Definition of "Informational Gathering"

Prepared by the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council
Meetings Subcommittee
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Interpretive approach.

In the absence of an applicable statutory definition, consideration may be given to a term's plain meaning. The Supreme Court of Virginia has previously stated:

> "when ... a statute contains no express definition of a term, the general rule of statutory construction is to infer the legislature's intent from the ... language used. When the legislature leaves a term undefined, courts must give [the term] its ordinary meaning, [taking into account] the context in which it is used."[1]

Definitions

The following entries are dictionary definitions compiled from various sources that include definitions for several relevant terms.

Term	Definition	Definition
Informational. *adj.*	Relating to or providing information. (Cambridge Dictionary)	relating to or giving information **:** informing. (Merriam-Webster)
Information. *noun*.	Facts about a situation, person, event, etc. (Cambridge Dictionary)	knowledge of a particular event or situation. (Merriam-Webster)
Gathering. *noun*.	A coming together of people in a group, including for social, religious, or political purposes; an assembly or meeting. (Merriam-Webster)	an assemblage of people; group or crowd. (Dictionary.com).
Discussion. *noun.*	The activity in which people talk about something and tell each other their ideas or opinions. (Cambridge Dictionary)	an act or instance of discussing; consideration or examination by argument, comment, etc., especially to explore solutions; informal debate. (Dictionary.com)

Staff Observations

In several dictionary definitions, the meaning of "gathering" includes "meeting." Accordingly, the ordinary meanings alone may not establish a clear distinction between an "informational gathering" and a "meeting." In the context of an exception to a meeting, informational gathering can be contrasted with meetings where there is discussion or transaction of public business.

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[1]Freedom of Information Advisory Opinion 03 (2020)(quoting *American Tradition Institute v. Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia*, 287 Va. 330, 341, (Va. 2014)).