

Appendix S

Public Records Policy

Whitman County Rural Library District (WCL) follows the requirements of RCW 42.56 Public Records, commonly known as the Public Records Act.

Definitions

A public record, as defined in the RCW, includes any writing containing information relating to the conduct of government or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function prepared, owned, used, or retained by any state or local agency regardless of form or characteristics, except as there exempted. The definition of a public record contains three elements, (WAC 44-14-03001):

1. The record must be a “writing,” which is broadly defined to include any recording of any communication, image or sound. A writing includes not only conventional letters and memoranda, but also emails, videos, photos and computer data. (RCW 42.56.010).
2. The writing must relate to the conduct of government or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function.
3. The writing must be prepared, owned, used or retained by the agency.

Requests

WCL encourages requests either for inspection or for copies of public records to be in writing addressed to the Public Records Officer and may be made in person to the WCL business office at 102 S. Main, Colfax WA. Requests can also be made by mail, email or fax. Individuals asking for public records information will receive a response within five (5) business office working days from the receipt of the request. The response will include one of the following (RCW 42.56.520):

1. Response to the request;
2. acknowledging the receipt of the request and an estimate of additional time needed to produce the information requested;
 - a. clarify the request
 - b. locate records to respond to the request
 - c. contact a third party affected by the request
 - d. determine whether any records are covered by an exemption and should not be disclosed in whole or in part
3. denial of the request based on specific exemption authorizing the withholding of the record (or part) and a brief explanation of how the exemption applies to the record withheld. RCW 42.56.210(3). Public records shall be available for inspection and copying during regular library hours.

Access to Public Records

Responding to public records requests is one of the library’s essential functions.

There is no charge for inspection of or locating public documents.

Similar to WCL's other essential functions, the staffing and resources that WCL can devote to responding to public records requests are necessarily limited by budgetary constraints as just 12 FTE's staff 14 locations.

In order to avoid excessive interference with other essential functions of the library and in light of these constraints, the Whitman County Library Board of Trustees has established that not more than two hours per week of staff time can be devoted to responding to public records requests. This amount is approximately ¼ of 1% of Whitman County Library's annual budget and the amount is in line with a number of agency policies within the region.

The Library's Business Manager has been designated as the Public Records Officer for the library district and is responsible for overseeing the library's compliance with the public records disclosure requirements.

Fees

RCW 42.56.120 allows for a reasonable charge for printed copies to be imposed for producing copies of public records. All copies of public records will incur a charge equal to the library's public copying per page fee along with fees for staff member's time to reproduce (prorated from actual salaries), cost of packaging and postage. For items saved to CD or other media, actual cost of the media storage will be relayed to the requester. Payment must be received prior to producing and/or mailing the information.

Exemptions

Any library record used to maintain control of library materials, or to provide access to information, that discloses or could be used to disclose the identity of a library user or to identify specific library users with specific library materials or information requests, is exempted from public disclosure to protect user privacy by RCW 42.56.]

Certain other exemptions, including personnel matters, items relating to land acquisition, labor negotiations, and donor identification are defined in the R.C.W. If any item is withheld, the specific exemption that authorizes such withholding will be cited and an explanation will be provided by the Public Records Officer.

Implementation

This policy will be implemented by the Public Records Officer, as delegated by the Library Executive Director. The Public Records Officer is expected to make every effort to apply these rules in a fair, reasonable, humane, and positive manner.