

How to make a freedom of information (FOI) request

1. The Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) gives you the right to access recorded information held by [public sector organisations](#).

Anyone can request information – there are no restrictions on your age, nationality or where you live.

Your request will be handled under different regulations depending on the kind of information you ask for, eg the:

- [Data Protection Act](#) if you ask for information an organisation holds about you
- [Environmental Information Regulations](#) (EIRs) if you ask for environmental information

! An organisation could refuse your request [if the information is sensitive or the costs are too high](#).

Before you make a request

You might not need to make a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to get the information you need.

An organisation might be able to give you information straight away, eg over the phone. You can also check [published responses to FOI requests](#).

2. Organisations you can ask for information

You can request information from some public sector organisations, eg:

- [government departments, and other public bodies and committees](#)
- [local councils](#)
- schools, colleges and universities
- health trusts, hospitals and doctors' surgeries
- publicly owned companies
- publicly funded museums

- [the police](#)

View the full list of [public sector organisations covered](#) by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Check FOI responses

Government departments and other bodies often publish responses to freedom of information requests online. You can search through [previous responses](#).

3. How to make an FOI request

[Contact an organisation](#) in writing to make a Freedom of Information (FOI) request. This can be by:

- letter
- email
- fax

What to include

You should give:

- your name (not needed if requesting environmental information)
- a contact address
- a detailed description of the information you want - eg you might want all information held on a subject, or just a summary

You can ask for information in a particular format, eg:

- paper or electronic copies of information
- audio format
- large print

When you'll get a response

You should get the information within 20 working days. The organisation will tell you when to expect the information if they need more time.

Costs

Most requests are free but you might be asked to pay a small amount for photocopies or postage. You'll be told by the organisation if you have to pay anything.

! [Check the copyright status](#) of information you receive if you plan to reproduce it.

4. If your request is turned down

Some sensitive information isn't available to members of the public. If this applies, an organisation must tell you why they can't give you some or all of the information you requested.

They might ask you to be more specific so they can provide just the information you need.

An organisation can also refuse your Freedom of Information (FOI) request if it will cost more than £450 (£600 for central government) to find and extract the information.

Reviews and complaints

If an organisation doesn't provide you with the information you requested, you should first ask them to review their decision.

You can then [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#) if you're still not satisfied.