

INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES AND LEGISLATED TIMELINES

WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO PROCESS A REQUEST?

Generally, the process of making a request is as follows:

1. **Request submitted:** Requesters can make a request for records to a government institution.
2. **Request received:** The institution's ATIP Office receives the request and may seek clarification from the requester, with a view to provide accurate, complete and timely access.
3. **Search and retrieval:** The ATIP Office coordinates the search for and retrieval of relevant records across the institution.
4. **Extension if needed:** The institution may require additional time to respond to the request if the search involves a large number of records such that meeting the original time limit would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the institution, or if other institutions or third parties need to be consulted on the records.
5. **Records reviewed:** Records are reviewed within the institution regarding whether exemptions under the Act can, or should, be applied. The ATIP Office supports the process by ensuring that the Access to Information Act is properly applied and that explanations for information that has been redacted are provided.
6. **Records released:** The ATIP Office in the institution sends the requested records to the requester, digitally or by mail.

While this represents the generic process, in reality it can be much more complex depending on the nature and scope of the request.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT TIMEFRAME FOR RESPONDING TO REQUESTS?

- The [Access to Information Act](#) (the Act) requires federal institutions to respond to information requests within 30 calendar days (Section 7)
 - This time limit applies to all requests
- Section 9 of the Act allows extensions of a “reasonable period of time” under the following circumstances:
 - where there is a high volume of records or search is required through a large number of records, or where meeting the time original time limit will unreasonably interfere with government operations
 - when consultations are required that will go beyond the response deadline
 - where notifying third parties is required if the content contains third-party information
- The Act does not set a time limit for these extensions

WHAT FACTORS IMPACT TIMELINES?

1. Request is submitted and received



Complex requests, or high request or record volumes can create challenges for ATIP offices

2. Search and retrieval process



Information management affects retrieval (e.g., paper records, or other legacy storage systems)

3. Records are reviewed



Research and discussions between ATIP and program officials can take time

4. Consultations if needed



Consultation processes with other federal institutions and third-parties often require extensions

5. Records are released



Preparing records for release takes time (e.g., converting file formats, preparing physical media)

OTHER PROCESSING CHALLENGES

- Need for better technology
 - Many processes lack automation (e.g., retrieval and review)
 - Digital tools may be costly
 - Digital tools are not standardized across departments
- Inconsistent information management (IM) and documentation practices
 - Combination of paper and electronic records, including legacy storage systems
 - Lack of resources and staff dedicated to documentation and IM
 - Inconsistent training for employees
 - Some institutions hold records in many different locations, complicating the search and retrieval process