

Public Summary of FOIA Procedures and Guidelines

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**It is the public policy of this state that all persons
(except those persons incarcerated in state or local correctional facilities)
are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and
the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and public employees.**

The people shall be informed so that they may fully participate in the democratic process.

Consistent with the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Public Act 442 of 1976, the following is the Written Public Summary of the Library's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines relevant to the general public.

This is only a summary of the Timothy C. Hauenstein Reynolds Township Library's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines. This Written Public Summary shall also be available on the Library's website at www.tchrtl.org

The Library's policy with respect to FOIA requests is to comply with State law in all respects and to respond to FOIA requests in a consistent, fair, and even-handed manner regardless of who makes such a request.

The Library acknowledges that it has a legal obligation to disclose all nonexempt public records in its possession pursuant to a FOIA request. The Library acknowledges that sometimes it is necessary to invoke the exemptions identified under FOIA in order to ensure the effective operation of government and to protect the privacy of individuals.

The Library will protect the public's interest in disclosure, while balancing the requirement to withhold or redact portions of certain records. The Library's policy is to disclose public records consistent with and in compliance with State law.

Section 1: General Policies

The Library Board of Trustees, acting pursuant to the authority at MCL 15.236, designates the Library Director as the FOIA Coordinator. He or she is authorized to designate other Library staff to act on his or her behalf to accept and process written requests for the Library's public records and approve denials.

If a request for a public record is received by facsimile or e-mail, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. If a request is sent by e-mail and delivered to a Library spam or junk-mail folder, the request is not deemed received until one day after the FOIA

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Coordinator first becomes aware of the request. The FOIA Coordinator shall note in the FOIA log both the date the request was delivered to the spam or junk-mail folder and the date the FOIA Coordinator became aware of the request.

The FOIA Coordinator may, in his or her discretion, implement administrative rules, consistent with State law and these Procedures and Guidelines to administer the acceptance and processing of FOIA requests.

The Library is not obligated to create a new public record or make a compilation or summary of information which does not already exist. Neither the FOIA Coordinator nor other Library staff members are obligated to provide answers to questions contained in requests for public records or regarding the content of the records themselves.

The FOIA Coordinator shall keep a copy of all written requests for public records received by the Library on file for a period of at least one year.

a) How do I submit a FOIA request to the Library?

- A person requesting to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by the Timothy C Hauenstein Reynolds township Library must do so in writing. A request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable the library personnel to find it.
- A request must include the requester's name, address, and contact information. If the requester is not an individual, the request must include the name, address, and contact information of the individual acting as the requester's agent. The address must be written in compliance with United States Posting Service addressing standards. Contact must include a valid telephone number or electronic mail address. This requirement does not apply to an individual who qualifies as indigent under Section 4(2)(a) of FOIA
- Requests to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by the Library may be submitted on the Library's FOIA Request Form, in any other form of writing (letter, fax, email, etc.), or by verbal request.
- Any verbal request will be documented by the Library on the Library's FOIA Request Form.
- No specific form to submit a request for a public record is required. Written requests for public records may be submitted in person or by mail to the Library. Requests may also be submitted electronically by facsimile and e-mail. Upon their receipt, requests for public records shall be promptly forwarded to the FOIA Coordinator for processing.

b) What kind of response can I expect to my request?

- Within 5 business days after receiving a FOIA request the Library will issue a response. If a request is received by fax or email, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. The Library will respond to your request in one of the following ways:

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- a. Grant the request,
 - b. Issue a written notice denying the request,
 - c. Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request,
 - d. Issue a notice indicating that due to the nature of the request the Library needs an additional 10 business days to respond, or
 - e. Issue a written notice indicating that the public record requested is available at no charge on the Library's website
- If the request is granted, or granted in part, the FOIA Coordinator will require that payment be made for the allowable fees associated with responding to the request before the public record is made available.
 - If the cost of processing a FOIA request is \$50.00 or less, the requester will be notified of the amount due and where the documents can be obtained.
 - If the request is denied or denied in part, the FOIA Coordinator will issue a Notice of Denial which shall provide in the applicable circumstance:
 - a. An explanation as to why a requested public record is exempt from disclosure; or
 - b. A certificate that the requested record does not exist under the name or description provided by the requestor, or another name reasonably known by the Library; or
 - c. An explanation or description of the public record or information within a public record that is separated or deleted from the public record; and
 - d. An explanation of the person's right to submit an appeal of the denial to either the office of the Library Manager or seek judicial review in the Montcalm County Circuit Court; and
 - e. An explanation of the right to receive attorneys' fees, costs, and disbursements as well actual or compensatory damages, and punitive damages of \$1,000, should they prevail in Circuit Court.
 - f. The Notice of Denial shall be signed by the FOIA Coordinator.

c) What are the Library's deposit requirements?

- If the Library has made a good faith calculation that the total fee for processing the request will exceed \$50.00, the Library will require that the requester provide a deposit in the amount of 50% of the total estimated fee. When the Library requests the deposit, it will provide you a non-binding best efforts estimate of how long it will take to process the request after you have paid your deposit.
- If the Library receives a request from a person who has not paid the Library for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, the Library will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated processing fee before it begins to search for the public record for any subsequent written request when **all** of the following conditions exist:
 - a. The final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
 - b. The public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in the Library's possession;
 - c. The public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment,

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within the best effort time frame estimated by the Library to provide the records;

- d. Ninety (90) days have passed since the Library notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
- e. The individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to the Library; and
- f. The Library has calculated an estimated detailed itemization list that is the basis for the current written request's increased fee deposit.

The Library will not require the 100% estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:

- g. The person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to the Library;
 - h. The Library is subsequently paid in full for all applicable prior written requests; or
 - i. Three hundred sixty five (365) days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to the Library.
- When a deposit is required, the library will provide a written notice of deposit to the requester. The notice of deposit will include the date by which the deposit must be received, which is 45 days from the date the requester received the notice. The notice of deposit is considered received by the requester 3 days after it is sent, regardless of means of transmission. If the library has not received the deposit by the due date, and the requestor has not filed an appeal of the deposit amount, the request shall be considered abandoned by the requester.

d) How does the Library calculate FOIA processing fees?

The Michigan FOIA statute permits the Library to charge for the following costs associated with processing a request:

- Labor costs associated with copying or duplication, which includes making paper copies, making digital copies, or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet.
- Labor costs associated with searching for, locating and examining a requested public record, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to the Library.
- The cost of copying or duplication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the Library's website if you ask for the Library to make copies.
- The cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media when the requester asks for records in non-paper physical media. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the Library's website if you ask for the Library to make copies.
- The cost to mail or send a public record to a requestor.

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Labor Costs

- All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15-minute increments, with all partial time increments rounded down. If the time involved is less than 15 minutes, there will be no charge.
- Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid Library employee capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work.
- Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits. Library may add up to 50% to the applicable labor charge amount to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits, but in no case may it exceed the actual cost of fringe benefits.
- Overtime wages will not be included in labor costs unless agreed to by the requestor; overtime costs will not be used to calculate the fringe benefit cost.
- Contracted labor costs will be charged at the hourly rate of \$48.90 (6 times the state minimum hourly wage)

A labor cost will not be charged for the search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from nonexempt information unless failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high Costs to the Library. Costs are unreasonably high when they are excessive and beyond the normal or usual amount for those services compared to the Library's usual FOIA requests, because of the nature of the request in the particular instance. The Library must specifically identify the nature of the unreasonably high costs in writing.

Copying and Duplication

The Library must use the most economical method for making copies of public records, including using double-sided printing, if cost-saving and available.

Non-paper Copies on Physical Media

- The cost for records provided on non-paper physical media, such as computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
- This cost will be charged only if the Library has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.

Paper Copies

- Paper copies of public records made on standard letter (8 ½ x 11) or legal (8 ½ x 14) sized paper will not exceed \$.10 per sheet of paper.
- Copies for non-standard sized sheets will paper will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.

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Mailing Costs

- The cost to mail public records will use a reasonably economical and justified means.
- The Library may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.
- No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless you request it.

Waiver of Fees

The cost of the search for and copying of a public record may be waived or reduced if in the sole judgment of the FOIA Coordinator a waiver or reduced fee is in the public interest because it can be considered as primarily benefitting the general public. The Library Board may identify specific records or types of records it deems should be made available for no charge or at a reduced cost.

e) How do I qualify for an indigence discount on the fee?

The Library will discount the first \$20.00 of fees for a request if you submit an affidavit stating that you are:

- Indigent and receiving specific public assistance; or
- If not receiving public assistance, stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigence.

You are **not** eligible to receive the \$20.00 discount if you:

- Have previously received discounted copies of public records from the Library twice during the calendar year; or
- Are requesting information on behalf of other persons who are offering or providing payment to you to make the request.

An affidavit is sworn statement. For your convenience, the Library has provided an Affidavit of Indigence for the waiver of FOIA fees on the back of the Library FOIA Request Form, which is made available on the Library's website: www.tchrtl.org.

f) May a nonprofit organization receive a discount on the fee?

A nonprofit organization advocating for developmentally disabled or mentally ill individuals that is formally designated by the state to carry out activities under subtitle C of the federal developmental disabilities assistance and bill of rights act of 2000, Public Law 106-402, and the protection and advocacy for individuals with mental illness act, Public Law 99-319, may receive a \$20.00 discount if the request meets all of the following requirements in the Act:

- Is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients.
- Is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under section 931 of the mental health code, 1974 PA 258, MCL 330.1931.
- Is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the state, if requested by the public body.

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g) How may I challenge the denial of a public record or an excessive fee?

Appeal of a Denial of a Public Record

If you believe that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, you may appeal to the Library Board by filing a written appeal of the denial (c/o the Library Director).

The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word “appeal,” and identify the reason or reasons you are seeking a reversal of the denial. You may use the Library FOIA Appeal Form (To Appeal a Denial of Records), which is available on the Library’s website: www.tchrtl.org.

The Library Board is not considered to have received a written appeal until the first regularly scheduled Library Board meeting following submission of the written appeal. Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal the Library Board will respond in writing by:

- Reversing the disclosure denial;
- Upholding the disclosure denial; or
- Reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part.

Whether or not you submitted an appeal of a denial to the Library, you may file a civil action in Montcalm County Circuit Court within 180 days after the Library’s final determination to deny your request. If you prevail in the civil action the court will award you reasonable attorneys’ fees, costs and disbursements. If the court determines that the Library acted arbitrarily and capriciously in refusing to disclose or provide a public record, the court shall award you damages in the amount of \$1,000.

Appeal of an Excess FOIA Processing Fee

If you believe that the fee charged by the Library to process your FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law, you must first appeal to the Library Board by filing a written appeal for a fee reduction to the office of the Library Director.

The appeal must specifically state the word “appeal” and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted. You may use the Library FOIA Appeal Form (To Appeal an Excess Fee), which is available at the Library and on the Library’s website: www.tchrtl.org. The Library Board is not considered to have received a written appeal until the first regularly scheduled Library Board meeting following submission of the written appeal. Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the Library Board will respond in writing by:

- Waiving the fee;
- Reducing the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee;
- Upholding the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the required fee; or
- Issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the Library Board will respond to the written appeal.

Within 45 days after receiving notice of the Library’s Board’s determination of the processing fee appeal, you may commence a civil action in Montcalm County Circuit Court for a fee reduction. If you prevail in

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the civil action by receiving a reduction of 50% or more of the total fee, the court may award all or appropriate amount of reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the court determines that the Library acted arbitrarily and capriciously by charging an excessive fee, court may also award you punitive damages in the amount of \$500.

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