

Open records: how to ask, how to answer

Records of public bodies are open unless a specific law closes them. A good request and a prompt answer save everyone time.

FOR REQUESTERS

Ask so they can find it

A request should describe records with reasonable specificity: a general time frame, identifiable records, and search terms. [51 O.S. § 24A.5\(7\)](#)

Too broad	Specific
Everything about the water plant	Emails between the City Manager and XYZ Engineering containing "water plant" from Jan. 1 to Mar. 31, 2026
All police records	The incident report and body camera video for the traffic stop on Main St. on Sept. 12, 2026, about 8:15 p.m.

- Ask for electronic copies.
- Keep a log: date sent, who received it, every reply.
- If the body asks you to clarify, help it narrow the request.

FEES

What they can charge

- Copies: reasonable direct cost, no more than 25 cents a page for standard paper and \$1 for a certified page. [§ 24A.5\(4\)](#)
- Search fees only for requests solely for a commercial purpose or that would clearly cause excessive disruption, and never when release is in the public interest, including to the news media and to taxpayers checking whether officials are doing their jobs. [§ 24A.5\(4\)](#)
- Fees may not be used to discourage requests. [§ 24A.5\(4\)](#)

TIMING

Prompt and reasonable

Delay is allowed only for the time needed to prepare the records and avoid excessive disruption, and a quick request may not wait behind a long one. [§ 24A.5\(6\)](#)

IF YOU ARE DENIED

Your options

You may sue for declaratory or injunctive relief and recover attorney fees if successful, after written notice to the body and the Attorney General 10 business days before filing. [§ 24A.17\(B\), \(C\)](#) Talk to a lawyer first.

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General information about Oklahoma law as of October 2026, not legal advice.

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FOR CUSTODIANS

Answer the right way

- ☐ Designate who can release records, with someone available during business hours. [§ 24A.5\(8\)](#)
- ☐ Acknowledge the request and give a realistic date.
- ☐ If a request is unclear, ask the requester to clarify and suggest topics or a list of records. [§ 24A.5\(7\)](#)
- ☐ Release what is open now; do not hold everything for the slowest item.
- ☐ Redact only what a specific law closes, and say which law.
- ☐ Charge only lawful copy costs. [§ 24A.5\(4\)](#)

YOUR PHONE

It is a filing cabinet

Officials' private email addresses and phone numbers are confidential, but that does not exempt "public records created using a private email address or private mobile phone." [51 O.S. § 24A.7\(D\)](#) Texts and personal emails about public business are records. Keep them, and use official accounts.

PERSONNEL RECORDS

What is open

A body may keep internal investigation and certain privacy-sensitive personnel records confidential, but these are open: the application of a person who becomes a public official, gross receipts of public funds, dates of employment and title, and final discipline resulting in loss of pay, suspension, demotion or termination. [§ 24A.7\(A\), \(B\)](#)

POLICE RECORDS

What must be released

Arrest information, incident report information, radio logs, jail registers and, with limited redactions, dash camera and body camera recordings of traffic stops, arrests, use of force and other listed events. [§ 24A.8\(A\)](#)

CONSEQUENCES

Why it matters

A willful violation by a public official is a misdemeanor punishable by up to a \$500 fine, up to a year in jail, or both. [§ 24A.17\(A\)](#)

Free tools: the Guerrilla News Citizen Toolkit drafts requests; the Records Clock tracks how long agencies take.

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