

Guide for members of the public requesting public data

This document explains how members of the public (“you”) may request access to public data from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS). The purpose of this document is, in part, to fulfill the requirements of [Minnesota Statutes, section 13.025, subdivision 2](#).

What law governs my right to access public data?

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) presumes that all government data are public unless a state or federal law or temporary classification provides that the data are not public. “Government data” is a term that means all information that DHS, as a state agency, keeps.

The MGDPA requires state agencies to keep government data in a way that makes it easy for you to access. You have the right to inspect public data that DHS keeps and to receive copies of public data for a cost. The MGDPA allows DHS to charge for copies and related costs. For more information, review the sections in this document about costs.

What is a data request?

A data request is a request from a member of the public to access public data that DHS keeps.

How do I make a data request?

Data requests must be made in writing. DHS does not require you to use a form to request public data. However, if you are requesting public data, [a data request form](#) is available for your convenience.

If you choose not to use the available form, write down a specific description of the data you are seeking. Your written request should include:

- A statement that you are a member of the public and you are making a request for data under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act
- A clear description of the data you would like to access
- A statement that you would like to receive copies of the data or look at (“inspect”) the data.

Where do I send my data request?

The responsible authority is the official designated by law as the individual responsible for the collection, use, and dissemination of a government entity’s data. At the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the responsible authority is the Commissioner of Human Services, Jodi Harpstead.

Data requests and concerns generally are handled by staff members assigned to respond to requests for the DHS responsible authority. Please see the following list for where to send your data request:

DHS Central Office. If your request is for information maintained by the DHS Central Office, send your request:

By email to: dhs.datarequest@state.mn.us

By U.S. mail to: The Minnesota Department of Human Services
Attention: Data Request
P.O. Box 64998
St. Paul, MN 55164-0998

Direct Care and Treatment (DCT). If you are requesting information from the Direct Care and Treatment (DCT) Division of DHS, send your data request to one of the following email addresses:

- For Forensic Services, Community Based Services, or Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, send your data request to: DCT.Release.of.Information.DHS@state.mn.us
- For the Minnesota Sex Offender Program (MSOP), send your data request to: MSOP-InfoRequest@state.mn.us

Media. If you are a member of the media, you may send your data request to a DHS communications person. You can find mailing addresses and contact information for [communications contacts](#) online.

How does DHS respond to data requests?

DHS responds to data requests in three ways:

1. **No responsive data:** If DHS does not have any data responsive to a request, DHS will notify you.
2. **Responsive data classified as confidential or private not about you:** If DHS has data responsive to the request, but the data is confidential or private data that is not about you, DHS will notify you. The MGDPA requires that when DHS withholds data classified as not public, and DHS will provide the law that classifies the data as not public when notifying.
3. **Responsive data collected, reviewed and disclosed:** If DHS has data responsive to your request, and the data is classified as public or private about you, DHS will begin the process to collect, review and disclose the data.

After DHS determines that responsive data exists, DHS collects the data, reviews the data to ensure that it meets the criteria for public data, and discloses the data to you. DHS makes copies of the data or makes the data available for in-person inspection. DHS generally provides copies of data by CD. When the volume of responsive data is high, DHS may disclose data on a rolling basis until all responsive data has been given to you.

How long will it take to get the data I requested?

The MGDPA requires DHS to fulfill requests for public data within a reasonable amount of time. The time it takes to fulfill a request depends on the volume of responsive data and the complexity of your request. If you write your request to be specific and concise, DHS will be more able to efficiently locate, review and disclose the data. Requests that seek a broad range of data, or unclear types of data, often yield high volumes of data, which take longer to process.

What if the request would require DHS to create new data or I want the data in a particular format?

The MGDPA does not require DHS to create or collect new data to respond to a data request. This means that if data does not exist at DHS, DHS cannot disclose it in response to a data request. If DHS agrees to create data to respond to a request, DHS will work out the details of that request with you, including the cost of creating data.

The MGDPA also does not require DHS to create new formats of requested data. This means that DHS is not required to disclose data in a particular format. DHS is also not required to scan data that is only in paper form to respond to a request that seeks data in an electronic format.

Although the MGDPA does not require DHS to answer questions that are not data requests, DHS typically attempts to answer questions from the public. Direct your questions to the DHS division that you think can best answer it. You can find [contact information for DHS divisions](#) on DHS' website.

How much does it cost to look at or “inspect” public data?

DHS does not charge to look at or “inspect” public data. This inspection must take place at DHS, at a time and place arranged by DHS, and you may not take or copy data from DHS without first paying the costs outlined below.

What if I want to take the data after “inspecting” it?

If you request copies of data after inspecting the data, DHS may charge you a prorated amount of the actual costs related to the request unless you are requesting paper copies of 100 or fewer pages, in which case you are only responsible for the copy charges listed below. For example, if 1000 pages of data are made available to you to inspect, and you want copies of 200 pages, you must pay 20 percent of the actual costs to receive the copies.

What if I want to have all the data sent to me (without first inspecting it)?

If you would like copies of the data sent to you without first inspecting the data, DHS will contact you to provide you with an estimate for how much it will cost to send the requested data to you and information about how the data will be delivered to you.

How does DHS calculate the actual costs of a request?

For members of the public, DHS computes the actual costs related to a request by multiplying the hourly pay rates of the DHS staff involved in the request by the time required to:

- Search and retrieve the responsive data.
- Make, certify, sort, and electronically transmit or mail the data.

DHS uses hourly staff pay rates determined annually by DHS Human Resources to calculate the actual costs related to a request. These rates are based on the median wages and do not include any adjustment for benefits, indirect costs or other surcharges.

DHS does not charge actual costs if you are requesting paper copies of 100 or fewer pages.

How much do the copies cost?

In addition to the actual costs of a request, if applicable, DHS may also charge for the copies of the data.

- Paper copies
 - 100 or fewer pages: DHS may charge 25 cents per page for a one-sided copy or 50 cents per page for a two-sided copy.
 - More than 100 pages: DHS may charge 8 cents per page for a one-sided copy or 16 cents per page for a two-sided copy.
- Electronic copies: DHS may charge for physical media to provide the electronic copies, which is commonly a CD for 59 cents each.

For accessible formats of this publication or assistance with additional equal access to Human Services, write to dhs.info@state.mn.us, call 651-431-2911, or use your preferred relay service.

