Transparency and Open Government:
A FOIA Solution for Government and Citizens

An FPMI Solutions, Inc. White Paper

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Stephen A. Moffett, President of FPMI Solutions, Inc. As a veteran, with 35 years of federal experience in Human Capital Management, Mr. Moffett’s vision is to lead “The Company of Choice in Human Capital Management and Training Solutions to the Markets We Serve.” To be a Company of Choice, he believes FPMI must be an employer of choice for our employees and a provider of choice for our customers. The most critical element necessary to achieve Company of Choice status is quality performance, which he guarantees. As the President of FPMI, he has focused on customer satisfaction, quality, delivering total solutions to customers, and business process re-engineering.

While serving as the Chief Administrative Officer for the Department of the Treasury, Mr. Moffett was responsible for the stand-up of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) office. While managing Human Resources, facility operations, executive correspondence/FOIA and day-to-day administrative functions, his FOIA operations were recognized as best practices in the Federal Government.

Upon leaving the U.S. Army, Mr. Moffett served four years with the Department of Defense and 27 in the Internal Revenue Service. He led the migration to the new HR Connect system, which 120,000 IRS employees and managers now use in 720 locations. Over his 35 years in Federal Government, Mr. Moffett has worked in every area of Human Resources—strategy, operations, human resources technology functional requirements, and implementations of the one of the largest ERPs in Federal Government.

At Northrop Grumman, he developed long-term strategies and plans that successfully landed significant new business and opened a new market segment for the company. He managed a variety of human resources functions and assisted in the stand-up of the Chief Human Capital Office at the Department of Homeland Security.

As a highly successful federal senior manager, Mr. Moffett developed expertise in human resources, risk management, information technology, facilities management, and business process reengineering.
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Background

In 1966 the Federal Government enacted the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) with the intent of instituting open government. More recently the Government launched a transparency in government website (www.federaltransparency.gov), and enacted multiple pieces of legislation.

The President’s January 21, 2009, memorandum entitled, “Transparency and Open Government” directed the Chief Technology Officer, in coordination with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the General Services Administration (GSA), to develop a set of recommendations that will inform an Open Government Directive.

In his 2009 Presidential Memorandum to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies (published in the Federal Register [74 FR 4685, January 26, 2009]), the President outlined three principles for promoting a transparent and open government:

- Transparency promotes accountability and provides information to citizens about what their Government is doing.
- Participation enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions by tapping knowledge that is widely dispersed in society.
- Collaboration harnesses innovative tools, methods and systems to promote cooperation across all levels of Government and with the private sector.

Today there are nearly 2,000 top-level Federal Government domains. Many are smaller sub-sites and microsites resulting in an estimated 24,000 websites of varying purpose, design, navigation, usability and accessibility.

While many of the government websites deliver value to our citizens through easy-to-use services and information, literally thousands of websites, are dedicated to a specific subject—and in some cases the same subject, such as FOIA e-reading rooms). This creates confusion and inefficiency. It is difficult to find information in current FOIA e-reading rooms, and that assumes a user knows where to look or how to conduct a search in the first place.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memorandum (M-11-24), subject: Implementing Executive Order 13571 (April 27, 2011) on Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service, provided direction to heads of Executive Departments and Agencies to:

My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.

~ President Barak Obama, 01/21/09
• Improve Customer Service Delivery
• Advance Customer Service through Innovative Technology
• Solicit Timely Customer Feedback
• Improve Online Services
• Eliminate Duplicate and Outdated Websites

FOIA Open BookSM Overview

The purpose of FOIA Open BookSM, is to build a centralized repository, or library, of all FOIA documents that are released by all Federal Government Agencies. This will eliminate all FOIA e-reading rooms within the Federal Government, streamline service delivery, improve customer service (IAW Executive Order 13571), and promote the President’s agenda on Transparency and Open Government.

The FOIA Open Book Concept

Using Cloud technology, FOIA Open Book will provide easy-to-use access methods and search capability. A 24/7 service center will provide assistance for those who need it. Figure A illustrates the basic design of the FOIA Open Book system.

![Figure A: Conceptual System Design](image-url)
This centralized, single source of information will act as a first-line filter. Requests with answers already in the library will be fulfilled without agency involvement. This eliminates the need for agency-specific FOIA reading rooms and accelerates the response time for requests with readily-available answers. Agencies save resources, time and money.

FOIA Open Book will be a powerful tool for the Federal Government, providing the benefits outlined in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintain and enhance transparency</th>
<th>Improve customer service</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce government websites</td>
<td>Reduce FOIA response backlogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt innovative Cloud technology</td>
<td>Reduce requests sent to agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase efficiency</td>
<td>Ensure ADA Section 508 compliance</td>
</tr>
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*Table 1: Benefits to the Government of FOIA Open Book™*

It will also be a valuable, convenient resource for citizens (individuals, organizations, educators, students, etc.) agencies and members of Congress to search and access robust information.

### Document Management and Workflow

Currently FOIA responses exist in several formats—paper, PDF files and CDs. After a response is provided to the requestor, it is housed either in a document library (paper format) or an e-reading room (electronic formats). Each agency has its own library/e-reading room—some have multiple reading rooms—and each follows its own procedures.

FOIA Open Book will centralize and standardize FOIA output across the Federal Government.

**PDF Files**

Documents and other formats and media (USB drive, CD-ROM, DVD, DAT, etc.) will be converted to the PDF format at our secure FOIA Operations Center and stored in a Document Staging area prior to indexing and uploading to the Secure Cloud (FOIA Open Book).
Searching the FOIA Open Book℠ Database

At the heart of FOIA Open Book is an extensive, easy-to-use database search function that will allow users to search for pre-existing information before contacting agencies with a formal FOIA request.

FOIA Open Book creates a clear first step—“look here first!” A user will search the library. If a previous FOIA response meets their needs, they are done. Only truly new requests will reach the agencies, saving significant time and money.

The database search is a hybrid of a controlled vocabulary, multi faceted and free form search methodologies. In this manner, a user will be able to specify multiple search terms and receive the most accurate results from the search.

The database search algorithms are accessible via web, mobile and other user interfaces.

Standardized Reading Rooms

One of the central features of the Open Book response library is the Standardized Reading Room that can be "plugged in” to each of the various agencies’ websites. The landing pages for the reading rooms will be optimized to each of the customer groups—Citizens, Agencies and Congress.

FOIA Service Center

Most users will use the Reading Room’s search function online without assistance. However, for those who have questions or need help, the FOIA Service Center is available for extra assistance. This is not a system of automated messages; these are real people providing real-time assistance.

For users with disabilities that make online searches difficult or impossible, the FOIA Service Center is their alternate search vehicle. In addition to providing the resources the user needs, the Government benefits from enhanced compliance with ADA Section 508.

FOIA Service Center representatives are available around the clock and via multiple media—phone, email, tablet, TTY, etc. The Reading Room also has a page with a contact form.
Mobile Access

The FOIA Open Book response library additionally facilitates initiating searches from mobile devices, as illustrated in Figure 2. iPhones, iPads and Android devices are planned for use with the system, with other devices to be included based on market acceptance of the device.

Summary

FOIA Open Book offers a wide range of benefits to the Federal Government and to users—Citizens, Federal Agencies and Congress.


Citizens (Individuals, Organizations, Educators, Students, etc.)

The greatest advantage for citizens is self-service—the ability to find information quickly and on their own if a similar request has already generated a response.

They can conduct multiple inquiries in a single request using the most convenient media—laptop, tablet, smart phone, etc. When their search needs are complex, they can save searches and resume their work at a later time. The FOIA Service Center is available 24/7 for those needing assistance. This service is free, and citizens’ privacy is maintained.

Federal Agencies

For agencies, FOIA Open Book creates a significant reduction in FOIA interface and requests for information; citizens can use the system as a self-service vehicle and avoid agency involvement. This front-line filter reduces cost, response time and the use of agency resources.

Agencies also benefit as users of the system. They can prioritize requests and monitor progress, and management can analyze data for department
improvements. The FOIA officer gains easy access to documents from other agencies.

**Congress**

Member of Congress can submit one request for information and received all responsive documents across all government agencies. In addition, members of Congress can use FOIA Open Book to research information about constituents—what they are inquiring about and how they are using the system—to gauge the pulse of their districts.

FOIA Open Book offers expedited, 24-hour response time to requests, guided self-service, and queries of multiple subject areas and agencies with a single request.

With FOIA Open Book, a centralized, standardized FOIA response library, the Federal Government can more thoroughly fulfill its goal of open government while saving every Federal agency significant resources, time and money.

“The right to know is a cornerstone of our democracy.”

~Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)