Vision Statement

Project Name: FOIA Rater and Editor (FARE)

Team Name: FARE-ohs

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Problem Statement:

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) allows the public to request access to records from any federal agency. However, the request process can be complex in both the writing and reviewing phases. Poorly written requests may increase processing fees and confuse reviewers, leading to significant costs and delays.

Project Description:

We are developing two portions of the FOIA Friend service. First, we are creating a rater that judges the quality of a user's FOIA request based on ambiguity, information scope, predicted processing time, and relevance to the target agency. Second, we are also developing an editor for FOIA requests that helps users write better requests.

Significance:

By improving the quality of FOIA requests and making them easier and faster to fulfill, we will enable users to efficiently access government records. We also save unnecessary expenses for taxpayers by lessening the burden on FOIA officers sifting through insufficiently scoped written FOIA requests.

Current Solutions:

Requester-side (journalists, media outlets, nonprofits, etc.) tools:

- FOIA Predictor: Gives probability that FOIA request will succeed using KNN algorithm.
- FOIA Search Tool: Finds already submitted FOIA requests that match the requesters' query or finds an agency that will have the requested information.

Requestee-side (government agencies, etc.) tools:

- JustFOIA: Helps manage FOIA requests.
- FOIA Request Management Software: Helps manage FOIA requests.

Outcomes:

By the end of this project, we intend to have an application that helps requesters create higher-quality requests with less effort. Our implementation aims to reduce the overall time spent writing and editing the request, the average time before an officer responds to a request, and the amount of communication needed between the FOIA officer and requester.

Milestones:

- Create a user-friendly interface using JavaScript for users to easily edit, submit, and manage requests
- Create a dataset of "good" FOIA requests using web scraping and LLMs
- Train a model on the dataset using PyTorch and Transformers that evaluates the clarity and effectiveness of a FOIA request and gives editing suggestions

- Build and deploy a scalable application infrastructure on AWS, including database and authentication management

Technologies:

- Dataset creation: scraping & LLMs
- Model training: PyTorch & Transformers
- UI construction: JavaScript & AWS