

ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR FOIA JOURNALISM

What does it take to use the Freedom of Information Act to enhance your reporting?

While FOIA allows you to request records that you believe should be made public, it's not a simple process. FOIA requests take time and effort. Knowing what to ask for and how to fight will help ensure your efforts get the best possible results.



Ask for Everything, But Not at Once

Narrow requests get better results. Ask for the last 10 emails from the police chief or all letters between agencies in a certain month.



Build Up a Pipeline

File requests at least once per week. Continual filing will eventually result in a regular stream of documents flowing in.



Piggyback on Other Requests

Regularly check FOIA logs for tips. And if you read a competitor's story and it mentions a document, request that document.



Read Everything. Then Read It Again

Don't give up on a document once you have your story. Mine those documents for tips. You never know what you may find.



Appeal, Appeal, Appeal

If an agency denies your request, appeal. If you get heavily redacted documents, appeal. Always fight to get the documents released.



If All Else Fails, Sue

Suing will bump your request to the top of the pile. And it doesn't cost much, averaging \$5k per suit. Making information public is worth it.

SOURCES

Jason Leopold, BuzzFeed News

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