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FOIAXpress®
FOIA Technology Showcase
Day 2, Section 2: Improved Public FOIA Reading Rooms / Websites

Request for Information (RFI) Response

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1   Outline for Day 2, Section 2 (Improved Public FOIA Reading Rooms / Websites)

1.1   The Importance of Having a FOIA Website and Reading Room
- A robust online presence is a critical and extremely useful tool for FOIA programs.
    - A well-designed website gives the agency an opportunity to educate the general public about the FOIA process and how the agency carries out its FOIA obligations, including information about the agency's records management practices – what records it keeps and how it manages them.
    - By proactively providing this information to requesters, FOIA offices can help requesters make more nuanced, well-tailored, and narrow FOIA requests that don't take as much time and resources as a poorly crafted request might, thereby easing the agency's FOIA burden.
- FOIA programs are also wise to use online public reading rooms where they can proactively disclose records that are required for proactive disclosure under FOIA, including the "operational" records under 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)(A-C), and records they expect will be the subject of future FOIA requests.
    - This includes types or classes of records that have historically been frequently requested as a matter of course, as well as records related to controversial or highly prominent topics that are likely to be of significant public interest.
    - At a minimum, agencies should follow the Rule of Three, and publish to a reading room every record that has been requested at least three times, as well as a listing of all agency FOIA requests.
    - By using a reading room to proactively publish these records, agencies can avoid countless duplicate FOIA requests and help the public to help themselves to the information they are looking for.
    - It should be noted, that even beyond FOIA websites and reading rooms, the more information an agency publishes to the internet in any context, the fewer FOIA requests they should expect to see.
- In any event, the main goals for an agency in having any online presence are to communicate with and educate FOIA requesters and the general public.
    - Plain websites can help FOIA offices achieve these goals, but only to a limited extent.
    - Agencies should look to more efficient and effective technologies to meet their goals and create, and benefit from, a truly modern FOIA program.

1.2   FOIAXpress and PAL Take Agency Sites to the Next Level
- AINS is the proud developer of FOIAXpress, the most widely used and feature rich FOIA case management solution ever available. AINS is also the developer of the FOIAXpress Public Access Link (PAL), which AINS provides to agencies to use as their online FOIA presence.
- PAL provides agencies with a front door to their FOIA program, and a place to educate the public and publish what they choose.
- But PAL is so much more than just a website. PAL is a deeply integrated portal to FOIAXpress.
- With PAL, FOIA requesters can submit FOIA requests and receive delivery of responsive records direct from the agency.

- Because of the FOIAXpress integration, PAL also automatically provides requesters with status updates, and includes messaging so FOIA personnel can communicate directly with requesters about their case, all within a secure system.
- Directing requests through PAL means that agencies receive and can process requests faster than before, but it also means that agencies can use templates and configured or customized features like drop-down menus and required fields that will drive requesters to submit only perfected requests, and only to the appropriate office, further reducing delay and complications.
- AINS offers many other features and capabilities with its Open Government solutions, that help agencies step into the future of FOIA administration.
    - PAL is currently accessible via mobile, and will ultimately include a native device application for requester use.
    - PAL is also easy for requesters to access, but extremely secure, and now leverages integrations with login.gov, id.me, and two factor authentication via email or text.
    - PAL also integrates with FOIA.gov, enabling agencies to comply with current government-wide directives, and PAL and FOIAXpress are the perfect agency-level complements to the government's newer initiatives to enable search and records retrieval across agency FOIA programs.
    - With the current reading rooms, requesters can easily search through published agency disclosures to find what they want and avoid having to make a request, and AINS will be leveraging the same AI and natural language processing technology that it currently employs in its document review module as part of FOIAXpress.
    - With a highly configurable and adaptive interface, PAL also enables agencies to leverage modern UX features and designs to steer the requester to their documents with the least friction possible. PAL offers an online experience on par with modern commercial enterprises, while remaining laser-focused on FOIA administration and the unique challenges and requirements of FOIA.
    - With FOIAXpress and the Public Access Link, agencies can quickly upgrade their entire FOIA program, and create a powerful link with the public to meet the goals of FOIA.