UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER'S REPORT FOR 2017

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

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

For the past few years, the Postal Service has faced unprecedented financial challenges, which has impacted the resources available to USPS programs. In its most recent annual financial report, USPS reported a net loss of $5.6 billion for Fiscal Year 2016 (http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/annual-reports/fy2016.pdf). This follows annual losses of approximately $5 billion in Fiscal Years 2013, 2014 and 2015. *Id.* Despite these financial challenges and a steady increase in the number of FOIA requests received each year, USPS has renewed its commitment to the principles of transparency and accountability that are embodied in the FOIA and are critical to the proper functioning of a democratic form of government. USPS has done so by improving FOIA processes and implementing new, low-cost FOIA initiatives that have achieved positive results. At the end of Fiscal Year 2014, there were 219 pending requests, and the number of overdue responses had risen to 132. As a result of the sustained hard work and sincere effort of the USPS's FOIA professionals, there were 182 pending requests and only 53 overdue responses at the end of Fiscal Year 2016 – nearly a 60% reduction in the number of overdue responses over two years.

Organizational Structure and Other Background Information:

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

This report represents responses from the following FOIA program offices:

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

The USPS FOIA program is decentralized. OIG and Postal Inspection Service FOIA programs are centralized. USPS has two FOIA Requester Service Centers (RSCs) to track and coordinate all FOIA requests received. FOIA requests for Postal Service Headquarters controlled records; Supply Management or Facilities controlled records including contracts, building leases, and other real estate transactions; and employee listings are tracked and coordinated by the FOIA RSC-Headquarters. The FOIA RSC-Field supports the tracking and processing of FOIA requests for Postal Service records maintained at area offices, district offices, Post Offices, or other field operations facilities (FOIA RSC-Field). The Postal Service has over 30,000 facilities throughout the country at which records are maintained. FOIA Coordinators have been designated to assist records custodians in each of the USPS

Headquarters departments and each of the Area and District offices across the country. The FOIA Coordinator, an ad-hoc position, provides procedural guidance on the FOIA to records custodians regarding requests that fall within their areas of responsibility.

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

It is USPS policy to make its official records available to the public to the maximum extent consistent with the public interest. In its commitment to the "Presumption of Openness" concept as it carries out its FOIA responsibilities, Postal Service policy requires a practice of full disclosure subject only to the specific exemptions required or authorized by law. This policy had been in place for some time prior to the issuance of President Obama's FOIA Memorandum and was affirmed in our Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Report to Congress, which states, "It is Postal Service policy to promote transparency and accountability by adopting a presumption in favor of disclosure in all decision involving the FOIA."

Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

A. FOIA Training

1. Did your FOIA professionals or the personnel at your agency who have FOIA responsibilities attend any FOIA training or conference during the reporting period such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

Yes.

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

Department of Justice training:

- Overview of the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016
- FOIA for Attorneys and Access Professionals
- Chief FOIA Officer Report Refresher
- Best Practices Series Workshop
- Advanced FOIA Seminar
- Continuing FOIA Education
- Two guest speakers from Office of Information Policy, U.S. Department of Justice, provided an overview and discussion of FOIA Exemption 5 to Privacy and Records Office FOIA professionals and Federal Compliance attorneys

American Society of Access Professionals (ASAP) training:

- National Training Conference
- FOIA and Privacy Act Interface Webinar

User Conference & Technology Summit (a vendor sponsored workshop) – topics included:

- Emerging FOIA Issues & the Impact of the New FOIA Law
- Leading the Way: Reshaping Citizen Engagement through Technology
- Recent Significant FOIA Decisions
- Tolling & Fees
- Addressing FOIA's Critical Challenges: Suppressing Surge & Resolving Backlog

2016 National FOIA Day Conference

USPS conducted three webinars for USPS area and district FOIA coordinators. The webinars covered FOIA coordinator duties and responsibilities, and communicating with FOIA requesters.

An article was published in the USPS *Postal Bulletin* to inform postal employees of new FOIA requirements. Specifically, it discussed the new requirement to establish a minimum of 90 days for requesters to file an administrative appeal and to provide dispute resolution services at various times throughout the FOIA process. It also contained new language to be included in certain responses to FOIA requests and notices to requesters extending the FOIA's time limit due to "unusual circumstances."

Privacy and Records Office FOIA staff and Federal Compliance attorneys began holding monthly "brown bag" meetings to discuss a variety of FOIA-related topics. Topics covered this year included a discussion the FOIA and Privacy Act interface; a review of where to locate FOIA resources, information and training;

a review of select appeal decisions; and an overview of procedural aspects involved in processing a complex FOIA and the challenges it posed.

Federal Compliance created a FOIA Roundtable hosting bi-monthly teleconferences with the area law offices in the field in order to coordinate efforts, train, and ensure a consistent approach to FOIA and Privacy Act matters. Field postal attorneys provide advice and guidance on the FOIA and the Privacy Act to records custodians located in field offices throughout the country and they handle FOIA litigation. This year, Federal Compliance attorneys provided training on FOIA Exemption 3 and a non-disclosure statute (39 U.S.C. § 410(c)(2)). Federal Compliance attorneys will provide training on the interplay between the Privacy Act and FOIA, Exemption 5, Exemption 6, and Adequate Search.

Privacy and Records Office FOIA professionals and Federal Compliance attorneys worked regularly with records custodians throughout the Postal Service to help them better understand their responsibilities under the FOIA and to ensure strict compliance with its requirements on a case-by-case basis.

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

97%.

4. OIP has directed agencies to "take steps to ensure that all of their FOIA professionals attend substantive FOIA training at least once throughout the year." If your response to the previous question is that less than 80% of your FOIA professionals attended training, please explain your agency's plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals receive or attend substantive FOIA training during the next reporting year.

N/A.

B. Outreach

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

No.

6. If you did not conduct any outreach during the reporting period, please describe why.

The Postal Service conducted its first-ever FOIA outreach activity in late 2015, and it generated almost no public interest at all. All of the attendees at the actual event were employees of the Postal Service, Postal Inspection Service or the USPS Office of Inspector General.

C. Other Initiatives

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

- To promote compliance with FOIA, the Postal Service continued its internal process whereby FOIA requests that are pending are escalated to management-, executive-, and officer-level employees to ensure that proper attention is being paid to responding to FOIA requests within the statutory timeframes. These strategies are intended to promote the importance of FOIA throughout the organization.

- USPS continued the Chief FOIA Officer's Awards program to recognize the contributions and efforts of non-FOIA professionals. FOIA professionals can nominate individuals for a Chief FOIA Officer's Award. Recipients are individually recognized in the *USPS News LINK*, an internal,

online publication that is distributed daily throughout the organization, and a copy of the letter and certificate is included in the employee's official personnel file.

- Federal Compliance provides guidance regarding agency obligations under the FOIA in connection with virtually every administrative appeal it considers – as well as in its role as in-house counsel to records custodians and managers across the Postal Service.

- OIG holds periodic meetings to educate investigative staff participating in the OIG New Leadership Development Program about FOIA best practices, processing, and records production.

- USPS Publication 550, *For the Record,* is a pamphlet that is made available for distribution to new postal employees. The pamphlet describes the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act, and includes employees' rights and responsibilities under the Acts.

- The Postal Inspection Service Chief Counsel discusses the FOIA with newly appointed postal inspector recruits. The Chief Counsel encourages cooperation from the Inspection Service's National Leadership Team regarding their FOIA obligations.

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

On November 30, 2016, the Postal Service published notice in the Federal Register that it was amending its regulations concerning compliance with the FOIA and to implement the changes to the procedures for the disclosure of records and for engaging in dispute resolution required by the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016. In the amended regulations, the Postal Service continued its commitment to promoting transparency and accountability by reiterating its long standing policy to make its official records available to the public to the maximum extent consistent with the public interest. This policy requires a practice of full disclosure of those records that are covered by the requirements of the FOIA, subject only to the specific exemptions required or authorized by law.

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

A. Processing Procedures

1. For Fiscal Year 2016, what was the average number of days your agency reported for adjudicating requests for expedited processing?

4.

2. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

N/A.

3. During the reporting period, did your agency conduct a self-assessment of its FOIA program? If so, please describe the methods used, such as reviewing Annual Report data, using active workflows and track management, reviewing and updating processing procedures, etc.

- The Privacy and Records Office conducted a nationwide survey directed to FOIA Coordinators at Headquarters, Area and District offices using an online survey tool. The survey gathered information to determine what tools, information and resources are needed that will assist them with their FOIA processing duties. The results of the survey were shared with the Chief FOIA Officer and the Chief Privacy Officer.

- The Chief FOIA Officer is provided a weekly status report on the number of requests received each week, the number of requests closed each week, the number of pending requests, and the number of backlogged requests. This weekly assessment helps to identify any spikes or trends in FOIA activity.

- USPS reviewed and revised its regulations concerning FOIA compliance contained in 39, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), section 265. As part of this undertaking, USPS reviewed "Updated FOIA Regulation Template and Guidance" posted by the Office of Information Policy, benchmarked against other Federal agency FOIA regulations, incorporated new statutory requirements to ensure compliance with FOIA amendments, and reviewed online resources concerning FOIA best practices (e.g., OIP, OGIS, etc.).

- USPS began the review and updating of USPS Handbook AS-353, *Guide to Privacy, the Freedom of Information Act, and Records Management*, which contains policies and procedures governing the release of Postal Service records under the FOIA. The Handbook supplements USPS FOIA regulations contained in 39, CFR, section 265, and includes a chapter that contains information on how to process a FOIA request and a FOIA processing checklist for use by records custodian. The update to the Handbook is expected to be completed and published in Fiscal Year 2017.

- During this reporting period, USPS FOIA professionals began a review of its internal FOIA website, which includes FOIA resources and training opportunities, FOIA contact information and sample letters. Updates are made on a continuing basis throughout the year.

- The Postal Inspection Service conducted a review of its procedures for requesting records searches and timelines for response, and the manner in which first-party requests are recorded in the FOIA Tracking system.

4. Please provide an estimate of how many requests your agency processed in Fiscal Year 2016 that were from commercial use requesters. If your agency is decentralized, please identify any components within your agency that received a majority of their requests from commercial use requesters.

461 requests from commercial use requesters were processed in Fiscal Year 2016. There are no components within the Postal Service that received a majority of their requests from commercial use requesters.

B. Requester Services

5. Does your agency provide a mechanism for requesters to provide feedback about their experience with the FOIA process at your agency? If so, please describe the methods used, such as making the FOIA Public Liaison available to receive feedback, using surveys posted on the agency's website, etc.

USPS has in place four FOIA requester service centers (RSCs), each having a designated FOIA public liaison. Contact information for the FOIA public liaisons are posted online and can also be found in USPS FOIA Regulations (39 CFR 265 and USPS Handbook AS-353).

6. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires additional notification to requesters about the services provided by the agency's FOIA Public Liaison. Please provide an estimate of how often requesters sought assistance from your agency's FOIA Public Liaison.

The FOIA Public Liaisons collectively receive about 1 call each week from FOIA requesters. With more than 30,000 facilities throughout country at which records are maintained, FOIA Coordinators in each of the USPS Headquarters departments and each of the area and district offices across the country play a key role in responding to inquiries from FOIA requesters about their requests. In many instances, USPS FOIA coordinators are able to respond to inquiries from FOIA requesters without the need for them to contact the FOIA RSC or public liaison for assistance.

7. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires agencies to make their reference material or guide for requesting records or information from the agency electronically available to the public. Please provide a link to your agency's FOIA reference guide.

http://about.usps.com/handbooks/as353/as353c4_002.htm

C. Other Initiatives

8. If there are any other steps your agency has undertaken to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively, such as improving search processes, eliminating redundancy, etc., please describe them here.

USPS is actively updating the hardware and software for its electronic FOIA Tracking System. The upgrades will provide enhanced system performance and functionality. Once the upgrades are completed, training on the new features and work processes will be provided to FOIA professionals and attorneys.

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

A. Posting Material

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

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

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

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

In this reporting period, Federal Compliance undertook a review of FOIA case logs, at the request of the Chief FOIA Officer, to identify records that have been frequently requested. Federal Compliance plans to work with records custodians to ensure that frequently requested records are posted online.

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

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

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

No.

4. If so, briefly explain those challenges and how your agency is working to overcome them.

N/A.

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

Because delivering for its customers is essential to the Postal Service's business, USPS is undoubtedly one of the most transparent government organizations in the United States. Each day, for example, millions of individual scanning events that track the progress of individual packages through the network are recorded and made available to package senders and receivers on-line or through notification e-mail messages. This high level of transparency into government operations is good for the mailing public and for the Postal Service.

The USPS website, found at *www.usps.com*, is one of the most frequently visited government sites averaging more than 3 million visits per day. 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 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.

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

Our *about.usps.com* website provides corporate information, such as USPS history and 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, sustainability, corporate structure, and how we impact the world around us.

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

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

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

Corporate Communications - *http://about.usps.com/news/welcome.htm* - proactively and routinely makes a wide variety of documents available for public viewing based on the public's and media's interest in Postal Service issues. These documents are available on the *about.usps.com* pages and include the Newsroom, with links to all national and local USPS press releases on postal products, consumer and business issues, financial results and other issues of great public interest. The Postal Service Newsroom provides national and local news releases, statements, fact sheets, electronic news kits, videos, leadership bios, written congressional testimony and other information to the news media and the general public. Included in the Newsroom are:

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

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

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

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

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

- Highway Contract Routes – *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/foia/FY-2017-Q1-HCR-Listing.xlsx*

- New issues to the Supplier Newsletter: - *http://about.usps.com/suppliers/forms-publications.htm*

OIG posted audit reports, white papers, semi-annual reports to congress, and congressional testimony in full or with modest redactions: *www.uspsoig.gov/document-library*.

Sustainability

- Annual Sustainability Report 2015 - *http://about.usps.com/publications/sar2015/sar2015/welcome.htm*
- Jan 2016 OMB Scorecard on Sustainability/Energy – *http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/pdf/omb-scorecard-2016.pdf*
- U S Postal Service Fleet Alternative Fuel Vehicle Program Report for Fiscal Year 2015 –

- *http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/news/FY15-USPS-AFV-Annual-Fleet-Compliance-Report.pdf*
- U S Postal Service's Compliance with Epact –
- *http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/news/FY15-US-Postal-Service-Compliance-with-EPAct.pdf*
- Various articles regarding Sustainability, on social media - *https://www.linkedin.com/company/usps*

Historian's Office

- Daily updates of the Postmaster Finder database - *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postmasterfinder/welcome.htm*
- Monthly updates of Postal Facilities Dedicated by Congress in Honor of Individuals - *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/dedicated-facilities.pdf*
- Postmaster Finder - *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postmasterfinder/welcome.htm*
- Postal Facilities Dedicated by Congress – *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/dedicated-facilities.pdf*
- On This Day in Postal History – *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/on-this-day.pdf*
- Rates for Domestic Letters since 1863 – *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/domestic-letter-rates-since-1863.pdf*
- Rates for Stamped Cards and Postcards – *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/postcard-rates.pdf*
- Ladies Delivery Windows – *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/ladies-delivery-windows.pdf*
- Collection Boxes: A Brief History – (new) anticipate posting in January 2017

Facilities

- National listing of both leased and owned postal facilities along with land for all fifty States and U.S. Territories - *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/foia/readroom/welcome.htm*
- Listing of postal properties for sale - *http://www.uspspropertiesforsale.com/*

Legal

- Senior Financial Managers' Code of Ethics - *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/legal/welcome.htm*

Board of Governors

- Announcements of upcoming meetings of the Temporary Emergency Committee of the Board of Governors are posted to online. Live audio webcasts and the presentations of the Open sessions - *http://about.usps.com/news/electronic-press-kits/bog/welcome.htm.*

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

USPS Human Resources used Linkedin, Dice.com., The Ladders.com, Careerbuilder.com, Monster.com, Salesjobs.com, Lawjobs.com, Facebook Page, *Careers@usps.com*., Twitter.com/USPSon Campus, Twitter.com/USPS Careers to share career-related information.

USPS Corporate Communications regularly provides information to the public that normally would not be available otherwise through news releases and other materials posted on the Newsroom of usps.com. In addition to website postings, Corporate Communications proactively discloses information through other

means, such as through media events and public events, webinars, mailings and other forms of communications.

The Postal Service uses other social media channels to publicize and highlight proactive disclosures:

- Facebook - *https://www.facebook.com/USPS/*
- Twitter - *https://twitter.com/usps*
- Youtube - *https://www.youtube.com/user/uspstv/custom*
- Pinterest - *https://www.pinterest.com/uspsstamps/*
- Instagram – *instagram.com/uspostalservice*
- LinkedIn - *linkedin.com/company/usps*
- Postal blogs – uspsblog.com

B. Other Initiatives

7. If there are any other steps your agency has taken to improve proactive disclosures, please describe them here. For example, has your agency engaged requesters in determining how and what to post? Has your agency used web analytics to inform your proactive disclosures?

USPS participates in cross-functional teams that discuss/develop messaging for all stakeholders, including industry.

Without the need to submit a FOIA request, information provided in the FAQs respond to customer inquiries received through various contact channels (usps.com, 1-800-ASK-USPS, etc.).

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

A. Making Material Posted Online More Useful

1. Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useful to the public, especially to the community of individuals who regularly access your agency's website?

Yes.

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

- USPS recently mobile-optimized the About USPS sites on *usps.com* to make them easier to see and use with smart phones. And, USPS is in the process of doing a complete design overhaul to the corporate pages to improve ease-of-use, as well as reviewing all content to assure that it is 508 compliant.

- The Postal Supplier Council is used by Supply Management to assist with determining the type of information that suppliers may be interested in having access to. Feedback is received on the content provided to the supplier community.

- Certain USPS financial documents are posted online at *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/welcome.htm*. A left margin with a table of contents allows the reader to quickly select a bookmark associated to the topic of interest they want to skip to. Other features available to the reader are search and thumbnails. Great efforts are made to simplify language in the documents for the general public to read and understand. Highly technical terms and language internal to the Postal Service have been removed.

- Delivery Operations currently is in the process of designing a landing page for Delivery Operations to make information more available to the public and easy to navigate.

- USPS expanded its Surface Visibility (SV) Program. The program is part of the Postal Service's broader efforts to better use technology and promote the SV application, which improves scanning and makes it easier for business customers to know the whereabouts of their mail and packages.

- The Postal Service created guidelines to ensure USPS sites have a standardized look and feel to improve the overall customer experience. The *USPS Digital Style Guide* covers proper branding, imagery, language, color palettes and typography, as well as widgets, templates, navigation buttons and other design features. It also includes resources to ensure USPS sites comply with a federal law that requires online content to be accessible to people with disabilities.

- The Postal Service enhanced its online holiday newsroom. The site features news releases, videos, stamp information, fact sheets, mail-by dates and details about the Operation Santa and Letters from Santa programs – all displayed on a snowy landscape. This year, users were able to "paint" the background with the click of their mouse.

- USPS introduced *Deliverthewin.com*, a site that provides political campaigns with guidance on how to best use direct mail to communicate with voters. *DeliverTheWin.com* promotes recent advancements that can transform traditional political mail pieces into interactive experiences. For example, with augmented reality apps, QR codes and other technologies, campaigns can combine physical and digital features to deliver information.

- The Postal Service's Irresistible Mail site was nominated for a Webby Award, an international honor for excellence on the Internet. The site, which highlights innovative designs and print and digital technologies, is nominated in the advertising and media business products category. See *http://www.irresistiblemail.com/#/*

- One of the largest mail-fraud cases in history is the subject of a new series of CNN reports. The cable network's five-part series (http://money.cnn.com/video/news/2016/03/30/maria-duval-psychic-scam-france.cnnmoney/index.html). The United States' case was handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of New York, in coordination with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. The Inspection Service also details the dangers of psychic scams on its new *Delivering Trust Site (http://www.deliveringtrust.com/)*.

- The Postal Service is becoming a hit on Instagram. Shareable, a social media software company, recently ranked USPS 19th on its list of the top 30 business brands on Instagram, a popular photo-sharing site. Rankings are based on interaction with users, including followers, likes and comments. The list notes the Postal Service boosted its Instagram following by almost 20 percent between last year's second and third quarters. USPS now has more than 14,500 Instagram followers. The Postal Service's success can also be attributed to its practice of posting content from its followers. The organization frequently shares users' images of all things postal, including Post Offices and blue collection boxes.

- The Customer Contact Center conducts customer satisfaction surveys related to the FAQ site on usps.com and analyzes the feedback to try to improve the overall usability of information and also to add information that is responsive to customer inquiries and requests.

- Sustainability has an inbox where the public can request information. See *http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/welcome.htm*.

- *The Chief Financial Officer holds a quarterly financial media call which is open to the public and reporters. In addition, the presentation slides includes a line for financial information (http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/financials/welcome.htm).*

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

Yes. USPS FOIA professionals maintain regular contact with USPS.com and Public Affairs staff to determine the best means for posting agency information online. In addition, FOIA professionals met with a vendor representative to reconfigure the FOIA public access link. The reconfiguration is expected to be completed in Fiscal Year 2017.

B. Use of Technology to Facilitate Processing of Requests

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

Yes. New employees were given basic training on the FOIA Tracking System. FOIA attorneys were provided group and individualized on-the-job training on FOIA appeals processing, creating and generating reports, and document redaction. Another group of employees tasked with processing a voluminous request was provided training on electronic document redaction.

FOIA professionals attended a conference held by the software provider of the USPS FOIA Tracking system. A widely attended event with attendees from more than 50 different government agencies, USPS FOIA professionals took part in a discussion about FOIA software, best practices, and emerging issues.

5. 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? If yes please describe:

- USPS is upgrading hardware for the FOIA Tracking System to enable the installation of new software upgrades. The software upgrades will provide enhanced functionality, security and reporting. While not inclusive of all the system enhancements to be made, listed below are some of the enhancements:
    - There is a new user interface. System defined dashboards have been added to the application and are associated to each user role created in the application. Each dashboard is configured to show specific data sets for each role.
    - A quick search tool has been added to the top of most screens.
    - Quick links have been added to the user's work summary for quick access to pending tasks.
    - Multiple instances of responsive documents can be opened at one time.
    - The application provides the ability to customize the Help drop down with links or documents to reference standard operating procedures, agency specific user manuals, or other websites.
    - The system can be configured to automatically update the estimated delivery date of requests.
    - The system will provide a new configuration option to automatically password protect document deliveries via email.
    - The system will allow for the creation of multiple cost sheets to track request processing costs from various offices independently so that fees can be invoiced separately or grouped into a single invoice.
    - Task reminders will allow for multiple users to receive email notifications of a pending task.
    - An email log has been added to allow for easy access to all email traffic sent from the application.
    - New tool to provide email containment and deduplication from data sources located during record search.
    - The option to save a 508 compliant pdf will be available.
    - There will be an option to drag and drop files to request correspondence and into document folders.
    - The ability to merge review layers to consolidate them into a single document will be available.
    - The application will be compatible with Internet Explorer version 11 and Microsoft Office 2013.
    - Ability to post records to the eFOIA Reading Room directly from the application.

- USPS 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.

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

USPS continually looks at how technology may be leveraged across the agency to improve FOIA processing.

C. Other Initiatives

7. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2016?

Yes.

8. If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports, with information appearing on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2017.

N/A.

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

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

A. Simple Track

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

Yes.

2. If so, for your agency overall in Fiscal Year 2016, was the average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer?

Yes.

3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2016 that were placed in your simple track.

84%.

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

N/A.

B. Backlogs

BACKLOGGED REQUESTS

5. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2016, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2015? If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able reduce its backlog.

Yes. The backlog decreased by 14 at the close of Fiscal Year 2016 compared to the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2015.

6. If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog.

N/A.

7. If you had a request backlog please report the percentage of requests that make up the backlog out of the total number of requests *received* by your agency in Fiscal Year 2016.

2.39%.

BACKLOGGED APPEALS

8. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2016, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2015? If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able reduce backlog.

Yes. The appeals backlog decreased by 8 at the close of Fiscal Year 2016 compared to the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2015.

9. If not, explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog.

N/A.

10. If you had an appeal backlog please report the percentage of appeals that make up the backlog out of the total number of appeals received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2016. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2016 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

2.81%

C. Backlog Reduction Plans

11. In the 2016 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2015 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did you agency implement a backlog reduction plan last year? If so, describe your agency's efforts in implementing this plan and note if your agency was able to achieve backlog reduction in Fiscal Year 2016?

N/A.

12. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2016, what is your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2017?

N/A.

D. Status of Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations

TEN OLDEST REQUESTS

13. In Fiscal Year 2016, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report?

No.

14. If no, please provide the number of these requests your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.E of your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

USPS closed 3 of the 10 oldest requests reported pending in the USPS Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report during Fiscal Year 2016.

15. Of the requests your agency was able to close from your ten oldest, please indicate how many of these were closed because the request was withdrawn by the requester. If any were closed because the request was withdrawn, did you provide any interim responses prior to the withdrawal?

None (0) of the three (3) oldest requests closed were withdrawn by the requester.

TEN OLDEST APPEALS

16. In Fiscal Year 2016, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report?

No.

17. If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

USPS closed 9 of the 10 oldest appeals reported pending in the USPS Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report during Fiscal Year 2016.

TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS

18. In Fiscal Year 2016, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report?

N/A.

19. If no, please provide the number of these consultations your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2015 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

N/A.

E. Additional Information on Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations & Plans

20. Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2015.

The was an increase in the number of incoming requests (76) in FY 2016 compared to FY 2015, and most of the oldest pending requests involve voluminous records or require cross-functional coordination among a number of stakeholders. As such, these types of requests are put on a slower processing track (complex) based on the amount of work and time involved in processing the request.

Other factors that impacted productivity during FY 2016 include the physical relocation of the USPS HQ FOIA Requester Service Center resulting in a two-week downtime period, and the installation of new computer hardware at the USPS HQ and Field FOIA Requester Service Centers. Additionally, a realignment which added two new positions to the USPS HQ FOIA Requester Service Center along with added responsibility for supporting the Federal Compliance appeals program required significant resources to develop, implement and train FOIA staff on new processes for handling FOIA appeals. We believe that these organizational changes will ultimately streamline and improve FOIA processing for both initial requests and appeals.

21. If your agency was unable to close any of its ten oldest requests because you were waiting to hear back from other agencies on consultations you sent, please provide the date the request was initially received by your agency, the date when your agency sent the consultation, and the date when you last contacted the agency where the consultation was pending.

N/A.

22. If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, or consultations, please provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those "ten oldest" requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2017.

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

A weekly backlog report is provided to the Chief Privacy Officer for the purpose of identifying backlogged requests that may require the attention of management. FOIA professionals will monitor assigned requests and send reminders to FOIA Coordinators and records custodians for those requests that are pending and overdue. With the renewed emphasis in Fiscal Year 2017, pending and overdue requests will be escalated to management for attention when warranted.

With respect to appeals, the Chief Counsel, Federal Requirements, has established performance goals for timely completion of appeals.

F. Interim Responses

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

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

24. If your agency had a backlog in Fiscal Year 2016, please provide an estimate of the number or percentage of cases in the backlog where a substantive, interim response was provided during the fiscal year, even though the request was not finally closed.

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

G. Success Stories

In the FY16, the Postal Service reduced its appeals backlog by over 55%, including its oldest pending appeals. By taking a fresh look at the process, the Postal Service identified several opportunities for improvement. The USPS Ethics & Compliance team's leadership also met with DOJ Office of Information Policy experts, who provided excellent advice and assistance, including examples of best practices used by DOJ and other agencies. The Postal Service achieved this excellent result by reorganizing personnel resources in the group, employing DOJ-identified best practices, initiating a paperless system for assigning appeal files to decrease the processing time, and sending weekly tracking reports of backlogged appeals to management and staff to assist with prioritization and emphasize the expectation of timeliness.