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Citizen Toolkit

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Find the right place to act, ask and follow up

Choose your next step

Use this toolkit after identifying the issue and responsible entity. It applies the master checklist's actor, authority and records questions to a practical next step.

Your purpose	Start here
Attend or speak	Read general meeting guidance , then check the particular body's procedure.
Speak at the County Commission	Use the clearly bounded County Commission section .
Ask for an explanation	Read Contact the right office .
Obtain documents	Use Prepare a records request and the separate request template.
Follow up	Use Follow up with the record in hand .

Scope: the local sign-up and decorum rules below apply only to Appling County Board of Commissioners meetings. They are not rules for city councils, school boards, authorities or other bodies. Public hearings may use different procedures.

General meeting guidance

Before: identify the actual body

Start with the body named in the governing record: a county commission, city council, authority board or another office or body. Verify the meeting date, location and any changes through that entity's official notice or clerk. Do not rely on a recurring calendar entry alone.

Save the notice, agenda and available packet with the date you obtained them. Look for the exact project, agreement, ordinance or budget item. An agenda identifies expected business; it does not prove that an action occurred. Compare it with the resulting record.

Attendance and speaking are different

The Attorney General explains that the Open Meetings Act gives access to covered meetings but does not itself grant a general right to speak. Ask the clerk about comment sign-up, time limits and agenda placement. A public hearing may have separate participation requirements; check the notice and governing procedure for that hearing. [\[2\]](#)

APPLING COUNTY | County Commission meetings only

This local guide describes the County Commission documents supplied by the Clerk. Do not apply these rules to Baxley, Graham, Surrency, school boards, authorities or other bodies.

The Clerk supplied a signed ordinance and blank speaker form on August 31, 2026. The ordinance scan states an effective date of November 5, 2024; its certification records adoption November 4, 2024. Its filename contains 2025. We use the dates on the document, not the filename. I cannot confirm that no later amendments exist. [\[6\]](#)[\[7\]](#)

First identify the speaking opportunity

Type	What the supplied ordinance says
Public-comment period	Section 18(a), PDF p. 7, places public comments at the end of the agenda. It requires the speaker to be an Appling County resident or own real property within the county.
Comment on an agenda item	Section 18(b), PDF p. 7, allows the Board, by majority vote, to permit comment while the item is considered. Comments stay on that subject; five minutes and one opportunity apply unless the Board waives those limits.
Public hearing	Section 18(d), PDF p. 8, treats hearings separately and discusses time per side and special zoning procedures. Do not automatically carry the regular public-comment sign-up process into a hearing.

These are descriptions of the County document, not a legal determination that every restriction is enforceable in every circumstance. [\[6\]](#)

Check the actual notice

Section 10 states first-Tuesday regular meetings at 5:30 p.m. in the County Annex meeting room. Section 11 provides for other or rescheduled meetings. Treat this as the ordinance's stated schedule and verify the notice for the specific date, place and meeting type. [\[6, PDF pp. 4-5\]](#)

Complete the County's own speaker form

The form asks for name, contact number, mailing address, email, meeting date and topic, plus signature and date acknowledging its requirements. It lists submission by email or in person to the County Clerk. Use the blank original supplied with this guide. [\[7\]](#)

The contact printed on that form is Robyn Olliff Evans, County Clerk; revans@applingco.com; 69 Tippins Street, Suite 201, Baxley, Georgia 31513. Verify the current recipient and ask for confirmation of receipt and scheduling. These are the supplied form's details, not an independently refreshed contact directory. [7]

Before submitting: confirm the exact deadline with the Clerk. The form body and footer use different reference dates; the difference is explained below. [Download the supplied blank speaker form.](#)

Important: two different deadline references

Source	Deadline language
Ordinance section 18(a), PDF p. 7	Names and topics go to the Clerk at least one week before the agenda work session.
Form: PUBLIC INPUT and PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	Both refer to at least one week before the agenda work session.
Form footer	Refers to at least one week before the meeting date.

The work-session date and meeting date are different reference points. The documents should not be summarized as one unambiguous deadline. Ask the Clerk to confirm the applicable work-session date and exact submission deadline in writing; submit early. CLOCK has not obtained a clarification resolving this difference. [6][7]

Know the time limit in the supplied ordinance

Section 18(a) states five minutes per speaker. When more than four speakers are scheduled for public participation, it reduces the time to three minutes each. It permits one speaking opportunity per meeting, keeps remarks to the chosen topic and does not allow giving your allotted time to another speaker. It also permits the Board, by majority vote of members present, to suspend these section 18(a) rules for a particular meeting. [6, PDF p. 7]

As a preparation aid, have a three-minute version ready as well as a five-minute version. Confirm which limit will apply. This is CLOCK's practical suggestion, not a promise of a speaking slot.

What the supplied rules say

Section 7(a) and the form require devices to be off or silent, while allowing them to record the meeting. Attendees are to remain silent while business is conducted. A speaker must first be recognized by the Chair and direct comments to the Chair rather than individual commissioners, staff or others. [6, PDF p. 2][7]

The documents call for respectful conduct, prohibit personal attacks and derogatory or inappropriate remarks, and prohibit profanity. Section 18(c) describes being ruled out of order, a Board vote on a commissioner's point of order, and possible removal at the Chair's direction. This reports the documents' terms; it does not resolve the legal limits of applying them to protected criticism. [6, PDF pp. 7-8][7]

Recording is expressly addressed

Section 12 permits visual and sound recordings of open meetings. Section 7(a)(1) specifically preserves use of a phone or device to record despite the silent-device rule. [6, PDF pp. 2, 5]

Putting a subject on the agenda is a separate request

Section 14(a)(3) and the form allow written requests to the Clerk for a subject to be considered for agenda placement, referring to receipt at least one week before the agenda work session. A request does not establish that the item has been placed on the agenda. Ask which process you need: an agenda item, the public-comment period, or participation in a hearing. [\[6, PDF p. 6\]](#)[\[7\]](#)

End of County Commission-only procedures. Obtain the notice and participation policy for every other body. The remaining sections are general research tools; the records-request template is not the County speaker form.

During and after any meeting you attend

During: record what happened

Write down	Keep it specific
Meeting identity	Body, date, location and agenda item.
Action	Motion, amendment, vote or other action you observed.
Source	Official recording timestamp, document page or your dated notes.
Open question	What you could not hear, establish or reconcile.

Mark personal notes as personal notes. If you paraphrase, do not put the paraphrase in quotation marks. Check consequential quotations against the recording or original document before repeating them.

After: compare the records

Look for the meeting summary and minutes; the Attorney General identifies those as meeting records. [\[2\]](#) Distinguish draft from approved minutes and note any correction. Follow a vote into the resulting resolution, agreement or other action record when one exists.

An agenda, an oral statement and an executed agreement answer different questions. Preserve their dates and status.

For the County Commission specifically, sections 19-20 of the supplied ordinance address summaries and minutes. [\[6, PDF p. 8\]](#)

Contact the right office with a focused question

Use the service and authority information from Modules 1 and 2 to identify the office. Verify its current official contact details before sending anything. This toolkit does not assume that the city clerk, county clerk or any other one person holds every record.

A useful inquiry is: “I am trying to identify which entity approved [specific action] at [location] during [period]. Which office handles that decision, and where can I find the approval record?” This is suggested wording, not a claim that the action occurred.

Questions and records requests serve different purposes

An ordinary inquiry can ask for an explanation. A records request should identify existing records. The Act does not require an agency to create a new report or summary, while electronic information accessible through its existing systems has specific production provisions. [3]

Prepare a records request

The Attorney General recommends writing to the records custodian and checking for a designated request officer on the agency website. Written requests help document scope and timing; the guidance also explains that enforcement actions depend on written requests. [1]

Name the project or topic, location if relevant, date range and record categories. For messages, identify likely people or offices and a useful topic and period. Check that the description would let someone distinguish the records you want from unrelated material.

Track timing and costs accurately

Under the cited Act, responsive records that can be located and produced must be made available within a reasonable time, no more than three business days after receipt. When responsive records exist but are unavailable within that period, the agency must provide their description and availability timeline within the same three-business-day period, and provide access as soon as practicable. Available records should not be held back solely because other responsive records are unavailable. Receipt by the designated recipient and lawful fee provisions can affect the timeline. [3]

Record the actual recipient, receipt evidence, any estimate and your response. Do not treat three business days as a guarantee that every request must be fully completed by then. Charges may apply; ask for an itemized estimate and clarify what you authorize. [3]

Use the record of delivery, the agency's response and the applicable provisions before drawing a conclusion about compliance.

Worked example: ask for the missing record

In the fictional repair exercise, F4 records payments, but F5 contains no completion evidence. A focused request to City B would ask for existing inspection reports, acceptance records and completion certificates for the identified repair, through a stated cutoff date. A separate request to County A could seek its contribution approval and transfer record.

Completed evidence-log entry: Documented fact: the invented ledger records \$90,000 paid. Unresolved: the supplied records do not establish acceptance of the repair. Next step: obtain City B's existing inspection and acceptance records. This exercise does not assert that those records exist or that payment was improper.

A reusable records-request template

Download the editable request and follow-up templates. These are separate from the County speaker form.

Replace every bracketed field and delete categories you do not need. Send to the appropriate agency, using its designated process where applicable. This is CLOCK's suggested wording, not an official form. The Attorney General also supplies a form. [\[5\]](#)

To: [Agency and designated records custodian]

Date: [Date]

Subject: Open Records Request - [project or topic; period]

Under the Georgia Open Records Act, I request copies of the following existing records held by your agency for [specific project, location or topic], covering [start date] through [end date]:

1. [Record category, such as an executed agreement and its amendments.]
2. [Record category, such as the approval, minutes or resolution for the identified action.]
3. [Record category, such as invoices and payment records for the identified contract.]

Please provide electronic copies where available, preferably in the format maintained or a supported standard export. Please provide an itemized cost estimate before incurring charges; I have not authorized a fee amount in this request. If any requested records are withheld or redacted, please identify the specific legal basis and provide the nonexempt portions. If responsive records cannot be provided within the applicable period, please describe them and provide the anticipated production schedule.

Please direct responses to [reply address].

[Name]

For issues involving several entities

Tailor each request to the records that entity may hold. Keep separate recipients, delivery evidence, responses and production lists. Then connect related items with a shared project name or agreement number. Do not infer that one agency's response speaks for every participant.

Check the response against the request

List which categories were supplied, partly supplied, withheld, reported not found or left unanswered. For withheld material, the Attorney General says the agency must cite the specific statutory exemption. [\[1\]](#) A statement that an agency has no responsive records is a statement about that agency's response, not proof that no such records exist anywhere.

Keep fact, statement and interpretation separate

Use these CLOCK reporting labels when describing what you found. They describe the strength and type of support; they are not legal rulings.

Label	How to write it
Documented fact	“The signed agreement dated [date], section [number], states...” Limit the claim to what the document establishes.
Attributed statement	“[Speaker/office] said [statement] on [date].” A statement is not automatically independent confirmation.
Allegation	“[Person] alleges [claim].” Identify the source and whether it has been corroborated.
Interpretation	“This may indicate [meaning], because [evidence].” Explain the reasoning and what could change it.
Unresolved question	“The reviewed sources do not establish [point].” Identify the search or missing record.
Conflicting evidence	State both sources, dates and scopes. Call it a contradiction only when the claims actually conflict.

Preserve an understandable record

Save the original files and correspondence as received. Keep notes, transcripts and marked-up copies separately. Record the source URL or sender, retrieval date, title and page or timestamp. Treat automated transcripts as derivative material until checked against the recording.

Maintain a short chronology: event date, what happened, supporting source and next step. If a date is unknown, label it unknown. A saved file or checksum can help track whether bytes changed; it does not establish the truth of the document's contents.

Use careful language about missing information

Prefer “not located in the sources reviewed” over “does not exist.” Prefer “the minutes record a vote” over a claim that the approved work was completed. Identify what would establish completion, such as an acceptance record, without assuming that record exists.

Follow up with the record in hand

If a response is incomplete or a promised production date passes, identify the unresolved item precisely. Preserve the earlier request and response so the agency can see what remains open.

Subject: Follow-up - records request dated [date]

On [date], I sent [agency/custodian] the attached request concerning [topic]. My records show [delivery evidence or confirmation]. Your response dated [date, if any] stated [brief accurate summary].

The following items remain unresolved: [identify missing categories, estimate, cited exemption or promised production date]. Please provide the status of those items and the expected next production date. I am attaching the original request and relevant correspondence for reference.

[Name and reply address]

A follow-up log

Field	What to retain
Request	Exact wording, recipient, date and receipt evidence.
Response	Date, records supplied, estimate, explanation and promised dates.
Your action	Clarification, fee decision or follow-up, with date.
Remaining issue	Specific missing category, unresolved question or next step.

When the issue remains unresolved

The Attorney General offers an informal Open Government Mediation Program for concerns involving access to local-government meetings and records. Intake is reviewed; participation is not guaranteed. The program warns that submitted information becomes an open record and may be shared with the entity involved. [\[4\]](#)

If considering that process, prepare a short factual chronology and relevant attachments. Avoid unrelated sensitive information. Do not assume a complaint suspends a legal deadline; a time-sensitive legal challenge needs advice about the applicable procedure.

Next: Follow the Money

Module 4 applies the same source-based method to budgets, revenues, transfers, expenditures and deliverables, keeping each government and authority's finances distinct.

Find the next record

Use the [source-finding guide](#) for document types, official starting points and unresolved local source limits.

Sources and scope

Reviewed September 27, 2026. This is an introductory civic-education toolkit, not a ruling about any agency's compliance or a complete guide to every legal exception. Verify the governing law and particular procedure for a disputed deadline, fee, hearing or court action.

1. [Georgia Attorney General: How to Make an Open Records Request](#). Custodian, written requests and disclosure exemptions.
2. [Georgia Attorney General: Open Government FAQ](#). Used for attendance versus speaking and general meeting-document guidance. Some other entries contain older figures; this module does not reproduce its fees, penalties or litigation deadlines.
3. [Open Records Act text linked by the Attorney General](#). O.C.G.A. 50-18-71(b), (c), (d), (f), (g), (j), PDF pp. 1-4: timing, charges, electronic records and existing records. This hosted compilation is not a certified current code edition.
4. [Georgia Attorney General: Open Government Mediation Program](#). Program purpose, intake discretion and notice that submitted information becomes an open record.
5. [Georgia Attorney General: request form](#). Optional agency-provided example. CLOCK template in this module is original suggested wording, not an official form.
6. [Appling County: Meetings Organization and Public Access](#). Preserved 13-page scan supplied by the County Clerk August 31, 2026. PDF p. 13 certifies adoption November 4, 2024 and states effective November 5, 2024, despite the filename containing 2025. Sections 7, 10-14 and 18-20, PDF pp. 2-8. Current amendments have not been independently ruled out.
7. [Appling County: Public Input - Speaker Request Form](#). One-page blank form supplied by the County Clerk August 31, 2026. Main instructions and footer use different deadline reference dates. Original filename retained.

What this toolkit does not assume

The County Commission section attributes local procedures and contact details to the supplied documents and identifies unresolved points. Confirm current arrangements before use; do not extend them to another body. The examples and templates are hypothetical learning tools.

Use the toolkit in order

Identify the entity and issue. Locate the relevant meeting or office. Read the records. Ask a focused question or request existing documents. Preserve the response. State what the evidence supports and what remains open.