

International Access to Information Day 2022 #AccessToInfoDay

Steps you can take to promote and improve your information access practice



Provide clear pathways to access

Options for access

- Update your access to information website / forms to make sure they are up-to-date and explain timeframes and review pathways.
- Ensure your forms are in plain English, readable and accessible.
- Provide options for access - administrative access, FOI or APP 12.
- **Go digital** - Consider leveraging technology and e-platforms to provide access to information.

Promoting transparency

- Develop educational material for your website about how to frame a request and where to go for help.



AVOID privacy breaches

- Agencies are seeing an increase in requests for access to personal information.
- Check your APP requirements to ensure you understand and comply with them.
- Give yourself sufficient time to process the request to avoid errors
- Check before you hit send! Incorrect email addresses or wrong attachments accounted for 43% of human error breaches in the July – Dec 21 reporting period.



Take a common sense approach

Meet timeframes

- Ensure information access officers are aware of the relevant statutory timeframes (for example, 30 days for a primary FOI request).
- If required, apply for extensions of time as early as possible.

Assist applicants

- Consulting with an applicant early can help refine the request, reduce processing time and have a positive impact on the outcome.
- Consider how you can assist an applicant to revise the scope of their request, and better target the information they are seeking access to.

Scope

- Apply a flexible and common sense approach to the wording of the request. If in doubt, consult with the applicant about their intended scope.
- Search records thoroughly (both physical and digital storage) for information that may come within scope.



Review practices and promote Information Access

Staff training

- Keep information access officers up-to-date with any legal or policy changes, which may have an impact on access to information.
- Raise awareness across your agency about the importance of information access, statutory timeframes, issues and sensitivities.
- Educate and support your business areas and executive on how to work collaboratively with your agency's information access team.

Third parties

- Consult third parties if a document contains their personal, business or sensitive information.
- Keep the third-parties informed of your decision.
- Clearly explain review rights if they disagree with the outcome.

Making a decision

- Maintain comprehensive records of the decision, including file notes and correspondence.
- Use plain English and clear language in your decision letters; avoid legal or complex language where possible.
- Decisions should clearly and logically address all issues concerning charges, exemptions and the redaction or removal of material.

Storage and filing

- Work with your records / archive team to ensure records are stored correctly and can be accessed in future.



Publish educational material

Proactive publishing

- Consider taking proactive steps to publish certain business documents prior to an access application being made, particularly documents that relate to matters of public interest.

Internal policies and procedures

- Develop policies and procedures for staff to promote efficient information access processing.
- Develop educational material for staff and the public about the importance of information access.
- Consider whether your information access internal policies and procedures can be made available on your website.



Know when (and where) to get help

Use resources available

- Keep up-to-date with compliance issues, guidance materials and decisions made by the Oaic at [Freedom of Information-Home \(oaic.gov.au\)](https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information-home).

Get specialist advice

Sparke Helmore's team of specialist information lawyers and processing officers can help you with all things Information Access.

Whether you need to train a new team member or need assistance with processing surge requests, we have a team that can be mobilised and scaled up or down to assist your agency.



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