



June 2006

*UNITED STATES  
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT*

**IMPROVEMENT PLAN UNDER  
EXECUTIVE ORDER 13392:  
IMPROVING AGENCY  
DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION**

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT



## Revision History

<b>Revision Number</b>	<b>Revision Date</b>	<b>Revision Summary</b>	<b>Authoring Office</b>
1.1	May 12, 2006	Initial Draft Release	MSD/CIS/PPG
1.2	May 16, 2006	Revised Draft Release	MSD/CIS/PPG
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## **U.S. Office of Personnel Management Improvement Plan Under Executive Order 13392: Improving Agency Disclosure of Information**

In accordance with Executive Order 13392: Improving Agency Disclosure of Information and related guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has performed a review of its Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) operations and provides the following information and action plan.

### **A. Nature of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's FOIA operations**

OPM receives and processes a significant number of FOIA requests each year. The largest number of FOIA requests are related to OPM contracts, civilian employment statistics, and personnel actions. In FY 2005, OPM received 4,594 FOIA requests, processed 4,518 within the statutory time limit, and has a backlog of 107 requests from FY 2005 which the agency is addressing.

OPM's FOIA Requester Service Center has one full-time FOIA coordinator working with 19 decentralized Program Office FOIA contacts who perform FOIA functions as a collateral duty. The FOIA coordinator manages the agency's new and outstanding FOIA requests and coordinates improvement plans for OPM's FOIA operations with the agency's Chief FOIA Officer and the 19 Program Office FOIA contacts throughout the agency. This arrangement is considered to be high-risk with regard to customer response times. Actions to address this risk are included in the following action plan.

### **B. Areas selected for review**

OPM selected all 27 areas recommended for review by the Department of Justice and added two improvement areas for developing this plan, as follows:

1. Affirmative disclosure under section (a)(2) of the FOIA
2. Proactive disclosure of information
3. Overall FOIA Web site improvement
4. Improvement of agency's FOIA Reference Guide
5. Automated tracking capabilities
6. Electronic FOIA – automated processing
7. Electronic FOIA – receiving/responding to requests electronically.
8. Multi-track processing
9. Troubleshooting of any existing problems (even minor ones) with existing request tracking
10. Case-by-case problem identification
11. Expedited processing
12. Backlog reduction/elimination
13. Politeness/courtesy
14. Forms of communication with requesters
15. Acknowledgement letters

16. System of handling referrals
17. System of handling consultations
18. Process by which necessary cooperation is obtained from agency "program personnel"
19. Improvement ideas from field office personnel (where applicable)
20. Additional training needed (formal and/or on-the-job)
21. In-house training on "safeguarding label"/FOIA exemption distinctions
22. Increased staffing (where applicable)
23. Changes to personnel practices (job series, grades, etc.) needed
24. Contracting out/hiring of contract employees
25. Purchase of new equipment needed
26. Centralization/decentralization
27. Recycling of improvement information gleaned from FOIA Requester Service Centers
28. Updating OPM FOIA regulations
29. Improved internal communication within OPM about FOIA responsibilities

### **C. Summary of review results**

OPM's initial review of the improvement areas mentioned above showed a need for improvement in 18 areas. The highest priority areas for improvement are:

- Affirmative disclosure under section (a)(2)
- Proactive disclosure of information
- Automated tracking capabilities
- Electronic FOIA – automated processing
- Expedited processing
- Backlog reduction/elimination
- Politeness/courtesy
- Acknowledgement letters
- Increased staffing
- Improved internal communications within OPM about FOIA responsibilities

The agency's action plan for improving these areas is provided in Section E, below, and includes such actions as increasing information on the OPM web site, improving the agency's outdated FOIA tracking system, increasing training for all Program Office FOIA contacts, and improving workflow for processing FOIA requests.

OPM was one of the first federal agencies to implement electronic FOIA processing which it initiated in 1999. Since then the agency has received 1,000 FOIA requests electronically. OPM plans to build on its success in processing FOIA requests electronically by adding the capability to scan incoming paper requests as noted in the action plan below.

## D. Improvement areas chosen for agency plan

OPM selected the following areas for improvement after conducting a review of the agency's FOIA processes. The list below reflects the Department of Justice Executive Order 13392 Implementation Guide numbering scheme and includes the two additional improvement areas mentioned above that have been identified by OPM.

1. Affirmative disclosure under section (a)(2) of the FOIA
2. Proactive disclosure of information
3. Overall FOIA Web site improvement
4. Improvement of agency's FOIA Reference Guide
5. Automated tracking capabilities
6. Electronic FOIA – automated processing
9. Troubleshooting of any existing problems (even minor ones) with existing request tracking
11. Expedited processing
12. Backlog reduction/elimination
13. Politeness/courtesy
14. Forms of communication with requesters
15. Acknowledgement letters
19. Improvement ideas from field office personnel (where applicable)
20. Additional training needed (formal and/or on-the-job)
21. In-house training on "safeguarding label"/FOIA exemption distinctions
22. Increased staffing (where applicable)
27. Recycling of improvement information gleaned from FOIA Requester Service Centers
28. Development of OPM FOIA regulations
29. Improved internal communications within OPM about FOIA responsibilities

## E. Improvement areas and improvement plan:

Name of improvement area	Brief statement of goal(s)/ objective(s)	Distinct steps planned to be taken	Time milestones	Means of measurement of success
*1. Affirmative disclosure under subsection (a)(2) of the FOIA	Increase the amount of information disclosed on the OPM web site: <a href="http://www.opm.gov">www.opm.gov</a>	Increase the disclosure of frequently requested OPM records on the agency's web site such as policy statements, staff manuals and instructions to staff, and final agency opinions	12/31/2006	Verify that frequently requested OPM records such as policy statements, staff manuals and instructions, and final agency opinions have been disclosed on the agency's web site.

\* Denotes improvement area derived from the Executive Order itself

Name of improvement area	Brief statement of goal(s)/ objective(s)	Distinct steps planned to be taken	Time milestones	Means of measurement of success
*2. Proactive disclosure of information	Strengthen OPM's FOIA processes for posting the most frequently requested records in OPM's electronic Reading Room	Increase the amount of information in OPM's electronic Reading Room to include the records most frequently requested under FOIA in the preceding fiscal year (FY)	Annually beginning 12/31/2006	Verify that the records most frequently requested under FOIA in the preceding fiscal year have been posted
3. Overall FOIA Web site improvement	Publish OPM's updated FOIA Reference Guide on the agency's FOIA website	Revise OPM's FOIA web pages to include the updated FOIA Reference Guide	12/31/2008	Verify that the updated FOIA Reference Guide has been published on the agency's FOIA website
*4. Improvement of the agency's FOIA Reference Guide	Annually review and update OPM's FOIA Reference Guide as needed	Update OPM's FOIA Reference Guide which includes instructions for submitting FOIA and Privacy Act requests and information about contacting the FOIA Requester Service Center for status	12/31/2007	Verify that the FOIA Reference Guide has been reviewed and updated
*5. Automated tracking capabilities	Improve workflow of FOIA requests	Replace outdated FOIA Tracking System with streamlined FOIA Tracking System for use by the OPM Program Office FOIA contacts and the FOIA Requester Service Center	12/31/2006	Verify that the streamlined FOIA Tracking System is operating
*6. Electronic FOIA -- automated processing	Develop the capability to produce electronic versions of mailed and faxed FOIA requests	Purchase a document scanner for use by the FOIA Requester Service Center. Begin using it to convert paper FOIA requests to	12/31/2006	Verify that the scanner is installed and is being used to convert paper FOIA requests to electronic form.

Name of improvement area	Brief statement of goal(s)/ objective(s)	Distinct steps planned to be taken	Time milestones	Means of measurement of success
		electronic form.		
*9. Troubleshooting of any existing problems (even minor ones) with existing request tracking	Improve the security of the FOIA requests received at OPM	Develop a proposed solution for linking secure faxes to the FOIA email system	12/31/2008	Verify that alternative solutions have been evaluated and submitted for budget consideration
*11. Expedited processing	Document handling procedures for expedited processing of FOIA requests in FOIA Reference Guide	Remind Program Office FOIA contacts about requirements of expedited FOIA processing by sharing the updated FOIA Reference Guide with them.  Implement updated FOIA Tracking System with built-in expedited request alert reminders	12/31/2007  12/31/2006	Verify that the FOIA Reference Guide is updated and shared with Program Office FOIA contacts.
*12. Backlog Reduction/Elimination	Eliminate present FOIA backlog	Distribute lists of outstanding FOIA requests to Program Office FOIA contacts for reconciliation of backlog  Implement updated FOIA Tracking System	12/31/2006  12/31/2006	Record percentage of requests completed on time and monitor trends
*13. Politeness/courtesy	Improve politeness and courtesy to FOIA requesters	Recommend customer service training for Program Office FOIA contacts	12/31/2006	Record the number of complaints received in the FOIA Requester Service Center about politeness of OPM staff and monitor trends
*14. Forms of communication with requesters	Improve the quality of denial letters	Emphasize the need to include appeal rights in all full and partial denial letters to Program Office FOIA contacts	12/31/2007	Periodically review sample of denial letters for completeness and monitor trends



Name of improvement area	Brief statement of goal(s)/ objective(s)	Distinct steps planned to be taken	Time milestones	Means of measurement of success
15. Acknowledgment letters	Send acknowledgement letters to all requesters regardless of method of receipt of FOIA requests	Respond via email or mail to requesters who mail or fax their requests	12/31/2006	Verify that the OPM Service Center has begun sending acknowledgement emails or letters to all requesters
19. Improvement ideas from field office personnel (where applicable)	Conduct annual meetings with Program Office FOIA contacts to discuss ideas and suggestions to improve FOIA processes.	Hold annual FOIA meetings with all Program Offices including field locations	12/31/2008	Verify that annual meeting has been held
20. Additional training needed (formal and/or on-the-job)	Increase FOIA and Privacy Act knowledge of the OPM Program Office FOIA contacts	<p>Recommend to Program Office managers to send employees involved in FOIA operations to a training course available from the Department of Justice or the American Society of Access Professionals</p> <p>Require proof of attendance from Program Office FOIA contacts by their submission of copies of training certificates</p>	<p>12/31/2007</p> <p>12/31/2007</p>	Count the number of people who attend FOIA training courses and monitor trends
21. In-house training on "safeguarding label"/FOIA exemption distinctions	Include safeguarding and labeling procedures for FOIA information in OPM's policy on Safeguarding Sensitive But Unclassified Information and include them in the FOIA Reference Guide	Update the FOIA Reference Guide to include the procedures	12/31/2008	Verify that the updated FOIA Reference Guide includes the procedures and is published

<b>Name of improvement area</b>	<b>Brief statement of goal(s)/ objective(s)</b>	<b>Distinct steps planned to be taken</b>	<b>Time milestones</b>	<b>Means of measurement of success</b>
22. Increased staffing (where applicable)	Increase FOIA Service Center staff	Recruit specialist to evaluate and support FOIA processes	12/31/06	Verify that employee is hired
*27. Recycling of improvement information gleaned from FOIA Requester Service Centers	In annual meetings with Program Office FOIA contacts ask for suggestions for improving the agency's FOIA program	Hold annual FOIA meetings with all Program Offices and request suggestions	12/31/2008	Verify that minutes of the meetings include Program Office suggestions for improving the agency's FOIA program
28. Development of OPM FOIA Regulations	Update OPM FOIA regulations	Address each requirement of the FOIA specifically in OPM regulations	12/31/2007	Verify that regulations are complete and have been published
29. Improved internal communications within OPM about FOIA responsibilities	Send semi-annual FOIA status report to OPM office heads	Develop report format  Create reports and send them	12/31/2006	Verify that report format has been developed and reports have been sent

## **F. Action plan:**

### **1. Areas anticipated to be completed by December 31, 2006**

1. Affirmative disclosure under section (a)(2) of the FOIA
2. Proactive disclosure of information
5. Automated tracking capabilities
6. Electronic FOIA – automated processing
11. Expedited processing
12. Backlog reduction/elimination
13. Politeness/courtesy
15. Acknowledgement letters
22. Increased staffing
29. Improved internal communications within OPM about FOIA responsibilities

### **2. Areas anticipated to be completed by December 31, 2007**

4. Improvement of agency's FOIA Reference Guide
14. Forms of communication with requesters
20. Additional training needed (formal and/or on-the-job)
28. Development of OPM FOIA regulations

### **3. Areas anticipated to be completed after December 31, 2007**

- 3. Overall FOIA Web site improvement
- 9. Troubleshooting of any existing problems (even minor ones) with existing request tracking
- 19. Improvement ideas from field office personnel (where applicable)
- 21. In-house training on “safeguarding label”/FOIA exemption distinctions
- 27. Recycling of improvement information gleaned from FOIA Requester Service Centers