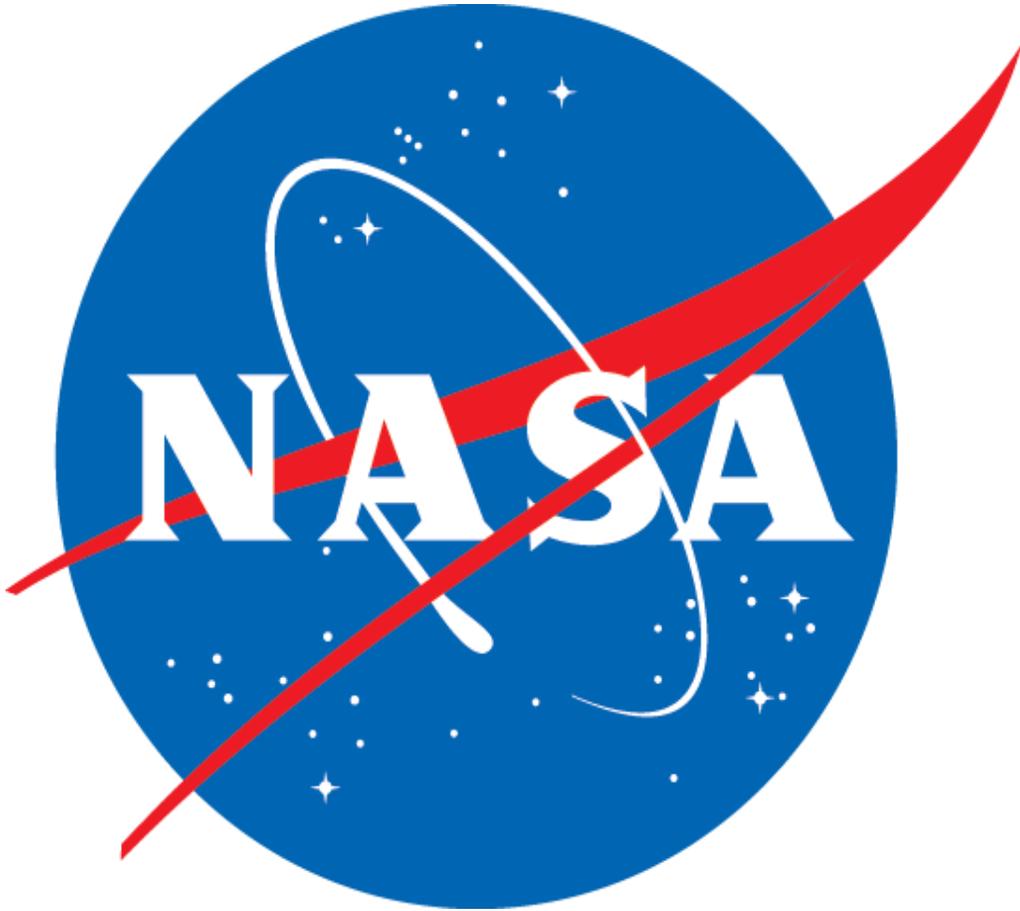


National Aeronautics and Space Administration



2026 CHIEF FOIA OFFICER REPORT

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SECTION I: FOIA LEADERSHIP AND APPLYING PRESUMPTION OF OPENNESS

The guiding principle underlying the Attorney General’s 2022 FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness. The Guidelines also highlight the importance of agency leadership in ensuring effective FOIA administration. Please answer the following questions about FOIA leadership at your agency and describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA.

A. Leadership Support for FOIA

1. The FOIA requires each agency to designate a Chief FOIA Officer who is a senior official at least at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(j)(1) (2018). Is your agency’s Chief FOIA Officer at or above this level?

ANSWER: Yes

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

ANSWER: Wes Brown, Deputy Associate Administrator for the Office of Communications

3. What steps has your agency taken to incorporate FOIA into its core mission? For example, has your agency incorporated FOIA milestones into its strategic plan?

ANSWER: Senior leadership at NASA emphasizes transparency as a core value, consistent with the National Aeronautics and Space Act's mandate for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information concerning NASA's objectives, methods, and results. NASA's robust proactive disclosure program, which includes comprehensive open data platforms (data.nasa.gov, api.nasa.gov, code.nasa.gov), extensive social media engagement, and regularly updated FOIA libraries, reflects the agency's commitment to making information accessible to the public beyond formal FOIA requests. This alignment between NASA's statutory mission and FOIA's transparency goals ensures that disclosure obligations are integrated throughout the agency's communications framework.

While NASA has not officially incorporated FOIA milestones into a strategic plan, the Freedom of Information Act Office is part of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA’s) Office of Communications (OCOMM). OCOMM handles corporate, Agency-wide communications for NASA and is accountable for managing the planning, development, and implementation of communications events, activities, and products for stakeholders, including the general public.

It provides for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information to news media and the general public concerning the objectives, methods, and results of NASA programs. OCOMM is responsible for planning, organizing, directing, and coordinating Agency-wide communications activities for all facets of NASA's mission, programs, activities, and functions for the Agency's workforce, media, and the general public. The scope of the Agency's communications entails a broad, diverse, and integrated set of efforts, including news and media engagement, digital services and products (including Web, multimedia, and social media), non-technical publications, and exhibits, as well as speaking and public engagement activities and events.

B. Presumption of Openness

4. DOJ's 2022 FOIA Guidelines provides that "agencies should confirm in response letters to FOIA requesters that they have considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing records and applying FOIA exemptions." Does your agency provide such confirmation in its response letters?

ANSWER: Yes.

5. In some circumstances, agencies may respond to a requester that it can neither confirm nor deny the existence of requested records if acknowledging the existence of records would harm an interested protected by a FOIA exemption. This is commonly referred to as a Glomar response. If your agency tracks Glomar responses, please provide:

- the number of times your agency issued a full or partial Glomar response during Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 (please separate full and partial Glomar responses if possible);
- the number of times a Glomar response was issued by exemption FY 2025 (e.g., Exemption 7(C) – 20 times, Exemption 1 – 5 times).

ANSWER: NASA did not issue any full or partial Glomar responses during FY 2026.

6. 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.

ANSWER: The National Aeronautics and Space Act mandates that NASA disseminate to the public as much information as possible concerning its missions and scientific findings. Please see answer to question number 3 above regarding OCOMM's mission to meet this mandate.

Section II – Ensuring Fair and Effective FOIA Administration

DOJ's 2022 FOIA Guidelines provide that "[e]nsuring fair and effective FOIA administration requires . . . proper training, and a full understanding of FOIA obligations by the entire agency workforce." The Guidelines reinforce longstanding guidance to "work with FOIA requesters in a spirit of cooperation." DOJ also "urge[s] agency Chief FOIA Officers to undertake

comprehensive review of all aspects of their agency's FOIA administration" as part of ensuring fair and effective FOIA administration.

A. FOIA Training

1. The FOIA directs agency Chief FOIA Officers to ensure that FOIA training is offered to agency personnel. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(j)(2)(F). Please describe the efforts your agency has undertaken to ensure proper FOIA training is made available and used by agency personnel.

ANSWER: In fulfillment of 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(j)(2)(F), NASA's Chief FOIA Officer has taken proactive steps to ensure that comprehensive FOIA training is made available to agency personnel at all levels. At the direction of and in coordination with the Chief FOIA Officer, NASA's Principal Agency FOIA Officer conducted multiple targeted FOIA training sessions throughout the year, tailored to meet the specific needs of various agency audiences.

NASA prioritized training for incoming political appointees to ensure immediate compliance with FOIA obligations upon assumption of their duties. The agency conducted dedicated FOIA training sessions for political appointees on April 2, 2025, December 16, 2025, and December 23, 2025, as well as January 5, 2026. These sessions covered essential FOIA principles including the statutory framework established in 14 CFR 1206, the FOIA Statute 5 U.S.C. § 552(b), and included DOJ guidance and prevailing caselaw, and agency responsibilities for timely responses, NASA's frequently used exemptions, and the importance of transparency in government operations.

Beyond executive-level training, NASA extended FOIA education to procurement and operational personnel. On May 21, 2025, the agency conducted a FOIA training session at the Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC) Procurement Town Hall, ensuring that procurement professionals understand their FOIA responsibilities when handling sensitive contractual and commercial information.

Additionally, on April 4, 2025, NASA provided a specialized FOIA briefing to NASA Officials In Charge (OIC)—senior leaders responsible for managing specific NASA Headquarters offices or centers that approve critical actions. OICs ensure agency-wide compliance with policies and often hold delegated authority to manage organizational, budgetary, and operational requirements. This training reinforced collaboration and ensured consistent FOIA implementation across all agency components.

All training sessions were developed and delivered by NASA's Principal Agency FOIA Officer in coordination with the Chief FOIA Officer to ensure agency-wide compliance with FOIA requirements and to promote a culture of transparency and accountability throughout NASA.

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

ANSWER: Yes

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

ANSWER: NASA FOIA attended the following FOIA training offered by the Department of Justice during this reporting period:

- Advanced FOIA Training;
- Administrative Appeals, FOIA Compliance, and Customer Service Training;
- Annual/Quarterly FOIA Report Training;
- Exemption 4 & 5 Workshop;
- Exemptions 1 & 7 Workshop;
- Litigation Seminar;
- Privacy Considerations;
- Procedural Requirements, and Fees;
- Procedural Requirements, and Fees.

In addition, NASA FOIA staff attended the following FOIA trainings and events offered by other entities:

- 09/11/2025 FOIA Advisory Committee Meeting;
- 07/23/2025 Annual Chief FOIA Officers Open Meeting;
- 07/12/2025 FOIA Advisory Committee Meeting;
- 03/06/2025 FOIA Advisory Committee Meeting;
- DGI Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Records Management
- Feith Systems AI Opportunities in FOIA Webinar.

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

ANSWER: 87% of NASA's FOIA staff attended FOIA training during the reporting period.

5. 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.

ANSWER: The Principal Agency FOIA Officer is committed to ensuring all FOIA professionals receive substantive FOIA training and has emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development for effective FOIA administration. During this reporting period, all FOIA professionals were encouraged to attend training opportunities offered by the Office of Information Policy (OIP) and other sources. However, due to challenges faced during the year, not all FOIA professionals completed training. To address this for the next reporting year, the Principal Agency FOIA Officer will implement a more structured approach to training compliance, including:

- Establishing clear expectations at the beginning of the year that all FOIA professionals must complete substantive FOIA training
- Identifying specific OIP training courses or other substantive training opportunities early in the year
- Tracking training completion throughout the year and following up with staff who have not yet completed required training

The office recognizes that consistent, substantive training is essential to maintaining high-quality FOIA administration, particularly given the complexity of NASA's records and the challenging resource environment the office currently faces.

6. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under the FOIA. In particular, please describe how often and in what formats your agency provides FOIA training or briefings to non-FOIA staff; and if senior leaders at your agency received a briefing on your agency's FOIA resources, obligations, and expectations during the FOIA process?

ANSWER: In addition to the trainings outlined in A.3 above, the Office of General Counsel makes a presentation about FOIA at the agency's New Employee Orientation Training sessions for new employees.

B. Outreach

7. As part of the standard request process, do your FOIA professionals proactively contact requesters concerning complex or voluminous requests in an effort to clarify or narrow the scope of the request so requesters can receive responses more quickly? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue, and, if applicable, any specific examples.

ANSWER: NASA routinely provides help to requesters in refining their submissions—a critical but often unseen aspect of our FOIA program's daily operations. When requests do not meet the specificity requirements outlined in 14 C.F.R. § 1206.301(b), FOIA specialists send detailed clarification emails that identify specific deficiencies, provide helpful context about NASA's organizational structure and missions, recommend publicly available resources, and offer direct contact information for continued dialogue with the assigned specialist or FOIA Public Liaison.

For example, when NASA receives overly broad email requests using vague keywords, specialists proactively explain that single words and generic phrases yield voluminous non-responsive records and work with requesters to develop specific phrases, Boolean search terms, or unifying themes that will facilitate more targeted searches and faster responses.

8. Outside of the standard request process or routine FOIA Liaison or FOIA Requester Service Center interactions, did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue, with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? For example, did you proactively contact frequent requesters, host FOIA-related conference calls with open government groups, or provide FOIA training to members of the public? 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.

ANSWER: No. While the FOIA office does not have any outreach *outside* of the standard FOIA processes, NASA has a strong and robust OCOMM with Public Affairs Officers embedded in all NASA programs to answer inquiries received from the media related to NASA programs and missions.

OCOMM handles corporate, Agency-wide communications for NASA and is accountable for managing the planning, development, and implementation of communications events, activities, and products for stakeholders, including the general public. The office provides for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information to news media and the general public concerning the objectives, methods, and results of NASA programs. The office is responsible for planning, organizing, directing, and coordinating Agency-wide communications activities for all facets of NASA's mission, programs, activities, and functions for the Agency's workforce, media, and the general public. The scope of the Agency's communications entails a broad, diverse, and integrated set of efforts, including news and media engagement, digital services and products (including Web, multimedia, and social media), non-technical publications, and exhibits, as well as speaking and public engagement activities and events. The office works to promote effective NASA communications by ensuring synergy and strategic focus and working collaboratively with the Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Office of STEM Engagement, and other Agency organizations, as appropriate.

NASA also has a Public Inquiries unit that answers thousands of inquiries from the public via mail, email, or phone calls. The customer service that NASA's OCOMM provides to the public in response to any inquiry is an essential part of the agency's open government activities. These services are key activities that help reduce the number of FOIA requests NASA receives.

Additionally, NASA utilizes a tool called NASA Engages (<https://my.nasa.gov/engages/s/>). This is a public outreach program connecting NASA experts with a wide range of audiences through educational, professional, and community events. Engagements are tailored to groups including students, libraries, museums, scouting organizations, professional societies, community groups, and non-profit organizations. Through these efforts, NASA experts share the agency's missions, research, and major accomplishments to inform, inspire, and educate.

9. 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 Fiscal Year 2025 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number).

ANSWER: NASA's FOIA Public Liaison received 9 requests for assistance and/or disputes from requesters regarding their FOIA requests during this reporting period. Disputes were resolved without further being raised to the agency's administrative appeal unit at NASA's OGC or OGIS. We believe that the continued minimal calls for assistance from NASA's FOIA Public Liaison indicates the level of customer service offered by NASA FOIA processors to ensure requesters receive timely assistance and continual status updates on their requests.

C. Other Initiatives

10. Has your agency evaluated the allocation of agency personnel resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands? If so, please describe what changes your agency has or will implement.

ANSWER: The FOIA office has evaluated its personnel resource allocation in light of recent workforce changes. Previously, the office utilized a rotational detailee to assist with FOIA tasks, which allowed the office to leverage experience from other areas of the agency and helped balance the workload between FOIA personnel and the detailee. This arrangement also provided valuable cross-training opportunities.

However, following recent staff departures, the FOIA office lost two FOIA personnel as well as the detailee position. This reduction, combined with significant agency-wide staffing shortages resulting from the departures, has created substantial resource challenges for meeting current and anticipated FOIA demands.

The agency is currently assessing strategies to address these personnel gaps, including:

- Redistributing FOIA responsibilities among remaining staff
- Exploring technology solutions to improve processing efficiency
- Working with NASA programs to streamline search efforts and document reviews

The agency recognizes that adequate staffing is essential to maintaining timely and effective FOIA responses and will continue to monitor resource needs as circumstances evolve.

11. How does your agency use data or processing metrics to ensure efficient management of your FOIA workload? For example, case management reports, staff processing statistics, etc. In addition, please specifically highlight any data analysis methods or technologies used.

ANSWER: On a weekly basis, the Principal Agency FOIA Officer conducts assessments of NASA's pending cases and provides a metric report to the agency's Chief FOIA Officer and other management officials. This report provides a snapshot of each FOIA processor's workload and what needs to be done either by the Principal Agency FOIA Officer or management to assist with resolving complex issues that are holding up the completion of a request. It also allows the Principal Agency FOIA Officer to measure each analyst's workload and implement an assignment process that factors in request complexity, as well as each analyst's caseload and proficiency for more equitable division of the FOIA workload.

12. Optional -- If there are any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure fair and effective FOIA administration, please describe them here.

ANSWER: N/A

SECTION III: PROACTIVE DISCLOSURES

DOJ's FOIA Guidelines emphasize that "proactive disclosure of information is . . . fundamental to the faithful application of the FOIA." The Guidelines direct agencies to post "records online quickly and systematically in advance of any public request" and reiterate that agencies should post records "in the most useful, searchable, and open formats possible."

1. Please describe what steps your agency takes to identify, track, and post (a)(2) proactive disclosures.

ANSWER: NASA has one of the most robust communications programs that uses social media to disseminate information of interest to the public. NASA's OCOMM routinely releases information to the public, especially information that has the potential to generate significant media, public interest, or other inquiries. Our program offices regularly post documents related to mission updates, launches, etc., and this information is further publicized through tweets, program-sponsored events, interviews, etc.

2. Does your agency post logs of its FOIA requests?

- If so, what information is contained in the logs?
- Are they posted in CSV format? If not, what format are they posted in?
- Please provide a link to the page where any FOIA logs are posted. If applicable, please provide component links.

ANSWER: NASA posts logs of its FOIA requests at the end of each quarter. Each log is posted in XLSX format and contains information about every FOIA request closed during that quarter. Specifically, the information available in each log contains the following: request number, request type (i.e., FOIA request), the organization the requester is affiliated with (if any), a description of the request, the final disposition of the request, any exemptions cited, and the date the request was closed. These logs are available at <https://www.nasa.gov/foia/nasa-e-libraries/headquarters-foia-library/>.

3. 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.

ANSWER: NASA has a vast amount of information posted on its many websites by its Mission Directorates and program officials. The FOIA office proactively posts the SmartPay Card Holder's list, FOIA logs, and any requests that have been requested 3 times or more.

The list for SmartPay Card Holders can be accessed by visiting the NASA Shared Services Center (NSSC) FOIA reading room at:
<https://searchpub.nssc.nasa.gov/servlet/sm.web.Fetch?rhid=1000&did=1761572&type=released>.

The FOIA Logs can be accessed by visiting the NASA Headquarters FOIA reading room at:
<https://www.nasa.gov/foia/nasa-e-libraries/headquarters-foia-library/>.

4. Please provide a link (or component links, if applicable) where your agency routinely posts its frequently requested records.

ANSWER: <https://www.nasa.gov/foia/nasa-e-libraries/>

5. 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? If yes, please provide examples of such improvements, such as steps taken to post information in open and machine readable formats. If not taking steps to make posted information more useful, please explain why.

ANSWER: Yes. NASA continues to take steps to make posted information more useful and accessible to the public. The agency provides data in open, machine-readable formats through multiple platforms. NASA's comprehensive data inventory at <https://data.nasa.gov/> is pushed to data.gov on set schedules, allowing the public to search datasets in standardized formats. NASA also has <https://api.nasa.gov/>, which provides machine-readable access to data, and <https://code.nasa.gov/> to offer computer code in multiple languages to assist application development, making NASA's data as interoperable as possible.

NASA has enhanced search capabilities and metadata to improve discoverability of information. NASA's Technical Reports Server (NTRS, <https://ntrs.nasa.gov/>) provides not only full-text documents but also robust metadata that enables more effective searching and discovery of technical information. The NASA Image Library (<https://images.nasa.gov/>) consolidates imagery and videos in one searchable location and includes detailed metadata associated with images, including EXIF/camera data, allowing users to better understand and utilize the content. The agency has also worked to consolidate information into centralized, searchable platforms rather than dispersing it across multiple sites, which improves discoverability and reduces the burden on users who previously had to know where to look for specific types of information. Additionally, the FOIA office continues to evaluate frequently requested records for proactive posting to the agency's FOIA library, reducing the need for the public to submit formal FOIA requests for commonly sought information.

These efforts align with the agency's statutory mandate to disseminate federally funded scientific and technical information to the widest audience practicable and support the goals of the Evidence-Based Policymaking Act under the purview of the NASA Chief Data Officer.

6. Does your proactive disclosure process or system involve any collaboration with agency staff outside the FOIA office, such as IT or data personnel? If so, describe this interaction.

ANSWER: No. The FOIA office's proactive disclosure process does not involve collaboration with agency staff outside the FOIA office. The FOIA office independently evaluates frequently requested records for posting to the agency's FOIA library and manages the posting of those records to the FOIA website.

While NASA's broader open data initiatives involve collaboration between various offices including IT and data personnel (as described in the previous response), these efforts are managed separately from the FOIA office's proactive disclosure program. The FOIA office focuses on identifying and posting records that have been the subject of FOIA requests to reduce duplicative requests, while the agency's larger open data and information dissemination programs are handled by other offices in fulfillment of NASA's statutory mandate to share scientific and technical information with the public.

7. Optional -- Please describe the best practices used to improve proactive disclosures and any challenges your agency faces in this area.

ANSWER: For best practices, please see response to question 5 above. One challenge the FOIA office faces is the remediation of records under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. 794d), as amended in 1998. Remediating records for 508 compliance is a costly service which prohibits the FOIA Office from utilizing it.

SECTION IV: STEPS TAKEN TO GREATER UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY

A key component of FOIA administration is using technology to make information available to the public and to gain efficiency in FOIA processing. DOJ's 2022 FOIA Guidelines emphasize the importance of making FOIA websites easily navigable and complying with the FOIA.gov interoperability requirements. Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is using technology to improve its FOIA administration and the public's access to information.

1. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA-related technological capabilities to identify resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands?

ANSWER: Yes. NASA uses an automated tracking system to track its FOIA workflow. We also use a web-based collaboration platform to store our FOIA request files which allows all relevant personnel to collaborate on records received and processed in response to FOIA requests. In addition, NASA uses a cloud-based content management platform to securely share larger volumes of records with external stakeholders during the records review process, and with requesters once the review process is complete. Further, NASA uses its Office of Information Technology to conduct FOIA searches of employees' and Capstone officials' email accounts. This has greatly helped to streamline the administration of our FOIA program. NASA also uses Adobe Acrobat Pro to redact records, and has several licenses for an Acrobat plug-in that enables FOIA processors to organize and identify duplicate email trails. It has helped the FOIA Office to manage and process requests for voluminous emails more efficiently.

2. Please briefly describe any new types of technology your agency began using during the reporting period to support your FOIA program.

ANSWER: During the reporting period, NASA's FOIA program integrated artificial intelligence and automation technologies to enhance operational efficiency and improve response quality.

The agency utilized NASA-approved AI tools, including ChatGSFC and Microsoft Co-Pilot, to develop and standardize multiple new FOIA response templates, ensuring consistent communication with requesters while maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements under 14 C.F.R. § 1206.

Additionally, NASA FOIA specialists developed custom automation scripts using PowerShell and Python programming languages to streamline administrative tasks. These scripts automate routine functions such as file documentation, metadata generation, and case file organization.

The automation tools also facilitate the sorting and indexing of large document collections, enabling FOIA professionals to more efficiently organize responsive records, identify potentially exempt information, and conduct quality control reviews. These technological improvements have reduced time spent on repetitive administrative tasks, allowing FOIA specialists to focus on substantive review work, legal analysis, and proactive requester engagement, ultimately improving both processing speed and response quality.

3. Does your agency currently use any technology to automate request intake, customer service, or record processing? For example, does your agency use artificial intelligence or other tools to conduct searches or make redactions? If so, please describe and, if possible, estimate how much time and financial resources are saved since implementing the technology.

ANSWER: The NASA FOIA Office currently utilizes several technology tools to improve efficiency in record processing. The office uses Adobe Acrobat Pro's search and redaction function, which allows users to search for specific text (such as words, short phrases, names, telephone numbers, email addresses, etc.) and "teach" the software to redact such text within a document. This functionality helps streamline the redaction process for repetitive exempt information.

Additionally, the FOIA office utilizes an Acrobat plug-in that helps automate several functions for managing and processing large batches of emails. This tool converts email files into PDF format while keeping attachments with their parent email, and uses metadata to identify duplicate and near-duplicate email chains. It also enables batch renaming of records according to set parameters (for instance, emails can be renamed using conventions such as `date_timestamp_subject`), which helps FOIA processors more easily identify any near-duplicate emails the software may have missed, and organize emails for more efficient processing. While we have not quantified specific time and financial savings from these tools, they have demonstrably improved workflow efficiency, particularly when processing voluminous email productions.

For request intake, the agency's tracking system automates the ingestion of requests submitted through FOIA.gov or NASA's Public Access Link (PAL), allowing for seamless integration into the agency's FOIA workflow.

The FOIA office is currently evaluating various artificial intelligence technologies already available at NASA that may assist with redactions, word processing, and document analysis. As these technologies continue to develop and as the agency assesses their compatibility with FOIA

requirements and security protocols, we will consider implementation options that could further enhance processing efficiency.

4. 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?

ANSWER: Yes, NASA has thoroughly reviewed and updated its FOIA website during the reporting period to ensure full compliance with the elements noted in the 2017 OIP guidance. In response to recent workforce changes and organizational restructuring within NASA's FOIA program, the agency undertook a comprehensive redesign of its FOIA web presence to enhance user-friendliness, streamline navigation, and ensure all essential resources are readily accessible to the public.

NASA significantly improved the accessibility and clarity of FOIA contact information by updating its dedicated "FOIA Contacts" page (<https://www.nasa.gov/foia/foia-contacts/>) that clearly explains NASA's partially decentralized FOIA structure. The redesigned page provides straightforward guidance to help requesters identify the appropriate NASA office for their request, including:

- Clear descriptions of which NASA Centers fall under HQ FOIA jurisdiction (Ames Research Center, Glenn Research Center, Goddard Space Flight Center, Johnson Space Center, Kennedy Space Center, Langley Research Center, Marshall Space Center, and NASA Shared Services Center)
- Separate contact information for independently operating offices (Office of Inspector General, Stennis Space Center, and Jet Propulsion Laboratory)
- Direct links to online submission portals (NASA's Public Access Link and the National FOIA Portal)
- Updated contact information for the Principal FOIA Officer (Sarah A. Scharf) and FOIA Public Liaison (Stephanie K. Fox)

This streamlined approach eliminates confusion about where to submit requests and reduces misdirected requests that cause processing delays.

5. Did all four of your agency's quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2025 appear on FOIA.gov?

ANSWER: Yes.

6. If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2026.

ANSWER: N/A

7. 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 2024 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2025 Annual FOIA Report.

ANSWER: NASA's Annual FOIA Reports for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025, including the raw data for each, can be accessed at the following website: <https://www.nasa.gov/foia/foia-reports/annual-foia-report/>.

8. In February 2019, DOJ and OMB issued joint Guidance establishing interoperability standards to receive requests from the National FOIA Portal on FOIA.gov. Are all components of your agency in compliance with the guidance?

ANSWER: Yes.

9. Optional -- Please describe the best practices used in greater utilizing technology and any challenges your agency faces in this area.

ANSWER:

NASA's FOIA Office has adopted a strategic approach to technology utilization that maximizes efficiency and innovation. The office's best practices include leveraging enterprise-available tools as described above including in-house automation scripts using PowerShell and Python programming languages to streamline administrative tasks. The office has also successfully implemented cost-effective solutions such as Adobe Acrobat Pro and specialized plug-ins to improve processing efficiency, exploring the full functionality of tools already licensed across the agency.

As NASA explores opportunities to further enhance its FOIA program through advanced technology, budget considerations remain an important factor in decision-making. More sophisticated technology options—including specialized artificial intelligence tools for automated redaction, advanced document analysis, and machine learning-assisted exemption identification—often require significant financial investment for licensing, implementation, training, and ongoing technical support.

The office takes a thoughtful approach to technology investments, carefully evaluating cost-effectiveness, scalability, and long-term sustainability as it explores new solutions. This includes assessing technologies available through existing agency agreements, considering custom development options that leverage internal expertise, and prioritizing tools that offer the greatest operational benefits relative to their costs.

NASA remains committed to continuous improvement and innovation in FOIA processing. The office actively monitors emerging technologies and best practices across the federal FOIA community, seeking opportunities to pilot new tools and approaches that can enhance service delivery while being mindful of resource allocation. This balanced approach ensures that technology investments align with both operational needs and fiscal responsibility.

SECTION V: STEPS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO ACCESS, IMPROVE TIMELINESS IN RESPONDING TO REQUESTS, AND REDUCE BACKLOGS

DOJ's FOIA Guidelines instruct agencies "to remove barriers to requesting and accessing government records and to reduce FOIA processing backlogs." Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is removing barriers to access, improving timeliness in responding to requests, and reducing FOIA backlogs.

A. Remove Barriers to Access

1. Has your agency established alternative means of access to first-party requested records outside of the FOIA process?

ANSWER: No

2. If yes, please provide examples. If no, please indicate why not. Please also indicate if you do not know.

ANSWER: NASA receives a small number of requests from requesters seeking their own records. Therefore, for these types of requests, NASA reviews the records and processes them under both the FOIA and Privacy Act to provide the widest possible access.

During the reporting period, NASA significantly improved its approach to first-party requests by developing enhanced response templates that streamline the dual-processing procedure and provide greater transparency to requesters. The improved templates clearly explain to requesters that NASA is processing their request under both statutes—the FOIA (5 U.S.C. § 552) and the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. § 552a(d)(1))—to ensure they receive access to information under both legal frameworks.

This dual-processing approach ensures that first-party requesters receive maximum disclosure under both statutory frameworks without needing to file separate requests or navigate different procedural requirements. By processing all first-party requests under both the FOIA and Privacy Act simultaneously, NASA removes potential barriers to access and provides a more user-friendly experience for individuals seeking their own records.

3. Please describe any other steps your agency has taken to remove barriers to accessing government information.

ANSWER: N/A

B. Timeliness

4. For Fiscal Year 2025, 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 2024 Annual FOIA Report.

ANSWER: 9.94

5. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, according to Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2025 Annual FOIA Report, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

ANSWER: N/A

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

ANSWER: Yes. NASA uses a multi-track system and has a separate track for simple requests.

7. If your agency uses a separate track for simple requests, according to Annual FOIA Report section VII.A, was the agency overall average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer in Fiscal Year 2025?

ANSWER: Yes. The agency overall average number of days to process simple requests was 6.94 working days in Fiscal Year 2025.

8. If not, did the simple track average processing time decrease compared to the previous Fiscal Year?

ANSWER: N/A

9. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2025 that were placed in your simple track. Please use the following calculation based on the data from your Annual FOIA Report: (processed simple requests from Section VII.C.1) divided by (requests processed from Section V.A.) x 100.

ANSWER: 39%

10. 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?

ANSWER: N/A.

C. Backlogs

Backlogged Requests

11. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2025, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.2, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2024?

ANSWER: No. NASA's backlog was 39 at the end of FY 2024, and 111 at the end of FY 2025.

12. If not, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.1, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2025 than it did during Fiscal Year 2024?

ANSWER: Yes, NASA processed 1,459 requests in FY 2024, and 1,463 requests in FY 2025.

13. If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2025, 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:

- 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)
- Litigation
- Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible

ANSWER: NASA's request backlog increased from 39 requests in Fiscal Year 2024 to 111 requests in Fiscal Year 2025. While the agency received fewer requests in FY 2025 (1,476 requests) compared to FY 2024 (1,560 requests) and processed a comparable number of requests (1,463 in FY 2025 versus 1,459 in FY 2024), several factors prevented the office from reducing the backlog.

The primary contributing factor was staffing departures. The FOIA office lost two FOIA processors as well as a detailee position, significantly reducing processing capacity. Additionally, the departures resulted in staffing shortages throughout the agency's program offices. Because FOIA processing relies heavily on coordination with program offices to conduct searches, provide responsive records, and identify sensitive technical information that may be exempt from disclosure, these agency-wide staffing losses created significant bottlenecks in the FOIA workflow.

In addition, many requests require consultation with other federal agencies regarding records or information that originated with or involve those agencies. The FOIA office has experienced longer response times from outside agencies for these consultations, which further delays the agency's ability to complete processing and respond to requesters.

Finally, the 43-day government shutdown in FY 2025 halted FOIA operations during the shutdown period, contributing to processing delays and backlog growth for the current Fiscal Year. When operations resumed, the FOIA office faced a significant backlog of suspended work

that required immediate attention, further straining already reduced staff resources and compounding delays in processing requests.

14. 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 2025. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged requests from Section XII.A) divided by (requests received from Section V.A) x 100. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."

ANSWER: 7.5%

Backlogged Appeals

15. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2025, according to Section XII.E.2 of the Annual FOIA Report, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2024?

ANSWER: No. NASA had a backlog of 8 appeals at the end of FY 2024, and 17 at the end of FY 2025.

16. If not, according to section XII.E.1 of the Annual FOIA Report, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2025 than it did during Fiscal Year 2024?

ANSWER: Yes. NASA processed 16 appeals during Fiscal Year 2024, and 22 appeals during Fiscal Year 2025.

17. If your agency's appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2025, 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:

- 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)
- Litigation
- Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible

ANSWER: The number of FOIA appeals received by NASA during Fiscal Year 2025 continued to increase as compared to prior Fiscal Years.¹ In Fiscal Year 2024 NASA received 21 appeals, and in Fiscal Year 2025 NASA received 25 appeals. These FOIA appeals are reviewed by attorney advisors within NASA's Office of the General Counsel (OGC), who advise on FOIA

¹ The referenced appeals are for those reviewed by NASA's Office of the General Counsel. NASA's Office of Inspector General processes its own appeals; however, that office reported no appeals in its backlog this Fiscal Year.

matters and a variety of other legal matters. The complexity and volume of records associated with these appeals has also increased. Review of these time-intensive appeals, coupled with competing demands for attorney time, including FOIA and non-FOIA litigation, and an overall increase in the number of appeals received, contributed to a backlog of appeals for this reporting year.

18. 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 2025. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged appeals from Section XII.A) divided by (appeals received from Section VI.A) x 100. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2025 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

ANSWER: 65.4%

D. Backlog Reduction Plans

19. In the 2025 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2024 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did your 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 2024?

ANSWER: NASA did not implement a formal backlog reduction plan last year because its backlog in Fiscal Year 2024 was less than 1,000 requests. However, consistent with the August 21, 2025 OIP Guidance on Backlog Reduction Plans, NASA has proactively implemented several key elements of backlog reduction planning to ensure sustainable FOIA operations and maintain manageable backlog levels despite increasing request volumes.

NASA is assessing staffing adequacy in light of recent workforce changes and the ongoing challenge of increased request volumes. The agency is evaluating whether current staffing levels are sufficient to manage workload demands and is exploring technological solutions and the distribution of expertise across the FOIA office to ensure efficient processing of complex technical and scientific requests.

NASA has identified patterns in request types to gain process efficiencies. The agency has developed specialized approaches for handling recurring categories of requests, such as contract-related inquiries, personnel records, and mission-specific technical documentation. By recognizing these patterns, NASA FOIA specialists have been able to streamline workflows and develop standardized processing procedures that reduce redundancy and improve consistency.

As described earlier in this report, NASA has leveraged artificial intelligence and automation technologies to enhance operational efficiency. The agency utilized NASA-approved AI tools to develop standardized FOIA response templates and created custom automation scripts using PowerShell and Python to automate routine administrative functions. These technological

improvements have reduced time spent on repetitive tasks, allowing FOIA specialists to focus on substantive review work and complex request processing.

As detailed earlier in this report, NASA has prioritized proactive communication with requesters to clarify and narrow voluminous or unclear requests. FOIA specialists routinely contact requesters to discuss any aspect of their request that could benefit from refinement, providing guidance on how to describe records effectively and directing requesters to publicly available resources. This approach reduces the volume of non-responsive records that must be processed and ensures requesters receive the most relevant information more quickly.

NASA continues to evaluate its case management system to identify opportunities for further automation and optimization. The agency has implemented process improvements within the system to streamline intake procedures, enhance tracking capabilities, and improve reporting functions that support workload management and accountability.

NASA has worked to support program offices that conduct searches and provide subject matter expertise on record sensitivities, particularly in light of recent workforce departures. The agency has reinforced clear communications about expectations and response timeframes with program offices to improve overall processing timelines. This includes regular follow-up on outstanding searches and enhanced training for program office personnel on their FOIA responsibilities under 14 C.F.R. § 1206.

NASA has examined workflow elements to identify bottlenecks and areas for improvement. The agency has evaluated intake procedures, review processes, and clearance workflows to determine where adjustments could facilitate greater efficiency. This includes assessing whether expanding the pool of reviewers or adjusting second-level review procedures could accelerate processing without compromising quality or legal compliance.

NASA regularly analyzes historical FOIA data to identify trends in request volume, processing times, and backlog levels. This data-driven approach informs resource allocation decisions and helps the agency anticipate future demands. By understanding patterns in request increases and identifying factors that contribute to processing delays, NASA can develop targeted strategies for maintaining sustainable operations.

While NASA's backlog remained below 1,000 requests in FY 2024, the agency recognizes that maintaining this level requires ongoing attention and adaptability. Consistent with OIP guidance emphasizing flexibility in backlog reduction efforts, NASA continues to monitor workload demands and adjust approaches as circumstances change. The agency maintains leadership support for FOIA operations and employee engagement in continuous improvement efforts to ensure that backlog levels remain manageable even as request volumes increase government-wide.

Through these comprehensive efforts aligned with OIP's backlog reduction guidance, NASA has maintained effective FOIA operations and positioned the agency to respond to future challenges while ensuring timely public access to information.

20. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2024, please explain your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2025.

ANSWER: N/A

E. Reducing the Age of Requests, Appeals, and Consultations

Ten Oldest Requests

21. In Fiscal Year 2025, did your agency close the ten oldest pending perfected requests that were reported in Section VII.E. of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report?

ANSWER: No.

22. 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 2023 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

ANSWER: NASA closed 7 of the 10 FOIA requests reported as pending at the end of FY 2024.

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

ANSWER: NASA's Principal Agency FOIA Officer implemented targeted strategies to reduce the age of pending requests and maintain accountability across the FOIA program. These strategies include strategic workload management, and established a reporting requirement for FOIA specialists to provide current status updates, identify next steps, and flag any bottlenecks for requests approaching or within the ten oldest request category. This information is reported to senior management to ensure leadership awareness of aging requests and to identify areas where intervention, process adjustments, or additional resources may be needed to advance requests toward completion.

Despite these proactive measures, NASA faced significant operational challenges during FY 2025 that impacted overall efforts to reduce the age of pending requests. Recent workforce departures reduced the number of available FOIA specialists, which limited the effectiveness of workload redistribution strategies as remaining staff were already managing substantial caseloads. NASA's overall staffing departures across the agency also added to the delays that program offices experienced in conducting searches and providing responsive records, further extending processing timelines. Additionally, the government shutdown interrupted processing operations, and the continued receipt of complex, voluminous requests requiring extensive search, review, and consultation further strained available resources.

NASA remains committed to managing the age of its pending requests through strategic workload balancing, enhanced reporting and accountability mechanisms, and continuous

evaluation of process improvements. As the agency addresses staffing challenges and continues to implement technology solutions described elsewhere in this report, these efforts will support more sustainable progress in reducing the overall age of pending requests.

Ten Oldest Appeals

24. In Fiscal Year 2025, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in Section VI.C.5 of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report?

ANSWER: No.

25. 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 2021 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

ANSWER: NASA closed 2 of the 10 oldest FOIA appeals reported as pending at the end of Fiscal Year 2024.

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

ANSWER: As indicated in response to question 17 above in this section, NASA's OGC reviews FOIA appeals. NASA OGC has and will continue to look for ways to gain efficiencies in its FOIA appeal review process in order to provide thorough and accurate reviews in the most timely manner possible.

Ten Oldest Consultations

27. In Fiscal Year 2025, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report?

ANSWER: During FY 2025, NASA successfully closed the 1 consultation that was pending at the end of FY 2024, demonstrating the agency's commitment to timely resolution of inter-agency coordination matters. This achievement reflects the diligent efforts of NASA's FOIA specialists who worked collaboratively with other federal agencies to review, coordinate, and finalize consultations despite the operational challenges the office faced during the fiscal year. The staff's persistence in maintaining inter-agency relationships and following through on consultation obligations ensures that NASA fulfills its responsibilities under the FOIA while protecting appropriate interests across the federal government. NASA remains committed to processing consultations efficiently and maintaining strong collaborative relationships with other agencies to ensure timely and consistent responses to FOIA requesters.

28. 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 2022 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

ANSWER: N/A

Additional Information Regarding Ten Oldest

29. If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, or consultations, please explain why and provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those “ten oldest” requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2026.

ANSWER: As detailed throughout this report, NASA faced significant operational challenges during FY 2025 that impacted the agency's ability to close its ten oldest pending requests. These challenges included recent workforce departures that reduced the number of available FOIA specialists, NASA's overall staffing departures across the agency that added delays to program office searches and responsive record production, the government shutdown that interrupted processing operations, and the continued receipt of complex, voluminous requests requiring extensive coordination.

A unique challenge NASA faces is the inherently collaborative nature of its work with other federal agencies, state and local governments, international partners, and commercial contractors. Records responsive to NASA FOIA requests frequently require extensive consultations with numerous stakeholders to protect shared equities, proprietary information, and sensitive technical data. These multi-party consultations are extremely time-consuming and pose significant processing challenges, particularly when voluminous records are involved and when consulting entities have varying response timelines.

Additionally, NASA frequently processes requests involving Export Control and ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulations) documents, which require specialized review and heightened sensitivity. Records subject to these laws require consultation with Center Export Administrators (CEAs) or the NASA Headquarters Export Administrator (HEA) to ensure proper identification and protection of export-controlled information. The complexity of reviewing these records, determining appropriate exemptions, and coordinating with export control officials adds substantial time to processing, particularly for requests involving technical or mission-related documentation.

To address aging requests in FY 2026, NASA's Principal Agency FOIA Officer will continue implementing the targeted strategies described in Question 23 of this report. Additionally, NASA began implementing a strategy of providing interim responses for requests involving complex or voluminous records that cannot be fully processed within standard timeframes. By releasing records on a rolling basis as they are reviewed and cleared, rather than waiting to process all responsive records before issuing any response, NASA can provide requesters with access to information more quickly while continuing to work toward full closure of their requests. This approach demonstrates progress, maintains requester engagement, and allows the agency to close portions of complex requests even when full processing requires extended timeframes due to consultation requirements, export control review, or volume considerations.

Additionally, as described earlier in this report, NASA FOIA specialists will continue proactively engaging with requesters to discuss processing challenges, clarify complex requests, and explore opportunities for scope refinement. This dialogue sometimes results in requesters narrowing their requests or agreeing to interim releases that allow NASA to close portions of complex requests while continuing to process remaining records.

NASA will also continue leveraging the technology improvements described in Question 2 of this report, including AI-assisted template development and custom automation scripts, to reduce time spent on administrative tasks and allow FOIA specialists to focus on substantive review work for complex aging requests.

NASA remains committed to reducing the age of pending requests and closing the ten oldest requests in FY 2026 by addressing staffing when possible, training, technology, and process improvements as outlined throughout this report. The agency will continue to strengthen internal coordination, maintain quality, compliance, and service to FOIA requesters.

F. Additional Information about FOIA Processing

30. Were any requests at your agency the subject of FOIA litigation during the reporting period? If so, please describe the impact on your agency's overall FOIA request processing and backlog. If possible, please indicate:

- The number and nature of requests subject to litigation
- Common causes leading to litigation
- Any other information to illustrate the impact of litigation on your overall FOIA administration

ANSWER: Yes. NASA had FOIA requests subject to litigation during the reporting period. Two litigations carried over from the previous reporting period: one involved an exceedingly complex request with multiple parts and voluminous highly technical records that required extensive consultation with multiple outside entities and close coordination with NASA engineers and other subject matter experts. NASA completed production of records for this matter in December 2025. The second litigation was decided in NASA's favor as it pertained to non-agency records not under the control of NASA. Additionally, NASA received a third litigation in December 2025 involving requests that were not properly clarified by the requester despite the agency's efforts to seek clarification.

The litigations NASA faced involved varying circumstances, including complexity and volume of records leading to longer response times, disputes over agency control of records, disagreements about the adequacy of request clarification, disputes over the application of exemptions, and failure to respond within statutory timeframes for complex, multi-part requests. The most resource-intensive case involved a highly visible program request where the plaintiff challenged the agency's withholdings, searches, and allegedly unaddressed portions of the requests.

The most significant impact of litigation on NASA's FOIA administration is the substantial resource commitment required to manage litigated cases. Litigated requests, particularly those involving voluminous or highly technical records, demand considerable staff time for coordinating searches across multiple program offices, conducting extensive consultations with outside entities and contractors, obtaining technical review and expertise from subject matter experts, preparing court filings, status reports, and interim responses, coordinating with agency legal counsel, and maintaining production schedules.

The highly visible litigation referenced above alone required 29 interim responses and processing of over 11,000 pages and 45 videos, representing hundreds of staff hours that could otherwise be dedicated to reducing the agency's pending request inventory. The FOIA Specialist assigned to this most resource-intensive litigation is a primary Headquarters (HQ) FOIA processor, further constraining the agency's capacity to address the increase in HQ requests and backlog while meeting court obligations. These challenges were compounded by the government shutdown and FOIA staff departures during the reporting period, which further strained the office's ability to balance litigation demands with routine FOIA processing and a growing backlog.