

Access to Information

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Everyone has the right to access records held by government, subject to some limitations. Access to information laws regulate access to records held by government ministries, Crown corporations, health authorities, and police forces.

WHAT LAW GOVERNS ACCESS TO INFORMATION?

In British Columbia, access to information laws are governed under the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act \("FOIPPA"\)](#).

Subject to some limitations, FOIPPA guarantees everyone the right to access records held by provincial government ministries and their service providers, including police forces.

There are two types of records:

- Personal records: information of a personal nature about an identifiable individual, such as records that contain your name, home address or phone, date of birth, etc.
- General records: information of a general nature that can be released in whole or in part, such as briefing notes, contracts, etc.

Access to information laws for federal institutions, such as government ministries and the RCMP, are governed under the following legislation:

- Access to **personal records** is governed under the [Privacy Act](#)
- Access to **general records** is governed under the [Access to Information Act](#)

HOW DO I REQUEST RECORDS?

This section provides information on how to request **personal records** and **general records** from **British Columbia government ministries** and **federal institutions**.

Personal Records:

If you want to access a personal record held by British Columbia government ministries or their service providers, you can do one of the following:

- Complete the [Access to Personal Information Request Form](#)
- Write a request in the form of a letter

If you submit a request in the form of a letter, your letter should include the following:

- Your full legal name (or any other names you went by in the past)
- Your date of birth
- Your complete mailing address and daytime phone number
- The name of the program or service where your records are held
- A description of the records you are requesting
- Any employee number, patient number, or other identifiable file number
- The date range for the records you are requesting

You will be required to submit a copy of your government-issued ID.

You can mail, email, or fax your request to Information Access Operations:

Information Access Operations
Freedom of Information Requests
PO Box 9569, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9K1
Phone: (250) 387 1321
Fax: (250) 387 9843
Email: FOI.Request@gov.bc.ca

If you want to request a personal record held by a federal institution, such as a government ministry, you can do one of the following:

- Submit a request online via the [Access to Information and Personal Information Online Service](#).
- Submit a request, in the form of a letter, to the [Access to Information and Privacy Coordinator](#) at the appropriate federal institution.

If you want to submit your request in the form of a letter, your letter should include the same information for a request to BC government ministries (see above).

There is no cost for personal records requests.

General Records

An example of a general record request could be:

"A copy of the agreement and/or contract between Party X and the Ministry of Y for management consulting services provided from April 2012 through March 2013."

If you want to access a general record held by British Columbia government ministries or their service providers, submit a [FOI General Request Online eForm](#).

If you do not want to use the electronic forms, you can send a request, in the form of a letter, to the province's Information Access Operations (see above).

Your letter should include the following:

- Your full name
- Your address, phone number, and email
- A description of the record you are requesting (see example above)
- Date range of the record you are requesting

For BC government ministries, there is no fee for the first three hours of staff time for general records requests. If your request requires more time, you may be charged a fee.

If you want to request a general record held by a federal institution, such as a government ministry, you can do one of the following:

- Submit a request online via the [Access to Information and Personal Information Online Service](#).
- Submit a request, in the form of a letter, to the [Access to Information and Privacy Coordinator](#) at the federal institution.

If you request a general record in the form of a letter, your letter should include the following:

- Your full name
- Your address, phone number, and email
- A description of the record you are requesting (see example above)
- Date range of the record you are requesting

There is a \$500 application fee for general records requests under the federal Access to Information Act.

HOW DO I REQUEST RECORDS HELD BY POLICE FORCES?

If you want to request a personal record held by a police force in British Columbia, other than the RCMP, you must submit a request in writing directly to the appropriate police force.

An example of a personal record request could be as follows:

“Copies of all records that contain my personal information from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2010.”

There are a number of police forces in British Columbia. Below are links to the Access to Information and Privacy request forms for a few of BC's largest police forces:

- [Vancouver Police Department](#)
- [Victoria Police Department](#)

If you want to request a personal record held by the RCMP, please see the personal records for federal institutions section (above).

Please note that police forces may redact or refuse to disclose records if:

- The record contains personal information about a third party, such as a 9-1-1 caller, witness, etc.
- The disclosure of the record would be harmful to law enforcement. For example, the record relates to an ongoing investigation.

HOW DO I CORRECT AN ERROR IN A RECORD?

All federal and provincial public bodies must make every reasonable effort to ensure that the personal information it holds is accurate and complete.

If you believe there is an error or omission in your personal information held by a public body, you can request that the head of the public body correct the error or omission. Submit a written request in the form of a letter to the public body.

HOW DO I FILE A COMPLAINT?

If you are refused access to personal or general records, or your request is not processed within the prescribed timelines, you can file a complaint with the provincial or federal information and privacy commissioner.

For complaints against provincial public bodies, file with the [Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia](#)

For complaints against federal public bodies, file with the [Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada](#)