March 28, 2023

Contribution Award Selection Committee
Administrative Professional Advisory Council (APAC)
Washington State University
PO Box 641038
Pullman, WA 99164-1038

RE: Alicia Foth

Dear APAC Contribution Award Selection Committee:

I am writing to add my enthusiastic support to the nomination of Alicia Foth for the Administrative Professional Contribution Award. Since joining the Washington State University (WSU) Division of the Attorney General’s Office in 2020, it has been my privilege to work with Alicia on issues related to the Washington Public Records Act. In my estimation, Alicia is an extraordinary Public Records Officer, demonstrating deep subject matter expertise, fastidious attention to detail, and personal dedication to the principles of open government. While these qualities alone provide tremendous benefit to WSU, Alicia has also shown exceptional work ethic, going above and beyond to fulfill WSU’s obligations under the Public Records Act (PRA).

The requirements of PRA are complex, and Alicia does an exceptional job of working with both a wide variety of requesters, ranging from individuals to major news organizations and record holders, some of whom have little knowledge of the stringent requirements of the PRA. Individual requesters may not know the names of the records they are seeking or understand how the wording of their request can affect the volume of records being produced. Record holders are often surprised to learn how broadly “public record” is defined, their individual responsibility for compliance, and the potential fines WSU can face if all responsive records are not produced. While each record holder is responsible for producing responsive records, Alicia is charged with assessing whether WSU has conducted an adequate search, which requires a high degree of engagement with individual record holders. Because of the variety in requestors, record-types, and record holders, what appears to be a routine agency function requires a high degree of individual attention to each request.

In addition to the technical complexity of her position, the role of Public Records Officer requires professionalism, grace, and emotional intelligence. Some requestors are seeking records for time-sensitive reasons, like news stories, background checks, or insurance claims, and the requestors may be impatient with the process. Other requestors seek records related to a dispute
or controversy and may be adversarial in communication. Exceptionally broad requests can result in frustration for both the requestor (due to the time required to fulfill the request) and the record holders (due to the administrative burden).

I have also seen Alicia persevere in stressful and difficult circumstances. During the pandemic, WSU received a large volume of requests related to its pandemic response and record holders struggled to respond to requests while transitioning to remote work. The Public Records Office also faced staffing challenges. For eight months in 2021 and 2022, Alicia was the only full-time staff member in the Public Records Office, which receives approximately 600 public records requests per year. Finally, WSU has been the subject of several regional and national headlines over the last year, increasing both the number of requests and the scrutiny applied to WSU’s response. Despite an overwhelming workload, Alicia has remained impressively productive, thorough, professional, and committed to ensuring public access to WSU records.

I cannot overstate the institutional value of Alicia’s skillful and tenacious service in this essential agency position. I wholeheartedly recommend Alicia Foth for the 2023 APAC Contribution Award.

Sincerely,

JESSICA SMITH-KAPROSY
Assistant Attorney General
March 28, 2023

Dear 2023 AP Contribution Award Committee:

I am excited to nominate Alicia Foth, WSU's Public Records Officer, for the 2023 AP Contribution Award. Alicia has been the lead staff member in WSU’s Public Records Office since 2018. She consistently goes above and beyond to manage the difficult and stressful work of the office, often working late in the evenings and on weekends to help ensure public records requests are fulfilled in compliance with the law. Alicia is deeply committed to the principles of government transparency and accountability in decision-making, and it is evident that these principles guide her work every day.

Alicia works closely with the Attorney General’s Office, WSU departments across the system, and records requesters to ensure responsive records are collected, redacted, and provided in accordance with detailed legal requirements. This work requires a high degree of specialized knowledge, excellent judgment, time management, attention to detail, and emotional and situational intelligence. Alicia demonstrates all these skills and attributes on a daily basis. Even when her workload is extreme and/or she is dealing with challenging requesters (which unfortunately is a regular part of the job), she conducts herself with professionalism and grace. She stays positive and focused, makes steady progress with her work, and calmly educates both requesters and university constituents as needed regarding their rights and duties under the law and university policy. Alicia is also a creative thinker, and she is able to use her knowledge, experience, and intellect to quickly develop solutions to complex problems. Even when faced with challenging circumstances, Alicia maintains her sense of humor and collegiality.

WSU’s Public Records Office receives an average of just under 600 public requests per year, and for approximately eight months in late 2021 and 2022, Alicia was the only full-time staff member in the office due to difficulties filling the vacant coordinator position. She persevered in the face of an overwhelming workload, and the quantity and quality of her work, as well as her professionalism with the public and colleagues, remained consistently excellent.

Alicia’s efforts have truly made a difference to WSU, and I am pleased to nominate her for this award.

Sincerely,

Danielle Hess
Executive Director, Policy and Governance