

# When RTI Information Must Be Supplied Free of Cost

**Direct answer.** RTI information is **free of cost** in two situations: (1) **Section 7(5)** - the applicant holds a Below Poverty Line (BPL) card, and (2) **Section 7(6)** - the PIO has missed the 30-day reply deadline (or the 48-hour life-or-liberty window). In Section 7(6) cases the supply must be free **even if the applicant did not pay the original Rs 10**. Claim the exemption by writing one paragraph at the start of your application or first appeal. The PIO **must** record the reason if rejecting the claim.



## When to use this guide

- You are a BPL cardholder and want to file an RTI without paying the Rs 10 fee or any photocopy charges.
- You filed an RTI more than 30 days ago and the PIO has now sent a reply asking for photocopy charges. You can refuse to pay and demand free supply under Section 7(6).
- You are filing the first appeal because the PIO is silent past 30 days and you want to claim free supply as part of the appeal.

For the master citizen guide, see [Guide for applicants](#).

## Section 7(5): BPL exemption

Section 7(5) of the RTI Act, 2005, reads:

- “The applicant who is below the poverty line as may be determined by the appropriate Government shall not be charged any fee.”

This exempts the applicant from:

- The **Rs 10 application fee** (Centre) or the State equivalent (Rs 10 to Rs 50).
- The **photocopy charges** (Rs 2 per page at the Centre).
- The **inspection charges** (Rs 5 per 15 minutes after the first hour).
- The **electronic media charges** (Rs 50 per CD or diskette at the Centre).

## How to claim the BPL exemption

Attach a photocopy of the BPL card to the application, and add this line to the fee block:

Fee: I am a Below Poverty Line cardholder, BPL card no. [number] issued by [issuing authority] on [date]. I claim exemption from the application fee and from the cost of supplying information under Section 7(5) of the RTI Act, 2005. A photocopy of the BPL card is enclosed.

The PIO **cannot** ask for additional proof beyond a valid BPL card. If the PIO insists on the Rs 10 IPO and rejects the application as defective, that is a ground for first appeal under Section 19(1) and a complaint under Section 18.

## Section 7(6): Free supply if the PIO misses 30 days

Section 7(6) reads:

- “Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (5), the person making request for the information shall be provided the information free of charge where a public authority fails to comply with the time limits specified in sub-section (1).”

This is a **hard rule**. The instant the PIO misses the 30-day deadline (or the 48-hour life-or-liberty deadline, or the 40-day third-party deadline), the information must be supplied **free**. The Rs 10 application fee is also refundable in such cases by Commission practice, although the Act does not expressly say so.

### When does Section 7(6) trigger?

- **Day 31** - if the PIO has not sent a substantive reply.
- **Day 36** - if the application went via an APIO (5 extra days under Section 5(2)).
- **Day 36** - if the application was transferred under Section 6(3) to a wrong public authority and the 5-day transfer was used.
- **Day 41** - third-party hearing case under Section 11.
- **Day 3** - life-or-liberty case (after 48 hours).

If the PIO replies on day 35 with a demand for Rs 200 in photocopy charges, the applicant can refuse to pay and demand free supply by citing Section 7(6).

### How to claim Section 7(6)

In the application itself, **before** the deadline expires, you cannot claim it (the deadline has not passed). You claim it only when:

1. The PIO sends a late reply demanding additional fees, or
2. You file the first appeal because the PIO is silent.

### Sample wording (in the first appeal)

Ground 1: The PIO of [public authority] received the application on [date] and was bound to dispose of it within 30 days under Section 7(1). 30 days expired on [date + 30]. The PIO has [not replied / replied on date X demanding Rs Y in photocopy charges]. Under Section 7(6), the information must now be supplied free of cost. The First Appellate Authority is requested to direct the PIO to supply the information free of cost and within 7 days.

Prayer 1: Direct the PIO to supply the information sought in the application dated [date], free of cost under Section 7(6) of the RTI Act, 2005.

Prayer 2: Direct the PIO to refund the Rs 10 application fee paid vide IPO no. [number].

Prayer 3: Make a recommendation under Section 19(8)(b) for compensation to the appellant for the loss caused by the delay.

## Note on the PIO's calculation

The 30-day period is counted from the **date of receipt by the PIO**, not the date of posting by

the applicant. The PIO's diary entry (or the rtionline.gov.in registration date) is the reference point. The Speed Post tracking date is the applicant's evidence.

If the application was first received by the public authority's general dak section and routed to the PIO three days later, the 30-day clock runs from the **date of receipt by the public authority**, not from the date the PIO opened the file. This is settled by Commission practice and by the Master Circular of DoPT.

If the PIO calculates the deadline wrongly and replies late, the applicant can challenge the calculation in the first appeal.

## Sample wording for the original application

For BPL applicants, paste this in place of the fee line in the standard format:

Fee: I am a Below Poverty Line cardholder, BPL card no. RJ/JPR/2024/01234 issued by the Tehsildar, Jaipur, on 12 March 2024. I claim exemption from the application fee and from the cost of supplying information under Section 7(5) of the Right to Information Act, 2005. A photocopy of the BPL card is enclosed as Annexure 1.

For non-BPL applicants who anticipate that the PIO will miss 30 days (this is rare but useful in urgent matters), add this paragraph:

Note on Section 7(6): The information sought is required urgently. If the Public Information Officer is unable to dispose of this application within the 30-day limit prescribed under Section 7(1), I will be entitled to free supply of the information under Section 7(6). I am ready to inspect the records and take notes under Section 2(j)(i) at any time, to expedite the disposal.

## When the PIO can still charge

- **No BPL card.** Without a valid card, Section 7(5) does not apply. The PIO must charge the Rs 10 fee unless Section 7(6) has triggered.
- **PIO replied within 30 days but the applicant delayed paying for copies.** Section 7(6) does not apply because the PIO complied with the deadline. The applicant must still pay the photocopy charges if they want the copies.
- **Inspection beyond the free first hour.** Even under Section 7(6), if the inspection was offered free in the original reply and the applicant chose to extend, the extension charges (Rs 5 per 15 minutes) can be levied unless the PIO had already missed the 30-day deadline at that stage.

## Frequently asked questions

Is a BPL card from any State accepted?

Yes. Section 7(5) does not restrict the issuing State. A BPL card from any State Government or Union Territory is accepted by every public authority across India.

What about Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cardholders?

AAY is a deeper category of BPL under the Public Distribution System and most public

authorities accept AAY cards under Section 7(5). Some State Rules expressly include AAY cardholders. Add the AAY card number in place of the BPL card number.

### If I am eligible for free supply, do I still pay Rs 10?

No. Section 7(5) makes both the application fee and the further charges zero. You do **not** pay the Rs 10.

### Does Section 7(6) refund my Rs 10 if I already paid?

The Act does not say so expressly, but the Commission has consistently held that the fee is refundable when the deadline is missed. Add a prayer for refund in your first appeal.

### Does Section 7(6) apply if the PIO replied saying "no information available"?

If the reply was within 30 days and was substantive (even if "no information available" with reasons under Section 8 / Section 10 cited), Section 7(6) does not trigger. If the reply is non-substantive ("file under examination", "kindly approach another department" without invoking Section 6(3)), the Commission has held that 7(6) still applies.

### Can the PIO ask for an income certificate to verify BPL?

No. The BPL card itself is the only proof contemplated by Section 7(5). Asking for additional documents is a violation and a complaint under Section 18 lies.

### What if the PIO ignores my Section 7(6) claim and demands payment?

File a first appeal under Section 19(1). The FAA can direct free supply. If the FAA also rejects, file a second appeal under Section 19(3) and a complaint under Section 18.

### Is the supply free even for inspection beyond the first hour?

Yes, where Section 7(6) has triggered. Once the deadline is missed, the entire supply (including inspection, photocopies, certified copies, and electronic media) becomes free of cost.

### What is the PIO's safe path?

Reply within 30 days with a fee demand for copies, or supply on inspection. Once 30 days are crossed without a substantive reply, the PIO has lost the right to charge.

### Where can I draft the first appeal claiming Section 7(6)?

Use the AI RTI Drafter. It produces a Section 19(1) draft with the Section 7(6) claim built in if you tell it the PIO is silent past 30 days.

## Related

- [Guide hub](#)
- [Guide for applicants](#)
- [How to file an RTI under Section 6](#)
- [Fill the form, line by line](#)
- [Penalty + compensation](#)
- [First appeal under Section 19\(1\)](#)

- RTI time limits

## Sources verified

1. Right to Information Act, 2005 - Section 7(5) and 7(6).
2. DoPT Master Circular on RTI - fee and free-supply rules.
3. cic.gov.in - Central Information Commission orders applying Section 7(6).

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### Right to Information Wiki

The working reference for India's Right to Information Act, 2005.



**Read online**

<https://righttoinformation.wiki/guide/applicant/application/information-free-of-cost>

**Main website**

<https://righttoinformation.wiki/>

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