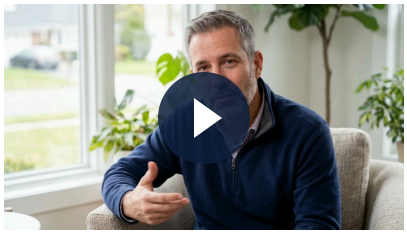
COLLECTION I — THE 12 POINTS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Transparency in Government — Citizen's Guide

How open government works, how FOIL requests work, and how to access public records in New York.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026



WATCH THE VIDEO

Transparency in 60 Seconds · 0:59

Watch it on American Civic Power or YouTube.

https://www.americancivicpower.com/goodgovernance#transparency

What it means

Transparent government does its business where the public can see it. Meetings are open, agendas and minutes are published, budgets and contracts are available, and records can be requested by anyone.

Why it matters

You can't judge what you can't see. Transparency lets residents spot waste, favoritism and mistakes early, and it gives honest officials a way to show their work.

Signs it's working

- Agendas are posted before meetings, with supporting documents.
- Meetings are open, livestreamed or recorded, and minutes are published promptly.
- Budgets, contracts and audits are online in plain language.

- FOIL requests are answered on time.

Warning signs

- Major decisions made in executive session without a clear legal reason.
- Agendas posted at the last minute, or vague items like "other business."
- FOIL requests that are ignored or repeatedly delayed.
- Contracts and spending that can't be found anywhere online.

What you can do

1. Know your rights. New York's Open Meetings Law requires most public bodies to meet in public and give notice. The Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) lets anyone request government records.
2. Check your town, county and school district websites for agendas, minutes and budgets.
3. File a FOIL request for records that aren't posted. See *How to File a FOIL Request in New York*.
4. The NY Committee on Open Government (opengovernment.ny.gov) gives free guidance when you're unsure what the law requires.

Related points

Accountability, Participation, Ethical Leadership.

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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