

# 2022 CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Volume Agencies Receiving More Than 50 Requests in FY20

### **Section 1: 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 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.

- *Michael Anthony, Chief Information Officer*

#### **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.

- *Agency training has previously been provided to agency personnel. The training is available for review to all employees. Currently the training is being updated to include FAQ's and process changes. Department of Justice and AINS training is also made available to our FOIA professionals.*

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.

- *Department of Justice (Annual Reporting requirements)*
- *AINS FOIAXpress User Conference (FOIA Process/FOIA Case Laws)*

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.

- *100% of staff within the NTSB FOIA Office*

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.

- *N/A*

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

- *Yes, members of the NTSB FOIA Office attended training for records management*

### **C. Outreach**

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.

- *No*

### **D. Other Initiatives**

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?
  - *FOIA training is provided virtually to new employees.*
  - *Emails are sent to staff describing the FOIA request and procedures to follow to send responsive documents to the FOIA office.*

- *Updates are provided to Directors concerning outstanding FOIA requests for their office.*
- *Senior leaders and Directors receive briefings on the responsiveness of their staff and the type of resources or efforts that would aid in enhancing the FOIA program.*
- *Individual FOIA guidance is provided as needed.*

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.

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

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 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.

- 2.67

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.

- N/A

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

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.

- *N/A*

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.

- *There are no established alternative means of access to first party requesters.*

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.

- *Yes, the Annual Report and FOIA software is used for the self-assessment of the FOIA program. As needed, processes to the FOIA program are updated and information updated for FOIA training.*

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).

- *0*

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

- *Yes*

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.

- *IT staff monitor the electronic system and meet with FOIA staff if anomalies occur.*
- *Established liaison with the Office of General Counsel for legal guidance and interpretation questions*
- *Challenges include limited contact with staff and paper documents during this max telework period. Agency utilizes contract support, which has some limitations on the scope of work performed. Additional FTE that could perform all tasks would be beneficial*

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

- NTSB monitors accident investigations and where safety recommendations are warranted and developed, these records are posted to the public website.
- Opinions and orders are written and when completed these records are posted to the public website.
- Recent agency products, such as an investigations manual, with significant interest to the public are published on the FOIA Reading Room.

2. Provide examples of any 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.

- Accident Investigation Records:  
<https://data.nts.gov/Docket/Forms/searchdocket>
- Published Reports:  
<https://www.nts.gov/publications/Pages/default.aspx>
- [FOIA Reading Room](#)

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.

- *Yes*

- *The NTSB provides transportation accident dockets which contain factual reports, and the evidence investigators consider in developing a probable cause. This is available in a search tool that the public can access.*
- *The NTSB developed a Case Analysis and Reporting Online (CAROL) query tool, which allows individuals to make comprehensive searches of surface modal accident data, aviation accident data and safety recommendation data.*
- *The NTSB provides Accident Reports as one of the main products of an NTSB investigation. Reports provide details about the accident, analysis of the factual data, conclusions and the probable cause of the accident, and the related safety recommendations.*
- *The NTSB provides a public website with information about the agency, some of its policies, and its key mission work.*

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 NTSB developed a Case Analysis and Reporting Online (CAROL) query tool, which allows individuals to make comprehensive searches of surface modal accident data, aviation accident data and safety recommendation data: <https://data.nts.gov/carol-main-public/basic-search> 4. The CAROL enables users to download data in JSON and CSV format both are open, machine-readable, and machine-actionable formats.*
- *NTSB also provides datasets containing all aviation investigation data from 1983 to the present, updated monthly in Microsoft Access format.*

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

- *Yes*
- *OCIO on management and dissemination of data on the website*
- *SRC Digital Services Division on management and distribution of the content on the website*

Optional -- Please describe:

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

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

- *Yes*

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

- *National FOIA Portal*

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 Fiscal Year 2022.

- *N/A*

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.

- [FY 2020 Annual FOIA Report Raw Data](#)
- [http://www.nts.gov/about/foia/Pages/foia\\_reports.aspx](http://www.nts.gov/about/foia/Pages/foia_reports.aspx)

7. Optional -- Please describe:

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

### **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 FY 2020 and 2021 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 2021?

- *No*

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.

- *26%*

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

When answering these questions, please refer to your Fiscal Year 2021 Annual FOIA Report, Sections XII.D-E, which compare the numbers of requests and appeals received, processed, and backlogged between Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021.

### BACKLOGGED 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.
  - *Loss of FOIA Specialist due to a detail to a section outside the FOIA Office for 7+ months as well as the loss of one additional contractor for 8 months*
- 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.
  - *The review of responsive documents increased for complex requests; some searches produced up to 20,000 pages for review.*
- Impact of COVID-19 and workplace and safety precautions
  - *NTSB staff from other states mail responsive records to the FOIA Office. Due to the pandemic FOIA staff are MAX teleworking and alternative means are used to retrieve hard copies of those responsive records to scan for processing. Additionally, with the majority of staff teleworking, retrieval of in-office paper or non-electronic records is slowed.*
- Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.
  - *Training contractors in areas of the FOIA process (e.g., intake of requests, requesting documents from staff) decreases the time spent on known tasks, as well as requiring additional time of the FOIA Office trainers.*

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."

- 25%

## **BACKLOGGED 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?

- *N/A*

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?

- *N/A*

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.
- *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 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."

- *N/A*

## **C. 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?

- *N/A*

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.

- *N/A*

#### **D. Status of 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 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

#### **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.

- *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.

- *The ten oldest pending perfected requests were closed. Additionally, the FOIA Office prioritized the oldest requests during a regular review to determine what was needed for closure.*

#### **TEN 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?

- *N/A*

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.

- *N/A*

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

- *N/A*

### **TEN 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?

- *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 2020 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 2020.

- *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 2022.

- *N/A*

### **F. Success Stories**

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.

- Expanded use of FOIA points-of-contacts in agency offices to increase responses to search and production of record requests.
- FOIA open cases are at the lowest level of the past eight years due, in part, to a focus on the FOIA program from the agency's highest leadership to throughout the staff.