

Ad No. 1 in a Series of 10
(2 col. x 5 inches)

Public records are your records...

How safe is your neighborhood?

A wide variety of public records and documents are available to citizens under Washington's Public Disclosure Act. You have a right to see a list of registered sex offenders that might live in your area (or anywhere else in the state), the employment contract of your superintendent of schools, health inspection results for restaurants, law enforcement activity in the neighborhood where you are thinking about buying a house.

A written request is best, citing the Public Disclosure Act (RCW 42.17). You do not have to give a reason for your request, nor do you have to represent anyone other than yourself to request the information.

To find out more about your rights to records, check our website at washingtoncog.org.

Remember: Open and accessible government is the keystone of a strong democracy.

 Washington Coalition for
Open Government
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Ad No. 2 in a Series of 10
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Public meetings are your meetings...

Can you tape the proceedings of your city council?

With few exceptions, all meetings of the governing bodies of public agencies, including cities, must be open and accessible to the public. Therefore, taping a public meeting is acceptable although general rules of decorum should be observed. It should not cause an obvious disturbance to the conduct of the proceedings.

Executive sessions are not open to the public but must be announced, together with the reason for the executive session, before being convened. Executive sessions can only be held for very specific reasons and all *actions*, like voting, must take place in open session.

To find out more about the Open Public Meetings Act, check our website at washingtoncog.org.

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Ad No. 3 in a Series of 10
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Public records are your records...

How much should you pay to inspect a public record?

A wide variety of public records and documents are available to citizens under Washington's Public Disclosure Act. You have a right to view such documents at no cost to you. Should you want copies, state law says agencies may charge for actual copying costs, an amount that should not exceed 15 cents a page.

As of this writing, agencies are not legally entitled to "research," "editing," or "administrative" fees. The intent is to make public records available to all members of the public, not discourage public access by imposing other fees. Should you be asked to pay more than the limit, your best course is to politely explain that state law limits such charges to actual copying costs only. If you are rebuffed, ask to speak with a supervisor.

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Ad No. 4 in a Series of 10
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Public records are your records...

'No' is hardly ever the right answer to a records request

A wide variety of public records and documents are available to citizens under Washington's Public Disclosure Act. Public agencies are required to keep records regarding their actions and an index of those records to facilitate the public's ability to view them. Viewing such records is free, agencies may charge a reasonable copying cost for copies, not more than 15 cents per page.

There are some exemptions; in most cases allowed to protect the broader public interest. Those exemptions can be found on our website at washingtoncog.org.

If you are seeking public records a written request is best, citing the Public Disclosure Act (RCW 42.17). You do not have to give a reason for your request, nor do you have to represent anyone other than yourself to request the information.

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Ad No. 5 in a Series of 10
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Public records are your records...

Emails: Boon to public officials or a method to hide actions?

A wide variety of public records and documents are available to citizens under Washington's Public Disclosure Act, including emails of public officials. But some public officials are adopting a policy of communicating about public business on their personal computers, then quickly deleting the messages with the idea of hiding them from public view.

Such an action ill serves the public's right to oversight of their public agencies. It is too often used to compile "unofficial votes," or conduct deliberation out of the public eye. Concerned taxpayers should demand their local officials and agencies keep such communications and see they are maintained in a fashion so that citizens can request and get them.

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The logo for the Washington Coalition for Open Government. It features a small graphic of the state of Washington to the left of the text. The text is arranged in three lines: "Washington" in a small, sans-serif font; "Coalition for" in a larger, serif font; and "Open Government" in the largest, bold serif font. Below the main text, the website address "washingtoncog.org" is written in a small, lowercase, sans-serif font.

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Ad No. 6 in a Series of 10
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Public records are your records...

Can you see documents used to seek building permits?

A wide variety of public records and documents are available to citizens under Washington's Public Disclosure Act. You have a right to see any documents submitted by a real estate developer used to secure building permits from the city or county. If you are concerned about a coming project in your neighborhood the best course of action is to attend planning and zoning meetings and city council meetings. But whether you attend or not, the documents related to the permitting process are public.

A written request is best, citing the Public Disclosure Act (RCW 42.17). You do not have to give a reason for your request, nor do you have to represent anyone other than yourself to request the information.

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Public records are your records...

Ask for the index to help limit your public records search

A wide variety of public records and documents are available to citizens under Washington's Public Disclosure Act. It is not always easy, however, to find exactly what you're looking for. Each agency is required to keep an index of their public documents. It will considerably shorten the search time and cost for the requestor agency if you use the index to more narrowly target your search.

When you are ready, make your request in writing, naming the documents you are requesting and citing the Public Disclosure Act (RCW 42.17). You do not have to give a reason for your request, nor do you have to represent anyone other than yourself to request the information.

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The logo for the Washington Coalition for Open Government. It features a small graphic of a state outline to the left of the word "Washington". The words "Coalition for" are in a smaller, italicized serif font, and "Open Government" is in a larger, bold serif font. Below this, the website address "washingtoncog.org" is written in a small, lowercase sans-serif font.

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Public records are your records...

Privacy v. good government?

There is an ongoing debate about when the need for personal privacy affects the right of individuals to information about the workings of government and the courts.

Public records that have always been legally accessible, but only at the courthouse or government offices, are increasingly becoming available online. Some privacy proponents take the extreme view that some of these records should now be kept from public access. This view constitutes an abridgement of the public's right to know. The issue, however, like most in our time, is not a simple one.

To become more informed about the issues surrounding your right to access public records, check our website at washingtoncog.org.

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Ad No. 9 in a Series of 10
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Public records are your records...

Are your local officials being paid what they are worth?

A wide variety of public records and documents are available to citizens under Washington's Public Disclosure Act. In a representative democracy the people have a right and responsibility to evaluate whether their tax dollars are being spent effectively. One key measure of that is to determine whether public officials are being paid in a way that matches their performance.

A written request is best, citing the Public Disclosure Act (RCW 42.17). You do not have to give a reason for your request, nor do you have to represent anyone other than yourself to request the information.

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It's your government, ask for your documents

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