

What is RTI?

RTI stands for "Right to Information". Right to Information is a fundamental right that every citizen has! Basically, the RTI gives you all the information that you want about the Govt. and what they are doing with your tax money!

You have the right to ask the Govt. why the roads outside your house are not fixed, why have you not received your "rashan card" as yet, why is there so much garbage in your area that is not picked up etc.

If RTI is a "fundamental" right, then why do we need an "Act"?

Simply because if you go into a Govt. office and demand that they tell you why your work has not been done, they will not entertain you or might even throw you out. If it's a law, then it becomes harder to do this. If they do not give you the information you want, they will have broken a law and can be punished for it!

Who will give me information I am looking for?

One or more officers in every Government Department have been made "Public Information Officers" (PIO). If you want some information, you need to file an application with the PIO. The PIO's are responsible for collecting information wanted by you and providing that information to you.

Also, several officers have been appointed as Assistant Public Information Officers (APIOs). Their job is only to accept applications from the public and forward it to the right PIO.

Can the PIO refuse to give me information?

A PIO can refuse information on certain subjects. These include information received in confidence from foreign governments, information prejudicial to security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the country, breach of privilege of legislatures, etc.

But, do not worry about this!

For an average citizen like you and me, the information we are looking for does not come under these categories. So the PIO can not refuse to give us information.

Where do I submit the application for information?

You can do that with the PIO or with APIO of the Govt. department you are questioning.

In the case of all Central Government Departments, certain "post offices" have been designated as APIOs. This means that you can go to any of these post offices and submit your "fee" and "application" at the RTI counter in these post offices.

They will issue you a receipt and acknowledgement and it is then the responsibility of that post office to deliver it to the right PIO. The list of these post offices is [given here](#).

Is there any fee? How do I deposit that?

Yes, there is an "application fee". For Central Government Departments, it is Rs.10. However, different states have different fees.

For getting information, you have to pay Rs.2 per page of information provided for Central Government Departments. It is different for different states. Similarly, there is a fee for inspection of documents. There is no fee for first hour of inspection, but after that, you have to pay Rs.5 for every hour or inspection. This is according to Central Rules. For each state, you need to see respective state rules.

You can deposit fee in cash or through a DD or bankers cheque or postal order. You can then deposit your application either by post or by hand.

What should I do if the PIO does not accept my application?

You can send it by post. Once you send it along with the fee, your job is done.

You should also make a formal complaint to the respective "Information Commission". The Information Commissioner has the power to impose a penalty of Rs.25,000 on the concerned PIO officer who refused to accept your application.

But it is most likely that the PIO will accept your application.

Is there an "application form" to be filled?

For Central Government Departments, there is no form. You should apply on a plain sheet of paper like an ordinary application. However, many states and some ministries and departments have prescribed formats. You should apply in these formats. Please read rules of your respective state.

How can I apply for information?

Draft your application on a normal sheet of paper and submit it by post or in person to the Public Information Officer (PIO). [Remember to keep a copy of the application for your personal reference.]

How can I send my application fee?

Every state has a different mode of payment for application fee. Generally, you can deposit your application fee via:

- In person by paying cash [remember to take your receipt]
- Demand Draft
- Indian Postal Order
- Money orders (only in some states)
- Affixing Court fee Stamp (only in some states)
- Banker's cheque

Some state governments have some "head of account". You are required to deposit fee in that account. For that, you can either go to any branch of SBI and deposit cash in that account and attach deposit receipt with your RTI application. Or you can also send a postal order or a DD drawn in favor of that account along with your RTI application. Please see respective state rules.

What if the PIO is not available?

In case the PIO is not available you can submit your application with the Assistant PIO or any other officer designated to accept the RTI applications.

Where can I find the concerned PIO?

A list of PIOs/APIOs for all Central and State departments/Ministries is available online at www.rti.gov.in

What if I can not locate my PIO or APIO?

In case you have problems locating your PIO/APIO you can address your RTI application to the “PIO C/o Head of Department” and send it to the concerned department with the requisite application fee. The Head of Department will have to forward your application to the concerned PIO.

Is there a time limit to receiving information?

Yes. If you file your application with the PIO, you must receive information within 30 days.

In case you have filed your application with Assistant PIO then information has to be made available within 35 days.

Do I have to give reasons why I want a particular information?

Absolutely not! You are not required to give any reasons or additional information other than your contact details (i.e., Name, Address, and Phone No.)

Can the PIO refuse to accept my RTI application?

No. The PIO can not refuse to accept your application for information under "any circumstances". Even if the information does not pertain to his/her department/jurisdiction, she/he has to accept it. If the application does not pertain to that PIO, he would have to transfer it to the right PIO within 5 days.

How does this law help me in getting my work done?

Let us take the case of Ram. He was not being given his ration card. But when he applied under RTI, he was given a card within a week. What did Ram ask? He asked the following questions:

- I filed an application for a duplicate ration card on 27th January 2004. Please tell me the daily progress made on my application so far. i.e. when did my application reach which officer, for how long did it stay with that officer and what did he/she do during that period?
- According to the rules, my card should have been made in 10 days. However, it is more than three months now. Please give the names and designations of the officials who were supposed to take action on my application and who have not done so?
- What action would be taken against these officials for not doing their work and for causing harassment to the public? By when would that action be taken?
- By when would I get my card now?

In normal circumstances, such an application would be thrown in a dustbin. But this law says that the PIO has to reply in 30 days. If they don't do that, their salary could be deducted. The problem is that it is not easy to answer these questions.

The first question is: Please provide the daily progress made on my application

There is no progress made. But the government officials cannot write in that they have not acted for so many months. Else that would be "admission of guilt on paper". Which in a legal term for saying that they are going to be "booted"

The next question is: Please provide the names and designations of the officers who were supposed to take action on my application and who had not done.

If the government provides names and designations of the officials, their responsibility gets fixed. Any officer is most scared of fixing of responsibility against him in this manner.

So, the moment one files such an application, his/her pending work is done.

What should I do after getting information?

It depends on why you asked for that information and what type of information is it. Often a lot of things start falling in place just by asking for information. For instance, you would get your passport or a ration card just by asking for the status of your application. In many cases, roads got repaired as soon as the "money spent" on repairs was asked. So, seeking information and questioning the government is an important step, which in itself is complete in many cases.

But suppose you expose some corruption or wrongdoing using RTI. Then, you can complain to vigilance agencies, CBI or even file an FIR.

But one thing is certain. Seeking information like this and exposing the corruption does improve the future. The officials get a clear message that the people of that area have become alert and any wrongdoings in future would not remain hidden as they were in the past. So, their risks of getting caught increase.