

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

Internal deliberative pre-decisional - FOR USE BY 2024 PRESIDENT-ELECT TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS
ONLY

SUMMARY

The EPA Executive Secretary serves as Director of the Office of the Executive Secretariat. The office provides direct administrative support to the Administrator, the Deputy Administrator and the Immediate Office of the Administrator by managing executive correspondence processing, records management and Freedom of Information Act requests. OEX oversees the Office of the Administrator's records and FOIA programs, runs an enterprise information technology system, manages the autopen and related delegations, compiles the Daily Reading File and develops agencywide style, format and usage standards for correspondence.

BACKGROUND

Primary Functions

- *Executive Correspondence* – Processes correspondence received by the agency and addressed to the Administrator and Deputy Administrator, drafts documents, proofs and edits signature packages and monitors the Administrator's primary (public) email account. Distributes the Daily Reading File, consisting of communications worthy of the Administrator's attention. Generates overdue reports and monitors tasking assignments made to national program and regional offices. Tracks and reports on hot topics or coordinated issue mail campaigns.
 - OEX reviews and provides QA/QC on hundreds of signature packages, logs and assigns as many as 6,500 pieces of correspondence and reviews between 600,000 and 1 million email messages annually. The office also generates between 500 and 5,000 hard copy responses to bulk/issue mail and individual correspondence.
 - Congressional and governor correspondence is received and handled by the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations. OEX forwards legal documents to OGC for processing. Scheduling requests received by OEX are routed to the scheduling team in the Immediate Office of the Administrator.
- *Freedom of Information Act* – Manages the FOIA program for the Office of the Administrator and processes all requests assigned to the AO. As the organization with the highest number of noncareer employees in the agency, including the agency's most senior leadership, and the office's role in determining the agency's strategic direction, initiatives and significant decisions, the AO receives the highest volume of complex and voluminous FOIA requests of any national program or regional office. AO leadership's policy decision-making and program implementation remain the subject of intense scrutiny by the press, stakeholders and interest groups, and the AO FOIA program plays an essential role in informing the public and helping the agency meet its statutory obligations.

- OEX manages a FOIA processing contract that provides the AO and other agency components with cradle-to-grave FOIA request processing services. The contract has options through Calendar Year 2029 and is currently capped at \$1 million/year.
- To date in FY 2024, the AO has received nearly 450 requests and closed nearly 300 requests, providing tens of thousands of pages of records to requestors.
- *Records Management* – The AO Records Liaison Officer is a member of OEX’s staff and is responsible for overseeing records management throughout the AO. OEX serves as custodian, or party responsible for capturing, maintaining and dispositioning, of the Administrator’s, Deputy Administrator’s and Immediate Office senior official records. Provides records briefings and consultations to all incoming and outgoing AO senior officials and noncareer employees and assists them in meeting their statutory responsibilities under the Federal Records Act. Manages the AO’s records digitization efforts and serves as liaison with the National Records Management Program and the National Digitization Centers.
- *Quill* – Quill is the EPA’s cloud-based correspondence tracking and workflow management tool, and the Quill team manages its budget and operations, ensures information security, facilitates training and provides support and troubleshooting. Quill is used by the EPA’s national program and regional offices to capture, route and preserve correspondence received at all levels throughout the agency. It is a Working Capital Fund service, so all agency components contribute to cover its \$1.29 million annual operating budget.
 - Beginning in Fiscal Year 2024, Quill began offering a micro-development service that leverages the agency’s investment to develop and host Microsoft PowerApps-based tools. By using existing IT infrastructure and contract vehicles, the Quill team can develop new solutions faster and at a vastly reduced cost compared to dedicated standalone contracts. To date, estimated savings to the agency over five years are \$4.5 million.

Secondary Functions

- *Ethics Reviews* – Reviews all domestic and international gifts to the Administrator and Deputy Administrator to ensure compliance with applicable regulations and statutes.
- *Document Control Officer* – Serves as the Office of the Administrator’s Document Control Officer for TSCA-related Confidential Business Information. DCOs oversee the receipt, storage, transfer, use, reproduction and destruction of TSCA CBI and assist employees in requesting or renewing authorization to access CBI.
- *Controlled Unclassified Information Program* – Manages the Controlled Unclassified Information business function for the Administrator’s Office, including enforcement of agency policies and procedures for designating, marking, handling, decontrolling and destroying CUI. CUI is sensitive information that laws, federal regulations or government-wide policies require or permit executive branch agencies to protect, including personally identifiable information.
- *Privacy Act* – The AO Privacy Liaison Official is a member of OEX’s staff and oversees the AO’s privacy program, including reviewing privacy impact assessments and documentation for the AO’s electronic and paper systems of records, preparing Systems of Records Notices for publication in the *Federal Register* and processing requests for information made under the Privacy Act.

- *Trial Advocacy Institute* – Since 2023 serves as executive sponsor of and manages the Trial Advocacy Institute, a unique educational opportunity that enhances the skills of EPA attorneys by teaching them a variety of advocacy techniques under the instruction of experienced trial attorneys.
- *EPA Correspondence Manual (Publication 1320)* – OEX sets the agency’s standards for how all EPA correspondence must be formatted. It promulgates those standards through the EPA Correspondence Manual, and conformance with the manual is mandatory for all agency employees. The manual was last updated in 2023.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Congress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> States | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tribes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Media | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other Fed. Agency |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Governments | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public | | | |

LEAD OFFICE/REGION

- Not applicable.

UPCOMING MILESTONES

- 1Q-2Q FY 2025 – Deploy the Public Query tool in Quill, which routes comments and questions from more than 800 EPA web pages and 100 EPA hotlines to the offices and personnel best positioned to provide citizens with the information or assistance they need.
- 1Q-2Q FY 2025 – Onboard contractors under the FOIA processing contract.
- 2Q-3Q FY 2025 – Begin work on two new Quill micro-development projects.

MOVING FORWARD

- Autopen Signature – OEX needs exemplars of the Administrator’s signature for conversion to electronic format for use in the mechanical autopen and to create graphics for use in electronically signed documents.
- Primary Email Account Access /Review Procedures – Assuming a new Administrator will maintain the primary and secondary email account model (primary for public comments; secondary to communicate with EPA senior leaders and peers across the government), need to coordinate OEX access to the primary email account and agree on review/routing protocols.
- Correspondence Formatting Preferences – OEX needs to know any preferences that the Administrator has for formatting outgoing correspondence, including preferred phraseology, document layout, etc. OEX communicates those preferences to the rest of the agency for use in preparing draft responses.
- Daily Reading File – Distribution list and Administrator/Deputy Administrator content preferences.
- Standard Delegations of Authority – Incoming Administrators make formal delegations of authority with respect to discrete functions, including authorizations to approve use of the autopen and to empower career staff to deal with certain administrative functions, including personnel actions, grievances, travel authorizations, disciplinary actions and discrimination complaints. OEX drafts the delegation memoranda and maintains the official copies of said delegations.
- Gift Contact/Context Data – Need to ensure that advance and other IO staff adequately document gifts received by the Administrator and that they route those gifts to OEX for review. OEX provides

determinations on whether gifts may be kept, destroyed, returned or paid for using personal funds. OEX assists with logistics for gifts that need to be returned, paid for or destroyed.

- Draft Standard/Canned Letter Responses (e.g. popular topics, eagle scouts, retirements, condolences). Often crafted in consultation with the Administrator's speechwriter and public affairs team to ensure alignment with priorities and comms plans.