

Hello SCC staff,

Recently, I was assigned as our agency's Public Records Officer. I wanted to provide some information on public records requests. Many staff members may already be familiar with this information, but it's helpful to have a refresher on the details of the Public Records Act and its importance.

What is the Public Records Act (PRA)?

It is a Washington State statute, [RCW 42.56 Public Records Act](#), which favors disclosure to provide the people with broad rights to access public records. A "public record" is defined broadly to promote full access to public records. A public record is a "writing" that includes any recording of any communication, image, or sound. Writing includes not only conventional documents, but also videos, photos, and electronic records, including emails, texts, and computer data.

What is a public records request?

A public records request is a formal request for a specific record or records related to a particular topic from a state agency.

What happens when the agency receives a request?

The public records officer:

- Reviews the request to determine what the requester is asking and how long it might take to fulfill the request.
- Responds to the requester within 5 days to acknowledge receipt of the request and a timeline of when the request will be completed.
- Provides a place, usually a Box folder, where staff can put any documents in their possession by a specific date.
- Reviews all files submitted to the folder to determine if they should be included in the public records request.
- Submits all responsive records to the requester within the timeline.

What are the staff's responsibilities?

Public records requests are a **priority** to fulfill. The agency has a duty to respond quickly and efficiently to a request. It's the law!

PUBLIC RECORDS ACT INFORMATION

The public records officer will email all staff with instructions on how to respond, including:

- Search for documents using specified search terms. Using search terms is helpful and efficient to determine which documents apply to the request.
- Find all documents, including emails, texts, and computer files that are responsive to those search terms. Do not try to determine if the requester needs to have access to them. The public records officer decides if the information meets the request or if there are any exceptions.
- Put all responsive documents into the designated folder created by the public records officer by the due date.

For more information, please see:

- SCC website for the public: [Public Records Requests](#)
- [ATG WA State Open Government Resource Manual](#)
- [RCW 42.56 Public Records Act](#)

Let me know if you have any questions.

Karla Heinitz, SCC Public Records Officer
Washington State Conservation Commission
PO Box 47721 Olympia, WA 98504-7721
Work Cell: 360-878-4666 | kheinitz@scc.wa.gov
Office hours:
Monday – Friday 7:30 am – 4:00 pm