

§ 294.108 Procedures for obtaining records.

(a) *Mailing or delivering a request.* Any person may ask for records under section 552 of title 5, United States Code, by directing a letter to one of the organizations listed in § 294.107, or by delivering a request in person at the addresses listed in that section during business hours on a regular business day.

(b) *Proper marking.* Each request for records should have a clear and prominent notation on the first page, such as "Freedom of Information Act Request." In addition, if sent by mail or otherwise submitted in an envelope or other cover, mark the outside clearly and prominently with "FOIA Request" or "Freedom of Information Act Request."

(c) *Contents of request letter.* A request must describe the records sought in sufficient detail to enable OPM personnel to locate the records with a reasonable amount of effort.

(1) OPM will regard a request for a specific category of records as fulfilling the requirements of this paragraph, if it enables responsive records to be identified by a technique or process that is not unreasonably burdensome or disruptive to OPM operations.

(2) Whenever possible, a request should include specific information about each record sought, such as the date, number, title or name, author, recipient, and subject matter of the record.

(3) If an OPM organization determines that a request does not reasonably describe the records sought, it will either provide notice of any additional information needed or otherwise state why the request is insufficient. OPM will also offer the record seeker an opportunity to confer, with the objective of reformulating the request so that it meets the requirements of this section.

(d) *Medical records.* OPM or another Government agency may disclose the medical records of an applicant, employee, or annuitant to the subject of the record, or to a representative designated in writing. However, medical records may contain information about an individual's mental or physical condition that a prudent physician would hesitate to give to the individual.

Under such circumstances, OPM may disclose the records, including the exact nature and probable outcome of the condition, only to a licensed physician designated in writing for that purpose by the individual or his or her designated representative.

(e) *Publications.* If the subject matter of a request includes material published and offered for sale (e.g., by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office), OPM will explain where a person may review and/or purchase the publications.

(f) *Responses within 10 working days.* Except in unusual circumstances (as defined in 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(6)(B)), OPM will determine whether to disclose or deny records within 10 working days after receipt of the request (excluding weekends and holidays) and will provide notice immediately of its determination and the reasons therefor, and of the right to appeal any adverse determination.

[54 FR 25094, June 13, 1989, as amended at 58 FR 32044, June 8, 1993]

§ 294.109 Fees.

(a) *Applicability of fees.* (1) OPM will furnish, without charge, reasonable quantities of material that it has available for free distribution to the public.

(2) OPM may furnish other materials, subject to payment of fees intended to recoup the full allowable direct costs of providing services. Fees for these materials may be waived if the request meets the requirements specified in paragraph (f) of this section.

(3) If a request does not include an acceptable agreement to pay fees and does not otherwise convey a willingness to pay fees, OPM will promptly provide notification of the estimated fees. This notice will offer an opportunity to confer with OPM staff to reformulate the request to meet the requester's needs at a lower cost. Upon agreement to pay the required fees, OPM will further process the request.

(4) As described in § 294.107, OPM ordinarily responds to FOIA requests in a decentralized manner. Because of this, OPM may at times refer a single request to two or more OPM entities to make separate direct responses. In such cases, each responding entity may assess fees as provided by this section,

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but only for direct costs associated with any response it has prepared.

(5) If fees for document search are authorized as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, OPM may assess charges for employee time spent searching for documents and other direct costs of a search, even if a search fails to locate records or if records located are determined to be exempt from disclosure. Searches should be conducted in the most efficient and least expensive manner so as to minimize the cost for both the agency and the requester, e.g., personnel should not engage in line-by-line search when photocopying an entire document would be a less expensive and quicker way to comply with a request.

(6) Services requested and performed but not required under the FOIA, such as formal certification of records as true copies, will be subject to charges under the Federal User Charge Statute (31 U.S.C. 483a) or other applicable statutes.

(b) *Rates used to compute fees.* The following rates form the basis for assessing reasonable, standard charges for

Requester's category	Search	Review	Duplication
Commercial	Actual direct costs	Actual direct costs	Actual direct costs.
Non-commercial (educational or scientific institution) or news media.	No charge	No charge	Actual direct costs. ¹
All others	Actual direct costs ²	No charge	Actual direct costs. ¹

¹ First 100 pages of paper copies or reasonable equivalent, such as a microfiche containing the equivalent of 100 pages, are copied free.

² First 2 hours of manual search time are free. If requested records are maintained in a computerized data base, OPM will use the following formula, suggested by OMB, to provide the equivalent of 2 hours manual search time free before charging for computer search time: The operator's hourly salary plus 16% will be added to the hourly cost of operating the central processing unit that contains the record information.

(d) *Payment of fees.* Fees are payable by check or money order to the Office of Personnel Management.

(1) If the total charge for fulfilling the request will be less than \$25, no fee will be assessed (except as provided in paragraph (d)(3) of this section).

(2) If a request may reasonably result in a fee assessment of more than \$25, OPM will not release the records unless the requester agrees in advance to pay the anticipated charges.

(3) OPM may aggregate requests and charge fees accordingly, when there is a reasonable belief that a requester, or a group of requesters acting in concert, is attempting to break down a request

document search, duplication, and review as required by 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(4). The listing of rates below should be used in conjunction with the fee components listed in paragraph (c) of this section:

Service	Rate
Employee time	Salary rate plus 16% to cover benefits.
Photocopies (up to 8½"×14")	\$.013 per page.
Printed materials, per 25 pages or fraction thereof.	\$.025.
Computer time	Actual direct cost.
Supplies and other materials	Actual direct cost.
Other costs not identified above.	Actual direct cost.

(c) *Assessing fees based on requester's category.* Rates are assessed differently for the different categories of requesters as defined in §294.103. Requests have three cost components for the purpose of assessing fees: the cost of document search, the cost of duplication, and the cost of review. OPM will apply the rates in paragraph (b) of this section to the cost components that apply to the requester's category as follows:

into a series of requests to evade the assessment of fees.

(i) If multiple requests of this type occur within a 30-day period, OPM may provide notice that it is aggregating the requests and that it will apply the fee provisions of this section, including any required agreement to pay fees and any advance payment.

(ii) Before aggregating requests of this type made over a period longer than 30 days, OPM will assure that it has a solid basis on which to conclude that the requesters are acting in concert and are acting specifically to avoid payment of fees.

(iii) OPM will not aggregate multiple requests on unrelated subjects from one person.

(e) *Payment of fees in advance.* If OPM estimates or determines that fees are likely to exceed \$250, OPM may require the payment of applicable fees in advance.

(1) If an OPM official, who is authorized to make a decision on a particular request, determines that the requester has a history of prompt payment of FOIA fees, OPM will provide notice of the likely cost and obtain satisfactory assurance of full payment.

(2) When a person, or an organization that a person represents, has previously failed to pay assessed fees in a timely manner (*i.e.*, payment was not made within 30 days of the billing date), OPM will require full payment of all fees in advance.

(3) If a person, or an organization that a person represents, has not paid fees previously assessed, OPM will not begin to process any new request for records until the requester has paid the full amount owed plus any applicable interest, and made a full advance payment for the new request.

(f) *Waiver or reduction of fees.* OPM will furnish documents without any charge, or at a reduced charge, if disclosure of the information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the Government, and release of the material is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.

(1) In determining whether disclosure is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the Government, OPM shall consider the following factors:

(i) The subject of the request: Whether the subject of the requested records concerns “the operations or activities of the Government”;

(ii) The information value of the information to be disclosed: Whether the disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of Government operations or activities;

(iii) The contribution to an understanding of the subject by the general public likely to result from disclosure: Whether disclosure of the requested in-

formation will contribute to “public understanding”; and

(iv) The significance of the contribution to public understanding: Whether the disclosure is likely to contribute “significantly” to public understanding of Government operations or activities.

(2) In determining whether disclosure of the information is or is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester, OPM shall consider the following factors:

(i) *The existence and magnitude of a commercial interest.* Whether the requester has a commercial interest that would be furthered by the requested disclosure; and, if so—

(ii) *The primary interest in disclosure.* Whether the magnitude of the identified commercial interest of the requester is sufficiently large, in comparison with the public interest in disclosure, that disclosure is “primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.”

(3) In all cases the burden of proof shall be on the requester to present evidence or information in support of a request for a waiver or reduction of fees.

(g) *Denial of waiver request.* (1) An OPM official may deny a request for a full or partial waiver of fees without further consideration if the request does not include:

(i) A clear statement of the requester’s interest in the requested information;

(ii) A clear statement of the use proposed for the information and whether the requester will derive income or other benefit from such use;

(iii) A clear statement of how the public will benefit from OPM’s release of the requested information; and

(iv) If specialized use of the documents is contemplated, a clear statement of the requester’s qualifications that are relevant to the specialized use.

(2) A requester may appeal the denial of a waiver request as provided by § 294.110 of this part.

(h) *Fees not paid; penalties; debt collection.* (1) If a request, which requires the advance payment of fees under the criteria specified in this section, is not accompanied by the required payment,

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OPM will promptly notify the requester that the required fee must be paid within 30 days, and that OPM will not further process the request until it receives payment.

(2) OPM may begin assessing interest charges on an unpaid bill starting on the 31st day following the date on which the bill was sent. Interest will be charged at the rate prescribed in 31 U.S.C. 3717, and will accrue from the date of the billing.

(3) To encourage the repayment of debts incurred under this subpart, OPM may use the procedures authorized by Public Law 97-365, the Debt Collection Act of 1982. This may include disclosure to consumer reporting agencies and the use of collection agencies.

[58 FR 32044, June 8, 1993]

§ 294.110 Appeals.

(a) When an OPM official denies records or a waiver of fees under the Freedom of Information Act, the requester may appeal to the—

Office of the General Counsel, Office of Personnel Management, Washington, DC 20415

(b) A person may appeal denial of a Freedom of Information Act request for information maintained by OPM's Office of the General Counsel to the—

Deputy Director, Office of Personnel Management Washington, DC 20415

(c) If an official of another agency denies a Freedom of Information Act request for records in one of OPM's Government-wide systems of records, the requester should consult that agency's regulations for any appeal rights that may apply. An agency may, at its discretion, direct these appeals to OPM's Office of the General Counsel.

(d) An appeal should include a copy of the initial request, a copy of the letter denying the request, and a statement explaining why the appellant believes the denying official erred.

(e) The appeals provided for in this section constitute the final levels of administrative review that are available. If a denial of information or a denial of a fee waiver is affirmed, the requester may seek judicial review in the district court of the United States in the district in which he or she resides, or has his or her principal place of

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business, or in which the agency records are situated, or in the District of Columbia.

§ 294.111 Custody of records; subpoenas.

(a) The Chief, Plans and Policies Division, Administration Group, OPM, has official custody of OPM records. A subpoena or other judicial order for an official record from OPM should be served on the—

Chief, Plans and Policies Division, Office of Personnel Management, 1900 E Street NW., Washington, DC 20415

(b) See 5 CFR part 297, subpart D—Disclosure of Records, of this title, for the steps other officials should take on receipt of a subpoena or other judicial order for an Office record.

[54 FR 25094, June 13, 1989, as amended at 57 FR 32150, July 21, 1992]

§ 294.112 Confidential commercial information.

(a) In general, OPM will not disclose confidential commercial information in response to a Freedom of Information Act request except in accordance with this section.

(b) The following definitions from Executive Order 12600, apply to this section:

(1) *Confidential commercial information* means records provided to the Government by a submitter that arguably contain material exempt from release under Exemption 4 of the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(4), because disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause substantial competitive harm.

(2) *Submitter* means any person or entity who provides confidential commercial information, directly or indirectly, to OPM. The term includes, but is not limited to, corporations, state governments, and foreign governments.

(c) Submitters of information shall designate by appropriate markings, either at the time of submission or at a reasonable time thereafter, any portions of their submissions that they consider to be confidential commercial information. Such designations shall expire 10 years after the date of submission unless the submitter requests, and provides reasonable justification