

2019 CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

CATHERINE ZALLER ROWLAND

Chief FOIA Officer
Associate Register of Copyrights and
Director of Public Information and Education
U.S. Copyright Office

The U.S. Copyright Office continues to operate an effective system for responding to FOIA requests by centralizing FOIA staff and database management, using tracking numbers, maintaining secure electronic files, and following appropriate retention policies. This system allows the Office to maintain regular operations and monitor requests to identify any “frequently requested records.” Two major administrative changes occurred during the reporting period. First, Office procedures were formalized through the implementation of a standard operating procedure across departments involved in the administration of FOIA. Second, a permanent Chief FOIA Officer was appointed in April. FOIA staff received training during the reporting period to maintain currency with administration of the law.

The Copyright Office saw an increase in timeliness and a reduction in FY17 backlogs. In FY18, the Office closed 8 of 9 requests that were pending at the end of FY17. The Office reduced average processing time for simple requests from 18 days in FY17 to 11 days in FY18. Finally, the Office improved statutory response time for simple requests. In FY17, 63% of requests were completed within statutory deadlines. In FY18, by contrast, 97% of requests were completed within 20 days.

The Office also experienced during the reporting period an increased number of records requiring consultation with other federal agencies. In these situations, the Office favored disclosing all other records on rolling basis, so as not to delay the majority of records from reaching requester while the consultation process was completed.

When responding to a FOIA request, the Office adheres to the presumption of openness when evaluating responsive documents. When preparing a record for release, the Office minimizes the number of redactions to eligible deliberative material or identifying information of a personal nature. In addition, to promote a spirit of cooperation, Office staff endeavor to provide direct lines of communication with requesters, grant fee and expediting requests whenever possible, and openly engage with requesters regardless of the purpose of the request. During the reporting period, the Office received a particularly time-sensitive request and worked expeditiously in order to satisfy the request on the same day the request was received.

As the *FOIA Guidelines* state, the responsibility for effective FOIA administration belongs to every agency employee, and is not merely a task assigned to an agency's FOIA staff. To respond to requests, the Office worked with staff across the agency to conduct thorough searches in response to requests from a number of departments. The Office also utilized centralized technology solutions to engage in searches that required a large number of custodians, complex search terms, and long time frames. The Office has made continuing efforts to increase proactive disclosures and enhance accessibility to records through online technology. During the reporting period, the Office launched a YouTube channel as a repository for recordings of symposia and roundtables held by the Office on policy matters. After finalizing the *Compendium of U.S. Copyright Office Practices (Third Edition)* update in September 2017, the Office expanded its prior version history so that changes could be easily accessed.



The Library of Congress
U.S. Copyright Office
101 Independence Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20559
www.copyright.gov