



Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse
Syracuse University

June 10, 2008

FOIA Request
Disclosure Services
Departmental Offices
Department of the Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20220

RE: FOIA request for copies of FOIA database records, raw statistical data, and related documentation

Dear Disclosure Services:

It is our understanding that you have a system [“database”] for tracking the receipt, processing, and final disposition of all FOIA/PA requests. For example, the FY 2007 FOIA Annual Report to the Attorney General (<http://ustreas.gov/foia/reports/fy07-ag.pdf>) indicates that 688 new requests were received during FY 2007 and 986 requests were processed that year which presumably was derived from your tracking system. And an earlier annual report for FY 2002 report indicates there were 1,189 requests received that year and 1,130 requests processed.

We also understand that on previous occasions the Treasury Department has released to the public case-by-case listings (“logs”) documenting the receipt and disposition of FOIA requests. In addition, Section 8 of the OPEN Government Act of 2007 mandates even greater public availability of raw data on agency processing of FOIA requests.

As evidenced by the President’s Executive Order 13392 of December 14, 2005 and the recent OPEN Government Act, there is heightened public interest in and attention to ensuring prompt and effective administration of FOIA requirements. In light of these recent mandates, TRAC has begun a government-wide study to document changes in the patterns of FOIA processing and to assess the impact of these changes on government openness. To assist us in examining how these recent mandates have affected the receipt and processing of FOIA requests received by Treasury Departmental Offices, we are seeking access to two broad classes of agency records: (A) documentation describing your FOIA database, and (B) copies of the information recorded in your FOIA database.

More specifically, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, we request copies of the following agency records:

(A) Copies of your documentation describing your FOIA database and tracking system including, but not limited to:

- 1) Complete table schema including identification of all tables making up the FOIA database and tracking system, as well as the identification of all fields in each of these tables;
- 2) Time period of coverage of data now in this tracking system;
- 3) Changes in coverage of recorded data, or in the fields that were recorded;
- 4) Contents of all look-up and code tables, including the definitions of all codes used in recording the

information;

- 5) All manuals and other instructional material, including all data input instructions, procedures used to ensure accuracy and completeness of the information entered, the use of the tracking system for report generation, and for all other purposes;
- 6) Descriptions of all regularly prepared statistical reports using data from this tracking system, including standards and rules used in deriving workload, performance and outcome measures.

(B) Copies of all records tracking the receipt, processing, and outcome of FOIA requests, including but not limited to:

- 1) All records and information recorded in your FOIA database and tracking system;
- 2) All raw statistical data used, or to be used, in preparing agency FOIA performance reports as provided for under Section 8(c) of the 2007 OPEN Government Act.

[Note that we are *not* asking for copies of the *actual* FOIA request letters or for *actual* agency response letters, but simply for copies of the records in your system for tracking FOIA receipts, processing and responses.]

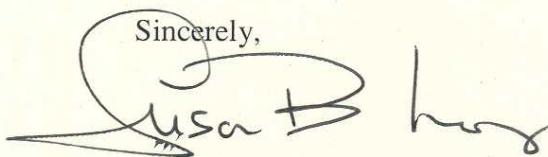
To the extent that any of these requested records exist in electronic form, we request that they be provided in digital form. We further ask to be consulted in advance on the specific format used in making these electronic copies, and also ask under FOIA for copies of all programs and scripts used in making all such copies.

We request that we be classified as "a representative of the news media" under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, and as representatives of "an educational or noncommercial scientific institution, whose purpose includes scholarly, scientific research." TRAC is a research data center at Syracuse University, and under the direction of its co-directors, Long and Burnham, carries out an active program of scholarly research. TRAC actively seeks to promote public understanding of the operation of the federal government through the gathering and dissemination of information. At TRAC, we actively gather information of interest to the public, transform this information utilizing our editorial and research expertise into various works -- including computerized knowledge bases, electronic and print reports -- and make these works available to the public.

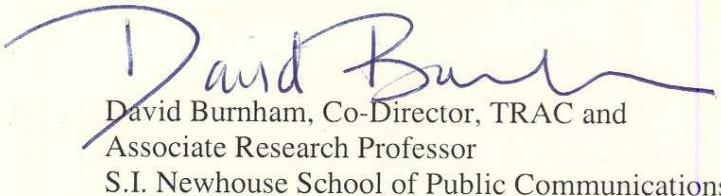
We also request a full waiver of fees. Disclosure of the requested information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations and activities of the federal government in administering FOIA requirements. And FOIA lies at the heart of our democracy. Indeed, the OPEN Government Act of 2007 emphasizes the importance of monitoring the operation of the Freedom of Information Act to ensure "that the Government remains open and accessible to the American people and is always based not upon the 'need to know' but upon the fundamental 'right to know'." Because the records requested constitute the original record of the Treasury Departmental Offices' implementation of FOIA requirements, public access to these records is essential *in order to effectively monitor* the operation of the FOIA provisions. And as such, as we noted above, they are essential to our current study. The inadequacies of current information on the state of FOIA practice was underlined in a recent G.A.O. Report (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08344.pdf>) which found the need for improved metrics before agency progress in meeting FOIA goals could be reliably assessed. The results from our research should help address these critical gaps in knowledge. Study results, as has been the case for our previous studies, will be made publicly available and widely distributed through their publication on our web site (<http://trac.syr.edu>).

Finally, we call your attention to the strict time limits set for furnishing requested records under 5 U.S.C. 552. We would very much appreciate your prompt action and response on this request.

Should you have any questions, or if we can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact us. You can reach Long at (315) 443-3563 or by email at suelong@syr.edu. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,


Susan B. Long, Co-Director, TRAC and
Associate Professor
Martin J. Whitman School of Management



David Burnham, Co-Director, TRAC and
Associate Research Professor
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications