

# Access for Everyday Life

Here are just some of the free government records that can help you buy a home:

- **Property taxes.** Visit the county assessor's office at the courthouse to look up property tax information. Find out details of the house, including the names of all previous owners, the square footage, number of bedrooms, bathrooms, etc. Also look up neighboring properties to find out what they are assessed at to compare.
- **Development.** Visit the city or county planning department to look at the zoning map and comprehensive plan for the area to see if a Wal-Mart could be built next-door and ask about any current or planned projects that could affect traffic. Check flood plain maps.
- **Public Works.** Visit the city public works department to examine the six-year road plan for the area, along with any other projects planned.
- **Crime.** Police can tell you if there are sex offenders living in the area and you can request incidents that have occurred during the past month or two. Also, are there any other nuisances out there (noise complaints, barking dogs, junky yards, etc.)?
- **Public safety.** Find the location of the nearest fire station and hospital and the number of minutes they would take to respond to an emergency.
- **Schools.** Find out what schools are in the area and whether they are good or not. Test scores are available online or at the school. Compare with other schools in the district. Would you want your kids to go there?
- **Amenities.** The parks department can explain plans for new trails, etc.
- **Airport.** Check with the airport to see flight patterns and decibel levels, as well as future runway changes or expansions that might affect the area.

## Access Resources

- **Society of Professional Journalists "Open Doors: Accessing Government Records"**  
[http://www.spj.org/foia\\_opendoors.asp](http://www.spj.org/foia_opendoors.asp) Online guide to access.
- **Student Press Law Center**  
<http://www.splc.org/> A searchable database on a variety of student media law issues. It also includes a great FOIA letter generator that caters to each state.
- **Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press**  
<http://www.rcfp.org/> Explains how to use the Freedom of Information Act (with a good FOIA letter generator).
- **National Freedom of Information Coalition**  
<http://www.nfoic.org/> Links to freedom of information coalitions throughout the country. Based at the University of Missouri–Columbia School of Journalism.
- **Coalition of Journalists for Open Government**  
<http://www.cjog.org/> News and resources regarding access to federal records.
- **Citizen Access Project**  
<http://www.citizenaccess.org/> Compare state access laws at this site maintained at the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications.
- **Freedom of Information Center**  
<http://foi.missouri.edu/> News and resources regarding access issues throughout the country. Through the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism.
- **AccessNorthwest**  
<http://www.wsu.edu/~accessnw/> An access research group based at Washington State University's Edward R. Murrow School of Communication.

## REQUEST FOR STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES

Automatic letter generator online at: [www.splc.org/foiletter.html](http://www.splc.org/foiletter.html). Tip: The last paragraph in the letter will be fairly threatening. I usually delete it.

Aug. 2, 2006

Peter Likins  
President  
University of Arizona  
1401 East University Boulevard  
Tucson, AZ 85721

Dear President Likins,

Pursuant to the state open records law, Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. Secs. 39-121 to 39-126, I write to request access to and a copy of the line-item budget of the UA president's office for the past 20 years in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet file. If your agency does not maintain these public records, please let me know who does and include the proper custodian's name and address.

I agree to pay any reasonable copying and postage fees of not more than \$5. If the cost would be greater than this amount, please notify me. Please provide a receipt indicating the charges for each document.

I would request your response within ten (10) business days.

If you choose to deny this request, please provide a written explanation for the denial including a reference to the specific statutory exemption(s) upon which you rely. Also, please provide all segregable portions of otherwise exempt material.

Please be advised that I am prepared to pursue whatever legal remedy necessary to obtain access to the requested records. I would note that willful violation of the open records law can result in the award of legal costs, including damages and reasonable attorney fees. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

David Cuillier  
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University of Arizona  
Tucson, AZ 85721  
520-621-7556