



TEXAS CITIZENS GUIDE TO PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUEST

How To Strategically Use Texas's Public Information Request Laws

Transparency isn't just a principle—it's your right. Texas's public information laws, established under [**Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code**](#), are among the most robust in the nation. Use this to access information held by state and local government agencies, from school boards to city commissions. Whether you're researching local spending, holding elected officials accountable, or simply seeking clarity on a public issue, this guide will walk you through filing an effective Public Information Request (PIR).

WHAT IS A PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUEST?

A Public Information Request (PIR) is a formal request to access documents, emails, data, videos, or other records maintained by Texas's state and local government agencies. These requests are governed by Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code, which legally obligates agencies to provide access unless a specific exemption applies.

PIR VS FOIA: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

Public Information Request (PIR) - Texas law for requesting records from Texas state and local government agencies (cities, counties, school districts, state departments)

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) - Federal law for requesting records from federal agencies (FBI, EPA, Department of Defense, etc.)

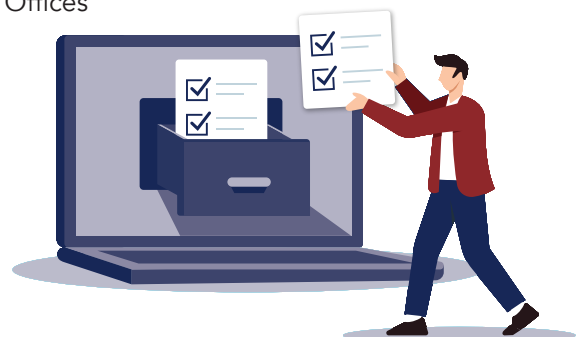
Use PIR for Texas agencies, FOIA for federal agencies. This guide covers PIR procedures only. For information on FOIA, see our resource: [**How to File a FOIA Request for Federal Records**](#).

WHEN TO SUBMIT A REQUEST:

File a PIR when the information you need isn't available online or shared publicly. This is your tool to access documentation like emails, contracts, or reports that would shed light on government decisions, verify actions, investigate spending, or follow up on public claims.

AGENCIES SUBJECT TO PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST LAWS:

- Texas Education Agency and Independent School Districts
- Texas Department of Public Safety and Local Police/Sheriff's Offices
- City Councils and County Commissioners Courts
- Public Universities and Community Colleges
- Texas Attorney General Office
- Texas Health and Human Services
- County Offices and Election Offices
- Local Code Enforcement Divisions



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HOW TO FILE YOUR REQUEST

1 IDENTIFY THE RIGHT AGENCY

Consider who creates or maintains the records you're seeking. Match your topic to the responsible department level—city, county, or state. For example, school issues typically fall under local school boards, while code enforcement records are usually held by city building departments.

2 LOCATE THE RECORDS CONTACT

Before you begin writing, find the correct agency by using keywords like "public information request [agency name]" on Google. Check their official website for pages labeled "Public Records," "Transparency," or "Open Government." Each agency may have preferred submission methods—online portals, email, or mail. Always submit requests in writing for documentation purposes.

Pro tip: Bookmark the agency's submission page if you plan on filing again in the future.

3 WRITE A CLEAR AND SPECIFIC REQUEST

The success of your request often depends on how clearly you describe what you're looking for. Be as specific as possible to avoid delays, unnecessary costs, or denials. A strong request usually includes:

- Clear **date range** (e.g., "January 1 to March 31, 2024")
- Name of **person, office, or department** involved
- Key **topics or keywords** that appear in documents
- **Preferred format** (digital PDF files or printed copies)

Sample Email Template: "Pursuant to Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code, I am requesting all emails sent or received by Planning Director John Smith between January 1 and March 31, 2024, that include the words 'permit' or 'zoning.' I prefer digital copies and would like a cost estimate if fees exceed \$40."

Make sure to reference the Texas Statute. Writing your request this way keeps it focused and easy for the agency to fulfill without unnecessary back-and-forth.

4 SUBMIT AND MONITOR THE RESPONSE TIME

Texas law requires agencies to respond within 10 business days with at least an acknowledgment and estimated completion time.

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5 UNDERSTAND COSTS AND FEES

Texas has Cost Protections for citizens who are requesting public information.

- Written cost estimates are required when charges exceed \$40.
- Prepayment may be required if costs exceed \$100 (or \$50 for smaller agencies).
- Fee waivers are available if information primarily benefits the public.
- You have 10 business days to respond to cost estimates or your request is automatically withdrawn.

6 FOLLOW UP AND REVIEW

If there is no response within 10 business days, follow up politely and professionally. Once you receive records, review them for completeness. If anything is missing or redacted, ask for clarification or appeal the decision. Agencies must cite specific legal exemptions for any denials and request the Texas Attorney General's opinion.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS

Understand that you have legal protections under **Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code**.

Officials cannot:

- Refuse valid requests without legal justification. (They must request an AG opinion for denial)
- Charge unreasonable fees (subject to state cost rules)
- Indefinitely delay responses beyond 10 business days
- Ask why you want the information
- Retaliate against requesters

REACH OUT IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING OCCUR:

No Response After 10 Days: (877) 673-6839 - Texas Attorney General's Open Government Hotline

Wrongful Denial: (877) 673-6839 - Texas Attorney General's Open Government Hotline

Excessive or Unreasonable Costs:

(512) 475-2497 - Texas Attorney General's Cost

<https://oag.my.site.com/OpenRecords/s/>

Remember: Transparency is your right. Use these tools to hold government accountable, verify public claims, and stay informed about how your tax dollars are spent and your community is governed.

