Introduction

Based on the guidance issued on September 30, 2021 by the Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF or Agency) falls within the definition of a "Small Volume Agency" because it received fewer than 50 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests in FY2021.

Accordingly, it has prepared this narrative as its 2022 Chief FOIA Officer Report.

During FY 2021, the IAF fully implemented FOIA policy guidance, including the Department of Justice 2009 FOIA Guidelines, applying the presumption of openness, ensuring an effective system for timely and accurately responding to FOIA requests, increasing proactive disclosures, and using technology. These efforts are detailed below.

Presumption of Openness

The IAF applies the presumption of openness to all requests. In FY2021, the IAF received seven FOIA requests, of which three generated “no responsive records” responses. Of the remaining four received, two resulted in the release in full of all responsive documents, one contained (b)(2) and (b)(6) redactions, and the last request the IAF directed the requester to publicly available information.

Ensuring an Effective System

The IAF posts information on how to submit a FOIA request on its public website, along with the names and contact information for both its Chief FOIA Officer and FOIA Public Liaison. The most common method of making a FOIA request is through an email inquiry to an IAF FOIA e-mail address that is regularly checked by the Associate General Counsel, who also serves as the Assistant Chief FOIA Officer. All incoming FOIA requests are initially reviewed by the Associate General Counsel. These requests are all logged and assigned a tracking number. The Associate General Counsel usually replies to the FOIA requester within twenty-four hours, acknowledging receipt and providing the FOIA tracking number assigned to the request. The Associate General Counsel, acting under the supervision of the General Counsel, who also serves as the IAF Chief FOIA Officer, coordinates with relevant members of the IAF staff to conduct a search for responsive Agency records. The IAF administers the FOIA in a “spirit of cooperation” through updates to requesters when necessary. When requesters have questions, they are answered in a timely and respectful manner.

The Associate General Counsel then compiles the responsive documents, follows up as appropriate, and drafts a response letter that is reviewed and signed by the General Counsel. The General Counsel is a member of the IAF senior staff and the principal legal advisor to the IAF's President and Chief Executive Officer, who serves as the head of Agency. The General Counsel also makes recommendations on proactive disclosures to the Agency head, and ensures broader Agency compliance with the FOIA.
Proactive Disclosures
In FY2021, the IAF implemented the principal of proactive disclosures by posting Agency documents to its public website. These documents included grant public statements, Agency reports, and publications. The IAF posts the minutes of the meetings of its Board of Directors. The IAF also maintains a blog on its public website in order to offer insight into the communities we serve and amplify the voices and experiences of our grassroots partners.

Technology
In FY2021, the IAF received all FOIA requests electronically, and it processed all FOIA responses electronically.

Improve Timeliness and Reducing Any Backlogs
The IAF works diligently to reduce any backlogs, especially requests that were backlogged from the previous fiscal year. In FY21, the IAF closed a backlogged request from FY20. The IAF also proactively responded to a requester of a complex FOIA through rolling responses in order to ensure the requester received information as quickly as possible.

Conclusion
As is evident by this Report, the IAF takes its FOIA responsibilities seriously. As the Chief FOIA Officer, I am committed to continuously reviewing and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Agency's FOIA program.

Aswathi Zachariah

Aswathi Zachariah
General Counsel & Chief FOIA Officer

Dated: February 9, 2022