



**Objectives:**

- Practice assisting an applicant, including explaining the aims and requirements of FOI.
- Explain the functions of your public authority, what records you hold, and what information is already in the public domain (either available for free or at a cost).
- Learn useful tips for assisting an applicant and how to communicate with the public.

**In groups of three or four people, divide the following roles amongst yourselves:**

- 1. One receptionist or other general staff member of a public authority**
- 2. One applicant seeking information from the public authority**
- 3. One or two observers**

**Staff member** – First, explain the purpose of FOI and how the FOI Law works to the applicant. Include in your brief explanation: who is able to make a request, what information can be requested and in what format, and what a request needs to have in order to be valid.

Assist the applicant in formulating the request by describing records that your public authority holds and what your public authority does. Include any offices, units, boards or committees that fall under your public authority. Also let the applicant know what information is already available in the public domain from your authority, whether for free or at a cost.

At the end of the activity you should ensure that the applicant's form is filled out completely and the request can be accepted as valid.

**Applicant** – Use the blank FOI application form from your packet and ask for help formulating a request. You may request any information that you like, but try to base the request on records that are held by the public authority where the staff member actually works if possible.

To help you formulate the request, ask the staff member questions about the functions of their public authority and what kinds of records they hold, including what records are already available to the public and which ones can only be requested under the FOI Law.

At the end of the activity you should have completed your application form in full.

**Observer(s)** – Pay close attention to the exchange between the applicant and the staff member. Make notes about the conversation, including but not limited to:

- What additional information could have been provided by the staff member,
- Information that needs to be included in a valid request but was not given,
- Comments on how helpful the staff member was,
- Tips you can think of that would help in dealing with applicants,
- What other information would be useful for civil servants to know, and
- Any other observations about the process.