



§4.50 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. § 552) establishes the rules under which individuals can request and obtain access to unpublished records of federal executive branch agencies. Certain types of records—such as classified documents or those that would disclose confidential business information—are exempt from FOIA. In addition, FOIA does not apply to the federal judiciary or elected officials, including the president, vice president, and members of Congress. The requesting individual may have to pay a fee for the reproduction of the documents, and the processing time for FOIA requests can be lengthy.

Despite its limitations, many Washington researchers use FOIA as part of their information-gathering process. Some organizations routinely use FOIA to obtain documents and make them publicly available. As an example, see the National Security Archive at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/.



§4.51 Resources for Learning About and Using FOIA

Most federal agencies have a link to FOIA information on their web sites.

“A Citizen’s Guide on Using the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act of 1974 to Request Government Records,” House Report 108-172

<http://reform.house.gov/UploadedFiles/FOIA%20Report.pdf>

This guide is published each Congress by the House Government Reform Committee. The web address above is for the 108th Congress edition. For a current copy, see the reports section of the committee’s web site, <http://reform.house.gov>.

Principal FOIA Contacts at Federal Agencies

www.justice.gov/04foia/foiacontacts.htm

This online directory from the Justice Department links to the FOIA web pages at federal agency web sites. It also provides name, address, and phone numbers for the agencies’ FOIA contacts.

FOIA Reference Materials

www.usdoj.gov/04foia/04_7.html

The Justice Department links to a number of useful documents and guides on this page, including the *FOIA Post* newsletter and the text of the Freedom of Information Act.