PROVA WORKSHEETS

TEMPLATE

Evidence Request Letter and Reply Log

A letter to send, a log to keep, and a record of what was answered

FOR:
the person in a resident group, tenants' association or community organization who sends the request and keeps track of the replies

INCLUDES:
a request letter to adapt, three short follow-up letters, a reply log, and a closing record of what was answered, refused and followed up

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01 Use this template

Result:
a written evidence request, the institution's reply, and a record of what was answered, refused and followed up, kept in one place that someone else in the group could pick up.

Fill in one copy for each decision you are asking about. Work through the parts in order: agree the details in Part A, send the letter in Part B, use Part C only if you need to follow up, log every contact in Part D, and complete Part E when the exchange is finished or paused.

Replace every bracketed prompt with your own words, or write **not known**. A blank is not an answer. Keep copies of everything you send and receive, with dates. For a completed version of these forms, see *A Completed Request and Reply, Annotated* in this collection. For when to use a formal request rather than an informal one, see the guide *Asking an Institution for the Evidence Behind a Decision*.

Whether a letter counts as a formal public-records request, and what deadlines, fees and appeal routes apply, depends on the law where the institution sits. Check before relying on any date.

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02 Part A: Agree the details before you write

Field	Your entry
The decision, in one sentence	
Who made it, and when	
Where it was announced or recorded	
What the group already has (papers, links, press releases)	
The one question that matters most	
Other questions, in order of importance	
Records you believe exist	
Questions that would need new work to answer	
Route chosen (informal ask, public meeting, formal records request, representative, oversight body)	
Law or policy the request is made under, if formal	
Who signs for the group	
Contact address the group checks	

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Where copies will be kept	
Agreed by (names or roles) and date	

Before you write: check that the records you list are things the institution would plausibly hold, and that your most important question is first. If a member prefers not to be named, the organization signs.

03 Part B: Request letter

Adapt the wording to your situation. Delete any paragraph that does not apply.

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[Your organization's name] [Contact address or email] [Date]

To: [Name or role, for example "Public Records Officer"] [Institution] [Address or email for records requests]

Request for the records behind [name of decision]

Dear [Name or role],

We are [organization name], a [tenants' association / residents' group / community organization] representing [who you represent, for example "residents of the Northside neighborhood"]. We are writing about [the decision], made by [body or official] on [date, if known].

[If formal:] We make this request under [name of the public-records law or policy, if known].

To understand the decision, we ask for copies of the following records, for the period [start date] to [end date]:

1. [The report, memo or presentation put to the decision-maker.]
2. [The figures cited as the reason for the decision, and the table or dataset they come from.]
3. [The definitions used for those figures: what was counted, how and over what period.]
4. [Any record of other options considered.]
5. [Any consultation summary or assessment of who would be affected.]

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We would find [spreadsheet / electronic copies / paper copies] most useful, if the records exist in that form.

[Optional:] We also have the following questions. We understand they may need to be answered separately from the records request:

- [Question.]
- [Question.]

If any part of this request is withheld, please tell us which part and the reason, and whether a summary or redacted version could be provided instead. If the request is too broad, we are glad to discuss narrowing it.

Please let us know who is handling this request and when we can expect a reply.

Thank you for your help.

[Name or role], on behalf of [organization name]

Before you send:

- Is it addressed to the right person or office? Many institutions publish a records contact or online portal; use it if there is one.
- Does the letter name only the organization and the agreed signatory, and no member who preferred not to be named?
- Have you kept a dated copy and logged it in Part D?

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04 Part C: Follow-up letters

Use these only when you need them. Keep each one short and refer to your original request by its date and any reference number you were given.

C1. Reminder (no reply received)

We wrote on [date] asking for records about [decision] (your reference [number, if any]). We have not yet received a reply or an acknowledgment. Could you let us know whether the request was received, who is handling it, and when we can expect a response? A copy of our original request is attached.

C2. Clarification or narrowing (partial reply, or a request to narrow)

Thank you for your reply of [date]. [To narrow: To help, we would like to limit our request to (items or dates).] [To clarify: We understood (item) to mean (your understanding). Could you confirm, or tell us whether a different record holds that information?] [For something held elsewhere: You mentioned that (record) is not held by your office. Could you tell us which body holds it?]

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C3. Request for review (refusal or withholding)

> Thank you for your reply of [date]. You withheld [item] on the basis of [reason given]. We ask that this decision be reviewed. [Brief reason, for example: a summary of the totals would not identify any individual.] Please let us know the review process and how long it usually takes.

Check whether a review or appeal must be made within a set time, and to whom. This differs by jurisdiction.

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05 Part D: Reply log

Add a row for every contact, in either direction, including phone calls and conversations at meetings. Record what was said in a sentence, not a judgment.

Date	Direction (sent / received)	Route (email, letter, phone, meeting, portal)	Who (name or role)	Reference number	What was asked or said	Records received	Next step; who; by when

Keep alongside the log: dated copies of every letter, the records received (unaltered), and any notes of calls. Name files with the date first so they sort in order.

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06 Part E: What was answered, refused and followed up

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Complete this when the exchange is finished, or when the group decides to pause it. It is the record a new volunteer or a decision-maker should be able to read on its own.

Item requested	Outcome (answered / partly answered / not held / held elsewhere / refused / no reply)	Reason given, if any	Follow-up made and result	Still open? Owner and next check

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Summary field	Your entry
What we now know that we did not before	
What we still do not know	
What the records show about the reason given for the decision	
What we will ask the decision-maker to do, and by when	
Who was told (members, the institution, others) and when	
Date this record was completed, and by whom	

Before handing on: check that every item in the request letter appears in Part E, that "not held" and "refused" are recorded separately, and that any open item has an owner and a date. Remove any personal information about individuals that was released by mistake, and do not share it further.

RELATED: Asking an Institution for the Evidence Behind a Decision, for when to use a formal request rather than an informal one; A Completed Request and Reply, Annotated, for a completed version of these forms.

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07 Further reading

1. **MuckRock**. A nonprofit site where requesters publish public-records requests and the replies they receive; useful for seeing how others have worded requests to a similar institution.
2. **Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, Open Government Guide**. Check here, state by state, for response deadlines, fees and appeal routes before relying on a date in Part D.

QUESTION IT

Found an error, or want to question this document? Contact Prova at hello@byprova.com.

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