



Dear Alan,

Below are some tips I'd offer for possible inclusion in a write-up of best practices for making requests. I'm happy to talk through any of them and/or otherwise work on the final document.

I will be in an airport the morning of Aug. 19. I may be able to log in for a brief time but I won't be on for the whole meeting.

Thank you for your work on this,
Megan

Before you request: Do your homework:

- Think about who is the most likely to have the record and what the record is most likely called.
 - TIP: review the records retention schedules on the Library of Virginia's website for ideas.
- Look online to see if the information you want is already posted somewhere.
- Familiarize yourself with the procedures in 2.2-3704.
- Locate the FOIA contact on the website and/or call to ask.

As you write your request (Yes, you can ask for records verbally, but we recommend writing out your request so that you and the government are literally on the same page.):

- Be respectful.
- Be direct and clear.
- Avoid getting personal or adversarial.
- Ask for records, not answers to questions.

The request itself

- Reduce the number of search terms, the length of time frames and the number of people involved to the extent possible.
- Use Boolean search terms when possible (e.g., "zoning application AND denied" or "zoning application AND residential NOT industrial").
- Avoid terms like "any and all" or "included but not limited to," which can broaden the scope of the request beyond what you really want.
These three items are aimed at reducing the number of potential records your search will yield. More records means more time, means more money. Though your narrowed search might miss some records you want, you can make follow-up requests that are based on what you've learned in the initial response.

After the request

- Work with the FOIA officer to get what you need.
- Be flexible, offer alternatives and be willing to negotiate if it will help you get what you need.

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