



FLORIDA CITIZENS GUIDE TO PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST

How To Strategically Use Florida's Public Record Request Laws

Transparency isn't just a principle—it's your right. Florida's Public Records laws, established under **Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes**, 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 tool will walk you through the process of filing a Public Records Request (PRR) in FL—clearly and effectively.

WHAT IS A PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST?

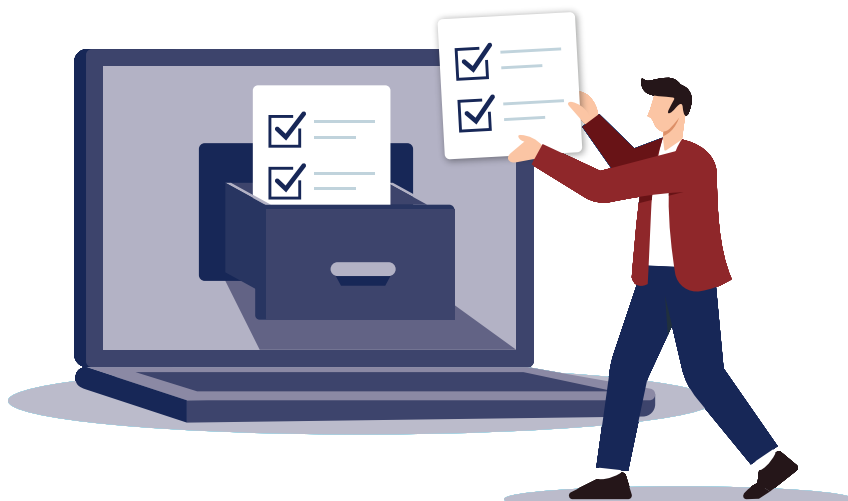
A Public Records Request (PRR) is a formal request to access documents, emails, data, or other records maintained by Florida's state and local government agencies. These requests are governed by Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes, which legally obligates agencies to provide access unless a specific exemption applies. PRRs are one of the most effective tools Floridians have for reviewing how local governments operate, communicate, and spend public resources.

WHEN TO SUBMIT A PUBLIC RECORD'S REQUEST:

File a PRR when the information you need isn't available online or shared publicly. If you're looking for documentation—like emails, contracts, or reports—that would shed light on a local government decision, a PRR gives you the legal right to request it. Whether you're verifying actions, investigating spending, or following up on public claims, this is the tool to get what's on record.

AGENCIES SUBJECT TO PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST LAWS:

- Florida Department of Education
- Florida Department of Law Enforcement
- City Councils and County Commissions
- Public Universities and Colleges
- State Attorney's Offices
- Florida Department of Health
- County and Municipal School Boards
- Sheriff's Offices and Local Police
- Clerk of Court Offices
- Local Code Enforcement Divisions



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1 IDENTIFY THE RIGHT AGENCY

Before submitting a request, take a moment to consider who creates or maintains the records you're seeking. Think about the level of government involved—city, county, or state—and match your topic to the department responsible. For example, school-related issues usually fall under the local school board, while code enforcement records might be held by the city's building department.

2 LOCATE THE RECORDS CONTACT

Before you begin writing, make sure you're targeting the correct agency that holds the records you need. Use keywords like "public records request [agency name]" on Google to quickly find the department responsible. Check their official website for a page labeled "Public Records," "Transparency," or "Open Government."

Each agency may have its own preferred way to receive requests—some use online portals, others list an email or require mailed letters. Submitting your request in writing (even if not required) is the best practice to ensure you have documentation.

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. Vague or overly broad requests can lead to delays, unnecessary costs, or even denials. Focus on what you need—think in terms of timeframes, people, and subjects. A strong request usually includes:

- A clear **date range** (e.g., "January 1 to March 31, 2024")
- The name of the **person, office, or department** involved
- A few key **topics or keywords** that appear in the documents
- Your **preferred format**, like digital PDF files or printed copies

For example:

"Pursuant to Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes, 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 \$25."

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

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4 MONITOR THE RESPONSE TIME

Florida law requires agencies to respond within a “reasonable time.” There is no strict deadline, but most agencies should at least acknowledge your request promptly and give you an estimated completion time.

5 FOLLOW UP POLITELY

If you haven’t heard back within a week or two, follow up with a polite inquiry. Keep your tone courteous and professional.

6 REVIEW AND RESPOND

Once the agency provides the records, review them to make sure they meet your request. If anything is missing or redacted, you may ask for clarification or appeal the decision. Agencies are required to cite specific legal exemptions if they deny access to any part of your request.

