
Understanding Iowa's Open Records Law & UI's Response Process

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Introduction

The University of Iowa and its employees are subject to the Iowa Public Records Law, Chapter 22 of the Iowa Code, which establishes that documents or records held by government agencies are public and subject to disclosure, unless an exception in the law recognizes the confidentiality of the material.

Introduction

The university has a centralized process for receiving and responding to public records requests, managed by the Office of Transparency. All requests should be funneled through the Office of Transparency to be processed and tracked.

If you receive a request directly from a requester:

Forward it to public-records@uiowa.edu so the request can be properly assigned and tracked.

Introduction

By statute, public records include all “records, documents, tape or other information, stored or preserved in any medium, of or belonging to this state.”

Records and communications relating to university business are public records even if they are stored in your personal devices (e.g. emails, texts, photos, phone records, instant messages).

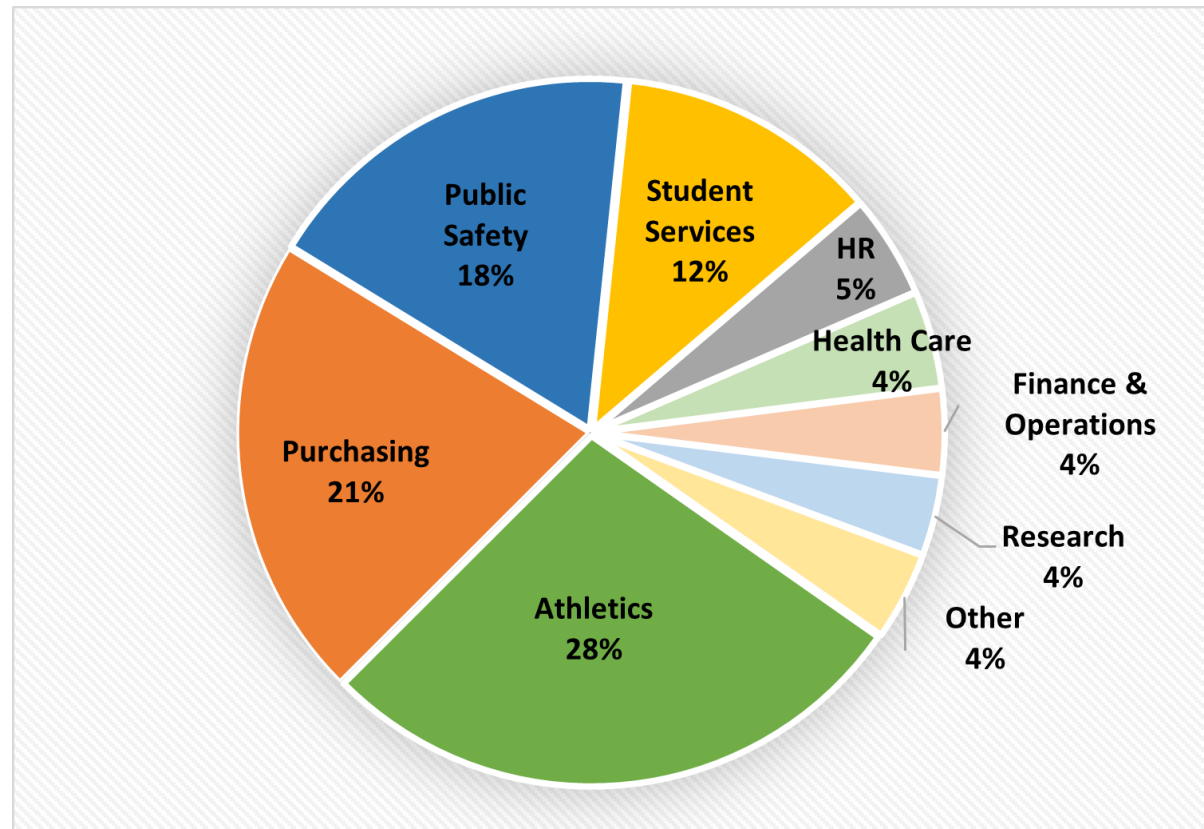
Examples

There are many types of documents and records that may be the subject of an open records request, but the following items are commonly requested:

- Employment contracts or offer letters
- Employees' emails or other correspondence
- Employee salary data
- Contracts between the university and vendors
- Statistics and datasets
- Police incident reports
- Bid proposals and results (after awarded)

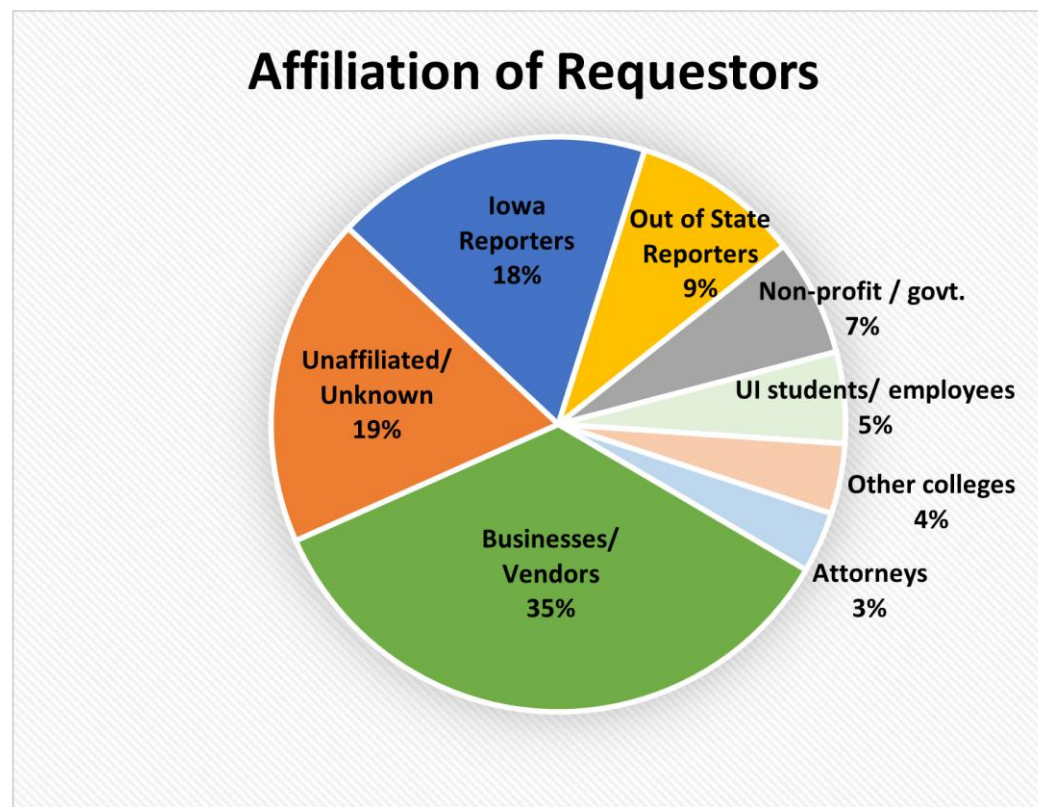
FY 2025 Public Records Requests

759 total requests received



Who can make an open records request?

Anyone may file a records request, and requestors do not have to provide a reason for their request.



Confidentiality exceptions

Iowa Code Section 22.7 has a list of records that are confidential. Some of the exemptions that apply to the University of Iowa include:

- Student education records
- Medical/patient records
- Trade secrets
- Personal information in confidential personnel records
- Attorney-client privileged communications
- Drafts
- Police investigative files
- Security-related information
- Communications from outside government with an expectation of privacy

If you are named in a public records request

You will receive a notification from the Office of Transparency with instructions.

If it will take longer than one hour to collect documents responsive to the request, please estimate the number of hours it will take to compile records. The Office of Transparency will send an invoice to the requester for the estimated time.

If payment is required, wait to gather responsive records until notified by the Office of Transparency that the invoice has been paid.

If you are named in a public records request

Retrieve all responsive records, including emails, attachments to emails, electronic files, paper documents, voice messages, photos, images, etc. Make sure to search all possible folders and locations, including but not limited to:

- Inbox and Sent folder
- Deleted folder
- Personal folders or .pst files stored on your hard drive or file server
- Storage cloud
- Hard drives/Network drives
- Document sharing accounts (e.g. Sharepoint)
- Hard copy folders
- Personal devices and personal email accounts

If you are named in a public records request

Once you have finished gathering the records, send all responsive materials to the Office of Transparency.

Do not withhold or redact records because you think the information is confidential or exempt from release. Leave that determination to the Office of Transparency and the Office of the General Counsel.

Do not delete, destroy, or conceal any record that is subject to a pending public records request.

What if I refuse to turn in records?

The law requires University employees to comply, and if they fail to do so, the University will consider appropriate discipline under the Ethics and Responsibilities policies for both faculty and staff (Policy Manual III-15 and 16).

The law also provides for civil penalties. Members of a governmental body who violate the law can be assessed damages and ordered to pay costs and attorney fees. Repeat offenders can be removed from office.

Best Practices: Email Use and Record Retention

Be mindful when sending messages which contain confidential or sensitive information. Any record or email could be considered a public record.

Records are maintained in accordance with the University's Record Retention Policy (Policy Manual V, Chapter 17). "Official" records should not be destroyed or disposed of by faculty or staff except as outlined in the Retention Schedule. However, "transitory" records do not carry a requirement for retention and may be destroyed at the discretion of the user when they cease to be useful.

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Questions?

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