

Freedom of Information (FOI) Process & Procedures

Saudi Commission for Health Specialties

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Introduction

The Freedom of Information (FOI) process outlines the guidelines and steps for individuals or entities seeking access to official information under the jurisdiction of the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) National Data Management Office (NDMO). This document ensures compliance with national data governance systems and regulations, while maintaining transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

Objectives

1. **Compliance:** Ensure alignment with national data governance laws and regulations.
2. **Transparency:** Facilitate access to information while safeguarding sensitive and classified data.
3. **Efficiency:** Provide clear and streamlined processes for managing FOI requests.
4. **Accountability:** Define roles and responsibilities for handling FOI requests and appeals.

Definitions

- **Freedom of Information (FOI):** The right of individuals, organizations, or entities to request and obtain access to records or information held by government bodies, subject to specific legal and regulatory limitations.
- **Requestor:** An individual, organization, or legal entity that submits a formal request for information under the provisions of FOI regulations.
- **Appeal:** A formal process by which a requestor can challenge a decision made by the entity, such as a denial of an FOI request or dissatisfaction with the information provided.
- **Classified Information:** Data or records deemed sensitive by the government and protected under national security, privacy laws, or other regulatory frameworks, which are exempt from public disclosure.
- **Government Portal:** An official online platform where citizens and organizations can access government services, submit FOI requests, and obtain public information.
- **National Data Governance System:** The overarching regulatory framework that governs how data is managed, shared, and protected within the country.
- **Response Timeframe:** The legally defined period within which an FOI request must be processed and responded to by the entity.



Scope

This document applies to all FOI requests submitted to SDAIA NDMO and covers:

1. Request submission.
2. Response handling.
3. Appeals and rejections.
4. FAQs and user guidance.

Key Processes

1. Managing FOI Requests

Step 1: Submission

Channels: FOI requests can be submitted via:

- a. SDAIA's official government portal.
- b. Email to the designated FOI office.
- c. Physical submission to the SDAIA headquarters.

Requirements:

- a. Full name and contact information of the requestor.
- b. Specific description of the information requested.
- c. Purpose of the request (if applicable).
- d. Any supporting documents.

Step 2: Acknowledgment

Timeline

Acknowledge receipt of the request within 3 business days.

Communication

Confirm receipt via the chosen communication channel and provide a reference number.



Step 3: Evaluation

Verification

Ensure the request complies with FOI regulations and does not involve classified or restricted information.

Consultation

Engage relevant departments to locate the requested information.

Step 4: Response

Timeline

Respond to FOI requests within 20 business days.

Types of Responses

- Approval:** Provide the requested information securely.
- Rejection:** Justify the denial, citing applicable laws or regulations.
- Extension:** Notify the requestor if additional time is required (maximum 10 business days).

Step 5: Record Keeping

Maintain a record of all FOI requests, including:

- Submission details.
- Evaluation and response timeline.
- Final resolution (approval or rejection).

2. Appeals and Rejections

Grounds for Rejection

- Classified or restricted information.
- Requests that violate national security or privacy laws.
- Incomplete or unclear requests.
- Excessively broad or resource-intensive requests.



Appeal Process

1. **Submission:** Appeals must be submitted within 15 business days of receiving the initial response.
2. **Review:** A designated appeals committee reviews the case within 10 business days.
3. **Outcome:** Communicate the decision to the requestor, including:
 - a. Upholding the rejection.
 - b. Reversing the decision and providing the information.

3. FAQs and User Guidance

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Who can submit an FOI request?** Any individual, organization, or entity with a legitimate interest in accessing public records held by SDAIA.
2. **What information can be requested?** Information that is not classified, restricted, or exempt under national laws. This includes general operational data, statistics, and publicly available reports.
3. **How do I submit an FOI request?** You can submit a request through the official government portal, via email, or by visiting the SDAIA headquarters in person. Ensure all required details and supporting documents are included.
4. **How long does it take to receive a response?** The standard response time is 20 business days. In cases requiring more time, an extension of up to 10 business days may be granted, and the requestor will be notified.
5. **What happens if my request is rejected?** If your request is denied, you will receive a detailed explanation citing the applicable laws or regulations. You can file an appeal within 15 business days if you believe the decision is incorrect.
6. **What types of information are considered classified?** Data that pertains to national security, individual privacy, or proprietary government operations is considered classified and exempt from disclosure.
7. **How can I track my FOI request?** Upon submission, you will receive a reference number. Use this number to track your request through the official government portal or by contacting the FOI office.
8. **Is there a cost for submitting an FOI request?** Most FOI requests are processed free of charge. However, if the request involves significant resource use, a minimal fee may be applied, and the requestor will be informed in advance.

User Guidance

- **Tips for Submission:**
 - Be specific and concise in your request.



- Ensure all required details are included.
- Avoid overly broad requests to expedite processing.
- **Contact Information:**
 - Phone: [Insert Phone Number]
 - Email: [Insert Email Address]
 - Portal: [Insert Portal URL]

Compliance and Oversight

- **Audit:** Regular audits ensure adherence to FOI procedures.
- **Training:** Staff handling FOI requests undergo periodic training.
- **Reporting:** Submit annual FOI performance reports to SDAIA leadership.

Conclusion

The FOI process and procedures for SDAIA NDMO are designed to promote transparency, efficiency, and compliance with national data governance systems. These guidelines ensure that FOI requests are handled professionally and in line with legal requirements.

For further details or support, please contact the FOI office via the provided communication channels.

