

Published based on [Why Public Records Are Not Free Online](#)

# Why Public Records Are Not Free Online

In general, public records are those records that the public can access - for the most part - without restriction. These records are made available to the public because they were voluntarily disclosed or because the government activity involved required disclosure. Often they contain personal or private information about individuals.

Government agencies keep these documents at all levels (from the national or federal level down through state and local/county). They are all supposed to be free, since they are disclosed for the purposes of public access.

To access public records, you go to the proper government agency. Then you simply put in a request for the record that you want, and wait for the response. The public record, if found, will be given or sent to you. You may be asked to pay a nominal fee for technical expenses.

If you go online, however, and use many of the online public record search sites, you will find that you are asked to pay for this same information. There are many reasons for this.

One straightforward reason is that some of these sites have purchased the documents from government agencies and are charging you to recoup these costs.

Some others may be charging you not for the document itself, but for the services they provide. If they maintain a large database for you to search, this is a very expensive thing that allows you quick and easy access to records that would otherwise take a good while to search.

People who need quick access to records but can't pay should not be worried. You can also get online access to these records for free. Try to find the right sites to use by going to a search engine and searching for "public record access free sites."

Some of these will be private websites that allow free searching, though often the database is smaller than are those that charge. You can also find websites that have links to government websites that allow online searching for records.

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