

Content of 2017 Chief FOIA Officer Reports

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Please provide a short narrative (at least 500 words) for how your agency implemented the President's **FOIA Memorandum** and the DOJ's **2009 FOIA Guidelines** during the reporting period. Your narrative may include any steps taken to: apply the presumption of openness, ensure that your agency has an effective system in place for responding to requests, increase proactive disclosures, greater utilize technology, and improve timeliness in responding to requests and reducing any backlogs. Please include in this narrative a description of your efforts to ensure that the FOIA is administered in a "spirit of cooperation," highlighting, for example, steps taken to ensure that there is good communication and good customer service when working with requesters.

Most FOIA requests received by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) fall into two categories: (1) requests for burial records and (2) requests for information related to the service members buried in ABMC cemeteries. In order to apply the presumption of openness, the American Battle Monuments Commission maintains and regularly updates a publicly available website:

<https://www.abmc.gov/>

To meet the presumption of openness for burial records, the ABMC website provides the public with the ability to search burial records for over 218,000 Americans either buried or memorialized overseas. Searches are launched from a dedicated search page and can be as specific or as broad as the requester may wish. To meet the presumption of openness for information on the service members buried in ABMC cemeteries, ABMC has integrated that information either into stories and features on the website, social media posts via Facebook, or directly into ABMC's education materials. For those requests that fall outside one of the two categories above, a presumption of openness can still be made through reference to the website. The ABMC website has a page dedicated to Annual Reports of the American Battle Monuments Commission. The Commission's Annual Reports alone provide a wealth of information, readily available to the public, on all manner of operational and budgetary concerns regarding the Commission. The report is pertinent because ABMC periodically receives FOIA requests related to ABMC finances. Each Annual Report contains comprehensive fiscal data on the agency, to include a complete financial analysis with consolidated balance sheets showing assets by type and value as well as liabilities by type and value as required by law. Organizational charts, mission statements, high priority performance goals and results, management statements and controls, legal compliance, and reports from independent auditors can all be found within the Annual Report.

To ensure that the American Battle Monuments Commission has an effective system in place for responding to requests, the Commission uses a digitized log. Each request received is cataloged and placed in queue, complete with receipt date and due date. The agency's FOIA Assistant is responsible for

the timely disposition of each received request, with oversight from the Chief FOIA Officer. The Chief FOIA Officer, like the FOIA Assistant, serves in this role as a collateral duty. The Chief FOIA Officer, through participation in regularly scheduled, weekly staff meetings, keeps senior leadership of the Commission apprised of all pending FOIA requests and thereby engaged in the Commission's FOIA program. Ultimately, it is this engagement of senior leadership that improves support for the program, which leads to the more timely allocation of resources needed to maintain excellent response times to requests.

The American Battle Monuments Commission has leveraged technology in several ways in order to improve the Commission's FOIA program. First, the aforementioned website provides a direct link between the public and the Commission. Upon visiting the site, the public is treated to a well thought out modern user interface designed to make browsing the site's content easy. Contact information is kept current and Commission records are easily searched and readily available. Second, the Commission uses cloud technology to facilitate collaboration across the Commission in pursuit of the timely resolution of requests. This cloud based collaboration allows members of the staff to communicate and collaborate with one another instantaneously, regardless of where they are located on the globe. Finally, the Commission leverages its cloud based Microsoft platform to organize, maintain, and store records of current and previous FOIA requests.

All of this is done in the spirit of cooperation between the Commission and the public. The American Battle Monuments Commission prides itself on its openness. To this end, the Commission maintains a page on its website that provides the public with clear and concise instructions for submitting FOIA requests. The Commission also promotes the importance of excellent customer service with regards to all public and media requests for information, including FOIA. The Commission has also tasked its Chief FOIA Officer with the responsibility of promoting a general philosophy of full agency disclosure and with emphasizing the importance of timely communication.