



# **FOIAonline: Bringing FOIA Processing to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Presentation for the World Resources Institute Study Tour**

October 23, 2012

# FOIAonline Vision

- Develop a cost effective, multi-agency, shared-service to assist EPA and any partner agencies meet their FOIA requirements, and
- Create a repository of publicly released FOIA records for reuse.

## FOIAonline



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*Benefits of an Account* : Sign up for a FOIA account today to receive the benefits of streamlined request creation and monitoring of created requests. [Create An Account](#)

Guest users are welcome to submit requests, search for records, and generate reports. Guest users will have limited communications features. Full features are available for registered accounts.

### FOIAonline

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) gives you the right to access information from federal agencies. FOIAonline allows you to submit FOIA requests to participating agencies from this website, track the status of requests, search for requests submitted by others, and generate up-to-the-minute reports on request processing.

Currently, FOIAonline participating agencies include: Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Commerce (except the US Patent and Trademark Office), Office of General Counsel of the National Archives and Records Administration, Merit System Protection Board, and Federal Labor Relations Authority. [note: Information available from FOIAonline varies by agency.](#)

Requests under the Privacy Act must be sent directly to the appropriate agency.

# High-level System Functionality: Summary

For Agencies		For the Public
✓Receive requests electronically		✓Submit a FOIA request online
✓Assign requests and track progress		✓Track progress
✓Facilitate correspondence with requesters		✓Allow online correspondence with Agencies
✓Approve & post responsive records		✓Search and view FOIA requests and responses
✓Notification when requesters withdraw or modify a request		✓For Accountholders: online request withdrawal or modification
✓View agency processing statistics		✓View agency processing statistics
✓Maintain administrative case file, including calculating fees		
✓Streamline consultations between participating agencies		
✓Generate Annual Report		

# More Detailed Functionality

## Agency Core functionality defined in the RTM

✓ <i>Accept Requests Online</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allow requester to pre-populate their information</li><li>• Provide status to requesters</li><li>• Create communications (i.e. letters via email) between agencies and requesters</li></ul>
✓ <i>Track Requests in a Case File</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FOIA request processing and tracking</li><li>• Breaking down requests into multiple tasks</li><li>• Multi-track processing (Simple, Complex, Expedited)</li><li>• Track time spent on requests</li><li>• Assign case numbers</li><li>• Start and stop the clock according to rules</li><li>• Keep an online folder of all documents related to a request (<i>including notifications to requesters</i>)</li></ul>
✓ <i>Manage Deadlines</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start/Stop the clock</li><li>• Generate backlog reports</li><li>• Monitor workload</li><li>• Notify FOIA professionals based on 10 and 20 day deadlines</li><li>• Close cases when fees are not paid (<i>according to business rules</i>)</li></ul>
✓ <i>Calculate Fees</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Track fees and fee waiver processing</li><li>• Generate invoices</li><li>• Deduct what is free of charge (e.g., first 100 pages)</li><li>• Manually adjust recorded time</li><li>• Distinguish between search and review time</li></ul>

# More Detailed Functionality

## Agency Core functionality defined in the RTM

### ✓ *Research and Upload Records*

- Store consultations, referrals and letters
- Send tasks to others with instructions about which records to search
- Upload scanned documents

### ✓ *Publish Electronic Records*

- Review/sign the case file to approve redactions and fee calculations
- Partial/incremental releases
- System-generated email notifications to requesters

### ✓ *Accept Appeals Online*

- Track status and outcome of litigation and appeals
- Issue supplemental release after appeal
- Forward copies of processing to Appeals unit

### ✓ *Prepare the Annual Report*

- Prepare the report in the required format with the required data structure
- Use dashboards to display these metrics throughout the year, including trends

### ✓ *Search and Retrieve*

- Searching (including metadata and full-text)

# Differences Between Guest User and User with an Account

- The public can use FOIAonline as a guest or create an account.
- Any public user can:
  - search for requests, records, or appeals posted by participating agencies
  - submit a FOIA request to a participating agency
- Creating a FOIAonline Account provides the added benefits of:
  - A personal dashboard to organize and view all of your requests;
  - Communicate with the agency processing your requests;
  - Pre-populating requests with commonly requested metadata; and
  - The ability modify, withdraw, or appeal a request online

# Process and Schedule to Develop FOIAonline

- ✓ 10/28/11 Agencies reviewed and concurred with system requirements
  - ✓ 11/30/11 Agencies finalized system functional requirements
  - ✓ 01/19/12 Agencies reviewed interface
  - ✓ 01/23/12 Partners initiated system construction
  - ✓ 04/19/12 Partners demonstrate in-progress version of system for agencies
  - ✓ 07/09/12 Partners conduct user testing
  - ✓ 08/28/12 Partner training/implementation configuration
  - ✓ 09/05/12 Deploy agency interface
  - ✓ 09/30/12 Deploy public interface
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- Initial system requirements were based on DOJ and DOD's FOIA system requirements largely driven by functionality needed to capture Annual Report metrics.
  - Agencies (partners and non-partners provided comments at each development point of the project)
  - Further developments in online FOIA processing on the horizon