



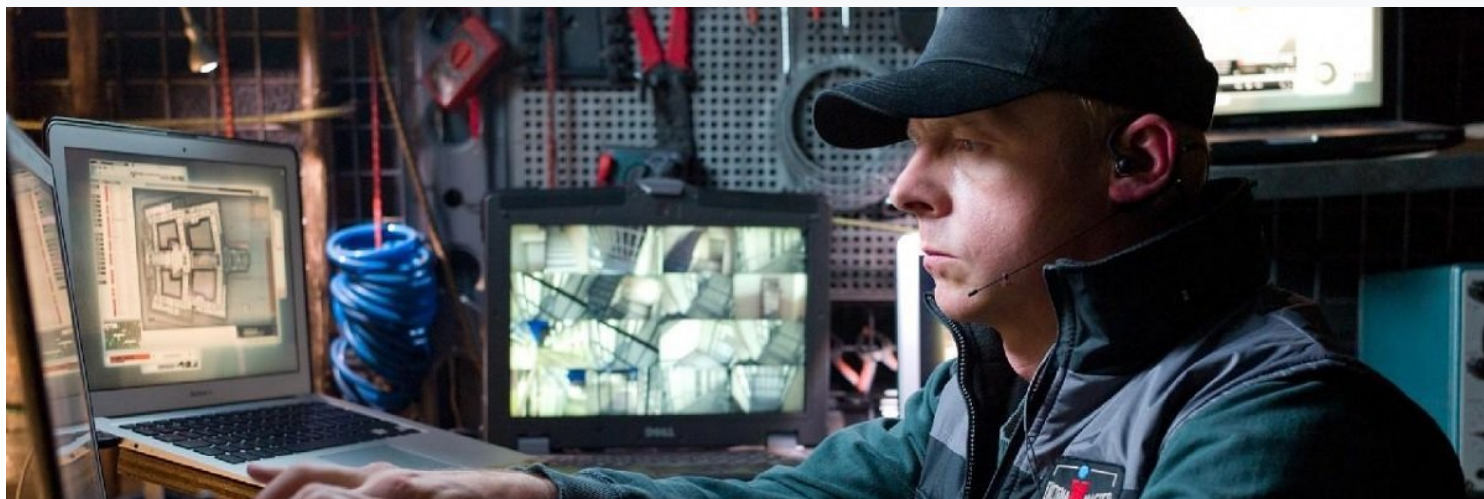
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August 21, 2018

UPDATED: The CIA's secret public email address

Since 2016, the Agency's FOIA office has finally allowed requesters to use email instead of fax. They just never told requesters about it.

Written by [Emma Best](#)

Edited by [Michael Morisy](#), [JPat Brown](#)

Update: Though the Agency has still not responded to our emailed inquiry after over a week, the CIA informed OGIS, who then informed us, that "the email address, cia_foia@ucia.gov, is only used to communicate with the public and should not to be used to submit FOIA requests. To submit requests, you can mail the request to the address given, send a fax, or use the portal."

However, the CIA's FOIA website [still states that the Agency "cannot receive or respond to e-mail messages" regarding requests](#). No explanation for this discrepancy has been given.

Further Update: A day after this update, the CIA responded via the cia_foia@ucia.gov, email and reiterated the same clarification made to OGIS. No other clarification was given.

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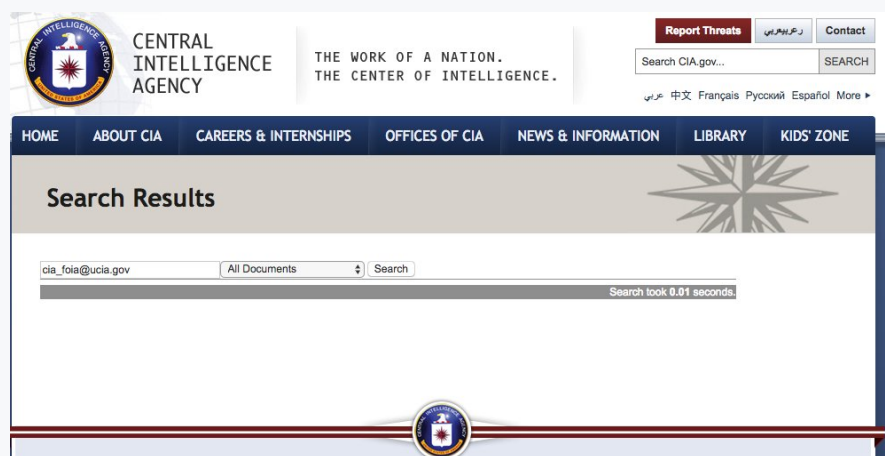
No Responsive Documents

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vaguely cumbersome [portal](#)), prompting [jokes](#) and [criticism](#) regarding the otherwise cutting-edge CIA insistence on the '80s technology [instead of email](#). The system caused headaches internally as well, with the Agency routinely complaining about the number and size of faxes that they receive. So why, in 2016, when the CIA finally implemented an [email account for FOIA for requesters to use](#), wasn't there greater fanfare in FOIA community? Because the CIA never told requesters about it.

Even searching the Agency's website for the email address turns up nothing.



The email address, cia_foia@ucia.gov, was created in 2016 (after a [year of planning](#)) for requesters to use to contact CIA directly. The Agency didn't make a public announcement of this or reveal the fact outside of the [Chief FOIA Officer's annual report](#). A search of a number of FOIA response letters from the Agency shows that they didn't routinely disclose the email address' existence to requesters, despite (if not because of) the ubiquitous use of and massive convenience associated with email compared to fax machines and snail mail.

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Access Professionals. This provides them with the opportunity to hear what transparency advocates have to say about FOIA administration at the federal level. Our professionals also follow a website maintained by open government groups and FOIA advocates to spot developments that affect CIA's public access programs.

- CIA FOIA professionals routinely engage with members of the public in order to clarify and properly scope requests. In one example, a requester submitted multiple requests for Agency records on a specific event. CIA FOIA professionals corresponded with the requester via email and explained that the processing of her requests would be facilitated by combining them into one request.
- Our electronic reading room provides helpful tips on how to compose effective FOIA requests. Requesters seeking additional information not found on CIA.gov may use our FOIA hotline at (703) 613-1287, which is staffed during routine business hours when the US Government is open. In Fiscal Year 2016, we will also established an email address (cia_foia@ucia.gov) which requesters may use to contact us directly.

The only other mention of it on the Agency's website is in the [report from the following year](#), adding that requesters can use it to seek "additional information not found on CIA.gov" and that the address is staffed during "normal business hours."

5. Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA?

- CIA FOIA professionals attended the annual American Society of Access Professionals conference and similar public access conferences. This provided them with the opportunity to hear what transparency advocates have to say about FOIA administration at the federal level. Our professionals also followed media coverage, and websites maintained by open government groups and FOIA advocates to spot developments that affect CIA's public access programs, and continually reviewed the DOJ website for current guidance.
- CIA FOIA professionals routinely engage with members of the public in order to clarify and properly scope requests. For example, an academic researching the political economy of authoritarian governments in Eastern Europe requested all records on a specific political party in a specific country for a 16-year period. After several discussions with the requester to understand his specific interest, he agreed to revise his request to documents about official corruption within the specified country's government, and expanded the request to include documents about seven named companies that were involved in those activities during the 16-year period. Through these negotiations, CIA was able to tailor the request to what the academic was truly interested in and also identify specific search parameters to locate the appropriate responsive material.
- CIA's electronic reading room provides helpful tips on how to compose effective FOIA requests. Requesters seeking additional information not found on CIA.gov may call the CIA FOIA hotline at (703) 613-1287 or write to cia_foia@ucia.gov, which is staffed during normal business hours when the US Government is open. CIA answered all hotline calls or returned calls by the next business day, answering questions in real time when possible, or informing the caller that CIA would call back or respond by letter.

As mentioned above, even the built-in search for the CIA's website turns up no instances of the email address. Prior to a [tweet](#) alerting people to the email address' existence, even Google was only able to find it in the two reports and a court document. A [search of DocumentCloud](#) proved similarly fruitless, producing only a trio of hits from the same court case.

5 results (0.32 seconds)

[PDF] COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE - Boston University
<https://sites.bu.edu/tclcf/files/2017/05/Johnson-Complaint.pdf> ▼
 May 4, 2017 - VIA EMAIL (cia_foia@ucia.gov) AND U.S. MAIL. Information and Privacy Coordinator, Central Intelligence Agency. Washington, D.C. 20505.

[PDF] Central Intelligence Agency 2018 Chief Freedom of Information ... - CIA
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 email address (cia_foia@ucia.gov) which requesters may use to contact us directly. 6. If you did not conduct any outreach during the reporting period, please ...

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The scope of the email address' use and purpose isn't clear. According to the Agency, the year they launched the address they used it to correspond with "a requester via email and explained that the processing of her requests would be facilitated by combining them into one request." In the [court case mentioned previously](#), the email address was used for communications between the CIA's FOIA office and a requester's lawyer. It's not immediately clear if the Agency will accept FOIA requests that are emailed to the office. An email asking the Agency if they accept FOIA requests submitted through, and an explanation for why not if they didn't, was not answered by the time of publication. (This article will be updated if the Agency responds).

The fact that it's part of the Agency's outreach effort for FOIA requesters makes its repeated and systematic failure to inform the requesters about its existence not only ironic but deeply concerning. FOIA requests have been submitted for information on any [efforts to promote the possibility of email communications](#) that aren't immediately apparent, along with the [most recent 4,000 pages of emails](#) sent and received from that address.

The 2017 FOIA [Chief FOIA Officer's annual report](#) is embedded below.



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time it is not possible to print the document with annotations.

Image via [Paramount Pictures](#)

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