

## FOIA Research Campaign - Fossil Free Research

### What are FOIAs

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is an act that allows the public to request and access internal records from public agencies including public universities. As such, this law can be used to inquire public universities (and their departments, academic centers, etc.) about records pertaining to their ties to the fossil fuel industry. Public records obtainable under FOIA can include contracts, written correspondence, emails, and other print and electronic documents. There exists a federal Freedom of Information Act used for federal agencies, but each state also has its own state-level FOIA law. For example, California has the California Public Records Act, and Illinois has the Illinois Freedom of Information Act. Since public schools are under state jurisdiction, we will be requesting records under state FOIA laws.

### General strategy

We intend to use FOIA requests to reveal primarily qualitative information on the ties between universities and their fossil fuel-affiliated donors. We are attempting to send four types of requests to various academic centers and public universities. These include:

- 1) Request all research written agreements between a public university (or academic center) and a list of fossil fuel companies. This is intended to reveal qualitative aspects of the fossil fuel ties.
- 2) Request all correspondence between a specific center at a public university and fossil fuel companies.
- 3) Request a list of grants with dollar amounts from fossil fuel companies at a state school. Intended to reveal quantitative aspects of fossil fuel funding.
- 4) Request government agencies to uncover information at private universities by requesting correspondence between any (potentially) fossil problematic individuals at private universities and the government agency.

### Guide to sending a FOIA request

- 1) Pick a target from our [target list](#) or add your own target (remember it has to be public universities, centers/departments at public universities, or government agencies), and add your name to that target.
- 2) Research what FOIA law exists in the state of your target.
  - a) Change the name of the law.
- 3) Identify FOIA contact at the university
  - a) Often, public universities have a FOIA contact such as FOIA Compliance Officer, public records act office, etc. The university might even have a dedicated page guide on how to send a FOIA request to them. Most FOIA requests happen through email.
- 4) Identify your specific ask
  - a) Are you interested in revealing correspondence, contracts, or a full list of grant amounts? Generally, we try to ask centers at public universities for correspondence or contracts, whereas we try to ask whole universities for just a list of grants and dollar amounts.
  - b) Identify which fossil fuel companies might be of interest. When asking for correspondence and contracts, identify what fossil fuel companies have collaborated with the center. For whole university list, you can include any large fossil fuel company.
- 5) Write the request using our template.

- a) Choose one our of [templates](#) depending on whether you request correspondence, contracts or list of grants.
  - i) Fill the blanks: name of the state law, name of the center at the university, list of fossil fuel companies in question.
- 6) Send FOIA request!
  - a) Send the FOIA to the email identified earlier.
  - b) Update the spreadsheet that you sent the record.
  - c) When you get a response, attach the results [here](#).
  - d) Feel free to notify Will Kattrup

A folder containing the links above and other resources can be found [here](#). Feel free to reach out to [wkattrup@fossilfreereserach.org](mailto:wkattrup@fossilfreereserach.org) or Will Kattrup on Slack for any questions.

Let's FOIA!