



Transparency in government is crucial to maintain a free and functioning society. Government was created by We the People to serve We the People, and government is obligated to be open, accountable, and honest about how our elected officials conduct public business, conduct themselves, and spend tax dollars.

One of the most powerful tools we have to ensure transparency is the [Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552 \(FOIA\)](#). Under FOIA, Federal agencies are required to disclose any information or records requested, unless they fall under an exemption to protect personal privacy, national security, and law enforcement. Learn more about the FOIA here: <https://www.foia.gov/>

In addition to the federal FOIA law, most states have their own version of public records request. In Montana, it is the [Montana Public Records Act § 2-6-1001 et seq.](#), and the [Right to Know under Article II, Section 9 of the Montana Constitution](#). Under this statute and law, Montanans can request public records from any government office or agency. And the information being requested can be obtained by any entity which possesses the information you are seeking.

Below is an example of a Records Request for seeking transparency in government. Requests can be sent via email or registered or certified mail. If fees are requested for the information, do not hesitate to push back and ask for an itemized list and description of the fees being assessed. For more information on Montana Public Records, visit <http://www.montanafoi.org/>.



[Your Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

[Date]
[Name of Custodian of Records]
[Title]
[Company Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

Dear [custodian of records]:

Under the **Freedom of Information Act**, the **Montana Public Records Act § 2-6-1001 et seq.**, and the **Right to Know under Article II, Section 9 of the Montana Constitution**, I am requesting an opportunity to inspect or obtain copies of public information that [Describe the records or information sought with enough detail for the public agency to respond. Be as specific as your knowledge of the available records will allow. But it is more important to describe the information you are seeking.]

If there are any fees for searching or copying these records, please inform me if the cost will exceed \$_____. However, I would also like to request a waiver of all fees in that the disclosure of the requested information is in the public interest and will contribute significantly to the public's understanding of _____. This information is not being sought for commercial purposes.

If access to the information I am requesting will take longer than a 'reasonable' amount of time, please contact me with information about when I might expect copies or the ability to inspect the requested records.

If you deny any or all of this request, please cite each specific exemption you feel justifies the refusal to release the information and notify me of the appeal procedures available to me under the law.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Phone number]