

## **Assignment for Freedom Fighters Assemble Episode 4**

FOIA: What it is, and how to make it work for you

### **Learning objectives:**

The class will hear Julia Roeder, now a Michigan State University journalism major, talk about her work on *The Tower* at Grosse Pointe South High School that earned her the 2024 Student Freedom of Information Award from the Student Press Law Center and the Joseph L. Brechner Freedom of Information Project.

Roeder discusses with Cathy Kuhlmeier and Jonathan Gaston-Falk, an SPLC attorney, the challenges she faced when she tried to get information to report on what happened between two district employees and the former school board president.

### **Materials needed:**

Access to computers to hear the podcast and read about FOIA and apply what students have heard to explore their own state's laws and perhaps write an article.

### **Warm-up/prep:**

Listen to the 28-minute conversation about Julia's challenge to get access to information related to her school board and how an SPLC attorney helped her through the process of trying to obtain records that should, by law, be open to the public, including high school students/journalists. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) on the national level and state laws allow anyone access to government meetings and actions, but content and access vary by state.

### **Activity 1:**

Discuss as a class or in smaller groups, coming together to share what kinds of topics students feel should be covered about your school or community but might be hard to access information. If logical human sources aren't available or, more likely, aren't willing to talk, what kind of records might be available as source material that would allow students to write a thorough news article?

### **Activity 2:**

Because there are different open records laws for each state, explore what YOUR state requires to make a FOIA request. A good place to find info about YOUR state is the [Open Government Guide from the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#). Use the sheet provided as a start to help you collect important information you would need to file a request in your state.

### **Possible final activity:**

Choose one of your topics from Activity 1 and assign reporter(s) to explore this. When they run into information they need but can't access, as Julia did, find out what school board minutes or official information or other records might contain it. Plan what you think you should obtain, then read information on the [Student Press Law Center website](#) about FOIA and how other students used it. When you're ready, reach out to the [SPLC Legal Hotline](#) and discuss this with an attorney from the SPLC.