

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
MANAGEMENT PLAN AND REPORT FOR
IMPROVING AGENCY DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION UNDER
E.O. 13392

A. Agency's FOIA Operation

The National Science Foundation (NSF) was established by Congress to promote progress in science and engineering. The agency does so primarily through grants and cooperative agreements with colleges, universities, K-12 school systems, businesses, information science organizations and other research institutions throughout the U.S.

NSF is a small agency with one central FOIA office and maintains a single-track system. The Foundation receives approximately 250 to 300 FOIA requests annually. An estimated 90% of NSF's FOIA requests are for copies of funded grant proposals. The vast majority of FOIA requests are answered within 20 working days. For example, as reported in our FY 2005 Annual FOIA Report, the median number of days to process the 266 requests in FY 2005 was 14.26 days. Response times over 20 working days are generally the result of difficulty in contacting the submitter for clearance, need to track and retrieve documents from off-site storage at the Federal Records Center, voluminous number of potentially responsive records, or need to consult among agency components. FOIA training is provided to all new employees and periodic training is provided to specialized groups such as personnel, contracts, and program officers. NSF will issue an agency-wide notice to advise staff of the President's Executive Order and describe the agency's responsibilities.

B. NSF has identified the following areas for review:

1. Review and revise NSF's FOIA web page;
2. Review and revise NSF's FOIA Information Handbook;
3. Review Agency posting of statements of policy, administrative staff manuals and copies of frequently requested records;
4. Review and revise the Foundation's form letters and email correspondence for possible improvement;
5. Review and revise the agency's referral and consultation procedures, as appropriate;
6. Review the processes of recording, tracking, and processing of requests for possible improvement;
7. Review the current mix of paper and electronic records and look for ways of improving the handling of them.

C. Summary of Review Results

NSF is a leader in technology and continues to move toward use of completely electronic formats for all program review and funding activities. In light of this, we selected as the primary focus of our FOIA management review, improving and upgrading NSF's FOIA electronic processes.

D. Areas Chosen for Improvement Focus

1. NSF receives most FOIA requests by email. In addition, we often respond to requests via email and most submitter notices are sent via email. To enhance electronic processing capability we will seek funds for purchase of a new scanner to create electronic .PDF records to increase efficiency.
2. We will investigate the acquisition of a state-of-the-art FOIA logging and tracking system for use by the FOIA Officer, FOIA back-up personnel and support staff who are assigned additional duties.

E. FOIA Improvement Processes

Electronic Responses

1. Process FOIA responses electronically.
2. To enhance our ability to process records electronically we propose purchasing a copier/scanner to transform paper records to .PDF files; we will become more efficient by producing electronic files in the FOIA office.
3. Determine availability of funds; defend the need for agency purchase; obligate funds.
4. Proposed purchase date: before 12/31/2006.
5. This milestone will be successful upon receipt of scanning equipment and will enhance electronic processing.

Logging and Tracking

1. FOIA log and tracking system.
2. NSF currently utilizes an Excel document to log and track FOIA requests. We will investigate the purchase of a state of the art FOIA logging and tracking system.
3. Identify suitable systems and determine costs.
4. Review of systems to be completed by 12/31/2007.
5. An electronic FOIA logging and tracking system will be identified and funding possibilities will be explored to expedite FOIA tracking and reporting.

In addition to these concentrated focus areas, NSF will monitor any requests pending for longer than the statutory time limit for responding to a request for records. We will

analyze any such requests to determine whether there are any systemic changes in addition to these focus areas that might be made to reduce processing time. We will complete our analysis of FY06 requests by December 31, 2006, and our analysis of FY07 requests by December 31, 2007. We will implement any systemic changes as appropriate. NSF will measure improvement by tracking the number of pending requests with response times greater than the time limit as a percentage of requests processed during the fiscal year. Additionally, we will determine for the fiscal year the median number of days pending for such requests. NSF will also review and improve the NSF FOIA web page to include an update of the FOIA Information Handbook and a review of the web posting of policy statements and copies of frequently requested records.

F. Completion Dates

December 31, 2006

1. Purchase of scanner;
2. Review and analyze any backlog of requests for possible systemic changes, in addition to the focus areas, that might reduce processing time;
3. Review and improve the NSF FOIA web page;
4. Review and revise NSF's form letters and email correspondence.

December 31, 2007

1. Identify and review of FOIA electronic logging and tracking systems;
2. Review and analyze any backlog of requests for possible systemic changes, in addition to the focus areas, that might reduce processing time;
3. Review and update FOIA Information Handbook.

Review Areas beyond December 31, 2007

1. NSF will conduct an annual review of its FOIA program during 2007 and beyond to continually update and improve processes.