



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *About the California Public Records Act*

**Q: Do I have to submit a Public Records Act request in writing?**

A: No, but we recommend it. It helps to create a record of your request.

**Q: Who can make a Public Records Act request?**

A: Anyone can. This includes individuals, organizations and companies. There is no residency requirement, meaning anyone regardless of where they live may request records. In fact, you can request records anonymously, meaning you have a right to request records without disclosing your identity.

**Q: What government agencies are subject to the Public Records Act?**

A: All state and local agencies, including local legislative bodies, such as school boards, city councils and boards of supervisors. Public colleges and universities, including their police departments. Law enforcement agencies at all levels, including district attorneys and city attorneys. Offices of elected and appointed officials, such as mayors, council members and their staffs.

**Q: How long does the government have to respond to my request?**

A: By statute, agencies have 10 calendar days to respond to you. Unfortunately, at that time, they may respond by telling you they need more time to locate, review and produce the records. Agencies can give themselves one 14-day extension for “unusual circumstances,” which is narrowly defined.

**Q: What if I need help from the government agency to make my request?**

A: When submitting a request, we recommend you note that the government has a duty to assist you. California law requires agencies to “assist the member of the public to identify records and information that are responsive to the request or to the purpose of the request.” You can read about that requirement [here](#).

**Q: How much can the government charge for records?**

A: You have a right to inspect most records – i.e., go into a government office and look at them – at no cost. You also have the right to make your own copies using your own devices, such as scanning or photographing the records. If you want the agency to make copies of paper records, they can charge you for “the direct cost of duplication.” They cannot charge for time spent searching for, reviewing or redacting records.

**Q: Can I request electronic versions of records?**

A: If a record exists in an electronic format, the government must provide it to you in that format.

**Q: What if my request is denied?**

A: First, review the reasons the agency provided for denying you access to the records. They are required to cite the reason – the specific statutory exemption – for denying your request. If they did not do that, demand in writing that they do so. If you disagree with the determination, you should push back and try to change the agency’s position. FAC can help with this. You can contract our free [Legal Hotline](#) for assistance. Ultimately, you can bring a lawsuit in Superior Court.

*For more information, see FAC’s [CPRA Primer](#), [Police Transparency Guide](#) and [Asked & Answered](#) database. Additionally, our comprehensive digital guide, [The Right to Know: A Guide on Public Access and Media Law](#), has an in-depth chapter on the Public Records Act.*

*This FAQ is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to constitute legal advice and does not form an attorney-client relationship.*

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