



TRANSPARENCY IN STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The League of Women Voters of New Mexico (LWVNM) expects state and local governments to follow the requirements of the New Mexico Open Meetings Act (OMA) and Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA).

LWVNM also recommends that state and local governments adopt the following policies and practices regarding open meetings and public records, over and above what is legally required by the OMA and the IPRA, within reasonable budget constraints:

A. Open Meetings

1. Maintain a comprehensive list of all meetings that are open to the public, along with their time, place, and agenda. With the exception of emergency meetings, announce public meetings at least one week in advance, using display ads in standard public media and on the government web site. To the extent that is practical, have all written materials that will be used in a public meeting available a week in advance, preferably on-line, or let the public know where and how such materials can be obtained.
2. Broadcast as many public meetings as possible, in both real-time and an archived format, preferably on-line.
3. Allow time and access for public input on important issues.
4. Develop and publish a policy concerning public attendance and participation at meetings of government bodies that are not covered by the OMA.

5. Make draft minutes of public meetings available to the public as soon as they are filed with the clerk or other appropriate official.

6. In order to avoid the possibility or the perception that executive sessions may be used to keep from informing the public on certain issues, the League recommends the following policies on executive sessions:

- a. Hold meetings in executive session only when absolutely necessary, even though the OMA may allow otherwise.
- b. Include an explanation of the purpose of the executive session in the meeting agenda.
- c. Keep a public record of all attendees at executive sessions and make that information public when the public body reconvenes after executive session.
- d. On important matters of wide public interest that have been discussed in executive session, publish a draft motion based on what was discussed in executive session and allow public input on it at a public meeting before a vote is taken.

B. Inspection of Public Records

1. Create an inspection of public records policy and procedure whose goal is to help the public obtain the maximum amount of information they may want to discover about their government and do so in a timely and cost-effective manner.
2. Publish a price list for copying different types of public records.

3. Develop a policy regarding the production and cost of spreadsheets, lists, and other reports which may not already exist as public documents but whose data exist within government files and in which there is a public interest.

4. Use the government website as a repository of all information that is most likely to be needed by the public, including (but not limited to) open meetings and public records policies, meeting lists, proposed agendas, minutes, contents of meeting packets, frequently requested documents, contact information for government employees, resolutions and ordinances, personnel and procurement policies, and the location and mission of various departments and divisions.

5. Use the government website as a repository for searchable budget and financial records, including operating budgets, expenditures over a specified amount, checks/warrants and any other budget and financial information made available to the governing body.

6. Ensure that the government website is easy to use and search, that the information posted there is timely and up-to-date, and that it provides for interactive processes, such as requests for public records, whenever feasible.

LWVNM recommends that state and local governments go beyond open meetings and inspection of public records in their efforts toward open, accessible governance. We especially recommend these practices:

A. State and local governments' resolutions, ordinances, or published policies should cover ethics and conflict of interest, providing sanctions for violations.

B. Managers responsible for transparency should be trained and evaluated according to relevant statutes, policies, resolutions and ordinances. Elected officials should receive training on statutes and other mandates applicable to them.

C. State and local governments should encourage input and listen to their constituents. They should make it easy for constituents to comment on local issues, and as budgets allow they should periodically assess the needs, desires, and satisfaction of their constituents. They should respond to constituents' recommendations by changing policies and practices or providing explanations when they reject such input.

D. State and local governments should provide timely and complete information to their constituents on current topics.

E. State and local governments should provide up-to-date, easy-to-find information about their office locations, building directories, organization charts, and contact information for managers of key functions.

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