



# Chief FOIA Officer Report 2021

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*U.S. General Services Administration*

*Deliver value and savings in real estate, acquisition, technology and other mission- support services across government.*

*U.S. General Services Administration*  
*Chief FOIA Officer Report Fiscal Year 2021*

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## **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.

**During Fiscal Year 2020, GSA's Chief FOIA Officer was Bob Stafford, Chief Administrative Services Officer.**

**Effective November 8, 2020, GSA's Chief FOIA Officer is the General Counsel. *See* GSA Order [ADM 5440.735].**

### **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.

**During the reporting period, several training sessions were provided to agency Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and personnel that are responsible for responding to FOIA requests. These training sessions included both a general overview of the FOIA and application of the FOIA's nine exemptions. Trainings also covered use of redaction software, the FOIAonline system, fee assessments, requesting clarifications from requesters and cradle-to-grave agency processes for responding to FOIA requests.**

**Additionally, GSA's Office of General Counsel provided updates on developments in FOIA case law.**

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.

**GSA FOIA Specialists attended a variety of training courses, including the following:**

- **American Society of Access Professional (ASAP) 2020 Virtual National Conference;**
- **Graduate School USA Freedom of Information and Privacy Act training;**
- **Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, Freedom of Information Act Litigation Seminar;**
- **Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, Introduction to Freedom of Information Act;**
- **Virtual Procedural Requirements and Fees Workshop;**
- **GSA's FOIA Requester Service Center and Office of General Counsel provided training to GSA services and staff offices, both in central office and the regions, covering the application of FOIA exemptions and the requirements for processing FOIA requests;**
- **FOIA Specialists met bi-weekly to discuss current issues, including new court rulings that affected FOIA implementation;**
- **Chief FOIA Officers Council Meetings;**
- **Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, Virtual Exemptions 1 and 7 Workshop;**
- **Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, Virtual Exemptions 4 and 5 Workshop;**
- **Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, Virtual Privacy Considerations Workshop;**
- **Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, The Freedom of Information Act for Attorneys and Access Professionals.**

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 percent of our FOIA professionals attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period. Approximately 75 percent of GSA staff with FOIA responsibilities participated in substantive FOIA training during the 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 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.

### **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, GSA FOIA professionals conducted outreach with several different segments of our FOIA requester community during this reporting period to gain insight and understanding of how internal agency processes are impacting the community.**

**GSA also surveyed a select portion of the community about how GSA could improve the timeliness of responding to FOIA requests and the utility of preemptively making agency records available. Due to the nature of the services that GSA provides, we often receive numerous identical FOIA requests for data sets related to federally leased and owned real estate, office space, vehicle fleet services, acquisition data, travel data, and purchase card data. In these cases, GSA FOIA professionals reach out to requesters to determine ways the agency can be more effective and proactively transmit and post these types of data on a permanent or cyclical basis.**

**GSA FOIA professionals also regularly engage with requesters to help streamline their FOIA requests, to ensure their FOIA requests are worded to obtain the specific records desired.**

### **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.

**Throughout this reporting period, GSA FOIA professionals engaged non-FOIA professionals by hosting meetings and conducting training sessions. One specific initiative included providing training sessions focused on the importance of proper implementation of FOIA as it pertains to GSA's records management policy across all of GSA's regions. Additionally, GSA's Chief FOIA Officer sent updates to staff which included key information regarding FOIA processes and responsibilities in a continued effort to ensure accountability in the FOIA program at GSA.**

**Also, GSA has continued agency-wide to add FOIA-related performance standards to employee performance plans for employees who have significant or recurring roles with responding to FOIA requests. We have seen marked improvement in timeliness and accuracy of FOIA releases when FOIA-related performance standards are in the performance plans of non-FOIA professionals.**

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.

N/A.

## **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 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.

**2.31 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 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 or raw 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.

**No, not during this reporting period. However, GSA did conduct a full self-assessment of its FOIA program in the prior reporting period, using the OIP Self-Assessment Toolkit mentioned above.**

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

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

**Yes.**

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

**N/A.**

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

**GSA last updated its FOIA SOPs in March 2020. The SOPs are updated on an as-needed basis, when there are substantial updates in FOIA laws, regulations or GSA internal policies, procedures and systems.**

d) 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 2020 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number).

**130.**

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 these records outside of the FOIA process?

**No, GSA does not frequently receive first-party requests. GSA does occasionally receive first-party requests from former agency employees regarding their prior employment or projects that they were previously involved in.**

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 your regulations?

**Yes. GSA's FOIA regulations were updated and posted to the Federal Register in February 2020.**

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.

**The GSA FOIA Requester Service Center effectively adapted to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on FOIA processing. The overall impact to operations was very limited. GSA FOIA professionals were able to seamlessly transition to a full time telework environment and continue to provide the same level of customer service to our FOIA requesters and other customers.**

**GSA has made substantial investments over the past few years in information technology infrastructure. GSA has also made great efforts via its Records Management Program to digitize paper records and to encourage agency employees to ensure new agency records are available in an electronic format. This has enabled GSA FOIA staff to continue to respond to FOIA requests in the same fashion as that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Also, as access to the physical GSA FOIA office was limited and opportunities to check mail daily were impacted, GSA posted the following statement to the agency FOIA homepage (<https://www.gsa.gov/reference/freedom-of-information-act-foia>):**

***“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, GSA has adjusted its normal operations to balance the need of completing its mission as effectively and efficiently as possible while also adhering to the recommended social distancing for the safety of our staff. As a result, you may experience a delay in receiving an initial acknowledgment as well as a substantive response to your FOIA request or appeal. We will be able to acknowledge***

*requests made electronically more quickly than by mail. You may reach out to our FOIA Requester Service Center and FOIA Public Liaison if you have any questions about your request. We apologize for this inconvenience and appreciate your understanding and patience.”*

9. Optional -- Please describe:

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

**The GSA FOIA office employs certain best practices to manage the large number of FOIA requests it receives with a relatively small staff. One best practice is to identify the subject matter of each FOIA request and assign it to the FOIA analyst whose agency contacts and/or subject matter expertise are most relevant.**

**Another best practice is to actively foster excellent working relationships with SMEs across the federal government for purposes of consultation and referrals when necessary.**

**A third best practice is to consult with the requesters when a data pull is required and the request is unclear so that GSA can provide the records relevant and responsive to the request in a timely manner.**

**The primary challenge GSA is facing is effectively managing the increase in both the number of incoming requests as well as the complexity and broad scope of those requests.**

### **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 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.

- GSA Acquisition Gateway - <https://hallways.cap.gsa.gov/app>
- Performance.gov - <https://www.performance.gov/>
- Federal Business Opportunities - <https://beta.sam.gov/>
- Facilities Management Institute - <https://sftool.gov/assess>
- Federal Procurement Data System - <https://www.fpds.gov/>
- Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS) - <https://www.fapiis.gov/fapiis/index.action>
- Data.gov - [www.data.gov](http://www.data.gov)
- GSA Forms - [www.gsa.gov/reference/forms](http://www.gsa.gov/reference/forms)
- GSA Auctions - <https://gsaauctions.gov/gsaauctions/gsaauctions>
- GSA Advantage - [https://www.gsaadvantage.gov/advantage/main/start\\_page.do](https://www.gsaadvantage.gov/advantage/main/start_page.do)
- GSA Lease Inventory- <https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/real-estate-services/leasing-policy-procedures/lease-inventory>
- GSA Electronic Reading Room - <https://www.gsa.gov/reference/freedom-of-information-act-foia/electronic-reading-room>

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.

**In addition to posting multiple data sets to the GSA FOIA webpage for ease of public access, GSA has several innovative features and websites that allow the public to view, access, and analyze information and data sets. GSA posts its publicly available data sets in a manner which allows the general public users to view and analyze agency data on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis.**

**Some of the nationwide data has also been further extrapolated to include demographic information broken out by region or metropolitan area. Included in these data sets are background information and/or instructions on the nature of the information and how it is presented. Much of the posted information solicits feedback, includes surveys on the usefulness of the information and provides the user with an opportunity to suggest new ways the information can be presented so it is user friendly.**

**GSA also manages and facilitates information for websites employed across the federal government such as data.gov. On sites like these, GSA formats the information in a way that the public can perform analysis based on their unique needs. Increased access to such government data has multiple positive ramifications including: cost savings, efficiency, informed policy and transparency and accountability, and more collaborative Executive Branch Agency information and summary data.**

4. 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 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 is leveraging or exploring any new technology that you have not previously reported. If so, please describe the type of technology.

**GSA is exploring the use of bot/early generation artificial intelligence (AI) to automatically perform redactions on templated documents, such as occupancy agreements and leases. The bot/AI technology may be able to assist the GSA FOIA office with more expeditiously performing more straightforward FOIA redactions.**

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.

**Link to 2019 Annual FOIA Report:** <https://www.gsa.gov/reference/freedom-of-information-act-foia/gsa-annual-foia-report-fy19>

6. 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 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.1) *divided by* (requests processed from Section V.A.) x 100.

**39.32%. There were 1,429 requests processed in Fiscal Year 2020. 562 of these were placed in the simple track.**

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 during Fiscal Year 2019?

**Yes.**

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

**During FY20, GSA experienced an increase in the complexity of requests and volume of records that were requested.**

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."

**26.10%. GSA received 1,352 requests in Fiscal Year 2020, 353 of which were backlogged requests at the close of the fiscal year.**

#### **BACKLOGGED APPEALS**

9. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2020, according to Section XII.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 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.
- 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) x 100. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2020 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

**31.4%. GSA had 11 backlogged appeals at the end of Fiscal Year 2020. GSA received 35 appeals in Fiscal Year 2020.**

### **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 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 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.

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 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 pending perfected requests that were reported in Section VII.E. of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

**No.**

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.

**GSA was able to close out seven of the ten oldest requests listed on the Fiscal Year 2019 Report.**

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

**GSA has emphasized working to complete and resolve action on the most aged FOIA requests in as timely a manner as possible. GSA's most aged requests are primarily for large data sets, reports and/or a large amount of agency email correspondence entailing often tens of thousands of pages. These requests also often require interagency consultations as well. Closing our oldest requests was dependent upon GSA completing its review as well as all necessary coordination.**

### **TEN OLDEST APPEALS**

18. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in Section VII.C.5. of your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

**No.**

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 fewer than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

**GSA closed five of the ten oldest appeals.**

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

**GSA's most aged appeals require a secondary review of large data sets, reports and/or a large amount of agency email correspondence entailing often tens of thousands of pages. Closing our oldest appeals was dependent upon GSA completing its review as well as all necessary coordination.**

#### **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 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.

**The main obstacle GSA faced in closing the ten oldest requests/appeals/consultations was the voluminous nature of the oldest requests. These requests were mostly for large data sets, reports and/or a large amount of agency correspondence and email communications, which included massive email retrievals from the GSA email system. These email retrievals take significant time to pull, review, redact and respond. The majority of the ten oldest requests also involved gathering information and coordinating with multiple GSA Programs and Regions across the country as well as sometimes consulting with multiple agencies.**

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.

**GSA intends to continue to prioritize work on pending requests and appeals. GSA will confer with requesters to try to further refine specific records they are seeking.**

## **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 that 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.

**The GSA FOIA Requester Service Center was able to significantly mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on FOIA processing. The overall impact on the FOIA Requester Service Center operations was very limited. GSA FOIA professionals were able to seamlessly transition to a full time telework environment and continue to provide the same level of customer service to our FOIA requesters and customers.**

**Fortunately, GSA has made substantial investments over the past few years in information technology infrastructure and digitizing agency records through a robust Records Management Program with a focus on ensuring the digitization of paper records and creating new records in a digital format. The advanced technology infrastructure increased digitization of records enabled the GSA FOIA Requester Service Center to continue with business as usual, and in many cases FOIA response times decreased during this period as FOIA professionals were able to access more records in a digitized format.**