gov. The OIG segregates information as necessary to allow for such postings.

Even so, after the issuance of the new FOIA Guidelines, audit report postings have increased. From January to October 2009, the OIG posted 109 audit reports on its public Web site. By contrast, the same period in 2008 saw just 93 reports posted online, an increase of 13 percent. In addition, and also in response to Public Law 110-409 [H.R. 928], Inspector General Reform Act of 2008, October 14, 2008, the speed with which the OIG posts the reports has increased, with a targeted 48 business-hour timeframe.

Finally, the OIG now uses social media including Facebook, Twitter, and actively maintained blogs, all housed on its public Web site, to share and debate policy and ideas about the Postal Service.

Postal Inspection Service:

The Postal Inspection Service proactively posts material thought to be of public interest (without the requirement of a FOIA request) to its Web site. For example, the following types of information are available on the Postal Inspection Service's Web site: consumer awareness information, mail fraud schemes, wanted and reward posters, press releases, and more. Since the issuance of the new FOIA Guidelines, the "wanted and reward posters" section has been updated, and 12 press releases were posted to

the Web site between May 4, 2009, and January 27, 2010. See www.postalinspectors.uspis.gov.

IV. Steps Taken To Greater Utilize Technology

Postal Service:

1. Does your agency currently receive requests electronically?

Yes. The Public Access Link (PAL) enables the public to submit and track FOIA requests over the Internet. PAL is accessible on the Postal Service's FOIA Web site. The Postal Service also receives FOIA requests via facsimile.

2. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency establishing a mechanism to receive requests electronically?

Not applicable.

3. Does your agency track requests electronically?

Yes. The Postal Service's FOIA Tracking System is a comprehensive, Web-based commercial-off-the-shelf (cots) application (FOIAXpress). In 2005, the Records Office and the Postal Inspection Service collaborated to replace their two legacy FOIA tracking systems. The purpose for replacing the legacy systems was to improve the administration and tracking of FOIA activities, streamline procedures, and improve efficiency. In FY 2009, the OIG FOIA Office and the General Counsel (appeals processing) were added as users to this application.

4. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing a system to track requests electronically?

Not applicable.

5. Does your agency use technology to process requests?

Yes. The functionality of the FOIA Tracking System provides: request management, correspondence management, document management, fee/payment management; document redaction and review; and reporting.

6. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing technology to process requests?

Not applicable.

7. Does your agency utilize technology to prepare your agency Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

General Counsel (OGC):

1. Does your agency currently receive requests electronically?

Yes. OGC receives appeals electronically via e-mail and facsimile, as well as through hard-copy mail.

2. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency establishing a mechanism to receive requests electronically?

Not applicable.

3. Does your agency track requests electronically?

Yes. FOIA appeals are tracked electronically using Excel to create a user-friendly database that hyperlinks appeal decisions to a spreadsheet that tracks the number of appeals, requester names, due dates, and subject matter.

4. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing a system to track requests electronically?

Not applicable.

5. Does your agency use technology to process requests?

Yes.

6. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing technology to process requests?

Not applicable.

7. Does your agency utilize technology to prepare your agency Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

Office of Inspector General (OIG):

1. Does your agency currently receive requests electronically?

Yes. Aside from receiving written FOIA requests, requesters may also submit requests to the OIG by facsimile, electronic mail, or an online electronic form.

2. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency establishing a mechanism to receive requests electronically?

Not applicable.

3. Does your agency track requests electronically?

Yes. The OIG tracks FOIA requests and appeals electronically. The OIG FOIA office uses the same Web-based cots application as the Postal Service for tracking and processing initial FOIA requests.

4. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing a system to track requests electronically?

Not applicable.

5. Does your agency use technology to process requests?

Yes. The functionality of the FOIA Tracking System provides: request management, correspondence management, document management, fee/payment management; document redaction and review; and reporting.

6. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing technology to process requests?

Not applicable.

7. Does your agency utilize technology to prepare your agency Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

Postal Inspection Service:

1. Does your agency currently receive requests electronically?

Yes. The Public Access Link (PAL), which is accessible on the Postal Service's FOIA Web site, enables the public to submit and track FOIA requests online. The Postal Inspection Service also receives FOIA requests via facsimile. The Postal Inspection Service also receives FOIA requests via facsimile.

2. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency establishing a mechanism to receive requests electronically?

Not applicable.

3. Does your agency track requests electronically?

Yes. The Postal Inspection Service utilizes the same FOIA Tracking System as the Postal Service.

4. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing a system to track requests electronically?

Not applicable.

5. Does your agency use technology to process requests?

Yes. The FOIA Tracking System provides: request management, correspondence management, document management, fee/payment management; document redaction and review; and reporting.

6. If not, what are the current impediments to your agency utilizing technology to process requests?

Not applicable.

7. Does your agency utilize technology to prepare your agency Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

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

1. Backlog Status

Postal Service:

	Backlogged requests at end of Fiscal Year	Oldest Pending Request
FY 2009	75	343 days (Jan. 2008)
FY 2008	129	322 days (June 2007)

The Postal Service reduced its backlog of requests at the end of FY 2009 when compared to the end of FY 2008 despite a significant increase in the volume of requests received. The number of FOIA requests received by the Postal Service over the last several years indicates an upward trend. A high turnover rate of the staff in the Records Office since FY 2004, coupled with an increase in the number of requests received, has made reducing the backlog a challenge. There are a number of factors that occurred in FY 2009 that enabled a reduction in the backlog: 1) there were no vacant positions in the Records Office staff during the year, 2) the Privacy Office loaned one employee to the Records Office to assist with FOIA processing, 3) other important projects were put on hold (e.g., updating USPS FOIA regulations, training activities, etc).

2. Backlog Reduction Steps

Not applicable.

3. Steps to Improve Timeliness

For FY 2010, the loaned employee remains onboard with the Records Office and one new analyst position has been authorized.

General Counsel (OGC):

At this time, there is no backlog of FOIA appeals. At the end of FY 2009, the General Counsel had no backlog of FOIA appeals – down from two for FY 2008. As a general matter, appeals are handled in a timely manner. Occasionally, however, OGC has encountered a situation where a records custodian is either unfamiliar with the requirements of the FOIA or is wary of turning over records. In those situations, OGC works with the records custodian or designee to educate them about the Postal Service’s obligations to identify and release all whenever possible.

Office of Inspector General (OIG):

The OIG backlog has decreased to zero. One backlogged request was recorded at the end of FY 2008; none was reported at the end of FY 2009. At the end of FY 2009, the OIG had one backlogged appeal, down from four backlogged appeals for FY 2008.

Postal Inspection Service:

The Postal Inspection Service backlog has decreased to zero. At the end of FY 2009, the Postal Inspection Service had a backlog of 34 FOIA requests.