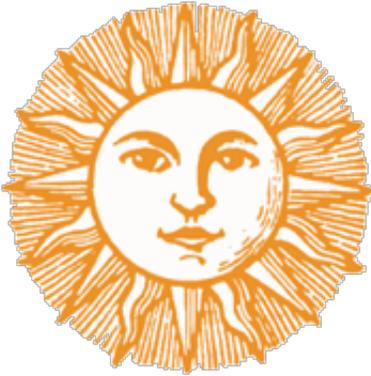


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The Sunshine Report: *Online* Transparency news from the Virginia Coalition for Open Government February 2013

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Coalition News

VCOG's print newsletter is online



FOIA car magnets

VCOG FOIA magnets are available for \$5 [on VCOG's website](#). It's also easy to add a VCOG membership to your purchase. Once you have your magnet in place, post a picture of it to [VCOG's Facebook page](#), or attach it to a tweet with the hashtag #vaFOIA.



Greetings, Friend of VCOG!

Legislative Update

As the Virginia General Assembly nears "crossover" (the deadline for each chamber to consider its own bills), most of the troublesome FOIA and public notice bills have either been defeated or amended to make them more palatable. A few still remain and, unfortunately, some of the good bills have been passed by, too, though some will have a chance for review by the FOIA Council.

To read a round-up of the bills thus far, [click here](#).

We urge you to contact your delegate or senator about these bills still pending:

[HB1823](#) - This bill, currently on the House Floor, would require localities to post some requests for proposals (RFPs) on the state's purchasing website (eVa). That's fine, but the bill also says that notice of RFPs, which have been in newspapers for years, *may* be put in the papers, but they don't have to be. Localities can use their own websites instead. ***This proposal will make RFPs less accessible to those potential bidders -- and the public -- who are not already plugged into the eVa system. The system would be confusing because some RFPs could be posted in any one of three places, and it could cost the locality money by limiting the pool of potential bidders who see the notice.***

[SB1371](#) - This Senate bill says that in a FOIA lawsuit to get records that have not been released, a court can refuse to require the release if the requester has filed so many FOIA requests that it unreasonably burdened the government, prevented the government from meeting its operational responsibilities or was made to evade

Stay up to date on access

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For a steady stream of access-related stories and additional commentary and information, join the more than 400 people who are following [VCOG on Twitter](#). The latest six posts are also carried on [our website](#).

How Many Clicks?

In early January, VCOG [released the results of its survey](#) of Virginia's cities and counties to determine how easy (or hard) it was to get to the locality's budget.

Grades ranged from A+ to F, but regardless of the grades they received, localities all over the state took a moment to evaluate how they presented their budget. Some made changes to address concerns raised by VCOG. Others opted not to change much because they were confident that the way they did it was the best way to serve their citizens.



VCOG applauds all localities who had these internal conversations -- and especially those who contacted VCOG along the way -- no matter what choices they made next. The [point of the survey was to create a conversation, as I explained in this Richmond Times-Dispatch op-ed](#), and in that the survey was a success.

**Note: VCOG was made aware of errors in the grades for Alexandria (should have been an A-), Hopewell (C+) and Clarke County (C). Many thanks to the representatives from those localities for (gently) pointing out the problems. We regret the errors.*

payment of past FOIA charges. ***There are existing provisions in FOIA for government to deal with these circumstances. This provision would create a mechanism to punish a frequent FOIA requester -- including the news media -- for no other reason than that he/she is a frequent FOIA requester.***

For a list of Delegates and Senators, [click here](#). If you don't know who your representatives are, [click here](#).

Open government in the news

After the swift negative reaction of the public and the press, the Portsmouth City Council [backed off its proposal](#) to edit certain public speakers out of the rebroadcasts of its public meetings....In early January, the Danville Fire Department [began posting its news releases](#) on fires, fire prevention tips and emergency management online....Nine months after its citizens told them they opposed a proposed 21% raise for the city manager, the Suffolk City Council nonetheless [abruptly added the raise to a January meeting agenda](#) and voted on it (albeit at only a 14% increase) without public notice or comment and with only minimal discussion....According to a study by the [Lynchburg News & Advance](#), the Senate bill proposing to lift the moratorium on uranium mining was being heard in a committee where 80% of its members received contributions from Virginia Uranium. (Note: the bill was withdrawn by its patron on Jan. 31)....A FOIA request filed by the [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#) showed that the city's sheriff was still employing four family members, despite a pledge in 2011 that he would remove all 12 of his relatives from the department by the end of 2012....A Henry County judge heard arguments Jan. 24 in a [\\$10 million case brought by the superintendent of the Patrick County Schools](#) against a county supervisor, who he said defamed him during an area radio program....An Albermarle County man is suing the local police department for [refusing to release 148 photos and four videos](#) taken of an Occupy Charlottesville protest in February 2012. The police denied the request under FOIA, saying the records were part of a criminal investigation....The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond ruled that [prosecutors can demand Twitter account information](#) on certain users during their criminal probe into the disclosure of classified documents on WikiLeaks.

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and are 100% tax deductible.**

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and feel free to ask for a copy of our IRS 990 and our FY11-12 financial review.

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