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The Sunshine Report: Online Transparency news from the Virginia Coalition for Open Government **September 2010**

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Coalition News

Recently on the VCOG Blog...

- [Requesters \(and government\) acting badly?](#)
- [Public interviews for board vacancies](#)
- [A few of my favorite \(and not so favorite\) things about Virginia's FOIA](#)

Board member promotion

VCOG board member Pam Luecke has been promoted to take over as the new dean of the Washington & Lee Department of Journalism and Mass Communication. Luecke, who has been teaching business journalism at the school, is on VCOG's Nominating Committee and also chairs the Marketing Committee. Congratulations, Pam!

Our Annual Conference

Greetings, Friend of VCOG!

VCOG annual conference in October; records management seminar is Sept. 15

Plans are well underway for VCOG's **annual conference**, Oct. 21-22 in Richmond. Most panel discussions will be held on the 22nd Virginia's historic Capitol and will include topics such as:

- Lobbying the legislature;
- FOIA bootcamp;
- Access on college campuses;
- Access to law enforcement records;
- Government technology; and
- Using FOIA to create Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism.

As always, the panels will be preceded by a board dinner on the 21st at the Commonwealth Park Suites Hotel.

[Click here to register](#), and also take a moment to [learn more](#) about the panels, panelists and our ever-growing list of awesome sponsors.

We've been pleased by the response so far to our **records-management-and-FOIA seminar**, which will be Sept. 15 at the Library of Virginia. More than 60 people, representing state and local governments from around the Commonwealth will be on hand to learn from the experts how effective records management practices can help make government's FOIA life easier.

To [learn more, or to register, click here](#).

sponsors: THANK YOU

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- The Associated Press
- Christian & Barton
- The Daily Progress
- Media General
- The News Virginian
- Richmond Free Press
- The Society of Professional Journalists - Virginia Chapter
- The Virginia Association of Trial Lawyers
- Virginia Lawyers Weekly
- The Virginian-Pilot
- The Virginian Review
- Joseph Walton
- WTVR-TV
- WWBT-TV

VCOG's members

We are lucky to have such dedicated and diligent members. A big thank you to those members who have already renewed their memberships for the year. Renewal notices continue to issue each month, and if you've received one already, please take the time to fill it out and send it back. In the meantime, check out this [impressive list of individuals and organizations](#). VCOG is proud to have as members for 2010-2011.

Stay up to date on access

Sign up for VCOG's [daily listserv on access and First Amendment news](#) from Virginia and across the country. It's free!

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VCOG hits a nerve with iPads

Open government advocates can sometimes feel they are shouting into the wind. We talk and write about open government every day, week after week, month after month. But we can't always be sure that anyone is listening.



What a pleasant surprise then when first local, then state, then national news outlets picked up on an issue VCOG blogged about in June: what happens when public bodies start using iPads (or other new technologies) in place of paper agendas at their public meetings.

[Read more on VCOG and the iPad on our website.](#)

Open government news

A [Virginian-Pilot investigation](#) found that Suffolk consistently charged more for records requested under the Freedom of Information Act than other localities in the region. Printing charges in the area ranged from \$.02 to \$.25 per page, and labor costs were as high as \$400 per hour in Chesapeake ... The Virginia FOIA Council [recently launched a workgroup](#) to study a bill introduced in the 2010 legislative session that would give some sort of access to closed investigative files. Such records can be denied indefinitely now ... The Albemarle School Board said it will interview the 15 or more individuals who have applied to fill a vacant seat [in closed session](#). Meanwhile, representatives from Albemarle and Charlottesville government have been holding a [series of two-by-two meetings](#) to work out a number of contentious issues ... The Hampton City Council, already wrestling with setting the number of meetings it will hold each month and whether public comment will be heard, recently got [sidetracked in a meeting](#) when one council member wondered aloud if employees were spending too much time on Facebook, and the mayor complained about an audience member's sighs and grunts.

FOIA Council study groups

Two subcommittees of the FOIA Council met during August to discuss a number of issues. The Rights and Responsibilities Subcommittee has worked out language clarifying how much advance notice a government defendant should get before a FOIA lawsuit. The same committee is still working on two other issues: (1) whether government should be allowed to prohibit or refuse to fill FOIA requests that are designed to "harass" the government; and (2) what type of FOIA training the council can provide to legislators and/or staff, as well as what kind of access can be offered to budget conferees' meetings.

A second subcommittee is studying access to criminal investigative records of law enforcement. The council hopes to come up with some sort of recommendation for the 2011 session, though the council has, in the past, held issues over into the next year for further study.

If you find VCOG's services and resources useful, consider making a donation or becoming a member. Your dues and/or donations go straight toward VCOG's modest operating budget and are 100% tax deductible

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Virginia Coalition for Open Government
P.O. Box 2576
Williamsburg, Virginia 23187

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