

**OFFICE OF NAVAJO AND HOPI INDIAN RELOCATION  
2020 CHIEF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT OFFICER'S REPORT  
MARCH 2020**

**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. Is your agency's Chief FOIA Officer at this level?

**ONHIR's Chief FOIA Officer is the Agency attorney who is a GS-15.**

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

**Lawrence A. Ruzow  
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**B. FOIA Training**

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

**No. USDOJ—OIP needs to keep in mind that ONHIR is a micro-agency with only 19 staff members**

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

**N/A**

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

**None**

6. 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.

**If FOIA Training is offered on-line or in Flagstaff, Arizona, then ONHIR's staff who provide FOIA services will attend such training.**

**C. Outreach**

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7. 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.

**Most of the FOIA requests received by ONHIR are requests for copies of Homesite Leases of persons whom ONHIR Relocated. ONHIR has been working to make sure such documents are available from the Navajo Nation (which actually issues such leases) or the Bureau of Indian Affairs Southwest Land Title and Records Office, which is supposed to record such leases.**

D. Other Initiatives

8. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under the FOIA.

**ONHIR staff with access to Homesite Leases, which are located at ONHIR, have been asked to provide such documents on request and without any required formalities to requesters.**

**ONHIR staff who interact with requesters are encouraged to have the requesters meet with the ONHIR FOIA staff so the requests can be expedited.**

9. 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.

**ONHIR has substantially expanded the materials available on the ONHIR website ([www.onhir.gov](http://www.onhir.gov)) so that more materials detailing ONHIR operations is readily available without the need for an FOIA request.**

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 2019, 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 2019 Annual FOIA Report.

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**No requests for expedited processing were received.**

2. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

**Not applicable.**

**ONHIR notes that most FOIA requests seek access to or information from closed ONHIR casefiles that, in preparation for ONHIR's closing are stored at the National Archives and Records Administration ("NARA") facility in Riverside, California. While NARA has been prompt in providing requested casefiles to ONHIR, the location of casefiles does add to the processing time of FOIA requests.**

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.

**No formal self-assessment took place, but maintaining a current spreadsheet for all requests has and had the effect of making sure that ONHIR responds promptly to requests.**

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.

4. 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 2019 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number).

**None**

5. Optional -- Please describe:

**N/A**

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

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.

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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 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.

**Please see “Transition Documents” section of ONHIR website [www.onhgir.gov](http://www.onhgir.gov)**

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?

**We are and will be responsive to any suggestions to improve our website either with respect to ease of access or content or any other suggestion.**

3. If yes, please provide examples of such improvements.

**No improvements have yet been suggested.**

4. Optional -- Please describe:

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

**Homesite leases—the most frequently requested document—contain Personally Identifiable Information concerning our client—the Lessee. It is not feasible to have these leases on our website.**

**In addition, the Navajo Nation, which issues most of the Homesite Leases, has committed to develop and online system so Tribal members can access their Homesite Leases in a secure manner.**

**The next most requested document are casefiles of Navajos (and some Hopis) who applied for Relocation Benefits. These contain substantial amounts of Personally Identifiable Information and often many pages of information are not feasible to post on our website. Virtually all of the requests for access to such files are made by the Navajo Nation’s Navajo—Hopi Legal Services Program and for decades we have made such files available to them to review in connection with representation of their clients.**

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

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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 describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. Is your agency leveraging or exploring any new technology to facilitate efficiency in its FOIA administration that you have not previously reported? If so, please describe the type of technology.

**We are not aware of any technology that would facilitate greater efficiency, but will be glad to evaluate any suggestions.**

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?

**ONHIR review its website regularly and has made significant improvements and changes in the last year.**

3. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2019?

**No.**

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 2020.

**We do not know why the then Chief FOIA Officer did not post quarterly information—perhaps because there were so few requests.**

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 2018 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report.

2019-- <https://www.onhir.gov/assets/documents/foia/archives/ONHIR-Foia-Annual-2019-Report.xml>

2018-- <https://www.onhir.gov/assets/documents/foia/archives/ONHIR-Foia-Annual-2018-Report.xml>

6. Optional -- Please describe:

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

**As noted, the most requested ONHIR data contains extensive PII and therefore not appropriate for posting on our website. Moreover, the most requested data exists only in paper files.**

**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 Annual FOIA Report and, when applicable, your agency's 2018 Annual FOIA Report.

**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?

**In FY 2019, all FOIA Requests were deemed "simple requests,"**

2. If your agency uses a separate track for simple requests, was the agency overall average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer in Fiscal Year 2019?

**Yes**

3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2019 that were placed in your simple track.

**100%**

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**

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**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 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019 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 2019, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2018?

**N/A**

6. If not, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2019 than it did during Fiscal Year 2018?

**No.**

7. If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2019, 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:

**N/A**

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.

Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.

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 2019. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."

**BACKLOGGED APPEALS**

9. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2019, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2018?

**N/A**



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10. If not, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2019 than it did during Fiscal Year 2018?

**N/A**

11. If your agency's appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2019, 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:

**N/A**

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.

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 2019. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2019 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

**C. Backlog Reduction Plans**

13. In the 2019 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2018 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 2019?

**N/A**

14. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2019, what is your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2020?

**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 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.



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**OLDEST REQUESTS**

15. In Fiscal Year 2019, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report?

**N/A**

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 2018 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.

**N/A**

**TEN OLDEST APPEALS**

18. In Fiscal Year 2019, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2018 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 VII.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer 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 2019, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report?

**N/A**

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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 2018 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer 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 2020.

**N/A**

**F. Success Stories**

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2019 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. 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.

**We have continued to work collaboratively with requesters and plan on continuing to do so.**

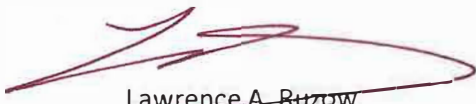
**The prior Chief FOIA Officer established a practice of meeting with requesters (especially non-lawyer requesters) in an effort to determine the purpose of their request and help them frame their request so the material disclosed would be helpful to them.**

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We have increased the information available on our website and consistent with Privacy Act Requirements and technological challenges from paper files will continue to do so.

We will welcome suggestions for improvement in our website and our FOIA program.

Dated: March 10, 2020



Lawrence A. Ruzow  
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Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation