

CHIEF FOIA OFFICER'S REPORT

INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES (IMLS)

March 2017

This report has been prepared by Nancy E. Weiss, IMLS General Counsel and Chief FOIA Officer, in compliance with the "Guidelines for 2017 Chief FOIA Officer Reports" published by the Department of Justice Office of Information Policy. Questions concerning this report can be addressed to my attention via e-mail at nweiss@imls.gov or by phone at 202-653-4640.

IMLS's 2017 Chief FOIA Officer Report provides a narrative of the agency's FOIA activities that have occurred since the filing of last year's Report (March 2016) up through the present with the filing of this 2017 Report.

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Museum and Library ("IMLS" or the "Institute") recognizes that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) plays a fundamental role in the framework of Open Government. By applying a presumption of openness and maintaining effective FOIA operations, IMLS seeks to expand the public's access to information about the agency's programs and operations. The following narrative reports the steps IMLS has taken to fulfill FOIA's mandate during the reporting period.

AGENCY FOIA ACTIVITY

In 2016, IMLS established the Office of Digital and Information Strategy (ODIS), with the key goal of increasing the IMLS's technology footprint both to better support IMLS' core mission and to better serve and inform key stakeholders and the general public. The addition of ODIS as a key partner within the agency's Open Government process has inspired the entire IMLS Open Government Team to develop and implement more innovative methods by which IMLS may provide the public improved technological access to information.

In addition to partnering with ODIS on new ways to enhance access to agency information, the IMLS heavily emphasized professional training in 2016, both more highly specialized training for Key FOIA Representatives as well as agency-wide FOIA training for the entire IMLS staff. More specifically, IMLS Key FOIA Representatives attended several Department of Justice (DOJ) sponsored FOIA trainings, including: FOIA Processing for Attorneys and Access Professionals, Advance FOIA Seminar, and Annual FOIA Report Refresher Training. In addition to DOJ-sponsored training, IMLS Key FOIA Representatives attended the September 2016 American Society for Access Professionals (ASAP) annual FOIA/Privacy Act conference in Chicago, Illinois. These trainings, in turn, were instrumental in equipping these Key FOIA Representatives to provide two separate on-site FOIA training sessions to all IMLS staff employees. With regard to these two agency-wide FOIA trainings, one in May and the other in December 2016, all staff learned how to conduct proper FOIA searches, how to timely route incoming FOIA requests and identify the reasonable and necessary steps each IMLS program

office must undertake to support the processing of agency FOIA requests. In addition, the December 2016 FOIA training also emphasized the new requirements established by FOIA Improvement Act, while also outlining the need for timeliness, efficiency, and reasonableness when processing agency FOIA requests.

During 2017, IMLS plans to reevaluate its FOIA request intake and processing cycle (from incoming FOIA request to final agency resolution) to determine whether “any” aspect of the IMLS FOIA process could be further improved, updated or automated. Moreover, the IMLS Open Government Team will address whether there are new or more innovative ways to make proactive public disclosures using a vast array of available and financially feasible technology methods. In addition, the IMLS Open Government Team will be developing and finalizing its Open Government Plan 3.0. The overall objective of IMLS’s Open Government Plan 3.0 will be to undertake agency-wide improvements in technology and set new standards for proactive disclosure and releases of information that will continue to move the agency forward in fulfilling IMLS obligations to maximize openness, transparency and collaboration. It should be further noted that, as in 2016, the IMLS Open Government Team will remain committed to making electronic and information technologies, including documents that are proactively disclosed, accessible to individuals with disabilities by meeting or exceeding the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Finally, as a small agency without staff devoted to full-time FOIA work, IMLS nevertheless considers as key priorities its adherence to FOIA mandates requiring the prevention of unnecessary backlogs, emphasizing proactive customer service, and remedying issues related to timeliness in processing agency FOIA requests. IMLS recently engaged a new staff attorney who, along with an additional administrative employee, will assist the other Key FOIA Representatives to process and close several voluminous and complex FOIA requests IMLS has pending.