
Mediated Access

Local Reporters'
Perceptions of Public
Information Officers'
Media Control Efforts

Carolyn S. Carlson
& Megan Roy

SUMMARY

A survey of political and general assignment reporters at the state and local levels found concerns about the amount of control the public information officers at the state and local levels are exercising over the reporting process. The vast majority said the amount of control has been increasing over the past several years and they see it only getting worse over the next few years. They agreed ~~that~~ the current level of media control by PIOs is an impediment to providing information to the public.

STUDY SAMPLE

The survey was conducted online Jan. 27, 2014, through Feb. 21, 2014. A random sample of 4,000 reporters was culled from a larger list of 16,500 reporters identified as covering state and local governments, general assignment, police and courts and other beats dealing with government public information officers. Of the 4,000, 450 email addresses bounced back, leaving a viable sample size of 3,550. They were e-mailed an initial message and four follow-up messages over the course of three and a half weeks to recruit them to take the survey. In all, 445 reporters responded to the survey, for a 12.5 percent return. The margin of error of the study is plus or minus 4.6 percent.

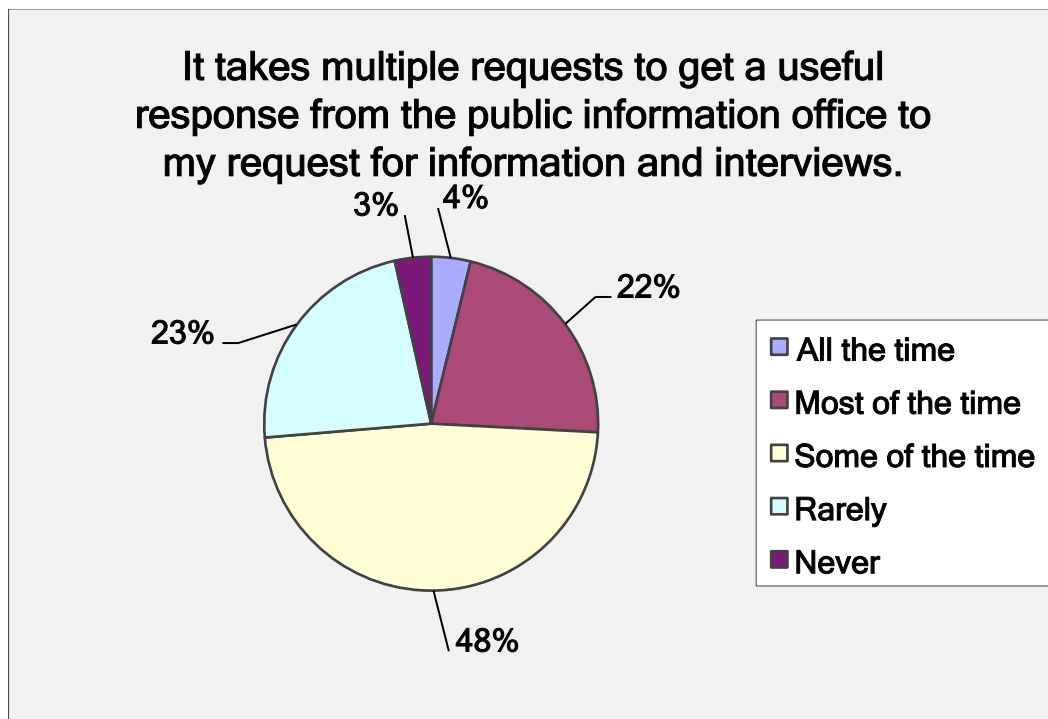
- Ninety-two percent (n=393) were full-time journalists, 10 were part-time and 21 were freelancers.
- The largest number worked for small daily newspapers (22.7%, n=97) and the next largest worked for television (17.8%, n=76), then weekly newspapers (14.7%, n=63), mid-sized daily newspapers (14.5%, n=62) and large daily newspapers (14.0%, n=60). The rest worked for radio, online-only media, wire services, magazines, multimedia outlets or other small print outlets.
- A third of the journalists said their beat was general assignment (35.9%, n=149) and another third said city, county or state government (31.4%, n=130). A smaller number said they covered police and courts (7.73%, n=32), education (n=31, 7.49%), public safety (5.56%, n=23) or federal government (3.14%, n=13). Sixteen said they were investigative reporters (3.86%) and the rest named other beats (4.83%, n=20).
- These were for the most part experienced reporters, with an average of 17 years experience. The median years of experience were 15 and the range was one year to 54 years.

- The respondents were evenly divided between men and women, with only one more man than women responding.
- Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 72, with a mean age of 42 and a median age of 40.

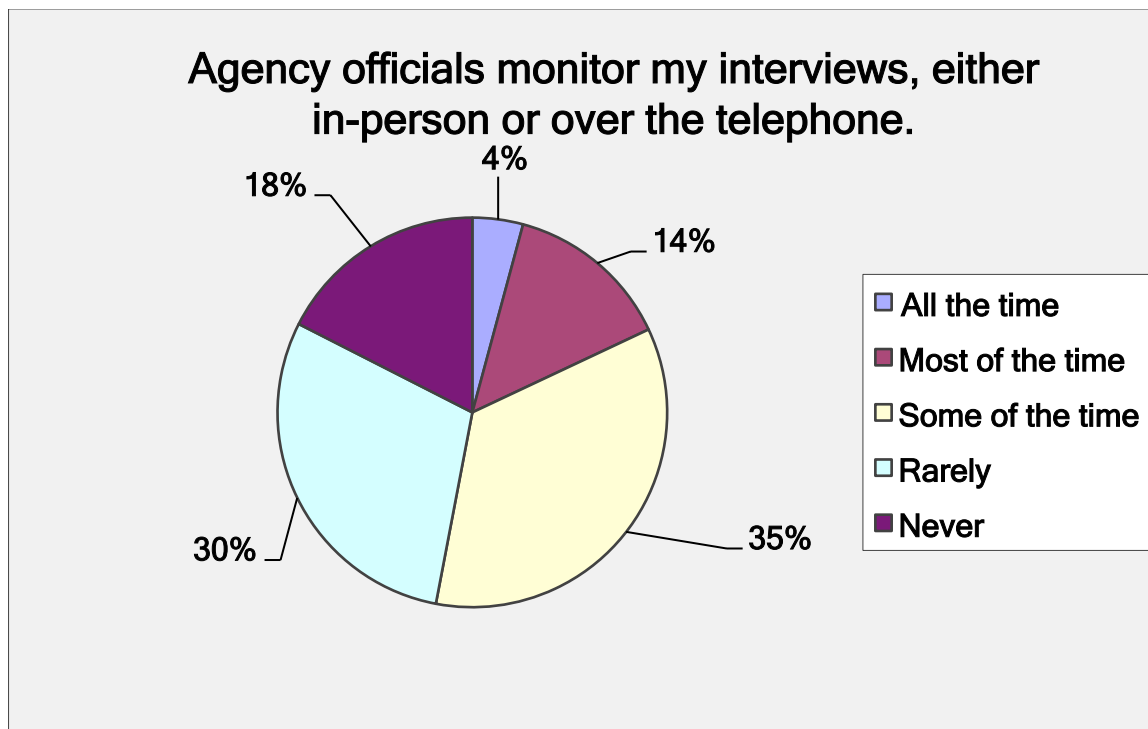
SUMMARY FINDINGS

The surveyed journalists overwhelmingly reported roadblocks set up by public information officers in the interviewing and reporting process. In particular:

- **Pre-approval:** Four out of five reporters say their interviews must be approved by the PIOs ahead of time at least some of the time (all of the time, 19.5%, n=78, most of the time 33.3%, n=133, some of the time 27.3%, n=109).
- **Response:** Most of the time PIOs respond quickly to requests for interviews (44.7%, n=177), although almost as many said a quick response happened only some of the time (40.9%, n=162).
 - For about half the reporters, it sometimes it takes multiple requests to get a useful response from the public information office to requests for information and interviews (47.8%, n=189); for about a quarter of the reporters multiple requests are the norm (most of the time 22.0%, n=87) but multiple requests are required only rarely for 90 reporters (22.8%).

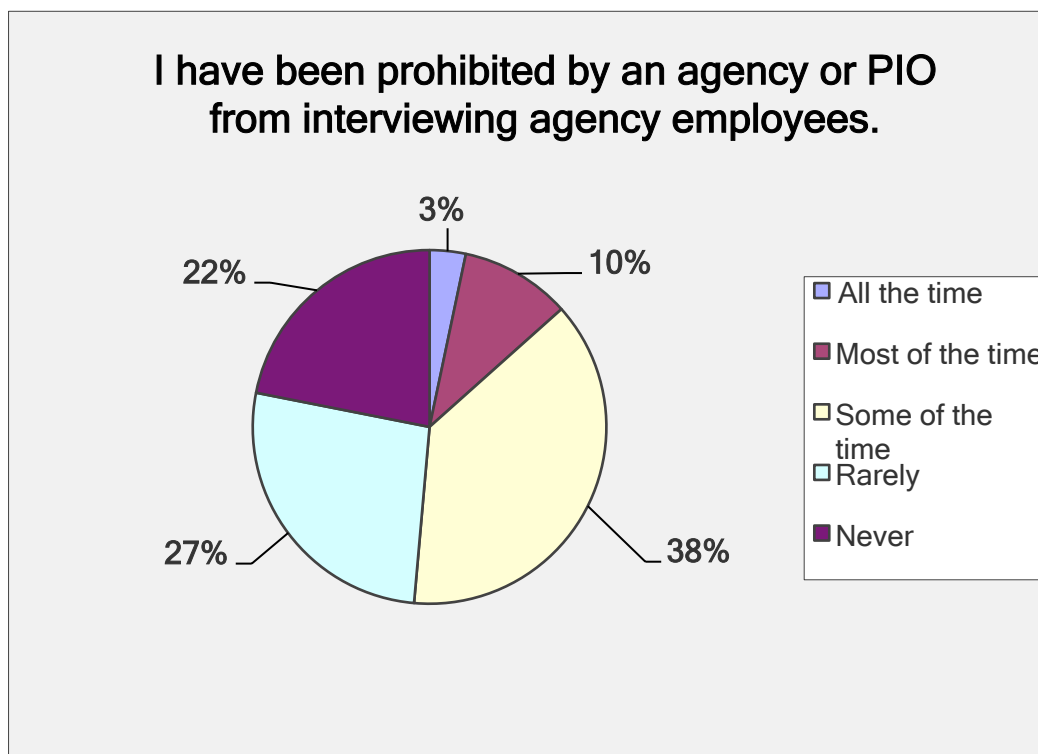


- Some of the time a PIO will ignore a request until after deadline for 42.0 percent (n=166), while 40.5 percent says they get ignored rarely (n=160) and 11.4 percent say it never happens (n=45). But for 21 reporters, this happens most of the time (5.3%).
- **Routing:** Two-thirds of reporters say their requests for interviews are forwarded to public information officers for selective routing to whomever the PIOs want (7.7%, n=30 all the time, 22.8%, n=89 most of the time and 37.7%, n=147 some of the time). For about 15 percent, this rarely happens (14.6%, n=57).
- **Monitoring:** More than half said their interviews are monitored in person or over the telephone at least some of the time (35.0%, n=134 some of the time, 13.8% n=53 most of the time and 4.2%, n=16 all of the time). However, 47 percent said this rarely or never happens to them (29.5% n=113 rarely, 17.5% n=67 never).



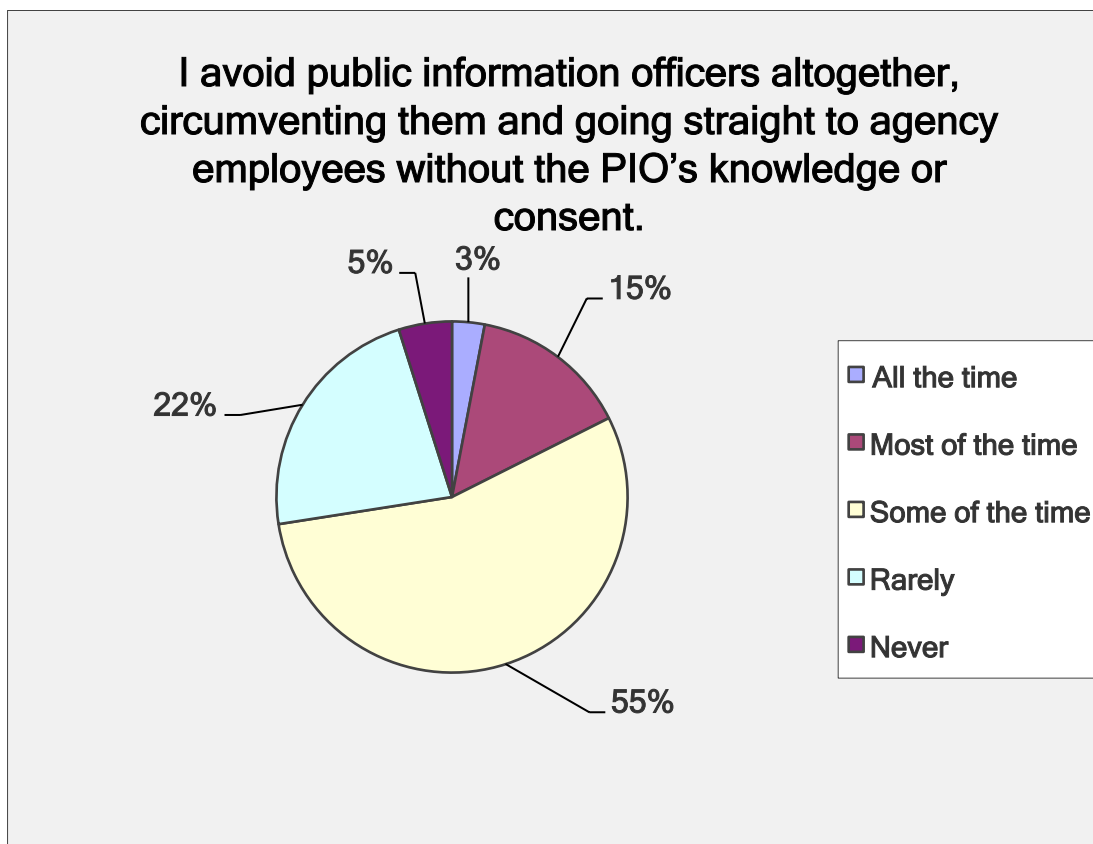
- Half of those with experience with monitoring said the PIO would sit in on the interview and record it (51.5%, n=86), some said they had experienced the PIO setting up a conference call for an interview and then staying on the line (19.8%, n=33) and 44 said they had experience with both in-person and telephone monitoring strategies (26.3%).
- **Prohibition:** More than half of the reporters said they had actually been prohibited from interviewing agency employees at least some of the time by public information officers. Thirteen (3.3%) said this happens all the time and 40 said this happens most of the time (10.1%). The rest (38.0%, n=151) said they had been banned from interviewing at least

some of the time.

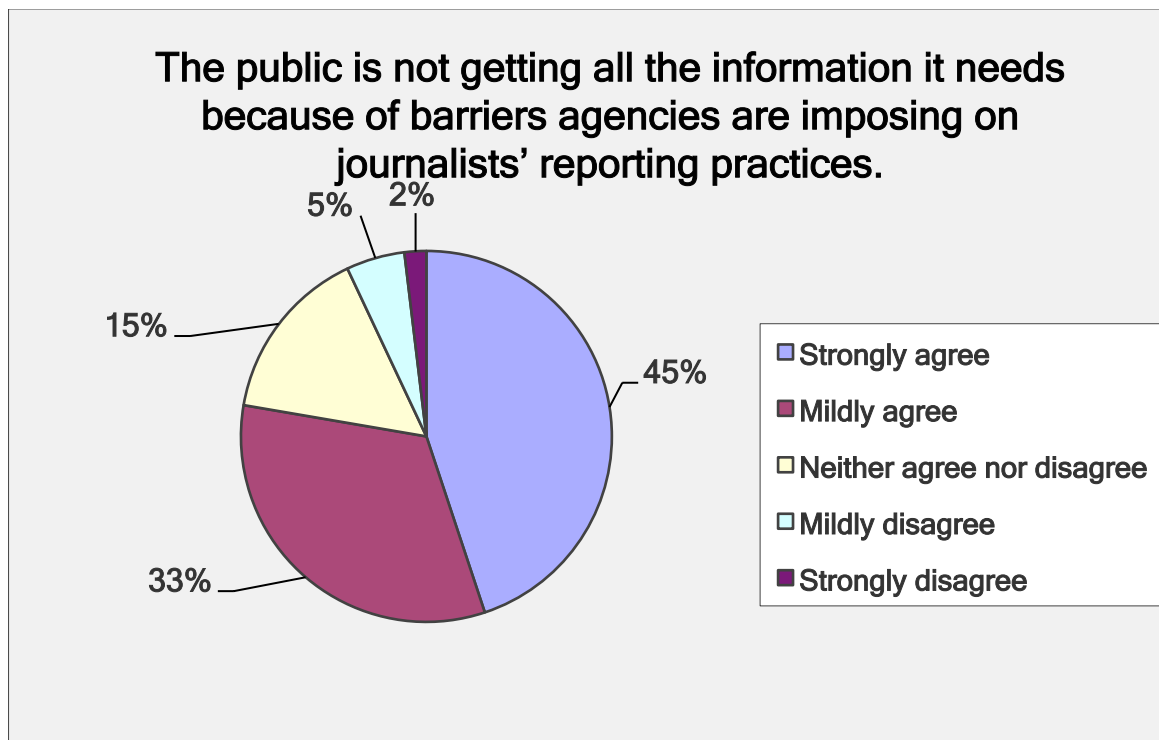


- Many times the PIO simply gave prepared answers to the reporters' questions rather than allow them to conduct an interview, or they claimed the person they wanted to interview would not know the answers to their questions (40.2%, n=72).
- Sometimes it was the employee who didn't want to speak to the media, either because they were afraid or they were too busy (31.8%, n=57).
- One respondent said: "We are not allowed to interview county employees. They can be suspended or otherwise disciplined for talking to the press."
- Another respondent said: "For decades, the state's human services agency banned its employees (from child-abuse investigators to food-stamp intake workers) from talking to the media. All information came from either the PIO or executive director, neither could speak from personal experience about the challenges of those jobs. I believe the lack of the line-worker perspective led to the criticisms of social programs and cuts in the agency's budget. Once, after a new board and leadership, I was allowed access to workers for a series. It had a profound impact, leading to an increase in budget and volunteerism to the programs highlighted."

- **Avoidance:** Three-fourths of the reporters said they circumvented the public information office and went straight to the interviewees without PIO consent at least some of the time (55.0%, n=204), most of the time (14.6%, n=54) or all of the time (3.0%, n=11). On the other hand, 22.6 percent said they rarely circumvented the public information office (n=84) and 18 reporters said they never did (4.9%).

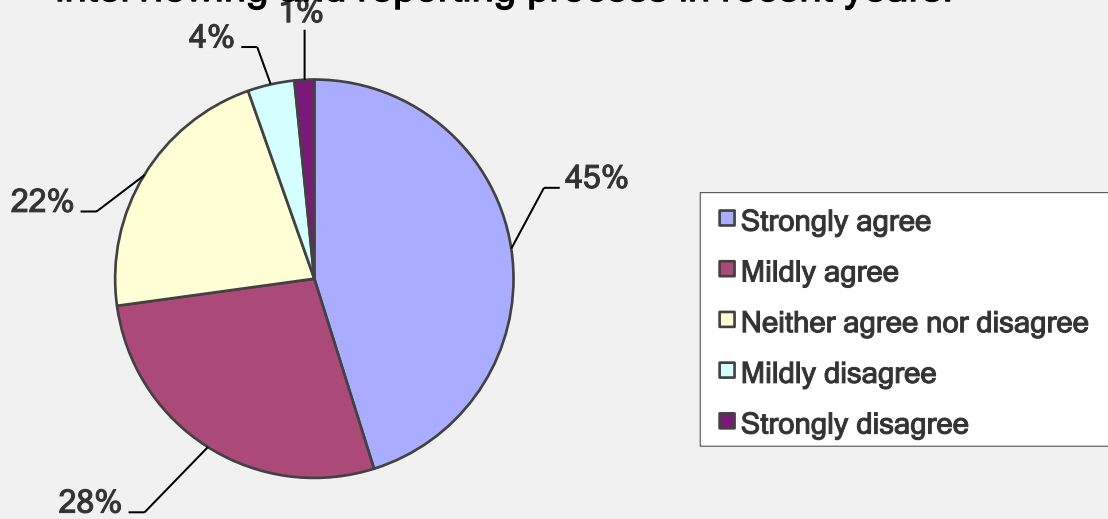


- **Working Relationship:** Despite the problems, three-fourths of the reporters said they had a positive working relationship with the PIOs on their beat (25.6% strongly agree, n=95, 47.7% somewhat agree, n=177).
- **Public hurt:** More than three-fourths of the journalists agreed with the statement that “The public is not getting the information it needs because of barriers agencies are imposing on journalists’ reporting practices” (44.9% n=167 strongly agree, 32.8% n=122 somewhat agree). Fifteen percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (15.3%, n=57), while 26 disagreed with the statement (5.1% n=19 somewhat disagreed, 1.9%, n=7 strongly disagreed).

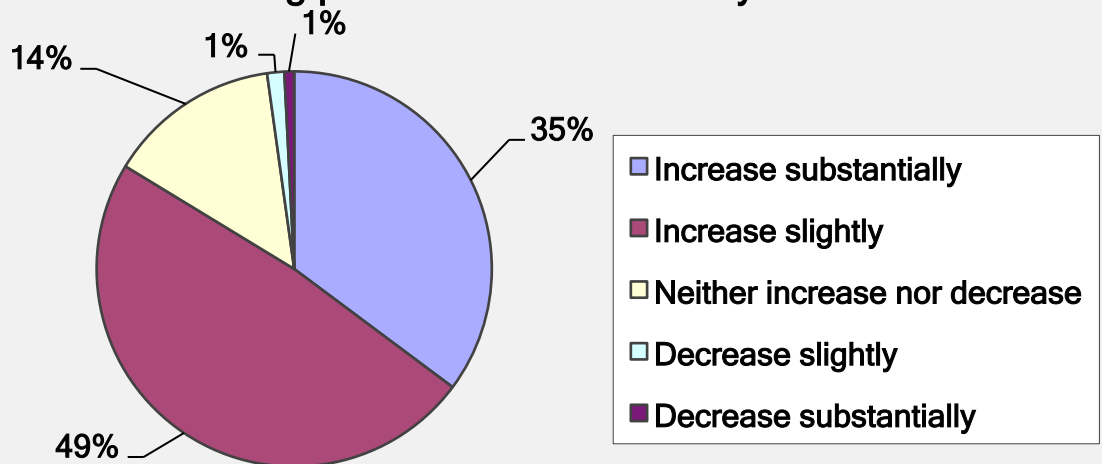


- **Control trends:** Almost three-fourths of the journalists see a trend toward increasing PIO control of the interviewing and reporting process in recent years and more than 83 percent think it'll get worse over the next five years.
 - Asked if they agreed with the statement "I believe government public information officers have been exercising increasingly tighter controls over the interviewing and reporting process in recent years, 72.9 percent agreed (45.2%, n=168 strongly agreed and 27.7%, n=103 mildly agreed).
 - Asked "what change would you predict there will be in the degree of government control over the reporting and interviewing process in the next five years," 35.2 percent (n=130) said it would increase substantially and 48.5 percent (n=179) said it would increase slightly. Fifty-two said it would stay the same (14.1%) and only eight said it would decrease (1.4%, n=5 decrease slightly, 0.8%, n=3 decrease substantially).

I believe government public information officers have been exercising increasingly tighter controls over the interviewing and reporting process in recent years.



What change would you predict there will be in the degree of government control over the reporting and interviewing process in the next five years?



- **Public records:** Two-thirds of the respondents reported that, the most recent time they asked for a public record, the public records custodian they dealt with responded to the record request within the required timeframe under their state's law (67.6%, n=238). Fifteen percent said they missed the deadline (15.6%, n=55) and five percent said they didn't respond at all (4.8%, n=17). Twelve percent said the custodians turned over records immediately (11.9%, n=42).
 - Of those whose request was fulfilled, only about half got the information they had requested (54.8%, n=188). Thirty didn't get the information they asked for (8.7%) and the rest "sort of" got the correct information (36.4%, n=125).
 - Of those who "sort of" got the right information, half said the information that was provided was vague or incomplete, a third said redacting had rendered the records useless and 11 reporters said the information they got was so convoluted it was useless.
 - In a common refrain, one respondent said, "Information is provided, but incomplete. Follow-up inquiries turned up more than double the information initially provided."
 - Another said, "The problem is that you never know what they didn't include. We've found out, after the fact, on some public records requests, that some sensitive documents were left out. The public records officers at the largest public institution I cover are known to really scrub the records before releasing them. So we're always suspicious about what we get."
 - Only 60 percent of the time, the PIOs or the records custodian would answer questions about the public records or the information reporters were seeking (60.5%, n=213). Fifteen percent of respondents said they refused to answer questions (15.1%, n=53) and 25 percent said they "sort of" answered questions (24.4%, n=86). Those who said "sort of" said the custodian took too much time to get information, gave incomplete or inconsistent answers, or gave prepared or vague answers.
 - One respondent said, "They answer questions they want to answer or questions they think you should ask. It takes a lot of energy to persuade them to open up. Some do but they are few and far between."

SURVEY QUESTIONS

I am required to obtain approval from the agency public information officer before interviewing agency employees.

All the time	78	19.5%
Most of the time	133	33.3%
Some of the time	109	27.3%
Rarely	51	12.8%
Never	29	7.3%

The PIO quickly responds to my requests for information and interviews.

All the time	28	7.1%
Most of the time	177	44.1%
Some of the time	162	40.9%
Rarely	27	6.8%
Never	2	0.5%

The PIO will ignore my request for an interview until after my deadline has passed.

All the time	3	0.8%
Most of the time	21	5.3%
Some of the time	166	42.0%
Rarely	160	40.5%
Never	45	11.4%

It takes multiple requests to get a useful response from the public information office to my request for information and interviews.

All the time	15	3.8%
Most of the time	87	22.0%
Some of the time	189	47.8%
Rarely	90	22.8%
Never	14	3.5%

I have been prohibited by an agency or PIO from interviewing agency employees.

All the time	13	3.3%
Most of the time	40	10.1%
Some of the time	151	38.0%
Rarely	106	26.7%
Never	87	21.9%

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My requests for interviews are forwarded to public information officers for selective routing to whomever they want.

All the time	30	7.7%
Most of the time	89	22.8%
Some of the time	147	37.7%
Rarely	57	14.6%
Never	15	3.8%
Does Not Apply	52	13.3%

Agency officials monitor my interviews, either in-person or over the telephone.

All the time	16	4.2%
Most of the time	53	13.8%
Some of the time	134	35%
Rarely	113	29.5%
Never	67	17.5%

I avoid public information officers altogether, circumventing them and going straight to agency employees without the PIO's knowledge or consent.

All of the time	11	3.0%
Most of the time	54	14.6%
Some of the time	204	55.0%
Rarely	84	22.6%
Never	18	4.9%

I have a positive working relationship with agency public information officers.

Strongly agree	95	25.6%
Mildly agree	177	47.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	62	16.7%
Mildly disagree	27	7.3%
Strongly disagree	10	2.7%

I believe government public information officers have been exercising increasingly tighter controls over the interviewing and reporting process in recent years.

Strongly agree	168	45.2%
Mildly agree	103	27.7%
Neither agree or disagree	81	21.8%
Mildly disagree	14	3.8%
Strongly disagree	6	1.6%

The public is not getting all the information it needs because of barriers agencies are imposing on journalists' reporting practices.

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Strongly agree	167	44.9%
Mildly agree	122	32.8%
Neither agree or disagree	57	15.3%
Mildly disagree	19	5.1%
Strongly disagree	7	1.9%

What change would you predict there will be in the degree of government control over the reporting and interviewing process in the next five years?

Increase substantially	130	35.2%
Increase slightly	179	48.5%
Neither increase or decrease	52	14.1%
Decrease slightly	5	1.4%
Decrease substantially	3	0.8%

How long did it take the PIO or other designated custodian of records to respond for a request for a public record?

Immediately	42	11.9%
Within the required timeframe under my state's law	238	67.6%
Eventually, but after the deadline under my state's law	55	15.6%
Didn't respond at all	17	4.8%

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RESEARCHERS

The survey was conducted by Dr. Carolyn S. Carlson, an assistant professor of communication at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Ga., on behalf of the Society of Professional Journalists Freedom of Information Committee, of which she is a member. Dr. Carlson is a former national president of the Society of Professional Journalists.

She was assisted in the project by Megan Roy, a graduate research assistant at Kennesaw State University and a student in the Masters of Arts in Integrated Global Communication program.

For further information, contact Dr. Carlson at ccarls10@kennesaw.edu.

SPONSOR

The Society of Professional Journalists comprises 8,000 members nationwide. Founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi, the Society of Professional Journalists promotes the free flow of information vital to a well-informed citizenry; works to inspire and educate the next generation of journalists; and protects First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and press.

APPENDIX: OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Thinking of the last time you were prohibited from interviewing, please explain the reason you were given for the prohibition, if any.
I was told that the Director of an Agency was not well informed of the issue at hand.
A state department director refused to answer questions about testimony he had just given to a state legislative committee. He gave no reason other than being tired.
It is only because the mayor was very busy.
I was simply ignored.
It was a "pocket veto"--in other words, I received no response from the PIO or the intended interviewee.
During a 2013 federal public corruption trial, I was prohibited from interviewing any of the defense lawyers or prosecutors anywhere in the federal courthouse. This has not been the case in the past.
A general example is our local city school district. More often than not, denied access to administrators/faculty (positive AND critical stories). Excuse is the administrators "don't want the media there because it will disrupt the learning process." Standard line from district PIO's.
The policy is that the PIO speaks for the school board and the administration.
Pure control issues - they want to control the information in the communications shop.
I am often told that lower level employees are not allowed to talk to the media.
I was told all communication channels have to go to the PIO first.
I was told all interviews must go through the executive director of the agency, unless he authorizes an interview with an employee.
(State) policy seems to keep all info-providing with PIO.
A new media relations policy. The town wants to speak with a single voice with consistent messaging.
None given
The PIO decided that they had given us the information requested and did not forward our request to the elected official.
Protocol.
Police department policy. No interviews with any police commanders, sergeants or rank-and-file officers unless arranged by PIO or chief of police.
Even a plow truck driver for the city cannot comment on something like snow without permission from the top.
Simply told no - PIO ignored request and then I ended up not doing story.
Confidentiality of the type of work they do.
It used to be common. Today it is unheard of. I've stopped asking for it. It's disgraceful. A great many young agency public relations people refuse to tell you their own last names. And as soon as you post a story on the web, they harass the heck out of you with their disappointment that you didn't publish their spin. They are on the public payroll, not a political payroll, but they don't have a clue that there is even a line.
We typically receive statements rather than get interviews.

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Excuse was that it was part of an ongoing investigation.
Never a problem with local officials, only state officials, especially the state human services department.
No valid reason given.
Told that members of the public attending a public official's inauguration weren't permitted to speak to the press.
It would hamper an ongoing investigation.
The Family Court chief judge blocks all media access. The other courts are more open.
All information being released must go through the PIO. No other person, except the agency director, is allowed to speak on the issue.
Cop: "talk to the PIO."
The person I needed to speak to was out of the office and needed more than a few hours notice to formulate the responses to my questions
Sheriff's Office policy is that only the sheriff and chief deputy may speak to the press on the record
Clearance by supervisor required
All communication must go through the PIO.
Employees are not allowed to speak.
Agency said another person was better suited for the questions.
Often given the excuse it will disrupt business, or employees don't want to talk. Often just ban us from premises to control.
With public schools, the reason given is that they don't want us talking to students without prior parental approval (when it's a story they don't like-- less of a problem on puff stories), and they don't let us talk to teachers because they say we don't want to take up instruction time for television stories. Again, less of a problem if they are pitching us the story. Same goes for the banking industry, city and county government (although the county government lately has been quite accessible).
(Government agencies) usually told it's because investigations are pending or that staff needs to go through PIO or that PIO is required to field the questions and then submit answers.
The person wasn't available.
Been told to instead talk to an elected official to boost their political profile, mostly get non-answers or redirects instead of direct denials or reasoning.
"That's our policy."
The direct contact did not want to give interviews and deferred to the PIO, which never returned calls/emails, etc.
Deals with a topic in which rank and file are not authorized to comment.
Some agencies outside my county prefer I not speak to detectives or investigators directly, but I usually get enough info from their PIO's.
A negative subject about government program.
No reason, just no response.
They were too "busy" to talk to me and prefer the flack to do it.
That any official communication should be coursed through the PIO, which, of course, is baloney.
She just didn't ask them, I think. I just never got word back, no matter how many times I called, texted and emailed.
Doing an investigative story on renovations at the (Court) building. All interview requests were

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required to go through Governors office. All requests were ignored.
Ongoing litigation
Not so much banned, but interviews are rarely set up.
Office policy.
(Police chief) maintains strict policy of information through chief.
The PIO did not prohibit me. But, employees told me they would not speak to me because they did not want to get fired.
None specifically; just denied or ignored.
No reason was given. Just "not available."
No good reason. Just their protocol
Agency policy, for reasons not explained to me.
Reporters are consistently denied interviews through our school system. We are told the only person we can interview is the Superintendent who is conveniently never available.
Sources within the agency did not like my coverage
Because I used some of what was said in a background interview for a news story.
PIO said that he would appear on my program instead.
The official was too busy.
Only certain people authorized to speak publicly for agency, usually a PIO or senior executive.
While reporting a story about security, the (government agency) refused my request to have direct contact with working officers and instead gave me several PIOs. This has happened twice with them.
Those people aren't available and/or they aren't media trained.
The person was nervous about talking to press and wanted the PIO to do it instead. The person gave information to the PIO who passed it on to me.
Not their area of expertise- sent me to another branch of the agency, that branch sent me back to the original point of contact! Sent me round and round
Information has to come from the PIO or spokesperson.
It was for the (police department). Officers on scene said it was the department's policy that they cannot talk to media and referred me to the PIO.
Officer shot while on duty. He survived but was told we county prosecutors asked police to prohibit interviews because it could hinder prosecution of suspect.
Could not be discussed while internal investigations were pending.
Time factors. Interviewee couldn't be made available for an interview.
Told that the person was not in the office, but he was.
Person was unavailable.
The city was upset about previous coverage that I did on a city project.
School district refused to let teachers/administrators at schools talk. Stated reason was that they wanted unity of message.
No explanation. Just a no.
All interviews with employees must be cleared by PIO.
It's just policy.
And I quote: "Students are not photo illustrations, sorry."
A superior officer for an area police department wanted me speaking to him only.
Usually it's just that people within government refuse to talk to me because they have been told not to

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by the mayor or a supervisor.
I was told official comment had to go through the PIO.
Simply that they were not going to comment on the story.
Agency policy
Subject wanted to talk about other topics.
All information has to go thru PIO, no interviews granted.
There was pending litigation.
(Regional) government forbade me from interviewing scientists doing climate research, and researching rapid retreat of glaciers in the (region).
I was told that the city communications office could handle all of my questions, and an interview with the department head wasn't necessary.
It involved a police officer in a pending investigation.
I was told the city manager could answer all my questions, and it was "ridiculous" to think a different staff member could give me a better answer.
"Your request has been denied." – (police department)
This is even in response to requests to interview hero cops.
I had the (city clerk) tell me he had more "mission critical" pieces of information to get out of his tech team than my request for data on the number of marriage licenses issued to same sex couples in (city). (This wasn't a request to interview anyone: I just wanted some simple, easy numbers.) This guy makes more than \$200,000 a year, incidentally, but can't be bothered to oblige the press w/statistics.
Agency policy.
Officer did not want to comment on an ongoing investigation.
PIO wants to be gate keeper.
Can't recall last time.
More often than not, I will request an interview with an employee, and they refer me to the PIO for comment.
I tried to talk to (football) cheerleaders. Their PR people told me I had to email the director to get permission. I sent her four emails and never heard back. I asked the cheerleaders' parents to ask the director to check her email, but the cheerleaders were afraid.
A press release had already been issued.
Only the press office is allowed to handle media requests.
The TSA said all interviews have to be done by PIO in relation to the (area) shooting.
They didn't want to talk about the subject matter.
The PIO preferred to give the information themselves, or made a politician available as opposed to a staffer.
Federal agencies never allow interviews with employees. No explanation is given, except they simply won't allow it. Social service agencies tend to be hyper-sensitive and cite the generic "privacy." Public schools are the best, often encouraging interviews with teachers. Private-school teachers usually are not allowed interviews except with PIO permission. Local and state police officers always talk.
An interview might interfere with the schedule of the person I had asked to speak to.
Employee accused of wrongdoing, sent questions through spokesperson.

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Higher-ups have been blamed.
Superintendent must OK every interview within the district. This was a controversial topic.
Not really banned, but most school district employees will not talk to me because they are afraid of the repercussion. (county government also like that).
The school district is the most challenging of all. When I write something they don't like, they make extra steps for me to gain access to information. They also delay responses to information requests. One of the most annoying incidents involved them having a PR person follow me around while I conducted interviews with adults in a school.
Almost always, the flack provides statement or background instead, says this is all you're getting with no reason given.
Employee not authorized to speak on behalf of the agency.
I was told to go directly through the communications manager, who either did not respond or when he did, said he would provide the information as soon as possible. I never received a response.
The (city) has never made (mayor) available for an interview. They generally say that he is unavailable. I tend to believe that they think my reporting is too critical.
Department policy.
All questions are handled by the communications director.
The reason given was that the department had a designated (civilian) public information office.
In the (city), the city manager likes to see all requests for interviews and he has denied a request to speak to the human resources department head concerning the departure of another department head.
Personnel, security
"It's an internal affair."
Employee refuses, citing policy
I've been told, "I'm not on the clock" or "that's not a story."
The PIO said she was a sworn deputy and thus capable of answering my questions about a law enforcement issue.
"It's just not our policy to have employees give interviews. Talk to the press officer instead."
The PIO said she couldn't reach the detective, who worked a different schedule.
Personnel issues and administrators in charge declined to talk
Policy
Agency policy forbids employee comment to press about work.
Told I had to wait until the next day at a presser despite official being at meeting I was attending.
One of the municipalities I report on has a policy requiring all requests to go through the PIO and only through the PIO. Any attempts to contact departments are ignored. Additionally, one county employee who made a presentation in an open meeting refused to provide his full name and the PIO was unaware that under both state and federal law a public employee's name is considered an open record.
It is usual practice in (city) to have government spokespeople to speak on behalf of their respective departments to ensure the "right information" is conveyed.
They said it was because the employee may not speak for the full administration or declined comment.
All requests for information must go through the main school board office.
Several cities prohibit their employees from talking to the media.
Feds on the water rights court case -- no comments due to litigation.
All information will be provided by the PIO.

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All information comes through one designated person.
Federal or state employees are a blanket, no interview for anything. Only PIO's unless they designate a person. Reason being, that's policy.
Part of my beat responsibilities includes public health agencies. In (state), the state health agencies rarely permit interviews with staff. They say it is their policy for the reporter to submit written questions, and then the PIO gets answers to the questions from their staff. The county public health agency that I cover requires that all interview requests go through a secretary who works for the PIO. Almost always an interview is lined up with a staff member. The Sheriff's Department also uses PIO's to provide info to reporters, but with other county departments, reporters can call staff members directly for interviews.
They wanted info to come through the spokesman
The employee didn't have the authority to speak publicly.
Told no one available to speak on camera. Or told they will not comment on an ongoing case.
More often, the PIO will attempt to delay response, delivering a small piece of information at deadline.
In the instances I have wanted to interview someone I could not, I was always told they were not willing to talk. I do not know if in any of these instances if the person wanted to talk or not, or if the PIO was forcing them not to talk or not.
The employee is not at liberty to speak to the press.
There was no reason given, the PIO said the agency "declined" to make him available.
I am out to do critical stories.
Police officers on the scene at a shooting.
I was told it "wasn't important" to talk to members of the staff who were not management.
Company made statements in a press release; no other statements would be made.
Policy did not to allow employees to be distracted from their work
The employee I needed to interview was not comfortable with speaking directly to media. For the most part, I am able to speak directly with department heads and employees.
I was asking the (agency) for information and was directed to an ill-informed flack who wasted my time. There was no direct reason given.
Most times, it's because department policy prohibits people from talking about ongoing investigations.
I requested an interview with a federal agency employee who had spoken at a public meeting, but was told he was not allowed to be interviewed.
The PIO was on vacation, said he couldn't meet my deadline, and got angry when I started dialing employees.
The most recent event occurred when a simple request to interview senior homicide investigators (a request that had been approved in the past) for a routine annual look-back at the city's homicides was denied. When asked for the reason, none was given, other that "detectives do not discuss homicides," although they have in the past. There is no new policy that I can see. They just decided they were done dealing with reporters.
The agency wanted a single voice, the PIO or spokesman or director, and did not want those employees unfamiliar with media to be uncomfortable speaking with the media.
My phone call to agency employees was redirected to the PIO. Getting a comment was nearly impossible.
The person I wanted to speak with was unavailable.

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Was told they didn't want to comment for my story
The person is too busy.
No reason given, but telephone interviews are almost unheard of in federal agencies
The official was unavailable for an interview and would not make himself available until after a deadline had passed in regards to a court-based story.

If you have ever been banned altogether from interviewing employees at a particular school, office or department, please explain the circumstances that led to the banning and what you were able to do about it.
"Banned" is a loaded word. I think "deterred" or "discouraged" is more accurate, and mostly it was done under the guise of, "So-and-so is an incredibly busy and important person and used to dealing only with important journalists, so it will be unlikely that you will be able to find time on his calendar before your deadline."
I complained about not being able to interview people in the federal courthouse about (person) public corruption trial, but the chief judge still stuck to his rule.
All requests to interview city or county employees must go through the respective PIO's. Both notorious for not allowing interviews to address/clarify issues.
Media is banned generally from talking to school board members, teachers and administrators at one of our local school districts. Everything comes through the PIO. We flood them with Right-to-Know requests and try to work around it, but it's a continuing problem.
For example, a teacher at a Christian school resigned after her nude pictures surfaced on a revenge porn website and the school asked us not to interview students on campus.
I was kicked out of a school after a mass protest. I handed a student my camera through the doorway and she took pictures.
I'm sometimes told I can only go through the PIO and speak to no one else. I ignore them and try reaching the people I need to reach.
Local public school districts have the same policy, of going through the PIO. And then, if school administrators deem it appropriate or OK, an interview with a student, teacher or staff member is granted.
City public school teachers wouldn't talk about getting another snow day for fear they did not follow protocol and get permission from PIO.
I have waited four years for the (department) to respond to my FOIL seeking to see what data or appraisals they used to determine that the rents they were permitting charter schools to pay (and for which they were reimbursed by the public school system). For two years I got a monthly letter saying the information sought was complicated, and they needed more time. Eventually they stopped doing even that. We never did a story saying they were breaking the law or hiding stuff. We should have.
It's more of a practice these days than one specific event; most agencies prohibit interviews and only issue statements. Worse, they require PRA requests for routine responses to questions or information requests
They didn't want them to talk. No recourse.
Yes, been told that principals or teachers in an entire city school system are barred from speaking to the press.
The chief (court) judge denies all access - period.

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<p>It happens on occasion, especially when it's a controversial issue or an issue that is critical of the agency management. In most cases when this happens, you try to find someone who will talk if they are not identified to get the info from. At least in that situation you can report on the issue, although an on camera interview would be preferred.</p>
<p>This would be a long essay.</p>
<p>I had some difficulty connecting with one of the police departments I required to check in with on an almost daily basis. The reporter to cover that department before had burned a lot of the sources, so they were not willing to speak to anyone following his exit for a while.</p>
<p>Again, usually officials just ban us from property, so we try to get people to talk off-campus/off grounds.</p>
<p>Nothing specific that I can recall. However, our usual practice is to seek comment from association representatives or to catch folks after hours and to solicit input through social media inquiries.</p>
<p>Local government easier to gain access to staff. Sometimes officials are reluctant to do media interviews.</p>
<p>I was told that they weren't available for weeks.</p>
<p>A school district said no one except the PIO would answer questions. I can't change their policies, so I started filing more public-records requests.</p>
<p>School district is very touchy about given us access to teachers or employees on controversial issues.</p>
<p>Schools will rarely allow me to interview employees if I am reporting something they deem as negative, such as an event that puts the school in a bad light, a student suicide or disciplinary measure. I was not able to do much about it except to try to reach employees at their homes after hours.</p>
<p>Not personally, but there are agencies that don't allow their employees to talk to the media.</p>
<p>I have not been "banned." My requests are ignored. Or, I am told they will get back to me and they don't.</p>
<p>A school district banned the paper for about 7 months, that is, refusing to allow any district employee from supplying any information whatsoever. We published several editorials on page 1. A school board vote solved the problem: the obstructionists were voted out of office and two members who promised to give information to the paper elected.</p>
<p>The two agencies I deal with most often do not typically permit people other than spokespeople or agency heads to comment on the record. For the most part I have just dealt with this by developing other sources. The policy was in the place before I started on the beat, and I have told the PIO numerous times how counterproductive I think it is, but to no avail.</p>
<p>Never been totally banned. They just "aren't available" for anything controversial. Have to track them down after they leave their offices.</p>
<p>I've been told by the (Department), for example, that all questions must be handled by their PIO, and there is no access to staff.</p>
<p>At particular companies, usually for writing unfavorable articles about them.</p>
<p>Bans seem to be situation-specific i.e. around a certain news event. Most common reason given is to protect privacy or feelings of people closest to an event that is getting a lot of media attention. All I can do in those situations is to respectfully repeat my request and be persistent.</p>
<p>In my crime beat, I deal mainly with a Police Captain PIO at one department and the Chief of another department. In both cases, they are pretty much the only people who will talk, unless it is a story that is not about a specific crime but more about trends. Also, for feel good stories like about getting a new k-</p>

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<p>9 unit, I am generally able to talk to other officers. Sources for crime stories though are only the PIO or Chief of Police.</p>
<p>Schools: all employees instructed to direct media to the PIO, said they're "not allowed" to talk, they fear getting in trouble even though they would like to comment, fear losing their job.</p>
<p>We are consistently banned from talking to teachers at schools whenever an incident happens. The PIO will make him or herself available, but we are not able to speak to teachers themselves</p>
<p>Many school districts do not want anyone interviewed other than the superintendent</p>
<p>I have been banned from talking to the city when I wrote a very controversial article on the city's closed-door talks with a developer over a controversial hotel project. I essentially continued my work and made the PIO's job much more difficult until they got tired of dealing with me that way and loosened up their rules. It was, and I believe these things typically are, temporary, catty, and political. But the city can learn it's not functional, and that's how you break them down and get them to cooperate.</p>
<p>We wanted information on an incident that happened at a school, and all teachers and school administrators were banned from talking about it. We had to hound the district for a comment and any records involved. At times, we have made limited use of unnamed sources.</p>
<p>It's not so much being banned as discovering that the PIO was not going to allow the principals (not school principals, but top dogs) to be contacted; nor did the top dogs contact us.</p>
<p>Most recently the building security was instructed not to allow us in and held the doors closed to a public building during school hours.</p>
<p>I asked to speak to teachers about large classroom size, which the School Board is working to address, and the PIO said no, as per usual. I let the School Board chair know, and he called the superintendent to make sure I could go in and talk to teachers.</p>
<p>I have been banned from interviewing employees as part of the agency's policy rules, but can often cajole an interview. If not, must submit questions to the PIO and use those answers.</p>
<p>Routinely, nothing can be done, and I don't get interviews. But in a recent instance involving a police official, I was able to interview the official for background purposes only.</p>
<p>(School district) has refused to make brass available over the forced transfer of teacher of popular Race and Social Justice class. They've hidden behind "personnel decision" excuse. Response was public disclosure request.</p>
<p>It happens often involving pending police investigations.</p>
<p>You just know no one can talk to you without going through the relevant PIO office. You have to get interviews on your own, and not use names so as not to jeopardize the jobs of the people who will speak to you.</p>
<p>I have never been outright banned. However, there have been several instances where a source was declined to speak with me simply because they were asked not to by a PIO.</p>
<p>At events</p>
<p>I was trying to speak to (department) officers about their feelings on security following the (department) shooting and was told they couldn't speak to me. I've also run into bans by police agencies who say all information in a case must come from the PIO.</p>
<p>Schools will never let us go inside with cameras and won't allow us to talk to employees. They usually only allow us to talk to the superintendent and school board for district.</p>
<p>Federal immigration officers got up and left the room when I entered once when getting a tour of a</p>

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<p>new local detention center. The PIO (from another agency) said, "They don't like media." No special circumstances led to that. I call the immigration PIO in another state for information, which is usually incomplete, late or denied. The situation has led to growing distrust of law enforcement by the immigrant community, who have come to view federal agents as the enemy. For decades, the state's human services agency banned its employees (from child-abuse investigators to food-stamp intake workers) from talking to the media. All information came from either the PIO or executive director; neither could speak from personal experience about the challenges of those jobs. I believe the lack of the line-worker perspective led to the criticisms of social programs and cuts in the agency's budget. Once, after a new board and leadership, I was allowed access to workers for a series. It had a profound impact, leading to an increase in budget and volunteerism to the programs highlighted.</p>
<p>It was considered a sensitive issue to the agency. I persisted over a few months and ultimately gained access.</p>
<p>I've never been banned, but I might as well be.</p>
<p>Our biggest difficulty in getting people to talk with us are police departments that don't have a PIO available when we need to talk to someone. They tell us to call back the next day even if it's a huge story.</p>
<p>I covered a city where the city administrator forced me to go through him to get answers to all my questions, although he was not able to answer them. I complained to the City Council and mayor. They felt the same way, as they were shut out from information they were seeking. They worked to get him to let me talk to staff and eventually fired him.</p>
<p>The communications director put in place a gag order that prohibits employees from speaking with the media and sometimes the public, with threats of disciplinary action.</p>
<p>I don't think I have ever been explicitly banned from interviewing an employee at a particular agency. I would say that it is more common for PIO's to simply ignore your requests or for them to insist that, on a given issue, only a written statement will be provided.</p>
<p>Yes. We are not allowed to interview county employees. They can be suspended or otherwise disciplined for talking to the press</p>
<p>Sought interview with state troopers but was denied. No reason given, no recourse.</p>
<p>No, to my knowledge, we have never been banned from doing our stories.</p>
<p>Constantly happens with Indian tribes. On deadline there's nothing to be done about it. Talking to people angry enough to break the rules often works</p>
<p>A school district established a policy in which no one in the district could talk with me without going through the PIO. I worked around it using already established relationships and using my tone in what conversations I did have to undermine the policy by implying that I was not a demon, but just doing my job in looking for transparency by public agencies</p>
<p>They didn't feel my reporting was objective, which it wasn't. I had sufficient material from off the record sources to publish without official comment.</p>
<p>State agency prohibited any employee from speaking to reporters. I ignored it and contacted employees directly.</p>
<p>Told people unavailable even though they could've done interview.</p>
<p>In reporting on the death of an 18-year-old from a head injury.</p>
<p>It is believed he received the fatal injury from a fight but he was taken into custody, cleared to be</p>

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<p>housed in cells by paramedics but found unresponsive a few hours later, dying five days later.</p> <p>After 3.5 years, criminal charges were settled against the man originally accused of manslaughter at the preliminary hearing stage, receiving a \$1,000 fine for assault causing bodily harm.</p> <p>The victim's mother wasn't informed of the decision and was not asked if she would like to present a victim impact statement.</p> <p>I attempted to get a comment from (court) regarding what had happened but was told since there is an as of yet unscheduled fatality inquiry to hear the matter, he could not comment.</p> <p>I wrote an 850-word comment piece on how the system let the mother of the victim down who, from talking to the mother, garnered members of the public to offer her their support and they in turn contacted the minister themselves.</p> <p>I was granted a lengthy interview with the Assistant Deputy Minister several weeks later.</p>
<p>I have never been banned, although many times employees refuse to talk due to agency policy and for fear of losing their jobs.</p>
<p>Can't recall being banned from above, but some schools, agencies have used rules to not talk and refer questions to main office as a way of stonewalling.</p>
<p>They say it is policy.</p>
<p>Banned from the junior high school when brought in Attorney General for an opinion on open meeting law and a board member voting for his administrative daughter and son-in-law.</p>
<p>Local officials are much easier to deal with and more likely to allow principals/teachers to work with us.</p>
<p>A few years ago, top officials for a city government I covered told staff members they were not to talk with me. Myself and another reporter had exposed a corrupt nonprofit housing agency and mismanagement of millions of dollars in federal housing funds the city had received. Our editors and I complained about the situation, we filed numerous public records requests for the information we were seeking, and eventually the city relaxed the restrictions. The department manager over the city's housing programs never agreed to interviews with me again.</p>
<p>Elected officials, police, prosecutors and school officials often say no one is available, or no one allowed to comment. Was recently told I could not stand on a public street and shoot video from the same vantage point where the public was. I complained to a higher up in PIO and was finally given access---but 15 minutes AFTER the scene was cleared. I am now seeking information about health concerns in a local waterway and have been told for over a week officials will get back to me. They have not.</p> <p>I am also regularly told we cannot interview anyone who works for the local government or public utilities, etc.</p>
<p>I have never been banned by a PIO that I am aware of. I have had only one official who would not speak to me. It is my understanding, and I believe it, that it was his choice.</p>
<p>Forced to go through PIO because all requests to employee got directly forwarded; PIO insists on</p>

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knowing "what the story is about;" forced to continue going through the PIO and only speaking in mass conference calls with a bevy of attorneys for the state chiming in to complain about everything I asked.
Am told by some school systems that no employee is allowed to talk without permission.
I have never been outright banned, though some employees at a hospital needed preclearance due to privacy issues.
I usually put "They would not take questions."
A number federal agencies have this requirement. Many local ones do too. I can't think of a specific circumstance recently.
(Department) now refuses to recognize me as a journalist and refuses to put me on their media list
I have never been banned

Give any examples of agency officials monitoring interviews.
The PIO will sometime sit on my interviews.
This is such a common practice that individual incidents are easy to name. It occurs with state and federal agencies regularly. Agencies that I have dealt with that use this practice include the (Departments), to name only two.
(News channel) monitored an interview with (anchor).
Public affairs personnel often ask to listen in on interviews or sit in.
They often listen in or sit in on interviews with top officials.
PIO or "trusted officials" on the phone or in person during an interview.
Sometimes they will watch the interview when it airs or online. But sometimes they'll be present when I interview the subject.
I've had to interview top officials at the (Department on conference calls because the PIO needed to listen.
When interviewing Mayor, city PIO always there. Same for our County Executive. PIO's often call after a story has aired saying, "someone told them" something about the story. Often without actually seeing themselves. Lots of paranoia.
I've had PIO officers monitor phone interviews and also accompany me to schools to monitor interviews
Unless the PIO can't get to the interview, most of the interviews with City council leaders or corporate executives are done with the PIO present.
I don't know that I've been monitored. I am not told either way
Police
Military PIO
Hospital spokesperson
Phone interviews held on speakerphone, with the PIO sitting in the room.
They are generally in the studio when we're doing the interview.
A PR coordinator will listen in on an interview and try to rephrase answers to make them more palatable.
Chief of police has occasionally sat in on interviews with detectives / rank-and-file officers.

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City public works PIO will call and be on speaker phone and then i realize there are 5 people in the room monitoring the call
I was interviewing the head of a transition team and the flack sat in the room for the entire interview and determined when it started and finished.
Mayor's office, generally not true of police, but often hard to get response from police except press spokesman.
A multi-line phone call or group interview.
Conference calls are routine with (office). And PR staff take notes (clacking on their computers as you speak over their speaker) as their attorneys talk to the reporter. And then PR guys jump in if they don't like your question tone or focus.
When we get interview (not often) the are typically accompanied/monitored by a PIO.
Almost always there is a PIO in the room when we are conducting an on-camera interview. I can't remember when that has not been the case.
Interviewing sheriff, PIO will sit in. Some mayors.
Press aides joining officials on interviews, accompanying subjects during in-person interviews
Whenever I'm speaking to head of local park district, or police officers with city, spokesperson monitors phone call or interview.
The court PIO monitors some interviews. The attorney general spokeswoman monitors most.
Almost any time an interview is conducted with a government department head or commissioner, the PIO is there taking notes or recording the exchange. An example of positions where this happens: Governor of the State, Commissioners on the Governor's staff, Large city mayors, large city department heads (police chief, fire chief, Housing Directors, Health Dept Directors, etc).
They announce themselves on the phone that they're listening to the call, or they sit in on the interview if it's in-person.
Interviews with presidents, vice presidents often monitored.
They will sit in on the interview.
I was interviewing someone from an alternative energy company. The public relations chair was on the conference call.
Listening in on the calls.
Hospitals always monitor.
They typically set up a conference call, and then the PIO is on the call. If I try to call source direct, source often just loops in PIO, and we are all on a call.
Police/school etc. PIOs will simply stand there with you while you interview the official.
Use of speakerphone and blind copy on emails.
Sitting in on edit boards, being on the line during an interview.
Hospital officials sitting in during interviews with doctors and patients.
Often the PIO asks to sit in on an interview, or be an intermediary with an email.
Regularly cover happenings at (Fort), local Army post. PIOs are almost always present for interviews.
I just sort of assume they do.
A state agency might have two or three people in a conference call, including the PIO.
They hang out and stuff while interview is conducted.
Interview is set up with individual I need to interview. The PIO then sits in on the interview.
If I am talking to anyone but the head of the agency I most often deal with the PIO will be

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<p>“conferenced” in on a call or in the room. In one strange case, they made someone available for an interview but then tried to insist that I attribute what she said to the PIO.</p>
<p>Speaking to the base commander or officers about various programs and issues.</p>
<p>They watch my newscasts and call when the story concerns their agency.</p>
<p>I have a "minder" whenever I attend the public meetings of one agency to make sure I don't talk to any employees. I do it anyway and the "minder" tries to answer instead of allowing the employee to talk.</p>
<p>It happens routinely when I speak with someone by phone at an (agency).</p>
<p>Three-way telephone calls or the official is in the room during the interview</p>
<p>Through all the agencies I work with -- school, police, local government, hospitals -- a PIO is there beside me during the interview. Those in the medical field trust me and will not hover, but other agencies keep PIOs close.</p>
<p>Most interviews requested through official channels are monitored.</p>
<p>They typically sit in the same office where the interview is taking place, whether I'm doing the interview in person or whether I'm conducting it via speakerphone. If it's a studio pre-taped interview, they typically like to hear the interview on a monitor or be present in the studio.</p>
<p>Mayor's press folks monitor calls always by being on the line during conference calls.</p>
<p>PIOs will help arrange a phone interview and then be on the call when the subject calls me. Reason given most often is they are there to help clear up confusion, provide background or to help the subject avoid delving into matters deemed too sensitive.</p>
<p>This mostly happens with federal agencies, such as the (Department), in which the PIO has to be present when you talk to employees</p>
<p>Sitting in on interviews or taking part in a conference call.</p>
<p>During virtually every interview they will listen, not record, throughout the duration to answer questions that interviewee can't or to assure they are being clear, truthful and direct</p>
<p>They'll stand next to your interview and listen in.</p>
<p>Our local hospital always sits in on any interview we at the paper do. Sometimes the school system and (College) PIOs do the same.</p>
<p>(Department) officials sitting in on an interview with interview subject.</p>
<p>PIO will occasionally sit in, either in person or by telephone, particularly on personnel issues.</p>
<p>PIOs sitting in on interviews with the director of an organization, PIO escorting me to the person doing the interview & stands next to me during interview to listen</p>
<p>Spokesperson will be in the room for an interview with a medical professional sometimes.</p>
<p>Mayor's office makes the Police PIOs keep a list of all requests for interviews and the possible stories we call to inquire about.</p>
<p>Interviewing members of congress - PIO are always monitoring.</p>
<p>3-way call with the PIO on mute, or the PIO sitting in the room.</p>
<p>Frequently the PIO will sit in the same room or be on a conference call during an interview.</p>
<p>Sitting in on interviews.</p>
<p>By sitting in on interviews with other staff.</p>
<p>County attorney sitting in on interview with the county manager.</p>
<p>School Board PIO sitting in on interviews with school personnel.</p>
<p>PIO was on call - I was later told I would not be granted any more interviews after they didn't like the</p>

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questions.
PIOs will sit in on interviews with police chief/captains or monitor phone interviews with them. But they never interject.
Sometimes they will demand to be in the room during an in-person interview.
I've had some sit in on an interview or contribute information in a slant they would like to the article.
Conference call interviews.
They insist on attending the interview, record the interview, and at times attempt to interject.
Most of the time the PIO just stands there during the interview and occasionally interjects.
Recently had spokesman sit in on interview with conservation officials; mayors spokeswoman always sits in on interviews she helps set up.
When a public employee has never or rarely has been interviewed, the PIO usually is there as a coach or support for them. Or when the issue is controversial and negative, they are there as a witness.
Don't know one way or another.
State safety commissioner, state election coordinator had flacks listen in during fairly recent interviews. Governor always has at least one flack with him, even for one-one-interviews, usually recording the interview
Interviewed (Elected official), his press secretary was in the room during the interview.
Sit-in during the interview.
They have been in the room during the interview.
PIOs will be present in speakerphone interviews, most often in large state agencies where bureaucratic protocol is an ironclad law.
In an interview with the (Elected official), a PIO officer sat in on the interview. He was mostly quiet although he tried to clarify or simplify the (official's) statements for my quotes.
It is the practice of (Elected officials) I deal with to have their PIO person next to them when they speak to reporters.
Officials told me I could only submit questions via email, so they would have a complete list before granting any interview.
The PIO will either be on a call or be present if we have set up an in-person interview.
Interview with (Elected official). The monitoring was non-intrusive.
I set up an interview with the newly hired fire chief. When I arrived at the designated site that was not a government building, there sat the city's communications director.
The police PIOs almost always sit in if the interview is with the chief, less often when I speak to lower-level command staff or street-level patrol officers.
The Public Information Officer either sits in on the interview or will create a conference call, which they attend.
I'm not big on chaperoned interviews and try not to do them. You may as well just have the PIO provide you the information you need.
If someone in government is high up enough, they can talk to you on their own.
Sitting in on phone calls, requiring the interview time to be around their schedule so they can be present
Often state officials such as those with (Agencies).
It depends on if they have been asked to sit in on the meeting to offer any additional information to the

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topic I am working on.
Police chief and sheriff listening to what I'm being told.
They will sometimes sit in on the meeting to offer relevant information.
Sit in on phone interviews.
Mayor's PR person sitting in on interview.
When I interview the airport director, his PIO is usually also on the conference call.
The PIO has been present via conference phone during interviews with (appointed official) and others.
Hospital officials or in person interviews with sources PIOs hover.
Prison officials sit in with prisoners; attorney general staff always present for interviews with AG.
The PIO who sets up the interview will often be there during the taping.
PIO will meet at the interview time and watch. This happens with most municipal staffers I interview.
It's personality-driven. Some PIOs will literally sit in on interviews with their own recorders, which alters the dynamic of the interview. Employees will be more cautious and nervous. It's kind of a Big Brother-like tactic. Other PIOs simply hand an employee a reporter's contact and let us set up what we need, especially when it is a feature or non-controversial topic. The worst situations are conference calls - it's hard to hear and keep up with who is speaking.
A school district PIO sat in on my last interview with the superintendent of a large district here.
Sitting in on conference calls, in-person interviews; in my state, PIOs also communicate through a central state office that racks media requests.
PIO standing within earshot during field interviews, sitting at the table in a conference room set up for the interview.
It's not really monitoring, but the superintendent and the district financial manager always talk to me together.
Sitting in on face-to-face interviews.
Sitting in on speakerphone or in room.
On telephone interviews, the PIO is also on the line, and in in-person interviews, is in the room. Occasionally interrupts to steer the conversation in the agency's preferred direction or add points.
(Agency) is the most likely state agency I work with that monitors interviews, especially if I'm talking to the director or a warden. Interviews with inmates are somewhat less monitored depending on the format. The (Official's office) also had numerous people sitting in surrounding me when I once interviewed (Appointed official) at his office - felt to me like they were attempting to intimidate me by the sheer number of people in the room.
I was previously told by a state environmental PIO that I needed to contact them before I interview any employee. I was scolded after I attended a public hearing and did not inform the PIO that I was going. Later, I was given a guilt trip about not calling her first. I felt like I was a child who had permission from one parent to grab a cookie, then was told by the other parent that I was not allowed to have a cookie and should have asked first. It was a public meeting for goodness sake.
Conference calls in which the PIO and other officials will sit in, even if it's primarily one person speaking
I believe there are times the PIO has me on speakerphone and higher-ups are listening, unannounced, in the background.
Often the state official seems comfortable with the interview; flack is there for spin and to follow up with additional info

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In television, we almost always do face to face, so it's pretty normal to have a PIO tag along. They don't generally get involved in the interview though - just sit there and listen.
(Elected official) PIOs sitting in on all interviews PIOs sometimes keeping an eye on interviews of department heads; (Appointed official) PIOs often monitoring interviews of her.
Recently, my interview with the director of the local public housing authority was monitored by the PIO. Same with a recent interview with a (agency) staffer.
Police chief or PIO will listen in on conversation.
Recent interview with district attorney with PIO on line as well.
Department's PIO generally takes notes and participates in sit-down interviews with employees.
The public information officer attended an interview I scheduled with the city manager about the five-year strategic plan; a school district public information officer attended an interview I had with the superintendent about a community planning process.
Setting up interviews as conference calls
They'll stand by as the expert does the interview.
Interviews on speaker phone is usually the way it is done.
PIOs sit in interview or have top staff there as a second set of ears
PIO sat in on an interview I was doing with a professor. Sometimes interviews are set up as conference calls with a PIO in the room. PIOs sometimes escort me when I am on campus.
They sit in and suck all the air out of the room.
(Agency) and any hospital working with the (agency) has PIOs sit in on phone calls all the time.
On the phone with a top official, I could hear the agency attorney in the background; some interviews are on speakerphone so that other officials are in the room.
(Public school)- Had administration on the telephone when interviewing about sufficient technology to implement testing funded by (foundation) (tests funded, but not the technology to implement them).
I have had several sit downs with both city administrators and the mayor and their PIO or spokesperson has been there the entire time, interjecting or asking for clarifications (or even clarifying the answers of the interviewees).
Calls delayed until interview subject returns call and states that he and PIO are on conference call or speakerphone together.
Conference calls for phone interviews.
The (Department) monitors almost every telephone interview I have done with agency officials.
Police PIO wears a recording device, so they are not misquoted..
Once when a state health agency granted an interview with an official on (state's) medical program, the public information officer took part in the conference call.
PIOs in multiple prosecuting attorney offices (including at the federal level) routinely sit in on interviews but rarely offer input.
State superintendent of school's PIO is always on the phone or in person for interviews, specifically with superintendent of schools, but also department officials.
The PIO is always on-hand for in-person interviews of the city manager. The PIO has never been directly involved in them and has never stopped an interview or asked him to not answer the question. This practice has only been employed for interviews with the city manager. Interviews with other senior directors have not been monitored.
They sit in on conference calls they arrange and moderate. It's getting worse; they all routinely insist

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on knowing why we want to do the interviews. There must be some mass public official PIO trainings going on.
Almost always any federal statement must be cleared by higher ups, often the (Department), before anything can be said on the record. Almost no one speaks on the record verbally.
I needed to speak with a field officer to understand how she typed records into a database, what it was called, and what elements she used for her work. The PIO refused to allow this. When he finally agreed, there were four PIOs on the phone with me and the employee.
PIO will stand next to me as I interview people at a board meeting. PIO will listen over the phone when I interview over the phone. PIO will arrange interviews and then sit in the room.
Some agencies insist on having PIOs there to "hand hold" the subject. Case in point, when the state police announced its massive "crackdown" on DWI/DUI arrests during the holidays, I asked to speak with a supervisor of a major patrol district about the effort. The PIO "arranged" the interview, although I'd contacted the supervisor directly prior to said arrangement, and then sat in. The supervisor, knowing full well the PIO reports directly to the head of the state police, seemed timid, and his answers were boiler-plate and gave me the impression that they weren't really doing anything differently. The story reflected as such.
Interviewing hospital doctors, PR person is always there.
Sitting in on telephone interviews/ or in person interviews.
Conference calls with subjects.
Phone interviews where the agency official stays on the phone as I interview the needed person.
I interview the police chief and the PIO sits in the room.
I don't have any, I am sure they record my conversations.
They will listen in on phone conversations.
(Agency). More common for interest groups
Often have interviews set up by phone with PIO there in room. I don't mind that so much.

If the request was fulfilled, did they provide you with the information you asked for? If "sort of," please explain.
They don't completely answer my questions.
When dealing with PIOs for interviews or responses to query, I typically get the sense that they are giving me the information they want me to have, not necessarily all of the information that is out there. (NOTE: I have never had to do a formal records request; most of my work involves interviews.) I have noticed, particularly for controversial issues, responses seem intentionally clipped or short, with little or no supporting information.
Much of document info was redacted.
Sometimes the information is deliberately meeting the bare minimum of the request, if that.
PIOs for state government provide what they want from your request, in some cases.
We received blackout reports. PIO said some info was off limits because the case was "under investigation."
Not enough of requested info. Required follow up
The answer is generally not specific. It's instead an acknowledgment that they received the request. They often believe they have answered all our questions.

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Ill get about 60 percent of my request fulfilled and have to hit back to get the remaining information.
Key parts and passages of copies of police reports and other documents obtained via Freedom of Information Act requests are increasingly redacted.
I have requested documents, but then a good portion of the documents come with info 'blacked out' which they say is 'confidential' or part of their own internal investigation. They have ways around providing information even if it is suppose to be public record. With one agency in particular, they also always wait the full 30 days before complying.
They provided numbers, but not the breakdown that was requested.
Sometimes they release lists, or contracts or other documents that do not spell out the issue we are researching. Without context/interpretation, the records are not as useful
They told me who to contact to get the information locally instead of providing it themselves (at the state level).
They got some of the requested info but not all.
Sometimes a state agency fulfills only a portion of a records request, often resulting in a tug-o-war over the rest of the records request.
The facts and figures given to me were a little outdated
I was looking for court documentation on a ruling on a lawsuit, but part of the information had been read into the record and was not yet available in writing.
On more than one occasion, they have not gotten all the information due to no understanding the original request.
Information is provided, but incomplete. Follow-up inquiries turned up more than double the information initially provided.
Not all of the requested information was initially disclosed.
Incomplete information.
Almost every request I file leads to an agency claiming it's overly burdensome to provide all the records.
The city always sends a request for extension within the deadline, and then after the maximum amount of time allowed, they would provide some redacted documents or charge exorbitant fees.
They offered more general answers, without any follow-up clarification.
It was a general statement; it was not useful.
Very basic information; few details.
You almost always never get what you want, and that means you'll have to do another FOI.
Often, they only give about half of what you are looking for, but sometimes that's because of our self-imposed deadlines. More time, we would get more stuff.
Documents were heavily redacted.
Supplied some of the requested documents but not all.
After a 6-year-old boy was killed in a traffic crash, grief counselors were sent to his school. I asked the school board officials how many times grief counselors had been sent to county schools this school year. I also asked for an itemized list that included the names of the schools where the counselors were sent. I got the number of schools but no names.
They gave me the minimum they thought answered my request and didn't tell me there was much more. I found that out, and we wrestled over whether I could have it.
The (Department) didn't provide all the documents requested because I "didn't ask" for specific ones

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<p>they felt weren't part of the public record. These included two letters from top agencies advising against an energy plant proposed for the region.</p>
<p>Federal open-records request was partially fulfilled, and not until when the government agency decided to release that information to the public at large via news release, after repeatedly delaying responding to the request.</p>
<p>I wanted an estimated number of people affected by a new immigration policy. The regional PIO checked with (Department), but they didn't have the number. I'm doubtful the (department) is ignorant of that number, but it's not in their interest to publish it. So the PIO informed me she didn't have the number.</p>
<p>Took repeated requests to get the information I requested because the PIO would not put me in touch with the person compiling it. Eventually, I was right up against a deadline and could not get all my questions answered.</p>
<p>Sometimes information is provided in the wrong format, dragging out the process of obtaining public records.</p>
<p>Sometimes it requires repeated requests to get exactly what I'm looking for.</p>
<p>There are sometimes "no comments" given or information that is provided may not be not exactly what was asked for unless the reporter is very specific about what they want.</p>
<p>It often seems that requests are fulfilled in ways that deliberately prolong the process - "miscommunications," that lead to partial fulfillment or the wrong documentation being delivered. The information is eventually given, and PIO's apologize for "honest mistakes" that make it much more difficult to report information when it is most critical to the public and often would seem to be least convenient for the administrator's agenda.</p>
<p>Provided some responsive information/documents, but ignored requests for others such as lapel cam video.</p>
<p>We got most of the requested information immediately, a bit more information after a second request and expect to get the final information (which is less essential) later, after the deadline.</p>
<p>The personal services contract included no process for accountability.</p>
<p>The city has repeatedly blocked my public records requests to the point that we had to get our lawyers involved over a financial study that multiple property owners and brokers were also requesting in the city. Ultimately, we only got three pages of the document. They used an exception in state public records law by retaining a financial consultant through their private law firm to keep the study shrouded in the squishy legal realm of attorney-client privilege.</p>
<p>We received some of what we asked for and had to go back more than once to get the rest of it, explaining, in detail, each time what we needed.</p>
<p>Results vary by state and local agency. Some respond relatively promptly, but usually wait to the outer limits of the time allowed by Pennsylvania law. (Department) ignores the timelines designated by federal law. Local agencies deny having correspondence and records that I believe exist. Some lose track of requests so that it is necessary to constantly monitor their progress.</p>
<p>They redacted information from the documents that wasn't allowed by law. If I wanted to challenge it, the newspaper would have to take the agency to court, which is costly.</p>
<p>It's more complicated than that. The committee had been operating illegally by meeting without public notice or minutes. The (Act) requires minutes. In lieu of minutes, after a violation is confirmed, notes, video transcripts or other documents can be published. In the meantime we were forced to file a FOIA</p>

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<p>doc request for notes, and emails. In retaliation the entire committee quit. We are still waiting for the other documents.</p>
<p>The FOIA was delivered after the deadline and ultimately was a partial response so I'm still waiting.</p>
<p>Some of it was restricted.</p>
<p>They denied the request and then provided a fitting legal explanation as to why.</p>
<p>Partial response for documents request; others declared exempt from state's open records law.</p>
<p>Gave me some documents, but there were more docs that they withheld that I had to fight for.</p>
<p>Provided a redacted version for a fee.</p>
<p>A common dodge is claiming not to understand the scope and nature of request.</p>
<p>For some strange reason the police are declining to give the name of a homicide victim, citing a judge's order sealing the case because one suspect is a juvenile. Even when cases are sealed, a victim's name is public record, as are charges and the suspect's name if they are charged as an adult.</p>
<p>Often will give info but not complete info; or much redacted.</p>
<p>They will give me most of what I want but will occasionally tell me that certain parts of my request were either too difficult to process or unavailable in the format I ask for. I know they're lying when I get a PDF of an Excel spreadsheet, but they won't send me the actual Excel file.</p>
<p>They answer questions but sometimes have to ask same question different way a few times to get answer.</p>
<p>When I asked for particular records on candidates for college dean, they said it would be too much work, and suggested I wait until the candidate list had been culled to a smaller number. I said no. They wound up putting the material on a website for me to access.</p>
<p>They provide documents, but a limited amount.</p>
<p>The usual response is the request was "too broad" to fill.</p>
<p>I asked for the governor's travel records, including how much was spent and if taxpayer money was used, and they said they don't keep those records and instead gave me a copy of his official calendar to show me where he's traveled on official business.</p>
<p>I asked for an electronic copy of the payroll. I received in the mail a packet of paper - the printed payroll. I had to take a copy of the state's Open Records Act to prove the definition of "record" includes an Excel spreadsheet. What could have been a couple of clicks within five minutes of receiving the request, it took seven days. This included arguing that names and pay to employees younger than 18 were exempted for "privacy." Completely not true. When a private company took over operation of the local jail, booking records became highly redacted, including details of the crime, age and address of the inmate and arresting officer.</p>
<p>Some documents were redacted because of attorney-client privilege.</p>
<p>I requested a mug shot and was sent a mug shot of the same person but for a different crime and year. When I requested the correct mug shot, I was told that was the only one available and the PIO suggested we crop the date out. When I responded that I couldn't do that and asked him why the record I needed was not available. I got a reply back hours later with the correct mug shot and an email with "advice on professional conduct" which was a reprimand disguised as advice. He took me questioning him as disrespect. This was a particularly rare but unpleasant experience that I feel was strongly influenced by the fact that I am a young woman, and he was an older man.</p>
<p>They provide their press release and then state, "That is all the information we have at this time."</p>
<p>We are ALWAYS very detailed and specific on what we are requesting. They often leave out one or</p>

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more parts to our requests.
Most recent contact was with PIO for utility company, and he declined full answers until utility officials have spoken with town supervisor who is on vacation, so interview and info was limited.
Seeing more and more redactions.
Law is unenforceable without lawyers so state can mollify sometimes by providing some of the info requested
Sometimes, records are withheld; at times, it seems clear that records have been edited, though it can be unclear.
I have a lot of requests where some piece or document is left out. Usually once I point it out, they comply immediately.
The person provided part of what was requested but said there was no record of the other part, which is required by law.
They rejected my key request, granting less significant portions only. I have appealed their decision and am optimistic I will win.
They'll often say we'll give you one piece or part of the Right to Know request information sought.
The information that was ultimately provided was redacted/limited.
I asked for all emails to and from city officials about a certain chamber of commerce staff member. I was really looking for one certain document, and I got it. Before receiving that document, I was told there were some other interesting emails responding to it. I received the one document I set out to find, but not the other possibly interesting documents that should have been covered under my FOIA request.
The (City) often denies our FOIA requests. Most recently, we requested police documents, including video police recorded, of an incident. The department provided some of the documents, but wouldn't release the police video.
They give the information they want to provide. Oftentimes, it's a statement and they avoid on camera interviews.
Incomplete - it may have been my question that was not clear
It was a big data dump -- I had to weed through a lot of pages of data to find what I had asked for. They gave me way more than I asked for.
Crucial parts of the report were redacted, beyond the legal stipulations.
They went to the Attorney General's office but were struck down in releasing some of the info to paper.
Most documents returned are highly redacted.
The problem is that you never know what they didn't include. We've found out, after the fact, on some public records requests, that some sensitive documents were left out. The public records officers at the largest public institution I cover are known to really scrub the records before releasing them. So we're always suspicious about what we get.
The data I requested was buried among a lot of other data I didn't request.
Heavily redacted.
Some records released, not all, followed by vague explanations of why others not released.
They redact or ask for more time to complete the entire request.
Answer one of two questions then dodge additional questions.
Not a complete response
I was given document that contained some of the information I was seeking, but not in context. Codes were used that were not defined.

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Partial information delivered, or delivered in less-than-useful format (i.e., spreadsheet data in PDF rather than CSV or Excel file).
My request was denied, although it was a legitimate request.
In a PDF form rather than text / data form; improper redactions; cut off the records as of the date of the request, not the date fulfilled (18 months later).
You never get what you fully ask for anymore.
Recently, I requested video footage from a court case. Instead, I got a printed PDF of a PowerPoint presentation.
Filed a request pursuant to the state's FOIA for an accounting of a public bank account, which state law says should be subject to FOIA. In return I got several pages of bank account summaries, but I wouldn't call it an "accounting," per se. It's as if the agency distributed as little information as they could to adhere technically to FOIA.
The information was not complete

Did the PIO or custodian answer questions you had about the public records or the information you were seeking? If "sort of," please explain.
The answered my questions in the most general response possible. I did not get detailed or direct answers.
Sometimes the school district's PIO will go back and forth with me by email for an entire afternoon as I try to get one point clarified. Mixed in is often criticism about articles we have written going back a year to before I arrived here.
The PIO chooses what he/she will talk about; otherwise they dance around the issue or say they can't discuss or don't know The more controversial or in-depth the request, the less information.
I was waiting for a judge's ruling on a civil case. She took forever to write it, but once it was done, the court clerk had a copy waiting for me.
Sometimes yes, sometimes no.
They answer questions they want to answer or questions they think you should ask. It takes a lot of energy to persuade them to open up. Some do but they are few and far between.
He just explained he didn't have any more information. What I saw was what there was.
She kept asking me for the purpose of the request and complained that she needed to pay someone overtime to pull the record. She demanded to know why my request was important.
Court records I asked to see were made available. Sometimes information is minimal or fails to include any details.
I asked for specific invoices she said did not exist and gave me broader financial information that made it tough to pinpoint the expenditures I was trying to determine.
They didn't understand enough about how their own agency worked to answer my questions.
They offered a general answer, but were not able to answer more specific follow-up questions. I had to clarify some items.
Few details
Appeal forthcoming.
Both dealing with the school system:
For one records request they told me they did not have digital copies of charter school applications. For

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another one they continued to tell me the salary numbers were not available in a digital format and that it would cost hundreds of dollars for me to obtain.
As explained in my earlier answer, she provided me the answers that she was provided by the hierarchy.
The PIO had a habit of delaying my requests and then dumping data at the last minute that she could not answer questions about.
They don't always give you what you seek.
I was given a reason as to why it was unlikely that I would receive the records.
Responsive to some questions, but may ignore others at their discretion.
I've had PIOs badger me with repeated questions of "what do you want??" instead of giving me information on what records are available. It's clearly obstructionist, and I believe it stems from ignorance about what journalists are supposed to be doing. Some PIOs, the good ones that are typically from journalism, understand that reporters are trying to function from the assumption that governments keep records for the purpose of keeping taxpayer-funded activity subject to public inspection. Others think you're just trying to stab governments in the back or "get them" on some kind of wonky political misstep.
Basically said documents spoke for themselves or that we'd have to check with another person for explanations.
Sometimes. It is frequently hard to get questions answered about what records are kept so as to structure requests well.
It is clear that the committee, the town manager, the mayor and the town council have a very poor idea of statutory requirements.
PIO didn't know, promised to 'get back with you.' Last two, one did; one didn't.
They claimed I couldn't have access to all of the records I requested, but I consulted an attorney, and he said they were flat out wrong. Still trying to get the records.
Again, I've had claims of not understanding used as ruse to buy time, to formulate answers.
They are looking into the matter at the moment, might give me the information later today.
Often, the PIO knows the public records law, but is not familiar with the actual information or data I want. I've asked if what I have was complete, and the answer usually is "I think so" with little follow up unless I really push for a definite answer.
My questions were regarding a city government personnel matter, so few details - other than those included in the provided documents - were given.
Continually said they were getting the information for me, then didn't, so had to file a freedom of information act request
I asked the details of a worker's comp case that was being settled by the County Commission. I was provided a summary that was written by the risk manager, so he went beyond providing a document and gave me a summary instead, which was preferable.
Could have been more specific describing the record, the information fields contained, things in the file I wasn't interested in.
I talked with the assistant city manager, which answered my questions.
Many areas are not responded.
PIOs tend to believe records are closed unless the media argues them to be open. The law is exactly the opposite. All records are considered open unless exempted by law. We spend a lot of time educating

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PIOs on the law.
When he provided the incorrect record it was presented as the record I had asked for. When I asked about the discrepancy his suggestion was to alter the photo, and he told me that it was the only mug shot available. I had to follow up asking why the record we needed was unavailable. While this questioning resulted in getting me the correct mug shot it also opened the door to this man freaking out on me and telling me I was unprofessional.
PIO referred to "talking points" during questioning. This led to many non-answers -- basically evading my questions by reciting the script.
Was vague about what had been redacted and why.
They speak more in generalities rather than answering specific/pointed questions.
As with the last question, some information was supplied, but much was not - though promises were made that more would be forthcoming within a week.
We hear what they want us to hear. Other than that, they "don't know" or it's redacted, or no comment. Some are more frank than others.
Often the answers are very narrow, so as to be unhelpful or misleading about the range of related records or their meaning.
She explained that she would provide me with the requested documents, but then denied my request for the document I wanted the most.
B.S. answers
Was seeking info on officer-involved fatal shootings in the state, but records are not kept in a consistent manner and different agencies withheld different information.
Said all the info was there, didn't have further info.
I was given answers I knew were incorrect.
Not completely informed.
They provided incomplete answers and were reluctant to set up a time to meet to discuss any additional questions.
They tried to charge me for photocopying - when we said we'd come to the office with a scanner they "magically" were able to provide the docs in PDF within minutes.
In a follow up court filing regarding a federal court lawsuit filed by the (City) in the online notice of filings, it was noted a document posed a "constitutional question." I asked what that question was, as well, if they could confirm if it was the same jurisdictional issue outlined in the original lawsuit. The answer couldn't be given over the phone and couldn't be confirmed until two days later when the requested documents were sent via fax.
We know a particular document was created and exists by government workers at a particular agency. But as it became part of a lawsuit, it was no longer in the possession of the agency in question, so they refused not only my request but to tell me where it went.
Vague general statement emailed, so they'd have a response without adding new or useful information.
Some of the questions were answered.
They provided their side of the story, but without the ability to verify their answers.
Most recently I requested information regarding the prevalence of new hospital construction from the state agency that oversees licensing and inspection. I told the PIO I wanted to know if hospital construction was on the rise or decline and what type of construction was most common now. I received an email at 4:57 p.m. on Friday informing me that there were "about 70" plans currently under

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review.
They didn't have expert answers for some questions, so we would either try to figure out how to "write around" the data or person who could provide the correct information.
I received a form letter.
Only on background, and only some of them.
Lots of "off the record" stuff from the police chief at the time. Pretty much just could quote public record.
Only in general terms after giving general statistics. Refused to give more specific details on the subject matter after releasing a general statistic.
The PIOs often have little to do with the FOI request. They receive them and then they hand the response back. Usually, the work of the request is handled by administrative staff or attorneys for those agencies.
Gave out smallest detail
I often get rejected for public records requests.
They answered questions about the specific material, but hedged on what supporting documents or other materials I could need.
They answer some questions, never go into detail and use exemptions in FOIA law to apply broadly in refusing releasing info and/or docs.
Direct dodge of the question, so he responded, but refused to address the information requested.
They answered the questions they wanted answered, not the ones I asked.
The questions were answered, but vaguely, and often read like pre-written statements.