



United States Department of Justice

Office of Information Policy

FOIA PUBLIC LIAISONS TRAINING

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FOIA Public Liaisons

- **Report to agency Chief FOIA Officers.**
- **Serve as supervisory officials to FOIA Requester Service Center personnel to whom requesters can raise concerns about the services received from the Service Center.**

Statutory Duties of FOIA Public Liaisons

General Responsibilities:

1. Assisting in reducing delays,
2. Increasing transparency and understanding of the status of requests, and
3. Assisting in the resolution of disputes.

Statutory Duties of FOIA Public Liaisons (con't)

Specific Responsibility:

- The FOIA provides that when unusual circumstances exist, and an agency advises a requester that the request cannot be processed within the FOIA's time limits, the requester must be given an opportunity to limit the scope of the request or to arrange an alternate time frame for processing.
- To aid the requester in such circumstances, agencies must make their FOIA Public Liaisons available to assist in the resolution of any disputes between the requester and the agency.

Common Concerns Raised by the FOIA Requester Community

- **Poor communication with requesters.**
 - ***Example: Repeated “still interested” letters or phone calls.**

Common Concerns Raised by the FOIA Requester Community (con't)

- **Difficulties obtaining status information on requests.**

Common Concerns Raised by the FOIA Requester Community (con't)

- **Inability to ascertain what records have already been processed under the FOIA.**
- **Inability to easily locate specific previously processed records online.**

Common Concerns Raised by the FOIA Requester Community (con't)

- **Inability to make requests electronically.**

Common Concerns Raised by the FOIA Requester Community (con't)

- **Delays in having their requests processed.**

**FOIA Public Liaisons can play
a vital role in assisting
requesters in addressing these
common areas of concern.**

Improving Timeliness

- **The greatest concern shared by both requesters and agencies alike is the length of time it takes to process requests.**

Improving Timeliness (con't)

- Requesters want and expect their requests to be processed timely as required by statute.
- Agencies want to process requests timely to avoid excessive backlogs.

**FOIA Public Liaisons Can Assist
in this Critical Aspect
of FOIA Administration**

There are typically three key areas that impact timeliness:

- **Scope of the Request**
- **Record Searches**
- **Consultation Process**

Scope of the Request

- **Upon receipt of request, contact requester to discuss the scope of the request.**
- **Work collaboratively with requester to determine responsiveness issues and to develop processing approach.**

Scope of the Request (con't)

- **Advise requester of time required to fulfill a request that requires extensive searches.**
- **Provide requester with opportunity to narrow the scope of the request or agree to an alternative time frame for processing.**

Searching For Responsive Records

- **Inform requester of search methods and parameters.**
- **Advise requester of time required for various search methods and collaborate on best approaches.**

Searching for Responsive Records (con't)

- **When appropriate, collaborate with requester to determine search terms for electronic searches.**
- **Inform requester of potential search fees.**

Consultations With Other Federal Entities

- **If consultations are required, inform requester of time involved in this process.**

Consultations With Other Federal Entities (con't)

- **Utilize technology to develop methods to enable fast-track consultations.**

Consultations With Other Federal Entities (con't)

- **Establish agreements, when possible, to streamline consultation process.**

Consultations With Other Federal Entities (con't)

- **Provide interim responses to requesters as consultations are completed and disclosure determinations are made.**

**Good communication
with FOIA requesters is
critical.**

Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) mission:

1. Review and recommend:

- * review policies and procedures of administrative agencies under the FOIA,**
- * review compliance with the FOIA by agencies,**
- * recommend policy changes to Congress and the President to improve the administration of the FOIA.**

OGIS mission (con't)

2. Mediation

- * offer mediation services to resolve disputes between persons making FOIA requests and agencies as non-exclusive alternative to litigation,
- * may issue advisory opinions if mediation has not resolved the dispute.

**Please send the names and contact
information for your agency's
FOIA Public Liaisons to
DOJ.OIP.FOIA@usdoj.gov**

**OIP will post a comprehensive list of all
agency FOIA Public Liaisons
on its website.**