

# ABMC CHIEF FOIA Officer Report

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## Content of 2018 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 service members buried in ABMC cemeteries, to oral histories, and educational materials, to name but a few. Educating the next generation is critical to ABMC's mission 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 nationwide, promoting many resources and activities on [www.abmceducation.org](http://www.abmceducation.org), and provides live stream lectures and events on Facebook to promote topics such as the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of America’s entrance into World War I.

The ABMC Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) program is built upon the foundation of openness, efficiency, and access to information. In 2017 the FOIA program conducted a thorough review of its administration to incorporate changes made by the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016. 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 adopted technology to effectively communicate with requesters. ABMC also reached out to requesters to identify how we can expedite the FOIA handling process.

To improve timeliness of requests and promote efficient FOIA request submission and processing, ABMC researched and identified tools to simplify FOIA processing, including

commercially available systems, and actively participated in the Department of Justice Office of Information Policy (DOJ/OIP) partnership with 18F data call for the FOIA.gov refresh.

Additionally, the ABMC internal tracking system was updated significantly to prepare the raw data for the FY 2018 FOIA Annual Report. Going forward, the raw data fields necessary to complete the FOIA Annual report are part of the internal tracking process; this change will facilitate FOIA Annual Reporting to the greatest extent possible while a manual system is in place.

To further identify areas of improvement, FOIA best practices, and enhance the FOIA team expertise, ABMC committed to sending all FOIA personnel to DOJ/OIP FOIA training in 2017.

Non-FOIA professionals were informed of duties under the FOIA in 2017 as a component of records management training. Agency staff are required to certify that they have properly managed agency records, including FOIA requests and FOIA restricted information, upon departure from agency service.

ABMC leveraged technology internally to create a dedicated FOIA mailbox, which provides a single access point for all request identification and processing. ABMC standardized FOIA handling processes, to include automatic assignment of a track within the multi-track system, a unique tracking identification number, and an acknowledgement letter upon processing of the initial request. The changes allowed ABMC to more freely engage in the spirit of cooperation while focusing on increased internal efficiency. Communications to requesters are based on templates provided by the OIP, with integrated agency FOIA contact information and details about the availability of dispute resolution services. FOIA requests are processed using the presumption of openness; if possible, partial information is released and the proper exemptions are applied to other content. This approach has been successful; the FOIA team worked hard to ensure that there were no backlogged requests from Fiscal Year 2016. Finally, there were no requests for assistance directed to the agency FOIA Public Liaison in 2017, and the dedication of the agency staff to the presumption of openness and service to others resulted in a wealth of agency information being available on our website.