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Chief FOIA Officer Report
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Chief FOIA Officer

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I. Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

The guiding principle underlying the President's FOIA Memorandum and the Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness.

1. Describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA. To do so, you should answer the questions listed below and then include any additional information you would like to describe how your agency is working to apply the presumption of openness.

a. Describe how the President's FOIA Memorandum and the Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines have been publicized throughout your agency.

The Peace Corps has posted the President's memorandum and Attorney General's guidelines on its Intranet. The FOIA staff have read and understood the memorandum and guidelines. FOIA staff provided training to new agency staff at new employee orientation. FOIA staff also give FOIA training to supervisors and to other employees when requested. FOIA staff strive to make as many discretionary releases as possible.

b. What training has been attended and/or conducted on the new FOIA Guidelines?

The Peace Corps' FOIA Office has provided training on the new guidelines at New Employee Orientation every other Monday. The FOIA Office has also established a point-of-contact with each office within the Peace Corps. FOIA staff have provided training on the new guidelines to the office point-of-contacts. Additionally, FOIA staff have provided training on the new guidelines at Supervisory Training.

c. How has your agency created or modified your internal guidance to reflect the presumption of openness?

We have not created or modified our internal guidance yet. We intend to modify our internal guidance in the upcoming months.

d. To what extent has your agency made discretionary releases of otherwise exempt information?

We did not specifically track the number of discretionary release although we will in the future. We can say for certainty that at least one (b)(2) and more than one (b)(5) discretionary releases were made.

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

We review and determine if we can release records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 2 and in cases where there is no foreseeable harm, we release records that may have formerly been withheld under FOIA Exemption 5.

f. How does your agency review records to determine whether discretionary releases are possible?

Records which may contain exempt information are reviewed by the FOIA Officer. The Peace Corps' General Counsel reviews the FOIA Officer's determinations. The FOIA Officer also consults with the offices from which records originate to determine whether the records should be released. These reviews assure that the presumption of openness is routinely and consistently applied to the review of records under the FOIA.

g. Describe any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied.

N/A

2. Report the extent to which the numbers of requests where records have been released in full and the numbers of requests where records have been released in part has changed from those numbers as reported in your previous year's Annual FOIA Report.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, we processed 249 requests of which 185 were fully released and 15 were partial releases (respectively, 74% and 6%). In FY 2010, we processed 188 requests of which 113 were fully released and 13 were partial releases (respectively, 63% and 7%). Comparing FY 2009 and FY 2010, we had a 11% decrease in the number of fully released and 1% increase in the number of partial releases.

II. Steps Taken to Ensure that Peace Corps has an Effective System for Responding to Requests

Describe here the steps your agency has taken to ensure that your system for responding to requests is effective and efficient. This section should include a discussion of how your agency has addressed the key roles played by the

broad spectrum of agency personnel who work with FOIA professionals in responding to requests, including, in particular, steps taken to ensure that FOIA professionals have sufficient IT support. To do so, answer the questions below and then include any additional information that you would like to describe how your agency ensures that your FOIA system is efficient and effective.

The Peace Corps' process for responding to requests follows:

- The FOIA specialist reviews the request, logs the request into the database, determines which office or offices have responsive documents and forwards the requests to the appropriate office(s).
- The office(s) return(s) the request to the FOIA/PA specialist with the responsive documents or certifies no records were found.
- The FOIA specialist reviews the responsive documents to ensure they are indeed responsive, consults with offices from which the documents originated, prepares a response letter and forwards the response letter and responsive documents to the FOIA Officer.
- The FOIA/PA Officer reviews the documents and approves or refers the documents to General Counsel for review if necessary.

a. Do FOIA professionals within your agency have sufficient IT support?

The Agency's IT department provides sufficient support to the FOIA staff. No action was taken in this area as none was deemed necessary.

b. Describe how your agency's FOIA professionals interact with your Open Government Team.

The Chief FOIA Officer and FOIA Officer attend intra-agency Open Government meetings. We also keep in contact with the Open Government Committee on matters of common interest with respect to maintaining frank discussions about areas where the agency can expand its transparency.

c. Describe the steps your agency has taken to assess whether adequate staffing is being devoted to responding to FOIA requests.

The Chief FOIA Officer, Deputy Associate Director of Management and the FOIA Officer meet periodically to discuss whether adequate staffing is being devoted to responding to FOIA requests. As a result of these meeting, we have recently hired a new FOIA/Privacy Act specialist.

d. Describe any other steps your agency has undertaken to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively.

The FOIA Office reviewed its administrative procedures to ensure its effectiveness. Agency-wide guidelines concerning the FOIA process were updated and sent out agency-wide via email on September 30, 2010.

III. Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

Describe here the steps your agency has taken to increase the amount of material that is available on your agency website, including providing examples of proactive disclosures that have been made since issuance of the new FOIA Guidelines. In doing so, answer the questions listed below and describe any additional steps taken by your agency to make proactive disclosures of information.

We are constantly searching for ways to be more proactive in providing the most access to the public. We revamped our FOIA Internet page, updating content and increasing usability. Our staff maintains lists of frequently requested documents that will be included in the FOIA Reading Room.

a. Has your agency added new material to your agency website since last year?

The Peace Corps has posted routine updates of documents posted on the website. A current list of the Peace Corps' proactive disclosures can be found at www.peacecorps.gov/open and www.peacecorps.gov/foia.

b. What types of records have been posted?

The Agency continuously updates its Web site to include relevant and interesting information for the public. The Peace Corps posts on its Web site numerous documents of interest, including its governing statutes, regulations, safety reports and Congressional Budget Justifications.

c. Give examples of the types of records your agency now posts that used to be available only by making a FOIA request for them.

Examples are Peace Corps Manual, safety reports and Congressional Budget Justifications. Additionally, statistical information on Peace Corps Volunteers is now available through www.peacecorps.gov/open.

d. What system do you have in place to routinely identify records that are appropriate for posting?

The Peace Corps currently does not have a formal system in place. However, the Peace Corps does routinely review and update its FOIA webpage, making selections on the basis of significance.

e. How do you utilize social media in disseminating information?

The Office of Communications uses Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media outlets to disseminate information about the Peace Corps

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

N/A

IV. Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

1. Electronic receipt of FOIA requests:

a. What proportion of the components within your agency which receive FOIA requests have the capability to receive such requests electronically?

The only component within Peace Corps that receives and processes FOIA requests is the FOIA Office. The FOIA Office has the capability to receive FOIA requests electronically.

b. To what extent have you increased the number of components doing so since the filing of your last Chief FOIA Officer Report?

N/A

c. What methods does your agency use to receive requests electronically?

We use fax and email.

2. Electronic tracking of FOIA requests:

a. What proportion of components within your agency which receive FOIA requests have the capability to track such requests electronically?

The only component within Peace Corps that receives and processes FOIA requests is the FOIA Office. The FOIA Office has the capability to track FOIA requests electronically.

b. To what extent have you increased the number of components doing so since the filing of your last Chief FOIA Officer Report?

N/A

c. What methods does your agency use to track requests electronically?

We currently use a generic spreadsheet application (not FOIA specific).

3. Electronic processing of FOIA requests:

a. What proportion of components within your agency which receive FOIA requests have the capability to process such requests electronically?

The only component within Peace Corps that receives and processes FOIA requests is the FOIA Office. The FOIA Office has the capability to process FOIA requests electronically.

b. To what extent have you increased the number of components doing so since the filing of your last Chief FOIA Officer Report?

N/A

4. Electronic preparation of your Annual FOIA Report:

a. What type of technology does your agency use to prepare your agency Annual FOIA Report, i.e., specify whether the technology is FOIA-specific or a generic data-processing system.

We use a generic data-processing system and electronic spreadsheets (not FOIA specific) to prepare the Annual FOIA Report.

b. If you are not satisfied with your existing system to prepare your Annual FOIA Report, describe the steps you have taken to increase your use of technology for next year.

N/A

V. Steps Taken to Reduce Backlogs and Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests

1. If your agency has a backlog, report here whether that backlog is decreasing. That reduction should be measured in two ways. First, report whether the number of backlogged requests and backlogged administrative

appeals that remain pending at the end of the fiscal year decreased or increased, and by how many, when compared with last fiscal year. Second, report whether your agency closed in Fiscal Year 2010 the ten oldest of those pending requests and appeals from Fiscal Year 2009, and if not, report how many of them your agency did close.

The number of backlogged requests increased in FY 2010. It increased by ten requests. The number of backlogged appeals did not increase or decrease (there were no backlogged appeals). We closed the oldest pending requests from FY 2009 (a total of two requests). We did not have any pending appeals from FY 2009.

2. If there has not been a reduction in the backlog as measured by either of these metrics, describe why that has occurred. In doing so, answer the following questions and then include any other additional explanation:

a. Is the backlog increase a result of an increase in the number of incoming requests or appeals?'

No.

b. Is the backlog increase caused by a loss of staff?

The departure of two thirds of the FOIA staff resulted in longer processing times.

c. Is the backlog increase caused by an increase in the complexity of the requests received?

Yes. We received 16 complex requests which is a high number for our agency.

d. What other causes, if any, contributed to the increase in backlog?

N/A

3. Describe the steps your agency is taking to reduce any backlogs and to improve timeliness in responding to requests and administrative appeals. In doing so answer the following questions and then also include any other steps being taken to improve timeliness.

a. Does your agency routinely set goals and monitor the progress of your FOIA caseload?

Our goal is to process every FOIA requests received within the statutory time limits. This has not always been possible but this is what we hope to achieve. Our current goal for our 10 pending backlogged requests is to reduce the backlog 50% by March 15, 2011.

b. Has your agency increased its FOIA staffing?

One new staff member has arrived in the past week, almost bringing the office to the size it was a year ago.

c. Has your agency made IT improvements to increase timeliness?

No.

d. Has your agency Chief FOIA Officer been involved in overseeing your agency's capacity to process requests?

Yes.

Spotlight on Success

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency in this last year to increase transparency, describe here one success story that you would like to highlight as emblematic of your efforts.

As part of the agency's Open Government Plan, raw data sets for 2009 Peace Corps Volunteer on-board strength were posted in FY 2010 on our Open Government Initiative webpage (www.peacecorps.gov/open). Such information has value for family and friends of Volunteers and it will make a significant contribution to people who are interested in Peace Corps.