

FILING OF RTI REQUESTS

Relevant Section: 10 of Punjab RTI Act 2013.

Introduction:

An applicant may make an application to a public information officer. As a first port of call he is the first person citizens will come to him in relation to anything to do with right to information. This course of process may be divided into three parts covering:

- A. RTI request procedure
- B. Handling requests (how to get information)
- C. Responding to requests (writing back to citizens)

A. REQUEST PROCEDURE

RTI application may be filed through different mechanisms. Some will be submitted in person by citizens. Others will be sent in the post, or electronically (e-mailed), or faxed. Some requests will simply be narrated orally by people who cannot write because of disability, illiteracy or other difficulty

Irrespective of the mechanism by which an RTI request is submitted, the basic procedure for handling the request by PIO is the same.

Eligibility of requester

Requester is a person submitting an RTI request eligible to do so. Under the Punjab RTI Act all citizens of Pakistan (including non-Punjabis) can access information, from all 'legal persons', e.g. CSOs, NGOs, corporations.

Request form

Department/organization will have an RTI request form that people can fill in when requesting information. However, the law also states that RTI requests can be submitted on plain paper.

Sufficient information provided

Sufficient and detailed informations should be provided in the RTI request to enable PIO to find the information and give it to the applicant. The request must contain: name and address/contact details of requester, details of the requisite information, name of the public body.

Form in which information to be provided

In the request form, requestors can also state the form in which they would like the information to be provided .For example, they could ask for a photocopy of documents, or the chance to inspect documents, or an electronic copy to be sent to them, or a CD, or even transcripts of a meeting/video, and so on.

Fee

Depending on which form the information is to be requested, there could be a fee charged. However there is no any processing fee. The fee is designed simply to cover the costs incurred by department/organization in providing the information. Thus, for sending an electronic copy by e-mail, no cost would be incurred and hence no fee charged. Similarly, for physical inspection of documents within the premises of the relevant department, no cost is incurred. Costs could be incurred mainly for photocopying and postage, or for CDs. The Punjab Information Commission will have set a schedule for such fees.

Justification

Requesters do not have to give a reason, explanation or justification for why they are seeking information.

Urgent requests

The Punjab RTI Act has a provision whereby RTI requests that relate to the life or liberty of a person must be responded to on an urgent basis within two working days

Issuance of Receipt

The final stage of the request procedure is issuance of a receipt to the requester. Generally the receipt should have the following:

- A reference number
- Name and address of the requester
- The date when request was submitted
- The name, details and signature of the recipient
- A brief summary description of the information sought.

B. HANDLING REQUESTS

Public Information Officer (PIO) has to respond to the RTI request within fourteen working days of receiving the RTI request. This could be a very time-consuming process. In such circumstances, the law allows an additional 14 days (on top of the normal 14 working days) to respond to RTI requests

C. RESPONDING TO REQUESTS

Citizens can give a preference for the form in which they would like information provided to them, e.g. they want to inspect original documents, they want electronic copies, and they want it on a CD, and so on. As far as possible, the PIO will try to provide information in the form in which it has been requested—as long as this does not interfere with the functioning of the department, or harm the document