COLLECTION II — CIVIC PARTICIPATION & VOTING

Filing a FOIL Request in New York

How to use New York's Freedom of Information Law to access government records.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026

What FOIL is

New York's Freedom of Information Law, known as FOIL, gives anyone the right to request records from state and local government agencies: towns, counties, villages, school districts and state agencies. You don't have to say why you want them. (Records of the State Legislature and the courts follow different rules.)

1. Decide exactly what you want

FOIL covers records that already exist. An agency doesn't have to create a new document or answer questions. Describe the records clearly, with a date range: for example, "all contracts over $20,000 awarded by the Town from January 2024 to the present." Ask for electronic copies if you can.

2. Find the agency's Records Access Officer

Every agency has one. Many now take requests through an online FOIL portal on their website. Others take requests by email or mail. Keep a copy of what you sent and the date.

3. Know the deadlines

- The agency must acknowledge your request within **5 business days**.

- It must then grant or deny it within **20 business days**, or tell you in writing why it needs longer and give a date.
- Agencies may charge for paper copies, but electronic records are often free.

4. If you're denied, appeal

A denial, or a missed deadline, can be appealed in writing to the agency's appeals officer within **30 days**. The agency then has 10 business days to respond. If the appeal is denied, you can go to court. The NY Committee on Open Government offers free advice and advisory opinions.

5. Track and share what you find

Civest Sphere's **Public Records** page shows real FOIL requests sent to Long Island towns and how each agency responded, as a model for your own.

Sample request

"Under the New York Freedom of Information Law, I request electronic copies of [describe records] for the period [dates]. If any portion is denied, please cite the exemption and release the remainder. Please contact me if fees will exceed $[amount]."

> OFFICIAL SOURCES
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> - NY Committee on Open Government (https://opengovernment.ny.gov)

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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