

Ohio

Public Records Request

This document contains 2 parts:

Part 1: Learning to Properly File a Public Record Request in Ohio

Part 2: Sample Public Records Request Form

Part 1: How to Make a Public Records Request

Making your first public record request can be intimidating. Making sure your request is proper and well formatted is crucial to ensuring you receive the correct documents you are looking for promptly. The first part of this document will go over the basic's of making a public records request to help you find what you are looking for. For even more information on Public Records make sure to read the [Ohio Sunshine Manual](#). You can also watch the Ohio Attorney Generals [videos](#) explaining Ohio Public Record Law.

What are Public Records?

Statutory definition – R.C. 149.011(G): The term “records” includes “any document, device, or item, regardless of physical form or characteristic, including an electronic record as defined in [R.C. 1306.01], created or received by or coming under the jurisdiction of any public office of the state or its political subdivisions, which serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office.”

Records and non-records: If a document or other item does not meet all three parts of the definition of a “record,” then it is a non-record and is not subject to the Public Records Act or Ohio’s records retention requirements. The next paragraphs explain how items in a public office might meet or fail to meet the three parts of the definition of a record in R.C. 149.011(G).

Common Public Records: A paper or electronic document, email, video, map, blueprint, photograph, voicemail message, text message, or any other reproducible storage medium could be a record. This element is fairly broad. With the exemption of one’s thoughts and unrecorded conversation, most public office information is stored on a fixed medium of some sort.

Being Specific

Now that you know what a public record is, you need to help the records custodian find the specific public records you are looking for. The best way to do this is by being as specific as possible. Your request is at least required to be made with “reasonable clarity” and cannot be “Overly Broad”



**Composing Your Request:
Be Specific!**

- Your request must be made with **“reasonable clarity”**
- Make your request as **specific** as possible so that the public office can identify and locate the records you want

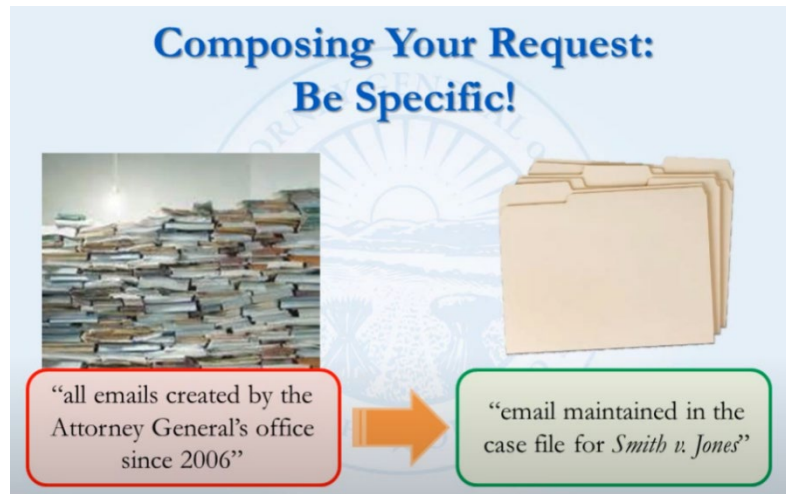
“Overly Broad”

An ambiguous or overly broad request is one that lacks the clarity a public office needs to ascertain what the requester is seeking and where to look for records that might be responsive and/or when the wording of the request is vague or subject to interpretation.

A request can be overly broad when it is so inclusive that the public office is unable to identify the records sought based on the

way the office routinely organizes and accesses records. The courts have also found a request overly broad when it seeks what amounts to a complete duplication of a major category of a public office’s records. Examples of overly broad requests include requests for:

- All records containing particular names or words;
- Duplication of all records having to do with a particular topic, or all records of a particular type;
- Every report filed with the public office for a particular time period (if the office does not organize records in that manner);
- All emails sent or received by a particular email address with no subject matter and time limitation;
- “All e-mails between” two employees (when email not organized by sender and recipient).
- “All documents which document any and all instances of lead poisoning in the last 15 years in any dwelling owned or operated by [the office].”
- Discovery-style requests that seek all records relating to or reflecting certain types of information.



Researching

One of the best ways to provide specific information about the records you are looking for is doing research about what you are requesting. You may have already done this which is why you are ready to request records, that’s great! If not that’s fine too, a good place to start is searching for records online that are already publicly available. You can also search for keywords on the public offices website you are going to request from. Try looking for similar documents from other public records to get an idea of what you’re looking for might look like.

How can I make a request?

Anyone can make a public records request in Ohio even if you don't reside in Ohio. Requests can be submitted in person, over the phone, by physical mail, email, or by fax. If you prefer to use any method besides of the phone the second part of this document can be used to help you format and organize your request.



Receiving Records

Once your records are found and processed there are many ways they can be delivered to you. They could be delivered or shown to you in person. They can be delivered as electronic copies via email, drop boxes, or on a physical storage device like a CD or a flash drive. Records can also be hard copied. Hard copies and some other delivery methods may cost a production fee that covers the price per page of printing or storing the records. If you request electronic copies of records delivered to you via email there is no fee. It is up to you the requester which way records are delivered.

Help Them Help You

Once you initiate your request most public offices will have someone reach out to you to confirm they received your request. The Ohio Sunshine Manual recommends you communicate with the person managing your request in order to help them better understand and find what you are looking for. If no one reaches out to you feel free to reach out to them. All Ohio Public offices are required by law to help provide you public records you're looking for.

Part 2: Sample Public Records Request Form

Ohio

Public Records Request

[Date]

[address: of the public office]

[your email]

Re: Public Records Request, O.R.C. 149.43

To Whom It May Concern,

I request electronic copies of the following public records from your office:

I request that the copies be made as electronic PDF documents. I would like to receive the copies by e-mail attachment to this address:

If some records become available sooner than others, please deliver them as they become ready rather than waiting for all records to become available. Please notify me of any costs relating to copying the requested records.

If you believe any of the above requests are ambiguous, overly broad, or insufficiently specific for you to identify the records requested, please contact me at the number below to explain how you organize and access that category of record so that I can try to revise the request with more specificity. I would like to respect your time and resources by making this request as understandable and easy to comply with as possible. If any records are withheld or redacted, please make clear the explanation, including legal authority, that is being asserted for each. If you expect a significant delay in fulfilling this request, please contact me with information about when I might expect copies to be prepared and delivered of the requested records.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request, and please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or updates.

Thanks,

[Name]

[contact information]