## Ohio Transparency Laws Research

**Sunshine Law Requirements:**

* All local governments and agencies must comply with the Ohio Sunshine Laws introduced in 1975 – which sets out guidelines for local government transparency
* The Sunshine Laws are a set of laws comprised of the Ohio Public Records Act, and the Ohio Open Meetings Law
* **Ohio Public Records Act:**
  + The Public Records Act sets out procedures, limits, and requirements designed to maximize requester success in obtaining access to public records, and to minimize the burden on public offices when possible. When making or responding to a public records request, it is important to be familiar with these statutory provisions to achieve a cooperative, efficient, and satisfactory outcome [2]
  + Every public office must organize and maintain public records in a manner that they can be made available in response to public records requests. A public office must also maintain a copy of its current records retention schedules at a location readily available to the public [2]
  + Any person can make a request for public records by asking a public office or person responsible for public records for specific, existing records [2]
* **Ohio Open Meetings Law:**
  + The Open Meetings Act requires members of a public body to take official action, conduct deliberations, and discuss the public business in an open meeting, unless the subject matter is specifically exempted by law [2]
  + The Act defines a “meeting” as: (1) a prearranged gathering of (2) a majority of the members of a public body (3) for the purpose of discussing public business [2]
  + Certain public gatherings are exempted from this act such as grand juries, the Ohio General Assembly etc. [2]

**Stars Rating System:**

* The Stars Rating System contains guidelines for government transparency which are not mandatory but implemented in addition to the Sunshine Law Requirements [3]
* There are 7 additional guidelines to earn a higher Star Rating for government transparency: (Quoted from [3])
  + 1 - The public office employs a method to track public records requests, such as record requested, date received and date provided.
  + 2 - To assist the public in making a request for records the public office has standard request forms that are available to requestors to use if they wish, as well as for the staff to use when a request is made via phone.
  + 3 - The public office provides an acknowledgment to the requestor when a public records request is received, consistent with how the request was made.
  + 4 - To assist the public in making a request for records, the public office has publicized (website, public records poster, etc.) the name or office title of the records custodian and his/her contact information. Further, the public office’s staff has been trained on how to route public records requests to the record custodian, who also has been trained on fulfilling the public records requests, including guidelines for negotiating ambiguous or large requests.
  + 5 - All elected officials or their designees, as well as community school administrators, have taken the required public-records training within the applicable time frame.
  + 6 - The public office has an online presence that provides the office’s agendas, policies, and schedules.
  + 7 - The public office has an online presence that provides access to official documents, such as the annual budget, salaries, and contact information
* My note – it may be useful to look into this system further as it may lead us to sources containing specific transparency ratings for towns in Ohio

**Bibliography:**

[1] <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/aklr16&div=21&id=&page>=

[2] <http://www.cantonhealth.org/pdf/2018%20Sunshine%20Laws.pdf>

[3] https://www.ohioauditor.gov/open/stars.html