



Practical advice on AI for requesters

How to use Artificial Intelligence responsibly to assist with official information requests

New Zealand's official information legislation is a powerful tool for people to access government information and participate in our democracy. People can request information from Ministers and government agencies under the Official Information Act (OIA) and Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act (LGOIMA). When requested, information must be provided unless there is good reason not to.

The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the way information is accessed, interpreted and understood. Some people are choosing to use AI to help them with official information requests. There are risks in using AI when requesting information. It must be used responsibly.

AI can help to summarise, organise and refine information. However, AI does not get it right all the time. If you want to use AI to make an official information request, we have some practical advice to help you get the most out of AI, while also avoiding some of the common problems that can occur.

AI is a developing area, and we will update this guide from time to time.

Remember—you don't need to use AI to make an information request. Please see our guide on [Making official information requests](#) for further information. This includes handy tips and a [template](#) for making an information request.

Please also see our guide [Practical advice on AI for complainants](#).

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Important note—you don't need to use AI to make a request

You don't need to use AI to make a good information request to an agency. In most cases, requests are clearer when they are in your own words. Agencies just need to know the specific information you are seeking.

It's as simple as that. Agencies are not looking for detailed legal arguments from you. Quite the opposite. A short, clear description of the information you are seeking is usually best. The best things you can do are to use the [template request letter](#) on our website, and be open to discussing your request with the agency. If agencies need you to explain anything or need more information they will ask you.

What is AI?

Generative AI (Gen AI) recognises patterns in large datasets to create new content, such as text and images. Commonly used tools include ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft 365 Copilot and Google Gemini.

Agentic AI can act independently, make decisions, and carry out multi-step plans to achieve broad goals with minimal human oversight.

Things to consider if you choose to use AI to make an official information request

Keep it simple

The best OIA and LGOIMA requests are clear, concise and focused on the information you really want. The legislation requires an information request to be '*specified with due particularity*'. Straightforward requests will ensure that the Minister or government agency (agency) will be able to understand what you're looking for and quickly find the information and respond to you.

Gen AI tools can sometimes suggest making information requests which are unnecessarily long, overly complex, or unclear and hard to understand. This can increase the likelihood of the agency having to contact you to ask for clarification or more information to better understand what you are wanting to access. This will place an unnecessary administrative burden on the agency. There could be outcomes such as:

- the response may be delayed;
- the agency might say it can't respond unless you are prepared to pay a charge for the provision of information; and
- your request may be refused on the basis it would require substantial collation or research to be answered.

To avoid this, carefully check the wording of your information request before you submit it. Remove any unnecessary detail or references to information you do not really want. You can make adjustments in your own words when you think it's needed, or you can ask AI to help make your request crisper and more focussed.

The reality for agencies

Agencies are responding to a high volume of information requests. In the 2025/26 year, central government agencies completed over 87,000 information requests. Ninety eight percent of these were completed within the legal timeframe, and the information was refused in full in only 9 percent of requests.¹

Managing this volume of requests and making the requested information available takes resource and dedicated effort by the people working in government agencies. If you can be clear and focused in your request, and if you are ready to discuss your request with the people responding, this will make it easier for agencies to better keep the public informed and respond to what you really want.

¹ See the [Public Service OIA statistics](#). These figures exclude the New Zealand Police and New Zealand Defence Force, which are reported separately.

Ask AI to focus on the information you really want to access

Make sure your request is focused on the official information that **you** really want to access, and that you believe the agency holds. AI can sometimes suggest a request that is unnecessarily expanded, for example by seeking additional information beyond what you are wanting to access, or asking for an opinion or answers to questions.

The OIA and LGOIMA only apply to information already in existence and held by the agency. They don't require agencies to provide an opinion or create information for you.

If the Gen AI tool you have used suggests a request that asks for opinions or appears to be provoking a debate, you can always amend the request yourself or you can ask AI to simplify it, to focus on official information held by the agency that you are seeking.

It will usually be a good idea for you to draft your request yourself, rather than asking AI to create a request for you. This will help ensure your interests remain at the heart of the request.

If you are wanting to check what you have been told or read or heard from other sources, don't be afraid to tell the agency that is why you are asking.

Check the accuracy of the information AI has included in your request

Official information requests prepared by Gen AI tools can sometimes include incorrect information which AI has somehow 'made up' (known as 'AI hallucinations'). For example, the Gen AI tool might refer to a law, guide or policy that doesn't actually exist or apply in New Zealand. It might suggest a process or decision by the agency that they can't or don't do.

Generally, you don't need to reference a law, guide or policy when making an OIA or LGOIMA request. The key thing is to be clear about what information you are seeking from the agency.

If your Gen AI tool includes references, don't rely on them without checking they are reliable and accurate. Be especially suspicious if your Gen AI tool is the only source telling you that something such as a law, guide or policy exists. You will not be alone in thinking AI generated content is genuine and relevant to your request—it's so convincing that lawyers and litigants have been fooled into [presenting fake cases](#) in their own research both [here](#) and [overseas](#).

Our [Ombudsman website](#) is a good place to start if you want to find reliable information about the requirements of the legislation, our view on specific matters, and past cases. You can also review the law on [the New Zealand Legislation website](#).

To check on any information or cases AI may have suggested or referenced, search for it through an internet search engine and look for other references beyond that which your Gen AI tool is suggesting.

Another option is to contact the agency. They have a specific legal obligation to provide reasonable assistance to people who want to make an OIA or LGOIMA request. This means they can provide you with advice on how to word your request to help you obtain the information you are seeking. This is both a really good place to start when preparing your

request and also a good place to check before you submit your request. The contact details for agencies can be found on their website.²

Check your request as drafted is constructive

Before you submit your information request, take the time to carefully read it through and think about how it will be received by the people working for the agency. Gen AI tools are technology. They can sometimes produce robotic, abrupt and discourteous requests which can be confronting to people within agencies who have the role of processing your request. The tone may not at all reflect what you intended.

If you are not happy with the tone of your request, you can change some of the words to ensure it comes across more constructively. This will help the process run more smoothly for everyone, and the person processing your request will feel more encouraged to contact you if they need to.

Be open to talking to the agency

Be open to discussing your request with the agency if they need to talk to you. If they contact you seeking to clarify or better understand your request, it is unhelpful to refuse to engage with them directly. Agencies need to provide you with reasonable assistance to make a request. However, if you don't engage, they may need to take steps to manage an unclear or large request, such as extending the timeframe for response, charging for the provision of information, or refusing your request.

The OIA and LGOIMA provide the right for a '*person*' to make an information request. This means there must be a human involved in deciding to make a request, even if you are getting assistance from AI in drafting your request. If it appears to an agency that an information request may have been made by agentic AI without any human involvement, they may need to contact you to confirm your request. Be prepared to confirm your personal identity where necessary.

Think about the impact of making multiple requests

The efficiency of using Gen AI tools means they can help people to make multiple information requests, in very short periods of time. However, this can have a disruptive impact on agencies and will reduce their ability to respond promptly to the requests made by you and other people.

It may also increase the likelihood of an agency refusing your requests on the basis that:

- it would require substantial collation or research to reply to them all; or
- the requests are vexatious—essentially an abuse of the right to seek official information.

² You can also find out about information held by government agencies through the [Directory of Official Information](#).

If you need to make multiple requests in a short space of time, we recommend you talk to the agency first so you can focus your requests on accessing the information you need and how best to ask for that information clearly.

What to be careful about when using AI to help draft your request for official information

Sharing private information

- Be careful about **sharing any personal, sensitive or confidential information** with a Gen AI tool. Any information you type into or share with it may be used or shared by the international company that owns the Gen AI tool, without your knowledge and for purposes you can't control.
- Be aware that once you enter information into a Gen AI tool, **you may not be able to get it back or have it deleted**.
- If you can, **change the settings in the Gen AI tool** to opt-out of sharing the chat history. This stops your conversations and information being saved and used or shared by the company that owns the Gen AI tool you are using.

Unclear and incorrect information

- Be wise to the fact that Gen AI tools may sometimes give you **drafts that lack the detail or context** the agency may need to address your request quickly and properly. If that happens, the agency may have to seek clarification from you before they can begin to respond.
- Always **check the information you get** from the Gen AI tool is correct before using it. For example, if the Gen AI tool gives you information about the agency's actions or decisions that you want to ask about, you should check it is the same as the information on the agency's website and not only from a post by an unofficial or unverified social media account.
- Use any draft the Gen AI tool gives you as a suggestion only and carefully consider it before confirming your request. **Change or add in your own words** any reasons for wanting the information. Make sure the request you send to the agency is focused and genuinely (and accurately) describes the official information you want to have access to.

What to do if you are unhappy with the processing or final response to your request

We are here to help. Under the OIA and LGOIMA, we can consider complaints about an agency's processing or final response to your request, including if you are concerned about a delay.

Please contact us to make a complaint and let us know your concerns. To do this you can use our [complaint form](#) on our website.

If you want to make your complaint to us using AI, we have a separate [Guide to using AI responsibly to make a complaint](#) to give you tips and information on how best you can do this.

Checklist for drafting an information request

Final checklist

Remember—[you don't need to use AI](#) to make an information request.

When using a Gen AI tool to help draft an information request, read through what it has drafted and make sure the final wording makes sense and reflects your actual information needs.

Before you submit a request check that:

- ☒ You are only asking for the information you are genuinely looking for.
- ☒ Your request is clear, concise and focused.
- ☒ There are no obvious factual inaccuracies.
- ☒ The wording of your request makes sense and the tone is constructive and appropriate coming from you.

If you don't fully understand the request you are about to submit, there's a very good chance the agency receiving it won't either.

Your careful review before submitting will go a long way to reducing the chance of delay in getting a response, being charged for lots of information you don't really want, or otherwise having your request refused.