

Public Access Agency Reference Group

Terms of Reference

Overview

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (the FOI Act)* outlines various obligations and responsibilities conferred on Victorian government agencies with respect to providing access to information that they hold. The FOI regime in Victoria has seen a number of changes since the FOI Act was introduced, including most recently in September 2017.

The Information Commissioner and the Public Access Deputy Commissioner's functions include promoting understanding and acceptance by agencies (and the public) of the FOI Act and its object.

More generally, OVIC's role is also to support a positive culture of information management and access across government.

To assist agencies, OVIC currently offers:

- FOI training courses for agency staff;
- monthly bulletins sent to subscribed agency officers; and
- guidance materials, e-learning modules and webinars, published on OVIC's website.

Purpose

The purpose of the Public Access Agency Reference Group is to inform and promote good practice in providing access to public sector information by:

- providing an opportunity for agencies to share their challenges in administering the FOI Act;
- exploring ways that OVIC can further assist FOI officers in their role;
- improving understanding of the FOI process, by agencies and the public;
- exploring ways that agencies can provide access to information outside of the FOI Act; and
- sharing information about trends in FOI decisions.

Outcomes

Through the Public Access Agency Reference Group, OVIC aims to:

- provide the relevant tools to address the challenges identified by agencies;
- improve the administration of the FOI Act by agencies;
- improve the public's understanding and knowledge of the FOI Act and other avenues for accessing information;
- improve the way OVIC discharges its functions;

- raise the profile and support the role of FOI practitioners in Victoria; and
- identify and suggest ways to address systemic issues affecting access to public sector information in Victoria.

Membership

Members of the Public Access Agency Reference Group are agency officers, invited by the Information Commissioner, who have experience in managing FOI processes in agencies.

The tasks of the members are to:

- identify challenges they face in administering the FOI Act;
- contribute to sharing information between agencies and OVIC;
- participate in raising the standard of FOI knowledge and practice in the public sector; and
- provide advice, based on members' operational experience, regarding suggested legislative changes or administrative practices that could be made to help achieve the objects of the FOI Act.

Meetings

The Group will meet quarterly, on dates set by OVIC.

The Information Commissioner will chair the inaugural meeting, with subsequent meetings to be chaired by the Public Access Deputy Commissioner.

Meetings will be informal in style. OVIC will circulate an agenda prior to meetings, with all members being invited to identify topics for discussion. Meeting outcomes will be provided to members after meetings.

All members are encouraged to share information received at meetings with their colleagues.