

ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC PUBLIC RECORDS:

A 50 STATE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the accessibility of state public records in electronic format through a 50-state (plus D.C.) survey to assess how states responded to a request for commonly-sought salary records in an electronic format, comparing the quality of responses.

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 electronic records, 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 option had a slightly faster response rate than states that required citizens to mail requests. The mode of response skewed heavily toward electronic communication, with less than 20 percent of states responding by either mail 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 processing the request, and the fees 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. Comprehensiveness of the data received was lacking.