

Your Right To Federal Records



**Questions and
Answers on the
Freedom of Information
Act and the Privacy Act**



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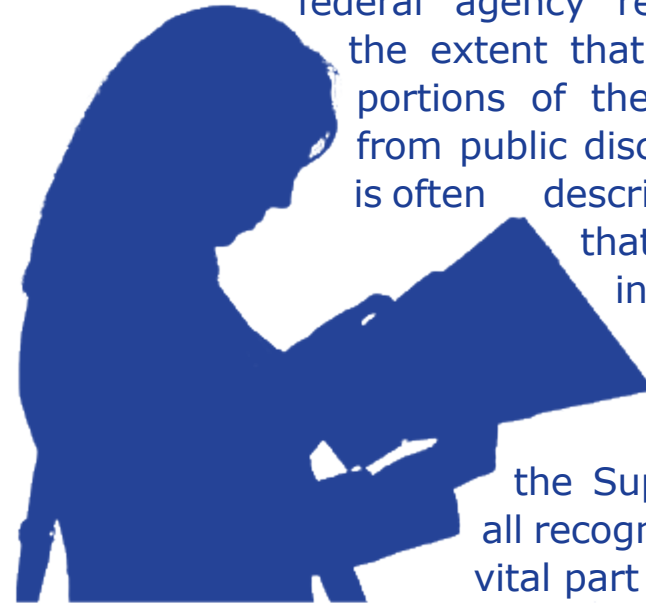
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Introduction

Enacted in 1966, and taking effect on July 4, 1967, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides that any person has a right, enforceable in court, to obtain access to federal agency records, except to the extent that such records (or portions of them) are protected from public disclosure. The FOIA is often described as the law that keeps citizens in the know about their government. As Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court have all recognized, the FOIA is a vital part of our democracy.



Under the FOIA, agencies must disclose any information that is requested – unless that information is protected from public disclosure. The FOIA also requires that agencies automatically disclose certain information, including frequently requested records. Agencies routinely post a wide variety of documents on their websites to inform the public about the activities of that agency. The primary source of FOIA-related information for the

public is the [FOIA.Gov](http://www.foia.gov) website (www.foia.gov). [FOIA.Gov](http://www.foia.gov) is a website created by the Department of Justice where you can learn about the FOIA, view significant FOIA releases, and access all the data collected by the Department of Justice reflecting agencies' administration of the FOIA. On [FOIA.Gov](http://www.foia.gov), you will find information about making a FOIA request, including agency contact information. [FOIA.Gov](http://www.foia.gov) contains a glossary of FOIA terms, frequently asked questions and

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answers connected with the FOIA, educational videos, and links and information regarding other Open Government websites. FOIA.Gov also provides detailed information about the number of FOIA requests received each year, how agencies handled these requests, as well as information on processing times, backlogs, fees and agency personnel who work to comply with the FOIA.

The Department of Justice's Office of Information Policy (OIP) oversees agency compliance with the FOIA and encourages all agencies to fully comply with both the letter and the spirit of the FOIA. At OIP's website (www.justice.gov/oip), you will find additional information, guidance, and a comprehensive legal treatise on the FOIA called the *United States Department of Justice Guide to the Freedom of Information Act*. The OIP website also includes summaries of court opinions decided under the FOIA and links to agencies' Annual FOIA Reports and Chief FOIA Officer Reports.

The Privacy Act of 1974 can also be used to obtain access to records about yourself. The Privacy Act establishes certain controls over how executive branch agencies of the federal government collect, maintain, use and disseminate personal information about individuals maintained by federal

agencies. The Privacy Act provides individuals with a means to seek access to and amendment of their records, but it pertains only to records about individual U.S. citizens and lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens. The FOIA, on the other hand, covers virtually all records in the possession and control of federal executive branch agencies.

This brochure provides basic guidance about how the FOIA and the Privacy Act work to assist you in exercising your rights. It uses a question-and-answer format to present information about these laws in a clear, simple manner. The brochure is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the complex issues associated with the FOIA and the Privacy Act.

The questions answered here are those frequently asked by persons who contact the Federal Citizen Information Center (FCIC) of the U.S. General Services Administration for information on the FOIA and the Privacy Act. The answers were compiled by the FCIC, along with the Department of Justice — the agency responsible for encouraging agency compliance with the FOIA in a spirit of openness and transparency. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which has a similar responsibility for the Privacy Act, reviewed the answers to questions on that law.

What information is available under the FOIA?

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides the public with a right of access to federal agency records except for those records (or portions of those records) that are protected from disclosure by any of nine exemptions. In addition, in three carefully defined situations, certain sensitive law enforcement records are "excluded" from the requirements of the FOIA.

The FOIA's exemptions provide protection for nine categories of information.

The exemptions cover:

1. classified national defense and foreign relations information,
2. internal agency personnel rules and practices,
3. information that is prohibited from disclosure by another law,
4. trade secrets and other confidential commercial information,
5. inter-agency or intra-agency communications that are protected by legal privileges,
6. information that would invade someone's personal privacy,
7. certain information compiled for law enforcement purposes,

8. information relating to the supervision of financial institutions, and
9. geological information on wells.

The FOIA does not apply to Congress, the courts, or the inner offices of the White House, nor does it apply to records in the custody of state or local governments. However, all state governments have their own statutes that provide procedures for access to state records. Details about a state's records access law are available on the state's official website.

Under the FOIA, you can request a copy of any record that is in an agency's files and it will be provided to you unless it is protected from disclosure by one of the exemptions or exclusions. Before making your FOIA request, first check the agency's website to see if the agency has already posted the information you seek. FOIA.Gov includes links to all the agencies' FOIA websites and so can be a useful starting point. For example, suppose you have heard that a certain toy has been recalled as a safety hazard and you want to know the details. The Consumer Product Safety Commission's website allows you to search for recall information by product type, company, product description, type of hazard, and location of manufacturer, and posts recall

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documents. If you want further information about the recall, you could make a FOIA request to the agency. Perhaps you want to read the latest inspection report on conditions at a nursing home certified for Medicare. Medicare's website includes information explaining the inspections, inspection reports, and tools for comparing reports from different

If the records you seek are about yourself, you can request them under both the FOIA and the Privacy Act of 1974.

facilities. If you need more information about the inspections or how they are conducted, you could make a FOIA request. In both of these examples, you could use the FOIA to request information from the appropriate federal agency.

If the records you seek are about yourself, you can request them under both the FOIA and the Privacy Act of 1974 (see "The Privacy Act" on page 10 for further information pertaining to

the Privacy Act). In such cases, records may be withheld from you only if exempt from release under both laws (See a "Sample Privacy Act Request Letter" on page 13).

When you make a FOIA request, you must describe the records that you seek as clearly and specifically as possible and comply with the agency's regulations for making requests. If the agency cannot identify and locate records that you have requested with a reasonable amount of effort, it will not be able to assist you. All federal agencies strive to handle all FOIA requests in a customer-friendly fashion, in accordance with the FOIA. For example, for requests that will require more than ten days for

the agency to process, the FOIA requires agencies to assign a tracking number to your request. Each agency must provide a telephone number or website by which a requester can use the assigned tracking number to obtain information about the status of a pending request. Further, each agency is required to provide a Public Liaison to assist in the resolution of disputes between the requester and the agency. However, the FOIA does not require agencies to do

research for you, analyze data, answer written questions, or in any other way create records in order to respond to your request.

Can I find agency records on the internet?

Yes, and it can be useful to look at the information that an agency makes available on the internet before making a FOIA request. Agencies place a wide variety of information on their websites that is useful to the general public and that describes their various programs and activities. Additionally, the FOIA requires that agencies make certain records available on the internet. For example, you will find certain agency opinions, staff manuals, policy statements, and records frequently requested under the FOIA. You can find links to the FOIA sites of federal agencies on the internet by going to FOIA.Gov (www.foia.gov, click on the "Learn" tab, then click on "Where to Make a FOIA Request").

Whom do I contact in the federal government with my request? How do I get the right address?

The FOIA.gov website provides contact data for all agencies. No single office of the federal government handles all FOIA requests. Each FOIA request must

be made to the particular agency that has the records that you seek. Therefore, it is important to send your request to the appropriate office. For example, if you want to know about an investigation of motor vehicle defects, write to the Department of Transportation. If you want information about a work-related accident at a nearby manufacturing plant, write to the Department of Labor (at its office in the region where the accident occurred). Most of the larger federal agencies have several FOIA offices. Some have one for each major bureau or component; others have one for each region of the country.

The Department of Justice maintains FOIA.Gov to help the public know where to make FOIA requests. FOIA.Gov offers a list of all the government agencies, briefly describes their missions, and provides contact information for each agency's FOIA office or offices. To access FOIA.Gov's list of federal agencies, visit www.foia.gov (click on the "Learn" tab, then click on "Where to Make a FOIA Request").

For additional assistance, you can contact the Federal Citizen Information Center (FCIC) of the U.S. General Services Administration. The FCIC is specially prepared to help you find the right agency, office, and

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address. See “Other Sources of Information” on page 18 for information on how to contact the FCIC.

The U.S. Government Manual, the official handbook of the federal government, may also be useful. It describes the programs within each federal agency and lists the names of top personnel and agency addresses. You can access the Manual online at www.gpoaccess.gov/gmanual/index.html. The Manual is also available at most public libraries and can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents (See “Other Sources of Information” on page 18 for ordering instructions). In addition, each agency publishes FOIA regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) that contain the mailing addresses of its FOIA offices. (For example, the Department of Justice’s FOIA regulations can be found in Volume 28 of the CFR, Part 16.) The CFR is available at most public libraries and on the internet at www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/. [FOIA.Gov](http://www.foia.gov) also includes links to agencies’ FOIA websites, where you will find each agency’s FOIA regulations. To access [FOIA.Gov](http://www.foia.gov)’s list of federal agencies, visit www.foia.gov (click on the “Learn”

tab, then click on “Where to Make a FOIA Request”).

How do I request information under the FOIA?

After you determine the agency most likely to have the records you seek, you can make a FOIA request by simply writing a letter (see “Sample Freedom of Information Act Request Letter” on page 6) or, in many instances, sending an email or using a web-based request form sent to the appropriate agency. An agency’s



FOIA requesters are not required to state the reasons why they are making their requests.

FOIA website and regulations will provide information about how to make a request to that particular agency. Every agency is different, so you should verify if the agency accepts requests by email, fax or other electronic means. If you write a letter, mark both your letter and the envelope “Freedom

of Information Act Request” for the quickest possible handling of your request.

Regardless of the way you send the request, your request should identify the records that you seek as specifically as possible in order to increase the likelihood that the agency will be able to locate them. Any facts that you can furnish about the time, place, authors, events, subjects, and other details of the records will be helpful to the agency in deciding where to search for the records that you seek.

As a general rule, FOIA requesters are not required to state the reasons why they are making their requests. You can do so if you think it might help the agency to locate the records.

Can I request records in a specific format?

Yes, but the records may not be available in the requested format. If you request records that already exist in an electronic format, the FOIA requires agencies in almost all cases to provide these records to you in that same format, if that is what you prefer. However, if you request records that exist only in paper form, and you would like them in an electronic format, the agency is obligated to provide the records in that electronic

format only if it can do so with a reasonable amount of effort. The same is true if you request that electronic records be provided to you in an electronic format that is not readily reproducible.

What is the cost for getting records under the FOIA?

The FOIA permits agencies to charge fees to FOIA requesters. For noncommercial requesters, an agency can charge only for the actual cost of searching for records and the cost of making copies. Search fees usually range from about \$15 to \$40 per hour, depending upon the salary levels of the personnel needed for the search, although such fees may vary considerably by agency. The charge for copying documents can be as little as five cents or less per page at some agencies, but may be considerably more at other agencies.

For noncommercial requests, agencies will not charge for the first two hours of search time or for the first 100 pages of document copying. Agencies also will not charge if the total cost is minimal.

An agency should notify you before proceeding with a request that will involve substantial fees,

Sample Freedom of Information Act Request Letter

A sample FOIA request letter is shown below. Keep a copy of your request. You may need to refer to it in further correspondence with the agency.

Date

Agency FOIA Officer
Name of agency or agency component
Address (see discussion on page
3 on whom to contact)

Dear _____:

Under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. subsection 552, I am requesting access to [identify the records as clearly and specifically as possible].

If there are any fees for searching for or copying the records, please let me know before you work on my request. [Or, please supply the records without informing me of the cost if the fees do not exceed \$_____ which I agree to pay.]

If you deny all or any part of this request, please cite each specific exemption you think justifies your refusal to release the information and notify me of appeal procedures available under the law.

Optional: If you have any questions about handling this request, you can telephone me at _____ (home phone) or at _____ (office phone).

Sincerely,

Name
Address

unless your request letter already states your willingness to pay fees as large as that amount. If fees are charged, you can request a waiver of those fees if you can show that the records, when disclosed to you, will contribute significantly to the public's understanding of the operations or activities of the government.

How long will it take to answer my request?

Under the FOIA, federal agencies are generally required to respond to your request within twenty working days of receipt (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and federal holidays). If you have not received a response by the end of that time (allowing for mailing time), you can contact the agency to ask about the status of your request. Agencies often need more time to find the records, examine them, possibly consult with other agencies or components within the same agency, decide whether to disclose all of the information requested, and prepare the records for release to you. Agencies can extend this twenty-day period for up to ten more working days, with written notice to you. Some agencies, particularly law enforcement agencies, receive large numbers of requests, many of which involve voluminous records or require exceptional care to process. If an

agency has a backlog of requests that were received before yours and has assigned a reasonable portion of its staff to work on the backlog, it is permissible for the agency to handle requests on a first-come, first-served basis even if the agency is unable to respond to all requests within the statutory time period. However, the FOIA does allow an agency to set up processing categories so that simple requests do not have to wait to be handled because a more complicated request was received by the agency first.

Is there any way for me to speed up the response time?

By making a simple request, meaning a request for a small volume of information, the agency will typically be able to process it more quickly. If an agency is unable to respond to your request in time, it may ask you to modify your request so that you can receive a response more quickly. Generally, it takes agencies less time to process simple requests involving a small number of records. Complex requests involving a greater number of records can take considerably more time to process. Therefore, you and an agency FOIA Officer or FOIA Public Liaison may want to discuss narrowing the scope

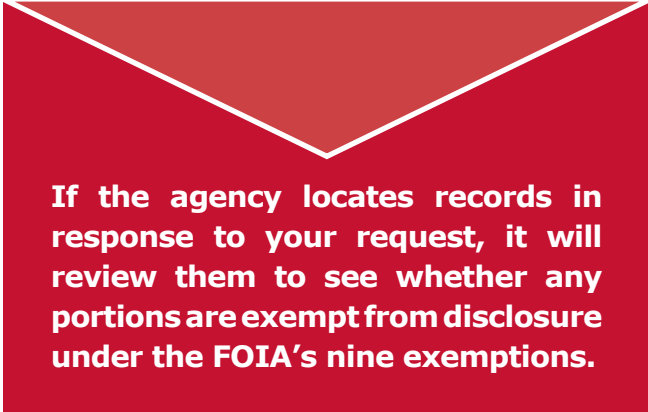
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of your request to speed up the response time or to agree on an alternative time frame for record processing.

Under certain conditions you may be entitled to have your request processed on an expedited basis.

There are two specific situations where a request will be expedited, which means that it is handled as soon as practicable. These two situations apply to every agency. First, a request will be expedited if the lack of expedited treatment could reasonably be expected to pose a threat to someone's life or physical safety. Second, if an individual will suffer the loss of substantial due process rights, his or her request will be expedited. A request will not normally be expedited merely because the requester is facing a court deadline in a judicial proceeding. However, an agency can allow expedited processing for other situations, depending on the regulations of that agency. The websites for each agency, which are accessible on FOIA.Gov, will provide more information on specific rules and regulations regarding expedited processing.

Additionally, as noted above, each agency must provide a telephone number or website that you can use to obtain information about the status of your pending FOIA request. Further, if you wish to raise a concern about the service provided to you by an agency's



If the agency locates records in response to your request, it will review them to see whether any portions are exempt from disclosure under the FOIA's nine exemptions.

FOIA office, you can contact a supervisory agency official known as a "FOIA Public Liaison." Contact information for each agency's FOIA office(s) and FOIA Public Liaison(s) are posted on each agency's FOIA website and are also on FOIA.Gov.

What happens if the agency denies my request?

If the agency locates records subject to the FOIA in response to your request, it will review

them to see whether any portions are exempt from disclosure under the FOIA's nine exemptions. For records that contain portions of information that is withheld, the agency will generally clearly mark those portions with the applicable FOIA exemption(s). Sometimes an agency will not locate any records in response to your request. In those cases, the agency will inform you that it could not locate records responsive to your request. If an agency denies your request, in whole or in part, it ordinarily must provide an estimate of the amount of material withheld, state the reason(s) for the denial, and inform you of your right to file an administrative appeal.

How do I appeal a denial?

You can file an administrative appeal if you are not satisfied with an agency's initial response to your request. Typically, all you need to do is send a letter to the agency stating that you are appealing the initial decision made on your request. There is no fee or cost involved. After an independent review, the appellate authority will send you a letter advising you of its decision.

Most agencies require that appeals be made within thirty to sixty days after the denial. The denial letter should tell you the

office to which your appeal letter should be addressed. For the quickest possible handling, you should mark both your appeal letter and the envelope "Freedom of Information Act Appeal."

Your appeal letter should include any tracking number the agency may have assigned to your request. It can save time in acting on your appeal if you include copies of your FOIA request and the agency's denial letter. You do not need to enclose copies of any documents released to you.

What can I do if my appeal is denied?

Once the administrative appeal process is complete, you have the option to seek mediation services from the Office of Government Information Services at the National Archives and Records Administration (www.archives.gov/ogis). The FOIA also provides requesters with the right to file a lawsuit.

The Privacy Act

What is the Privacy Act?

The federal government compiles a wide range of information on individuals. For example, if you were ever in the military or employed by a federal agency, there should be records of your service. If you have ever applied for a federal benefit or received a student loan guaranteed by the government, you are probably the subject of a file. There are records on every individual who has ever paid income taxes or received a check from Social Security or Medicare.

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The Privacy Act, passed by Congress in 1974, establishes certain controls over what personal information is collected by the federal government and

how it is used. This law guarantees three primary rights:

1. the right to see records about oneself, subject to the Privacy Act's exemptions;
2. the right to amend a nonexempt record if it is inaccurate, irrelevant, untimely, or incomplete; and
3. the right to sue the government for violations of the statute, such as permitting unauthorized individuals to read your records.

The Privacy Act also provides for certain limitations on agency information practices, such as requiring that information about an individual be collected from that individual to the greatest extent practicable; requiring agencies to ensure that their records are accurate, relevant, timely, and complete; and prohibiting agencies from maintaining information describing how an individual exercises his or her First Amendment rights unless the individual consents to it, a statute permits it, or it is within the scope



of an authorized law enforcement investigation.

What information can I request under the Privacy Act?

The Privacy Act applies only to records about individuals maintained by agencies in the executive branch of the federal government. It applies to these records only if they are in a "system of records," which means they are retrieved by an individual's name, Social Security number, or some other personal identifier. In other words, the Privacy Act does not apply to information about individuals in records that are filed under other subjects, such as organizations or events, unless the agency also indexes and retrieves them

by individual names or other personal identifiers.

There are ten exemptions to the Privacy Act under which an agency can withhold certain kinds of information from you. Examples of exempt records are those containing classified information on national security and those concerning criminal investigations. Another exemption often used by agencies is that which protects information that would identify a confidential source. For example, if an investigator questions a person about your qualifications for federal employment and that person agrees to answer only if his identity is protected, then his name or any information that would identify him can be withheld. The ten exemptions are set out in the law.

The Privacy Act

Sample Privacy Act Request Letter

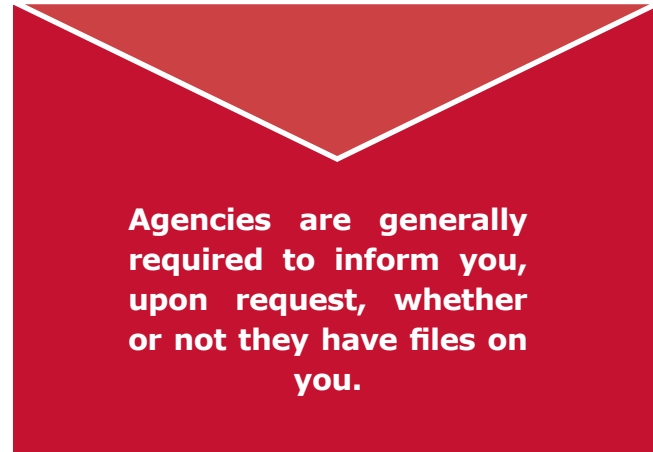
If you are interested in more details, you should read the Privacy Act in its entirety. Though this law is too lengthy to publish as

Whom do I contact in the federal government with my request? How do I get the right address?

As with the FOIA, no one office handles all Privacy Act requests. To locate the proper agency to handle your request, follow the same guidelines as for the Freedom of Information Act.

How do I know if an agency has a file on me?

If you think a particular agency has a file pertaining to you, you can write to the Privacy Act Officer. Agencies are generally required to inform you, upon request, whether or not they have files on you. In addition, agencies are required to report publicly the existence of all systems of records they keep on individuals. The Office of the Federal Register makes available on the internet a compilation of each agency's systems of records notices, including exemptions, as well as its Privacy Act regulations. The Privacy Act Issuances Compilation includes most systems, is updated every two years, and can be



Agencies are generally required to inform you, upon request, whether or not they have files on you.

part of this brochure, it is readily available. It is printed in the U.S. Code (Section 552a of Title 5), which can be found in many public and school libraries. You can also order a copy of the Privacy Act of 1974, Public Law 93-579, from the Superintendent of Documents (ordering instructions are on page 20). Also, the full text of the Privacy Act is available on the Department of Justice's website at www.justice.gov/opcl (click on "Privacy Act of 1974," then select the link "Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a").

Date
Agency FOIA/Privacy Act Officer
Name of agency or agency component
Address (See discussion on pages 3-4 on whom to contact)

Re: Privacy Act Request

Dear _____:

Under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. subsection 552, and the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. subsection 552a, I am requesting access to [identify the records as clearly and specifically as possible].

If there are any fees for searching for or copying the records, please let me know before you work on my request. [Or, please supply the records without informing me of the cost if the fees do not exceed \$_____ which I agree to pay.]

If you deny all or any part of this request, please cite each specific exemption you think justifies your refusal to release the information and notify me of appeal procedures available under the law.

Optional: If you have any questions about handling this request, you can telephone me at _____ (home phone) or at _____ (office phone).

Sincerely,

Name
Address
Enclosure (proof of identity)

The Privacy Act

found at www.gpoaccess.gov/privacyact/index.html.

How do I request information under the Privacy Act?

Write a letter to the agency that you believe may have a file pertaining to you. Address your request to the agency's Privacy Act Officer. Be sure to write "Privacy Act Request" clearly on both the letter and the envelope.

Most agencies require some proof of identity before they will give you your records. Therefore, it is a good idea to enclose proof of identity (such as a copy of your driver's license) with your full name and address. Do not send any original documents. Remember to sign your request for information, since your signature is a form of identification. If an agency needs more proof of identity before releasing your files, it will let you know.

Give as much information as possible as to why you believe the agency has records about you. The agency should process your request or contact you for additional information.

A "Sample Privacy Act Request Letter" is available on the previous page. Keep a copy of your

request. You may need to refer to it in further correspondence with the agency.

What is the cost for getting records under the Privacy Act?

Under the Privacy Act, an agency can charge only for the cost of copying records, not for time spent locating them.

How long will it take to answer my request?

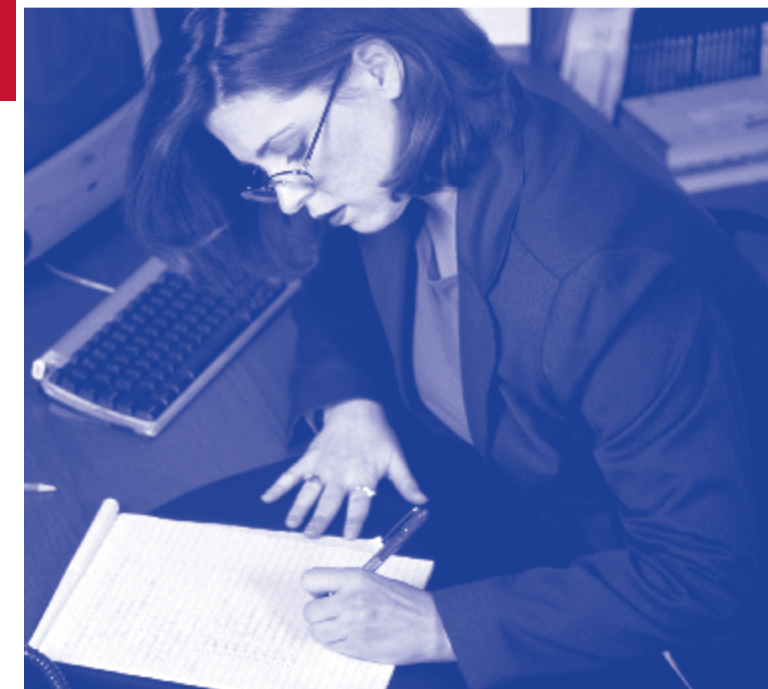
Under the terms of the Privacy Act, the agency is not required to reply to a request within a given period of time. However, most agencies have adopted the FOIA response times. If you do not receive any response within four weeks or so, you might wish to write again, enclosing a copy of your original request.

What if I find that a federal agency has incorrect information about me in its files?

The Privacy Act requires agencies maintaining personal information about individuals to keep accurate, relevant, timely, and complete files. If, after seeing your file, you believe that it contains incorrect information and should be

amended, write to the agency official who released the record to you. Include all pertinent documentation for each change you are requesting. The agency will let you know if further proof is needed. The law requires an agency to notify you of the receipt of such an amendment request within 10 working days of receipt. If your request for amendment is granted, the agency will tell you precisely what will be done to amend the record. You can appeal any denial.

Even if an agency denies your appeal, you have the right to submit a statement explaining why you think the record is wrong and the agency must attach your statement to any nonexempt records involved. The agency must also inform you of your right to go to court and have a judge review the denial of your appeal.



What can I do if I am denied information requested under the Privacy Act?

There is no required procedure for Privacy Act appeals, but an agency should advise you of its own appeal procedure when it makes a denial. Should the agency deny your appeal, you can take the matter to court.

A Comparison of the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act

What is the relationship between the FOIA and the Privacy Act?

Although the two laws were enacted for different purposes, there is some similarity in their provisions. Both

Both the FOIA and the Privacy Act give you the right to request access to records held by agencies of the federal government.

the FOIA and the Privacy Act give you the right to request access to records held by agencies of the federal government. The FOIA's access rights are generally given to "any person," but the Privacy Act's access rights are given only to the individual who is the subject of the records sought (if that individual is a U.S. citizen or a lawfully admitted permanent resident alien).

The FOIA applies to all federal agency records. The Privacy Act, however, only applies to those federal agency records that contain information about individuals, are maintained in a "system of records," and which are retrievable by a name or personal identifier of the individual. Each law has a somewhat different set of fees, time limits, and exemptions from its right of access.

If the information you seek pertains to the activities of a federal agency, an organization, or some person other than yourself, you should make your

request under the FOIA, which covers all agency records. If you request records relating to another person, and release of the records could invade that person's privacy, they ordinarily will not be disclosed to you.

If the information you seek is about yourself, you should also make the request under the Privacy Act, which covers most records of federal agencies that pertain to individuals. Sometimes you can use the FOIA to obtain



records about yourself that are not in a Privacy Act "system of records." If you are in doubt about which law applies or would better suit your needs, you can refer to both in your request letter. If you request records about yourself and do not specify a statute, the agency will, as a matter of policy, process the request under both the FOIA and the Privacy Act and withhold requested information from you only if it is exempt under both laws.

Other Sources of Information

FOIA.Gov

FOIA.Gov (www.foia.gov) is the primary source of FOIA-related information for the public. This website, created by the Department of Justice provides educational resources about the FOIA, significant FOIA releases, and access to details about all the agencies' administration of the FOIA. FOIA.Gov also includes information about making a FOIA request, including agency contact information. The website contains a glossary of FOIA terms, frequently asked questions and answers connected with the FOIA, and educational videos.

Federal Citizen Information Center

The General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies—the nation's focal point for data, information and services offered by the federal government to citizens—manages the Federal Citizen Information Center's National Contact Center. The NCC helps connect people with information about federal agencies, services, and programs. You can ask them for assistance in locating the FOIA office in any federal agency. Call toll-free 1-800-FED-INFO

(1-800-333-4636) from anywhere in the United States, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern time. Recorded information on frequently requested subjects is available around the clock. You can also search USA.gov—the official web portal of the federal government—to locate FOIA offices for specific federal agencies, email a question using USA.gov's web form or chat live online with a federal information specialist.

In addition, FCIC (www.gsa.gov/FCIC) publishes the free Consumer Information Catalog, which lists approximately 200 free and low-cost federal booklets on a wide variety of consumer topics. For a free printed copy of the Catalog, write to Consumer Information Catalog, Pueblo, CO 81009. The Catalog is also available online through FCIC's website at Publications.USA.gov, as is a text version of this publication (click on "Federal Programs," and scroll down to this publication's title).

U.S. Government Manual

The *U.S. Government Manual* is the official handbook of the federal government. Published by the National Archives and Records Administration, it describes the programs in each federal agency, lists the names of top personnel,

the mailing address, and a general information telephone number. You can access the Manual online at www.gpoaccess.gov/gmanual. It is available in most public libraries or can be purchased from the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). For pricing and ordering information, call toll-free 1-866-512-1800 (202-512-1800 in the Washington, D.C. area) or visit the online U.S. Government Bookstore at bookstore.gpo.gov/. The text version is available on the U.S. Government Printing Office's website at www.gpoaccess.gov/gmanual.

A Citizen's Guide on Using the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act of 1974 to Request Government Records

This booklet, written by the Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, provides a much more detailed explanation of the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act than this brochure. You can purchase this booklet from GPO by calling toll-free 1 (866) 512-1800 (202-512-1800 in the Washington, D.C. area). This document is also available online at www.fas.org/sgp/foia/citizen.html.

The Freedom of Information Act

A copy of the FOIA is available electronically on the Department of Justice's website at www.justice.gov/oip (click on "FOIA Resources," and then click on "Text of the FOIA"). You can order a copy of the FOIA from GPO by calling toll-free 1 (866) 512-1800 (202-512-1800 in the Washington, D.C. area). A complete copy of the FOIA can also be found at Section 552 of Title 5 of the U.S. Code, available at www.gpoaccess.gov (click on "United States Code" under "GPO Access Resources by Branch").

Freedom of Information Act Guide

The *United States Department of Justice Guide to the Freedom of Information Act* is a comprehensive legal treatise of the FOIA's procedural requirements, exemptions, and litigation considerations. It contains a detailed analysis of the key judicial opinions issued on the FOIA. The Guide is prepared and updated by the staff of the Department of Justice's Office of Information Policy. This publication is available online at the Department of Justice's

Other Sources of Information

website at www.justice.gov/foia (click on " FOIA OIP Guidance," click on "DOJ Guide to the FOIA"). You can also purchase this book from the Government Printing Office at bookstore.gpo.gov or by calling 1-866-512-1800 (202-512-1800 in the Washington, D.C. area).

FOIA Post

The Department of Justice's Office of Information Policy (OIP) posts a wide variety of news and guidance related to the FOIA on its website. *FOIA Post* is now the Department's blog which provides agencies and the public with information concerning the FOIA and its proper interpretation. When OIP issues guidance on the FOIA, it alerts agencies thru FOIA Post. Training announcements and guidelines for submitting annual reports and Chief FOIA Officer Reports are all conveyed on FOIA Post. *FOIA Post* can be found on the home page of OIP's website, www.justice.gov/oip.

FOIA Court Decisions

The Department of Justice's Office of Information Policy posts summaries each month of litigation cases decided under the FOIA. The monthly case summaries are organized both chronologically, beginning in December 2009, and

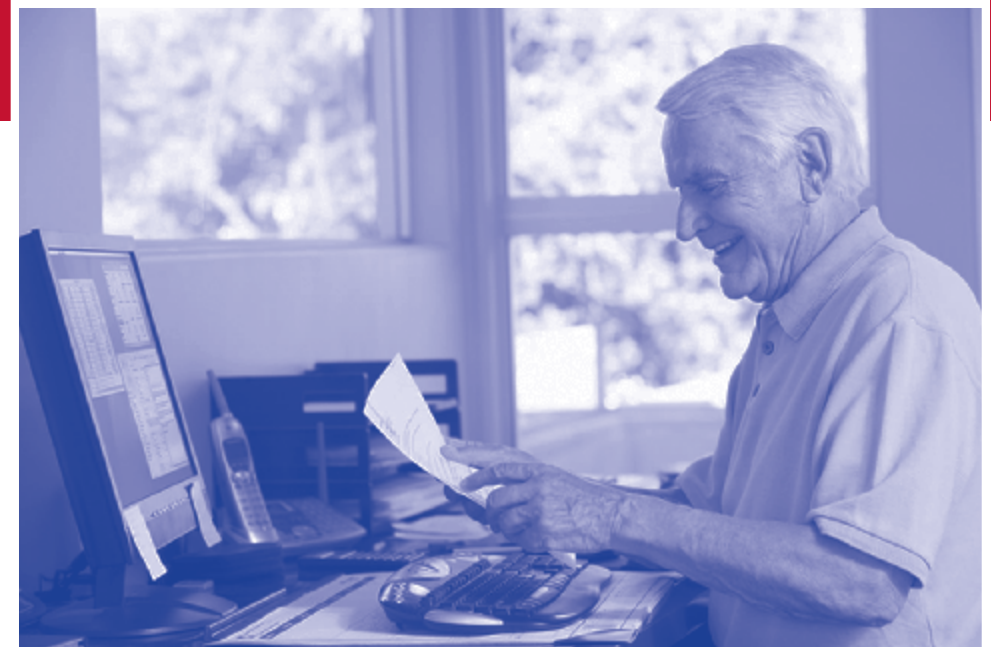
by topic. These case summaries can be found on the Department of Justice's website at www.justice.gov/oip (click on "FOIA Resources," then click on "Court Decisions").

FOIA Reference Guides or Handbooks

Each federal department or agency is required to maintain a reference guide or handbook to assist the public in making FOIA requests to that agency. Included is contact information for each agency's FOIA office(s) and FOIA Public Liaison(s). These reference guides for FOIA requesters are available on each agency's FOIA website. For example, the Department of Justice's FOIA Reference Guide is available at www.justice.gov/oip. All agency FOIA websites are also available on FOIA.Gov.

The Privacy Act of 1974

A copy of the Privacy Act is available electronically on the Department of Justice's website at www.justice.gov/opcl (click on "Privacy Act of 1974," then select the link "Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a"). You can order a copy of the Privacy Act, Public Law 93-579, from GPO by calling toll-free 1 (866) 512-1800



(202-512-1800 in the Washington, D.C. area).

Overview of the Privacy Act of 1974

The *Overview of the Privacy Act of 1974* is prepared by the Department of Justice's Office of Privacy and Civil Liberties in coordination with the Office of Management and Budget, and is a discussion of the provisions of the Privacy Act. This book also contains the text of the Privacy Act. It can be viewed on the Department of Justice's website at www.justice.gov/opcl/privacyact1974.htm (click on "Overview of the Privacy Act of 1974.")



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