



Training for Freedom of Information Officers

Introduction

In 2009, the Minister responsible for the *Freedom of Information Act 1991* (the FOI Act) approved the FOI Training Strategy. The main objective of the strategy is to develop comprehensive FOI training to facilitate the ongoing professional development of South Australian employees across State Government, Local Government and the three State Universities in the area of FOI.

Training for staff wishing to become Accredited FOI Officers

Central to the FOI Training Strategy is the delivery of the training course entitled *Training for Accredited and Non Accredited FOI Officers*. This course is a mandatory requirement for staff who need to be designated as an Accredited FOI Officer under the FOI Act. However, it is also suitable for other FOI officers who require further training or wish to update their FOI knowledge and skills.

The purpose of this course is to provide the participant with the knowledge and skills to allow them to be designated by their principal officer as an Accredited FOI Officer - provided they meet the definition of an Accredited FOI Officer in section 4 of the FOI Act. Accredited FOI Officers are responsible for dealing with FOI applications and making determinations and, therefore, need to possess a sound understanding of the FOI Act.

This is a comprehensive training course that is made up of four modules that extend over two and a half days. A participant must attend all modules before their principal officer can designate them as an Accredited FOI Officer.

The modules are as follows:

- Module 1 & 2 – FOI Officers and Processing FOI Applications (full day)
- Module 3 – Assessing FOI Exemption Clauses (full day)
- Module 4 – Making and Drafting FOI Determinations (half day).

Each of the modules are offered once a month and are usually run in the same week so that participants can complete the overall course in no more than one week (unless they choose to take longer). Modules should be completed in order from 1 to 4.

Participants will need to register and pay for each module separately via the State Records website, although registration for all modules can be included on the same purchase order. A certificate will be issued at the completion of each module. In order to be designated as an Accredited FOI Officer, a participant will need to present all certificates to their principal officer as evidence that they have completed the full course.

Already an Accredited FOI Officer?

Staff who have already attended training in the past and have been designated as an Accredited FOI Officer, do not need to attend this new course. However, if they wish to update their skills and knowledge, they may choose to attend any of the modules.

Training for non-accredited FOI officers

Other staff from State Government, Local Government and Universities are also able to undertake the training to support their Accredited FOI Officer. Current FOI officers can also undertake the training as a 'refresher' by attending either all or any of the modules that make up the course. It is not compulsory for these staff to attend all modules.

Content of the modules

Module 1 – FOI Officers and the FOI Act

Module 1 introduces participants to the South Australian FOI legislation and examines FOI in the context of other administrative law and policy. This module explains the role of an Accredited FOI Officer and their responsibilities under the FOI Act and is essential knowledge for those intending to take on this role within their agency.

Course outline:

- FOI and FOI legislation
- FOI and other administrative law, policy and procedure
- Accredited FOI Officers and their responsibilities
- Reporting requirements and other obligations.

Module 2 – Processing FOI Applications

Module 2 examines all aspects of the administration and processing of FOI applications. It is designed to advance the practical knowledge and skills of FOI practitioners in the procedural aspects of handling FOI requests according to the requirements of the FOI Act.

Course outline:

- Administration of FOI applications
- Interpretation of applications and transfers
- Searching for and compiling documents
- Time limits and time extensions
- Refusal to deal with an application
- Fees and charges
- Consultation
- Amendment of personal records
- Internal and external reviews.

Module 3 – Assessing FOI Exemption Clauses

Module 3 examines the types of documents that may be exempt from disclosure as identified in Schedule 1 to the FOI Act. It discusses some common terms or themes that appear in Schedule 1, such as the ‘public interest’ and ‘substantial adverse effect’.

Module 3 also discusses case law and administrative decisions relevant to the interpretation and application of exemption provisions in the FOI Act.

Course outline:

- General approach to exemptions
- The public interest
- Recurring themes
- Exemption clauses in Schedule 1
- In-depth exercises.

Module 4 – Making and Drafting FOI Determinations

Module 4 examines the requirements that must be met by agencies when making and drafting notices of determination under the FOI Act. This module also provides examples of written determinations and examines some of the common deficiencies in notices of determinations.

Course outline:

- Making a determination
- Drafting a written determination
- Templates of written determinations.

Other specific FOI training

Subject to resourcing, State Records may develop other FOI training as part of the FOI Training Strategy to meet the need for more agency-specific, practical-based training. Through consultation with agencies, it is clear that FOI Officers prefer training addressing the specific problems and issues faced by their agencies.

Continuing FOI training courses

Subject to demand, State Records will continue to offer the following training courses. Please check the State Records website www.archives.sa.gov.au for upcoming dates.

- Introduction to the Freedom of Information Management System (FOIMS)
- FOI Awareness – face to face general awareness
- FOI Induction (ERNI) – online course available at any time.

Training for regional staff

State Records is mindful of the practical difficulties faced by staff in regional areas wanting to attend FOI training courses.

State Records will continue to review the delivery of FOI training and may from time to time consider delivering the training in selected regional areas to meet this demand.

Registration and course information

Registration for all FOI courses is undertaken through the State Records website www.archives.sa.gov.au.

If you require help in registering for any course, please contact the State Records Training Coordinator by email srsaTrainingEnquiries@sa.gov.au or telephone (08) 8204 8772.

If you require further information about the content of a course that is not available in this information sheet or on the website, please contact the Freedom of Information and Privacy team at State Records by email foi@sa.gov.au or telephone (08) 8204 8786.

Related information

For more information on what is an Accredited FOI Officer, please refer to the information sheet on the State Records website entitled *What is an Accredited FOI Officer* http://www.archives.sa.gov.au/files/foi_admin_accreditedofficer.pdf