

Washington State Auditor's Office
Administrative Policies and Procedures

Public Records Requests

[Form: Agreement Against Commercial Use](#)

INTRODUCTION

This policy provides guidelines for responding to requests for public records. As a public agency, the State Auditor's Office is obligated to make public records available to citizens. The Office also has an equal responsibility to preserve all records and prevent disclosure of records protected by state law.

Definitions

RCW 42.56.010 states that a public record includes any writing containing information relating to the conduct of government or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function prepared, owned, used, or retained by any state or local agencies regardless of physical form or characteristics.

Public records may include any reports, working papers, correspondence, forms, photographs, film, recordings, drawings, computer and other machine-readable material, and other documents.

POLICY NO. 1

- **The State Auditor's Office Provides Public Access to Public Records As Required By Chapter 42.56 RCW.**

All documents that meet the definition of public records will be made available, except those that are exempt from disclosure under RCW 42.56.210 or other applicable state laws or regulations.

Requesting Access to Records:

The Office does not require written requests to review or obtain copies of records unless the request is lengthy or complex in nature. The request will be forwarded to the Public Records Officer.

Within five business days after receiving a request, the Public Records Officer will do one of five things:

1. Make the records available for inspection or copying; or
2. If copies or scanned documents are requested and terms of payment are met, send the copies to the requestor; or
3. Provide a reasonable estimate of when the records will be available; or

4. If the request is unclear or does not sufficiently identify the requested records, request clarification from the requestor. Such clarification may be requested and provided by telephone. The Public Records Officer or designee may revise the estimate of when records will be available; or
5. Deny all or part of the request in writing, stating the reasons for the denial. State law requires us to cite the specific exemption from disclosure.

The Public Records Officer or designee will process requests in the order allowing the most requests to be processed in the most efficient manner.

The Public Records Officer will make records available for inspection and copying by appointment during normal business hours, excluding legal holidays. Requestors will not remove documents from the viewing area or disassemble or alter any documents.

If the State Auditor's Office does not respond in writing within five business days of receipt of the request for disclosure, the requestor should consider contacting the Public Records Officer to determine the reason for the failure to respond.

Records Requests from the News Media:

Any records request from the news media should be forwarded to the Office's Communications Manager. The Communications Manager will work with the Public Records Officer to respond to these requests.

Documentation of Requests:

The Public Records Officer will maintain an electronic log of all requests received by the agency. Team Managers **must notify the Records Officer of all requests to ensure accurate documentation. This includes written and non-written requests, and notification when people visit field offices and ask for records.**

Protection of Public Records:

In order to adequately protect public records, these guidelines shall be followed when providing access. Before access is provided, all records must be reviewed for any information that is protected by state law or regulation. Such information will be withheld and the specific reason for withholding it will be given to the requestor in writing.

1. Inspection of any public record will be conducted in the presence of an Office employee.
2. No public record may be marked or defaced in any manner during inspection.
3. Public records which are maintained in a file, jacket or in chronological order may not be dismantled except for purposes of copying and then only by a designated employee of the Office.
4. Access to file cabinets, shelves, etc. is restricted to Office employees.
5. No public records shall be removed from the Office premises unless they are in the possession of an Office employee.

Access to Audit and Investigation Reports and Working Papers:

Audit reports, whistleblower reports, and related working papers are not subject to disclosure until a final audit or investigation report has been issued.

Before whistleblower working papers are disclosed, the name(s) of the whistleblower and any information that could lead to the identity of a whistleblower by law should be redacted. The Whistleblower team will handle the review and redaction of all whistleblower documents.

Records Requested for Commercial Purposes:

The Office does not provide lists of individuals (e.g., roster of employees) for commercial purposes. If a request for such a list is made, the requestor must complete an Agreement Against Commercial Use.

Requests to Create Information:

All requests for information that require the creation of summary reports or documents should be referred to the Public Records Officer. These requests will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Access to Electronic Records:

The Public Records Officer in consultation with other staff will determine when it is appropriate to provide records in electronic form.

Charges for Copying Records:

The Office may charge a fee of 10 cents for each photocopy page, or paper copy of electronic records. However, fees shall normally be charged for only 100 or more pages. In the event that a requestor repeatedly abuses this privilege, the Public Records Officer may approve charges for all copies.

The Office Receptionist will receive all payments for copy charges. When copying charges are assessed at the field offices, the employee providing the copies will notify the Public Records Officer, who will send a letter invoicing the requestor.

Notification of Affected Parties:

Instances may arise in which information requested or sources of information are considered sensitive, however the information may not be exempt from disclosure. In these circumstances, it may be appropriate to notify parties who could be affected by the disclosure.

The Office may enter into Agreements with agencies allowing them to review our redacted work papers before release.

Public Records Officer:

The Public Records Officer reports directly to the Deputy Director of Administration. If the need arises, the Public Records Officer may delegate certain duties to other

Office employees. If there are any questions about the elements of this policy, contact the Public Records Officer for clarification.

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Approved by Troy Kelley	