

Public Records Policy

Effective Date: 01/25/2012

Replaces: NEW

Approved by: SEAT Board of Trustees

Approval Date: 01/25/2012

PURPOSE:

It is the policy of SEAT that openness leads to a better informed citizenry, which leads to a better government and better public policy. It is the policy of SEAT to strictly adhere to the state's Public Records Act. All exemptions to openness are to be constructed in their narrowest sense and any denial of public records in response to a valid request must be accompanied by an explanation, including legal authority, as outlined in the Ohio Revised Code. If the request is in writing, the explanation must also be in writing.

DEFINITIONS:

SEAT, in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code, defines records as any of the following: Any document-paper, electronic (including, but not limited to, e-mail) or other format-that is created or received by, or comes under the jurisdiction of a public office that documents the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office. All records of SEAT are public unless they are specifically exempt from disclosure under the Ohio Revised Code.

It is the policy of SEAT that, as required by Ohio law, records be organized and maintained so that they are readily available for inspection and copying (See Section 4 for the e-mail record policy). Record Retention Schedules are to be updated regularly and posted prominently.

PROCEDURES:

Each request for public records should be evaluated for a response using the following guidelines:

1. Although no specific language is required to make a request, the requester must at least identify the records requested with sufficient clarity to allow SEAT to identify, retrieve, and review the records. If it is not clear what records are being sought, the records custodian must contact the requestor of the manner in which the office keeps its records.
2. The requester does not have to put a records request in writing, and does not have to provide his or her identity or the intended use of the requested public record. It is SEAT's general policy that this information is not to be requested.
3. Public records are to be available for inspection during regular business hours, with the exception of published holidays. Public records must be made available for inspection promptly. Copies of public records must be made available within a reasonable period of time. "Prompt" and "reasonable" take into account the volume of records

requested; the proximity of the location where the records are stored; and the necessity for any legal review of the records requested.

4. Each request should be evaluated for an estimated length of time required to gather the records. Routine requests for records should be satisfied immediately if feasible to do so. Routine requests include, but are not limited to, meeting minutes (both in draft and final form), budgets salary information, forms and application, personnel rosters, etc. If fewer than 20 pages of copies are requested or if the records are readily available in an electronic format that can be e-mailed or downloaded easily, these should be made as quickly as the equipment allows.
5. Any denials of public records requested must include an explanation, including legal authority. If portions of a record are public and portions are exempt, the exempt portions are to be redacted and the rest released. If there are redactions, each redaction must be accompanied by a supporting explanation, including legal authority.

All requests for public records must either be satisfied (see Section 2.4) or be acknowledged in writing by SEAT within three (3) business days following the office's receipt of the request. If a request is deemed significantly beyond "routine", such as seeking a voluminous number of copies or requiring extensive research, the acknowledgement must include the following:

1. An estimated number of business days it will take to satisfy the request
2. An estimated cost if copies are requested
3. Any items within the request that may be exempt from disclosure.

COSTS FOR PUBLIC RECORDS

Those seeking public records will be charged only the actual cost of making copies.

1. The charge for paper copies is five (5) cents per page.
2. The charge for downloaded computer files to a compact disc is \$1 for the disc if the disc is provided by the requestor.
3. The charge for downloaded computer files to a compact disc is \$4 per disc if SEAT provides the disc.
4. Requesters may ask that documents be mailed to them. They will be charged the actual cost of postage and mailing supplies.

EMAIL

There is no charge for documents e-mailed. Documents in electronic mail format are records as defined by the Ohio Revised Code when their content relates to the business of the office. E-mail is to be treated in the same fashion as records in other formats and should follow the same retention schedules.

1. Records in private e-mail accounts used to conduct public business are subject to disclosure, and all employees or representatives of SEAT are instructed to retain their emails that relate to public business (See Definitions) and to copy them to their business e-mail accounts and/or the office's record custodian.
2. The records custodian is to treat e-mails from private accounts as records of public office, filing them in the appropriate way, retaining them per established schedules and making them available for inspection and copying in accordance with the Public Records Act.

FAILURE TO RESPOND TO A PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST

SEAT recognizes the legal and non-legal consequences of failure to properly respond to a public records request. In addition to the distrust in government that failure to comply may cause, SEAT's failure to comply with a request may result in a court ordering SEAT to comply with the law and to pay the requestor attorney's fees and damages.