

# ABMC CHIEF FOIA Officer Report

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## Content of 2019 Chief FOIA Officer Reports

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Please provide a short narrative (at least 500 words) for how your agency improved its FOIA administration during the reporting period. Your narrative may include any steps taken to: apply the presumption of openness, ensure that your agency has an effective system in place for responding to requests, increase proactive disclosures, greater utilize technology, and improve timeliness in responding to requests and reducing any backlogs. Please include in this narrative a description of your efforts to ensure that the FOIA is administered in a “spirit of cooperation,” highlighting, for example, steps taken to ensure that there is good communication when working with requesters.

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), the guardian of America’s overseas commemorative cemeteries and memorials—honors the service, achievements and sacrifice of U.S. armed forces. In full spirit of cooperation and service, ABMC provides information on overseas American commemorative cemeteries and memorials via its website, [www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov), and various social media channels, at select ABMC sites, and on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. ABMC provides information about [those interred and memorialized at ABMC sites](#), information related to disinterment of unknown remains, oral histories, and educational materials, to name but a few. Educating the next generation is critical to illuminate the service, experience and sacrifice of those honored at ABMC cemeteries and memorials. For example, ABMC creates lesson plans geared towards remembrance, intended to be used by teachers and students nationwide, promoting many resources and activities on [www.abmceducation.org](http://www.abmceducation.org), such as [battlefield 3D visualizations](#), and [interactive battle maps](#). The ABMC commitment to information access has resulted in live stream lectures on Facebook and other events to promote topics such as the [100th anniversary of America’s entrance into World War I](#) and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II. ABMC partners with the public and local communities to pay tribute to Americans that made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom overseas, such as the January 2019 [event at Sicily-Rome American Cemetery](#). ABMC informs the public of not just ABMC efforts to honor these anniversaries, but also about the overall importance and significance of key battles and offensives to world history.

The ABMC Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) program is built upon the foundation of openness, efficiency, and access to information. In 2018, the FOIA program completed a thorough review of its administration to incorporate changes made by the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, which was initiated in 2017, in conjunction with a Government Accountability Office audit. To provide more efficient FOIA service to the public and incorporate new requirements, ABMC standardized the steps required to handle a FOIA request based on new FOIA guidelines, and continued to use technology to effectively communicate with requesters.

In 2018, ABMC proactively disclosed records that have been requested three or more times, by posting FOIA logs to our FOIA Reading Room. A large number of FOIA requesters contact ABMC to request information about military members, which often resides in other Federal agencies. In our revised FOIA Reference Guide, ABMC addressed frequently requested information that does not fall under our agency's purview by directing requesters to agencies responsible for maintaining that content. ABMC also shared this information on the [FOIA.gov](https://www.foia.gov) ABMC page, created in partnership with the Department of Justice Office of Information Policy (DOJ/OIP). ABMC was pleased that our [FOIA.gov](https://www.foia.gov) page design and language regarding records that we do and do not maintain, was featured in a Department of Justice Office of Information Policy training. In the agency's efforts to further inform requesters about FOIA at ABMC, our FOIA Regulation update will be completed and posted in Fiscal Year 2019.

In 2018, ABMC streamlined its internal review workflow to improve timeliness of requests and promote efficient FOIA request submission and processing; committed to sending all primary FOIA personnel to DOJ/OIP FOIA training to continuously identify areas of improvement, FOIA best practices, and enhance the FOIA team expertise; informed non-FOIA professionals of their duties and responsibilities under the FOIA as a component of records management training; and in 2017, incorporated a FOIA requirement, FOIA requests and restricted information, into the agency out-processing procedures.

In the "spirit of cooperation", ABMC remains committed to providing public access to agency records and information. Efforts include:

- Use of a dedicated FOIA electronic mailbox, which provides a single access point for all request identification and processing;
- Standardization of FOIA handling processes, which include automatic assignment of unique tracking identification numbers, raw data capture and acknowledgment letter processing with initial request;
- Utilization of OIP templates for requester communication with integrated agency FOIA contact information and dispute resolution services;
- Agency-wide support in responding to redirection of requests to the appropriate entity and when possible providing point of contact information to expedite the requester's search (e.g. military record requests that should be handled at the Military Personnel Records Center, National Archives and Records Administration);
- Ensuring that all requests are processed expeditiously to avoid backlogged requests; and,
- Publishing new and updated information on the agency website, which we believe increases transparency and conveys the agency's commitment to service of others.

Additionally, there were no requests for assistance directed to the agency FOIA Public Liaison 2018.