

**PEACE CORPS FOIA PLAN
UNDER EXECUTIVE ORDER 13,392**

A. NATURE OF PEACE CORPS' FOIA OPERATIONS

The Peace Corps' FOIA Office processes Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act (FOIA/PA) requests for records maintained by all offices at Peace Corps, except for the Office of the Inspector General, Volunteer Financial Operations, and Volunteer Medical Files. Peace Corps is an agency with 1,082 employees worldwide and more than 182,000 former and current volunteers. Peace Corps received 6823 FOIA/PA requests in Fiscal Year 2005 and processed 6,996 FOIA/PA throughout the agency. These requests are processed by the FOIA Office staff, which consists of an officer who oversees one specialist, as well as one temporary administrative assistant. Many of the PA requests are processed by the Office of Medical Services and the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations. The FOIA officer has official authority to deny or partially deny any requests and oversees policies in the other offices that process PA requests.

While the Office of Inspector General (OIG) independently services FOIA and Privacy Act requests related to its System of Records and other documents, it does so in close coordination with the agency. This includes a public record access information reference to OIG record requests on the agency website. OIG currently has no backlog of FOIA or Privacy Act requests and will work with the agency to implement the agency plan of improvement being submitted.

B. AREAS SELECTED FOR REVIEW

Peace Corps reviewed the following potential improvement areas:

- Training program for employees
- Electronic FOIA/requests and responses
- Overall FOIA Website improvements
- Improvement of FOIA Reference Guide
- Affirmative Disclosure
- Process by which necessary cooperation is obtained from agency personnel
- Purchasing of new equipment to ensure privacy
- Backlog reduction
- Additional training for FOIA office employees
- Increased Staffing

C. NARRATIVE STATEMENT SUMMARIZING RESULTS OF REVIEW

After an extensive review of the areas identified in Part B, above, Peace Corps determined that although the processing of FOIA/PA requests is working well, there is room for improvement.

One of the first areas we carefully reviewed was training. Training is essential to the office's success. The FOIA Office plans and executes training sessions, assists with privacy

matters throughout the agency, and familiarizes employees with the necessities of complying with each Act. Currently, new employees are trained during new employee orientation every two weeks. Training, by department, is conducted when requested. Our newsletter, *Management Update*, is issued bi-monthly and email quizzes are posted electronically as topics arise. However, training remains necessary on a global level and at regional offices. We will provide in-person training at some international offices, and we will examine how the offices conduct their records management responsibilities. It is essential to our training program that we implement improvement ideas provided by field personnel which we gather through training activities. An Electronic Annual Training program is also planned to provide scheduled training each year for office employees.

In addition, we examined how requests are currently submitted, which is only via mail and facsimile. Since we have experienced public interest in adding electronic request capabilities, we plan to move towards electronic FOIA submissions and responses. Our record for responding to requests within the statutory 20 days is excellent. A letter is sent to notify requesters of initial receipt. When needed, we also send a request for an additional 10 working days. The office contacts requesters regularly for more information when working on requests and maintains a good working relationship with requesters. When we move to electronic submissions and responses, our response speed may even increase, but we are primarily making the move to provide better customer service and convenience.

In the area of website improvements, we examined where our website/reference guide is located and what is in the reading room. The FOIA website is fairly easy to locate from the Peace Corps main page. There is sufficient information found on the website to make a request and answer basic questions. The FOIA Office has a superb track record for submitting Annual Reports on time each year and posting them on the website immediately. The link is www.peacecorps.gov. Improving the website by adding more information in our FOIA Reference Guide is also essential to our electronic enhancements. We are also currently in the process of increasing the number of publicly available documents on the Peace Corps FOIA website.

A major goal of the Office of Inspector General is to place its public reports on the Peace Corps public website to facilitate access to the public. In addition, it will be working with the agency to enhance its request processing software to provide better tracking and servicing of FOIA and Privacy Act requests and otherwise seek improvements consistent with the agency plan.

To accomplish many of these improvements, the FOIA Office will continue to work with other offices, such as General Counsel, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), Communications, and the Office of Records Management, to update the Manual Sections and Code of Federal Regulations. Interaction with other offices in the agency is essential to accomplish changes, such as placing more documents on the FOIA webpage and determining how to format electronic request forms.

Through our review, we learned that our customer service is excellent, with a fast and friendly response time, but other improvements can be implemented to make FOIA more user-

friendly. A line will be added to our office's FOIA acknowledgement card indicating the expected, or no later than, response date. To provide better customer service and safeguard personal information, the FOIA Office will request its own printer/fax/scanner. .

We also reviewed our files and found that we have two FOIA cases in backlog. Our review shows that we need to resolve these cases immediately and work to prevent any backlog from accruing in the future. We plan to work with the Office of General Counsel to resolve these cases.

In late 2004, the FOIA and Privacy Act Offices combined and, as a result, FOIA employees need a wider range of knowledge on FOIA, privacy and records. In recent months, employees working in the FOIA Office attended Department of Justice and American Society of Access Professionals training events to become more knowledgeable in these areas. FOIA employees will be receiving more training to handle questions arising in the privacy and records management areas to provide the best customer service. With more training, we will be able to provide well-rounded training on all issues and questions that arise.

In the area of staffing, we have a very knowledgeable staff of two permanent employees and one temporary assistant when it comes to FOIA matters. In response to merging of the FOIA and Privacy Offices, we will be hiring an employee with a privacy and records background to help support the types of requests and training our office handles.

D. AREAS CHOSEN AS IMPROVEMENT AREAS FOR PLAN

- Training for employees throughout the agency
- Electronic Requests
- Website improvements
- More training for FOIA personnel in Privacy and Records
- Backlog reduction
- Process by which necessary cooperation is obtained from agency "personnel"

E. IMPROVEMENT AREAS PLAN

1. Training for employees throughout the agency

Goal: The FOIA/Privacy Office will conduct more in-person (non-electronic) training throughout the agency. **Target completion: 1-1-2008.**

Steps

- Attend annual Country Director conference(s). Visit a Peace Corps international post and conduct training, while also gathering information to be implemented in future international trainings. Create updated training program for international employees. **To be completed by 9-1-2007.**

- Provide video and Tele-conference training from Washington, DC. Provide in-person training to employees, by department, at headquarters, regional offices, and at conferences with training material specific to their jobs, and participate in overseas staff training at headquarters. **To be completed by 1-1-2007 (and continuing thereafter).**

Goal: Annual FOIA/Privacy training will also be initiated through an online training program.
Target completion: 1-1-2007.

Steps

- Create PowerPoint presentations that are found on the intranet for employees. Training exams will be conducted annually from online PowerPoint materials. Initiate mandatory FOIA/Privacy training at the agency. **To be completed by 1-1-2007.**
- Newsletters, such as our Management Update, will continue to be posted online. Emailed quizzes devised to improve employee awareness of FOIA responsibilities will also be used. **To be completed by 9-30-2006.**
- Institute online training program for all employees. **To be completed by 1-1-2007.**

2. Electronic Requests

Goal: Allow the public to make FOIA requests through an online form and receive electronic responses. **Target completion: 5-1-2007.**

Steps

- Work with the Office of General Counsel to update the applicable Code of Federal Regulations and Manual Sections. **To be completed by 4-1-2007.**
- Work with the CIO to design a form and update current webpage on a regular basis. Create an electronic FOIA request form. **To be completed by 3-1-2007.**
- Update information and FOIA Reference Guide on the website to reflect the electronic form request capabilities. **To be completed by 3-1-2007.**
- Post the electronic FOIA request form online. Report on success in Annual FOIA report. **To be completed by 5-1-2007.**
- Respond to requests with electronic information as often as possible. The FOIA office will be able to quantify the number of FOIA online requests and will also have fewer emails and phone calls about the FOIA/Privacy Act request process. **To be completed by 5-1-2007.**

3. Website Improvements

Goal: Enhance the FOIA electronic reading room by adding more available information/records and making it more user-friendly. **Target completion: 12-31-2007.**

Steps

- Identify the most commonly requested documents/records. Work with the different departments involved to decide what will be uploaded. **To be completed by 3-1-2007**
- Create a more user-friendly main webpage with easy-to-find link to FOIA. The online guide will emphasize the importance of including a telephone number and/or e-mail to expedite follow up on requests. Create an electronic customer satisfaction survey card or suggestion box for customer feedback. Analyze customer feedback. **To be completed by 1-1-2007.**
- Create a more complete FOIA and Privacy Act Reference Guide on the website. **To be completed by 1-1-2007.**
- Add information on the website about what constitutes an agency record and how long they are retained. Add more documents to website, such as Manual sections and other documents identified by departments. **To be completed by 1-1-2007.**
- Work with the Office of Communications, the CIO's office and General Counsel to decide on which documents to place online and how. **To be completed by 1-1-2007.**
- Work with Communications and the CIO to identify how many visitors we receive at the website and how many requests for more types of information we receive. Meet with Communications and the CIO Office regularly to discuss changes to the FOIA webpage and discuss possible documents to upload. Review the website monthly. **To be completed by 12-31-2007.**

4. More training for FOIA personnel in Privacy and Records

Goal: Provide more training for employees in the FOIA Office regarding privacy and Information Technology needs. **Target completion: 12-01-2007.**

Steps

- Hire an employee in the FOIA Office with privacy expertise who will also provide training and advice to FOIA personnel. **To be completed by 9-1-2006.**
- Support FOIA employees by providing training possibilities each year in this subject matter, especially NARA trainings, privacy, Information Technology (IT) concerns, and Privacy Impact Assessments. **To be completed by 9-1-2006.**

- Peace Corps FOIA Employees will attend training at least once per year. **To be completed by 12-31-2007, 12-31-2008.**
- FOIA employees will participate in more IT activities taking place, at the agency, by including employees in the Internal Review Board process and adding FOIA/Privacy signed approval before completing the designated form/system process. **To be completed by 4-1-2007.**

5. Backlog Reduction

Goal: There are two outstanding FOIA requests that must be resolved. **Target completion: 12-31-2006.**

Steps

- Contact the requester and ask whether they would like to continue to pursue a response to the request. **To be completed by 6-15-2006.**
- We will either administratively close the case and let the requester know that it has been erroneously neglected, or respond to the request with responsive documents. **To be completed by 9-1-2006.**
- Contact the Office of General Counsel for their guidance. **To be completed by 6-15-2006.**
- We will ensure that requests do not remain outstanding in the future and the FOIA Office will contact the Office of General Counsel for advice in complying with the statutory time limit when the danger arises. **To be completed by 12-31-2006, 12-31-2007, 12-31-2008.**

6. Process by which necessary cooperation is obtained from agency “personnel.”

Goal: Foster a good working relationship within the agency and improve communication between departments so that projects progress. **Target completion: 12-31-2007.**

Steps

- Work with other departments at Peace Corps to prioritize projects related to FOIA and Privacy. One such project will be to help departments gain a better understanding of the records schedule for materials that can be requested under FOIA. Another project will be to work with departments to identify systems that contain privacy information and Privacy Act system notices still need to be published in the Federal Register. **To be completed by 12-31-2006, 6-30-2007, 12-31-2007, 6-30-2008 (and ongoing thereafter).**

- Work with the Office of General Counsel to update Manual Section, which will result in the FOIA Office implementing electronic project plans. **To be completed by 12-31-2006.**
- Perform training quarterly at different departments. Collect information about who keeps and disseminates what information for FOIA/Privacy requests. **To be completed by 8-30-2006, 11-30-2006, 2-30-2007, 5-30-2007, 8-30-2007, 11-30-2007, 2-30-2008, 5-30-2008, 8-30-2008 (and continuing thereafter).**
- The CIO's Office will provide technical upgrades and assistance to proceed with other plans of the FOIA Office. Their latest database upgrades help our office run efficiently at reporting time. **To be completed by 12-31-2006.**
- Meet quarterly with the CIO Office to discuss ongoing projects held in common with the FOIA Office that have privacy interests. **To be completed by 9-30-2006, 12-30-2006, 3-30-2007, 6-30-2007, 9-30-2007, 12-30-2007, 3-30-2008, 6-30-2008, 9-30-2008 (and continuing thereafter).**
- Create a current guide to departments and what they supply to the public. For FOIA purposes, offices will be asked to keep better records of the number of requests. Work with each office to identify this information on a yearly basis. **To be completed by 8-31-2007.**