



# Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council

DEVOTED TO PROTECTING WISCONSIN'S TRADITION OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

September 3, 2008

Dear FOIC project volunteer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this important open government project overseen by the Freedom of Information Council. Your help is crucial, and without it we won't succeed.

The goal of this project is to assess how well local governments in Wisconsin respond to requests for public information. To do this, we need journalists and citizens around the state to conduct an "audit" of how well local government agencies comply with public records requests. We need you to request five items from local governments in your designated county, write up the results, and send them to us. We'll compile the data and in November we hope to unveil the results. Journalism students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison will conduct follow-up reporting and write stories about open records issues for the Web site of the Freedom of Information Council. Ten years ago, the concerted efforts of journalists statewide drew media widespread attention to public records issues, and we hope to do the same once again.

Here is what we need you or someone from your news organization to do:

1. During the month of September, ask for the attached documents from the respective agencies.
2. Please compile the responses and fill out the attached questionnaire.

Some tips:

- Ideally, please ask for these documents in person.
- You should not be readily known to the person who is providing the documents (the law requires records custodians to provide documents to any citizen, and they might treat you better if they know you're a reporter). Don't let this be a hurdle if it's not possible.
- Absolutely do not lie about your identity if asked.
- Do not become adversarial if denied access. Note lack of cooperation in your write-up.

3. Send your write-up and the compiled documents to us **by October 3, 2008** at:

Jason Shepard  
UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
5169 Vilas Hall  
821 University Avenue  
Madison, WI 53706

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at 608-251-1408 or at [jmshepar@wisc.edu](mailto:jmshepar@wisc.edu).

Sincerely,

Jason Shepard,  
project coordinator

## Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council

Audit Questions | September 2008

1. **School Board.** Select the largest school district in your county and request “copies of meeting agendas and minutes that show each occasion when the school board went into closed session in April, May and June 2008.”
2. **County Sheriff's Office.** Ask for a “jail booking log for the past 48 hours, or documents showing the names and tentative charges of individuals booked into the county jail in the past 48 hours.”
3. **City Police Department.** Select the largest municipality in your county and ask for “documents, such as a list of police calls, that show when and why police were called to one given high school (provide them with the street address) between Jan. 1, 2008 and July 1, 2008.”
4. **Township.** Select a township in your county and request “documents showing total legal fees paid by the town for the last complete fiscal year.”
5. **City Mayor.** Select the largest city in your county and ask for “all e-mails sent by the chief municipal officer (the mayor or city administrator) on Sept. 2, 2008.” Request for them to be provided electronically.

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Results Questionnaire | September 2008

Please write-up information about your requests, addressing the questions below. Please note any problems you had in accessing the information or any charges you incurred. Also, please feel free to suggest follow-up story ideas about encounters you had or any other open records issues. These will be helpful for journalism students who write stories based on the results on the audit.

1. **School Board.** Select the largest school district in your county and request “copies of meeting agendas and minutes that show each occasion when the school board went into closed session in April, May and June 2008.”

Who did you contact? Were you required to identify yourself or put request in writing? Was the request fulfilled? Do the agendas properly notice the reason the board went into closed session? Any other important information?

2. **County Sheriff's Office.** Ask for a “jail booking log for the past 48 hours, or documents showing the names and tentative charges of individuals booked into the county jail in the past 48 hours.”

Who did you contact? Were you required to identify yourself or put request in writing? Was the request fulfilled? Any other important information?

3. **City Police Department.** Select the largest municipality in your county and ask for “documents, such as a list of police calls, that show when and why police were called to one given high school (provide them with the street address) between Jan. 1, 2008 and July 1, 2008.”

Who did you contact? Were you required to identify yourself or put request in writing? Was the request fulfilled? Any other important information?

4. **Township.** Select a township in your county and request “documents showing total legal fees paid by the town for the last complete fiscal year.”

Who did you contact? Were you required to identify yourself or put request in writing? Was the request fulfilled? Any other important information?

5. **City Mayor.** Select the largest city in your county and ask for “all e-mails sent by the chief municipal officer (the mayor or city administrator) on Sept. 2, 2008.” Request for them to be provided electronically.

Who did you contact? Were you required to identify yourself or put request in writing? Was the request fulfilled? Did you get the information electronically? Any other important information?