



HOW TO SUBMIT AN OPEN RECORDS REQUEST

“Sunshine laws” give citizens access to government documents and meetings. “Open records laws” detail the records, documents and information that state agencies and local governments must disclose if requested. “Open meetings laws” establish the rights the public has to listen to debate and watch the decision making process of their elected officials. For federal agencies, records requests are governed by the Freedom of Information Act (foia.gov). Each state has their own individual laws for record requests and open meeting requirements.

>> TIP: Your state may offer trainings and guides to educate citizens about the specific laws in their state, best practices for making requests, and resources for citizens when agencies fail to comply with requests. See a list of resources below.

6 Steps to Making an Open Record Request:

1. MAXIMIZE AVAILABLE RESOURCES: Before you make your request, see whether the materials you seek have already been made publicly available on the agency or local government’s website. That can often save time and work!

2. IDENTIFY THE CORRECT RECIPIENT: Identify the correct government agency or entity to submit your request to. If you are looking for a list of textbooks used in your child’s class, you will want to submit the request to that school (the regional planning commission won’t have the list!). There may be a specific staff member that processes open record requests, such as a secretary or clerk. Identifying that person can help ensure your request is processed quickly!

3. BE SPECIFIC: Be specific as possible about the type of the record(s) you are requesting, and the time window when the records would have been created. Some examples:

- school district budgets for the last five years
- Mr. Smith's outgoing and incoming emails for March 26-27, 2021
- materials used in teacher trainings during the 2020-2021 school year
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum materials for the 2019-2020 school year
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training materials for the 2020-2021 school year
- grant applications or awards in the last three years

4. CONFIRM RECEIPT: Emailing your request is generally best practice for a quick response. If necessary, you can require an email-read receipt or mail the request via certified mail to confirm the date your request was received.

5. FEES AND RESPONSE TIME: States typically require the agency or local government to respond within a set number of days. Depending on your state's laws, the agency or local government may be allowed to charge a fee covering the cost of staff time to fulfill a request or to cover copying costs if physical copies were requested. Ask the agency if there is a fee when making your request, or for them to notify if the fee will be above a certain amount (i.e. \$50).

6. FOLLOW UP: A little kindness can go a long way! Be sure to thank the staff that assisted in fulfilling your request. If your request has passed the statutory deadline for response, politely follow up.

SAMPLE REQUEST:

[Your Name]
[Street Address]
[City, State ZIP Code]

[Date]

[Name of Custodian of Records]
[Title]
[Agency Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

Dear Public Official:

Pursuant to the *[your state's public records law]*, I would like to obtain a copy of the following public records: *[Be sure to describe the records sought with enough detail, or as the statute indicates, for the public agency to understand the request and be able to respond.]*

I understand if I seek a copy of this record, there may be a fee to fulfill this request. Could you please inform me of any costs prior to completing the request?

I can be reached at *[phone number and/or email address]*. According to the statute, the *[name of the government entity you are requesting from]* is allowed *[XX]* days to respond to this request.

If you choose to deny the request, please respond in writing and state the statutory exception authorizing the withholding of all or part of the public record.

Thank you for your assistance on this matter.

Respectfully,

Resources for Making Open Record Requests:

Alabama: [Alabama Public Records Law](#)

Alaska: [Alaska Public Records Act](#)

Arizona: [Open Meetings and Public Records Law](#)

Arkansas: [Freedom of Information Act Handbook and Trainings](#)

California: [Public Records Act Training Powerpoint](#), [Summary of California Public Records Act](#)

Colorado: [Colorado Open Records Act](#), [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Connecticut: [Freedom of Information Commission](#)

Delaware: [Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\)](#)

Florida: [Open Government Links](#)

Georgia: [Open Government Links](#)

Hawaii: [Basic Q& A on Access to Government Records](#)

Idaho: [Public Record Laws Manual](#)

Illinois: [FOIA Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Indiana: [Handbook on Indiana's Public Access Laws](#), [Sample Request](#), [How to File a Complaint](#)

Iowa: [Examination of Public Records](#), [Frequently Asked Questions](#), [Sample Request](#)

Kansas: [Citizen's Guide to Open Government](#), [Request Training](#), [File a Complaint](#)

Kentucky: [Guide to the Kentucky Open Records & Open Meetings Acts](#)

Louisiana: [Public Records Law FAQ](#)

Maine: [Freedom of Access Act FAQ](#)

Maryland: [Public Information Act Manual](#)

Massachusetts: [Guide to Massachusetts Public Record Law](#), [Sample Request](#), [Appealing a Denial of Access to Public Records](#)

Michigan: [FOIA Resources and Publications](#)

Minnesota: [Laws and Rules](#), [Requesting Data and Info](#), [Sample Request](#)

Mississippi: [Public Records Rules](#), [Public Records Complaint](#)

Missouri: [Sunshine Law Guide](#), [Sample Language Forms](#), [Sunshine Law Complaint Form](#)

Montana: [Montana Code](#)

Nebraska: [Outline of Nebraska Public Records Statutes](#)

Nevada: [Nevada Code](#), [Nevada Public Records Act Overview PowerPoint](#), [Open Meeting Law Manual](#)

New Hampshire: [Attorney General's Memorandum on New Hampshire's Right to Know Law](#)

New Jersey: [Citizen's Guide to the Open Public Records Act](#)

New Mexico: [Inspection of Public Records Act Compliance Guide](#), [Request IPRA Training](#), [Submit Complaint](#)

New York: [Freedom of Information Law FAQ](#), [Trainings & Recordings](#), [Sample Request](#), [Committee on Open Government](#)

North Carolina: [Open Government Guide](#), [More Information & Questions](#)

North Dakota: [Requesting Public Records](#)

Ohio: [Sunshine Law Manual and Trainings](#)

Oklahoma: [Understanding Oklahoma's Open Meeting Act & Open Records Act Slide Show](#), [Open Records Act](#)

Oregon: [Public Records and Public Meetings FAQ](#), [Public Records and Meetings Manual](#)

Pennsylvania: [Office of Open Records](#)

Rhode Island: [Making Public Records Requests](#)

South Carolina: [Citizens Guide](#), [Freedom of Information Act Code](#)

South Dakota: [Open Government Resources](#)

Tennessee: [Office of Open Records Counsel FAQ](#)

Texas: [How to Make a Public Information Act \(PIA\) Request](#)

Utah: [Open Records Portal](#)

Vermont: [Guide to Vermont's Public Records Law](#), [Public Records Resources](#)

Virginia: [Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council](#), [Sample Request Letter](#)

Washington: [Guide to Obtaining Public Records](#), [Open Government Resource Manual](#)

West Virginia: [Freedom of Information Act Handbook](#)

Wisconsin: [Open Government Law and Compliance Guides](#)

Wyoming: [Wyoming Public Records Act Powerpoint](#), [Complaint Form](#)