DRAFT

2020 Chief FOIA Officer Report

FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION (FERC)

Leonard Tao Chief Officer Director of Office of External Affairs

Section 1: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

The guiding principle underlying DOJ's FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness.

Please answer the following questions in order to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA. You may also include any additional information that illustrates how your agency is working to apply the presumption of openness.

A. FOIA Leadership

1. The FOIA requires each agency to designate a Chief FOIA Officer who is a senior official at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level. Is your agency's Chief FOIA Officer at this level?

Yes

2. Please provide the name and title of your agency's Chief FOIA Officer.

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B. FOIA Training

3. Did your FOIA professionals or the personnel at your agency who have FOIA responsibilities attend any substantive FOIA training or conference during the reporting period such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

Yes

4. If yes, please provide a brief description of the type of training attended or conducted and the topics covered.

FOIA for Attorneys by Department of Justice.

During FY2019 several FOIA professionals attended a two day training session at the Department of Justice that provided a detailed overview of

FOIA procedural requirements, exemptions, proactive disclosure requirements and all major aspects of FOIA.

5. Provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals and staff with FOIA responsibilities who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.

FERC has one full time FOIA professional and 17 individuals who routinely work on FOIA matters along with other responsibilities. Internal training was provided for new employees and refresher training was provided to staff, as necessary. Special training sessions were also conducted for specific program offices to address issues and offer guidance on conducting effective electronic searches for responsive material. Approximately, 80% of the FOIA professionals attended or conducted FOIA training during FY2019.

6. OIP has directed agencies to "take steps to ensure that all of their FOIA professionals attend substantive FOIA training at least once throughout the year." If your response to the previous question is that less than 80% of your FOIA professionals attended training, please explain your agency's plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals receive or attend substantive FOIA training during the next reporting year.

N/A

C. Outreach

7. Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue, and, if applicable, any specific examples of how this dialogue has led to improvements in your agency's FOIA administration.

No

D. Other Initiatives

8. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under the FOIA.

Training for new employees and refresher training advised individuals of their roles and obligations under FOIA. This includes an employee's obligation to provide responsive material, along with an opinion regarding the impact of the possible release of such material. These elements are critical to have a successful FOIA program. Performance standards for current FOIA professionals include pertinent language that clearly define the duties and responsibilities of such individuals.

9. Optional -- If there are any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied, please describe them here.

During this period FERC created "The FERC Insight" newsletter that provides another method in which information can be proactively shared with members of the public. This monthly newsletter includes a compilation that highlights Commission meetings, speeches, upcoming conferences, news releases and other special announcements relating to FERC matters. It also includes direct links to Commission orders, notices, reports, podcasts, and other pertinent material. This newsletter is available on our webpage: http://www.ferc.gov/media/insight.asp

FERC insight | Volume 1 | May 2019

<u>Section II: Steps Taken to Ensure that Your Agency Has an Effective System in Place for Responding to Requests</u>

DOJ's FOIA Guidelines emphasize that "[a]pplication of the proper disclosure standard is only one part of ensuring transparency. Open government requires not just a presumption of disclosure, but also an effective system for responding to FOIA requests." It is essential that agencies effectively manage their FOIA program.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the management of your FOIA program is effective and efficient. You should also include any additional information that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. For Fiscal Year 2019, what was the average number of days your agency reported for adjudicating requests for expedited processing? Please see Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report.

8 Days

2. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

N/A

3. During the reporting period, did your agency conduct a self-assessment of its FOIA program? If so, please describe the methods used, such as reviewing Annual Report data, using active workflows and track management, reviewing and updating processing procedures, etc.

No formal assessment was conducted during this period. However, FERC continuously strives to identify methods to improve the FOIA program on a regular basis. This includes routinely reviewing workflow activities.

 Note: In September 2017, OIP released a FOIA Self-Assessment Toolkit as a resource for agencies conducting a self-assessment of their FOIA program. The Toolkit is available on OIP's website for all agencies to use.

4. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires additional notification to requesters about the services provided by the agency's FOIA Public Liaison. Please provide an estimate of the number of times requesters sought assistance from your agency's FOIA Public Liaison during FY 2019 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number).

100 (Estimate)

5. Optional -- Please describe:

N/A

- Best practices used to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively
- Any challenges your agency faces in this area

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

The Department of Justice has long focused on the need for agencies to work proactively to post information online without waiting for individual requests to be received.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to increase the amount of material that is available on your agency websites. In addition to the questions below, you should also describe any additional steps taken by your agency to make and improve proactive disclosures of information.

1. Provide examples of any material that your agency has proactively disclosed during the past reporting year, including records that have been requested and released three or more times in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)(D). Please include links to these materials as well.

The FERC elibrary database (http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/elibrary.asp) includes an index of documents that have been filed at FERC or issued by FERC. An index of these documents is available, along with the ability to view most public material online. The following material reflects some of the documents that have been posted to the FERC webpage (http://www.ferc.gov)

March 29, 2019

FERC Staff Report Identifies Lessons Learned from CIP Reliability Audits News Release | Report

March 21, 2019

Item: E-1: FERC Opens Inquiry on Improvements to Electric Transmission Incentives Policy News Release | Presentation | NOI | NOI | DECEMBED | DECEMBED | NOI | DECEMBED | DECEMBE

April 18, 2019

April 15, 2019 - Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Richard Glick regarding PJM Interconnection, L.L.C., tariff <u>Read More</u>

April 18, 2019 - Commissioner Bernard L. McNamee Statement on FERC's Approval of the Driftwood and Port Arthur LNG Export Facilities <u>Read More</u>

April 18, 2019 2018 State of the Markets Report Presentation

June 12, 2019

FERC Chairman Neil Chatterjee and Commissioners Cheryl A. LaFleur, Richard Glick, and Bernard L. McNamee testify before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Energy

Subject: Hearing on Oversight of FERC: Ensuring Its Actions Benefit Consumers and the Environment

- » Chairman Chatterjee Testimony
- » Commissioners' Testimony: LaFleur Glick McNamee
- » Event Details

June 20, 2019

Item E-2: FERC Strengthens Cyber Security Standards for Bulk Electric System News Release | Staff Presentation | Order | Order |

June 20, 2019

Item M-1: FERC Revisions to the Filing Process for Commission Forms News Release | Order No. 859

July 10, 2019 - Chairman Chatterjee Talks Electricity Storage, recorded July 8, 2019. <u>Transcript</u> ■ | MP3 | YouTube | iTunes |

July 12, 2019

OER Director J. Andrew Dodge, Sr., P.E, testifies before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Energy on Keeping The Lights

Subject: Addressing Cyber Threats To The Grid.

- » Testimony
- » Event Details

July 18, 2019

FERC and NERC Release Report on January 2018 Extreme Cold Weather Event News Release | Report

August 2, 2019 - Statement on ONEOK Elk Creek Pipeline, L.L.C. Read More

Executive Director Anton Porter testifies before The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy, on S. 607, Timely Review of Infrastructure Act. Transcript

September 11, 2019 - Executive Director Anton Porter testifies before The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy, on S. 607, Timely Review of Infrastructure Act. Transcript

September 11, 2019 - Energy Cybersecurity, recorded September 6, 2019
FERC cyber experts Andrew Dodge, director of the Office of Electric Reliability, and Joseph McClelland, director of the Office of Energy Infrastructure Security, discuss what the Commission is doing to help improve the security of the nation's energy facilities.

Transcript

Music: "Get Me Started" by juqboxmusic, courtesy Getty Images.

MP3 YouTube ₽ iTunes ₽

September 19, 2019

Item E-1: FERC Proposes to Modernize PURPA Regulations News Release | Presentation NOPR Fact Sheet Commissioner Statements: Glick | McNamee

October 4, 2019 - Joint Statement of Chairman Neil Chatterjee and Commissioner Bernard L. McNamee on Southwest Power Pool, Inc., To Comply with the Fair Rates Act of 2018 Read More

October 4, 2019

FERC Staff Report Identifies Lessons Learned from CIP Reliability Audits News Release | Report | FERC Staff Report | Rep

October 16, 2019 - McNamee. Markets. Metallica? Recorded October 9, 2019

Commissioner Bernard McNamee joins Open Access for a review of his first 10 months at FERC and shares his views on natural gas markets and energy regulation, and reveals he's a huge fan of heavy metal in general and Metallica in particular. Transcript

Music: "Get Me Started" by juqboxmusic, courtesy Getty Images.

MP3 YouTube

☐

Tunes

October 16, 2019

FERC's Open Access Podcast: McNamee. Markets. Metallica? Podcast

October 17, 2019

FERC Issues Guidance for Hydro Development News Release | Notice Guide

| October 17, | 2019-2020 Winter Energy Market Assessment Presentation (As Presented) |
|-------------|---|
| 2019 | Presentation (Full Version) |

November 5, 2019

Today at 10 a.m. ET, Mr. James P. Danly will testify before the Energy & Natural Resources Committee to be a Member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission <u>Event Details</u> | Testimony

November 15, 2019

FERC Staff Issues Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Jordan Cove Energy Project (CP17-494-000 and CP17-495-000) Read More

November 20, 2019 - What does OEPI do? Recorded November 14, 2019

Learn all about the important policy work in the FERC Office of Energy Policy and Innovation from Office Director Jignasa Gadani. Transcript [DI]

Music: "Get Me Started" by juqboxmusic, courtesy Getty Images.

MP3 YouTube ₽ iTunes ₽

November 21, 2019

Item E-11: FERC Adopts New Base ROE Methodology, Addresses Complaints Against MISO News Release | Presentation Commissioner Statements: Glick | Order

November 21, 2019

Item A-4: FERC Staff Identifies Key Cybersecurity Program Priorities <u>News</u> Release | Staff Presentation

November 21, 2019

» Visit our Enforcement section

November 21, 2019

Items C-1, C-2, C-3, C-6: FERC Approves Four LNG Export Projects News Release | Commissioner Statements: Glick | Decisions: C-1 , C-2 , C-3 and C-6

November 19, 2019

FERC Announces Alternative Dispute Resolution Process for Midwest Propane Situation <u>News</u> Release

November 26, 2019

FERC Staff to convene EQR Users Group Meeting on December 4, 2019 Notice Supplemental Notice Event Details

December 5, 2019

FERC Chairman Chatterjee met December 4 with the President of the Polish Energy Regulatory Office on energy market oversight, development of the LNG sector in the U.S. and Europe, and renewable energy. Read More

December 9, 2019

FERC, Czech ERO Chairmen Meet to Strengthen Ties News Release

Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

| Between FERC and | Торіс | Date |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|
| Electricity System | markets they oversee and their regulatory | December 10, 2019 |
| Operator | experiences and practices. | |

December 17, 2019

We're No. 1! FERC Rated 'Best Place to Work' in Federal Employee Survey News Release

December 18, 2019

Letter from FERC to Federal Communication Commission regarding the unlicensed use of the 6 GHz spectrum band. Letter

December 19, 2019 - Concurrence of Commissioner Bernard L. McNamee Regarding New York Independent System Operator, Inc. <u>Read More</u>

January 9, 2020 - Concurrence in Part, Dissent in Part Regarding Constellation Mystic Power, LLC <u>Read</u> More

2. Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useful to the public, especially to the community of individuals who regularly access your agency's website?

Yes

3. If yes, please provide examples of such improvements.

Ongoing efforts to enhance search capabilities and other functions in online services. This includes creating additional podcasts and videos that provide tutorials, along with an overview of FERC functions and responsibilities. FERC also anticipates enhancing the infrastructure of the FERC elibrary database to make the system more user friendly as well as enhancing the users experience on our webpage.

4. Optional -- Please describe:

N/A

- Best practices used to improve proactive disclosures
- Any challenges your agency faces in this area

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

A key component of FOIA administration is using technology to make information more accessible. In addition to using the internet to make proactive disclosures, agencies should also be exploring ways to utilize technology in responding to requests.

Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is utilizing technology to improve its FOIA administration and the public's access to information. You should also include any additional information that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. Is your agency leveraging or exploring any new technology to facilitate efficiency in its FOIA administration that you have not previously reported? If so, please describe the type of technology.

During this period our IT experts are exploring additional types of software that may assist with conducting searches of emails that result in user friendly results to reduce the amount of time required to review and compare search results.

2. OIP issued guidance in 2017 encouraging agencies to regularly review their FOIA websites to ensure that they contain essential resources, and are informative and user-friendly. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA website(s) during the reporting period to ensure it addresses the elements noted in the guidance?

Yes.

3. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2019?

Yes

4. If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports, with information appearing on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2020.

Reports were posted on FERC webpage. However, they were not captured by the automated tool on foia.gov. FERC is working with OIP to

identify technical issues and assure that all future reports are reflected on the FERC webpage and foia.gov.

5. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires all agencies to post the raw statistical data used to compile their Annual FOIA Reports. Please provide the link to this posting for your agency's Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report.

2019 Annual Report Raw Data

6. Optional -- Please describe:

N/A

- Best practices used in greater utilizing technology
- Any challenges your agency faces in this area

<u>Section V: Steps Taken to Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests and Reducing Backlogs</u>

The Department of Justice has emphasized the importance of improving timeliness in responding to requests. This section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report addresses both time limits and backlog reduction. Backlog reduction is measured both in terms of numbers of backlogged requests or appeals and by looking at whether agencies closed their ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations.

For the figures required in this Section, please use the numbers contained in the specified sections of your agency's 2019 Annual FOIA Report and, when applicable, your agency's 2018 Annual FOIA Report.

A. Simple Track

Section VII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "FOIA Requests – Response Time for All Processed Requests," includes figures that show your agency's average response times for processed requests. For agencies utilizing a multi-track system to process requests, there is a category for "simple" requests, which are those requests that are placed in the agency's fastest (non-expedited) track, based on the low volume and/or simplicity of the records requested.

1. Does your agency utilize a separate track for simple requests?

Yes

Simple - These requests are identified as track 1.

Complex - These requests are identified as track 2 and track 3.

2. If your agency uses a separate track for simple requests, was the agency overall average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer in Fiscal Year 2019?

No

3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2019 that were placed in your simple track.

34%

4. If your agency does not track simple requests separately, was the average number of days to process all non-expedited requests twenty working days or fewer?

N/A

B. Backlogs

Section XII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "Backlogs of FOIA Requests and Administrative Appeals" shows the numbers of any backlogged requests or appeals from the fiscal year. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

BACKLOGGED REQUESTS

5. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2019, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2018?

No

6. If not, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2019 than it did during Fiscal Year 2018?

Yes

7. If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2019, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

There was an increase in the number of complex requests that were received in 2019. Many of these requests were processed on a rolling basis which required additional time. This included requests for key words within emails for extended date ranges.

- An increase in the number of incoming requests.
- A loss of staff.
- An increase in the complexity of the requests received. If possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase.
- Any other reasons please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.

8. If you had a request backlog please report the percentage of requests that make up the backlog out of the total number of requests received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2019. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."

34%

BACKLOGGED APPEALS

9. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2019, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2018?

The appeal backlog remained the same in FY19 as FY18 with 1 backlogged request.

APPEAL BACKLOG:

10. If not, did your agency **process** more appeals during Fiscal Year 2019 than it did during Fiscal Year 2018?

Yes

11. If your agency's appeal **backlog** increased during Fiscal Year 2019, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

N/A (The backlog was the same for FY2018 and FY2019. It did not increase).

- An increase in the number of incoming appeals.
- A loss of staff.
- An increase in the complexity of the requests received. If possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase.
- Any other reasons please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.
- 12. If you had an appeal backlog please report the percentage of appeals that make up the backlog out of the total number of appeals received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2019. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2019 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

10%

C. Backlog Reduction Plans

13. In the 2019 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2018 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did you agency implement a backlog reduction plan last year? If so, describe your agency's efforts in implementing this plan and note if your agency was able to achieve backlog reduction in Fiscal Year 2019?

N/A

14. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2019, what is your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2020?

N/A

D. Status of Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations

Section VII.E, entitled "Pending Requests – Ten Oldest Pending Requests," Section VI.C.(5), entitled "Ten Oldest Pending Administrative Appeals," and Section XII.C., entitled "Consultations on FOIA Requests – Ten Oldest Consultations Received from Other Agencies and Pending at Your Agency," show the ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

OLDEST REQUESTS

15. In Fiscal Year 2019, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report?

No

16. If no, please provide the number of these requests your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.E of your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

6

17. Beyond work on the ten oldest requests, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending requests.

FERC has designated a specific staff member to routinely monitor rolling, backlog and the ten oldest requests in an effort to finalize such matters during FY2020.

TEN OLDEST APPEALS

18. In Fiscal Year 2019, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes

19. If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

3 of 3 oldest appeals from FY28 were closed.

20. Beyond work on the ten oldest appeals, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending appeals.

N/A

TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS

21. In Fiscal Year 2019, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

22. If no, please provide the number of these consultations your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2018 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

1 of 1 oldest consults from FY18 were closed.

E. Additional Information on Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations & Plans

23. Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2019.

The ten oldest requests dealt with complex matters and/or large volumes of material and were processed on a rolling basis.

24. If your agency was unable to close any of its ten oldest requests because you were waiting to hear back from other agencies on consultations you sent, please provide the date the request was initially received by your agency, the date when your agency sent the consultation, and the date when you last contacted the agency where the consultation was pending.

N/A

25. If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, or consultations, please provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those "ten oldest" requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2020.

FERC has assigned a specific staff member to routinely monitor rolling, back log and ten oldest requests in an effort to finalize such matters during FY20.

F. Success Stories

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency since March 2019 to increase transparency and improve FOIA administration, please briefly describe here at least one success story that you would like to highlight as emblematic of your agency's efforts. The success story can come from any one of the five key areas. As noted above, OIP will highlight these agency success stories during Sunshine Week. To facilitate this process, all agencies should use bullets to describe their success story and limit their text to a half page. The success story is designed to be a quick summary of key achievements. A complete description of all your efforts will be contained in the body of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

During this period FERC created "The FERC Insight" newsletter that provides another method in which information can be proactively shared with members of the public. This monthly newsletter includes a compilation that highlights Commission meetings, speeches, upcoming conferences, news releases and other special announcements relating to FERC matters. It also includes direct links to Commission orders, notices, reports, podcasts, and other pertinent material. This newsletter is available on our webpage: http://www.ferc.gov/media/insight.asp