



# **SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)**

## **CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2013**

Chief Freedom of Information Act Officer:  
Sarah Maloney, AIG for Management and Support

## Table of Contents

SECTION I: STEPS TAKEN TO APPLY THE PRESUMPTION OF OPENNESS.....	3
SECTION II: STEPS TAKEN TO ENSURE THAT YOUR AGENCY HAS AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM IN PLACE FOR RESPONDING TO REQUESTS.....	5
SECTION III: STEPS TAKEN TO INCREASE PROACTIVE DISCLOSURES.....	7
SECTION IV: STEPS TAKEN TO GREATER UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY.....	8
SECTION V: STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE TIMELINESS IN RESPONDING TO REQUESTS AND REDUCING BACKLOGS .....	9
USE OF FOIA’S LAW ENFORCEMENT “EXCLUSIONS” .....	13
SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS.....	13

## SECTION I: STEPS TAKEN TO APPLY THE PRESUMPTION OF OPENNESS

The guiding principle underlying the President's FOIA Memorandum and the Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness.

Describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA. To do so, you should answer the questions listed below and then include any additional information you would like to describe how your agency is working to apply the presumption of openness.

### **FOIA TRAINING:**

1. Did your agency hold an agency FOIA conference, or otherwise conduct training during this reporting period?

Yes. The Office of Privacy, Records and Disclosure (PRD) has developed a FOIA training module that provides SIGAR personnel with an overview of the FOIA and current legislative authorities. Also, FOIA courses and in-depth training materials can be accessed via SIGAR's private website for personnel involved in the day-to-day processing of FOIA requests.

2. If so, please provide the number of conferences or trainings held, a brief description of the topics covered, and an estimate of the number of participants from your agency who were in attendance.

The training modules are provided to new employees within the first three days of their new hire training. During FY2013, SIGAR conducted 19 new-hire briefings. The total number of personnel trained in FY2013 was 33. The training outlines the following information:

- The Freedom of Information Act
- The FOIA Request Process
- Records Subject to FOIA
- FOIA Exemption and Exclusion Overview
- Agency Compliance

3. Did your FOIA professionals attend any FOIA training during the reporting period such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

No.

4. Provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.

Although FOIA professionals did not attend training, 100 % viewed the SIGAR's FOIA training module.

5. OIP has issued guidance that every agency should make core, substantive FOIA training available to all their FOIA professionals at least once each year. Provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such training is offered to all agency FOIA professionals by March 2015. Your plan should anticipate an upcoming reporting requirement for your 2015 Chief FOIA Officer Reports that will ask whether all agency FOIA professionals attended substantive FOIA training in the past year.

SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013

All SIGAR FOIA professionals plan to attend annual FOIA training events provided by DOJ.

FOIA training attendance plan for FY2014:

- The Freedom of Information Act for Attorneys and Access Professionals, July 15-16, 2014
- FOIA Requester Roundtables, July 24, 2014
- Director's Lecture Series, TBD

**OUTREACH:**

6. Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach and dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? If so, please briefly discuss that engagement.

No. However, SIGAR allows requesters to submit comments regarding their FOIA program via the public website (<http://www.sigar.mil/contact/foia/contact.aspx>).

**DISCRETIONARY DISCLOSURES:**

In his 2009 FOIA Guidelines, the Attorney General strongly encouraged agencies to make discretionary releases of information even when the information might be technically exempt from disclosure under the FOIA. OIP encourages agencies to make such discretionary releases whenever there is no foreseeable harm from release.

7. Does your agency have a formal process in place to review records for discretionary release? If so, please briefly describe this process. If your agency is decentralized, please specify whether all components at your agency have a process in place for making discretionary releases.

Discretionary releases of records are considered for any requested information that might otherwise be covered by Exemptions 2 or 5. When SIGAR receives requests for such information, the FOIA professionals confer with the relevant SIGAR components to determine whether discretionary release would harm agency operations. If a determination is made that release would not harm agency operations, then the information is disclosed. SIGAR determines on a case-by-case basis whether information falling under other Exemptions that are appropriate for discretionary disclosure should be released.

8. During the reporting period did your agency make any discretionary releases of otherwise exempt information?

Yes.

9. What exemptions would have covered the information that was released as a matter of discretion?

(b)(2) and (b)(5)

10. Provide a narrative description, or some examples of, the types of information that your agency released as a matter of discretion.

SIGAR only received one request for information that covered by Exemptions 2 and 5 in FY 2013. That request was initially denied in full. However, on appeal, the SIGAR appellate authority granted the request in part and released information that would have otherwise been covered Exemptions 2 and 5.

SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013

11. If your agency was not able to make any discretionary releases of information, please explain why.

N/A

**OTHER INITIATIVES:**

12. Did your agency post all of the required quarterly FOIA reports for Fiscal Year 2013? If not, please explain why not and what your plan is for ensuring that such reporting is successfully accomplished for Fiscal Year 2014.

Yes. The FY 2013 report can be accessed via the public website (<http://www.sigar.mil/contact/foia/reading-room.html>)

13. Describe any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied. If any of these initiatives are online, please provide links in your description.

SIGAR redesigned the agency's FOIA website (<http://www.sigar.mil/contact/foia>). The website allows requesters to submit FOIA requests via the online form (<http://www.sigar.mil/contact/foia/privacy-request.aspx>) in addition to providing information on traditional methods for submitting requests.

The public website also includes a link to the agency's Electronic Reading Room (<http://www.sigar.mil/contact/foia/reading-room.html>). The reading room provides access to processing logs, annual FOIA reports, and a agency regulations.

SIGAR has also made a concerted effort to publish frequently requested records in the Electronic Library (<http://www.sigar.mil/contact/foia/e-library.html>).

## SECTION II: STEPS TAKEN TO ENSURE THAT YOUR AGENCY HAS AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM IN PLACE FOR RESPONDING TO REQUESTS

As the Attorney General emphasized in his FOIA Guidelines, "[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.

Describe here the steps your agency has taken to ensure that your management of your FOIA program is effective and efficient. To do so, answer the questions below and then include any additional information that you would like to describe how your agency ensures that your FOIA system is efficient and effective.

**PERSONNEL:**

During Sunshine Week 2012 OPM announced the creation of a new job series entitled the Government Information Series, to address the work performed by FOIA and Privacy Act professionals. Creation of this distinct job series was a key element in recognizing the professional nature of their work.

**SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013**

1. Has your agency converted all of its FOIA professionals to the new Government Information Specialist job series?

Yes.

2. If not, what proportion of personnel has been converted to the new job series?

N/A

3. If not, what is your plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals' position descriptions are converted?

N/A

**PROCESSING PROCEDURES:**

4. For Fiscal Year 2013 did your agency maintain an average of ten or less calendar days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing? If not, describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

N/A. SIGAR did not receive any request for expedited processing in FY2013.

5. Has your agency taken any steps to make the handling of consultations and referrals more efficient and effective, such as entering into agreements with other agencies or components on how to handle certain categories or types of records involving shared equities so as to avoid the need for a consultation or referral altogether, or otherwise implementing procedures that speed up or eliminate the need for consultations. If so, please describe those steps.

Consultations: SIGAR will send a notice letter to the agency. Once acknowledged, the agency is given 10 working days to provide recommendations on the request.

Referrals: SIGAR will send a notice letter to the agency. Once acknowledged, SIGAR notifies the requester of the referral and forwards all information to the receiving agency.

**REQUESTER SERVICES:**

6. Do you use e-mail or other electronic means to communicate with requesters when feasible?

Yes. Approximately 98% of all communications take place by means of e-mail.

7. Does your agency notify requesters of the mediation services offered by the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at NARA?

Yes. This information is located in the SIGAR regulation: (<http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/foia/2012-06-11-FOIA-rules-regulations.pdf>), and in responses to appeals.

8. Describe any other steps your agency has undertaken to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively, such as conducting self-assessments to find greater efficiencies, improving search processes, eliminating redundancy, etc.

SIGAR is currently in the process of reorganizing its electronic records repositories. This will ensure timely search and retrieval of records requested under FOIA.

## SECTION III: STEPS TAKEN TO INCREASE PROACTIVE DISCLOSURES

Both the President and Attorney General focused on the need for agencies to work proactively to post information online without waiting for individual requests to be received.

Describe here the steps your agency has taken both to increase the amount of material that is available on your agency website, and the usability of such information, including providing examples of proactive disclosures that have been made during this past reporting period (i.e., from March 2013 to March 2014). In doing so, answer the questions listed below and describe any additional steps taken by your agency to make and improve proactive disclosures of information.

### POSTING MATERIAL:

1. Do your FOIA professionals have a system in place to identify records for proactive disclosures?

Yes.

2. If so, describe the system that is in place.

SIGAR FOIA professionals carefully examines the frequency of similar requests and the types of records requested. When frequently requested records are suitable for public release, SIGAR will make them available.

3. Provide examples of material that your agency has posted this past reporting period, including links to where this material can be found online.
  - USDA's Program to Help Advance the Revitalization of Afghanistan's Agricultural Sector: Audit of Costs Incurred by Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance ([http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/Financial\\_Audits/Financial%20Audit%2013-6.pdf](http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/Financial_Audits/Financial%20Audit%2013-6.pdf))
  - Afghan Special Mission Wing: DOD Moving Forward with \$771.8 Million Purchase of Aircraft that the Afghans Cannot Operate and Maintain (<http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/2013-05-27-audit-13-13.pdf>)
  - USAID's Program to Support the Loya Jirga and Election Process in Afghanistan: Audit of Costs Incurred by The Asia Foundation ([http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/Financial\\_Audits/Financial%20Audit%2013-5.pdf](http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/Financial_Audits/Financial%20Audit%2013-5.pdf))
  - John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, testimony before the House Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations. (<http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/testimony/2013-feb-12-ig-testify.pdf>)

### MAKING POSTED MATERIAL MORE USEFUL:

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, such as soliciting feedback on the content and presentation of posted material, improving search capabilities on the site, posting material in open formats, making information available through mobile applications, providing explanatory material, etc.?

Yes.

SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013

5. If so, provide examples of such improvements.

SIGAR currently uses several popular social media tools such as Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, and YouTube. In addition, RSS feeds and e-mail updates are available to the public.

6. Did your agency use any means to publicize or highlight important proactive disclosures for public awareness? If so, was social media utilized?

Yes. Proactive disclosures are highlighted on the public website and Twitter.

7. Has your agency encountered challenges that make it difficult to post records you otherwise would like to post? If so, please briefly explain what those challenges are.

No.

8. Describe any other steps taken to increase proactive disclosures at your agency.

N/A.

## SECTION IV: STEPS TAKEN TO GREATER UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY

A key component of the President's FOIA Memorandum was the direction to "use modern technology to inform citizens about what is known and done by their Government." In addition to using the internet to make proactive disclosures, agencies should also be exploring ways to utilize technology in responding to requests. Over the past several years agencies have reported widespread use of technology in receiving and tracking FOIA requests and preparing agency Annual FOIA Reports. For 2014, as we have done over the past years, the questions have been further refined and now also address different, more innovative aspects of technology use.

### ONLINE TRACKING OF FOIA REQUESTS:

1. Can a FOIA requester track the status of his/her request electronically?

No.

2. If yes, how is this tracking function provided to the public? For example, is it being done through regularly updated FOIA logs, online portals, or other mediums?

N/A.

3. Describe the information that is provided to the requester through the tracking system. For example, some tracking systems might tell the requester whether the request is "open" or "closed," while others will provide further details to the requester throughout the course of the processing, such as "search commenced" or "documents currently in review." List the specific types of information that are available through your agency's tracking system.

N/A.



**SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013**

4. In particular, does your agency tracking system provide the requester with an estimated date of completion for his/her request?

N/A.

5. If your agency does not provide online tracking of requests, is your agency taking steps to establish this capability? If not, please explain why.

The PRD office is currently working with the IT professionals to create a real-time status tracking system on the public website.

**USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO FACILITATE PROCESSING OF REQUESTS:**

6. Beyond using technology to redact documents, is your agency taking steps to utilize more advanced technology to facilitate overall FOIA efficiency, such as improving record search capabilities, utilizing document sharing platforms for consultations and referrals, or employing software that can sort and de-duplicate documents?

Yes.

7. If so, describe the technological improvements being made.

SIGAR implemented the eDiscovery tool as a means to improve search and collection times of electronic data from shared drives and email servers. eDiscovery will provide SIGAR's FOIA professionals with the tools to collect and filter out responsive records from non-responsive and duplicative records prior to the document review process.

8. Are there additional technological tools that would be helpful to achieving further efficiencies in your agency's FOIA program?

No, not at this time. However, SIGAR is continually looking into technological tools that may aid our FOIA program.

## **SECTION V: STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE TIMELINESS IN RESPONDING TO REQUESTS AND REDUCING BACKLOGS**

The President and the Attorney General have emphasized the importance of improving timeliness in responding to requests. This section 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 those contained in the specified sections of your agency's 2013 Annual FOIA Report and, when applicable, your agency's 2012 Annual FOIA Report.

**SIMPLE TRACK REQUESTS:**

1. 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.

- a. Does your agency utilize a separate track for simple requests?

SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013

Yes.

- b. If so, for your agency overall, for Fiscal Year 2013, was the average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer?

Yes.

- c. If your agency does not track simple requests separately, was the average number of days to process non-expedited requests twenty working days or fewer?

N/A

**BACKLOGS AND "TEN OLDEST" REQUESTS, APPEALS AND CONSULTATIONS:**

2. 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. 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 2012 and Fiscal Year 2013 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

**BACKLOGS**

- a. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2013, did that backlog decrease as compared with Fiscal Year 2012?

No. SIGAR had one backlogged request in FY2012, which was processed in FY2013 and only one backed-logged request at the end of FY2013.

- b. If your agency had a backlog of administrative appeals in Fiscal Year 2013, did that backlog decrease as compared to Fiscal Year 2012?

N/A.

**TEN OLDEST REQUESTS**

- c. In Fiscal Year 2013, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2012?

Yes.

- d. 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 2012 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that. For example, if you only had seven requests listed as part of your "ten oldest" in Section VII.E. and you closed two of them, you should note that you closed two out of seven "oldest" requests.

N/A.

**TEN OLDEST APPEALS**

**SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013**

- e. In Fiscal Year 2013, did your agency close the ten oldest administrative appeals that were pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2012?

N/A.

- f. If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close, as well as the number of appeals your agency had in Section VI.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2012 Annual FOIA Report.

N/A.

**TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS**

- g. In Fiscal Year 2013, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations received by your agency and pending as of the end of Fiscal Year 2012?

N/A.

- h. If no, please provide the number of these consultations your agency did close, as well as the number of pending consultations your agency listed in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2012 Annual FOIA Report.

N/A.

**REASONS FOR ANY BACKLOGS:**

3. If you answered "no" to any of the questions in item 2 above, describe why your agency was not able to reduce backlogs and/or close the ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations. In doing so, answer the following questions then include any additional explanation:

**REQUEST AND/OR APPEAL BACKLOG**

- a. Was the lack of a reduction in the request and/or appeal backlog a result of an increase in the number of incoming requests or appeals?

N/A.

- b. Was the lack of a reduction in the request and/or appeal backlog caused by a loss of staff?

N/A.

- c. Was the lack of a reduction in the request and/or appeal backlog caused by an increase in the complexity of the requests received?

Yes. The backlogged request was voluminous and complex in nature.

- d. What other causes, if any, contributed to the lack of a decrease in the request and/or appeal backlog?

N/A.

**"TEN OLDEST" NOT CLOSED**

**SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013**

- e. Briefly explain the obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2012.

N/A.

- f. If your agency was unable to close any of its ten oldest requests or appeals 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.

**PLANS FOR CLOSING OF TEN OLDEST PENDING REQUESTS, APPEALS, AND CONSULTATIONS AND REDUCING BACKLOGS:**

Given the importance of these milestones, it is critical that Chief FOIA Officers assess the causes for not achieving success and create plans to address them.

4. If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations, please provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those "ten oldest" requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2014.

N/A.

5. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1000 pending requests and did not reduce that backlog in Fiscal Year 2013, provide your agency's plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead.

N/A.

**INTERIM RESPONSES:**

OIP has issued guidance encouraging agencies to make interim releases whenever they are working on requests that involve a voluminous amount of material or require searches in multiple locations. By providing rolling releases to requesters agencies facilitate access to the requested information.

6. Does your agency have a system in place to provide interim responses to requesters when appropriate?

Yes. Interim releases are applied to requests with 100+ responsive documents. Each release contains between 30-45 pages, and released every 10 days from the initial interim release until all documents are delivered to requester.

SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)  
CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT FY 2013

7. If your agency had a backlog in Fiscal Year 2013, please provide an estimate of the number or percentage of cases in the backlog where a substantive, interim response was provided during the fiscal year, even though the request was not finally closed.

None.

## USE OF FOIA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT "EXCLUSIONS"

In order to increase transparency regarding the use of the FOIA's statutory law enforcement exclusions, which authorize agencies under certain exceptional circumstances to "treat the records as not subject to the requirements of [the FOIA]," 5 U.S.C. § 552(c)(1), (2), (3), please answer the following questions:

1. Did your agency invoke a statutory exclusion during Fiscal Year 2013?

No.

2. If so, what was the total number of times exclusions were invoked?

N/A.

## SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2013 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, 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 a key achievement. A complete description of all your efforts will be contained in the body of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

SIGAR makes the statutory response timeframe its top priority. As a result, SIGAR FOIA professionals have created a detailed tracking database that includes a "quick-glance" dashboard.

The dashboard uses conditional formatting and color-coding to highlight nearing response due dates. This past reporting period, SIGAR encountered a 172% increase in requests received. This database aided SIGAR in the processing of twice the amount of FOIA requests, while successfully reducing response times.

Processing Time Comparison			
Average # of Days FY2012	Average # of Days FY2013	Highest # of Days FY2012	Highest # of Days FY2013
61	20	381	53
67% Decrease		86% Decrease	