Agency-Side Effects and Efficacy of Online Public Records Request Portals

By Alexa Capeloto
John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY
acapeloto@jjay.cuny.edu
Abstract

My research aims to study the effects and efficacy of online PRR portals from the agency perspective, both at the process level and in a broader sense of reshaping the relationship between citizen and government.

A survey of 54 U.S. public jurisdictions suggests that online portals are significantly improving agencies’ internal and external processes of receiving, tracking, and responding to requests for public records, but do not necessarily spur correlative improvement in their overall relationship with citizens for a number of possible reasons.
Findings

How satisfied would you say you are with your online PRR portal?

- 73% Extremely satisfied
- 18% Somewhat satisfied
- 9% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 0% Somewhat dissatisfied
- 0% Extremely dissatisfied
Findings

Reasons for satisfaction, listed in order of frequency of mention:

1) Centralization/consolidation of PRR management
2) Tracking
3) Ease of use for requesters

Others: Speed, transparency, compliance, cost, redaction tool, proactive release.
Findings

How has the online PRR portal affected your agency's internal process of managing and responding to records requests?

- 65% Vastly improved the internal process
- 24% Somewhat improved the internal process
- 5% No real difference in the internal process
- 0% Adversely affected the internal process
- Other (Please describe) (5%)
Findings

How has the online PRR portal affected your agency's external process of working with public-information requesters?

- **56%** Vastly improved the external process
- **27%** Somewhat improved the external process
- **9%** No real difference in the external process
- **0%** Adversely affected the external process
- **7%** Other (Please describe)
Findings

In your experience, how has the online PRR portal affected the overall relationship between the public and your agency?

- Vastly improved the relationship (22%)
- Somewhat improved the relationship (44%)
- No real difference in the relationship (25%)
- Adversely affected the relationship (0%)
- Other (Please describe) (9%)
Findings

Elaboration on the question of relationship:

1) Lack of public awareness/interaction
2) Heightened expectations
3) Technology/format concerns