

Data Practices Policy for Members of the Public

Right to access public data

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA), Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 13, presumes that all government data are public unless a state or federal law says the data are not public.

Government data is a term that means all recorded information a government entity has, including paper, email, flash drives, CDs, DVDs, photographs, etc.

The MGDPA also provides that the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA) must keep all government data in a way that makes it easy for you, as a member of the public, to access public data. You have the right to look at (inspect), free of charge, all public data that we keep. You also have the right to get copies of public data. The Government Data Practices Act allows us to charge for copies. You have the right to look at data, free of charge, before deciding to request copies.

How to make a data request

To look at data or request copies of data that MELSA keeps, MELSA requires that you make a written request. You may make your request for data by sending an email to MGDPA@melsa.org or by mail to the MELSA Data Practices Compliance Official (MDPCO) listed on page 3. You may also make your request for data by using the data request form on page 5. If you choose not to use the data request form, your written request should include:

- that you, as a member of the public, are making a request for data under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 13;
- whether you would like to look at the data, get copies of the data, or both; and
- a clear description of the data you would like to inspect or have copied. Please be as specific as possible -- including subject matter, dates, etc.

MELSA cannot require you, as a member of the public, to identify yourself or explain the reason for your data request. However, depending on how you want us to process your request (if, for example, you want us to mail you copies of data), MELSA may need some information about you. In addition, please keep in mind that if MELSA does not understand your request and have no way to contact you, we will not be able to begin processing your request.

How we respond to a data request

Upon receiving your request, MELSA will work to process it.

- If MELSA does not have the data, we will notify you in writing within 10 business days.
- If MELSA has the data, but the data are not public, we will notify you as soon as reasonably possible and state which specific law says the data are not public.
- If MELSA has the data, and the data are public, we will respond to your request appropriately and promptly, within a reasonable amount of time by doing one of the following:

- Arrange a date, time, and place to inspect data, for free, if your request is to look at the data, (inspection must occur during normal business hours and at a time when staff are available); or
- Provide you with copies of the data as soon as reasonably possible. You may choose to pick up your copies, or we will mail or fax them to you. If you want MELSA to send you the copies, you will need to provide a mailing address. We will provide electronic copies upon request if we routinely retain the data in electronic format.

Information about copy charges is on page 4. MELSA will arrange for you to pre-pay for the copies.

If you do not understand some of the data (technical terminology, abbreviations, or acronyms), please let us know. MELSA will give you an explanation if you ask.

The MGDPA does not require MELSA to create or collect new data in response to a data request if we do not already have the data, or to provide data in a specific form or arrangement if we do not keep the data in that form or arrangement (for example, if the data you request are on paper only, we are not required to create electronic documents to respond to your request). If MELSA agrees to create data in response to your request, we will work with you on the details of your request, including cost and response time.

MELSA may ask questions or request additional information in order to better process your request. If you do not respond to a request for clarification or other communication about your request, we may consider your request abandoned after a reasonable time passes.

The MGDPA does not require MELSA to answer questions that are not specific requests for data.

Requests for summary data

Summary data are statistical records or reports that are prepared by removing all identifiers from private or confidential data on individuals. The preparation of summary data is not a means to gain access to private or confidential data. MELSA will provide summary data if you make your request in writing and pre-pay for the cost of the data. MELSA is not required to create summary data, but may do so at your request and upon prepayment of the cost if it is able to. Upon receiving your written request – you may use the data request form on page 7 – we will respond within ten business days with the data or details of when the data will be ready and how much we will charge.

Data Practices Contacts

Responsible Authority

Ken Behringer, Executive Director
Metropolitan Library Service Agency
1619 Dayton Avenue, Suite 314
Saint Paul, MN 55104-6276

651-645-5731/ken@melsa.org

MELSA Data Practices Compliance Official

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Copy Costs – Members of the Public

MELSA charges for copies of government data. These charges are authorized under Minnesota Statutes, section 13.03, subdivision 3(c).

You must pre-pay for the copies before MELSA will give them to you.

For 100 or fewer paper copies – 25 cents per page

100 or fewer pages of black and white, letter or legal size paper copies cost 25¢ for a one-sided copy, or 50¢ for a two-sided copy.

Most other types of copies – actual cost

The charge for most other types of copies, when a charge is not set by statute or rule, is the actual cost of searching for and retrieving the data, and making the copies or electronically transmitting the data (e.g. sending the data by email).

In determining the actual cost of making copies, MELSA is permitted to factor in employee time, the cost of the materials onto which we are copying the data, and mailing costs, if any. If your request is for copies of data that we cannot reproduce ourselves, such as photographs, we will charge you the actual cost we must pay an outside vendor for the copies.

If, because of the subject matter of your request, we find it necessary for a higher-paid employee to search for and retrieve the data, we will calculate the search and retrieval portion of the copy charge at the higher salary/wage.

Data Request Form – Members of the Public

Request date: _____

I am requesting access to data in the following way:

- Inspection¹
- Copies²
- Both inspection and copies

¹ Inspection is free and must be done during normal business hours.

² There may be a cost for copies of data. MELSA will require you to pre-pay for copies

These are the data I am requesting:

Describe the data you are requesting. Be as specific as possible (i.e., dates, types, names, projects, etc.).

We will respond to your request as soon as reasonably possible.

Contact information

Name: _____

Address/phone number/email address: _____

Phone number: _____ Email address: _____

Note: You do not have to provide any contact information. However, if you want MELSA to mail/email you copies of data, we will need some type of contact information. In addition, if we do not understand your request and need to get clarification from you, without contact information we will not be able to begin processing your request until you contact us.