



How to use the Public Records process effectively!

The procedure for asking for “Public Records” is really quite simple.

1. Download the form found at http://www.crgnetwork.com/media/docs/open_records_request_template.pdf or use the CRG Automatic Open Records Request Generator found at http://www.crgnetwork.com/Pages/19/Open_Records.aspx to make it simple for yourself, and to make it as clear as possible to the custodian so that they know which records you are seeking.
2. Starting at the top of the page, make sure that you have the correct date. This is very important should you be required to prove when you actually submitted your request.
3. “Custodian of Records” is a fancy word for the person who has control of the records that you have requested. For example, if you are looking for records that may be held by your local city clerk, you would address your request to, Custodian of Records-City Clerk of Ottumwa or if you were seeking records held by your state rep. it would be addressed to Custodian of Records-State Rep. xxxx etc. It can sometimes be difficult to figure out who may have the records but it is very important to be persistent. In other words, if your request is rejected by your 1st choice, you MUST keep going until you find the person who actually has the records.
4. When asking for public records, it is very important to be as specific as you possibly can, to avoid any delay in obtaining those records. It is important to note that you should try to keep your request very narrow and focused for the following reasons.
 - a. The request must be “time specific” and “subject specific.”
 - b. You must ask for records that the custodian already has in their possession, they are not required to produce records that do not exist.
 - c. Under current state law, the 1st \$50.00 dollars of search fees are free. Once you exceed the \$50.00 dollar limit you will also be charged for the initial \$50.00 of search fees. I would recommend that you make multiple requests spread out over several days or weeks to keep under the \$50.00 dollar limit.
 - d. You can also reduce your costs by requesting that you be able to review the records that you are seeking and either make your own copies or bring a scanner and scan the records into your computer.
 - e. You can further reduce your costs by asking for an estimated cost to produce the records.
 - f. If you think that the records might be in electronic format, you can ask that the custodian produce them in electronic format. This will reduce your costs of both search time and copying costs substantially.

5. Give the custodian a date that is at least 10 to 14 days from the date that you will submit your request.
6. There is no requirement to provide a name, address or other identifying information but you do need to give the custodian a way to contact you should they have any questions and a way for them to notify you when the records are ready for pick-up.
7. This is a very basic overview of the Open records process. As you make more and more requests, you will become more proficient and familiar with how to use this process. You will also feel like you have control over your elected representatives that very few people use or exercise.
8. The records that are available to you as a citizen are almost infinite and you are only limited by your imagination and creativity. There are a few things that you will be unlikely to obtain through Open Records such as employee personal records, home phone numbers, home addresses and SS #'s of employee's, ongoing contract issue's, Police informant name's, specific medical information, student records just to name a few.
9. The most important thing that you can do is to begin thinking about what records might be available when you have a problem with government bureaucrats. Very few people actually use this process, to a large extent this is why government has been allowed to grow at a pace that is almost beyond our ability to pay for it.