

PIPR *INDEX*

THERE'S A NEW BENCHMARK IN TOWN.

HARNESS THE POWER OF THE *ONLY* PUBLIC RECORDS INDEX

QUANTIFYING COMPLEXITY IN PUBLIC RECORDS

As the leading provider of cloud-based automated workflow (SaaS) software for governments, GovQA is singularly positioned to provide actionable data for the public records industry. GovQA is 100% government focused and has more than twice as many customers as its next two competitors. GovQA serves over 110+ of the top 300 U.S. Cities; 45% of Top U.S. Counties; and 80+ state agencies.

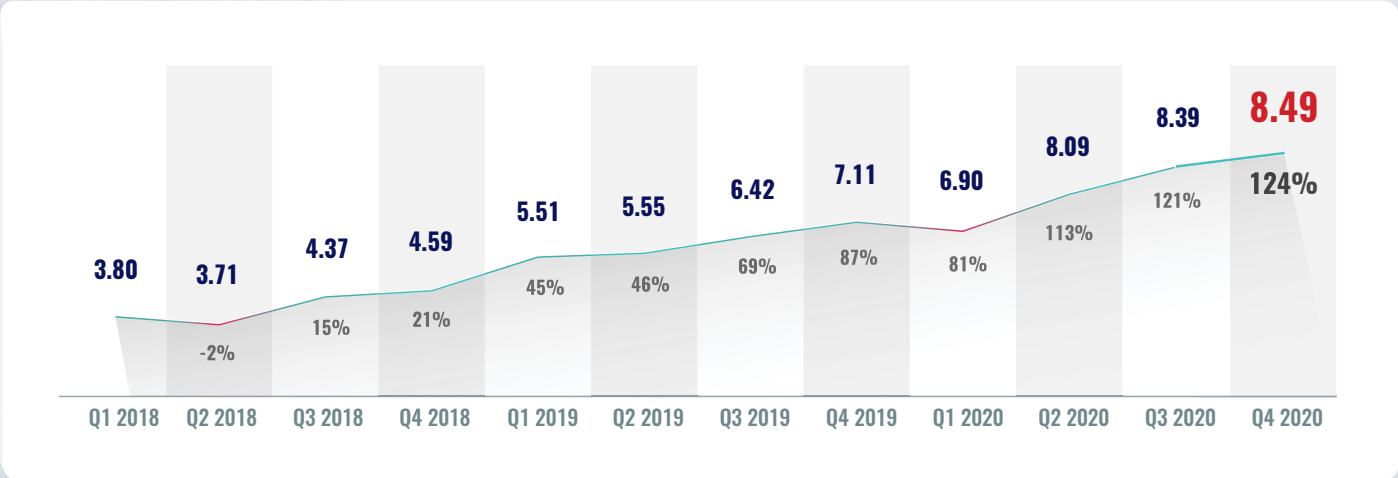
Using this broad and diverse customer base, GovQA has selected anonymized data from 500 representative agencies that includes state, county and city organizations falling within a high standard deviation within each metric to build the PiPRIndex. Data is adjusted for volume and tracked quarterly.

The PiPRIndex quantifies predictable growth (or retraction) in complexity, compliance, accessibility and economics of public records from “peers” across the U.S. and will be updated quarterly with results posted here.

The first of the four PiPRIndex reports covers **Complexity**. The other three (Compliance, Accessibility, and Economics) will follow in 2021.



HISTORICAL TREND



MAKING SENSE OF THE COMPLEXITY REPORT:

Overview

The GovQA Complexity Index is composed of two markers: the Records Marker; and the Activities Marker.

Records Marker

The **Records** Marker is an indicator of the complexity of the *public record files themselves*. This marker includes four figures — the last two of which are grouped under “File Types”.

Detailed descriptions of each can be found in the Metrics Definitions section below.

The four figures included in the Records Marker are:

- The quantity of response documents (indicates scale)
- The sizes of response documents (indicates scale)
- File Type Group: video file (indicates scale and diversity)
- File Type Group: OCR files (indicates scale and diversity)

Activities Marker

The **Activities** Marker is an indicator of *user activities related to processing public records requests*. Find detailed definitions in the Metrics Definitions section below.

The Activities Marker includes three figures:

- Average user interactions (indicates connectivity)
- Clarification emails generated (indicates connectivity)
- Total Time spent (indicates scale)

To calculate the PiPRIndex, the Records and Activities Markers are weighted against Request Volume - which is the total count of public records requests received by an agency.

HOW THE PiPRINDEX WAS CREATED

To calculate complexity, GovQA analyzed blind, anonymized data from almost 500 Public Records Customers. We identified those organizations that fall within a high standard deviation of values within that specific metric. Then we identified 239 customers that represent the most common experience across all 8 metrics.

The 239 member agencies includes 58 State Organizations, 44 Counties, and 128 Cities.

Adjusted for volume and tracked quarterly, GovQA is able to quantify the predictable growth in the complexity organizations will continue to face across the country.

Complexity, by definition, is the state of being intricate or complicated - having many interconnected parts or features. The causes of complexity as they relate to public records are:

- **Scale** (the number of elements in the system);
- **Diversity** (the extent to which elements are different); and
- **Connectivity** (the inter-relationships between components).

The GovQA PiPRIndex Complexity Report looks at anonymized data over time which may indicate an increase or decrease in the scale and diversity of public records request files and the time and connectivity required to process requests. These trends may be helpful to state and local government agency leadership in decision making with regard to budgeting, staffing levels, and technology investments.

METRICS DEFINITION

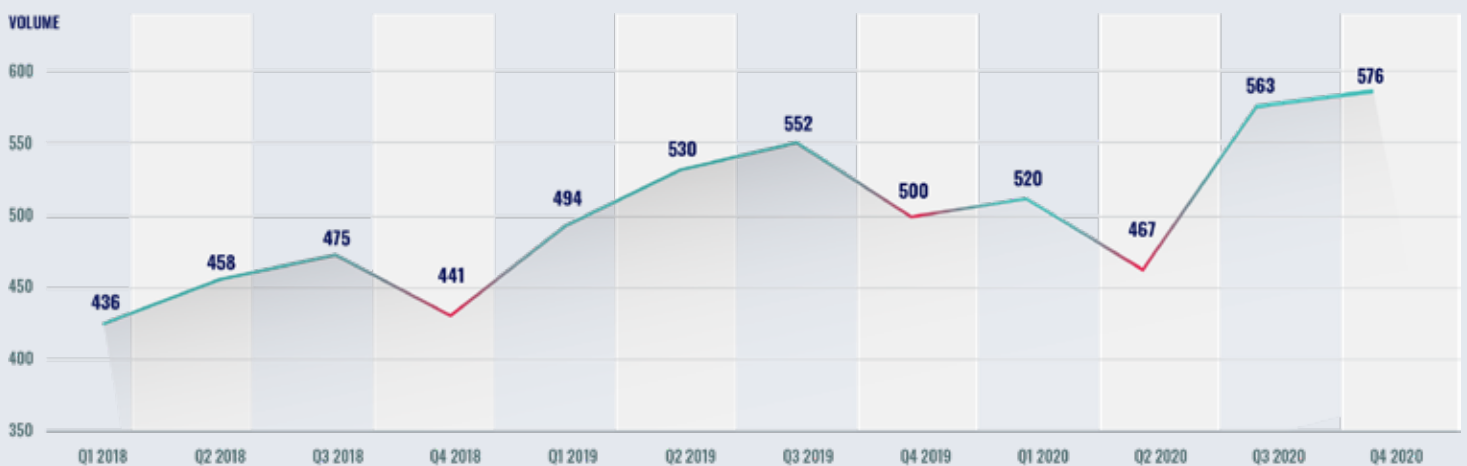
COMPLEXITY

Complexity, by definition, is the state of being intricate or complicated - having many interconnected parts or features. The causes of complexity are scale (the number of elements in the system), diversity (the extent to which elements are different), and connectivity (the inter-relationships between components).

REQUEST VOLUME

When measuring public records, request volume is the most common and helpful metric to watch; and it is usually measured in requests per month or year. Annual request volume varies from agency to agency - but in general, the larger the agency, the higher the request volume. A populous state, county, or city agency can have 4,000 to 15,000 or more public records requests submitted each year. A smaller city or county agency might have 100 or fewer public records requests annually. High profile events (such as officer-involved shootings) can trigger a surge in public records requests for any affected agency. Critical incidents often create a flood of requests around the time of the incident and for several months afterward as citizens, the media, and other agencies strive to understand what transpired and how the event was handled internally by the agency.

Click here for a definition of a public record:
<https://govqa.com/public-records-management/>



In general, public safety agencies have the highest public records request volumes. Many of the requests being submitted to public safety agencies are simple to fulfill - such as single page incident reports. However, Police and Sheriff's Departments, Departments of Correction, and other law enforcement agencies also have some of the most complex public records requests - those involving audio and video files and an abundance of PII (personally identifiable information) and other sensitive data which is protected from disclosure by exemption laws.



▲ 19%

**Public Records Request
Volume Increased by 19%
from Q3 to Q4, 2020.**

RAPID VOLUME INCREASE

*The majority of state and local government agencies are seeing **rapid increases in public records requests year over year.** According to a 2018 study from the Sunlight Foundation, public records request volume for mid-sized U.S. cities (ranging in population from 18,749 to 850,282) grew by approximately 188 requests per month in 2018 — or 470% over the last eight years. And in 2020, GovQA customers are seeing upwards of 57% increases in requests since March this year...with some customers getting more requests in the last 3 months than they did in the last 3 years. [Read more about this phenomenon here: https://govqa.com/drowning-in-public-records-foia-requests/](https://govqa.com/drowning-in-public-records-foia-requests/). Request Volume may be the most critical quantifier of complexity as it relates to scale.*

In the GovQA PiPRIndex Complexity Report, **Request Volume** is measured as the total count of requests created in the GovQA system.

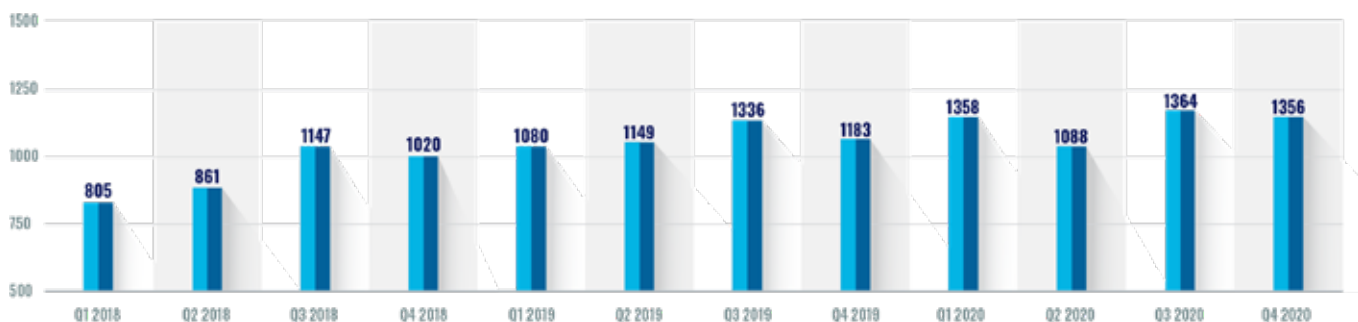
WITHIN THE COMPLEXITY INDEX, THE RECORDS MARKERS ARE MEASURED AS FOLLOWS:

QUANTITY OF RESPONSE DOCUMENTS (COUNT)

Measures the scale of complexity as the total count of individual documents sent to requesters, averaged by volume. The quantity of response documents affects the overall complexity of public records requests because each document added increases the number of required interactions. Each response document file must, at the very least, be uploaded to the GovQA system. This can be simplified using bulk upload, folder upload, or drag and drop functions within the software. But, since a key step in processing public records is “Review” prior to release, each document must be opened, read, and possibly redacted prior to release.

So by this definition, the more documents there are in the system, the more complex or numerous the actions needed to complete processing. In the case of agencies not using software to manage public records requests (a group which is not counted in the GovQA Complexity Index; but is surveyed in the companion [PEERS in Public Records Survey](#) conducted annually by GovQA), the quantity of response documents plays an even greater role in increasing the complexity of public records request processing.

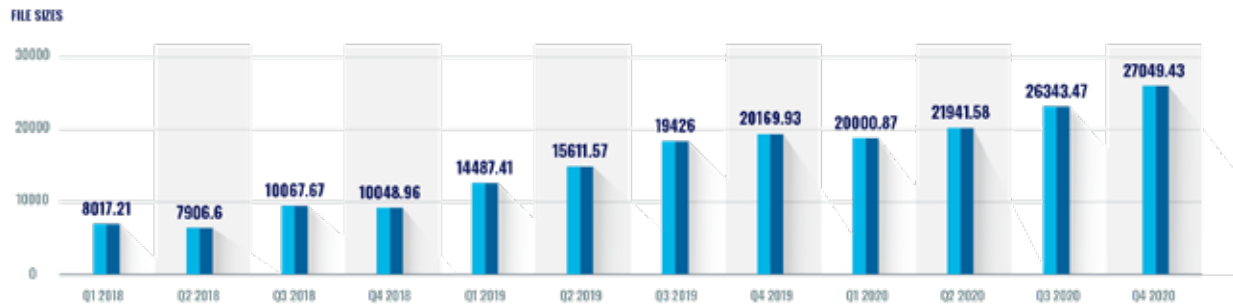
QUANTITY OF RESPONSE DOCS



FILE SIZE OF RESPONSE DOCUMENTS (MB)

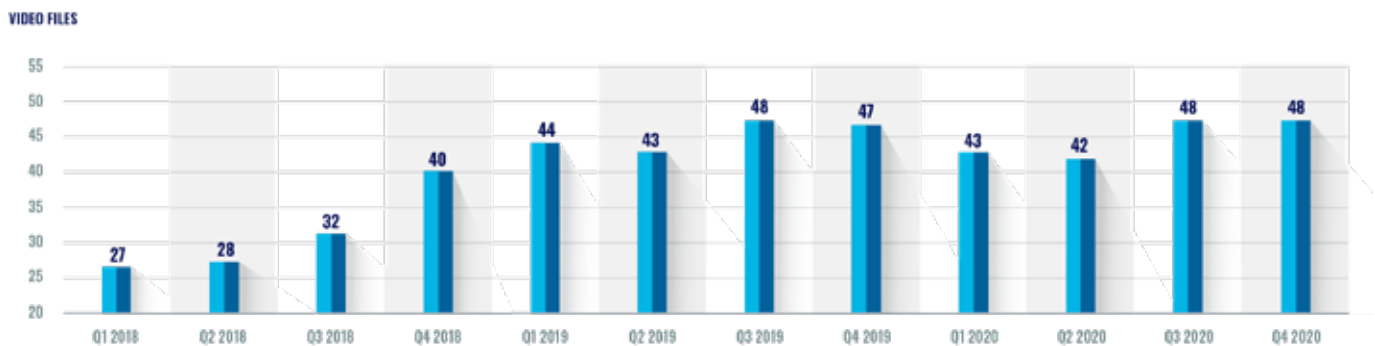
Measures the scale of complexity as the total size, in Megabytes, of all documents sent to requesters.

While the sheer quantity of files counted in the metric defined above plays an important role in assessing Complexity, the file size of those documents is also key. Larger files can contain more pages (which in turn require more time to review and redact - though tools within GovQA greatly simplify this activity with powerful search functions for pattern matching and more). Large files can also be large because they contain images (and audio or video data) which can introduce additional redaction challenges and time to process. Large files create complexity by generally taking more time to manipulate within an agency's public records processing system.



FILE TYPE GROUP: VIDEO FILES (COUNT)

Measures both the complexity scale and diversity as the count of all video files inside the GovQA system (identified by file extension such as .mp4, .avi, and .mov). Not all agencies manage video files; but for those that do, video files present unique challenges. Almost by definition, video files are some of the largest records created or owned by agencies. They take longer to upload and download due to their size (particularly on slower networks or Internet connections). They also can present enormous challenges in terms of redaction due to the time and skill involved in viewing videos to identify heads, license plates, laptops and other sensitive objects and audio and then manipulating redaction tools to fully obscure or remove that data prior to release. Using AI-enabled software to automatically identify these elements back and forth in the video/audio timeline is a new way to reduce some of the complexity in video/audio redaction. GovQA has partnered with Veritone ([VERI](#)) to integrate video and audio redaction tools into the GovQA workflows, allowing video/audio redactions up to 90% faster than with manual methods. Whether using sophisticated AI tools or manual methods of redaction, however, the more video files an agency must process for public records requests, the more Complexity can be increased.

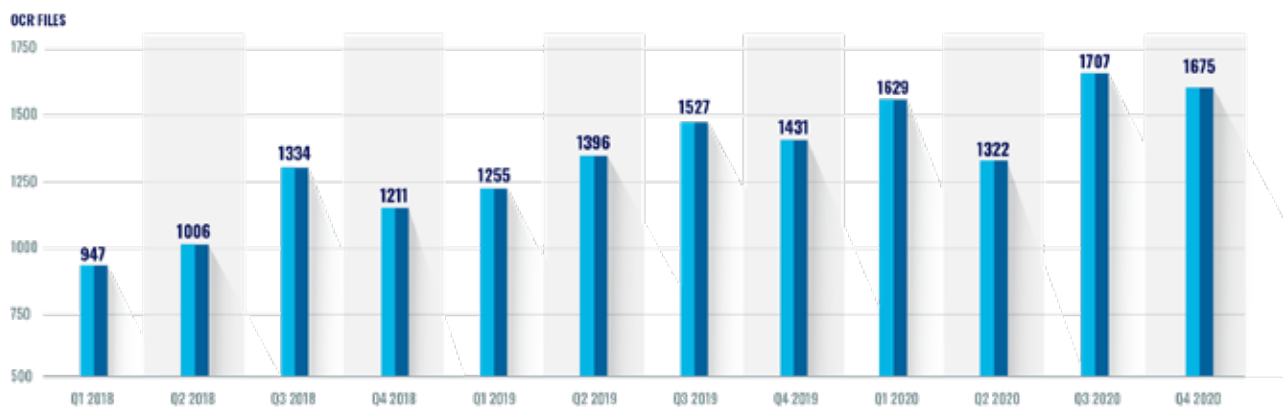


FILE TYPE GROUP: OCR PROCESSED IMAGES & PDF (COUNT)

Measures both the complexity scale and diversity as the count of all OCR scanned documents and PDFs processed by the GovQA OCR robot. These file types are not managed by all agencies; but for those that do, they introduce diversity in file types which requires unique handling. Text which cannot be selected by a cursor is not searchable by a computer until it's converted to recognized characters via the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) process. When ink-on-paper records are scanned into a computer (with a scanner or camera), any text contained in those records is not searchable by default. Generically, scanner settings include several options, some which merely "take a picture" of the file, and others which process the scan to attempt to recognize letters and words.

GovQA offers an add-on module called *Attachment Search with OCR* that simplifies the optimal processing and searching of documents which are not readily searchable in their native format. This metric shows how many agencies are still working with paper or files which are not readily searchable in their native format.

Learn more about OCR here: <https://govqa.com/optical-character-recognition-ocr-redaction-explained/>.

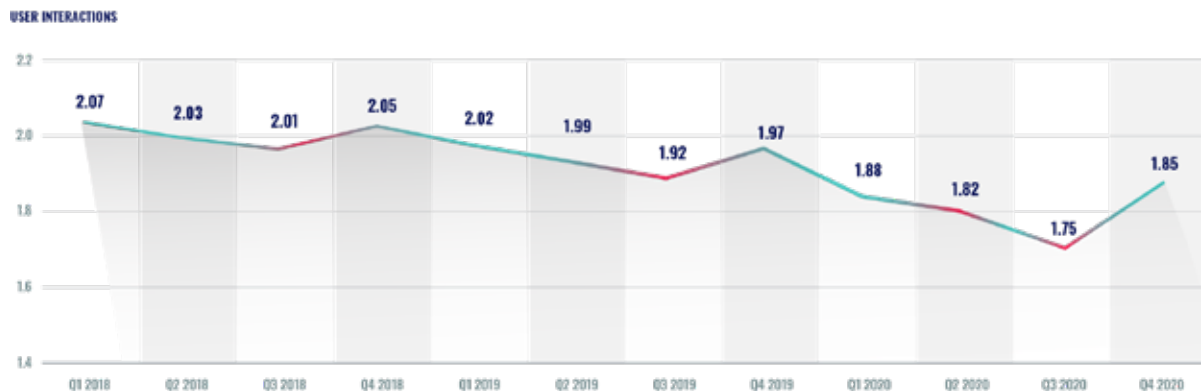


WITHIN THE COMPLEXITY INDEX, THE ACTIVITIES MARKERS ARE MEASURED AS FOLLOWS:

AVERAGE USER INTERACTIONS (COUNT)

Measures connectivity-induced complexity as the average number of staff involved in a request.

This is counted by unique user IDs assigned to or involved in a request. Nearly every public records request includes the following steps in the process: intake, vet, gather, review, respond, report. If one staff person can accomplish all those activities themselves to complete a request, the request is much simpler than if other people must be brought in to consult, confer, review, comment, redact, or approve a response packet prior to release. The higher the number of records managers, legal staff, and reviewers involved in a request, the more complexity increases. Requests can require interactions from just a single individual up to 8 or more people. Every touchpoint adds a layer of complexity.



Analysis: Within the GovQA customer universe, user interactions trend downward as workflow automations are optimized in the software. It's true that agencies can do more with fewer staff when using automated software; every process takes less time when automated so staff can get the work of responding to public records requests done faster and move on to the agency's other critical missions. Each of GovQA's quarterly software releases contain new and upgraded features to continue to drive user efficiency upwards and user interaction count down.

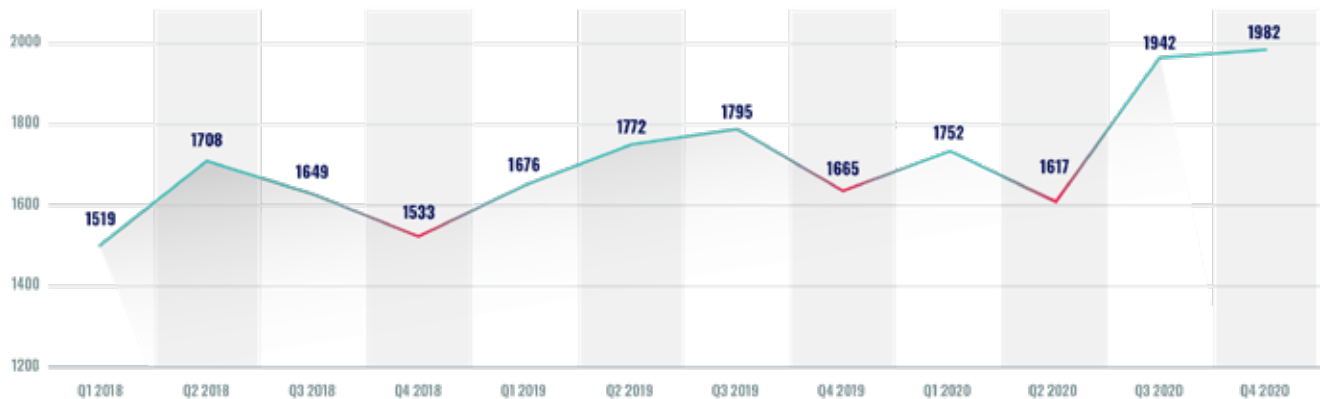
CLARIFICATION EMAILS GENERATED

(COUNT)

Measures complexity as connectivity by counting the number of clarification emails generated

between requesters and those managing requests. As the public becomes more aware of the availability and usefulness of public records requests, new requesters are entering the system at a higher rate than ever before. New requesters, unfamiliar with the norms of submitting public records requests and perhaps less knowledgeable about what specific records are available, may struggle to submit requests in the most efficient way to allow agencies to respond directly and quickly. And the more unsophisticated or unclear the requests made by the public, media, or other agencies, the more time and effort must go into achieving the clarity necessary to narrow and fulfill requests. Clarification emails can be generated from the GovQA system using templates and merge tags for efficiency; but the added steps to sending a clarification email and awaiting a response can result in a more complex request.

CLARIFICATION EMAILS

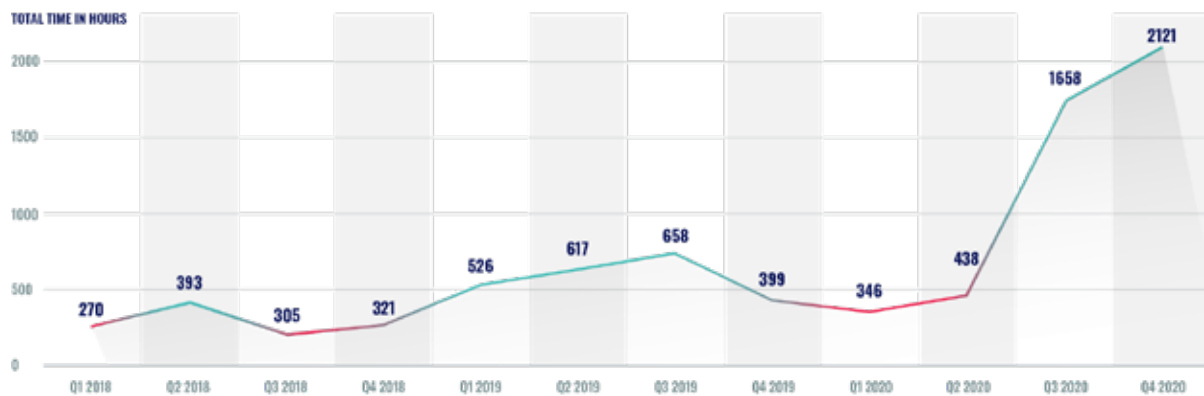


Analysis: The spike in clarification emails between Q2 and Q3, 2020 could be attributed to influx of pandemic or civil unrest-related public record requests which GovQA customers have reported are coming from national requesters, research groups, and other government agencies. In attempts to narrow the scope of these types of requests, clarification emails are often necessary.

TOTAL TIME SPENT

(HOURS)

Measures the scale of complexity as the number of hours spent processing requests. Like overall request volume, total time spent is an important indicator of complexity for any agency. Many things can affect the amount of time it takes to complete public records requests. As detailed above under other metrics, it takes longer to fulfill a request which is poorly defined in terms of which records are needed (see clarification emails metric). It takes longer to fulfill voluminous requests which require the gathering and processing of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of record files (see quantity of response documents metric). It takes longer to review and redact record files which have many pages or those that are not in simple text format, such as video or OCR scanned files (see file sizes, video and OCR metrics). And it takes longer to involve more than one person in the process — particularly the gathering, reviewing and redacting stages of a request (see average user interactions metric).



Analysis: As you can see by the spike in time spent fulfilling requests between Q2 and Q3 2020, we can likely, again, blame the pandemic. While many GovQA customers were already set up to work from home (with laptops and internet access) when lockdown orders came into effect; many agencies were still challenged to access paper records back at the office. This created delays, lengthened the time to complete records requests, and made it easy to see why reliance on paper can be a roadblock to productivity.

Those agency staff who were not able to work from home and continued to work on premise during the pandemic also reported delays in processing time due to inaccessibility of colleagues who were on split schedules or otherwise unavailable for reviews, etc.

Since GovQA is a cloud-based software solution, if all records needed and all personnel were accessible during the pandemic, the effect of the pandemic on records processing was minimal.

ABOUT PUBLIC RECORDS:

All 50 states have an open records law based on the Federal “Freedom of Information Act” (FOIA). The laws have slightly different names for each state; but each has requirements to make public records and information available to citizens, the media, and other US governments within a certain time frame and each has exemptions for information which must be redacted and not released — such as personal identifiers (SSNs).



ABOUT GOVQA:

GovQA is the leading provider of cloud-based public records automated workflow (SaaS) software for state, county and city governments. Our customers use our software to more easily process and manage public records requests from citizens, the media, and other government offices; ensuring secure intake, control, and timely release of responsive records in compliance with the law. 100% government-focused for over 20 years, GovQA has the largest customer base in the industry — with 110+ of the top 300 U.S. Cities; 45% of Top U.S. Counties; and 80+ state agencies.

COMPLEXITY AS A CATALYST



Requests are increasing in complexity. Litigation throws sand in the gears of operations. It's getting more and more difficult over time. So we must embrace new techniques and methodologies if we're going to continue on the course of improvement that we're all seeking here in this profession.

Explained by **Michael Sarich**, Director
Veterans Health Administration, FOIA
program and co-chair of the CFO
Technology Subcommittee to OGIS



Given the increased awareness of public records accessibility; the media trying to gather data for 24-hour news cycles; and the increase in successful litigation in compliance lawsuits; this complexity trend is likely to continue.

Jen Snyder



BEYOND THE GOVQA UNIVERSE: INSIGHT AND CORRELATIONS WITH THE PEERS SURVEY.

When paired with the Peer Survey data (from Peers in Public Records) collected from state and local government agencies which include GovQA customers AND non-customers, the index figures here reveal the differentiation between agencies using automated workflow software like GovQA, and those which are still largely manual processing operations.

Subscribe to Peer News to receive the full survey results report: <https://www.govqa.com/resources/peers-in-public-records-newsletter/>.