

## 5 Keys Areas FOIA Personnel Must Address When Vetting New Technology

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The 2012 Managing Government Records Directive (M-12-18) instructs federal agencies to establish and maintain appropriate recordkeeping and records management practices while transitioning completely to electronic systems capable of meeting 21st-century demands.

With every new purchase of technology related to records management, federal agencies are directed to consider its abilities to optimize the agency's processes for responding to Freedom of Information Act requests. The best technologies will help agency employees:

- Manage the exploding volumes of data created today;
- Access various types of video, audio, internet, social media, mobile, etc. files;
- Reduce the potential for human error and improper disclosures;
- Speed and improve the accuracy of search, review, and redaction processes.
- Ease and automate the production of records suitable for public consumption.

### **Managing government records is a monumental task**

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Almost every federal, state, county, and city government agency can improve upon its procedures for responding to public records requests (PRRs). Adopting modern technology tools adds efficiencies such as significantly reduced document review times and much more accurate search results that simply cannot be achieved by any other means.

The National Archives & Records Administration (NARA) maintains permanent archives of the federal government records and is in large part responsible for ushering agencies into the new digital era.

- Currently, NARA holds more than 5 million cubic feet (equivalent to 12.5 billion pages) of archival records and anticipates that an additional 3 million cubic feet of permanent records will be added by 2030.
- NARA's Federal Records Centers Program stores over 28 million cubic feet of records on a temporary basis for other federal agencies, costing agencies approximately \$200 million annually in payments to NARA. Agencies also acquire records management and storage services from commercial providers.

At the same time, agencies are trying to manage a surge in their electronic records. NARA managed archival electronic records equivalent to 12 billion pages in 2005, which grew to 34 billion in 2017.

Source: [June 2018 Whitehouse Reform Plan and Reorganization Recommendations](#)

The White House said in its Reform Plan that “The continuing need to support paper-based processes diverts resources away from investments in a modernized electronic records management system. Without focused attention to this challenge, NARA and agencies will face inadequate electronic records systems and protocols, leading to higher costs **and lost records**, as well as deficient practices and services for paper records.”

It’s been noted in recent years that over [75% of the government’s IT budget](#) is spent on maintaining outdated legacy systems. These stats may lend a feeling of scarcity when considering new technologies. But, they should also inspire a sense of urgency. Because as NARA’s data shows, many drivers of these expenses will only continue to multiply.

## **Better Technology for Better Records Management & FOIA Practices**

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A modernized approach that includes newer technology tools is needed to avoid lost or misplaced records that hinder the ability for agencies to respond thoroughly to public records requests. With improved technology, agency employees are also empowered with the critical tools needed to achieve success in their records management improvement endeavors.

But how can government officials of any government agency — federal, state, or local — make the wisest choices when it comes to which technology tools they select to manage records and respond to public records requests more effectively? What factors should they consider?

## **5 Key Areas for Assessing Technology for FOIA/PRR Needs**

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Any technological solution will need to offer sufficient capabilities in 5 key areas related to responding to FOIA and public records requests:

**Financial:** Are savings in time and cost achieved? Is there room to improve in areas that save employee time and effort?

**Quality & Risks:** Can employees search all agency records with tools powerful enough to deliver accurate results? What files may be missed? Which remain inaccessible?

**Ease of Use & Automation:** Is the technology user friendly? Do the tools relieve the burdens and stresses on employees?

**Security:** Are records safe against hacking and unintentional leaks? Is there an unacceptable potential for accidental disclosure of private or exempt information?

**Processes & Collaboration:** Are workflows simplified and improved? Can internal departments and outside agencies easily collaborate and share information?

Download the white paper, [Take Control of Public Records Requests: A Maturity Model](#) to learn more about the various methods and tools agencies use today to prepare responses to FOIA and PRRs, from wholly manual practices to totally optimized, “smart fact-finding” abilities

delivered by advanced technologies.

The Maturity Model provides a comparison framework for agency officials to evaluate technology options based on the five key areas above. Read it and see which tools your agency needs to more easily manage electronic records in the digital era and deliver fast, accurate public records disclosures.



**DOWNLOAD OUR WHITE PAPER**  
Take control of Public Records Requests: a maturity model

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