

them. If any other date is used, the agency will inform the requester of that date.

(b) *Consultations and referrals.* When the agency receives a request for a record in its possession and control, it will determine whether another agency of the Federal Government is better able to determine whether the record is exempt from disclosure under the FOIA and, if so, whether it should be disclosed as a matter of administrative discretion. If the agency determines that it is best able to process the record in response to the request, then it will do so. If the agency determines that it is not best able to process the record, then it will either:

(1) Respond to the request regarding that record, after consulting with the agency that is best able to determine whether to disclose it and with any other agency that has a substantial interest in it; or

(2) Refer the responsibility for responding to the request regarding that record to another agency that originated the record (but only if that agency is subject to the FOIA). Ordinarily, the agency that originated a record will be presumed to be best able to determine whether to disclose it.

(c) *Notice of referral.* When the agency refers all or any part of the responsibility for responding to a request to another agency, it ordinarily will notify the requester of the referral and inform the requester of the name of the agency to which the request has been referred and of the part of the request that has been referred.

(d) *Timing of responses to consultations and referrals.* All consultations and referrals will be handled according to the date upon which the FOIA request initially was received by the first agency, and not any later date.

(e) *Agreements regarding consultations and referrals.* The agency may make agreements with other agencies designed to eliminate the need for consultations or referrals regarding particular types of records.

§ 304.5 Timing of responses to requests.

(a) *In general.* The agency ordinarily will respond to requests according to their order of receipt.

(b) *Multi-track processing.* The agency may use two or more processing tracks by distinguishing between simple and more complex requests based on the amount of work and/or time needed to process the request, including according to the number of pages involved. If it does so, then it will advise requesters in its slower track(s) of the limits of its faster track(s) and may provide requesters in its slower track(s) with an opportunity to limit the scope of their requests in order to qualify for faster processing within the specified limits of its faster track(s). The agency will contact the requester by telephone, e-mail or letter, whichever is most efficient, in each case.

(c) *Unusual circumstances.* (1) Where the statutory time limits for processing a request cannot be met because of "unusual circumstances," as defined in the FOIA, and the agency determines to extend the time limits on that basis, it will as soon as practicable notify the requester in writing of the unusual circumstances and of the date by which processing of the request can be expected to be completed. Where the extension is for more than ten business days, it will provide the requester with an opportunity either to modify the request so that it may be processed within the time limits or to arrange an alternative time period processing the request or a modified request.

(2) Where the agency reasonably believes that multiple requests submitted by a requester, or by a group of requesters acting in concert, constitute a single request that would otherwise involve unusual circumstances, and the requests involve clearly related matters, they may be aggregated. Multiple requests involving unrelated matters will not be aggregated.

(d) *Expedited processing.* (1) Requests and appeals will be taken out of order and given expedited treatment whenever it is determined that they involve:

(i) Circumstances in which the lack of expedited treatment could reasonably be expected to pose an imminent threat to the life or physical safety of an individual;

(ii) An urgency to inform the public concerning actual or alleged federal

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government activity, if made by a person primarily engaged in disseminating information; or

(iii) Other circumstances as determined by the agency.

(2) A request for expedited processing may be made at the time of the initial request for records (i.e., as part of the initial request) or at any later time.

(3) A requester who seeks expedited processing must submit a statement, certified to be true and correct to the best of that person's knowledge and belief, explaining in detail the basis for requesting expedited processing. For example, a requester within the category in paragraph (d)(1)(ii) of this section, if not a full-time member of the news media, must establish that he or she is a person whose main professional activity or occupation is information dissemination, though it need not be his or her sole occupation. That requester also must establish a particular urgency to inform the public about the government activity involved in the request, beyond the public's right to know about government activity generally. The formality of certification may be waived by the agency as a matter of administrative discretion.

(4) Within ten calendar days of its receipt of a request for expedited processing, the agency will decide whether to grant it and will notify the requester of the decision. If a request for expedited treatment is granted, then the request will be given priority and will be processed as soon as practicable. If a request for expedited processing is denied, then any appeal of that decision will be acted on expeditiously.

§ 304.6 Responses to requests.

(a) *Acknowledgments of requests.* On receipt of a request, if the agency cannot provide the requested information within two business days, then an acknowledgment letter or e-mail message will be sent to the requester that will confirm the requester's agreement to pay fees under § 304.3(c) and will provide a request tracking number for further reference. Requesters may use this tracking number to determine the status of their request—including the date of its receipt and the estimated date on

which action on it will be completed—by calling the agency's FOIA Public Liaison at (202) 480-2080. In some cases, the agency may seek further information or clarification from the requester.

(b) *Grants of requests.* Ordinarily, the agency will have twenty business days from when a request is received to determine whether to grant or deny the request. Once the agency makes such a determination, it will immediately notify the requester in writing. The agency will inform the requester in the notice of any fee charged under § 304.9 and will disclose records to the requester promptly upon payment of any applicable fee. Records disclosed in part will be marked or annotated to show the amount of information deleted, unless doing so would harm an interest protected by an applicable exemption. The location of the information deleted also will be indicated on the record, if technically feasible.

(c) *Adverse determinations of requests.* Whenever the agency makes an adverse determination denying a request in any respect, it will notify the requester of that determination in writing. Adverse determinations, or denials of requests, consist of: A determination to withhold any requested record in whole or in part; a determination that a requested record does not exist or cannot be located; a determination that a record is not readily reproducible in the form or format sought by the requester; a determination that what has been requested is not a record subject to the FOIA; a determination on any disputed fee matter, including a denial of a request for a fee waiver; and a denial of a request for expedited treatment. The denial letter will include:

(1) The name and title or position of the person responsible for the denial;

(2) A brief statement of the reason(s) for the denial, including any FOIA exemption(s) applied by the agency in denying the request;

(3) An estimate of the volume of records or information withheld, in number of pages or in some other reasonable form of estimation. This estimate does not need to be provided if the volume is otherwise indicated through deletions on records disclosed in part, or if providing an estimate