

SUCCESSFUL FOIA REQUESTS

Step 3: Communication is key.

- Be willing to discuss what you are looking for throughout the record production process.
- Avoid "scripting" (i.e., looking for specific data elements you believe *should* be contained in one record because that is the way you would have done it).
- Avoid conspiracy theorist thinking.

Remember the "golden rule" and treat others in the same way you wish to be treated. FOIA is meant to be procedural, not adversarial.

VIRGINIA FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

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*Advisory opinions of the FOIA Council are
available on our website.*

Citizen Guide to FOIA Requests

*How to Request Public
Records*



*Prepared by the Virginia
Freedom of Information
Advisory Council*

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Under Virginia law, the presumption is that all documents in the possession of public officials and all meetings of state and local public bodies are open to citizens of the Commonwealth. Of course, there are exceptions and these exceptions can lead to good faith disagreements between citizens or media and public officials.

There's an office with the expertise to help resolve disputes over Freedom of Information issues. The Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council answers questions from private citizens, state and local public officials, and the media about access to public records and meetings.

**CONTACT US TODAY!
1-866-448-4100**

SUCCESSFUL FOIA REQUESTS

Step 1: Preparing to make the request.

Do your homework before you make your FOIA request. Spend time thinking about:

- WHAT specific information or records you are interested in.
- In what FORM do you want the public body to provide the records?
- Research what may already be available online on the public body's website. State agencies are required to have a FOIA Rights and Responsibilities document online that details the types of records they have and the costs for production.
- Anticipate that you may have to pay the actual costs to obtain the information.

Contact the FOIA Council if you need help formulating your request or if you have any questions!

SUCCESSFUL FOIA REQUESTS

Step 2: Making the request.

While a written request is not required under FOIA, you may want to consider putting your request in an email or letter to ensure that your request is clearly communicated.

- Make sure your request is legible.
- Make your request in a business-like manner.
- Avoid accusations and/or editorial comments in your request.
- You may request a cost estimate in advance.
- Include your full address, daytime telephone, and email address.
- Consider including language such as "FOIA Request" in the subject line of your email.