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The Sunshine Report: Online Transparency news from the Virginia Coalition for Open Government **October 2011**

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VCOG on the road

During September, VCOG had the opportunity to participate on two conference panels: one at the COVITS (Commonwealth IT professionals) conference in Richmond, and one at the Virginia Preservationists conference in Winchester. We also conducted a FOIA training session at the Alexandria Sanitation Authority. To schedule a panel or training session, [contact Megan Rhyne](#).

THANK YOU to our Access 11 conference sponsors:

- Alpha Omega Wealth

Greetings, Friend of VCOG!

ACCESS 2011 - Register NOW!

Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's historic home on the bucolic hill, will be the backdrop for VCOG's 12th conference on access and open government in Virginia. Join us Oct. 29 for a panel on access to campus email, featuring key players in the dispute over UVA's response to a FOIA request for a former professor's email. Another panel will feature local public officials grilling journalists on the use (and abuse?) of access laws. VCOG will acknowledge its annual award winners, and the Library of Virginia will update us on the project to put an archive of Gov. Kaine's email online.

[Click here for schedule and registration information](#)

Closed-door work groups rankle

The Governor's Government Reform & Restructuring Commission caught some open-government flak after its Aug. 31 meeting when it came to light that work groups had been meeting without notice to the public. The work groups were announced in April as a replacement for the committee system. The governor's staff said the work groups did not have to comply with FOIA because they were entities appointed by the governor. The issue quickly heated up politically, as the governor's office touted its devotion to transparency, and as Democrats complained they were excluded from the work groups. Republican Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli declined Del. David Englin's (D-Alexandria) request to have the work groups investigated for FOIA violations. The governor eventually promised to follow FOIA when three or more commission members attended.

As the furor subsided, and prompted by [an editorial in The Roanoke Times](#), VCOG asked that if the AG does not have authority to investigate or enforce FOIA, "Isn't it time for either the AG, the FOIA Council or some other

- Management
- The Daily Progress
- The News Virginian
- Society of Professional Journalists, Virginia Pro Chapter
- The Sorensen Institute
- The Star-Exponent
- Virginia Lawyers Weekly
- Virginia Trial Lawyers Association
- Virginia Public Access Project
- Joe Walton
- WTVR, CBS-6, Richmond
- WWBT, NBC-12, Richmond

[Contact Megan Rhyne](#) for sponsorship information.

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!

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](#).

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(but won't you like us more?)



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entity to have such authority as an alternative to court?"

[Read more on the VCOG Blog.](#)

Making Your FOIA Life Easier: Northern Virginia

VCOG will hold its third seminar on records-management and FOIA on Thursday, Nov. 10, from 9:30 to 12:30. Presenters Craig Fifer (City of Alexandria), Maria Everett (FOIA Council) and Anita Vannucci (Library of Virginia) will be sharing tips and strategies for keeping, storing and destroying records in accordance with the Public Records Act, and in responding to FOIA requests. The seminars, which are underwritten by a grant from the Knight Foundation, are geared towards government employees, but all are welcome. The cost is \$20/person.

Thank you to our host, The Gannett Co.



[Get more details and register here.](#)

Open government news

In addition to the closed work group controversy, the Governor's Reform Commission was also [criticized](#) by [several newspapers](#) for its suggestion that public bodies should have even more leeway in meeting electronically. The current rules governing electronic meetings resulted from a months-long study by interested stakeholders, including VCOG, press and government representatives....The Virginia Port Authority insisted that its 2-day "retreat" was not subject to FOIA. "There will be no votes or action items," the VPA's spokesman said, and all materials are exempt from disclosure, [prompting one critic to complain](#) that the port's action "exemplifies the worst type of disdain for the Hampton Roads public."...*The Virginian-Pilot* [launched an online database of salary information](#) for five Hampton Roads localities. The FOIA Council is studying whether the minimum salary amount for mandatory disclosure should be raised from \$10,000 (set in the late 1970s) to an amount reflective of the current cost of living...Though it was denied several emails from the Albemarle County Schools superintendent, *The Hook* was able to obtain other records that showed widespread teacher dissatisfaction with a new student information system, not to mention a [potential personal financial incentive](#) to school administrators to use the system...Thanks to records released in response to a FOIA request made by the Charlottesville Albemarle Transportation Coalition, [Charlottesville Tomorrow reported](#) that the unofficial estimate for how much a road construction project in the area would cost was twice as much (\$436 million) as

VDOT told the Commonwealth Transportation Board it would be...The Reporters Committee has issued the 6th edition of its [online Open Government Guide](#). The site lets you search one state's open records and open meetings laws, or compare what any or all states do in particular areas. Virginia's round-up was prepared by attorneys Craig Merritt and David Lacey of Christian & Barton in Richmond.

[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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