



VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1 | JULY 2021

UMALOHOKAN

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION-PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE

TRANSPARENCY
LEGACY

2021 PCOO
ROADSHOW

FOI BEST
PRACTICES

FAQS



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With a vision of building a nation of smart citizens and regaining public trust in pursuit of a transparent and accountable government, the Freedom of Information - Project Management Office is paving its way of reinventing the right of the public to access government information. Since its establishment in 2016 through the Executive Order No. 02 s. 2016, the agency has been conducting various activities, and has been launching various mechanisms to promote access to information. Numerous roadshows, IEC materials, and information dissemination programs have been conducted and produced to increase public awareness on the various initiatives of the government in promoting access to information. To add among the many tools is the creation of this newsletter, Umalohokan.

The official publication of the Freedom of Information will be named Umalohokan, which translates to bearer of news. It is an ancient term for individuals who are responsible for making the people aware of the different policies and rules imposed or enacted by the Datus or chieftains. True to its name, Umalohokan will also provide relevant and accurate information about the different programs, projects, activities, policies, and initiatives of the government towards promotion of public welfare and right to access information.

Additionally, in line with its 2021 Communication Strategy, Transparency to Transparency, Responsibility, User focus, Sustainability, Technology (TRUST), the Umalohokan is a proactive tool, which other agencies and stakeholders can utilize to further understand the processes, systems, structures, policies, and initiatives of the FOI Program. It will also serve as an avenue for the stakeholders to share their insights and experiences with regards to the importance of promoting the right to access information thus, establishing trust and strengthening citizen participation.



DATA ACCESS SAVES LIVES

The FOI portal received 30,403 requests for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19)-related information as of March 2021. Data on the Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program, financial assistance for overseas workers offered by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, and calamity loan application are just a few examples of the requested information. Of the requested information, the agencies successfully released 46% of the requests, denied 28%, and processing the remaining 26%.

On the surface, it seems that the government is gradually becoming more transparent. However, a closer examination reveals that the total number of unacted and declined requests still outnumbers the total number of requests successfully issued to the public. These figures show that the government is still a long way from being accountable and accessible. However, the Presidential Communications Operations Office, through its Freedom of Information Project Management Office, has been conducting consultative meetings with other organizations and has been lobbying for the passage of the FOI bill in order to strengthen the implementation of the right to access information.

The prioritization and promotion of the right to access information is necessary especially during a pandemic. Every person has experienced fear and uncertainty as a result of the Covid-19 situation. To prevent the virus from spreading further, the government has implemented lockdowns and countermeasures at the same time. In consequence, real-time information must be made available to the public.

Access to reliable and timely information assists the

public in keeping their families safe by allowing them to make informed decisions. With access to information, there is awareness on new policies and standards introduced and implemented within their communities. When people have access to information, misinformation, disinformation, and misconceptions are prevented.

Encouraging people to get vaccinated for extra protection against the adverse effects of Covid-19 is one area where access to information is critical. According to a Pulse Asia poll, 61% of Filipinos, or 6 in 10, oppose vaccination against Covid-19. Vaccine refusal is due to skepticism about the vaccine's effectiveness and safety and speculation that vaccines aren't necessary to fight the disease.

Misinformation is more harmful than beneficial. It puts the public's safety in jeopardy. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its article "*The Right to Information in Times of Crisis*", public access to information should be seen as an asset rather than as a liability because it benefits the country's public health and economic objectives.

The situation with Covid-19 has yet to come to an end. In times like this, the government must recognize the value of promoting the right to access information. Building trust, fostering accountability, and keeping elected officials accountable are just a few of the benefits of data access. The ability to access data is crucial to saving lives.

NEW FOI WEBINAR TO FOCUS ON "SHARPENING THE SAW" OF FOI PRACTITIONERS FOR GOV'T TRANSPARENCY LEGACY

By John Wilmer Jimenez



In line with its commitment to promote the right to access government information, the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), through its Freedom of Information – Project Management Office (FOI-PMO), launched the FOI Transparency Legacy Digital Lecture Series to build a long-term legacy of transparency in the country on March 10, 2021.

“It is on building a legacy that FOI-PMO sought to sustain and spread its advocacies to its stakeholders,” PCOO Undersecretary Kristian Ablan said during the virtual launch of the FOI Digital Lecture Series.

“It is through an informative discourse that our stakeholders are continuously capacitated, and are engaged more meaningfully in FOI,” Ablan added.

The “FOI Transparency Legacy Digital Lecture Series” is a new capacity-building seminar offered by the FOI-PMO to “sharpen the saw” of its FOI Practitioners. It covers broad, as well as audience and skills-specific topics geared towards improving the knowledge and skills essential to FOI praxis. It also ensures the continuous growth, development, and innovation of the FOI program and related disciplines.

The first series of the FOI Transparency Legacy Digital Lecture Series is focused on preserving data integrity.

PCOO Usec. Ablan highlighted the important link between preserving data integrity and information disclosure, both of which are important aspects of records management and FOI of agencies.

Speakers during this series were Sharifa Datu Tambuyung, of the Ateneo De Manila University Data Privacy Office, who thoroughly discussed Data Integrity and Proportionality in disclosing information; and Nick Tobia, Senior Consultant of Cirrolytix Research Services, whose integrating concepts were focused on Data Ethics and Stewardship among our FOI Practitioners.

Its first series on Preserving Data Integrity was well-attended by more than 550 FOI Practitioners from various government agencies.

The “FOI Transparency Legacy Digital Lecture Series” is a free webinar conducted every quarter via Zoom. Interested participants may visit the official Facebook page of FOI Philippines for future topics, schedules, and updates.

SPOTLIGHT!

By Jaya Illustrisimo



Consistency
is the **KEY!**

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) is one of the agencies with most requested information. On a monthly basis, the agency receives an average of thirty (30) requests even before the pandemic. Despite the volume of requests received, the agency maintains a high response rate averaging to seven (7) days per request.

Behind this stint is the sole Receiving Officer of the MMDA, Ms. Mary Ann Tanbio. Ms. Tanbio has been a recipient of the Best FOI Receiving Officer for two consecutive years.

Ms. Tanbio shared that the key to their efficient process is the round-the-clock monitoring of the eFOI portal. She ensures that all requests are provided with appropriate action within the 15 working day period or shorter.

"May target kasi ang boss ko na dapat seven (7) days closed na," Ms. Tanbio said.

In addition, Ms. Tanbio shared that having unlimited patience is also an essential trait in executing the duties and responsibilities of a Receiving Officer.

"Maging consistent bilang public servant. Kailangan nating gampanan ang responsibility natin sa public. Kumbaga tiwala na sila sa 'tin kaya sila lumalapit. 'tsaka patience syempre kasi meron din pong makukulit at demanding," Ms. Tanbio said.



"Always
give your
**BEST
SHOT!"**



One of the agencies with most requested information during the pandemic is the Department of Labor and Employment. From an average of 100-200 requests in 2017-2019, it doubled and reached an average of 400-500 requests in 2020.

The number of requests received did not stop the agency in providing information to the public. Zyra Glerica Perlora, one of the Best Receiving Officer Awardees, assisted the public in accessing requested information from the DOLE.

Ms. Perlora is part of the Internal Audit Service (IAS) of the DOLE and has been a recipient of the award for two consecutive years, since her designation as the agency's Receiving Officer in 2017.

In an online interview with Ms. Perlora, she mentioned that in executing her duties and responsibilities as a public servant, she always gives her best shot.

"Gawin mo lang yung tama at kailangan mong gawin kahit 'di ma-recognize ng iba," she added.

1st 2021 PCOO Roadshow kicks off!

By Dianne Gammad

The Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), through the Freedom of Information - Project Management Office (FOI-PMO), kicked off the first leg of the 2021 PCOO Roadshow at Hotel Le Duc, Dagupan, Pangasinan on February 11, 2021.

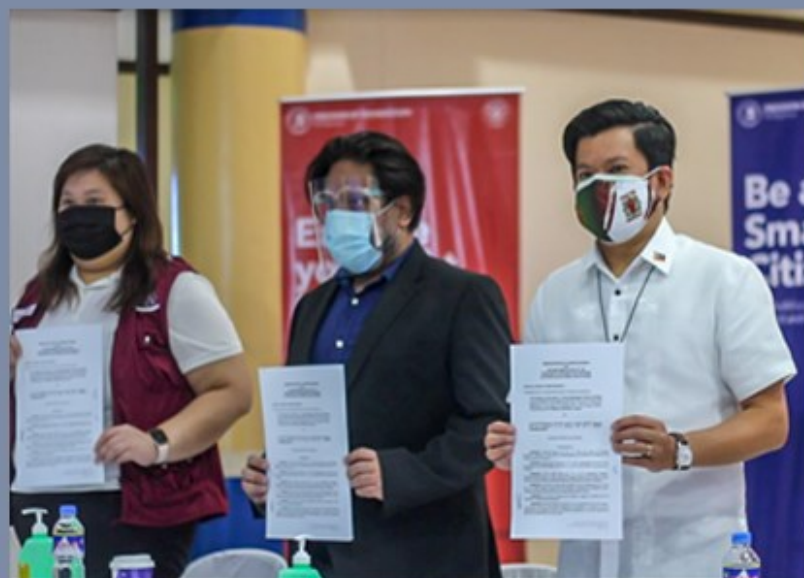
The first leg of the 2021 PCOO Roadshow aims to raise public awareness about every Filipino's right to access government information and to continue advocating for openness and accountability, particularly during a public health crisis.

Also, it aims to enhance media and information literacy to promote responsible information handling

and sharing and to prevent the dissemination of false news, as well as to educate the public about the government's COVID-19 mitigation efforts and to keep the public informed about the pandemic's current status in the nation.

Officials from the Local Government Units of Pangasinan, academe, media, and bureaus of the PCOO were present during the event.

The event was conducted in partnership with the Provincial Government of Pangasinan and the Lyceum Northwestern University.



FOI is for better DECISION-MAKING



Undersecretary and FOI Program Director Atty. Kristian R. Ablan discussing the importance of passing a local FOI Ordinance during the conduct of the 1st 2021 PCOO Roadshow at Hotel le Duc on February 11, 2021 in Pangasinan.

If we ask the media, they would say FOI is for transparency; a tool to fight corruption. But, I'm here to tell you that FOI is more than that. It is for better decision-making," Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Undersecretary and Freedom of Information (FOI) Program Director Atty. Kristian R. Ablan said in his speech before the officials of the Local Government Unit of Pangasinan.

Undersecretary Ablan urged the LGUs to enact their own FOI Ordinance, emphasizing how FOI contributes to better decision-making during the conduct of the first (1st) leg of the 2021 PCOO Roadshow at the Hotel Le Duc, Dagupan, in Pangasinan on February 11, 2021.

According to Undersecretary Ablan, the most frequently requested FOI information is local data maintained and updated by local governments.

The data on Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program, the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration's financial assistance for overseas workers, data on the coronavirus disease 2020, and a calamity loan application are just a few examples of the requested information.

Furthermore, Undersecretary Ablan said that people must have the power to request public and official information from the government.

DOLE: Strengthening openness and transparency

By Deniel Echevarria

The Freedom of Information, through its FOI Awards, recognizes the valuable efforts and remarkable contributions to the development and progress of the FOI Program of government agencies, individuals, and organizations. The criteria for the selection of the recipients of the FOI Awards includes the timeliness, efficiency, and quality of services rendered by agencies, individuals, and organizations to the public with regards to the implementation of the FOI.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) is one of the agencies who was conferred with an award during the conduct of 2020 FOI Awards on November 25, 2020. The DOLE, for three consecutive years, was again recognized as 2020 FOI Champion. Thus, elevating its status to the Hall of Fame.

FOI best practices

For the past years, the Department adopted several best practices and is continuously initiating more. The peak of the pandemic did not standstill the Department's effort in ensuring the smooth implementation of the FOI program. Despite voluminous receipt of COVID-19 related requests, we continuously maintain our performance in dealing with them.

The IAS, as FOI focal monitoring office, included the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) Personnel as among the

participants of the Orientation for FOI officers who will serve as Receiving Officers for the POLOs. As part of the extended assistance, the IAS issued an online form to assist the Receiving Officers and Decision Makers who encountered technical errors in accessing their accounts.

On the transparency initiative, the Department encodes all manually received requests for information in the eFOI portal which enables the requesting party to first search for information available in the eFOI portal prior to going through the requesting process.

On the Department's continual awareness of the FOI Program, the DOLE-FOI webpage includes additional features, among others, the COVID-19 related issuances and info-materials, DOLE's Top Requested Information, BP2 Program Info-Pack of PCOO, and One Page FOI Manual. Also, an FOI short-clip video presentation on the DOLE FOI webpage was posted and is currently screening in the two monitors located at the entrances (Muralla and General Luna wings) of DOLE Building, Intramuros, Manila.



“Transparency is a rule of thumb and practice in the DOLE. Even at the height of the pandemic, we did our best in communicating the real employment situation and true conditions of the Filipino workers and employers. We guarantee to remain committed in making an informed and empowered citizenry including our stakeholders.”

Another initiative we did was the inclusion of the eFOI logo linked to the eFOI portal in the DOLE Mobile Application considering that digital technology has been the way to address in mitigating the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as help in improving efficiency in responding to FOI requests and provides convenience to our clients.

To further advance the FOI's information dissemination and to continuously support the same, all DOLE Services, Bureaus, Regional Offices and Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLOs) were instructed to post and disseminate the DOLE-One Page FOI Manual both on the website and on the Facebook Page of POLOs without official websites and inconspicuous place in their respective offices for the general public to be guided on how they can make a request for access to public information aside from posting of FOI Banners. Program Managers with specific Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa (BP2) programs were instructed to submit information materials for the "Info-Pack" project of the PCOO, which is also posted on the DOLE website under the FOI-Webpage.

As for our transparency initiative and for proactive disclosure of information to the general public, we fully commit to maintaining labor and employment-related datasets in the Open Data Portal of DICT. We also issued an internal issuance "Strengthening Openness in Data Sharing of DOLE Generated Data and Information," which is crucial especially in this time of the pandemic.

We actively participate in various FOI events: In Focus: Transparency Webinar Series, FOI under quarantine: Online Public Forum, FOI Summit, and 1st Data Privacy, FOI Congress of 2020, among others.

We, in the DOLE recognize the significance of the passage of the FOI Law especially in this time of the pandemic, thus, the Senior Officials and Directors signed the

Manifesto of support for the Passage of FOI Law in the Philippines in the Time of COVID 19 Pandemic.

I believe that the above initiatives and true commitment to the FOI have been the key for the Department to be recognized as FOI Champion and Hall Famer since we believe in what the FOI espouses and what it aims to achieve.

Challenges of implementing foi within the agency

Like any other agencies who have to adapt to something new, of course, we also experienced various challenges especially during the early years of implementation. These challenges, however, served as learning experiences for us to better/continually improve its implementation. When the FOI-PMO informed us of the onboarding in the eFOI portal, we immediately set a meeting with the FOI officers together with the FOI-PMO to facilitate the portal onboarding in June 2017. From then on, we experienced various challenges, among them was the FOI officers' expiration on the activation of accounts since activation only lasts up to 24 hours.

The difficulty in determining the assigned office who will be in charge of the requested data was also a tough challenge we had to address. Lastly, we also encountered the unclear transferring of requests from FDM to FDM, that is, if the FDM transfer requests to another FDM, no notifications were made, thus prolonging/delaying the requests for information. These were difficult moments then but made us all the more resolved to never stop learning and improving.

FOI/Transparency-related projects that are unique to DOLE

Aside from posting the Top Requested Information received by the Department on the DOLE website, we are currently

strengthening the proactive disclosure of information posted in the DICT Open Data Portal.

Message for the FOI-PMO

We sincerely appreciate and likewise humbled by the yearly recognition bestowed on us for our adherence to the FOI Program.

Since we have reached the peak and the highest recognition, we have no plans of stopping and we would never rest our laurels from there. Being an FOI Champion has now become a tradition.

I would like to thank the Presidential Communications Operations Office headed by Secretary Martin Andanar and the FOI-Project Monitoring Office headed by Assistant Secretary Kristian Ablan and the rest of the FOI Team for their unwavering commitment and support to us. Your constant FOI Program facilitation has been our motivation to continuously improve and better our FOI Program implementation.

Message to agencies that are already implementing /not yet implementing FOI

The Freedom of Information is a network to enhance our accountability and transparency to the general public. Access to information is a reliable system and a key for the government to maintain public trust in the government as we also are one in the belief that public office is synonymous with public trust. I salute the other agencies for continually supporting this directive.

I highly encourage those who are not yet enrolled in the portal to get on board to allow/enable the citizen's online access to information and datasets they directly need from your agency. Let us altogether work in strengthening openness and transparency across the agencies. More power to our FOI warriors!



FOI CONDUCTS ZOOMUSTAHAN FOR FOI YOUTH AMBASSADORS

By Deniel Echevarria

The Freedom of Information – Project Management Office (FOI-PMO) conducted a ZOOMustahan for the FOI Youth Ambassadors hailing from the various State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Luzon on March 17, 2021.

The event provided an avenue for Youth Ambassadors to discuss the progress of their respective action plans and commitments, which was conceptualized during the launching of the first FOI Youth Ambassador Camp on March 3-5, 2020.

Kalinga State University Youth Ambassadors Saura Baggas and Vincent Venapen Valenzuela presented the FOI Workshop that will be conducted in their University; while Benguet State University Youth Ambassadors Kristine Seblaoan and Joshua Sagayo shared their initiative in lobbying the enactment of a Municipal FOI Ordinance in La Trinidad, Benguet.

The ZOOMustahan is a part of the FOI Youth Ambassadors Project of the FOI-PMO, which aims to revive the partnership and empower the designated FOI Youth Ambassadors as co-advocates of the program's information, education, and communications campaign.

The rest of the program served as an opportunity for the participants to share their challenges and experiences in terms of leadership, academics, and as a youth in the midst of a pandemic.

A total of 35 participants took part in the two-hour virtual event. The Visayas and Mindanao Legs of the Youth Ambassador Camp is scheduled to be conducted in the Third Quarter of 2021.

UPDATES ON FOI BILLS, POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

By Jaya Illustrisimo

FOI Bill

Nineteen (19) of the 21 committee members supported the approval of the Freedom of Information Bill during the conduct of the first (1st) online public hearing via Zoom last April 07, 2021.

Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus Rodriguez emphasized the importance of the immediate passage of the FOI Bill and said, *“Approve this much-needed legislation and give transparency to all our government actions and [to] give the people their right to look into all matters of public concern.”*

House Bill (HB) No. 5776 entitled “An Act Enabling the People’s Constitutional Right of Access to Information”, which was filed by Cong. Alfred Vargas is the FOI Bill version of the administration.

Additional Technical Working Group meetings on the FOI Bill were also conducted on May 26 and June 29, 2021.

FOI MC No. 1 s 2021

On 1 March 2021, the FOI-PMO issued FOI MC No. 1 s 2021 to remind all government agencies implementing FOI program to observe the proper use of the FOI Reports template and refrain from posting other information not identified in the prescribed template.

The MC reiterates further that agencies are to submit their FOI Reports to the PCOO annually instead of the usual quarterly deadline; however, the updating of the reports in their Agency’s website under the Transparency Seal is still on a quarterly basis.



How Do I Request You?

By: Rio Aurea Magpantay

How do I request you? Let me
count the ways
I go to your doorway of facts,
statistics, and data
Up above, at the sight among the
many of the site: "Login"
Then "Create an account"
For a moment an asterisk of
importance blinded my eyes
I filled what was needed, made
all of my information known
What? You had dare presumed
that I am not a human?
Demons I say! I am not a robot!
Heaven of faith, I selected "Make
a request"

And then, nominated one among
the selection of an agency
As again requested, I filled what
was needed and made all
possible information known
Heaven forbid! You dare
presume once more!
The God has blessed my request
You spoke to me, "We received
your request"
And upon two sleeps, you spoke
to me once more
"Your FOI request is approved.
Enclosed is a copy of the
information you requested."

The Request Not Denied

By: Rio Aurea Magpantay

Two roads diverged in a
cyberspace-themed wood
And sorry I could not travel both
Another traveler stood, googled
all he could
He looked down at his results
Google said, "Your search did
not match any results"

Shivered had I, afraid that I shall
suffer the same
And so on forth I marched to you
Made an account, submitted all I
had apart my soul
I looked down at my results
FOI officer said, "Your FOI
request is approved"

What information can I ask through the eFOI Portal?

Information, official records,
public records, and documents,
and papers pertaining to official
acts, transactions, or decisions –
as well as to government
research data used as a basis for
policy development.

Are we allowed to collect fees?

It is encouraged that the release
of information to the Requesting
Party should be free of charge.

How many FOI Officers can we designate in our office?

The agency may designate at
least one (1) FOI Receiving
Officer (FRO) and FOI Decision
Maker (FDM) per Office or unit
within the agency.

Who is administratively liable if the request is not acted upon?

If the agency failed to respond to
a request made either by
standard form or through the
eFOI portal, whoever is the last
ball or the last in-charge who
holds the request in custody and
fails to act on it is administratively
liable.



About the Cover

This issue's cover of Umalohokan is the winner of FOI-PMO's Poster-making Contest during the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAL) Multi-arts Festival 2020. Created by John Eliakim Azor V. Custodio, a student of Iloilo Science And Technology University, Iloilo City, the poster is his interpretation of IDUAL's 2020 theme **"Access to Information: Saving Lives, Building Trust, Bringing Hope."**



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