

FOIA:

Balancing Rights and Responsibilities

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Group Website

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We chose our topic by brainstorming a list of possible topics that would fit this year's NHD theme of Rights and Responsibilities, and would interest us. When compiling the list, we looked in particular at people's rights because this was a subject area that appealed to all of us. After considering patients' rights and workers' rights, we finally decided on the Freedom of Information Act, which balances citizens' rights with government responsibilities. We chose the FOIA because it was the most interesting topic considering the number of primary sources and amount of information available. We focused on how FOIA benefited citizens, and wanted to see how this involved the balance of rights and responsibilities.

After settling on our topic, we began researching by looking for specific information through search engines on the Internet. Before refining our searches, we read the original text of the FOIA and learned more about the act by reading official government FOIA websites, which taught us the minute details of FOIA. As we were conducting our research, we found a great resource called the National Security Archive by George Washington University which uploaded declassified government documents online, like presidential signing statements, congressional reports, and the actual text of amendments. This helped us find many primary source documents. Moreover, our research led us to many FOIA experts who were authorities on our topic, like Susan Karren, Director of the National Archives at Seattle, and Jon Wiener, the man who fought a revolutionary FOIA case. We interviewed them, as well as professors from other universities. Susan Karren's interview taught us a lot about FOIA because she works at the National Archives and receives numerous FOIA requests. She told us about her experiences in doing so. Our interviews were great primary sources. Overall, we were able to find a lot of information in several different formats, including primary source documents, interviews and quotes.

The website category appealed to all of us because it seemed both efficient and fun. Not only was it a simple way to show written information, pictures, videos and quotes, but it also sanctioned creativity. The Weebly platform helped our team because we could simultaneously work on different components of the website and finish different parts of the website in a shorter amount of time. A website also seemed the most appropriate format to use for our topic since one of the FOIA amendments (EFOIA) gave the

government the responsibility to publish information online. Furthermore, we decided to keep our website's layout clear and open use simple fonts to fit with FOIA's purpose, to have an open government without any secrets.

The Freedom of Information Act balanced citizens' rights with government responsibilities. It gives U.S. citizens the right to access some previously confidential government records and puts the responsibility of imparting this information to citizens on the government. FOIA has been greatly beneficial to citizens throughout its existence, although there remains room for improvement.