

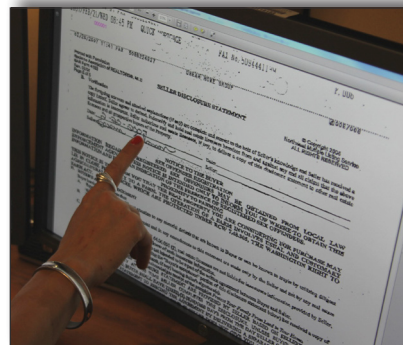
RESULTS WASHINGTON CASE STUDY: Investigative Records Disclosure

Faster disclosure of investigative records. The Department of Licensing team handling requests for the agency's investigative records cut the time to fulfill a request in half.

In addition to issuing driver's licenses, Washington's Department of Licensing (DOL) licenses more than 40 professions. Under state law, real estate brokers, property appraisers, auto dealers, funeral home operators, private investigators, security guards and many other professionals require a license.

To ensure that the public is protected, the department investigates complaints against licensees, as well as initiating its own investigations.

About 275 times each year, a member of the public requests a copy of an investigation. These requesters are often consumers who filed complaints, members of the news media, attorneys, businesses or the people being investigated. Each request averages 400 to 500 pages of records.



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Brad Benfield

The process for handling these requests was confusing for both requesters and DOL staff. The average time to fulfill a request was 10 days. In some cases, it was taking as long as three months.

"We would receive a request and we often weren't sure which type of record they were looking for," said Sara Crosby, a Lean consultant at the agency. Many of the records were kept at different sites, meaning that staff would have to drive from one building to another to pick up records or mail them. That slowed response times to requesters.

Improvements: DOL's public disclosure team first clarified the way to handle investigative record requests.

"We had a list for who to contact, and we trained those people so they knew exactly what to do," said Crosby.



"Training was key," said Brad Benfield, DOL's communications director. "People weren't necessarily aware of the basics of public disclosure. They often wanted to talk to their supervisor, which required scheduling a meeting. It had the potential to add days onto these processes. Providing training saved having to explain things over and over."

The agency also revised the request form, so it was clearer which records the person was asking for. And they set up a process for scanning the records and keeping them in a shared computer folder for quick access. The agency also got a faster document scanner for the section with the highest number of requests and the largest files.

Outcome: The changes cut in half the time it takes to fulfill an average records request. In the fall of 2014, the process took an average of 10 days. By the fall of 2015, that had been cut to five days.

“The changes had a bigger impact than we anticipated,” said Crosby.

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Due to the improvements, the public disclosure team was able to handle an increase in requests without adding new staff. (Total record requests coordinated by the Public Disclosure Office nearly doubled in the first six months of 2015, rising from an average of 65 per month to 112 per month.)

And the team is looking at ways to use the lessons learned from the investigative records process more broadly throughout the agency.



Department of Licensing Investigative Records Team