

Commission of Fine Arts
2017 Chief FOIA Officer Report
Frederick Lindstrom, Assistant Secretary, serving as Chief FOIA Officer
Reporting Period: March 1, 2016 through February 1, 2017

Introduction

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) is an independent federal agency charged with giving expert advice to the President, Congress and the heads of departments and agencies of the Federal and District of Columbia governments on matters of design and aesthetics, as they affect the Federal interest and preserve the dignity of the nation's capital. The Commission consists of seven "well qualified judges of the fine arts" who are appointed by the President. It provides advice to the U. S. Mint on the design of coins and medals, and approves the site and design of national memorials in accordance with the Commemorative Works Act or the American Battle Monuments Act, whichever applies. Within the District of Columbia community, the Commission advises on design matters affecting the Historic District of Georgetown, under the Old Georgetown Act, as well as other private sector areas adjacent to federal interests, under the Shipstead-Luce Act. The work of the Commission is supported by a staff of twelve full-time employees.

I. Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

The Commission of Fine Arts routinely and promptly responds to requests from concerned citizens and interested parties to review a wide variety of agency documents, regardless of whether these materials are requested under the FOIA or as a regular research request. Generally, requested material is delivered in full; information is withheld only if it meets the criteria of an exemption. Within this reporting period, partial disclosures were made under Exemption 6 to protect personal privacy. Records created as a result of the fulfillment of the agency's mission are promptly made available on the agency website at <https://www.cfa.gov/records-research/record-cfa-actions>.

II. Steps Taken to Ensure an Effective System is in Place for Responding to Requests

The FOIA Public Liaison was allocated significant time during this reporting period to review FOIA mandates and guidance. Additionally, the FOIA Public Liaison undertook informal, but intensive, training in the form of working cooperatively with FOIA staff at the Department of the Interior to re-draft the agency's FOIA regulations. A draft of the regulations updated prior to the passage of the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 is complete; inclusion of the 2016 Act elements is a goal for the coming year.

Building upon the re-drafting of the regulations, the agency has adopted the procedures outlined therein when processing FOIA requests. Each request is assigned a tracking number, classified as simple, normal, complex or voluminous and processed within the time frames stated in the current version of the regulations. In the interest of effectively and efficiently responding to FOIA requests, the agency has made it a practice to deem all incoming FOIA requests as a priority within the workload of the agency's staff whose assignments include FOIA requests.

III. Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

Apart from adhering to the agency's stringent schedule of posting official records of its actions to its website, there have been no additional or extraordinary efforts to proactively disclose records during this reporting period. A staff review of projects of public interest likely to be subjects of future FOIA requests is in progress.

IV. Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

The agency makes every effort to post official records of its actions to its website in a timely manner. The website was recently re-designed with the objective of making its content more accessible and user-friendly. Highly customized search functions were a key feature in the website's design. A footer link to the website's FOIA section appears on every page.

All communications in response to FOIA requests are conducted electronically, mainly through email. Unless specifically requested otherwise, responsive documents are delivered to FOIA requestors electronically.

V. Steps Taken to Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests and Reducing any Backlogs

At this reporting, the agency receives a low volume of FOIA requests; a total of six were received in FY2016. Nonetheless, as stated above in part II, FOIA requests are given priority within the workflow of the office. As a result, all requests, whether classified as simple or complex, were filled within the time frames stated in the regulations; in some cases, requests were filled ahead of schedule.

Points of Contact

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