



**Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
GREEN COUNTY

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*Youth in Government*

## **Overview of Open Meetings & Open Records**

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The open meeting and open records laws are part of Wisconsin's long-standing tradition of openness in government. They are based on the premise that public officials are conducting public business and that the public has the right to know, and needs to know, what their representatives are doing so they can make informed decisions at the polls.

### ***Open Meetings***

Therefore, the open meeting law requires that all meetings of all governmental bodies be preceded by public notice and be publicly held in places reasonably accessible to the public and open to all citizens at all times unless otherwise expressly provided by law.

### ***Closed Sessions***

Wisconsin allows municipal governing bodies to go into closed session for discussion of specific topics as defined in law, such as personnel issues.

### ***Open Records***

The open records law (also known as the public records law) establishes rules and regulations concerning public inspection and copying of government records. These policies require municipal officers and staff to retain public records for a specific time. The open records law maintains that the public should have access to government records except in specific instances.

### **Helpful Definitions**

**Quorum** The minimum number of members of an assembly or society that must be present at any of its meetings to make the proceedings of that meeting valid.

Taken from *Handbook for Wisconsin Municipal Officials* by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities (2002).

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