2022 CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

Photo of Bears by Lisa Hupp, Fish & Wildlife Service.

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The Department of the Interior 2022 Chief FOIA Officer Report

Section I: Steps Taken to Apply a Presumption of Openness

A. *FOIA Leadership*

1. *The FOIA requires each agency to designate a Chief FOIA Officer who is a senior official at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level. See 5 U.S.C. §552(j)(1) (2018). Is your agency's Chief FOIA Officer at this level?*

    Yes.

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

    Robert T. Anderson, Solicitor.

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.*

    The Departmental FOIA Office (DFO) provided mandatory FOIA training to all incoming political staff, created a new intranet site for all employees that provides links to training opportunities available from the Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Information Policy (OIP), and distributed notifications about OIP training to FOIA processors via email. In January 2022, the DFO also hired a Training Program Manager, who will evaluate the Department's FOIA training needs, as well as design and implement a comprehensive training plan.

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 or conducted and the topics covered.*

    Specific training attended by DOI FOIA professionals include:

- Training provided by the OIP to include: FOIA Annual Report and Quarterly Report Refresher; Chief FOIA Officer Report Refresher; Intro to the FOIA; FOIA Litigation Seminar; Processing from Start to Finish; Exemption 1 and Exemption 7; Exemption 4 and Exemption 5; Procedural Requirement and Fees; Privacy Considerations; and Continuing FOIA Education.
- The Graduate School's Virtual Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts.
- The American Society for Access Professionals' Annual National Training Conference.

- The DFO and Bureau FOIA Officers also provided internal training on procedural requirements and Exemptions 4, 5, 6, and 7.

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

    At least 88%.

7. *OIP has directed agencies to "take steps to ensure that all of their FOIA professionals attend substantive FOIA training at least once throughout the 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.*

    Not applicable.

8. *Did the personnel at your agency who have FOIA responsibilities attend training in federal records management during this reporting period?*

    Yes.

C. *Other Initiatives*

9. *Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue, outside of the standard request process, 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.*

    In addition to engaging in ongoing outreach and dialogue with the requester community during the processing of requests and the appeal process, the Department also

    regularly interacts with the requester community by participating in efforts related to DOJ's National FOIA Portal, assisting the Office of Government Information Services' (OGIS) ombudsman efforts related to the Department, attending meetings of the Chief FOIA Officers' Council (CFOC), and serving on the CFOC's Technology Committee and Committee on Cross-Agency Collaboration & Innovation.

10. *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 and if senior leaders at your agency received a briefing on your agency's FOIA resources, obligations and expectations during the FOIA process.*

    In 2021, the Director of the DFO continued to engage in regular communications with bureau leadership to help ensure they are fully apprised of the status of their organizations' FOIA operations, provide meaningful support to their FOIA offices, and hold employees across their organizations accountable for compliance with the FOIA.

The DFO also launched a new FOIA intranet site accessible to all Department employees for FOIA Officers and staff with easy-to-use training materials for the new FOIA request tracking and case management system, as well as reference materials on a range of FOIA issues, policies, and best practices.

As referenced above, the DFO provided incoming political staff with a FOIA-specific briefing concerning their legal obligations under FOIA. This training provided political staff with the practical knowledge needed to effectively and timely respond to search requests from Department's FOIA offices. The briefing materials were also provided to the Bureau FOIA Officers to encourage the same level of onboarding training be provided to other new employees within bureaus and offices.

In addition, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior issued a memorandum to senior leadership specifically on the importance of the FOIA, as further described in our Success Story.

11. *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 continued our training efforts to encourage increased utilization by FOIA personnel of the improved FOIA tracking and case management tool we launched in FY2020 to promote greater availability of information released to the public. These efforts are designed to increase compliance with FOIA's statutory requirements of transparency, accountability, and prompt productions.

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

A. *Processing Procedures*

1. *For FY 2021, 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 2021 Annual FOIA Report.*

39 days.

2. *If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, according to Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2021 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.*

During the second half of FY 2021, the DFO hired a FOIA Compliance Officer, whose has begun to monitor, investigate, and address exactly these sorts of issues. The DFO also discussed this issue during monthly meetings with the Bureau FOIA Officers. The Compliance Officer is collaborating with the Bureau FOIA Officers to provide more frequent monitoring of expedited processing requests and expects to see improvements in FY 2022.

3. *The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 required all agencies to update their FOIA regulations within 180 days. In 2016, OIP issued Guidance for Agency FOIA Regulations and the*

accompanying Template for Agency FOIA Regulations to assist agencies in updating their regulations in accordance with the statute. 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 your regulations?

Yes.

B. Requester Services

4. *Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) generally document your agency's internal processes for administering the FOIA beyond your FOIA regulations and FOIA Reference Guide. As noted in OIP's guidance, having SOPs can improve the consistency and quality of an agency's FOIA process. SOPs can also serve as a significant resource for incoming FOIA professionals and a way to preserve much of the agency's institutional knowledge on administering the FOIA from how to handle requests from start-to-finish, to identifying and making proactive disclosures, to maintaining a FOIA website. Does your agency have up-to-date internal SOPs for your FOIA administration?*

Yes.

5. *If not, please provide a timeline for when your agency plans to develop or update its SOPs.*

Not applicable.

6. *Has your agency established alternative means of access to first-party requested records outside of the FOIA process?*

No.

7. *If yes, please provide examples. If no, please explain if such opportunities exist at your agency and whether there are any challenges in establishing alternative means of access.*

Opportunities exist at the Department to establish alternative means for accessing first-party records, such as accident reports generated by the bureaus that have law enforcement programs, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Establishing an alternative means of access for these records is challenging, given the size and decentralized nature of the programs. Nevertheless, this is an area that is ripe for further exploration and the Department looks forward to considering this further in the coming years.

8. *Did your agency conduct a self-assessment of its FOIA administration during the reporting period? If so, please describe the self-assessment methods used, such as analyzing Annual Report or raw data, using active workflows and track management, reviewing and updating processing procedures, etc. In addition, please specifically highlight any data analysis methods or technologies used to assess your agency's FOIA program.*

The Department regularly conducts self-assessments of the Department's FOIA program by reviewing Annual Report data, conducting audits of each bureau's tracking system entries at least bi-annually, and reviewing and updating processing procedures. As noted

above, the DFO also hired a FOIA Compliance Officer who will engage in such assessments on a more-frequent basis.

9. *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 2021 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number)*

   We estimate requesters sought assistance from the FOIA Public Liaison approximately 40 times during FY 2021, although such requests for assistance are not always specifically framed as seeking assistance from the FOIA Public Liaison in that capacity.

10. *Has your agency reviewed its FOIA-related staffing capabilities to identify resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands?*

    The DFO conducted a comprehensive review of the FOIA processing offices in two of the Department's components. These reviews evaluated the current state of the components' FOIA operations, including staffing capabilities made data-driven improvement recommendations. The DFO is also providing ongoing operational support to implement the recommendations.

11. *Optional--Please describe:*

    - *Best practices used to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively*
    - *Any challenges your agency faces in this area.*

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

A. Posting Material

1. *Please describe what steps your agency takes to identify, track, and post (a)(2) proactive disclosures.*

   - In FY2020, the Department modernized its tracking and case management system. Department FOIA processors now have the ability to more easily post responsive documents.
   - The Open Data, Design, and Development (ODDD) team within the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR) manages their public websites. The team follows user-centered design and development practices to identify the public need for data and information, conducts usability testing, and gathers information from customers about needs for data and information. The ODDD team also reviews FOIA and other agency data requests to identify additional categories and types of information to consider for inclusion on ONRR websites.

2. *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 Department proactively disclosed many types of materials this past reporting year. For example:

- The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the NPS proactively disclosed records related to the May and June 2020 events at Lafayette Square to include the Review of U.S. Park Police Actions at Lafayette Park. https://www.doioig.gov/complaints-requests/foia/electronic-reading-room and https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/foia/foia-frd.htm
- The BLM's Automated Fluid Minerals Support System Reports are used to track oil and gas information on public and Indian land. It contains data concerning lease and agreement ownership; well identification; location and history, including casing information; geologic formations; resource protection; production; and operator compliance. https://reports.blm.gov/reports/AFMSS

3. *Does your agency disseminate common types of material outside of FOIA, including in online databases where the public may access them? If yes, please provide examples and, if applicable, statutory authority.*

   The Department disseminated common types of material outside of FOIA. For example:

- The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) launched a new website dedicated to solving missing and murdered cases in Indian Country. The tool draws attention to unresolved cases involving indigenous persons that the BIA, Office of Justice Services, Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) is working on and invites the public to help law enforcement solve those cases. The new site provides detailed case information that can be easily shared, and three pathways to submit important tips and other case information that may help investigators with the detection or investigation of an offense committed in Indian Country. The site also contains information regarding how to submit tips or case information that may help investigators. This is an important new resource that connects those who might have case information with the investigating agency and agent -- speeding feedback to address the legitimate concerns of our Native communities. https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu
- The BLM developed the Wild Horse and Burro Online Corral to provide another resource for the public to adopt or purchase a wild horse or burro. The Online Corral features a streamlined interface that enables users to more easily find a wild horse or burro and allows users to submit and track the status of their application directly through the website. https://wildhorsesonline.blm.gov/
- The FWS Environmental Conservation Online System includes a variety of reports related to FWS Threatened and Endangered Species. The system includes Conservation Plans, the Wildlife & Environmental Contents Mapper, and Species Reports. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/
- The NPS manages the Integrated Resource Management Applications (IRMA) Portal to provide easy access to NPS applications that manage and deliver resource information to parks, partners, and the public. IRMA includes: a data store that contains documents and datasets about natural and cultural resources in the parks; the Aquarius Web Data Portal where users can search and view continuous water quality and quantity data from NPS monitoring locations; STATS (Park Visitor Use Statistics) which contains comprehensive graphs, reports, and statistics on historic, current, or forecasted park visitor use; and NPSpecies which contains species lists with the occurrence and status of species in more than 300 NPS national parks. https://irma.nps.gov/Portal/

- The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) developed a database to help make more transparent the process of how it carries out the requirements of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act in cooperation with States and Tribes to ensure that coal mines are operated in a manner that protects citizens and the environment during mining and assures that the land is restored to beneficial use following mining, and to mitigate the effects of past mining. The database provides current or former oversight documents for states and tribes by evaluation year. https://www.odocs.osmre.gov/

4. *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.

5. *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.*

   The Department is committed to making its information and communication technology accessible to individuals with disabilities by meeting the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. For example, the ONRR's ODDD team has taken the initiative to ensure Section 508 compliance for more than 3,000 documents posted on onrr.gov.

B. *Other Initiatives*

6. *Does your proactive disclosure process or system involve any collaboration with agency staff outside the FOIA office? If so, describe this interaction.*

   As described above, the ODDD team within ONRR reviews FOIA and other agency data requests to identify additional categories and types of information to consider for inclusion on ONRR websites.

7. *Optional --Please describe:*

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

   The Department emphasizes the importance of proactive disclosures in formal and

   informal training, including at monthly FOIA Officer meetings. We understand increased proactive disclosures lead to increased transparency, although it is challenging to make proactive disclosure when the FOIA staff (who would typically be

   making the proactive disclosures) are focusing on responding to increasing backlogs,

   requests, and/or litigation. We also note that the competing obligations of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and FOIA are a continued unresolved challenge.

<u>Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology</u>

A. *Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology*

1. *Has your agency reviewed its FOIA-related technological capabilities to identify resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands?*

    The Department recently hired a FOIA Technology Program Manager whose responsibilities include leading technical planning and execution efforts within the DOI FOIA community. The incumbent has begun working closely with the Bureau FOIA Officers to facilitate information management and technology initiatives and has also taken the lead role for the Department's FOIA Technology Working Group. The DFO and FOIA professionals from multiple bureaus also participate on a Department team responsible for procuring a document review platform.

2. *Please briefly describe any new types of technology your agency began using during the reporting period to support your FOIA program.*

    The Department uses electronic means of search, redaction, and tracking to support its FOIA program. Particularly, this year the Department began to utilize features more fully in its electronic case management and tracking system to include the posting of publicly released documents.

3. *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.

4. *Did all four of your agency's quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2021 appear on your agency's website and on FOIA.gov?*

    Yes.

5. *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 FY 2022.*

    Not applicable.

6. *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 2020 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2021 Annual FOIA Report.*

    https://www.doi.gov/foia/DOI-FOIA-Annual-Reports

B. *Other Initiatives*

7. *Optional --Please describe:*

- *Best practices used in greater utilizing technology*
- *Any challenges your agency faces in this area.*

   Given that our current case management and tracking system has announced it will be sunsetting in FY23, we are exploring new systems, as well as other best practices for greater utilization of technology such as conducting centralized searches (where appropriate) and utilizing document review platforms. We have expanded our membership in the CFOC's Technology Committee to include our new Compliance Officer and Technology Program Manager to ensure we are up to date on government-wide best practices. We also continued our internal Departmental subcommittee on FOIA and technology. The decentralized nature of the Department's Information Technology program can present challenges, as technology available for use for one bureau may not be available or supported in another, and we are striving to address those challenges.

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

A. **Simple Track**

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 2021?*

   No. (92.16 days)

3. *Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2021 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.1) divided by (requests processed from Section V.A.) x 100.*

   56%

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?*

   Not applicable.

B. **Backlogs – Requests**

5. *If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2021, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.2, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2020.*

   No.

6. *If not, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.1, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2021 than it did during Fiscal Year 2020?*

    No.

7. *If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2021, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to 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 types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase.*
    - *Impact of COVID-19 and workplace and safety precautions.*
    - *Any other reasons –please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.*

    Our backlog increased in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, in part due to the continued impact of past sustained increases in the volume and complexity of incoming requests. Specifically, from FY 2016 to FY 2019, incoming FOIA requests to the Department increased nearly 24 percent (from 6,428 to over 7,970). Litigation also increased during that time period, as discussed in past reports, particularly over agency non-response to initial FOIA requests. This created backlogs in many bureaus that are still being worked through. Additionally, incoming requests also increased sharply for some of the Department's components. For example, the number of incoming requests increased approximately 38 percent for the NPS and 25 percent for the BLM in FY 2021 as compared to the previous fiscal year, although both Bureaus also had an increase the number of processed requests.

    We have also been affected by attrition of staff and FOIA Officers. Additionally, many FOIA processors work on FOIA matters only as a collateral duty, which has the effect of FOIA work being a lower priority.

    A few of our bureaus experienced delays in processing requests because facilities where hardcopy records are stored were closed due to the impacts of COVID-19, but this was not a major source of our backlog issues.

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 2021. 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. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."*

    71%

C. Backlogs – Appeals

9. *If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2021, according to Section XII.E.2 of the Annual FOIA Report, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2020?*

    Yes.

10. *If not, according to section XII.E.1 of the Annual FOIA Report, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2021 than it did during Fiscal Year 2020?*

    Not applicable.

11. *If your agency's appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2021, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to 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.*
    - *Impact of COVID-19 and workplace and safety precautions.*
    - *Any other reasons –please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.*

    Not applicable.

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 2021. 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) x 100. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2021 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."*

    131%

D. Backlog Reduction Plans

13. *In the 2021 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2020 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did your 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 2021?*

    The Department implemented a backlog reduction plan last year to include utilizing the FOIA Support Team (FST) in the DFO to assist bureaus with the greatest need of backlog assistance. Although the Department was not able to achieve an overall backlog reduction in FY 2021, the Office of the Secretary FOIA Office (OS FOIA) was able to reduce its backlog, with the help of the FST, as further described in our Success Story. Additionally, the DFO is seeking to ensure leadership attention throughout the bureaus on this important issue.

14. *If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2021, please explain your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2022. In particular, please also detail how your agency developed and plans to execute your backlog reduction plans.*

- The Bureaus are working toward addressing the underlying reasons for their backlogs, for example:
    - The NPS awarded an IDIQ contract at the end of FY 2021 to provide options for regional and park offices to obtain additional contractor support for FOIA processing to assist with the increases in incoming requests and backlog reduction.
    - The FWS included backlog reduction requirements in the FOIA processor employee performance appraisals.
- In addition, it has been just over two years since the establishment of the DFO and more than a year since our migration to FOIAonline. We are hopeful these improvements, the increased staffing for the DFO discussed above, and other upcoming changes to the Department's FOIA structure and assessments of current operations will increase processing capacity and reduce the backlog in the long-term.

E. 10 Oldest Requests

15. *In Fiscal Year 2021, did your agency close the ten oldest pending perfected requests that were reported in Section VII.E. of your Fiscal Year 2020 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 2020 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.*

    Not applicable.

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

    Each bureau was encouraged to close their 10 oldest requests, even if those requests were not on the list of the Department's 10 oldest.

F. 10 Oldest Appeals

18. *In Fiscal Year 2021, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in Section VI.C.5 of your Fiscal Year 2020 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 VI.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.*

    Not Applicable.

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

Ongoing adjudication of open appeals.

G. *10 Oldest Consultations*

21. *In Fiscal Year 2021, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report?*

Yes.

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 2020 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.*

Not applicable.

H. *Additional Information on 10 Oldest*

23. *Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2020.*

Not applicable.

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.*

Not applicable.

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 2022.*

Not applicable.

I. *Success Story*

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2021 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 that you have reported in a prior year. As noted above, these agency success stories will be highlighted during Sunshine Week by OIP. 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.

- The Secretary of the Department of the Interior issued a memorandum to senior leadership specifically on the underscoring the importance of the FOIA, her support for

the work of the DFO, and her expectation that senior leaders in the Department make effective FOIA operations a management priority. Her memorandum included a FOIA tips one-pager developed by the DFO as an easy reference tool for senior leaders to help them meet their legal obligations under the FOIA.

- The FST has been providing targeted operational support for the OS FOIA Office to address a sizable backlog. The FST uses best practices, careful analysis, and technology to strategically and effectively process backlogged requests in compliance with the law and Department policies. For FY 2021, the OS FOIA Office set and was able to successfully achieve a 20 percent backlog reduction goal that would not have been realized without the assistance of the FST.