



December 5, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Millennium Challenge Corporation
Attn: Chief FOIA Officer
1099 14th St. NW, Suite 700
Washington D.C. 20005-3550
FOIA@mcc.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Freedom of Information Officer:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), 22 C.F.R. Part 1304, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

The White House has reportedly made an unprecedented number of political appointments (of individuals with limited, if any, relevant experience) into MCC leadership roles traditionally reserved for subject-matter or technical experts appointed by the Chief Executive Officer.¹ American Oversight seeks records to shed light on the activities of MCC leadership, and whether and to what extent their decisions have been shaped by the interests of the American people, rather than personal or professional allegiances.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that MCC produce the following within twenty business days:

¹ Robert O'Harrow, Jr., *White House Uses Foreign Aid Agency to Give Jobs to Trump Loyalists*, WASH. POST, July 28, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/white-house-uses-foreign-aid-agency-to-give-jobs-to-trump-loyalists/2018/07/28/3f819ac2-86da-11e8-8589-5bb6b89e3772_story.html?utm_term=.94699d857eca; Robert O'Harrow, Jr., *Appointed Leader Resigns from Foreign Aid Agency Used to Give Jobs to Trump Supporters*, WASH. POST, Aug. 15, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/appointed-leader-resigns-from-foreign-aid-agency-used-to-give-jobs-to-trump-supporters/2018/08/15/2a9230c4-a08c-11e8-b562-1db4209bd992_story.html?utm_term=.18243d4af255; Robbie Gramer, *Senator Raises Alarm Bells on Diversity at U.S. Foreign Aid Agency*, FOREIGN POLICY (Feb. 26, 2018, 4:05 PM), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/26/senator-menendez-raises-alarm-bells-on-diversity-at-millennium-challenge-corporation-racially-insensitive-comments-robert-blau-sean-caimcross-foreign-aid-development-senate/>.



All final policy directives, instructions, guidance, recommendations, memoranda, or decisions provided by the White House to MCC regarding the agency's mandate, jurisdiction, or duties, including any guidance regarding the agency's priorities, or any instructions to increase or decrease certain types of work.

Please provide all records from January 20, 2017, through the date the search is conducted.

In addition to the records requested above, American Oversight also requests records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used and locations and custodians searched and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request. If MCC uses FOIA questionnaires or certifications completed by individual custodians or components to determine whether they possess responsive materials or to describe how they conducted searches, we also request any such records prepared in connection with the processing of this request.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the terms "record," "document," and "information" in their broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations or discussions. Our request includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

Please search all records regarding agency business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.² **It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.**³

² See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); cf. *Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

³ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016) ("The Government argues that because the agency had a policy requiring [the official] to forward all of his emails from his [personal] account to his business email, the [personal] account only contains duplicate agency records at best. Therefore, the Government claims that any hypothetical deletion of the [personal account] emails would still leave a copy of those records intact in [the official's] work email. However, policies are rarely followed to perfection by anyone. At this stage of the case, the Court cannot assume that each and every work-related email in the [personal] account was duplicated in [the official's] work email account." (citations omitted)).

In addition, please note that in conducting a “reasonable search” as required by law, MCC must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered MCC’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. **In light of the government-wide requirements to manage information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.**⁴ Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians’ files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but MCC’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that MCC use the most up-to-date technologies to search for responsive information and take steps to ensure that the most complete repositories of information are searched. American Oversight is available to work with you to craft appropriate search terms. **However, custodian searches are still required; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information “only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption” or “disclosure is prohibited by law.”⁵ If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974). As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as exempt with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA.”⁶ Moreover, the *Vaughn* index “must describe *each* document or portion thereof withheld, and for *each* withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing the sought-after information.”⁷ Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.’”⁸

In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. If it is MCC’s position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are

⁴ Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records>; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, “Managing Government Records Directive,” M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

⁵ FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114–185).

⁶ *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

⁷ *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

⁸ *Id.* at 224 (citing *Mead Data Central, Inc. v. U.S. Dep’t of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 251 (D.C. Cir. 1977)).

so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what portion of the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the document.⁹ Claims of nonsegregability must be made with the same degree of detail as required for claims of exemptions in a *Vaughn* index. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

MCC should institute a preservation hold on information responsive to this request. American Oversight intends to pursue all legal avenues to enforce its right of access under FOIA, including litigation if necessary. Accordingly, MCC is on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

To ensure that this request is properly construed, that searches are conducted in an adequate but efficient manner, and that extraneous costs are not incurred, American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and MCC can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in electronic format by email or in PDF or TIF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 22 C.F.R. § 1304.9(c), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute significantly to public understanding of those operations.¹⁰ Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹¹

Under the public interest requirement, FOIA requesters must satisfy four factors.¹² American Oversight has met these four factors for the reasons set forth below. As described above, this Administration has made an unprecedented number of appointments to MCC leadership positions traditionally reserved for the CEO to fill with subject-matter or technical experts.¹³ The subject matter of the requested records specifically relates to the operations or activities of the government, because it relates to the actions of MCC personnel taken in their official capacities.

⁹ *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

¹⁰ 22 C.F.R. § 1304.9(c).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² 22 C.F.R. § 1304.9(c)(1)-(4); see also *D.C. Technical Assistance Org. Inc. v. U.S. Dep't of Hous. and Urban Dev. (D.C. Technical Assistance)*, 85 F.Supp.2d 46, 48-49 (D.D.C. 2000) (requested documents will contribute to “greater understanding of government activities”).

¹³ See O’Harrow, *supra* note 1; Gramer, *supra* note 1.

The requested documents will be “likely to contribute” to an understanding of specific government operations because of their potential to shed light on whether and to what extent those actions or related decisions might have been influenced by parties outside the agency. Disclosure of the requested information will contribute to the public’s understanding of these aspects of the operations of the federal government.

Increasing the likelihood that disclosure of these records will contribute significantly to public understanding of a reasonably broad audience, American Oversight’s objective is to reveal to the public at large any information it receives related to this FOIA request. American Oversight has the capacity to disseminate this information as it posts all records to its public websites and publishes analyses of its records. In the past, the organization has successfully informed the public of specific government activities and operations. As an example, American Oversight obtained Education Secretary DeVos’s calendar entries, which revealed Secretary DeVos’s frequent absences from office, staffing choices, and the influence of charter schools and for-profit colleges on the Education Department.¹⁴ The *New York Times* and CNN relied on American Oversight’s analyses to report on Secretary DeVos’s priorities within the Department of Education.¹⁵ Disclosure will contribute to a greater understanding on the part of the public at large about the considerations driving policy decisions, and how such decisions are implemented at MCC. Disclosure will “significantly” contribute to the public’s understanding of government activities or operations related to MCC’s decisionmaking and policy implementation under a leadership regime and structure not previously in place at the agency. The subject of this request is a matter of public interest, and the public’s understanding of the government’s activities would be enhanced through American Oversight’s analysis and publication of these records.

This request is primarily and fundamentally not for commercial purposes, but rather the primary interest is in public disclosure of responsive records.¹⁶ As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight’s financial interest. American Oversight’s mission is to promote transparency in government, to educate the public about government activities, and to ensure the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their

¹⁴ See *Influence & Access at the Department of Education*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT (Oct. 27, 2017), <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/influence-access-at-the-department-of-education>; *Unexcused Absences: DeVos Calendars Show Frequent Days Off*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT (Oct. 27, 2017), <https://www.americanoversight.org/unexcused-absences-devos>.

¹⁵ Eric Lipton, *Betsy DeVos’s School Schedule Shows Focus on Religious and Nontraditional Schools*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/27/us/politics/betsy-devos-work-schedule-education.html>; Gregory Wallace *et al.*, *What Betsy DeVos’s Schedule Tells Us About Her Agenda*, CNN (Oct. 29, 2017, 12:22 PM), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/28/politics/devos-schedules-education/index.html>.

¹⁶ 22 C.F.R. § 1304.9(c)(5)–(6).

availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.¹⁷ American Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney,¹⁸ American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ's process for ethics waivers.¹⁹ As another example, American Oversight has a project called "Audit the Wall," where the organization is gathering and analyzing information and commenting on public releases of information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border.²⁰

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact Katherine Anthony at foia@americanoversight.org or (202) 897-3918. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,



Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight

¹⁷ American Oversight currently has approximately 12,100 page likes on Facebook and 49,200 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Dec. 5, 2018); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Dec. 5, 2018).

¹⁸ *DOJ Civil Division Response Noel Francisco Compliance*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

¹⁹ *Francisco & the Travel Ban: What We Learned from the DOJ Documents*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/francisco-the-travel-ban-what-we-learned-from-the-doj-documents>.

²⁰ *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.