

Citizens Union • Civic Commons  
New York Civil Liberties Union  
League of Women Voters of New York State  
New York Public Interest Research Group  
Open Plans • Reinvent Albany

Cas Holloway  
Deputy Mayor for Operations  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

January 24, 2012

Re: Opportunity for NYC to get free federal online Freedom of Information Law system

Dear Deputy Mayor Holloway,

Our groups write today to urge you, and the New York City agencies you oversee, to take advantage of an unusual opportunity to provide better service, save tax payer dollars and increase government transparency.

We recently learned that the federal Environmental Protection Agency is on the verge of building a \$1.3 million, online software tool that will automate Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The “FOIA Module” is set for public launch in October 2012. (An internal EPA slideshow describing the project is attached.)

The good news here is that the EPA’s project managers, and their partners at the federal Office of Government Information Services, are receptive to making their “FOIA Module” open source, and available to states and localities. However, the EPA’s time frame for finalizing the software design is very tight. Only after we contacted them did they contemplate the potential of their tool for use by state and local government. They asked us to encourage any cities and state we knew were potentially interested in this tool to contact their agencies and the White House ASAP.

Therefore, we urge you, on behalf of New York City, to contact the EPA and express New York’s interest in using an open source version of the “FOIA module” for local government here. New York City would not have to provide money or other resources, as all open source tools are freely redistributable and usable. (Below is contact information for recommended federal officials.)

New York City agencies receive many thousands of Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) disclosure requests annually. Many requests are complicated, and city agencies vary

widely in the timeliness of their responses, and the time and money it takes to process requests. Putting FOIL online, with a free and open-source tool for the more efficient management of FOIL makes sense. The experts we consulted estimate government agencies save 50% to 75% in FOIL processing costs with commercially available software. However, that software can be expensive at \$1,000 per government user per year, for the first four years.

EPA's online tool is very similar to the best commercial software, and EPA estimates that it can save the federal government \$40 million annually if adopted by all federal agencies. We think NYC could save proportionally large amounts of money, while shortening response times.

It's not everyday that the federal government develops a free software tool that could save New York City and its agencies millions of dollars while improving a much used public service.

Federal Contacts re: EPA FOIA Module

Lisa Jackson, EPA Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W. Mail Code: 1101A  
Washington, DC 20460  
jackson.lisap@epa.gov

Christopher Veins, Deputy Chief Technology Officer  
White House Office of Science and Technology Policy  
725 17th Street Room 5228  
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Thank you for your attention to our request.

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CC: Carole Post, Commissioner of NYC DoITT

For more information, or to follow up with one of the signers of the letter, please contact:

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