

Be bold, pursue RTI query

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DOSE OF GOOD ADVICE: Experts offer tips on drafting effective RTI applications at a workshop in Delhi

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Treat your RTI application like a course of antibiotics." This was academician and activist Shekhar Singh's tip to participants on the second day of the RTI workshop organised by The Times of India as part of its I Lead India initiative.

Singh, one of the key architects of the RTI Act, used this analogy to emphasise the importance of pursuing a query. "Antibiotics don't have the desired effect until you take them for the prescribed duration. Similarly, pursue your RTI query until you get satisfactory answers. If you leave it halfway, it will embolden government officers to get away without providing complete information."

This, and many other practical tips, made the sessions interesting and lively for participants who were eager to learn the nuts and bolts of the act. For instance, Venkatesh Nayak, co-ordinator of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, reminded the audience that the right to information was their fundamental right. "It's not something which can be denied or which needs to be justified. If you have asked for information from a relevant government authority, they are duty-bound to provide it to you."

The sessions, moderated by the Na-

tional Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information (NCPRI), also saw participants seeking guidance from experts on bottlenecks faced by them on the RTI route. From individual queries on delay in release of pension to corruption in government hospitals, the experts provided suggestions on how RTI applications should be formulated, who they should be addressed

to and appeals that can be made if answers are not forthcoming or unsatisfactory. "In order to get a re-

sponse to your query, it's very important to draft the application correctly," Anjali Bhardwaj of NCPRI said. "For this, one should be very specific and ask for details. A vague application will only get vague answers."

When a participant disclosed that her query had resulted in her getting phone calls at odd hours asking why she wanted the information, Singh advised her to persist. "The very fact that there is resistance in providing information shows that what you have asked for is important enough for people to be disturbed about it."

The workshop also reiterated that the RTI Act was not a magic wand. "One should be clear that RTI can't deliver you from bad governance," cautioned Singh. "What it can do is deliver information which then has to be used judiciously to solve your problems."

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR ROAD/DRAIN CONSTRUCTION

A road/drain is being constructed at _____ (exact location with landmarks). Please provide the following information in relation to this:

1. Please provide a copy of the contract and tender awarded for construction of the work.
2. Please provide a map showing the exact location, length and starting and ending point of the work which is being constructed.
3. What is the date of the start and completion of the work as per the contract/tender?
4. How much money has been allocated/sanctioned for construction of the road/drain and till date what is the actual expenditure on the construction of the work?
5. From which fund/account is this work being carried out? Please provide the full name of the funds and the account head.
6. I would like to inspect all the papers and files (contract, tender, work files, measurement books, inspection reports and any other files/papers) related to the construction of this road/drain.

Source: NCPRI

EXPERT SPEAK

“ To file a successful RTI application, it is important to remember the 3 Ps – Patience, Persistence and Public Pressure. This will enable you to get the maximum out of your query

— **LOKESH BATRA** | RTI ACTIVIST



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On RTI Day, step forward to file a query about issues that matter. This is an I Lead India initiative in partnership with NCPRI