How to request records pursuant to FOI Laws in 8 not-so-easy but worthwhile steps
STEP ONE

What records are you looking for? documents/records not questions

Who has them, state, federal, and which agency?
STEP TWO

Search agency website.

Find a stakeholder who already FOILed.

Call agency PIO or FOI officer - ask for the records, or at least get name or description of record.
STEP THREE

Try to find the record description by searching:
- Muckrock archive
- DocumentCloud
- NYSCOG advisory opinions (for FOIL)
- Agency subject matter lists
STEP FOUR

Request must be specific and describe the record you are requesting.

Use a template or sample letter, or try using a platform like iFOIA, Muckrock or FOIAMachine.

Request must include the full name of the FOI statute name in your request, and your contact information. You should ask for a fee waiver.
STEP FIVE

Wait!

NYS FOIL: five days to acknowledge, and 20 to respond to a request.

Federal FOIA: 20 days to respond.
STEP SIX

Your request is:

Fulfilled or denied.
STEP SEVEN

Request is denied - must cite specific exemption.

Know the law - you should appeal the denial in writing - in NYS you have 10 days to appeal.

If that doesn't work, you can sue.
Request is fulfilled—
Analyze the records and report on them!

Publicly archive the records at MuckRock, FOIA Machine, or DocumentCloud.