



SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

2021 CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

2021 Chief FOIA Officer Report

Social Security Administration

Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

The guiding principle underlying DOJ's FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness.

Please answer the following questions in order to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA. You may also include any additional information that illustrates how your agency is working to apply the presumption of openness.

A. FOIA Leadership

1. The FOIA requires each agency to designate a Chief FOIA Officer who is a senior official at least at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level. Is your Chief FOIA Officer at or above this level?

Yes

2. Please provide the name and title of your agency's Chief FOIA Officer.

Royce Min
General Counsel
Social Security Administration

B. FOIA Training:

3. The FOIA directs agency Chief FOIA Officers to ensure that FOIA training is offered to agency personnel. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(j)(2)(F). Please describe the efforts your agency has undertaken to ensure proper FOIA training is made available and used by agency personnel.

Under the direction of SSA's Chief FOIA Officer, the FOIA team provided numerous trainings to agency personnel throughout FY2020. In addition to training agency personnel who provided support directly and indirectly to the FOIA processing, SSA FOIA analysts attended several virtual trainings hosted by Department of Justice and American Society of Access Professionals. Internal trainings include the following:

- **Presentations to agency components concerning the FOIA regulations and exemptions;**

- **Presentations to agency personnel concerning proper disclosure;**
- **Examination and review of new case law;**
- **Trainings related to communications with the FOIA requesters; and**
- **Trainings related to timely dispositions of Fee Waiver and Expedited Processing Requests.**

4. Did your FOIA professionals or the personnel at your agency who have FOIA responsibilities attend substantive FOIA training during the reporting period such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

Yes

5. If yes, please provide a brief description of the type of training attended and the topics covered.

- **Weekly FOIA Staff Meetings – Our weekly meetings include, but not limited to FOIA appeals, exemptions, recent federal court cases, partial disclosures, FOIA fees and fee-waivers, requirements for perfected requests under the FOIA, communications with the requester, and Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) referrals.**
- **Bi-monthly FOIA/PA coordinator meetings – Discussions included the interface between the FOIA and the PA, FOIA fees, and fee-waivers. We also discussed cases that may be of public interest or may become common.**
- **Office of Privacy and Disclosure Component meetings. The FOIA division hosted two of these meetings and presented several case studies for the entire component.**
- **Freedom of Information Act online courses.**
- **FOIA training to more than 100 new attorneys from the regions.**
- **The Virtual American Society of Access Professionals Annual Conference (ASAP) – Included sessions on the exemptions, best practices, and updates from the courts.**
- **ASAP training concerning the court’s changing views on Exemption 5.**

6. Provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals and staff with FOIA responsibilities who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.

100% of our FOIA professionals attended substantive training during this reporting period.

7. OIP has directed agencies to “take steps to ensure that all of their FOIA professionals attend substantive FOIA training at least once throughout year.” If your response to the previous question is that less than 80% of your FOIA professionals attended training, please explain your agency’s plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals receive or attend substantive FOIA training during the next reporting year.

N/A

C. Outreach:

8. Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue, and, if applicable, any specific examples of how this dialogue has led to improvements in your agency's FOIA administration.

Yes, the Office of Communications' Office of Strategic and Digital Communications (OSDC) works with the FOIA professionals to conduct outreach with the requester community and open government groups. Additionally, we work with OSDC and the Office of Retirement and Disability Policy to post disability application related data proactively. Below are some of the outreach activities conducted in FY20:

- **The Open Data Customer Feedback Process provides a mechanism for the public to make suggestions of proactive disclosure and for SSA to share recent data related to the programs SSA administers.**
- **Select datasets can be found on SSA's Open Government Initiative website and Social Security Data webpage.**

In addition, the Archivist of the United States appointed an SSA Senior FOIA Analyst to the FOIA Advisory Committee with other Federal agency appointees, employees and members of the requester community. The objective of the FOIA Advisory Committee is to improve FOIA processing for both requesters and responders.

D. Other Initiatives:

9. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under the FOIA. In particular, please describe how often and in what formats your agency provides FOIA training or briefings to non-FOIA staff.

- **Office of Privacy and Disclosure staff presented several FOIA trainings to non-FOIA professionals about SSA's obligations under the FOIA. On average, SSA provided monthly trainings and briefings to non-FOIA staff. The formats included Power Point presentations, Case Studies, exemptions overviews and FAQs.**
- **Meeting with Deputy Commissioners and their staffs to remind them of their respective components' obligations under the FOIA.**
- **In addition to Sunshine Week activities, we interacted with non-FOIA professionals on a regular basis to streamline agency's FOIA process and improve the quality and timeliness of our responses.**
- **We provided training to the new component FOIA liaisons. Such trainings included what constitutes a record, applicable exemptions, how to use the FOIAonline platform to respond to requests for record searches, the twenty-day response time limitations, and how to calculate fees if applicable.**
- **We presented interesting FOIA requests, hot topics, trends and exemptions to non-FOIA professionals during the bi-monthly FOIA/PA Coordinators' meetings.**

10. Optional -- If there are any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied, please describe them here.

We took the opportunity during Sunshine Week to provide an agency-wide message via internal broadcast, webpage banner, and email message from the agency Chief FOIA Officer to draw attention to the importance of openness in government.

Section II: Steps Taken to Ensure that Your Agency Has an Effective System in Place for Responding to Requests

The DOJ's FOIA Guidelines emphasize that “[a]pplication of the proper disclosure standard is only one part of ensuring transparency. Open government requires not just a presumption of disclosure, but also an effective system for responding to FOIA requests.” It is essential that agencies effectively manage their FOIA program.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the management of your FOIA program is effective and efficient. You should also include any additional information that describes your agency’s efforts in this area.

1. For Fiscal Year 2020, what was the average number of days your agency reported for adjudicating requests for expedited processing? Please see Section VIII.A of your agency's Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report.

The average number of days to adjudicate any requests for expedited processing is 4.

2. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, according to Section VII.A of your agency’s Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

N/A

3. During the reporting period, did your agency conduct a self-assessment of its FOIA program? If so, please describe the methods used, such as reviewing Annual Report data, using active workflows and track management, reviewing and updating processing procedures, etc.

Note: In September 2017, OIP released a FOIA Self-Assessment Toolkit as a resource for agencies conducting a self-assessment of their FOIA program. The Toolkit is available on OIP’s website for all agencies to use.

Yes, we conducted a self-assessment. We used the data from our 2019 Annual Report and modified some case processing procedures in order to move cases more efficiently through the review process. We also used raw data to identify the training needs and addressed them accordingly.

4. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Having SOPs can improve the consistency and quality of an agency's FOIA process. In addition, describing the agency's standard practices for handling FOIA requests on agency FOIA websites can help requesters better understand how their request will be handled.

Does your agency have SOPs that outline general processes for handling FOIA requests and appeals?

Yes

If not, does your agency have plans to create FOIA SOPs?

N/A

If yes, how often are they reviewed / updated to account for changes in law, best practices, and technology?

We review the SOPs several time per year and they are updated when we have made changes to improve our practices.

In addition to having SOPs, does your agency post or otherwise describe your standard processes for handling requests on your website?

Yes

5. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires additional notification to requesters about the services provided by the agency's FOIA Public Liaison. Please provide an estimate of the number of times requesters sought assistance from your agency's FOIA Public Liaison during FY 202020 (please provide a total number or estimate of the number).

We received 7,617 emails to our FOIA Public Liaison mailbox and about 1,200 phone calls.

6. Does your agency frequently receive common categories of first-party requests? If so, please describe the types of requests and if your agency has explored establishing alternative means of access to those records outside of the FOIA process.

We receive numerous first-party requests for copies of their original Application for a Social Security card, information from their claim files, and earnings histories. A different division handles these requests to allow FOIA staff to focus on complex FOIA requests. Recently, SSA made earnings records available to first-party requesters via *my Social Security* account.

7. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 required all agencies to update their FOIA regulations within 180 days. Has your agency updated its FOIA regulations in accordance

with the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016? If not, what is your agency's plan to update the regulations?

We have drafted updated FOIA regulations and submitted them for agency approval. They will be posted once approval is received.

8. Please explain how your agency worked to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on FOIA processing. Examples could include, but are not limited to: altering workflows, implementing new technology, providing notices and instructions or otherwise communicating directly with requesters.

- **We added language to both SSA and FOIA public facing websites that explain some delays in handling mail due to the building closures.**
- **We modified our workflow concerning our communication with requesters during the pandemic. Specifically, we followed up with them via email and phone calls if we did not receive a response from them before the due date. We did this as a courtesy because some requesters may have responded via regular mail.**
- **We provided printer/scanners to select employees who volunteered to handle mail at their alternative duty stations. We also provided postage to these employees so they were able to mail the responsive records to the requesters when electronic transmission was not an option.**
- **SSA also issued softphones to employees and installed softphone related software. This technology allows the FOIA staff to contact the requesters from an authorized U.S government telephone number. When the FOIA staff contacted the requesters from an authorized phone number, it immediately improved the trust and boosted SSA's credibility.**

9. Optional - Please describe:

the best practices used to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively any challenges your agency faces in this area.

Best Practices

We use a multiple track system so that simple and complex cases are split amongst appropriate FOIA analysts in a quick, but balanced way. This specialized case assignment is based on analysts' expertise to reduce the learning curve, duplicate work and processing time.

We utilized the agency's Skills Connect program, which provides highly motivated part-time detailees from other components to assist with the FOIA workload and projects remotely.

We hold regular meetings with the FOIA team to discuss any issues or lesson learned from processing the FOIA requests. Such meetings are designed to head off any processing problems and share best proven practices.

We continue to use FOIAonline to facilitate our search efforts with responsive components, communication with the requesters and uploading and transmitting documents.

We also have continued the incoming case review process to catch and eliminate duplicate cases before they are entered into the system. We are also able to better identify items mis-categorized as FOIA requests by the requesters, such as first-party requests.

We modified the way we monitor our FOIA Public Liaison mailbox by clearly marking which emails concerned the Privacy Act (PA). Such marking allows the PA Division to quickly identify the PA requests and handle them appropriately. This modification frees up the FOIA team and allows more time to focus on the FOIA work.

Challenges

As a result of COVID-19, office buildings were closed and serviced by a limited number of personnel. This, in turn, resulted in initial delays of logging and processing paper requests received by mail. Further, agency business process (BP) requires the processing of personal checks and money orders on-site using a secure room and secure financial processing program and server. The combination of receiving these requests by physical mail, together with the associated check / money order BP, renders this workload non-portable. As such, the resumption and completion of this workload is dependent on a limited number of employees who are authorized to enter the office buildings on a limited basis later in the year.

One challenge we faced this year was experienced by all federal agencies using the FOIAonline program. Multiple updates and system slowness caused work stoppage completely for several days and severely limited the system functionality on several occasions. Such system issues, completely outside SSA control, led to longer processing time.

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

The Department of Justice has long focused on the need for agencies to work proactively to post information online without waiting for individual requests to be received.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to increase the amount of material that is available on your agency websites. In addition to the questions below, you should also describe any additional steps taken by your agency to make and improve proactive disclosures of information.

1. Provide examples of material that your agency has proactively disclosed during the past reporting year, including records that have been requested and released three or more times in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)(D). Please include links to these materials as well.

The FOIA staff released 54 documents that are available in SSA’s FOIA Reading Room, under proactive disclosures (<https://www.ssa.gov/foia/readingroom.html>). The releases included hearing statistics, training materials, representative payee information, records management self-assessments, and Consultative Examiner oversight reports. In addition, SSA proactively posts data related to Social Security Disability applications.

2. Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useful to the public, especially to the community of individuals who regularly access your agency’s website?

Yes.

3. If yes, please provide examples of such improvements. In particular, please describe steps your agency is taking to post information in open, machine-readable, and machine-actionable formats, to the extent feasible. If not posting in open formats, please explain why and note any challenges.

We simplified document names so it is clear what documents are easily searchable once posted. We began an ongoing project in 2017 to update our FOIA website to make it more organized and user friendly. We also reviewed the documents to verify if they were Section 508 compliant.

Most of our documents are posted as searchable pdfs.

4. Optional - Please describe:

- Best practices used to improve proactive disclosures
- Any challenges your agency faces in this area.

As stated above, we use the FOIAonline Released Document Report to identify documents that are of public interest and should be included in the Reading Room. In addition, analysts recommend documents that are good candidates for proactive disclosure.

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

A key component of FOIA administration is using technology to make information more accessible. In addition to using the internet to make proactive disclosures, agencies should also be exploring ways to utilize technology in responding to requests.

Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is utilizing technology to improve its FOIA administration and the public's access to information. You should also include any additional information that that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. Please briefly describe the types of technology your agency uses to support your FOIA program. In addition, please highlight if your agency leveraging or exploring any new technology you have not previously reported. If so, please describe the type of technology.

- **We use FOIAonline to process our FOIA cases. FOIAonline is an encrypted, secure system that allows us to provide responses to requesters within the portal. FOIAonline also allows us to gather responsive records quickly from other components.**
- **We use the eDiscovery tool Veritas to perform keyword searches to identify responsive records in requests for email communications. This eliminates the need for analysts to review emails that are not responsive. As such, the utilization of Veritas reduces processing time.**
- **We created a new process to convert any faxes received by our fax machine to emails and, therefore, available to FOIA professionals while the office buildings are closed.**

2. OIP issued guidance in 2017 encouraging agencies to regularly review their FOIA websites to ensure that they contain essential resources and are informative and user-friendly. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA website(s) during the reporting period to ensure it addresses the elements noted in the guidance?

Yes

3. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2020?

Yes

4. If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports, with information appearing on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2021.

N/A

5. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires all agencies to post the raw statistical data used to compile their Annual FOIA Reports. Please provide the link

to this posting for your agency's Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report.

<https://www.ssa.gov/foia/annualreports.html>

6. Optional - Please describe:

- Best practices used in greater utilizing technology
- Any challenges your agency faces in that area

We have worked with our Information Technology staff to improve the quality of keyword searches in Veritas in response to requests for emails. The utilization of Genband and softphone allows us to contact the requesters from an US Government phone number. We have also leveraged the functionality in FOIAonline to communicate with the requesters within the portal during the pandemic. Collectively these items allow us to process cases more efficiently.

Section V: Steps Taken to Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests and Reducing Backlogs

The Department of Justice has emphasized the importance of improving timeliness in responding to requests. This section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report addresses both time limits and backlog reduction. Backlog reduction is measured both in terms of numbers of backlogged requests or appeals and by looking at whether agencies closed their ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations.

For the figures required in this Section, please use the numbers contained in the specified sections of your agency's 2019 and 2020 Annual FOIA Reports.

A. Simple Track:

Section VII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "FOIA Requests – Response Time for All Processed Requests," includes figures that show your agency's average response times for processed requests. For agencies utilizing a multi-track system to process requests, there is a category for "simple" requests, which are those requests that are placed in the agency's fastest (non-expedited) track, based on the low volume and/or simplicity of the records requested.

1. Does your agency utilize a separate track for simple requests?

Yes

2. If your agency uses a separate track for simple requests, according to Annual FOIA Report section VII.A, was the agency overall average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer in Fiscal Year 2020?

Yes

3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020 that were placed in your simple track. Please use the following calculation based on the data from your Annual FOIA Report (processed simple requests from Section VII.C) divided by (requests processed from Section V.A. x100)

93.04%

4. If your agency does not track simple requests separately, was the average number of days to process all non-expedited requests twenty working days or fewer?

N/A

B. Backlogs:

Section XII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "Backlogs of FOIA Requests and Administrative Appeals" shows the numbers of any backlogged requests or appeals from the fiscal year. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

Backlogged Requests

5. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2020, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.A, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2019?

No

6. If not, according to Annual FOIA Report Section V.A, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2020 than it did in Fiscal Year 2019?

No

7. If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2020, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

- An increase in the number of incoming requests
 - A loss of staff
 - An increase in the complexity of the requests received. If possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the requests contributing to your backlog increase.
 - Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.
- **As a result of COVID-19, the majority of office buildings were closed and serviced by a limited number of personnel. This, in turn, resulted initial delays of logging and processing paper requests received by mail. Further, agency business process (BP) requires the processing of personal checks and money orders on-site using a secure room and secure financial processing program and server. The combination of receiving these requests by physical mail, together with the associated check / money order BP renders this workload non-portable. As such, the resumption and completion of this workload is dependent on a limited number of employees who are authorized to re-enter the office buildings on a limited basis later in the year.**

8. If you had a request backlog please report the percentage of requests that make up the backlog out of the total number of requests received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged requests from Section XII.A) divided by (requests received from Section V.A) x 100. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with “N/A.”

SSA’s backlog percentage for Fiscal Year 2020 is 17.65%.

Backlogged Appeals

9. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2020, according to Section XI.A of the Annual FOIA Report, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2019?

Yes

10. If not, according to section VI.A of the Annual FOIA Report, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2020 than it did during Fiscal year 2019?

N/A

11. If your agency’s appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2020, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

- An increase in the number of incoming appeals
- A loss of staff

- An increase in the complexity of the requests received. If possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase.
- Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.

N/A

12. If you had an appeal backlog please report the percentage of appeals that make up the backlog out of the total number of appeals received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged appeals from Section XII.A) divided by (appeals received from Section VI.A) x100. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2019 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

SSA's appeal backlog percentage for fiscal year 2020 is 1.68%.

C. Backlog Reduction Plans:

13. In the 2020 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2019 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did you agency implement a backlog reduction plan last year? If so, describe your agency's efforts in implementing this plan and note if your agency was able to achieve backlog reduction in Fiscal Year 2020?

N/A

14. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2020, please explain your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2021?

A limited number of employees have been authorized to enter the office buildings on a limited basis. These employees are diligently working to mitigate the backlogged requests and close all of them in FY2021. In addition, we hired additional staff to process the backlogged cases. The agency also adjusted team lead workloads to assist in mitigating the backlog of requests.

D. Status of Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations:

Section VII.E, entitled "Pending Requests – Ten Oldest Pending Requests," Section VI.C(5), entitled "Ten Oldest Pending Administrative Appeals," and Section XII.C, entitled "Consultations on FOIA Requests – Ten Oldest Consultations Received from Other Agencies and Pending at Your Agency," show the ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

OLDEST REQUESTS

15. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported in Section VII.E of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes

16. If no, please provide the number of these requests your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.E of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

N/A

17. Beyond work on the ten oldest requests, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending requests.

We utilized the agency's Skills Connect program to solicit detailees to assist with the simple cases, freeing up the experienced analysts to work on their oldest complex and appeal cases.

The agency also hired some additional employees to work on the FOIA caseload.

TEN OLDEST APPEALS

18. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes

19. If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

N/A

20. Beyond work on the 10 oldest appeals, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending appeals.

We utilized the agency's Skills Connect program to solicit detailees to assist with the simple cases, freeing up the experienced analysts to work on their oldest complex and appeal cases.

The agency also hired some additional employees to work on the FOIA caseload.

TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS

21. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in Section XII.C of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

N/A

22. If no, please provide the number of these consultations your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section XII.C of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

N/A

E. Additional Information on Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations & Plans:

23. Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2019.

N/A

24. If your agency was unable to close any of its ten oldest requests because you were waiting to hear back from other agencies on consultations you sent, please provide the date the request was initially received by your agency, the date when your agency sent the consultation, and the date when you last contacted the agency where the consultation was pending.

N/A

25. If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, or consultations, please provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those “ten oldest” requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2021.

N/A

F. Success Stories

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2020 to increase transparency and improve FOIA administration, please briefly describe here at least one success story that you would like to highlight as emblematic of your agency’s efforts. The success story can come from any one of the five key areas, but should not be something you have reported in a prior year. As noted above, OIP will highlight these agency success stories during Sunshine Week. To facilitate this process, all agencies should use bullets to describe their success story and limit their text to a half page. The success story is designed to be a quick summary of key achievements. A complete description of all your efforts will be contained in the body of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

This year, we implemented FOIAonline Phase II to onboard the remaining SSA employees to the FOIAonline system and decommissioned eFOIA (our old processing system). This transfer improved our process since FOIAonline allows the requesters to pay via pay.gov and collects better management information data for us to use to improve case processing, proactive disclosure and reporting responsibilities. In addition, since FOIAonline is an encrypted system, it allows the requesters to pick up responsive documents and dispositions directly within the portal, lessening our reliance on mailed documents. As part of this transfer, we migrated all the historical data from eFOIA to the FOIAonline database. This change facilitates searching for closed requests since now we only need to search one system, not two.