

How to Receive Documents and Information from the Smithsonian Institution

SI Website: The Smithsonian website (www.si.edu) is an interrelated, searchable system of thousands of records about Smithsonian museums, research centers and administration. Each museum and research center has a link, as does the Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA), the Smithsonian Research Information System (SRIS), the Smithsonian Institution Libraries (SIL), and the Visitor and Associates Reception Center (VIARC). These offices may be able to help you.

For documents not available on our website, send a request to the Smithsonian providing:

- A description of the information or documents you want to receive. Provide as much detail as possible.
- The pertinent department or museum, if you know.
- Your name, address, email, and telephone number.
- Whether the documents are requested for a commercial, scientific, education, or personal use. This information will help us determine what fees, if any, to charge.

Send your request by fax, email, or post:

Information Requests Officer
Office of General Counsel
Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Drive, SW
Washington DC 20560
Email: fanchera@si.edu
Fax: 202-357-4310

The Office of General Counsel answers all written requests for documents within 20 business days of receipt. Our response will state whether you have provided enough information for us to search for the documents, whether we can provide the documents you request, an estimate of what you will be charged for providing the documents, and an estimate of how long it will take before you receive the documents.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is the Smithsonian governed by the Freedom of Information Act? If not, by what authority does the Smithsonian provide documents to the public?

You may have requested documents from government agencies through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which governs the way the executive branch of the federal government provides documents to the public. The Freedom of Information Act governs the release of information to the public by agencies within the executive branch of government. FOIA does not apply to the legislative and judicial branches of government. The Smithsonian Institution is not an executive branch agency and is not required by statute to provide documents to the public.

Instead, the Institution provides documents about its programs and operations in keeping with the Smithsonian's mission to increase and diffuse knowledge. The Smithsonian is guided by internal policy, and by FOIA and other relevant law, such as the Privacy Act, when providing documents to the public.

2. What kind of documents and information can I request?

You can request anything that is defined as a *record* under FOIA, which includes almost everything. Documents, photographs, electronic data, spreadsheets, emails, and tape recordings are all defined as records under FOIA. Please be aware, however, that the objects in the Smithsonian collections (artifacts, paintings and sculptures, for example) are not records under FOIA. We will, however, provide the documents associated with an object, such as its history of ownership (provenance) and its deed of gift.

3. How soon will I receive my documents?

The Smithsonian provides documents as quickly as possible, taking into account how many documents you have asked for, how long it will take to search for them, and how many people must be involved in the review process. In general, the more documents you request the longer it will take to provide them to you, simply because it will take longer to collect and review them. Our letter will provide you with the tracking number assigned to your request, so that you can track its status on our website.

4. How will my request be processed?

The Smithsonian will process your request in a manner similar to the FOIA Requester Centers located in government agencies. The Office of General Counsel (OGC) will determine which Smithsonian offices are likely to have the records you seek, and then ask each office to conduct a search and deliver the documents to OGC. OGC staff will review and redact the documents. If a document contains information written by someone outside the Smithsonian, we will forward the document to the author for a consultation and an opportunity to object to disclosure. When the review is complete OGC will provide the documents to you, along with a cover letter explaining any redactions or withholdings. The OGC Staff may request payment before or after sending the documents.

5. How much does it cost to obtain documents?

It depends on your use of the documents:

- If you use the document for a commercial purpose, then you must pay for searching, copying, and reviewing the documents.

- If you use the documents for a scientific or educational purpose, or if you are a member of a news organization using the documents for a story, then you are charged only for copying more than 100 pages. There is no charge for search and review.

-- If you use the documents for any other purpose, then you are charged for searching after the first two hours and for copying more than 100 pages. There is no charge for review.

The fee to copy paper records is \$0.10 per page. The fee for copies produced by computer, such as CDs or printouts, is the direct cost of producing the copy, including the operator's salary. The fee to review paper and electronic records is \$7.00 per quarter hour. The fee to search for paper records is \$7.00 per quarter hour. The fee to search for computer records is the direct cost of conducting the search, including the cost of operating a central processing unit and the actual cost of the operator's salary.

6. Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns?

Annette Fancher
Office of General Counsel
Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Drive, SW
Washington DC 20560
Phone: 202-336-5096
Email: fanchera@si.edu
Fax: 202-357-4310

7. If I don't like a decision, can I appeal?

Yes. You have 60 days to appeal a partial or full denial of your request. Send your appeal to John Huerta, General Counsel, to the same address you sent your request (listed above). Explain the reason for your appeal and why you think it should be granted