



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the General Counsel
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250-1400

November 27, 2020

Delivered via Electronic Mail

Austin Evers
American Oversight
1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255
foia@americanoversight.org

Re: Interim Response for Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request No. 2020-OSEC-00934-F

Dear Mr. Evers:

This is an interim response to the above-referenced FOIA request received by the Departmental FOIA Office (DFO). The request sought the following:

1. All guidance, directives, instructions, policies, and procedures (including that transmitted via email, memoranda, or other means of communication) regarding the use of properties owned by the Trump Organization for government-sponsored meetings, conferences, or travel. Both technical/logistical guidance as well as policy guidance should be considered responsive to this request.
2. All guidance, directives, instructions, policies, and procedures (including that transmitted via email, memoranda, or other means of communication) regarding reimbursement for meals, overnight stays, or other expenses incurred at properties owned by the Trump Organization. Both technical/logistical guidance as well as policy guidance should be considered responsive to this request.
3. All records reflecting costs reimbursed or paid directly by your agency for visits to any property owned by the Trump Organization. Reimbursements include payments for lodging, meals, conference fees, incidental expenses, costs for transportation, costs of individual airfare, per diem payments, overtime payments, payments made via government-issued charge cards or travel cards, or other reimbursable expenses. This request encompasses costs incurred not only by government employees, but also by their spouses or any staff or security detail assigned to government employees traveling to any Trump Organization property.

Your request is being processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A search for responsive records relating to Items one (1) and two (2) of your request was conducted by the Office of Ethics (OE). The Office of Ethics (OE) is the centralized office responsible for coordinating and implementing USDA's Ethics program throughout the Department. OE provides ethics services to employees at all levels of USDA concerning advice and training about compliance with ethics laws and regulations, including the conflict of interest and impartiality rules, as well as the rules governing political activity by Federal employees. No records were identified as a result of this search.

Additionally, the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) conducted a search for records responsive to Item 3 of the above request. FAS works to improve foreign market access for U.S. products. This USDA agency operates programs designed to build new markets and improve the competitive position of U.S. agriculture in the global marketplace. FAS also handles international travel on behalf of the USDA Secretary. No records were identified as a result of this search.

The DFO continues processing your request and will issue a final response.

You have the right to appeal the DFO's determination. Due to the need to issue more than one determination in order to fully resolve your request, your appeal rights for all determinations in response to this request will be provided to you in our final response letter.

You may seek dispute resolution services from the DFO's FOIA Public Liaison, Ms. Camille Aponte. Ms. Aponte may be contacted by telephone at 202-690-5260, or electronically at Camille.Aponte@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

You also have the option to seek assistance from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS). Please visit <https://www.archives.gov/ogis/mediation-program/request-assistance> for information about how to request OGIS assistance in relation to a FOIA request.

If you have any questions regarding the processing of this request, please contact Ms. Sarah A. Scharf electronically at sarah.scharf@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

For additional information regarding USDA FOIA regulations and processes, please refer to the information available online at www.dm.usda.gov/foia.

The DFO appreciates your patience as we continue processing the remainder of your FOIA request.

Sincerely,

Alexis R. Graves

Alexis R. Graves
Departmental FOIA Officer
Office of the General Counsel