

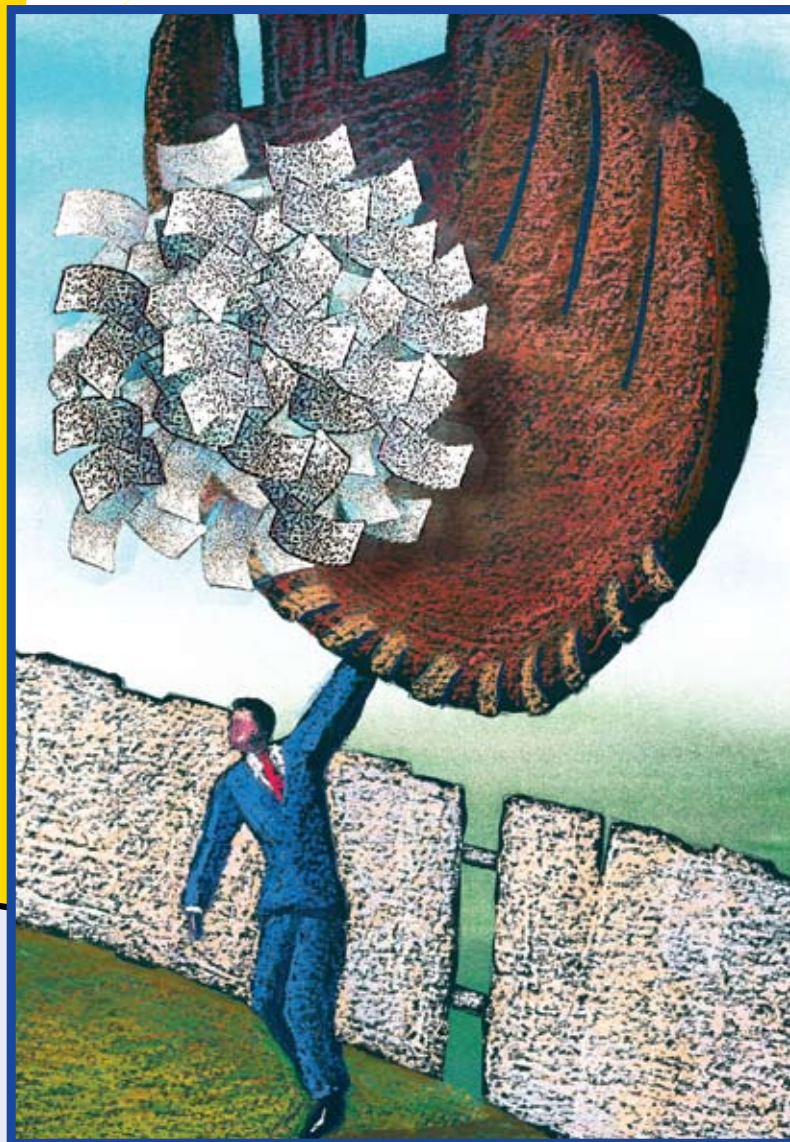
How do I obtain PUBLIC RECORDS?

So now that you understand the importance of public records, here are some tips and tools to help you get what you need from the government:

❖ **Be specific about what you want.** You are not required to say who you are or why you want the record, but you should make your request as clear as possible to the public office you are contacting.

❖ **You can ask for your request orally or in writing.** See examples of letters for requesting information from a federal or state government public office.

❖ **Be courteous to your public officers.** A little politeness goes a long way. Asking for, rather than demanding, the information you seek may actually get you closer to your goal more quickly.



(Date)
(Agency head or FOI Officer)
(Agency)
(Address)
(Fax number)

FOI Request

Dear (Agency head/FOI Officer),

Pursuant to the Federal Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. Section 552, I request access to and copies of (clearly describe what you want. Include identifying material, such as names, places and the period of time about which you are inquiring. If you think they will help to explain what you are looking for, attach news clips, reports and other documents describing the subject of your research. Be as specific as possible — including your description of paper or electronic copies.)

I agree to pay reasonable duplication fees for the processing of this request in an amount not to exceed \$_____. However, please notify me prior to your incurring any expenses in excess of that amount.

(Fee waiver request should always be requested.) Please waive any applicable fees. Release of the information is in the public interest because it will significantly contribute to public understanding of government operations and activities.

If my request is denied in whole or part, I ask that you justify all deletions by reference to the specific exemptions of the act. I will also expect you to release all segregable portions of otherwise exempt material. I, of course, reserve the right to appeal your decision to withhold any information or to deny a waiver of fees.

I would appreciate you communicating with me by telephone, rather than by mail, if you have questions regarding this request. I look forward to your reply within 20 business days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays), as the statute requires.

Thank you for your assistance.

(Your Name)
(Address)
(City, State, ZIP)
(Telephone number)
(Fax number)

❖ **Be persistent if you have to.** If the record should legally be public, then you have a right to it. Don't give up the first time you are told "no."

Sample request for Federal records

February 22, 2008

Joe Smith
Seattle Police Department
500 Northwest Way
Seattle, WA 98222

Dear Mr. Smith,

Pursuant to the state Public Records Act, RCW Chapter 42.56, I am writing to request access to and a copy of the line-item budget for the Seattle Police Department for the past five years, including an electronic copy in Excel or other similar format. If your agency does not maintain these public records, please let me know who does and include the proper custodian's name and address.

I agree to pay any reasonable copying and postage fees of not more than \$25. If the cost would be greater than this amount, please notify me. Please provide a receipt indicating the charges for each document. As provided by the open records law, I will expect your response within five (5) business days.

If you choose to deny this request, please provide a written explanation for the denial including a reference to the specific statutory exemption(s) upon which you rely. Also, please provide all segregable portions of otherwise exempt material.

Please be advised that I am prepared to pursue whatever legal remedy necessary to obtain access to the requested records. I would note that violation of the open records law can result in a fine of up to \$100 each day that I am denied access. Litigation costs, including reasonable attorney fees, may also be awarded.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

William O. Douglas
923 Access Drive
Seattle, WA 98222
206-555-1111

Sample request for WA state records

❖ **Wait for a response.**

The agency must respond within five business days. Agency officials can either give you the record, deny the request, or say they need more time to gather the information and tell you how long the delay will be.