

CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

MARCH 2014

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, and USPS Deputy Chief FOIA Officer, who reports to the 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 Records Office is part of the USPS General Law Service Center ("GLSC"). 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 FOIA program is decentralized. OIG and Postal Inspection Service FOIA programs are centralized.

Since 2007, USPS had one FOIA Requester Service Center (RSC) to track and coordinate all FOIA requests received. On October 17, 2013, USPS announced the establishment of a second FOIA RSC to specifically support 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). 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 continued to be tracked and coordinated by the FOIA RSC-Headquarters. 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 Coordinator, an ad-hoc position, provides procedural guidance on the FOIA to records custodians regarding requests that fall within their areas of responsibility.

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.

Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

FOIA Training:

FOIA professionals attended training and 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.

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

Yes.

2. *If so, please provide the number of conferences or trainings held, a brief description of the topics covered, and an estimate of the number of participants from your agency who were in attendance.*

Number of training sessions held: 5

Topics: New FOIA RSC-field, agency roles and responsibilities, procedural overview, FOIA exemptions - 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.

Participants: Approximately 100

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

Yes. FOIA professionals attended FOIA formal training events and conferences. Hands-on training was provided to journey-level staff by experienced FOIA professionals.

4. *Provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.*

90%

5. *OIP has issued guidance that every agency should make core, substantive FOIA training available to all their FOIA professionals at least once each year. Provide your agency’s plan for ensuring that such training is offered to all agency FOIA professionals by March 2015. Your plan should anticipate an upcoming reporting requirement for your 2015 Chief FOIA Officer Reports that will ask whether all agency FOIA professionals attended substantive FOIA training in the past year.*

Training requirements will be incorporated into individual performance goals and individual development plans at the beginning of the fiscal year. The Deputy Chief FOIA Officer will ensure that FOIA professionals are made aware of FOIA training opportunities that become available during the reporting period and will encourage attendance as budget availability allows.

Outreach:

6. Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach and dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? If so, please briefly discuss that engagement.

No.

Discretionary Disclosures:

7. *Does your agency have a formal process in place to review records for discretionary release? If so, please briefly describe this process. If your agency is decentralized, please specify whether all components at your agency have a process in place for making discretionary releases.*

USPS, OIG and Postal Inspection Service do not have a formal process in place to review records for discretionary release.

8. *During the reporting period did your agency make any discretionary releases of otherwise exempt information?*

Yes. 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, USPS releases 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 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. OIG and Postal Inspection Service FOIA professionals conducted case-by-case analysis of requests, including those 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.

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

FOIA Exemptions 2, 3, and 5.

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

- Email exchanges between agency officials regarding program administration
- Federal contractor payroll records
- Annual revenue data for a specific postal retail unit
- Investigative data that would depict agency-wide efforts while protecting privacy interests

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

N/A

Other Initiatives:

12. *Did your agency post all of the required quarterly FOIA reports for Fiscal Year 2013? If not, please explain why not and what your plan is for ensuring that such reporting is successfully accomplished for Fiscal Year 2014.*

Yes.

13. *Describe any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied. If any of these initiatives are online, please provide links in your description.*

N/A

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

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 four FOIA Requester Service Centers in which requesters may submit requests – USPS-Headquarters, USPS-Field, 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.

Personnel:

1. *Has your agency converted all of its FOIA professionals to the new Government Information Specialist job series?*

No. The Postal Service does not follow Government Schedule position classification standards.

A review of the job titles and position descriptions for USPS was undertaken by Human Resource professionals and the Chief FOIA Officer due to the realignment of the FOIA Program to the Office of the General Counsel (formerly reporting to the Consumer Advocate) and the establishment of a new FOIA RSC. The Government Information Specialist job series was used as a reference tool. Two new positions were created to support the new FOIA RSC-field: Records Request Liaison and Records Request Specialist. The Consumer Research Analyst position that supports the FOIA RSC-Headquarters was changed to Records Specialist and the Manager, Records Office is now formally designated as the Deputy Chief FOIA Officer.

2. *If not, what proportion of personnel has been converted to the new job series?*

N/A

3. *If not, what is your plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals' position descriptions are converted?*

N/A

Processing Procedures:

4. *For Fiscal Year 2013 did your agency maintain an average of ten or less calendar days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing?*

Yes.

If not, describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

N/A

5. *Has your agency taken any steps to make the handling of consultations and referrals more efficient and effective, such as entering into agreements with other agencies or components on how to handle certain categories or types of records involving shared equities so as to avoid the need for a consultation or referral altogether, or otherwise implementing procedures that speed up or eliminate the need for consultations. If so, please describe those steps.*

No. The Postal Service receives few consultation requests.

Requester Services:

6. *Do you use e-mail or other electronic means to communicate with requesters when feasible?*

Yes.

7. *Does your agency notify requesters of the mediation services offered by the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at NARA?*

Yes.

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

A new structure of the USPS Program was implemented. To better assist postal personnel in the processing of FOIA requests and improve USPS FOIA performance, a new "Field" FOIA RSC in St. Louis, Missouri, was established October 2013. The RSC-field was formed specifically to support the tracking and processing of FOIA requests for records maintained at area offices, district offices, Post Offices, or other field operations facilities. The RSC-field is also responsible for facilitating communication between field units and FOIA requesters and providing required information to those requesters concerning the status of both FOIA requests and responses to those requests.

Based on the number and types of requests received in prior years, it is anticipated that the new field RSC will handle a higher number of requests which are primarily classified as "simple" requests. This new structure will allow the USPS Records Office, which serves as the RSC-Headquarters, to focus more on FOIA program administration and the coordination of the largest and most complex, national requests.

Field law offices take on a significant role in supporting field clients that require guidance concerning the FOIA. A point of contact at each field law office was designated to ensure that legal support on FOIA matters is provided to field offices as needed.

An attorney position was established and filled in the Privacy and Records Office at USPS Headquarters. This position was created, in part, for the purpose of providing legal

interpretation and support for Headquarters units on FOIA requests involving the most complex or sensitive matters.

Regular system upgrades to the FOIA Tracking System were made. FOIA professionals were trained on software upgrades and enhancements to the system.

FOIA RSCs staff work closely together and frequently collaborate in processing requests for records in which multiple stakeholders throughout the organization have an interest in the records subject matter.

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

Posting Material:

1. *Do your FOIA professionals have a system in place to identify records for proactive disclosures?*

Yes

2. *If so, describe the system that is in place.*

- The FOIA Tracking System alerts FOIA professionals when the same or similar FOIA requests are received and logged into the tracking system.
- 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.

For example, after some reports appeared in the media, USPS received a series of similar FOIA requests seeking information about three distinct processes and/or programs: Mail Cover Program, mail imaging, and Mail Isolation Control and Tracking (MICT). Requesters were provided with a narrative overview of each program and/or process in interim and/or final response letters.

In response to a news media request, USPS voluntarily provided information about the 2013 commemorative stamp program and sales data regarding two stamp events.

- Information provided in FAQ's and posted proactively respond to customer inquiries received through various contact channels (*usps.com*, *1-800-ASK-USPS*, etc.) – *http:faq.usps.com*.

3. *Provide examples of material that your agency has posted this past reporting period, including links to where this material can be found online.*

In the past year, over 4,000 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 with 1.1 billion visits in 2013 – averaging more than 3.6 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. The Postal Service offers *usps.com* in Spanish and Simplified Chinese.

The Postal Service website – *usps.com* – 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*, anytime and anywhere.

Our [about.usps.com](http://www.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.

Highlights of some of the information posted this past reporting period, including links to where this material can be found online, is listed below:

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 - <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/welcome.htm>.
Examples include:

- The 2013 Annual Report to Congress: <http://about.usps.com/publications/annual-report-comprehensive-statement-2013/welcome-landing.htm>.
- 2012 Annual Sustainability Report: <http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/pdf/2013-sustainability-report-web.pdf>
- Integrated Financial Plan 2014: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/integrated-financial-plans/fy2014.pdf>

Six-day package, five-day mail delivery electronic news kit:

<http://about.usps.com/news/electronic-press-kits/five-day-delivery/wedocome.htm>

USPS newsroom – national and local news releases, fact sheets and electronic news kits: <http://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/welcome.htm>

The 2014 edition of Postal Facts was posted. It contains an annual compilation of facts and figures on the Postal Service – illustrates the Postal Service’s commitment to sustainability and technologies that make mail more interactive and effective for customers. The publication showcases the Postal Service’s more than 235-year heritage and shows how it’s connecting every American and business through the mail: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-facts/welcome.htm>

The *Postal Bulletin*, one of the oldest federal publications still in print, has been the official chronicler for USPS since 1880. Originally created to communicate the internal business of the Post Office Department, today’s 50-page version, provides information on USPS operations, policies, procedures and forms, as well as postal product information, stamp and philatelic news and information used to combat fraud. The *Postal Bulletin*, published every two weeks, is the official source of updates to Postal Service policies and procedures and is available to the public online or by subscription: <http://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/pb2014.htm>

USPS Service alerts - provides information to consumers, small businesses and mailers about postal facility service disruptions due to weather-related and other natural disasters or events: <http://about.usps.com/news/service-alerts/welcome.htm>

Post Plan – designed to make sure America’s communities continue to have access to USPS products and services as we right-size our Post Office network to reflect the nation’s current use of our services. Schedules are provided here to give details on the date, time and location of public meetings for each Post Office being considered under the plan. The meetings are shown in alphabetical order by state and Post Office name: <http://about.usps.com/news/electronic-press-kits/our-future-network/post-plan/welcome.htm>

Village Post Offices are located within existing communities in a variety of locations, including convenience stores, local businesses and libraries, and are operated by the management of those locations: <http://about.usps.com/news/electronic-press-kits/expandedaccess/vpo-welcome.htm>

Federal Cloud Computing Exchange – will give individuals ability to access online services at participating government agencies by using their existing commercially issued digital identification: <http://about.usps.com/news/secure-digital/welcome.htm>

New information was 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 is geared toward business mailers but is open to anyone seeking information about the Postal Service. Examples include:

- Federal Register notices - <http://pe/FederalRegisterNotices.asp>
- Daily updates - <https://ribbs.usps.gov/index.cfm?page=updates>
- January 2014 Price Change Fact Sheets - https://ribbs.usps.gov/intelligentmail_schedule2014/releases/jan2014/docs/January2014ReleaseFactSheet.pdf

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 (<http://about.usps.com/doing-business/suppliers/welcome.htm>). Supply management provides an opportunity for all suppliers interested in doing business with the USPS to register their organization in the Supplier registration module of the USPS eSourcing solution. Some of the items posted this reporting period are:

- USPS supplier opportunities: www.fbo.gov
- November 2013 Supplier Newsletter: <http://about.usps.com/suppliers/newsletter/november-2013-17.pdf>
- Business disagreement decisions rendered by the USPS Supplier disagreement Resolution Official: <http://about.usps.com/suppliers/disagreement-decisions/welcome.htm>

Judicial Officer Administrative decisions: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/judicial/admin-decisions/welcome.htm>

Board Contract Appeals decisions: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/judicial/board-contract-appeals-decisions/welcome.htm>

USPS is continually improving its efficiency by making better use of space, staffing, equipment, and transportation in processing the nation's mail. Documents detailing updates of area mail processing studies were posted online: <http://about.usps.com/streamlining-operations/area-mail-processing.htm>

OIG posted audit reports and management advisories in full or with modest redactions: www.uspsoidg.gov/document-library

The Postal Inspection Service posted a major new section to its website to reach one of the most important audiences, crime victims and witnesses. This new section includes new pages on victim resources, victim laws, information on crime victims' rights, a special section for child exploitation victims, a special section for financial crime victims and more: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/radDocs/consumer/VictimWitness/VictimWitnessMain.html>

On other website pages, the Postal Inspection Service added new publications for consumers, including:

- Annual Report: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/pressroom/pubs.aspx>
- News releases: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/pressroom/pressreleases.aspx>
- Updated information on identity theft
<https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/investigations/MailFraud/fraudschemes/mailtheft/IdentityTheft.aspx>

The Postal Inspection Service posted updated online recruitment information:
<https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/employment/positions.aspx>

The USPS FOIA Reading Room contains a link to the Postal Regulatory Commission's (PRC) website (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. The PRC's online Library, <http://www.prc.gov/prc-pages/library/default.aspx?view=main>, includes dockets, PRC reports and studies, USPS periodic reports and USPS mail classification schedule.

Making Posted Material More Useful:

4. *Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useful to the public, especially to the community of individuals who regularly access your agency's website, such as soliciting feedback on the content and presentation of posted material, improving search capabilities on the site, posting material in open formats, making information available through mobile applications, providing explanatory material, etc.?*

Yes

5. *If so, provide examples of such improvements.*

The USPS corporate site <http://about.usps.com> was redesigned to make it easier for residential and business customers to find information on mail service alerts, news announcements on new products and services, five-day delivery, marketing and sustainability initiatives, public documents (Annual Reports to Congress, Annual Sustainability Reports, etc.), postage stamps and other items of interest to the philatelic community.

USPS upgraded usps.com to make it easier for customers to track letters and parcels. Changes were based in part on customer feedback. Tracking numbers now can be entered directly on the usps.com homepage using the Track button under Quick Tools, which also have been updated to include the most popular usps.com web pages.

Changes made to usps.com are making the process of applying for U.S. passports online easier. A section was added called "Popular Links" where customers can easily connect to the information most often searched for – such as mail and shipping prices, change of address forms, Post Office boxes and passports.

Updates to the Industry Outreach page on the Rapid Information Bulletin Board System (RIBBS) site have improved communications to the mailing industry. Mailers are offered improved opportunities for interaction with USPS, educational resources, and outreach and engagement opportunities. Some of the website improvements include: USPS Leadership Forum for Stakeholders reception dates, agendas and presentation; industry

alert archives; USPS webinars; access to postal Industry groups, business services, industry meetings and notices.

A “Recent Changes” box was added to the Area Mail Processing web page to show the 10 most recent postings to the site: <http://about.usps.com/streamlining-operations/area-mail-processing.htm>

The Postal Inspection Service completed intermediary design changes for the homepage of its website to meet brand requirements and to make more information accessible to the public. Significant redesign and restructuring changes for all of its online reporting forms to improve the customer experience and to increase the likelihood that customers will report mail-related crime online were completed.

USPS is active on a variety of social media sites. Currently, USPS has a corporate presence on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and *LinkedIn*. USPS Corporate Communications uses social media to listen to and receive feedback from the public regarding and including the USPS and its products, services and employees. Through our social media channels we determine our customers, partners, employees and society’s voices on the sentiment and opinion of USPS. These conversations and the information we gather helps guide USPS public relations and communications, and assist marketing and customer care teams in assessing the effectiveness of communication strategies.

USPS Supply Management works with the Postal Supplier Council in 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.

USPS directs stakeholders to industryfeedback@usps.gov for feedback about how to improve information on *USPS.com*.

Every year USPS receives many ideas from the mailing community on ways we can improve our products and services. Our *innovations@USPS* service includes collecting and reviewing ideas from the public. One way the *innovations@USPS* service makes sharing ideas easier for the public is via information posted to <http://about.usps.com/transforming-business/innovations.htm>.

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* and other types of social media (*Linked-In*, *Dice.com*, *The Ladders.com*, *Careerbuilder.com*, *Monster.com*, *Salesjobs.com*, *Lawjobs.com*, and *Twitter.com/USPSCareers*) alert jobseekers to open positions and upcoming career fairs.

OIG continued to build its social media profile, providing information and soliciting feedback from the public. OIG and postal-related information is posted to the OIG’s *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts regularly. The OIG has posted more than 50 blog entries, generating hundreds of comments, since the beginning of the reporting period. The blogs may alert the public to OIG reports, or to OIG plans for reports, and engage the public before auditors go to work. For instance, the OIG ran a four-part blog in May 2013 entitled “Giving America A Voice,” linked to a survey of “What Americans Want from the Postal Service,” asking “If you were going to reshape the nation’s postal system, which parts would you keep and which parts would you change?”

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*.

The Postal Service's smart-phone apps make it even quicker to use the most popular functions on *usps.com*, anytime and anywhere. With our free Mobile App, individuals can find locations, calculate shipping prices, manage pickups, and much more – all from the convenience of their smartphone (<https://www.usps.com/mobile/info.htm>). With our mobile version of *USPS.com* tools, individuals can use their web-enabled device to get delivery information, find locations, and look up a ZIP Code (<http://m.usps.com/>). With both the mobile app and the mobile web, individuals are able to use GPS-based Post Office location service to find retail Post Offices, self-service kiosks, approved postal providers, pickup service locations, and collection boxes nearby.

In 2013, the Postal Service app was downloaded nearly 1.6 million times across all platforms. In 2013, there were more than 40 million visitors to the mobile site - *m.usps.com* – averaging 100,000 visits per day.

An online news site that focuses on technology created by government agencies has offered some high praise for the Postal Service's Mobile app. Contributors at *Nextgov.com* gave the app high marks for its usability and noted that it "wasn't bogged down by software bugs as government apps frequently are."

6. *Did your agency use any means to publicize or highlight important proactive disclosures for public awareness?*

Yes.

If so, was social media utilized?

Yes.

7. *Has your agency encountered challenges that make it difficult to post records you otherwise would like to post? If so, please briefly explain what those challenges are.*

Yes. Given the size and geographically dispersed nature of the Postal Service there is at times the need to educate some postal officials regarding the FOIA's requirements, especially in the face of regular retirements and other turnover in management positions. Resource issues have also been a challenge the past few years as the Postal Service's precarious financial position has created an emphasis on limiting any new spending that has prohibited the establishment of any centralized procedure or enterprise funding for records custodians to follow in the posting of their records online.

8. *Describe any other steps taken to increase proactive disclosures at your agency.*

Agency personnel are regularly reminded of the requirement to proactively disclose records through formal and information communications, and through training efforts. Corporate Communications continued to work 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.

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

Online tracking of FOIA requests:

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

Yes. All agency components utilize the same FOIA tracking system.

2. *If yes, how is this tracking function provided to the public? For example, is it being done through regularly updated FOIA logs, online portals, or other mediums?*

Online portal.

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

- 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.

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

No.

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

No. USPS uses a commercial off-the-shelf tracking system.

Use of technology to facilitate processing of requests:

6. *Beyond using technology to redact documents, is your agency taking steps to utilize more advanced technology to facilitate overall FOIA efficiency, such as improving record*

search capabilities, utilizing document sharing platforms for consultations and referrals, or employing software that can sort and de-duplicate documents?

The Information Catalog Program 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.

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

USPS is purchasing a COTS document review tool to filter out duplicate and non-responsive documents for those requests involving voluminous records. Regular updates to the FOIA Tracking System are made as software updates becomes available.

8. Are there additional technological tools that would be helpful to achieving further efficiencies in your agency's FOIA program?

One agency component has the need for a video redaction tool.

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

Simple Track Requests:

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

Yes.
 - b. If so, for your agency overall, for Fiscal Year 2013, was the average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer?

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

N/A

Backlogs and "Ten Oldest" Requests, Appeals and Consultations:

2.
 - Backlogs*
 - a. *If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2013, did that backlog decrease as compared with Fiscal Year 2012?*

No.
 - b. *If your agency had a backlog of administrative appeals in Fiscal Year 2013, did that backlog decrease as compared to Fiscal Year 2012?*

No.

Ten Oldest Requests

- c. *In Fiscal Year 2013, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2012?*

No.
 - d. *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 2012 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that. For example, if you only had seven requests listed as part of your "ten oldest" in Section VII.E. and you closed two of them, you should note that you closed two out of seven "oldest" requests.*

Five (5) of the ten (10) oldest requests were closed at the end of FY13.

Ten Oldest Appeals

- e. *In Fiscal Year 2013, did your agency close the ten oldest administrative appeals that were pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2012?*

No.

- f. *If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close, as well as the number of appeals your agency had in Section VI.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2012 Annual FOIA Report.*

Seven (7) of the ten (10) oldest appeals were closed at the end of FY13.

Ten Oldest Consultations

- g. *In Fiscal Year 2013, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations received by your agency and pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2012?*

N/A

- h. *If no, please provide the number of these consultations your agency did close, as well as the number of pending consultations your agency listed in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2012 Annual FOIA Report.*

N/A

Reasons for Any Backlogs:

3. *If you answered "no" to any of the questions in item 2 above, describe why your agency was not able to reduce backlogs and/or close the ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations. In doing so, answer the following questions then include any additional explanation:*

Request and/or Appeal Backlog

- a. *Was the lack of a reduction in the request and/or appeal backlog a result of an increase in the number of incoming requests or appeals?*

No.

- b. *Was the lack of a reduction in the request and/or appeal backlog caused by a loss of staff?*

Yes.

- c. *Was the lack of a reduction in the request and/or appeal backlog caused by an increase in the complexity of the requests received?*

Yes.

- d. *What other causes, if any, contributed to the lack of a decrease in the request and/or appeal backlog?*

USPS experienced temporary staffing shortages that resulted from the implementation of a new structure to the FOIA Program, including the start-up of a new field FOIA RSC. Three new positions were created for the FOIA RSC-field, and the complement at the Headquarters FOIA RSC was reduced by three positions. As of January 2014, all positions were filled.

During FY 2013, OGC lost three experienced FOIA professionals: one attorney and two FOIA specialists. There was a delay of approximately 10 months in filling the resulting attorney vacancy and one specialist position remains vacant.

"Ten oldest" Not Closed

- e. *Briefly explain the obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2012.*

There were two obstacles the Postal Service faced in closing its ten oldest requests and appeals: 1) staffing shortages, and 2) the oldest pending FOIA requests and appeals generally involve voluminous records and/or complex subject matter.

- f. *If your agency was unable to close any of its ten oldest requests or appeals 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

Plans for Closing of Ten Oldest Pending Requests, Appeals, and Consultations and Reducing Backlogs:

Given the importance of these milestones, it is critical that Chief FOIA Officers assess the causes for not achieving success and create plans to address them.

4. *If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations, please provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those "ten oldest" requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2014.*

In FY 2013, USPS contracted with a supplier to provide FOIA processing services. Two contract employees were brought onboard to the FOIA RSC-Headquarters to assist in processing the oldest, pending requests and to provide other program support. USPS is purchasing a document review tool to filter out duplicate and non-responsive documents and emails. This tool will assist FOIA professionals in processing requests involving voluminous records more efficiently. Upgrades to the FOIA Tracking System, a commercial off-the-shelf product, will be made as they become available.

5. *If your agency had a backlog of more than 1000 pending requests and did not reduce that backlog in Fiscal Year 2013, provide your agency's plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead.*

N/A

Interim Responses:

OIP has issued guidance encouraging agencies to make interim releases whenever they are working on requests that involve a voluminous amount of material or require searches in multiple locations. By providing rolling releases to requesters agencies facilitate access to the requested information.

5. Does your agency have a system in place to provide interim responses to requesters when appropriate?

There is no formal system in place. The agency practice is to make interim response determinations and the practice is done on a case-by-case basis.

6. If your agency had a backlog in Fiscal Year 2013, 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.

Not available.

Use of FOIA's Law Enforcement "Exclusions"

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

1. Did your agency invoke a statutory exclusion during Fiscal Year 2013?

No.

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

N/A

Spotlight on Success

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2013 to increase transparency and improve FOIA administration, please briefly describe here at least one success story that you would like to highlight as emblematic of your agency's efforts. The success story can come from any one of the five key areas. As noted above, these agency success stories will be highlighted during Sunshine Week by OIP. To facilitate this process, all agencies should use bullets to describe their success story and limit their text to a half page. The success story is designed to be a quick summary of a key achievement. A complete description of all your efforts will be contained in the body of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

The Postal Service launched a renamed and redesigned Mail Service Updates website in June 2013. The new name is USPS Service Alerts and can be found at <http://about.usps.com/news/service-alerts/welcome.htm>.

- Provides customers with near real-time information about postal facility service disruptions due to weather-related issues and other natural disasters or events.
- Webpage re-organized to provide consumers and business mailers with more complete, timely information on what matters to them – mail delivery and Post Office retail service in an affected area as well as operational planning details for business and international mailers.

- New, robust section with information for residential customers was added.
- Section pertaining to commercial mailers was revised to eliminate duplicative links and to display information in a more logical, easy-to-use format.
- Revamped the international mailer section to assure information is up-to-date on a daily basis and is written in plain English.