Public Abstract
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A 50 STATE STUDY

This research explores the accessibility of state public records in electronic format through a 50-state (plus D.C.) survey assessing agency responses to requests for commonly-sought public salary records.

Specifically, this research looked at whether states prioritized access to records in electronic format by proactively making electronic records available online, and how states responded to requests for records in an electronic format, in terms of agency response time, compliance with state law, fees charged, and the format, quality and comprehensiveness of responsive records.

States with an online records request submission option had a slightly faster response rate overall than states that required citizens to submit requests by mail. Most states responded by email, with less than 20 percent of states responding by either mail service or phone.

Ten states failed to adequately respond to the records request and failed to grant or deny the request in whole or in part. Seven states required payment of a fee before the request could be processed, and the fees quoted ranged drastically, from $17 in Missouri to potentially $195,000.00 in South Dakota.

About half of all states provided the data in the format requested and nearly all states proactively provided at least some salary data online. However, the comprehensiveness of the data received was lacking.

Recommendations are that agencies should adopt policies to efficiently store each new record electronically from the moment it is created and, at the same time, should develop a plan to bring pre-digital records up-to-date so that they may also be stored in accessible electronic formats.