

WA Surveillance Watch - Email Templates

EMAIL TEMPLATES FOR PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS

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✉ TEMPLATE 1: INITIAL SUBMISSION EMAIL

Use when: Submitting your public records request for the first time

To: [Agency's public records email address]

Subject: Public Records Request - Surveillance Camera Systems

Dear Public Records Officer,

Attached please find my public records request regarding surveillance camera systems operated by [DEPARTMENT NAME].

This request is submitted pursuant to the Washington State Public Records Act, RCW 42.56.

Please confirm receipt of this request within five (5) business days as required by RCW 42.56.520.

I prefer to receive records electronically via email to minimize costs and facilitate timely delivery.

If you have any questions or need clarification, please contact me promptly.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]

Attachment: Public Records Request - [Department Name] - [Date].pdf

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✉ TEMPLATE 2: 5-DAY FOLLOW-UP (No Response)

Use when: Agency hasn't responded within 5 business days

To: [Same public records email]

Cc: [Department head/chief if needed]

Subject: FOLLOW-UP REQUIRED - Public Records Request Submitted [Date]

Dear Public Records Officer,

I submitted a public records request on [SUBMISSION DATE] regarding surveillance camera systems operated by [DEPARTMENT NAME].

RCW 42.56.520 requires agencies to respond to public records requests

within five (5) business days by either:

1. Providing the requested records,
2. Providing a reasonable time estimate and cost estimate, or
3. Denying the request with specific exemptions cited.

As of today ([CURRENT DATE]), I have not received any response to my request.

Please respond immediately with one of the statutorily required responses. If you did not receive my original request, it is attached for your reference.

I expect a response within 24 hours.

Thank you,

[YOUR NAME]

[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]

[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]

Attachment: Original Request - [Date].pdf



📧 TEMPLATE 3: ESCALATION TO DEPARTMENT HEAD

Use when: Still no response after 10+ days

To: [Police Chief/Sheriff/City Manager email]

Cc: [Public records officer, City attorney]

Subject: Escalation - Unanswered Public Records Request - [DEPARTMENT NAME]

Dear [Chief/Sheriff/City Manager NAME],

I am escalating an unanswered public records request to your attention.

SUMMARY:

- Request Date: [DATE]
- Subject: Surveillance camera systems
- Days Elapsed: [NUMBER] business days
- Law Requires Response Within: 5 business days (RCW 42.56.520)
- Follow-ups Sent: [DATE(s)]
- Responses Received: NONE

ACTIONS TAKEN:

1. Submitted formal request on [DATE] (attached)
2. Sent follow-up email on [DATE] (attached)

3. [Additional follow-ups if any]

Despite multiple attempts and clear legal requirements, I have received no response from your department's public records officer.

REQUEST FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION:

Please ensure this request receives immediate attention and compliance with Washington State law. I expect a response within three (3) business days.

If your department intends to deny this request, state law requires specific exemption citations and explanations.

I hope we can resolve this matter without further escalation to the Washington Attorney General's office.

Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]
[YOUR MAILING ADDRESS]

Attachments:

- Original Request ([DATE])
- Follow-up Email ([DATE])

📄 **TEMPLATE 4: APPEAL OF PRIVACY-BASED DENIAL**

Use when: Agency denies request citing privacy concerns

To: [Department Head/Police Chief]

Cc: [Public records officer, City attorney if known]

Subject: APPEAL - Denial of Public Records Request Based on Privacy

Dear [Chief/Sheriff/Department Head],

I am formally appealing the denial of my public records request dated [DATE] regarding surveillance camera systems operated by [DEPARTMENT NAME].

BACKGROUND:

Your agency denied my request on [DATE], citing privacy concerns and [specific exemption if cited].

LEGAL BASIS FOR APPEAL:

1. CONTROLLING COURT PRECEDENT:

On November 7, 2024, Skagit County Superior Court Judge Elizabeth Yost

Neidzwski ruled in Rodriguez v. City of Sedro Woolley that surveillance

camera data collected by law enforcement agencies qualifies as public

records subject to the Washington Public Records Act (RCW 42.56).

2. COURT'S SPECIFIC FINDING:

The judge found that the scope of surveillance is "so broad and indiscriminate" – with most images capturing people not suspected of any crime – that the data MUST be released under public records law.

3. REJECTION OF PRIVACY ARGUMENTS:

The court explicitly rejected the same privacy-based arguments your agency is now asserting. The cities of Sedro Woolley and Stanwood made identical arguments about privacy violations and potential harm. The court found these arguments insufficient to withhold the records.

4. STATEWIDE IMPLICATIONS:

This ruling affects dozens of Washington police departments using surveillance technology. Both cities involved have since turned off their camera systems rather than comply with transparency requirements.

REQUEST FOR RELIEF:

I respectfully request that you:

1. IMMEDIATELY REVERSE the denial of my public records request
2. PROVIDE the requested surveillance camera records within ten (10) business days
3. If you believe specific information is exempt, CITE the specific RCW 42.56 exemption (other than privacy) and EXPLAIN how it applies

CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINUED DENIAL:

Failure to comply with this appeal may result in:

- Complaint to the Washington Attorney General's office
- Potential legal action under RCW 42.56.550
- Penalties against the agency (\$5-\$100 per day)
- Recovery of attorney fees if legal action is successful
- Public reporting on your department's lack of transparency

I remain willing to work cooperatively to ensure appropriate transparency while addressing any legitimate concerns you may have.

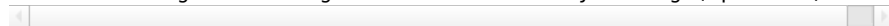
Please respond to this appeal within ten (10) business days.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]
[YOUR MAILING ADDRESS]

Attachments:

- Original Request
- Agency's Denial Letter
- News coverage of Rodriguez v. Sedro Woolley ruling (optional)



📧 TEMPLATE 5: REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION

Use when: Agency asks you to clarify or narrow your request

To: [Public records officer]

Subject: RE: Clarification of Public Records Request - [Date]

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for your email dated [DATE] requesting clarification of my public records request.

To address your questions:

[Answer their specific questions clearly. Examples below:]

Q: What specific time period are you requesting?

A: I am requesting records from [START DATE] to present, or if your surveillance program predates [START DATE], from the inception of the program to present.

Q: Are you requesting records about all cameras or specific locations?

A: I am requesting records about all surveillance cameras operated by [DEPARTMENT NAME], with particular interest in the cameras located at:

- [Location 1]
- [Location 2]
- [Location 3]

Q: What do you mean by "network audit logs"?

A: Network audit logs are the records maintained by surveillance system vendors (such as Flock Safety) showing every search performed on your surveillance data, including: who performed the search, when it was performed, what was searched for, and the stated reason for the search.

[Continue answering their questions...]

PRIORITIZATION:

If providing all requested items would result in excessive delay or cost, please prioritize the following items for immediate response:

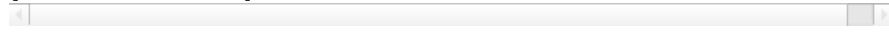
1. Complete list/map of all surveillance camera locations
2. Contracts with surveillance technology vendors
3. Current policies governing camera use and data sharing
4. Network audit logs for the past [time period]
5. Records of federal agency access

I am willing to receive records on a rolling basis as they become available, rather than waiting for the entire request to be completed.

Please let me know if you need any additional clarification. I remain committed to working cooperatively while preserving my rights under RCW 42.56.

Thank you,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]



TEMPLATE 6: FEE WAIVER REQUEST

Use when: Agency quotes a fee that seems too high

To: [Public records officer]

Subject: Fee Waiver Request - Public Records Request [Date]

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for your response dated [DATE] providing a cost estimate of \$[AMOUNT] for my public records request regarding surveillance camera systems.

I am formally requesting a waiver or reduction of fees pursuant to RCW 42.56.120(3) on the following grounds:

1. PUBLIC INTEREST:

This request serves a significant public interest by:

- Ensuring transparency regarding government surveillance programs
- Allowing public oversight of law enforcement technology
- Informing the community about surveillance in their neighborhoods
- Verifying compliance with state law prohibiting immigration enforcement cooperation (RCW 10.93.160)

2. NON-COMMERCIAL PURPOSE:

This request is for personal use to understand surveillance in my community. It is not for any commercial purpose. Any information obtained will be used to promote government accountability and public awareness.

3. PUBLIC SIGNIFICANCE:

Given:

- The November 2024 Skagit County court ruling on surveillance transparency
- The October 2024 University of Washington report revealing unauthorized federal access to Washington surveillance systems
- Widespread public concern about surveillance and civil liberties

Disclosure of this information contributes significantly to public understanding of government operations and is clearly in the public interest.

4. REQUEST FOR COST BREAKDOWN:

Please provide a detailed breakdown of the estimated cost:

- Number of pages/documents to be copied
- Copying cost per page
- Staff time allocated (by task)
- Hourly rate for staff time

Note: RCW 42.56.120(3) specifically prohibits charging for:

- Staff time to search and compile records
- Legal review or redaction time

5. ALTERNATIVE FORMAT:

I am willing to accept records in electronic format (PDF via email or file transfer) to minimize or eliminate copying costs.

6. NARROWED REQUEST:

If cost remains prohibitive even after fee waiver consideration, I am willing to discuss narrowing my request to focus on the most essential items, particularly:

- Camera location inventory

- Vendor contracts
- Network audit logs
- Policies on data sharing

Please reconsider the fee in light of the public interest factors and statutory limitations on allowable charges.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]

TEMPLATE 7: RESPONSE TO “RECORDS DON’T EXIST”

Use when: Agency claims requested records don’t exist

To: [Public records officer]

Subject: Request for Adequate Search Documentation

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for your response dated [DATE] indicating that certain requested records do not exist.

To ensure an adequate search was conducted, please provide documentation of the search performed, including:

1. SEARCH METHODOLOGY:

- Which systems, databases, or file locations were searched
- What search terms were used
- Which staff members performed the search
- Date(s) the search was conducted

2. VENDOR CONSULTATION:

Please confirm whether you consulted with your surveillance system vendor(s) regarding:

- Network audit logs (Flock, Motorola, etc. maintain these logs)
- User access records and permissions
- System configuration settings
- Data retention records

3. RECORDS THAT SHOULD EXIST:

If [DEPARTMENT NAME] operates surveillance cameras, the following records should exist:

- Contracts or purchase orders for camera systems
- Installation records and location data
- Policies or procedures for camera use
- Access credentials and user accounts
- Some form of usage records or data logs

Please explain specifically why these records would not exist if your department operates a surveillance camera program.

4. PARTIAL COMPLIANCE:

If some requested items exist and others do not, please provide the items that do exist while explaining the search conducted for items

you indicate do not exist.

5. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE:

Please provide documentary evidence of your search process, such as:

- Email to IT staff requesting records search
- Memorandum documenting search methodology
- Response from vendors indicating no records exist

If the search was adequate and records truly do not exist, this documentation will help me understand the scope of your search.

If the search was not thorough, please conduct an adequate search including consultation with:

- IT staff
- Surveillance system vendors
- Contract/procurement staff
- Officers/units that use the surveillance systems

Thank you for your cooperation in ensuring a complete search.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]

TEMPLATE 8: INQUIRY BEFORE FORMAL REQUEST

Use when: You want to gauge agency cooperation before filing

To: [Public records officer]

Subject: Inquiry Regarding Public Records - Surveillance Camera Systems

Dear Public Records Officer,

I am considering filing a public records request regarding surveillance camera systems operated by [DEPARTMENT NAME]. Before submitting a formal request, I wanted to reach out to:

1. Confirm the best method for submitting requests (email, portal, mail)
2. Understand your typical response timeline for this type of request
3. Inquire about potential costs for electronic records
4. Ask if any summary information is publicly available

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS:

1. Does [DEPARTMENT NAME] currently operate or have access to:
 - Automatic License Plate Reader (ALPR) cameras?
 - Video surveillance systems?
 - Community camera programs (Ring, etc.)?
2. Do you have any publicly available information about your surveillance programs, such as:
 - Camera location maps?
 - Program policies or procedures?
 - Council presentations or reports?

3. What is your preferred format for receiving public records requests?
4. What is your typical timeline for responding to requests about surveillance technology?

I appreciate any guidance you can provide. If formal request submission is required to receive this information, please let me know and I will submit accordingly.

Thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]

📧 TEMPLATE 9: REDACTION EXPLANATION REQUEST

Use when: You receive heavily redacted documents

To: [Public records officer]

Subject: Request for Redaction Justification and Index

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for providing records dated [DATE] in response to my public records request.

I note substantial redactions throughout the documents. RCW 42.56.210 requires agencies to provide a statement of the exemption authorizing the withholding and an explanation of how it applies to the records being withheld.

Please provide:

1. REDACTION INDEX:

For each redacted portion, please provide:

- Document title/description
- Page number(s)
- Specific RCW 42.56 exemption authorizing the redaction
- Brief explanation of how that exemption applies to the specific redacted content

2. PRIVILEGE LOG:

If entire documents were withheld, please provide a privilege log listing:

- Document description
- Date created
- Author/sender
- Recipient(s)
- Exemption(s) claimed
- Explanation of exemption application

3. CONFIRMATION:

Please confirm that you have provided all non-exempt portions of

responsive records and that redactions represent the minimum necessary to protect legitimately exempt information.

4. SPECIFIC CONCERNS:

I note the following redactions that appear questionable:

[List specific examples, such as:]

- Page 3: Entire paragraph redacted regarding camera locations (locations should not be exempt)
- Page 7: Vendor name redacted (contract information is public)
- Page 12: Cost information redacted (budget data is public)

Please provide either the unredacted information or specific explanation for why these particular items are exempt.

I reserve the right to appeal specific redactions once I understand the basis for them.

Thank you for your cooperation in ensuring appropriate transparency.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]



📧 TEMPLATE 10: THANK YOU AND FOLLOW-UP

Use when: You receive responsive records and want to follow up

To: [Public records officer]

Subject: Thank You and Follow-Up Questions - Records Request
[Date]

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for providing records on [DATE] in response to my public records request regarding surveillance camera systems.

The information has been helpful and informative. After reviewing the materials, I have a few follow-up questions that may require additional records requests:

CLARIFICATION NEEDED:

1. [Example: The camera location list shows 12 cameras, but I observed additional cameras at [locations]. Can you confirm whether these are included in your inventory?]
2. [Example: The network audit logs provided cover January-March 2024. Can you provide logs for April 2024-present?]
3. [Example: The vendor contract is redacted on pages 5-7. Can you explain what information was redacted and why?]

ADDITIONAL RECORDS:

I may submit a follow-up request for:

- [Specific item you now know to request]
- [Additional timeframe or information]

Before submitting a new formal request, can you confirm these records exist and would be responsive?

Thank you again for your assistance in providing government transparency.
I appreciate your department's cooperation with Washington's Public Records Act.

Best regards,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]

TIPS FOR USING THESE TEMPLATES

Customization

- Replace ALL [BRACKETED] items with your specific information
- Adjust tone if needed (these are firm but professional)
- Add or remove details based on your situation

Timing

- Initial submission: Immediately
- 5-day follow-up: Business day 6
- Escalation: Day 10-15
- Appeal: Within 10 days of denial

Documentation

- Save copies of all sent emails
- Print or PDF important correspondence
- Create a folder for each request
- Track dates in a spreadsheet or calendar

Professional Tone

- Stay calm and professional
- Cite law but don't lecture
- Be firm but not hostile
- Offer cooperation while preserving rights

When to Use Which Template

1. **Template 1:** Always use for initial submission
2. **Template 2:** If no response by day 6
3. **Template 3:** If no response by day 10-12
4. **Template 4:** If denied for privacy (use immediately)
5. **Template 5:** If agency asks questions (respond promptly)
6. **Template 6:** If quoted high fees (respond within a few days)
7. **Template 7:** If told records don't exist (respond promptly)
8. **Template 8:** Optional preliminary inquiry
9. **Template 9:** If you get heavily redacted docs
10. **Template 10:** After receiving records, for follow-up

EMAIL CHECKLIST

Before sending any email:

- ☐ Replaced all [BRACKETED] placeholders
 - ☐ Correct recipient email address
 - ☐ Clear subject line
 - ☐ Professional tone
 - ☐ Specific dates and details included
 - ☐ Relevant attachments included
 - ☐ Your complete contact information
 - ☐ Spell check completed
 - ☐ Copy saved for records
-

Print and keep these templates handy for quick reference!

*Part of the Washington State Surveillance Camera Public Records
Request Toolkit*