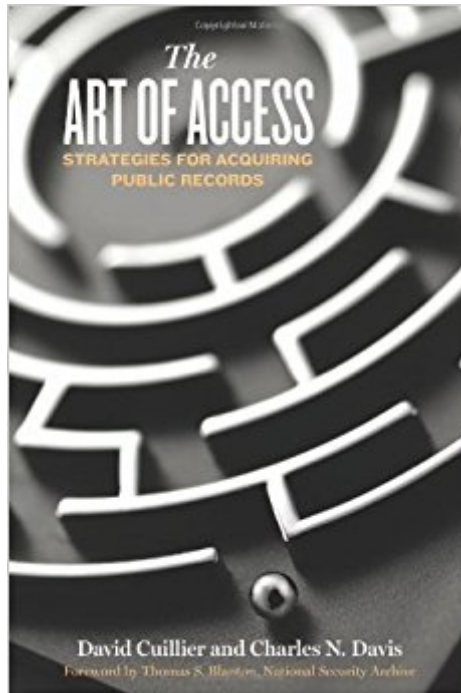




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The Art Of Access: Strategies For Acquiring Public Records



Synopsis

Whatever you're trying to learn about the world—whether as a journalist or as an informed citizen—public records often hold the key. But what records, where? And how to get them? It starts with understanding the Freedom of Information Act, but what you really need are strategies for dealing with the officials who stand between you and the information you seek. Gaining access to records is an art, one that requires an organized approach and a good understanding of human behavior. The Art of Access is a how-to guide for putting the law into action and using ingenuity to pry records loose. Building on their own experience and interviews with more than 100 practitioners, FOI experts and longtime journalists David Cuillier and Charles Davis help you rethink the information-gathering process and develop a document state of mind. With Cuillier and Davis's strategies, get ready to: overcome roadblocks and illegal denials; better understand government officials' perspectives so you can more successfully work with them; find more and better online resources and mine them effectively; and write document-based stories that resonate with readers. A "Pro Tips" feature showcases advice from some of the best in the business, from media lawyers and prominent journalists to a private investigator and other access experts. At the end of each chapter, a Try It! section offers exercises and story ideas that will empower you to start finding and using documents right away. Appendixes include a comprehensive list of online FOI resources as well as an annotated Record Album that guides you from records on everything from abandoned buildings and air quality to workplace safety and zoning.

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Customer Reviews

The Art of Access is more than just a highly readable primer on obtaining public records; it's a fantastic, in-depth resource for anyone seeking information from or about their government. This is a guide that can help you turn a public official's right to no into your right to know. --- Pete Weitzel, former managing editor, Miami Herald, and former director of the Coalition of Journalists for Open Government This clear, concise and timely book provides a step-by-step guide for turning the overhyped rhetoric of transparency into a much-needed reality. Cuillier and Davis, both veterans of the access wars, provide journalists and citizens alike with the keys to unlocking the secrets held in public records that government officials too often like to stow away. Replete with tips from professional journalists, a bevy of relevant websites and many handy checklists, this book is a practical guide for navigating the often bumpy road to getting the government records you want and need. --- Clay Calvert, Professor and Brechner Eminent Scholar in Mass Communication, University of Florida Open government laws such as the Freedom of Information Act provide us with powerful political tools, but we don't always know how to use them. This superb handbook distills the most effective techniques for gaining access to official records. It will help readers become more skillful requesters, and better citizens. --- Steven Aftergood, Director, Project on Government Secrecy

David Cuillier, Ph.D., is chairman of the Society of Professional Journalists national Freedom of Information Committee and is a newsroom FOI trainer for the national SPJ on-the-go newsroom training program. He gathered public records as a government reporter and city editor for a dozen years at daily newspapers in the Pacific Northwest. He is an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Arizona, teaching computer-assisted reporting, public affairs reporting and access to information. He has earned national honors for his access teaching exercises and research in freedom of information, including the 2007 Nafziger-White Dissertation Award by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication for the top dissertation in the field. Charles N. Davis, Ph.D., is executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, former chairman of the Society of Professional Journalists national Freedom of Information Committee, and is an SPJ newsroom trainer in FOI. A former newspaper reporter and national correspondent for Dublin-based Lafferty Publications, Davis currently teaches access to information and media law at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He has been honored by SPJ with a Sunshine Award for his work in FOI, and in 2009 he was named the Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism

Teacher of the Year. In 2009-10 he was head of the Law and Policy Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. He has been published extensively in academic and professional journals, and is first author of the book *Access Denied: Freedom of Information in the Information Age*.

The book *"The Art of Access"* by David Cuillier and Charles N. Davis explains in detail the methods the average person can use to gain access to public documents that are related to government or tax-funded organizations or entities. From the start, the authors make clear that requesting and being able to have full access to such documents is an American right that should not be overlooked. Further, they explain that requesting and reading public documents in physical or digital form has benefits for everyone in society, not just journalists. Interestingly, far more businesses request public records than journalists, which may say something about the state of journalism. If you are intrigued with a certain house that's for sale, you can request public records to learn what the crime rate is in its neighborhood or if any sex offenders live nearby. If you want information about your deceased grandpa, you can request an FBI file on him, if one exists. You can request an FBI file and public records on yourself. Cuillier and Davis convey numerous other examples of how requesting public documents can "help your life in ways that go far beyond work." Of course, public documents are crucial for journalists, too. Utilizing them can spur the writing of stories that a journalist's editor may not even consider. Accessing public records is an honest way for journalists to make sure public officials are being honest themselves in all realms of their governmental work. *"The Art of Access"* contains examples of intuitive journalists who used public records to write stories that brought to light dishonest practices by public officials. Requesting documents involves doing your homework, being diligent and sometimes playing hardball, but getting them can be attained. The authors also emphasize the need for journalists to be empathetic toward record-keeping employees who work in a bureaucratic culture, and to make sure that documents-based stories have a human element so that the material isn't too dry. To supplement their information, Cuillier and Davis provide a plethora of websites people can visit to read Pulitzer Prize-winning stories, access helpful records for articles, learn about Freedom of Information strategies, discover legal resources and much more.

The book is good as far as it goes, but it includes nothing but a mention of The Open Government Act of 2007. The Open Government Act of 2007 is very important because it includes penalties for agencies that take longer than 20 days to respond to FOIA requests.

A must read for all reporters. You want the docs, but your paper can't always threaten to sue the city. What do you do? Read this book.

I did not realize all the records regular citizens can access until I read this book. "The Art of Access" gave me a lot of good ideas I can use in future reports as a journalist/writer.

This book has helped me access public documents as a journalist and personally. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to get at the truth.

Thank you.

required textbook for a winter class, but it has a lot of interesting information

It was very cheap and exactly what I needed.

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