



Report: Clinton State Dept one of least transparent agencies

By [Chris Moody](#), CNN Senior Digital Correspondent

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Washington (CNN) When Hillary Clinton stepped down as Secretary of State in 2013, she left an agency that has one of the most "dismal" transparency records in the federal government, according to an independent review released Tuesday that tracks response rates to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

The nonpartisan Center for Effective Government examined compliance rates for FOIA request during fiscal years [2012](#) and [2013](#) --Clinton's final two years in office -- and found that of 15 federal agencies that take on the most requests, the State Department was the least likely to respond or provide information in a timely manner.

Clinton, who served as Secretary of State from 2009-2013, has come under fire in recent weeks for using a personal e-mail account to conduct official government business from a private server set up in her home. Clinton has handed over some 55,000 pages of e-mails she sent from the account to the State Department for review and on Tuesday, she defended using the private account, saying it was only for "convenience."

[READ MORE: Hillary Clinton: I used one email 'for convenience'](#)

"Looking back, it would have been better if I'd simply used a second email account and carried a second phone, but at the time, this didn't seem like an issue," she said during a Tuesday press conference.

Still, the report's authors suggest that transparency and responding to FOIA requests was not a primary concern during her tenure at State.

"I can definitely say that during her time at the agency, it wasn't a priority," said Sean Moulton, the Center for Effective Government's Open Government Policy.

The report's release on Tuesday wasn't related to Clinton's decision to hold a press conference on the same day.

Overall Grades	
Agency	Score
Top Performers	
Department of Agriculture	85% (B)
Social Security Administration	82% (B-)
Middling Performers	
Department of Justice	73% (C)
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	72% (C-)
National Archives and Records Administration	71% (C-)
Lowest Performers	
Department of Homeland Security	69% (D+)
Department of Transportation	68% (D+)
Department of the Treasury	68% (D+)
Environmental Protection Agency	67% (D)
Department of Veterans Affairs	64% (D)
Department of Labor	63% (D)
Department of Defense	61% (D-)
Securities and Exchange Commission	61% (D-)
Department of Health and Human Services	57% (F)
Department of State	37% (F)

Transparency rating of government agencies. (Source: Center for Effective Government)

A State Department spokesperson declined to comment on the record for this article, providing a statement that could only be used if attributed to an anonymous official.

"The State Department is the agency of first resort for all requests for foreign policy and national security information. We have a centralized, enterprise-wide FOIA program. We are different from other agencies in that we handle our requests at the agency level through a centralized program," the official said. "In order to respond to requests, the Department may need to go to numerous places as part of the search effort. This includes nearly 100 bureaus and offices within the Department, more than 260 posts, including our embassies and consulates."

The report rated the agency by three criteria: Whether it established clear rules for requesting information; the "user-friendliness" of the FOIA website; and the timeliness and level of completion in responding

For both years, the group's report gave State an "F" grade, calling the agency "a serious outlier," compared to other agencies. Of the agencies rated, the group granted two "B" scores, three "C's," eight "D's" and two "F's." The Department of Agriculture received the highest rating at 85%; the State Department received the lowest with 37%.

The report noted that "only eight percent [of FOIAs] were processed within the required 20 days," despite categorizing 65% of the requests as "simple." That year, "only 51 percent of requests were granted in full or in part." The department received 18,753 FOIA requests in fiscal year 2013 and employed 157 staff members to process them.

The poor performance on transparency issues came to a head last week when [the Associated Press said it was considering a lawsuit](#) against the agency for unfulfilled requests.

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Moulton noted that given the Department's challenges, they could devote more staff to handling FOIA requests.

"The State Department deals with a lot of classified information, so you can see why they pour over records before they release them, and that can take time. At the same time, there are other agencies that face similar challenges," he said. "They're comfortable with the fact that they are under performing on FOIA. They see all these excuses as sufficient."

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/10/politics/state-department-transparency-hillary-clinton/index.html>