

IMPROVEMENT PLAN UNDER EXECUTIVE ORDER 13,392

A. The USITC is an independent, quasijudicial Federal agency with broad investigative responsibilities on matters of trade. All FOIA requests are addressed to the Secretary and handled by that office. The agency currently has no backlog of FOIA requests. There are no major challenges facing the agency regarding FOIA processing.

B. Areas Selected for Review

1. FOIA Page on agency Web site
2. Coordination form (internal FOIA tracking form for staff)
3. Logging system
4. Customer service guidelines
5. Internal FOIA handbook
6. Staff guidance (both FOIA staff and agency staff who respond to FOIA requests).

C. Discussion of results

1. FOIA Page on agency Web site

We looked to see if the FOIA page was easily located from the main page, and all required and relevant documents or information were checked to make sure everything was current.

There is a link to “FOIA” from the agency home page; there is a separate FOIA page; all relevant documents (notices and most requested FOIA’s, how to contact us) were on the FOIA page; all documents were up-to-date; and the page was updated to be in compliance with EO 13,392 regarding making known all FOIA contacts, i.e. Chief FOIA Officer, Liaison Officer and Service Center Contacts.

2. Internal coordinating form

We updated the internal form used to process every FOIA request to emphasize information internal staff need to provide when processing a FOIA (e.g. time spent, grade).

3. Internal logging system/database

We reviewed the FOIA logging/tracking system and database. We determined no changes were necessary.

4. Customer service guidelines

We determined that our customer service could be improved with more communication. It was determined that we needed to have initial contact with requesters to let them know their request was received. We also have started to contact the requestor for any request not handled within one week of receipt.

5. Internal FOIA handbook

We reviewed our internal handbook and decided it needed updating. We are updating the sample letters. The handbook will also include guidelines and steps to FOIA processing.

6. Staff Guidance

We reviewed the process of working with staff from other offices regarding their input in completing a FOIA. We decided that we could help with a follow-up call (asking if assistance is needed) when it gets closer to the response time set for completion.

D. Areas chosen for Improvement

1. Coordination form (internal FOIA tracking form for staff)
2. Customer service guidelines
3. Internal FOIA Handbook
4. Staff Guidance

E. Improvement Area Detail

1. We revised our tracking form used as a cover page to the request asking for information needed from staff.

2. We found that we needed to augment our documentation of current practices and procedures. It was determined that we needed to have initial contact with requesters to let them know their request was received. Also, we found need to make contact for any request not handled within one week of receipt.

3. We found that our FOIA Handbook needed to be updated now and scheduled for periodic update. We further determined that we needed to add report guidance.

4. We found a need to provide better follow-up to staff who researched FOIA requests.

F. Time line for completion

Our internal tracking form has been updated, new customer service guidelines have been implemented, the FOIA Handbook was updated and is scheduled for periodic updates, and we have started following up with staff to see if assistance is needed in processing the request as the response date gets nearer.

We will continue to monitor the FOIA process and updates that have been set in place and will review the process annually during fiscal years 2006 and 2007 to determine if further updates are needed.