

Services Provided Under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Ease the Process for Public and Agencies



The [Freedom of Information Act](#), serves as a pivotal mechanism for the public to access records from any federal agency. It fosters transparency and accountability in the United States government, but it can also create headaches. Fortunately, services provided under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) ease the pain for requesters and agencies.

Services Provided Under the Freedom of Information Act to Individual Requesters

Since 1967, FOIA has proved instrumental in providing access to federal agency records while including certain exemptions to protect privacy, national security, and law enforcement interests. Numerous state laws have also come into play, giving similar rights to the public regarding state and local [government agencies](#).

The process for filing a FOIA request is relatively simple, and most agencies have online systems or forms to use for submitting a request. To help expedite the request, take the time to be specific about the information sought and provide any relevant details. For instance, clearly describe the subject matter and indicate your preferred format for receiving the information.

In addition, the government provides several services to further ease the process. These include the following:

- FOIA.gov website – This one-stop resource should provide most of the information you need to get started.
- FOIA libraries – By law, federal agencies must make certain types of information available through electronic means, including frequently requested records. These “FOIA libraries” represent a valuable resource for obtaining information without submitting a formal request.
- Appeals and mediation services – If a requester is dissatisfied with the response they receive to their FOIA request, they have the right to appeal the decision.
- FOIA public liaisons and mediation services – Designated public liaisons assist requesters with concerns and provide details about the status of their request. Additionally, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) offers mediation services to help resolve disputes.

Requesters can improve the FOIA process by doing their research before making a request. First, determine the right agency and check to see if the information already exists on the agency’s website or through the search tool available on FOIA.gov. Then, when submitting a request, be sure to follow the specific requirements outlined by the agency.



Services Available to Agencies

While agencies understand and support the need for transparency and accountability, responding to public records requests presents difficulties. Most agencies deal with complex and diverse data sets. Further, the growing number of these requests, combined with strict regulations, tight deadlines, and limited resources can prove extremely challenging.

Fortunately, the federal government provides a range of services to agencies to facilitate compliance with FOIA requests. For instance, electronic systems allow most agencies to accept FOIA requests by web form, email, or fax.



Further, the federal government has implemented training programs for agency personnel to ensure they understand the legal and practical aspects of FOIA request handling. This includes handling the nuances of exemptions. A standardized approach helps facilitate a smoother process for requesters and agencies alike.

Additionally, the government provides guidance on best practices for records management. This includes advice on how to organize and categorize records, making it easier to retrieve information when needed. Strong [data governance](#) is critical to easing the FOIA process.

Expedite the FOIA Process with Effective eDiscovery

Agencies deal with exponentially more data now, and that data comes in numerous formats and resides in multiple platforms. At the same time, the number of records requests continues to increase.

Consequently, agencies need improved visibility into their data. They also need the ability to locate and redact sensitive information. And they need ways to find, extract, and process information quickly.

Enter eDiscovery. A [competitive eDiscovery solution](#) like the one provided through Messaging Architects and Reveal Data provides the necessary visibility into all the agency's data. It also enables the response team to navigate multiple data sources from a centralized location. And features such as advance searches and automated tagging further ease the process.