



F10-06-MS Narrowed Request Helps Police Locate Additional Information

Individuals requesting their personal information from public bodies or private organizations with which they have had many dealings increase their chances of obtaining effective results by being as clear as possible about what it is they are looking for and, whenever possible, providing dates and similar markers that can help the organization to expedite the process by narrowing the search.

A woman who asked a police department for all of the information it had about her complained to us that the department hadn't done a thorough enough search, as some information was missing from the records sent to her. Section 6 of FIPPA sets out the duty of a public body to assist applicants and states that:

6(1) *The head of a public body must make every reasonable effort to assist applicants and to respond without delay to each applicant openly, accurately and completely.*

Since it was not clear from the wording of the complaint what information the complainant believed to be missing, we asked her to provide some clarification. She did so by providing relevant dates of certain encounters she had had with the police over the years. This clarification (in effect, a narrowed request) enabled the police department to locate some additional records and provide the applicant with a new response about them.

Although some information had not been uncovered in the department's earlier search, we concluded that it had complied with section 6 of FIPPA. The standard required in searching for records is not one of perfection, but rather that a public body must do that which a fair and rational person would expect to be done or consider acceptable. The search was considered reasonable in this case for two reasons: the police department gave us a reasonable explanation for not searching two particular areas the first time; and it was not clear from the applicant's request that she was looking for a particular type of record.