



Overview

Nevada Public Records Act (NPRA) – NRS Chapter 239

Purpose, Defining a Record, Records Retention, PRR Procedures

The 5-Day Rule and Beyond

Acknowledgement, Clarification, Referral, Estimated Response Date

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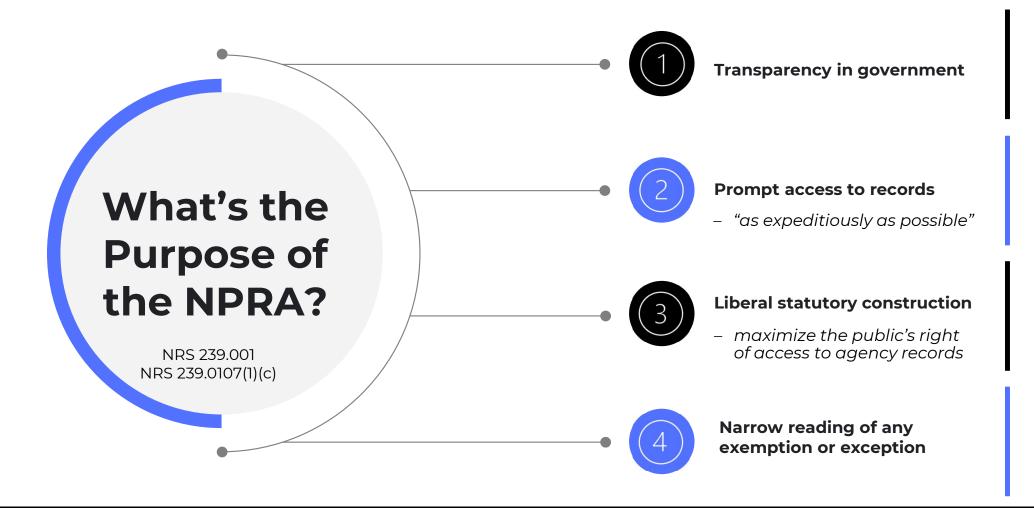
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NPRA Overview

The Nevada Public Records Act (NPRA) gives the public broad access to most government records

- NPRA codified at NRS Chapter 239
- NPRA ≠ FOIA (federal Freedom of Information Act)
 - But NPRA and FOIA have a similar purpose





Records Retention and Archiving

Agencies are required to maintain records pursuant to records management programs (State & agency specific)

- Records Retention Schedule –
 provides the minimum retention
 period for an agency's records
- At the appropriate time:
 - Destroy securely, or
 - Send to State Library and Archives

For more information, visit: https://nsla.nv.gov/state_records_services and find the retention schedule you need.

What is a "Public Record"?

No comprehensive definition of a "record" or "official state record"

Recorded evidence of business operations

Information an agency *creates* or *receives* to transact public business, which the agency maintains as evidence of its functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities

NRS 239.005, NAC 239.705(1).



What's NOT a Public Record?

General guide for what materials are not public records

- Informal notes and drafts
- Stationary and unused blank forms

Reference materials

 Reference texts, brochures, newsletters, magazines, newspaper articles, textbooks, presentation handouts, catalogs, etc. Copies of policy and procedure manuals

Administrative and personal email & correspondence

 Meeting times, lunch dates, staff association memos, FYI memos, spam email, etc.

Personal materials

 Errand lists, bills, personal letters and/or photos

NAC 239.705(2)

Ad hoc reports

Convenience copies

Extra copies of official records

Publications for distribution

For more guidance, see Nevada Public Records Act: A Manual for Executive Branch Agencies, available at https://nsla.nv.gov/ld.php?content_id=56642757, and https://nsla.nv.gov/public-records/.

Non-record materials can—and should be—destroyed when they are no longer administratively needed!







Which Records are Subject to Public Records Requests?

Legislative Intent

ALL state agency records are public records <u>unless</u> declared confidential by Nevada law.

NRS 239.010.

 NPRA presumes an agency record is a public record, unless specific confidentiality restrictions apply

City of Sparks v. Reno Newspapers, 133 Nev. 398, 400 (2017).

How can Public Records Requests be Submitted?

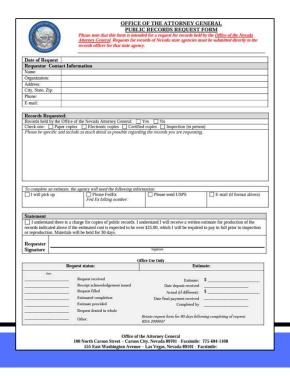
Method and Medium for requesting records

The NPRA allows both written and verbal requests for public records. NRS 239.0107(1).

Agencies must provide:

- a form for requesting public records, and
- an alternative method for disabled individuals to submit a request

NAC 239.863.



A records request form should be posted on an agency's website and made available in-person.

NAC 239.862.

Example:

https://ag.nv.gov/Contact/Public_Records_ Requests/

What Must Agencies Do in 5 Days?

The NPRA provides three options:



Acknowledgment and Estimated Response

If records cannot be made available within five (5) days, a written *acknowledgement* and estimated response date must be provided.

NRS 239.0107(1)(c).



Respond with No Responsive Records or a Referral

Tell requester the agency does not have responsive records and, if known, provide the contact information for a government entity that does.

NRS 239.0107(1)(b).



Full Response and Records Release

Provide a copy of the records requested

NRS 239.0107(1)(a).



Acknowledgments & Readily Available Records

Written communications are REQUIRED by the NPRA

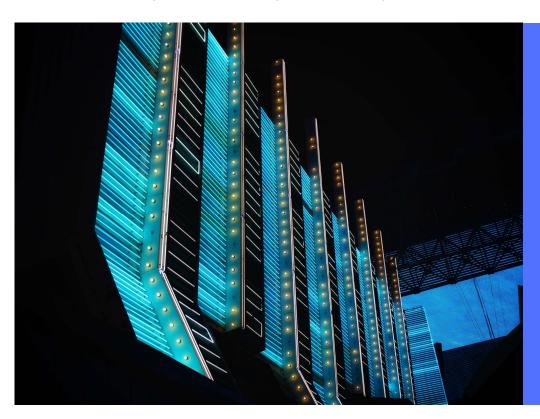
Acknowledgement: Agencies must respond in writing within *five (5)* business days after a request is received. NRS 239.0107(1).

When a record is "readily available," agencies must provide a copy of the record within five (5) business days.

 Does your agency have policies and procedures to ensure the 5-day time frame is met?

Request for Clarification

NPRA Requests ≠ requests for production of documents under civil procedure rules



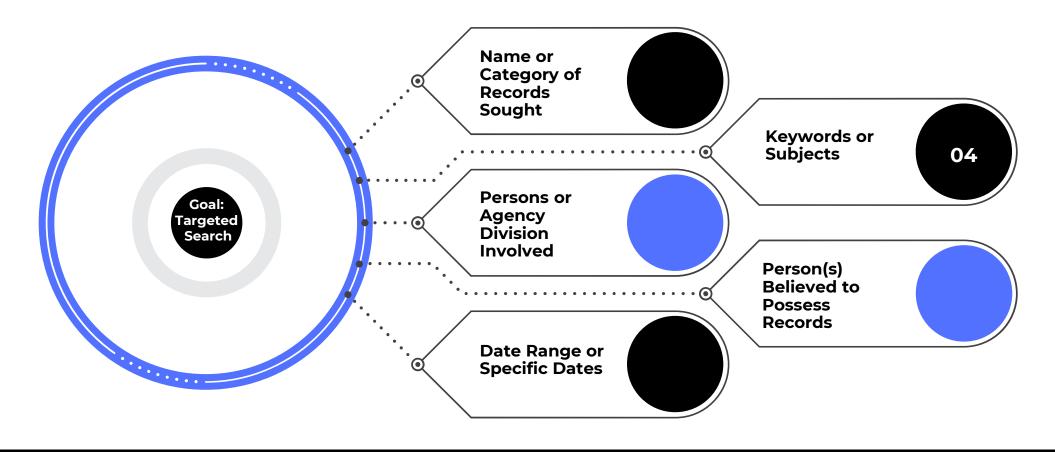
Reasonable requests for public records

When a request is overbroad or unreasonable, the agency is obligated to request a clarification and narrowed time frame. NRS 239.0107(1)(c)(2).

 Agencies must make a reasonable effort to assist the requester to maximize the likelihood the requester will receive a copy of the record as expeditiously as possible.

Records must be identifiable and requests must not be overbroad. *Freedom Watch, Inc. v. Dep't of State*, 925 F. Supp. 2d 55, 62 (D. D.C. 2013).

Specific Requests for Clarification



Example Procedure for Processing Public Records Requests

* Note that each agency should develop agency-specific protocols in coordination with counsel.

(1)

Log all public records requests (and related communications) and acknowledge request within 5 days

2

Search for potentially responsive records

Alternatively: request clarification or refer to another agency 3

Review records for applicable confidentiality restrictions based on statutes or regulations



Review records for *privileged* information

(e.g., attorneyclient, work product, etc.)



Review records for *common law* exemptions

(e.g., deliberative process, etc.)

Example Procedure for Processing Public Records Requests

* Note that each agency should develop agency-specific protocols in coordination with counsel.

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Consider the appropriate balancing test if no specific privileges or confidentiality statutes apply



Confer with agency counsel to confirm all applicable legal restrictions on release, if needed



Redact any
personal privacy
information (PII)
or other privileged
or confidential
information from
responsive
records, if needed



Release the records and/or cite applicable legal authority for withholding records, if needed



Statutory Authority to Withhold Records or Redact Information

NRS 239.010 Public books and public records open to inspection; confidential information in public books and records; copyrighted books and records; copies to be prepared by governmental entity and provided in electronic format unless other medium requested.

1. Except as otherwise provided in this section and NRS 14683, 14687, 1A 110, 3 2203, 41 0397, 41 071, 49 095, 49 293, 62D 420, 62D 440, 62E 516, 62E 620, 62H 025, 67H 030, 62H 170, 62H 220, 62H 320, 75A 100, 75A 150, 76 160, 78 152, 80 113, 81.850, 82 183, 62 46, 86 5645, 87 515, 87 5413, 87 4200, 87 450, 87 410, 87 4200, 87 450, 87 4200, 87 450, 87 440, 87 450,

Many statutory exemptions are listed in the NPRA

Exemption = NPRA does *not* apply

NRS 239.010 refers to other provisions of Nevada law

- Cite both NRS 239.010 and the statute listed therein
- If records are confidential under **federal law or regulations**, they may be exempt from the NPRA. City of Reno v. Reno Gazette-Journal, 119 Nev. 55 (2003).

Regulatory Authority to Withhold Records or Redact Information

Regulatory exemptions are stated in the NAC or agency regulations

 Agencies may adopt regulations declaring certain records confidential.

NRS 233B.040(1)(a) (reasonable regulations appropriately adopted by an agency "have the force of law"); Banegas v. State Indus. Ins. Sys., 117 Nev. 222, 227 (2001).

- E.g., NAC 441A.335(2) protects certain health information, medical records, or reports
- But beware: Nevada Supreme Court has held that NACs do not limit the scope of the NPRA

Comstock Residents Ass'n v. Lyon Cty. Bd. of Commissioners, 134 Nev. 142, 414 P.3d 318 (2018); Clark Cty. Sch. Dist. v. Las Vegas Rev.-J., 134 Nev. 700, 429 P.3d 313 (2018).





Nevada's General Balancing Test

The General Balancing Test *must be* used by government agencies to determine if a withholding is justified when a record is not explicitly made confidential by statute

Donrey of Nevada, Inc. v. Bradshaw, 106 Nev. 630 (1990) Reno Newspapers, Inc. v. Gibbons, 127 Nev. 873 (2011)

- Government must explain why the records are not disclosed and provide specific legal authority justifying withholding
- Government interest in withholding must outweigh the public interest in disclosure by a "preponderance of the evidence." NRS 239.0113.
- Test generally should not be used to withhold record in its entirety

This test "weighs":

Agency's Interests

Public's Right of Access

Vs.

Disclosure

Vs.

Liberal policy favoring open & accessible government

Personal Privacy Balancing Test

Basic two-part inquiry for withholding information based on **personal privacy interests**:

- Government must establish a "nontrivial" personal privacy interest —interest = "more than de minimis"
- If successful, the burden shifts to the requester to show that disclosure/info sought are likely to advanced a significant public interest



Clark Cnty. School Dist. v. Las Vegas Rev.-J., 34 Nev. 700 (2018) (adopting the Ninth Circuit's test in Cameranesi v. U.S. Dep't of Defense, 856 F.3d 626 (9th Cir. 2017) (personnel and medical files may be shielded from public disclosure to prevent an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy)).

Personal Privacy Balancing Test - reaffirmed



NVSC has reaffirmed key parts of the personal privacy balancing test:

- Test applies whenever the government asserts a nontrivial personal privacy interest
- Threshold to show a nontrivial privacy interest is low
- "avoidance of harassment is a cognizable privacy interest"
 - embarrassment, stigma

Las Vegas Metro. Police Dep't v. Las Vegas Rev.-J., 478 P.3d 383 (Nev. 2020) (discussing Clark Cnty. School Dist. v. Las Vegas Rev.-J., 34 Nev. 700 (2018), and Cameranesi v. U.S. Dep't of Defense, 856 F.3d 626 (9th Cir. 2017)).

Denying a Request or Withholding Records

Statutory or regulatory authority justifying confidentiality:

- State statutes: NRS 239.010 and other NRS provisions
- Federal statutes
- State NACs (use with a balancing test!)

Common Law

Privileges

Balancing Tests

- General Balancing test (Bradshaw/Gibbons)
- Personal Privacy Balancing test (CCSD/Cameranesi)



Denying a Request or Withholding Records

Provide specific citations

Agencies must provide a written response and a specific citation to statute or other legal authority making a record confidential.

NRS 239.0107(d).

Privilege Log or Index

Agencies are *not* required to produce a log or "Vaughn index" of confidential records *unless* and *until* the requester files a lawsuit. *Gibbons*, 127 Nev. at 881–83.

- NVSC declined to define the precise form that a log must take or what it must contain
- "adequate log" will vary depending on the circumstances of each case

Helpful Questions for Responding to Public Records Requests





Are records
(or
information)
responsive to
the request?

2

Do the requested records exist?



Does the agency have legal custody or control of the requested records?



Do any statutory exceptions apply? (state or federal)

Helpful Questions for Responding to Public Records Requests

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Do any
common law
privileges or
confidentiality
doctrines
apply?



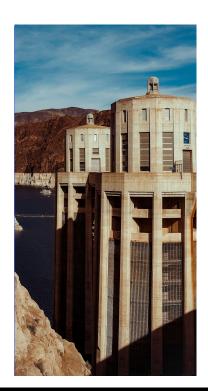
Do the **general** or **personal privacy** balancing tests favor withholding?



Are responsive records confidential in their entirety?



Do the responsive records require redactions?



Common Personal Privacy Info (PII) for Redaction

Redactions should be "narrowly tailored" to fit only the protected info

- Social Security Number or Tax ID Number
- Driver's license number or identification card number
- · Name of a minor child
- Date of birth and place of birth
- Race or Gender
- Home address
- Personal e-mail address (i.e., any non-government email address)
- · Signature, fingerprint, or any other biometric record
- User name or unique personal identifier
- Direct telephone number (e.g., direct line, an assistant, or cell phone)
- Ride Share (i.e., Uber/Lyft) pickup or drop-off address
- Medical identification number or a health insurance identification number
- Airline flight, ticket, or confirmation numbers, and departure/arrival times
- Financial account number or credit/debit card number
- Bank name and associated information (address, phone, routing number, etc.)
- Tracking number and package signer for any shipping carrier (e.g., Fed Ex, UPS, U.S. Postal Service, DHL, etc.)
- Video conference meeting IDs, passcodes, phone conference IDs, and video conference device links (e.g., Teams, Zoom, Lifesize)
- Criminal Justice Information (CJI) (e.g., personal data, property data, other information related to incidents and cases)
- Criminal History Record Information (CHRI), (e.g., arrest descriptions and notations, conviction status, etc.)

Fee Schedule - List of Fees

Fees charged to fulfill public records requests can be a very contentious issue for government agencies

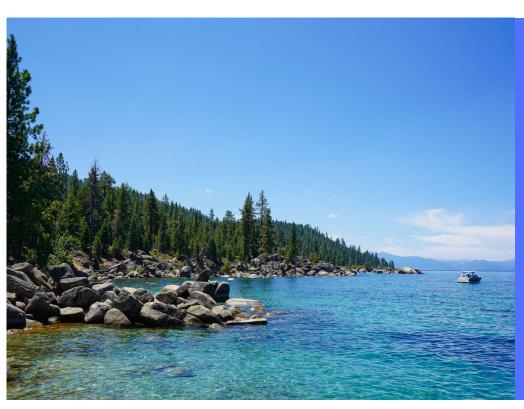
NRS 239.052(3)

An agency must prepare and *maintain* a list of its fees for providing public records and post the list in a conspicuous place in each of its offices.

NRS 239.053(2)

If applicable, the agency's list of fees must also include per page fee for court reporter transcripts.

Meetings: Minutes & Recordings



No Charge for Minutes and Recordings

- Minutes or audiotape recordings of meetings must be made available to the public within *30 working days*. NRS 241.035(2).
- Upon request, a copy of the minutes or audio recordings must be made available to a member of the public at *no charge*. NRS 241.035(2).
- Agencies must retain five (5) years of minutes. The remainder may be sent to State Archives. NRS 241.035(2).

Charging "Actual Costs"

- Providing copies of public records is part of agencies' regular duties
- But, the NPRA still allows agencies to recover actual costs NRS 239.052
- Actual costs = include, *but are not limited to*, the "direct cost" incurred in responding to a records request, such as those for ink, toner, paper, media, and postage NRS 239.005
 - 2019: Legislature repealed "Extraordinary Use" fees NRS 239.055

☆ ACTUAL COSTS CHARGED MUST BE EXACT ☆

 It may be difficult to ascertain these costs unless an agency has a dedicated public records employee(s)

Charging "Actual Costs"

- "Actual cost" does *not* include a cost an agency "incurs regardless of whether or not a person requests a copy of a particular public record" NRS 239.052
 - Discourages agencies from depending on such fees to make up annual budget shortfalls
- In 2019, the Legislature expressly considered and chose not to exclude overhead, personnel, and labor costs from the definition of actual costs
 - Legislators found such costs appropriate when requests are "incredibly onerous" or "incredibly large"
 - Flexibility to recoup costs for broad requests that disproportionately utilize agency resources, so costs are not borne taxpayers but are made the requester's responsibility

June 3, 2019 Mins. Assembly Comm. on Gov't Affairs, SB 287

Judicial Review by the District Court

A requester may file a petition for review before the district court involving their NPRA request on three grounds:

- 1. Denial of a request
- 2. Unreasonable delay
- 3. Excessive or Improper fees

NRS 239.011

Relief available?

- Compel agency or person with legal custody to provide a copy of the record
- Provide relief relating to fees
- Award attorneys' fees & costs
 - Requester *must* prevail

Immunity from damages liability for acting in good faith



Civil Penalties for Willful Violations

If a court decides that an agency willfully failed to comply with the NPRA, the court must impose a civil penalty:

- 1. First violation = \$1,000
- 2. Second violation = \$5,000
- 3. Third or subsequent violation = \$10,000

NRS 239.340(1) (violations within 10-year period)

- Penalty is imposed on agency
- Money goes toward improving access to public records



Recent NVSC Decisions

LVRJ v. LVMPD, 139 Nev. Adv. Op. 8 (Nev. 2023)

- Background: newspaper seeks records of LVMPD's criminal investigation of an NHP trooper
- Holding: Confidential Informant (CI) privilege (NRS 49.335) does not justify withholding records in their entirety; LVMPD failed to demonstrate government interests in confidentiality "clearly outweighed" public interests favoring disclosure

Key takeaways for public agencies:

- If withholding records under general balancing test, be prepared to provide a **detailed** explanation of risks and harms that may stem from disclosure
- Avoid tendency to minimize public interest in access to records
- Consider redact and release
 approach if no confidentiality statute
 or privilege applies and arguments to
 withhold under general balancing
 test are weak

Recent NVSC Decisions

Conrad v. Reno Police Dep't, 139 Nev. Adv. Op. 14 (Nev. 2023)

- Background: news website sought RPD's unredacted body camera footage
- Holding: unredacted body camera footage is exempt from disclosure under NRS 289.025

Key takeaways for public agencies:

- NRS 289.025 provides that any photograph of a peace officer in the possession of a law enforcement agency is confidential and "not public information"
- Any body camera footage responsive to a PRR that identifies officers' faces must be redacted prior to release

There were
NO
2021 or 2023
Legislative
Amendments
to the NPRA!





Public Records Q & A

