

Chief FOIA Officer Report for the
Corporation for National and Community Service

February 1, 2011

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) submits this report in response to the request in the United States Department of Justice Office of Information Policy memorandum dated November 23, 2010. The report has been prepared by Wilsie Y. Minor, Chief FOIA Officer, CNCS.

I. Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

1. Description

As CNCS Chief FOIA Officer, I am responsible for supervising a FOIA Public Liaison, an Associate General Counsel who monitors and advises on FOIA, and a FOIA Disclosure Officer who reads, reviews, and responds to all FOIA requests. We have read and understand the President's FOIA memorandum and Attorney General's FOIA guidelines and I ensure my staff carries them out as they respond to FOIA requests.

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

We have prepared articles on FOIA for our agency-wide supervisors' newsletter.

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

My staff and I have attended FOIA training offered by the American Society of Access Professionals and briefings provided by the Office of Information Policy. In addition, the new FOIA staff attended training offered by the Office of Legal Education of the Executive Office for United States Attorneys.

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

Review of FOIA processes has been included in the agency's Open Government Plan and should be completed during this fiscal year. As the staff processes FOIA requests, if an organization with responsive records proposes withholding any portion of the documents the FOIA

disclosure officer discusses with the office the guidelines for the presumption of openness.

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

The agency released a detailed description of its Social Innovation Fund grant selection process, the identities of the expert peer reviewers, the reviewer comments, the names of all applicants considered.

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

Exemptions 5 and 6

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

We always review with an eye toward transparency. If we cannot identify a clear harm, we release.

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

The Chief FOIA officer serves as a member of the agency's Open Government Council. As a part of its Open Government Plan, the agency plans to make available information as it becomes available including a plan to post grants after award and to publish documents released under FOIA.

As an example of proactive and discretionary disclosures, in response to interest expressed about our process, the Corporation released and posted on our website detailed information about our grant application review process for the Social Innovation Fund. Previously, we would have withheld portions of this information under Exemptions 5 and 6.

2. Disclosure Comparisons

CNCS provides all records possible without withholding any text. In FY 2009, CNCS had 36 full grants and 12 partial grants. In FY 2010, CNCS had 42 full grants and 11 partial grants. CNCS continues to experience an increase in the number and complexity of records requested. The majority of the records withheld were due to the protection of personally identifiable information. .

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

In addition to requests by mail, FOIA requests may be submitted by email to foia@cns.gov or by fax to the FOIA Requester Center which resides in the Office of General Counsel. If the request comes in by mail or fax, the request is forwarded to the FOIA Disclosure Officer, who reviews the request, assures that it is logged into the tracking system. Our FOIA Disclosure Officer sends an acknowledgment notice to the requestor and provides the FOIA request number. Then the Disclosure Officer determines whether CNCS has any responsive documents and if so what they are. There are representatives who work in each of our agency's program areas who assist in locating FOIA requests and all are aware of the Presidential Directive and Justice Department Memorandum.

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

CNCS is fully supported with an IT department that ensures the internet and email systems are functioning properly. They are available to provide technical support on issues that would delay FOIA processing.

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

The Chief FOIA Officer serves as a member of the agency Open Government Council. The Associate General Counsel who serves as the FOIA attorney serves as the team lead on FOIA integration into the Open Government process. The FOIA Disclosure Officer will support implementation of the Open Government Initiative as the agency implements its plan to post all FOIA releases to the internet.

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

The FOIA Disclosure Officer is encouraged to telework when FOIA releases require concentrated focused attention. The volume and types of FOIA requests are being monitored to determine whether staffing remains adequate.

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

The FOIA Disclosure Officer sends requests for document searches to offices by email. Most responsive documents are sent back as pdf files. Most FOIA requests are released to requestors by electronic mail. Administrative records are maintained electronically.

III. Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

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

- Corporation Sustainability Plan--This plan describes how the Corporation will fulfill its commitment to increased energy efficiency and conservation.

- The Corporation created a Recovery Act sub-site of our National Service website. This website details the Corporation's work towards implementing the Recovery Act. It offers an interactive online tool that allows members of the public to review what the Corporation funded under Recovery Act using an interactive map of the United States.

- Civic Life in America - Key Findings on the Civic Health of the Nation- The 2010 *Civic Life in America* series features national statistics, findings, and trends on civic life. Civic life is, in essence, the common thread of participation in and building of one's community. The report offers data on five central themes of civic life, including service, participating in a group, connecting to information and current events, social connectedness, and political action.

- Social Innovation Fund: CNCS posted on our website the full applications for each of the 11 successful applicants including answers to clarification questions, budgets, and three sets of reviewer comments. We provided a detailed description of the grantee selection process, including the ratings of the 11 awardees at each stage of the process, and the recusal of Corporation officials from that process to avoid potential conflicts of interest. We released the names of 43 applicant organizations, all of whom consented, who were considered in at

least one phase of the review process by external expert reviewers and were not awarded a Social Innovation Fund grant. We released the names of the 63 expert reviewers, all of whom consented, and information about the reviewer selection process.

b. What types of records have been posted?

In response to significant interest in the agency's new Social Innovation Fund, after grant award, the agency posted grant application and review materials for successful Social Innovation Fund grantees as described above. For the first time, we posted the identities of all applicants who were considered, as well as the identities of the expert peer reviewers.

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.

For the 2011 Social Innovation Fund competition, CNCS has described the application review process stage by stage in its Draft Notice of Funding Opportunity for Public Input. In addition, CNCS plans to provide the following information to the public (except for any information which is clearly protected by law) within 90 days of announcing the selected grantees:

- Names of expert reviewers
- List of all applicants considered for funding
- Executive summaries of all applications considered for funding
- [The applications of selected grantees](#)
- External reviewer comments for the selected grantees

Beginning with the FY 2011 AmeriCorps grant award cycle currently underway, the Corporation will post more information on our grant award process and applicants for AmeriCorps grants.

Following the application deadline:

- A detailed description of the review and selection process.
- Links to external reviewer guide and training materials.
- Blank external and internal review worksheet templates.

The following information will be published for new and recompet applications after final funding notifications at the end of May, 2011:

- Names of external reviewers.

- List of all applicants considered for funding.
- Executive summaries of all applications considered for funding.
- Full text of approved applications.
- Results of external and internal review for approved applications.

For Continuation applications (current grantees in year two or three of a three year cycle), the following information will be published after final funding notifications at the end of May, 2011:

- List of all continuation applicants considered for funding.
- Executive summaries of all continuation applications considered for funding.
- Results of internal review for approved continuation applications.

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

As Chief FOIA Officer and member of the Open Government Council, I will work with the Transparency Committee to identify additional records that are appropriate for posting.

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

CNCS uses social media channels including Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to share information about our major initiatives (MLK Day of Service, Mentoring Summit, Veterans & Military Families, 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance) and programs with the public. Each of our programs has a social media coordinator who is responsible for managing their own social media channels—with guidance and oversight from our Director of New Media. The Public Affairs Office manages the Serve.gov social media channels, which include Facebook and Serve.

Social media, like any other communications channel, has marketing, information, and engagement components. With social media, we can further the mission of the organization by engaging the public, sharing information about volunteer opportunities and programs. In addition, we use social media to support Open Government, collaboration, and transparency.

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

The Open Government Initiative has a series of records that it will begin to disclose this year including all Corporation policies located on the

intranet to the internet during this year; FOIA releases; AmeriCorps member feedback on service; national service activity by state; AmeriCorps member statistics by state of origin; information on AmeriCorps grantee performance

The FOIA team will continue to work with individual offices as requests are processed to implement the presumption of disclosure.

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?**

CNCS has a single FOIA Requester Service Center in the Office of General Counsel. Our office prefers electronic requests and posts our FOIA email address on our FOIA contact page. During FY 2010, of the 69 perfected requests CNCS received, approximately 20 were received 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 post our FOIA email address on our agency website and respond, when an email address is provided, by email to acknowledge receipt of FOIA requests and provide responsive requests.

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?**

As the agencies sole FOIA office, we track 100% of our 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 receive about 70 FOIA requests a year. CNCS files all incoming FOIA requests in an off-the-shelf spreadsheet product. This spreadsheet is stored on a Shared drive.

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?**

As the agencies single FOIA Requester Service Center, we process 100% of our FOIA requests electronically. We scan and file all requests, responsive documents, and responses electronically. If the requestor agrees, we also provide the requested records 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 process requests electronically?**

We prefer to receive requests electronically, and paper requests are scanned to our FOIA shared drive folder. We communicate search requests via email and provide the records electronically if the requestor agrees and the records aren't too large to send to requestor email.

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.**

Our FOIA Disclosure Officer prepares the Annual FOIA Report in an off-the-shelf spreadsheet product.

- 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.**

None identified at this time given the relatively small number of requests.

V. Steps Taken to Reduce Backlogs and Improve timeliness of 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.**

At the end of FY 2010, CNCS had no backlog. CNCS had two requests backlogged at the end of FY 2009.

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.

CNCS closed FY 2010 with no pending requests or appeals.

- 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:**

CNCS's oldest pending request at the close of FY 2009 was dated 8/5/2009. CNCS had no pending requests at the close of FY 2010.

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

N/A

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

N/A

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

N/A

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.

The Corporation has no backlog of administrative appeals.

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

N/A

- b. Has your agency increased its FOIA staffing?

CNCS hired an attorney partly to assist our FOIA Disclosure Officer with review of our responsive documents.

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

N/A

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

The Chief FOIA Officer tracks the status of FOIA response. If necessary, work priorities are adjusted for the FOIA Disclosure Officer if processing begins to suffer.

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.

The Corporation's proactive release of the process for selection for our Social Innovation Fund grant competition was the agency's greatest transparency achievement. Before we issued the final Notice of Federal Funds Availability (NOFA), we held a very open conversation on the design of the Social Innovation Fund and had a robust response during the public input period on the NOFA.

The grant announcement generated a healthy debate about openness and transparency during the Social Innovation Fund process. As a response, the Corporation posted:

- the full applications for each of the 11 successful applicants including answers to clarification questions, budgets, and three sets of reviewer comments;
- a detailed description of the grantee selection process, including the ratings of the 11 awardees at each stage of the process, and the recusal of Corporation officials from that process to avoid potential conflicts of interest;
- the names of 43 applicant organizations who were considered in at least one phase of the review process by external expert reviewers and were not awarded a Social Innovation Fund grant; and
- the names of the 63 expert reviewers and information about the reviewer selection process.