



City of Saint Paul Audit Committee

EVALUATION OF DATA PRACTICES PROCESS

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DRAFT REPORT

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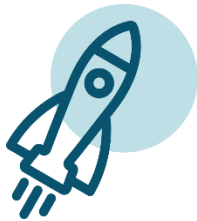


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Executive summary

The City of Saint Paul partnered with Wilder Research to evaluate its public data request process and identify opportunities for improvement. The study included a review of City policies, procedures, and technology systems; a review of best practices identified in the literature; interviews with City staff and peer jurisdictions; analysis of data from the City's data request system (GovQA); and feedback from individuals who manage requests and who have submitted public data requests. Overall, the findings suggest that the City has established tools and processes to support public data requests but faces many of the same challenges reported by other jurisdictions, including increasing requests, growing volumes of electronic records, and the need for clear and consistent processes. The following findings highlight key themes that emerged and informed the recommendations presented in this report.



GovQA functions primarily as a request management and communication tool rather than a records retrieval system.

Recommendation: Make better use of the tools already available in GovQA. The City should focus on helping staff make better use of existing tools through training, shared practices, and a review of how the system is currently being used across departments.



Requests are becoming larger, more frequent, and more difficult to manage.

Recommendation: Create a more structured intake process for public data requests. Reviewing the public request form and exploring ways to guide requesters toward providing more specific information may reduce staff time spent clarifying, routing, and managing requests.



Clear processes, training, and communication support effective public data request management.

Recommendation: Develop clearer citywide procedures for managing requests. Developing shared guidance for common tasks, such as routing requests, documenting decisions, communicating with requestors, and handling complex requests, could help create more consistent experience for both staff and the public.

Background

The City of Saint Paul receives public data requests under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA). These requests come from residents, journalists, businesses, attorneys, community organizations, and others seeking access to government information maintained by the City. The City is responsible for providing access to public data while also protecting information that is classified as private, confidential, or otherwise not public under state law.

Responding to public data requests can range from relatively straightforward to highly complex. Some requests involve records that can be provided quickly, while others require coordination across multiple departments, review of large volumes of records, legal consultation, redaction of protected information, or retrieval of archived materials. As requests vary in scope and complexity, City staff must balance timely responses with legal requirements, records management obligations, and available staff capacity.

Responsibility for fulfilling requests often spans multiple offices, including City departments, the City Clerk's Office, the City Attorney's Office, City Council staff, and other administrative teams. Because several groups may be involved in a single request, coordination across offices plays an important role in how requests are processed and communicated.

The City uses GovQA as its primary platform for receiving, tracking, and managing public data requests. The system supports request intake, workflow management, communication with requesters, and reporting. While the platform provides important administrative support, the overall effectiveness of the process also depends on policies, staff training, internal guidance, and coordination across departments.

The Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee partnered with Wilder Research to conduct an evaluation of the City's public data request process and identify opportunities for improvement. The study included a review of City policies and procedures, GovQA documentation and reporting tools and data, publicly available materials, interviews with City staff and peer jurisdictions, and feedback from individuals who manage and have submitted requests. This report summarizes findings from that review, including strengths of the current process, challenges identified by staff and requesters, and opportunities for improvement.

Research questions

In partnership with the Saint Paul City Audit Committee, Wilder Research developed guiding questions to evaluate how the City's public data request process is functioning and where improvements may be considered. The study focused on three primary questions:

1. How is the City's current public data request process operating?

2. How does the public experience the current request process?

3. What opportunities exist to strengthen the process moving forward?

Methods

To conduct this evaluation, Wilder used three information-gathering activities to understand how the City of Saint Paul currently manages public data requests and where improvements may be considered:

Document and system review

Wilder collected and reviewed documents related to the City of Saint Paul's public data request process. These materials included public-facing information, GovQA training materials, internal process documentation, workflow guidance, performance reports, records retention resources, and model policies and guidance from the Minnesota Department of Administration's Data Practices Office (DPO). Wilder also reviewed the City's public-facing request portal and related systems. The review helped identify how requests are received, managed, tracked, and completed under the current process, as well as opportunities for clarification, consistency, and improvement. A summary of the document and system review can be found in Appendix A. Wilder also interviewed two key City of Saint Paul staff connected to the GovQA processes to better understand its implementation and current use.

Literature review

Wilder conducted a review of peer-reviewed and gray literature. Wilder reviewed peer-reviewed and gray literature published within the last five years to better understand how local governments across the United States manage public data and public records requests. The review included research studies, government guidance, practitioner resources, legal analyses, and examples from state and local jurisdictions. The review focused on best practices used by municipal public records programs, including governance and staffing structures, request management processes, technology tools, policies and procedures, compliance considerations, performance measures, and communication with requesters.

Peer jurisdiction interviews

Wilder conducted key informant interviews with representatives from Minnesota jurisdictions and organizations involved in public records administration, including Hennepin County, Minneapolis, Duluth, the Office of the State Auditor, the League of Minnesota Cities, and the Minnesota Department of Administration's Data Practices Office. Interview participants were selected for their experience managing public data requests and related systems. These interviews provided insight into staffing models, technology platforms, reporting practices, policies, challenges, and lessons learned. Together, the interviews helped Wilder better understand how Saint Paul's approach compares with practices used by peer jurisdictions. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Surveys

Wilder also administered two surveys as part of the study. One survey was distributed to City staff involved in processing public data requests, including departmental leads and staff responsible for request management. A second survey was distributed to individuals who had submitted requests through the City's public-facing portal. The survey focused on the user experience, including ease of submitting requests, communication throughout the process, and overall satisfaction with the request process. The surveys provided perspectives from both internal and external users and helped identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. A copy of the survey instruments can be found in Appendix C.

GovQA capabilities and internal workflow

To understand the City's current process, Wilder reviewed GovQA, the platform used to manage public data requests and interviewed key staff with deep knowledge of the City's use of GovQA. The City uses GovQA as the primary platform for receiving, tracking, coordinating, and responding to public data requests. GovQA serves as the central point of entry for requests submitted by members of the public and data subjects and provides a shared system for managing requests across City departments. Through the public-facing portal, requesters can submit requests, track the status of requests, communicate with City staff, access released records, and review information about the City's data practices process. The portal also includes frequently asked questions and provides access to publicly available records and resources.

The City's public data request process follows a decentralized model. While GovQA serves as the central platform for intake and tracking, responsibility for fulfilling requests is distributed across departments. Requests are routed to designated departmental staff who are responsible for identifying responsive records, reviewing records for accuracy and completeness, coordinating with other staff as needed, and preparing records for release. Depending on the nature of the request, multiple departments may participate in fulfilling a single request. GovQA includes functionality that allows requests to be divided into separate department-level assignments while maintaining a connection to the original request. This allows departments to work independently while providing centralized tracking of overall request activity.

The request process begins when a request is submitted through the public portal. Requesters may create an account or submit requests anonymously when permitted by law. The system captures information about the request, including the request type, description, date range, and whether the requester is seeking data about themselves or requesting public data. Once submitted, requests are routed to the appropriate staff for review and assignment. Automated notifications alert staff to new requests and provide requesters with confirmation that the request has been received.

After a request is received, staff review the request to determine what records may be responsive and whether clarification is needed. Requests may be reassigned to another department, shared across multiple departments, or divided into sub-requests when multiple business units are involved. Staff can use activities, assignments, and internal notes to coordinate work and document progress. Throughout the process, GovQA maintains a record of communications, status changes, assignments, and other actions associated with the request.

Although GovQA serves as the City's request management platform, responsive records are typically stored outside of GovQA. Staff must locate records within departmental systems, shared drives, email systems, archives, and other record repositories. Once responsive records have been identified, they can be uploaded into GovQA for organization, review, and release. As a result, the fulfillment of requests often requires coordination across multiple systems in addition to work completed within GovQA itself.

GovQA includes a variety of tools to support document management and review. Staff can organize records within folders, upload attachments, manage permissions, create document packets, and maintain documentation related to the request. The system also includes built-in redaction functionality that allows users to review documents, redact protected information, and prepare records for release without exporting files to external software. Additional tools support searching for common data elements, applying redactions in bulk, generating PDF release packets, and maintaining versions of records throughout the review process.

For requests involving audio or video records, GovQA offers integration with specialized redaction software. These tools support automated identification and redaction of faces, license plates, and other sensitive information in video files, as well as transcription and redaction of audio content. The integration is designed to streamline processing of increasingly large and complex multimedia requests while maintaining an audit trail documenting actions taken throughout the review and release process.

Communication with requesters occurs directly through the platform. Staff can send messages, request clarification, provide updates, communicate estimated timelines, and release responsive records through GovQA. The system supports communication with both registered and anonymous requesters and maintains a history of correspondence associated with each request. Requesters can log into the portal to review messages, access released records, and monitor the status of their requests.

GovQA also includes administrative and reporting functions intended to support management of the City's public data request program. Administrative users can manage permissions, assign user roles, configure request categories, maintain templates and standard correspondence, and update workflow settings. The system includes a variety of standard and custom reports that can be used to monitor request volume, assignment patterns, processing timelines, fees, activities, and other operational metrics. Automated reminders and notifications help staff monitor open requests and approaching deadlines.

Overall, GovQA functions as the City's central request management system, providing tools to support intake, coordination, communication, document review, redaction,

reporting, and record release. At the same time, fulfilling requests remains dependent on departmental staff, access to records stored in multiple systems, and coordination across offices responsible for locating, reviewing, and providing responsive records.

Comparison of GovQA and alternative public records request platforms

To better understand the functionality available within GovQA, we reviewed two other public records request management platforms commonly used by local governments: NextRequest and JustFOIA. These platforms provide many of the same core functions, such as public request portals, request tracking, document management, communication tools, and reporting capabilities. However, differences exist in how systems support complex workflows, interdepartmental coordination, review records, and redaction processes.

The comparison in Figure 1 focuses on functionality that is particularly relevant to public records administration. Overall, GovQA offers a comprehensive set of tools that support the City's decentralized request process, including the ability to route requests across multiple departments, maintain parent-child request relationships, conduct document review and redaction within the platform, and manage complex requests that may involve multiple staff, business units, or record repositories. These features align with the City's current approach to processing requests, where responsibility for identifying and reviewing responsive records is distributed across departments while request tracking remains centralized.

Figure 1 summarizes key similarities and differences between GovQA, NextRequest, and JustFOIA based on publicly available product documentation and vendor materials.

1. Comparison of public records request management platforms

	GovQA	NextRequest	JustFOIA
Public request portal	x	x	x
Anonymous request submission	x	x	x
Request tracking and status updates	x	x	x
Automated notifications and reminders	x	x	x
Multi-department routing	x	Limited	Limited
Parent-child request functionality	x	no	no

Internal notes and staff collaboration	x	x	x
Document attachment management	x	x	x
Public records archive	x	x	x
Built-in document redaction	x	Limited	Limited
Audio/video redaction integration	x	Limited	Limited
Request activity history and audit trail	x	x	x
Custom request categories and workflows	x	x	x
Reporting dashboards	x	x	x
Scheduled reports	x	Limited	Limited
User permissions and security controls	x	x	x
Open data integration	x	x	Limited
Customer account management	x	x	x

Records retention and management

In addition to using GovQA to manage requests, the City follows the Minnesota Clerks and Finance Officers Association (MCFOA) General Records Retention Schedule to guide how long government records must be maintained and when they may be destroyed. The schedule establishes minimum retention requirements for records across city operations, including administrative, financial, personnel, public safety, permitting, and utility records. It applies to records in all formats, including paper files, electronic documents, audio recordings, and video files.

The retention schedule serves as a framework for records lifecycle management by providing standardized retention periods, identifying applicable legal requirements, and aligning records with Minnesota Government Data Practices classifications. The schedule also requires documentation of record destruction and outlines procedures for handling records that are not covered by existing retention requirements.

The 2021 revision reflects changes in technology and recordkeeping practices, including updated requirements for inspection records, the addition of new record categories such as domestic partnerships and drone data, and clarification of data privacy classifications. These updates help ensure that records management practices remain aligned with

current statutory requirements while supporting transparency, accountability, and compliance across city departments.

While GovQA and the MCFOA retention framework help define how requests and records are managed within the City, they represent only part of the broader public records administration landscape. Many jurisdictions face similar challenges related to coordinating requests across departments, managing growing volumes of electronic records, balancing transparency with privacy requirements, and responding to requests efficiently. To provide additional context for evaluating Saint Paul's current approach, we reviewed peer-reviewed and grey literature to offer a broader understanding of data practices.

Literature review

Public data request processes serve as an important mechanism for providing access to government information while ensuring that protected data remains secure. Across the literature, researchers, government agencies, and professional organizations describe public records administration as a balance between legal compliance, operational efficiency, and public access. The following sections summarize key findings from the review of peer-reviewed and gray literature. Our objectives were to understand what best practices exist for municipal public records programs nationwide and highlight practices that may inform future improvements to the City of Saint Paul's public data request process.

Clear processes and defined responsibilities support effective request management

Public data requests often involve multiple staff, departments, and offices. Clearly documented procedures, defined staff responsibilities, and consistent workflows help ensure requests are processed efficiently and consistently. Standardized intake procedures, documented decision-making processes, and clear ownership of requests can reduce duplication of effort and improve coordination across departments (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2020; League of Minnesota Cities, n.d.; U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

Requests that involve multiple departments can be especially challenging when responsibilities are unclear or when staff use different approaches to managing requests. Establishing consistent procedures and providing staff with guidance on request management can help improve coordination and reduce delays (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2020; U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2023).

Technology can support request management

Many jurisdictions use technology platforms to receive, track, and manage public data requests. These systems can help centralize communication, document request activity, track timelines, support records searches, and manage redaction processes (Cloud Nine, 2024; RELI Group, 2025; U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

Technology is most effective when supported by clear procedures and staff training. Successful implementation depends on staff understanding how systems should be used and how technology fits within broader request management processes (Richardson, 2021; National Forum on Education Statistics, 2020).

Communication shapes the requester experience

Clear communication throughout the request process can help requesters understand timelines, expectations, and next steps. Acknowledging requests, providing updates when requests require additional time, and communicating early when clarification is needed can improve the overall experience and reduce confusion (Sanders & Stewart, 2021; Office of Government Information Services, 2021).

Providing clear public-facing guidance can also help individuals understand how to submit requests and what information may be available. Plain-language instructions and transparent communication are frequently identified as important components of an accessible request process (U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 2012; Wagner et al., 2026).

Managing complex requests often requires flexibility

Some requests can be fulfilled quickly, while others require review of large volumes of records, coordination across multiple departments, or legal review. Working with requesters to clarify broad requests, prioritize records, or establish phased responses can help agencies manage complex requests while continuing to meet operational responsibilities (MRSC, 2023; Civic Plus, n.d.).

Communication is particularly important when requests are large or require significant staff time. Early conversations can help clarify expectations and reduce unnecessary work for both staff and requesters (MRSC, 2023; Office of Government Information Services, 2021).

Training and ongoing review support compliance

Training helps staff understand legal requirements, data classification practices, records retention requirements, and internal procedures. Regular training and accessible guidance can improve consistency and support compliance with public records laws (League of Minnesota Cities, n.d.; U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

Several organizations also recommend periodically reviewing request processes, performance measures, and requester feedback to identify opportunities for improvement. Routine assessment can help agencies strengthen processes, address challenges, and adapt to changing needs over time (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023; National Freedom of Information Coalition, 2020).

Proactive disclosure can reduce workload and improve access

Making commonly requested information publicly available can reduce the need for individual requests and provide faster access to information. Open data initiatives, public dashboards, and online access to frequently requested records have been associated with greater transparency and reduced administrative burden (Kim, 2022; National League of Cities, 2014; iBabs, 2025).

Successful proactive disclosure efforts often involve leadership support, ongoing maintenance, and regular evaluation to ensure information remains accessible and useful to the public (National League of Cities, 2014).

GovQA request data analysis

To better understand the volume and type of requests managed by the City of Saint Paul, Wilder requested an extract of request data from the GovQA system. In reviewing the request data extracted from the GovQA system on November 3rd, 2025, there is evidence of an increase in data requests for the City of Saint Paul year-over-year (Figure 2). Note that the data for 2025 are not complete.

2. Total requests by year

Year	Total Requests	% of Total
2022	15,190	20.2%
2023	19,005	25.2%
2024	22,678	30.1%
2025	18,497	24.5%

For requests that are closed, the mean close time (Figure 3) is approximately 19.6 days, with a median of 4 days and a maximum of 1,400 or more days, signaling significant outlier requests.

3. Average close time (days) by year [closed requests only]

Year	Avg Days to Close
2022	20.4
2023	17.0
2024	12.1
2025	13.5

Requests assigned to Police represent the substantial majority (95%) of requests, followed by Safety and Inspections, Site Administrator, and Fire. The remaining departments represent a small share of requests from this period (Figure 4).

4. Total requests by assigned department

Assigned Department	Total Requests	% of Total
Police	71,585	95.0%
Safety and Inspections	1,623	2.2%
Site Administrator	419	0.6%
Fire	345	0.5%
Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity	271	0.4%
Public Works	177	0.2%

Financial Services	131	0.2%
Human Resources	122	0.2%
Planning & Economic Development	116	0.2%
Parks & Recreation	113	0.1%
Mayor	93	0.1%
Water Services	80	0.1%
City Clerk	73	0.1%
City Attorney	64	0.1%
City Council	63	0.1%
Library	55	0.1%
SPPD Records Custodian	27	0.0%
Technology and Communications	6	0.0%
Emergency Management	4	0.0%
Total	75,367	100.0%

In examining the requests by department by year, the same pattern emerges as seen overall – an increase in the volume of requests by department year-over-year (Figure 5).

5. Requests by department by year

Assigned Department	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Police	14,465	18,090	21,719	17,311	71,585
Safety and Inspections	284	310	474	555	1,623
Site Administrator	67	165	100	87	419
Fire	96	92	95	62	345
Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity	19	48	81	123	271
Public Works	30	61	35	51	177
Financial Services	25	26	42	38	131
Human Resources	31	30	21	40	122
Planning & Economic Development	23	27	22	44	116
Parks & Recreation	23	38	13	39	113
Mayor	20	17	10	46	93
Water Services	13	23	19	25	80
City Clerk	15	19	15	24	73
City Attorney	23	19	9	13	64
City Council	9	16	13	25	63
Library	20	15	9	11	55
SPPD Records Custodian	25	2	0	0	27
Technology and Communications	1	2	1	2	6

Emergency Management	1	2	0	1	4
Total	15,190	19,002	22,678	18,497	75,367

Following the above request volume information, the request type volume is comparable – Police Department requests are the most common, followed by PD Interagency Requests and Police Photo Requests. Non-police requests (e.g., Safety and Inspections, Fire, General Multi-Department, and so on) comprise one-third of the remainder of requests (Figures 6, 7).

6. Request types by year

Request Type	2022	2023	2024	2025	Grand Total
911 Police Request	496	523	630	342	1,991
Audio (Interview)	271	393	399	266	1,329
City Attorney	2	1	2	1	6
City Clerk	51	66	88	80	285
City Council	8	12	20	28	68
Email	89	116	0	4	209
Financial Services	25	29	35	47	136
Fire Department	125	114	125	104	468
General Multi-Department Request	40	109	52	94	295
Human Resources	35	41	28	46	150
Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity	14	23	47	75	159
Library	21	14	7	14	56
Mayor's Office	16	13	7	43	79

PD - Subpoena Request	0	4	24	12	40
PD Interagency Request	1	634	3,098	3,645	7,378
Parks and Recreation	18	27	15	40	100
Planning and Economic Development	36	40	49	46	171
Police Body Camera Video Request	1,119	654	711	518	3,002
Police CCTV Camera Video Request	0	452	482	300	1,234
Police Clery Data	53	46	64	23	186
Police Crash Report	0	0	0	1,242	1,242
Police Department	11,315	13,466	14,606	8,578	47,965
Police Equipment	27	40	0	0	67
Police Forensics Request	0	0	0	2	2
Police In Car Camera (ICC) Video Request	0	339	394	284	1,017
Police Incident Report	0	0	0	1,158	1,158

Police Local Records Check	0	0	0	81	81
Police Media	0	0	0	18	18
Police Personnel	88	124	0	4	216
Police Photo Request	730	877	997	647	3,251
Police Statistics	169	172	251	123	715
Police Training	28	57	7	8	100
Policy-Police Request	68	147	9	2	226
Public Works	45	69	45	66	225
Safety and Inspections	218	235	368	451	1,272
Unrecognized Email	68	149	100	87	404
Water Services	14	19	18	18	69
Grand Total	15,190	19,005	22,678	18,497	75,370

7. Request type percentages by year

Request Type	2022	2023	2024	2025
911 Police Request	3.3%	2.8%	2.8%	1.9%
Audio (Interview)	1.8%	2.1%	1.8%	1.4%
City Attorney	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
City Clerk	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
City Council	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Email	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Financial Services	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%

Fire Department	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
General Multi-Department Request	0.3%	0.6%	0.2%	0.5%
Human Resources	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%
Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%
Library	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Mayors Office	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%
PD - Subpoena Request	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
PD Interagency Request	0.0%	3.3%	13.7%	19.7%
Parks and Recreation	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Planning and Economic Development	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%
Police Body Camera Video Request	7.4%	3.4%	3.1%	2.8%
Police CCTV Camera Video Request	0.0%	2.4%	2.1%	1.6%
Police Clery Data	0.4%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%

Police Crash Report	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%
Police Department	74.5%	70.9%	64.4%	46.4%
Police Equipment	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Police Forensics Request	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Police In Car Camera (ICC) Video Request	0.0%	1.8%	1.7%	1.5%
Police Incident Report	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%
Police Local Records Check	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Police Media	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Police Personnel	0.6%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Police Photo Request	4.8%	4.6%	4.4%	3.5%
Police Statistics	1.1%	0.9%	1.1%	0.7%
Police Training	0.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Policy-Police Request	0.5%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Public Works	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%
Safety and Inspections	1.4%	1.2%	1.6%	2.4%
Unrecognized Email	0.5%	0.8%	0.4%	0.5%
Water Services	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%

In reviewing the open requests or requests not closed between 2022 and the partial year of 2025, approximately 2% of requests over this time are open (Figure 8).

8. Open (not closed) requests

Overall Total Requests	75,370
Total Not Closed	1,399
% Not Closed	1.9%

However, when examined by year, the percentage of open requests decreased between 2022 and 2024 (Figure 9). The largest percentage of open requests was for 2025, the year that was incomplete and represents likely requests still in process. A more accurate 'open request' rate for 2022 through 2024 is 0.5%.

9. Open (not closed) requests by year

Year	Total Requests	Not Closed	% Not Closed
2022	15,190	132	0.9%
2023	19,005	106	0.6%
2024	22,678	72	0.3%
2025	18,497	1,089	5.9%
Grand Total	75,370	1,399	1.9%

In examining open requests, Technology & Communications has the highest open rate, although its volume is extremely low. Planning & Economic Development and Human Resources also have higher percentages of open requests than other departments, and this trend appears to be consistent over time (Figures 10 - 11).

10. Open (not closed) requests by department

Department	Total Requests	Not Closed	% Not Closed
Police	71,585	1,056	1.5%
Safety and Inspections	1,623	143	8.8%
Planning & Economic Development	116	42	36.2%
Human Resources	122	40	32.8%
Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity	271	37	13.7%
Public Works	177	24	13.6%
City Attorney	64	12	18.8%
Fire	345	10	2.9%
Mayor	93	9	9.7%

Technology and Communications	6	5	83.3%
Site Administrator	419	4	1.0%
Library	55	4	7.3%
City Clerk	73	3	4.1%
Water Services	80	3	3.8%
Financial Services	131	2	1.5%
Parks & Recreation	113	2	1.8%
Emergency Management	4	1	25.0%
City Council	63	0	0.0%
SPPD Records Custodian	27	0	0.0%
Grand Total	75,367	1,397	1.9%

11. Open (not closed) requests by department by year, count and percentage

Department	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Police	122	83	47	804	1,056
Safety and Inspections	0	4	1	138	143
Planning & Economic Development	4	4	4	30	42
Human Resources	4	5	6	25	40
Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity	0	2	5	30	37
Public Works	0	0	5	19	24
City Attorney	0	0	2	10	12
Fire	0	0	1	9	10
Mayor	0	0	0	9	9
Technology and Communications	1	2	0	2	5
Site Administrator	0	4	0	0	4
Library	0	0	1	3	4
City Clerk	0	0	0	3	3
Water Services	0	0	0	3	3
Financial Services	0	0	0	2	2
Parks & Recreation	0	0	0	2	2
Emergency Management	1	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	132	104	72	1,089	1,397

Department	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Police	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	1.1%	1.5%
Safety and Inspections	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%	8.5%	8.8%

Planning & Economic Development	3.4%	3.4%	3.4%	25.9%	36.2%
Human Resources	3.3%	4.1%	4.9%	20.5%	32.8%
Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity	0.0%	0.7%	1.8%	11.1%	13.7%
Public Works	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	10.7%	13.6%
City Attorney	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%	15.6%	18.8%
Fire	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.6%	2.9%
Mayor	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.7%	9.7%
Technology and Communications	16.7%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	83.3%
Site Administrator	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Library	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	5.5%	7.3%
City Clerk	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.1%	4.1%
Water Services	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	3.8%
Financial Services	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	1.5%
Parks & Recreation	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%
Emergency Management	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%

Interview analysis

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the Data Practice Process based on the interview we conducted with city staff and the key informant interviews with peer jurisdictions. This section outlines findings across these three core areas: data request processes, systems and internal workflow, volume, trends and reporting, public facing process and user experience and lastly policies, training and compliances.

Internal findings: City of Saint Paul staff perspectives

GovQA functions primarily as a request management and communication tool rather than a records retrieval system

Staff described GovQA as an effective platform for receiving requests, routing them to departments, communicating with requesters, and maintaining documentation throughout the request process. However, participants emphasized that GovQA does not actually locate responsive records. Staff must still search email systems, shared drives, departmental databases, and other record repositories outside the platform to identify responsive information. As a result, GovQA serves primarily as a coordination and tracking tool, while much of the substantive work required to fulfill requests occurs outside the system.

GovQA is used for attaching the data and communicating with the requester. Communicating with other city staff is outside GovQA. Getting records is outside GovQA. It's really just a repository that allows you to communicate with the requester.

Staff also noted that one significant limitation is that GovQA cannot search for records across City systems.

It doesn't allow users to actually find documents. You can't use it to find emails, and you can't use it to find resolutions.

Flexibility supports department-specific workflows but creates inconsistency across the organization

Staff described GovQA as highly flexible, allowing departments to customize categories, workflows, and request management practices to fit their operational needs. While this flexibility supports a decentralized model, staff noted that departments use the system in

different ways, resulting in inconsistent tracking, reporting, and utilization of available functionality.

They noted that some departments, particularly those processing high volumes of specialized requests, have developed customized workflows, while others use only the platform's basic functionality. Staff also indicated that many features remain underutilized because users are unaware they exist or have not received training on how to use them.

The system gives too many hidden options, so if you don't know the system really deeply, you don't know how to leverage all of the aspects of it

It's a powerful tool if you knew how to use all of its functionality

Request intake and cross-department coordination remain highly manual

Although GovQA includes workflow tools such as request routing, reassignment, parent-child request functionality, and automated notifications, staff reported that significant manual effort is still required to process requests. Open-ended request forms often require staff to interpret requests, determine which departments should be involved, divide requests into separate components, and coordinate communication across departments.

Staff noted that approximately half of the requests received centrally are ultimately routed elsewhere because requesters often do not know which department maintains the information they are seeking. Staff suggested that more structured intake forms and subject-based routing could reduce administrative burden and improve efficiency.

The process is flexible. A big text box means lots of items can be entered, and city staff have to split the request up and use individual personnel time to sort through it.

Jurisdiction scan

To better understand how public data requests are managed across Minnesota, Wilder Research interviewed representatives from the League of Minnesota Cities, the State of Minnesota's Data Practices Office (DPO), Hennepin County, City of Minneapolis, and City of Duluth. While processes varied depending on jurisdiction size, staffing, and organizational structure, several consistent themes emerged across interviews.

The jurisdictions included in this scan use a range of tools and processes to manage public data requests. Some have adopted dedicated request management platforms; others continue to rely on more manual approaches. Participants from supporting organizations noted that communities across Minnesota use a mix of systems, including GovQA, NextRequest, shared email inboxes, and spreadsheet-based tracking processes. Despite differences in technology, many described similar challenges and experiences managing public data requests.

We primarily use GovQA. We've been using it since 2017

We don't currently use any tools. Right now, everything is done through email, Word documents, and folders on our I drive

Requests are becoming larger, more frequent, and more difficult to manage

All jurisdictions described a noticeable increase in both the number and complexity of public data requests over time. Participants reported that requests are becoming broader in scope, more time-intensive, and increasingly focused on electronic communications, particularly email records.

Several participants noted that requests tied to controversial public projects, personnel matters, or City Council activity often generate large-scale email searches involving thousands of potentially responsive records. Participants also observed that requesters are increasingly using artificial intelligence tools to draft requests that cite statutes and case law, contributing to more formalized and expansive requests.

More requests for more data, taking longer, but we all have the same resources and staffing.

Participants consistently emphasized that staffing and operational capacity have not increased at the same pace as request volume.

Email requests stretch staff time and resources

Across jurisdictions, email searches and review processes were identified as one of the most resource-intensive aspects of responding to requests. Participants described spending substantial amounts of time searching inboxes, reviewing duplicate communications, identifying responsive records, and conducting legal reviews and redactions.

The City of Duluth described email requests as the single largest challenge within its current process. Broad keyword searches often produce large numbers of irrelevant or duplicated records that still require manual review.

If it weren't for emails, these things could be done in an hour or two.

Participants also noted that current technology systems do not adequately support large-scale email review workflows, particularly when requests involve thousands of records across multiple staff members or departments.

Staff still rely heavily on manual processes to fulfill requests

Some jurisdictions described a range of approaches for managing public data requests, from centralized intake systems to decentralized department-based models. Despite these differences, many participants said that responding to requests still involves a significant amount of manual work.

Common practices included:

- Shared email inboxes
- Spreadsheet tracking
- Folder-based file management
- Manual routing of requests
- Department-by-department coordination
- Email-based communication with staff and requesters

Several participants explained that much of the process depends on the knowledge and experience of a small number of staff members. In many cases, those individuals play a key role in coordinating requests, interpreting requirements, and ensuring requests are completed correctly and on time.

It's kind of one of those things... it's up here with me, which probably isn't a good thing.

Technology systems support intake and tracking but staff still do much of the work manually

Some jurisdictions, particularly larger organizations such as Hennepin County, use systems like GovQA to help manage public data requests. Participants described these

systems as useful for receiving requests, tracking progress, assigning work, communicating with requesters, and keeping records organized.

At the same time, participants identified several limitations associated with current technology platforms. Common concerns included:

- Limited redaction functionality
- Difficulty managing very large files
- Challenges handling duplicate records
- Limited support for large-scale email review
- User training burdens
- Clunky workflows

Several participants noted that although systems such as GovQA help organize requests, much of the substantive work still occurs outside the platform. Staff still spend significant time searching for records, reviewing documents, coordinating with colleagues, and preparing records for release.

Ninety percent of the work happens outside of GovQA.

Data practices compliance is legally complex and highly interpretive

Participants consistently described the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act as technically complex and highly dependent on interpretation. Participants emphasized that determining whether data are public, private, confidential, or otherwise protected often requires a detailed review of statutes, advisory opinions, case law, and organizational context.

Many participants described ongoing uncertainty when reviewing and releasing records, particularly in situations where statutes may apply differently depending on the type of data, department, or purpose for which information was collected.

It's not black and white at all. It's very gray.

Several jurisdictions discussed the importance of regular training, consultation with legal counsel, and reliance on guidance from the Data Practice Office (DPO) to support compliance efforts.

Participants also noted that responsibility for responding to requests can create significant stress for staff due to the risk of accidental disclosure of protected information.

You always have this sinking feeling in your heart when you go to release that public data.

Requester expectations do not always align with operational realities

A common theme across interviews was the gap between what requesters expect and what is involved in fulfilling a public data request. Participants shared that many requesters are unaware of the time and effort required to locate, review, and prepare records for release, particularly when requests involve large volumes of records or multiple departments. Participants noted that requestors often:

- Underestimate the time required to retrieve and review records
- Assume electronic records are easy to search and produce
- Expect all requests to be completed within ten business days
- Confuse Minnesota's Data Practices Act with federal FOIA processes
- Expect staff to interpret records after release

Survey analysis

City of Saint Paul GovQA department user survey

Departmental survey respondents

The following departments responded to the survey: City Attorney, City Clerk, Emergency Management (2), Financial Services, Fire, Human Resources, HREEO, Library, Parks & Recreation, Policy, Public Works, and Safety & Inspections. The majority (69%) of team members have been using GovQA for two years or more (Figure 12).

12. Length of time using GovQA

	Count	Percent
Since it was first implemented	3	23.1
More than 2 years	6	46.2
6 months–2 years	3	23.1
Less than 6 months	1	7.7
Total	13	100.0

Role in the data practices request process

All respondents (n=13) reported that they manage/oversee requests for their department. Of the respondents, 10 (77%) reported that they process requests directly; nine (69%) assign requests to staff; seven (54%) review/approve responses before release and provide records/information when assigned; and two (15%) mainly upload/attach documents. One respondent noted,

I am like the air traffic controller – I gather information and guidance and reassign, assign, or ask for data as necessary, load it, and respond.

Number of staff in the department using GovQA

In most departments (69%), five or fewer staff are using GovQA. Only one department has more than 10 staff using the system (Figure 13).

13. Number of staff using GovQA

	Count	Percent
1	2	15.4
2–5	7	53.8
6–10	3	23.1
More than 10	1	7.7
Total	13	100.0

Typical data practice processes in departments

Slightly fewer than half of respondents (46%) reported that requests are handled primarily by one designated person in their department. Almost one-quarter of respondents (23%) reported that requests were assigned to a Public Information Officer, and only one respondent reported that requests were assigned to a department administrative/procurement/records staff. Approximately one-third of respondents (39%) reported that the approach for navigating responses varied depending on the request type.

Frequency of logging into GovQA to check or manage requests or upload files

Approximately one-third of respondents log into the system weekly, with the other options evenly distributed across respondents (Figure 14).

14. Frequency of logging into GovQA

	Count	Percent
Multiple times a day	2	15.4
Daily	2	15.4
Weekly	5	38.5
Less than weekly	2	15.4
Almost never	2	15.4
Total	13	100.0

Functionality of GovQA for managing requests

Approximately half of respondents (54%) report that GovQA is somewhat functional, and fewer than one-quarter (23%) report the system is very functional (Figure 15).

15. Functionality of GovQA

	Count	Percent
Very functional	3	23.1
Somewhat functional	7	53.8
Not very functional	2	15.4
Not at all functional	1	7.7
Total	13	100.0

When asked which request format is easier for their department to process, one-third of respondents (39%) reported that multiple smaller, specific requests were easier, while the remaining respondents (62%) stated that it depends on the request.

When asked about the parts of GovQA that are most difficult for their department, six respondents (46%) reported understanding what is needed to complete a request; one-third (31%) reported tracking deadlines/timeliness, closing out requests/final steps, and running reports or pulling metrics; three respondents (23%) reported uploading or attaching records; and two respondents (15%) reported finding assigned requests was difficult. Respondents also shared that,

Communication across departments and determining who is responsible and who has the information requested is difficult.

In addition, a respondent stated,

If a request has many attachments, it is laborious to make them public. Email data requests can be huge and labor intensive to share responsive email as well and not always knowing if there is litigation or pre-litigation happening in another department that may be related. Also, in departments with outdated lists or many Data Practices folks in Gov QA, it can be hard to know who to assign it to or to send child requests to.

Finally, a respondent shared that,

If you close requests and don't know the number they are impossible to find again and you can only search by your name which brings up EVERYTHING.

When asked what would help their department the most with GovQA, the majority of respondents (62%) reported clearer guidance on best practices/workflows and clearer request intake (more structured request form); slightly more than half of respondents (54%) reported improved automation/features (notifications, assignment, tracking,

templates) would help them the most with GovQA; almost half of respondents (46%) reported refresher training and training for new staff; approximately one-third (39%) of respondents reported wanting subject-topic-based request intake option (instead of department-based); and slightly less than one-quarter (23%) of respondents thought reporting dashboards or request metrics would help their department. Additional comments regarding support around GovQA included:

The "training" I got many years ago was a 30-minute tutorial from the city clerk. There was no formal training or continued training on Gov QA, city processes, or how or when the CAO gets involved. I had to request from my supervisor that I take a data practice training course from the state. There are no processes or support for data practices. CAO is barely involved on data practices that we know are going to be litigious.

Updated staff lists in Gov QA - perhaps listing subject matter expertise for child requests and reassignment. I could use easier access to closed requests which sometimes require added information. Refreshers on private vs. public data. Frankly - having City Attorneys assigned specifically to data practices would be a good practice.

Data requester web portal users survey

Portal survey respondents

Of the 1,324 individuals invited to participate in the portal users survey (695 users from Saint Paul and 629 users from elsewhere in Minnesota), 30 entered into the survey system, and at most, 26 responded to a question (approximate 2% response rate).

Ease of knowing the department for submission

Most respondents (73%) reported it was very or somewhat easy to know which department to submit data requests to. Notably, one in four respondents (27%) found it somewhat or very difficult to know which department to submit their data request to (Figure 16).

16. Ease of knowing the department for submission

	Count	Percent
Very easy	8	30.8
Somewhat easy	11	42.3
Somewhat difficult	3	11.5
Very difficult	4	15.4

Total	26	100.0
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Ease of logging into the portal

Almost all respondents (85%) reported it was very or somewhat easy to log into the portal (Figure 17).

17. Ease of logging in

	Count	Percent
Very easy	11	55.0
Somewhat easy	6	30.0
Somewhat difficult	1	5.0
Very difficult	2	10.0
Total	20	100.0

Ease of filling out a request in the portal (e.g., using categories, keywords, fields)

Approximately three-quarters (74%) of respondents found it very or somewhat easy to fill out a request in the portal (Figure 18).

18. Ease of filling out request

	Count	Percent
Very easy	9	47.4
Somewhat easy	5	26.3
Somewhat difficult	4	21.1
Very difficult	1	5.3
Total	19	100.0

Almost all respondents (95% of 20) reported that the portal was very accessible and that they could use it in their preferred language.

When asked about the variety of changes that would help make the portal easier to use, almost half of respondents (48%) stated clearer updates about request status and next steps; one-third (33%) shared clearer instructions/examples of what to include in a request; about one-quarter (29%, 24%) of respondents stated clearer explanations of departments and their roles would be helpful and a simpler request form and links to publicly available data; one in five (19%) said fewer required fields or click boxes when submitting a request. One in ten respondents (10%) stated that translation options or language assistance and links in the confirmation email to FAQs and data rights information would make the portal easier to use.

Recommendations

Based on the literature review, staff and jurisdiction interviews, document and data review, and survey results, Wilder Research, in partnership with the City of Saint Paul Audit Committee, has identified a set of actionable recommendations to improve the Data Practices Process.

Several recommendations were reinforced by interviews with the Minnesota Data Practices Office and the League of Minnesota Cities. While these organizations do not process requests directly, they work with jurisdictions across Minnesota and have identified common themes related to training, internal procedures, requester communication, and structured intake processes.

- **Make better use of the tools already available in GovQA:** The City has invested in GovQA, and many staff members described it as a useful tool for tracking requests, communicating with requesters, and coordinating work across departments. However, interviews suggest that departments use the system differently and that some features are not being fully utilized. Before exploring a new platform, the City should focus on helping staff make better use of existing tools through training, shared practices, and a review of how the system is currently being used across departments.
- **Create a more structured intake process for public data requests:** Staff shared that many requests arrive with limited information or cover several topics at once, requiring additional time to clarify, route, and break apart. The City could reduce some of this burden by reviewing the public request form and exploring ways to guide requesters toward providing more specific information when submitting requests.
- **Develop clearer citywide procedures for managing requests:** Departments play different roles in fulfilling public data requests, but several participants noted that processes can vary from one department to another. Developing shared guidance for common tasks, such as routing requests, documenting decisions, communicating with requesters, and handling complex requests, could help create a more consistent experience for both staff and the public.
- **Continue investing in staff training and support:** Participants consistently described data practices work as complex and often dependent on experience. Regular training opportunities, refresher sessions, and opportunities for staff to learn from one another could help improve consistency and build confidence when handling requests.

- **Use reporting data to identify trends and opportunities for improvement:** GovQA collects information about request volume, processing times, and request types. Regularly reviewing this information could help the City better understand workload trends, identify bottlenecks, and make informed decisions about future improvements
- **Make frequently requested information easier to find:** Several jurisdictions and literature sources noted that making commonly requested information publicly available can reduce staff workload and improve public access. The City may wish to identify information that is requested repeatedly and explore opportunities to make those records easier to access online.
- **Periodically review whether current technology continues to meet the City's needs:** As request volumes and electronic records continue to grow, the City should periodically assess whether its current tools meet staff and public needs. This could include reviewing GovQA functionality, emerging technologies, and practices being used by peer jurisdictions.
- **Strengthen public-facing information about the request process:** Participants noted that requesters do not always understand how long requests take, what records are available, or how the process works. Updating FAQs, guidance materials, and request status communications could help set expectations and improve the overall experience for requesters.

Appendix

A. Document review

To inform the evaluation, Wilder Research conducted a review of key documents related to the City of Saint Paul's Data Practice process. These materials provided important background on how the current process is structured, how projects are evaluated and funded, and what guidance is provided to applicants.

The following documents were reviewed:

- **Attachments Tips & Tricks for Managing Attachments:** This training presentation provides guidance on managing attachments within the GovQA platform. Topics include organizing documents using folders and subfolders, uploading and searching attachments, creating PDF packets, and applying tags and security permissions. The document was reviewed to better understand document management capabilities available to City staff and how records associated with data practices requests can be organized, stored, and retrieved within the system.
- **Elevating Your Customer Portal:** This training presentation describes features available within GovQA's public-facing portal. It highlights tools designed to improve user experience, including trending topics, frequently asked questions (FAQs), inline request deflection, open data resources, and branding customization. The document was reviewed to understand options available to the City for communicating with requesters and improving access to public information through the online portal.
- **Activities to Subrequest Upgrade:** This training presentation outlines GovQA's transition from activity-based task assignments to a subrequest workflow. The document describes features that support collaboration, delegation, communication, progress tracking, and document sharing among staff and external stakeholders. It was reviewed to understand how the platform supports coordination across departments when responding to complex data practices requests.
- **Anonymous Requests:** This procedural guide describes how City staff can communicate with anonymous requesters through GovQA. The document outlines steps for adding messages to a request record that can be viewed by requesters using their reference number while maintaining anonymity. It was reviewed to understand available communication tools and procedures for managing requests submitted without identifying information.

- **Saint Paul Administrative Training Setup Map, Part 1:** This system configuration guide provides an overview of administrative settings available within GovQA. It includes navigation paths and administrative functions related to customer management, request processing, prepared responses, staff management, and portal configuration. The document was reviewed to understand how GovQA is structured and maintained by City administrators.
- **Saint Paul Administrative Training Setup Map, Part 2:** This administrative reference guide documents additional GovQA configuration settings, including request types, routing rules, staff permissions, reporting functions, and communication templates. The document was reviewed to understand system administration functions and the tools available for managing data practices workflows and staff access.
- **Audit Committee Scope of Work – Data Practices Study:** This document outlines the purpose, research questions, stakeholders, and data collection approach for the City of Saint Paul's Data Practices Process Assessment. It identifies key areas of inquiry related to GovQA functionality, reporting, user experience, training, compliance, and comparisons with peer jurisdictions. The document served as a foundational resource for understanding the objectives, scope, and methodological approach of the assessment.
- **Data Practices Department Contacts:** This document contains contact information for departmental representatives responsible for data practices requests across City departments. It identifies primary points of contact in departments such as City Attorney, Police, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Human Resources, and others. The document was reviewed to understand departmental roles and identify individuals involved in the City's data practices process.
- **Data Practices Survey Responses for Wilder Research:** This summary document compiles responses from Audit Committee members regarding key questions, concerns, and priorities for the data practices assessment. Responses highlight interests related to compliance with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, process efficiency, staffing impacts, request volume, response times, and stakeholder engagement. The document was reviewed to understand stakeholder priorities and inform the development of research questions and data collection activities.
- **GovQA Power User Advanced Training:** This training presentation provides advanced instruction for staff responsible for managing public records requests within GovQA. Topics include linking related requests, reviewing customer histories, managing multiple requesters, sharing attachments, searching records,

and coordinating subrequests. The document was reviewed to understand advanced workflow capabilities available to staff responsible for processing complex or recurring data practices requests.

- **GovQA Power User Novice Training:** This introductory training presentation provides an overview of the public records request process within GovQA. Topics include vetting requests, collaborating with staff, communicating with requesters, reviewing documents, and releasing records. The document was reviewed to understand the foundational workflows and responsibilities of staff responsible for processing public records requests.
- **Power User Training: Handling a Single Request:** This step-by-step training guide outlines the process for managing an individual data practices request within GovQA. It describes how staff receive request notifications, upload responsive records, communicate with requesters, release documents, and close completed requests. The document was reviewed to understand operational procedures used by City staff when processing routine data requests.
- **Power User Training: Responding with Exemptions:** This training guide provides instructions for responding to requests involving records that are classified as private, confidential, or otherwise exempt from disclosure. It describes procedures for citing applicable legal exemptions, communicating withholding decisions to requesters, and documenting exemptions within GovQA. The document was reviewed to understand how legal exemptions are applied and documented within the City's request management process.
- **Contributor Training: Handling an Activity:** This training guide provides instructions for departmental contributors responsible for locating and uploading responsive records. The document outlines procedures for receiving assignments, attaching records, documenting progress, completing activities, and communicating with Power Users. It was reviewed to understand the role of departmental staff in supporting responses to data practices requests.
- **Get Started Guide:** This user manual provides a comprehensive overview of GovQA functionality, including request creation, request management, customer searches, communication tools, attachments, activities, fees, and reporting features. The guide serves as a foundational reference for system users and documents standard operating procedures for processing public records requests. It was reviewed to understand the full range of system capabilities and workflow functions available within GovQA.
- **Data Requests Training:** This internal City training document provides guidance for accessing the GovQA portal, searching for requests, creating new requests, and assisting requesters with submitting records requests. The document also

- outlines procedures for tracking requests using reference numbers and identifying assigned staff responsible for request processing. It was reviewed to understand how City employees interact with GovQA and support public access to the data practices process.
- **GovQA Admin Training: Advanced:** This training presentation focuses on advanced administrative functions within GovQA. Topics include custom field configuration, conditional display settings, dashboard development, security profiles, user permissions, and access controls. The document was reviewed to understand how the City can configure the system to support business processes, reporting needs, and user management.
 - **GovQA Admin Training: Novice:** This introductory administrative training presentation covers view configuration, staff management, response templates, and communication settings. The document describes how administrators can create and share views, manage staff accounts, and standardize communications with requesters. It was reviewed to understand the administrative tools available for supporting day-to-day operation of the City's records request system.
 - **GovQA Report Templates:** This document provides a catalog of standard reports available within GovQA. Reports include measures related to request volume, response times, staff workload, department performance, request fees, activity tracking, customer activity, and billing. The document was reviewed to understand reporting and performance-monitoring capabilities available through the system and to identify data sources that may support assessment of the City's data practices program.
 - **Saint Paul Data Practices Policy for Data Subjects:** This policy outlines the rights of individuals who are the subject of government data under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA). The document describes classifications of government data (public, private, and confidential), procedures for accessing data about oneself, requirements for identity verification, Tennessee warning requirements, protections for personal information, and processes for challenging the accuracy or completeness of data. The policy was reviewed to understand the City's procedures and legal obligations when responding to requests from data subjects.
 - **Saint Paul Data Practices Policy for Members of the Public:** This policy outlines procedures for members of the public seeking access to government data under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. The document describes public access rights, procedures for requesting data, response requirements, copy fees, requests for summary data, and circumstances under

which data may be withheld. The policy was reviewed to understand the City's formal procedures for responding to public data requests and ensuring compliance with state law.

- **MGDPA for GovQA Training Presentation:** This training presentation provides an overview of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act and its application within the GovQA request management system. Topics include classifications of government data, public and data subject rights, responsibilities of government entities, response timelines, handling public and private information, and requirements for denying access to nonpublic data. The presentation was reviewed to understand the legal framework governing the City's data practices request process and the role of GovQA in supporting compliance.
- **GovQA Redaction and Email Extraction Training:** This training presentation provides instruction on GovQA's document redaction and email extraction tools. Topics include managing attachments, redacting responsive records, extracting content from email archive files (PST files), publishing records to requesters, and creating PDF document packets. The document was reviewed to understand the functionality available for preparing records for public release and managing electronic records requests.
- **Veritone Redact Training:** This training presentation introduces Veritone Redact, a video redaction tool integrated with GovQA. The document describes challenges associated with processing video records, including body-worn camera footage, and outlines functionality for redacting sensitive information from video files while maintaining chain-of-custody and records management requirements. The training was reviewed to understand available tools for managing and redacting audiovisual records that may be responsive to public records requests.
- **Standard and Custom Reports Training:** This training presentation provides an overview of GovQA's reporting capabilities. Topics include standard report templates, custom report development, report scheduling, report sharing, dashboard creation, and data visualization tools. The document was reviewed to understand the reporting and performance monitoring functions available within GovQA and how system data can be used for management and oversight purposes.
- **Notes about GovQA:** This document contains internal notes and observations regarding implementation and use of GovQA within the City of Saint Paul. Topics include data request workflows, request routing, public-facing request portals, statutory response timelines, multi-department request coordination, attachment management, communication with requesters, proactive disclosure practices,

and customization of system features. The document was reviewed to understand operational practices, user experiences, and department-specific considerations associated with the City's use of GovQA.

- **Unlocking a GovQA Account:** This procedural guide provides instructions for assisting users who are unable to access their GovQA accounts. The document outlines steps for locating customer accounts, removing account locks, issuing temporary passwords, and troubleshooting login issues. It was reviewed to understand account administration procedures and user support functions within GovQA.
- **Possible Autoreply Additions:** This document outlines potential enhancements to automated acknowledgment messages sent to data requesters. Suggested additions include links to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, the Minnesota Department of Administration's data practices resources, City of Saint Paul data practices FAQs, and publicly available records repositories. The document was reviewed to understand ongoing efforts to improve requester communication and self-service access to information.

In addition, the following documents from other jurisdictions and from the League of Minnesota Cities and the State of Minnesota are included in the Technical Appendix:

- City of Duluth Request for Information Form
- City of Duluth Request for Information Form for Data Subjects
- City of Duluth Data Practices Policy for Public (2025)
- City of Duluth Data Practices Policy for Data Subjects (2025)
- City of Duluth Data Access Policy – Security of Not Public Data (2025)
- General Records Retention Schedule for Minnesota Cities (2021)
- Ramsey County Data Request Portal
- Ramsey County Data Practices Request Form
- League of Minnesota Cities Amicus Brief in City of St. Paul v. Cattnach (2025)
- Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (Minn. Stat. Ch. 13)
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office Guidance
- GovQA Training and Reference Materials
- Veritone Redact Training Materials

Data Practice Office documents: [Data Practices / Data Practices Office](#)

- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Data Practices Overview
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Rules and Requirements
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Requesting Data
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Data Classifications
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Types of Data
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Warnings and Notices
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Challenges and Appeals
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Temporary Classification
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Records Management
- Minnesota Department of Administration Data Practices Office (DPO) – Copy Costs Guidance

B. Interview protocol

Wilder Research was recently hired by the City of St Paul to conduct a study examining how the city currently manages and processes public data requests under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.

As part of this study, we are conducting a jurisdictional scan of peer cities and counties to better understand how other jurisdictions organize and manage their public data request processes, including intake systems, routing, tracking, and internal review procedures.

We identified your jurisdiction as one that has an established approach to handling public data requests, and we would greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn more about your process.

Our goal is simply to understand different approaches so we can provide the City of St Paul with examples of how other jurisdictions structure their data request systems and processes.

We would like to record this interview so that we can clean up our notes. Is that okay with you. After cleaning up our notes, we will immediately delete the interview recording. (Confirm: Yes/No to record the interview.)

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Key Research Questions

1. Data Request Process

- Can you walk me through your process for handling data requests from the public from start to finish?
- Who is typically involved at each stage?

2. Systems & Internal Workflow

- What request management tool(s) and online portal(s) do you use?
- How are requests tracked and assigned?
- How do these tools support (or limit) your workflow?

3. Volume, Trends & Reporting

- Approximately how many requests do you receive per year, and has that changed over time?
- What types of requests are most common?
- Do you track any metrics (e.g., response times, volume, completion rates)?
- How is this information used?

4. Public-Facing Process & User Experience

- How do members of the public typically submit requests? [If unanswered above]
- What does the communication process look like between staff and requesters?
- Where do users tend to experience challenges or confusion?

5. Policies, Training & Compliance

- What policies or guidelines inform how requests are handled? [Ask if those policies or guidelines are public or could be shared for the purposes of this study and shared with the City of St. Paul.]
- What training or support is available to staff? [Ask if training materials could be shared for the purposes of the study and shared with the City of St. Paul.]
- How do you ensure consistency and compliance across departments?

6. Comparison & Best Practices

- Have you looked at other jurisdictions for ideas or improvements?

7. Strengths & Opportunities

- What is working well in your current system/process?
- What challenges do you face?
- If you could improve one aspect of your process, what would it be?

Thank you. These are all the questions we have!

C. Department and portal surveys

Department Leads Survey

INTRODUCTION

Wilder Research is working with the City of Saint Paul Audit Committee to understand how the City's data practices request process is working from the perspective of City staff who manage or support requests. This includes how GovQA is used to receive, track, and complete requests, what parts of the process work well, and what improvements could be considered.

The survey should take about 5 – 7 minutes. Your responses will be combined with others and reported in summary form.

Survey Questions

1. Which department do you work in?

- City Attorney
- City Clerk

- City Council
- Emergency Management
- Financial Services
- Fire
- Human Resources
- HREEO
- Library
- Mayor's Office
- Parks & Recreation
- Planning & Economic Development
- Police
- Public Works
- Safety & Inspections
- Technology & Communications
- Water
- Other City Department: _____
- Prefer not to say

2. How long have you been using GovQA?

- Since it was first implemented
- More than 2 years
- 6 months–2 years
- Less than 6 months
- I have never used GovQA

3. What is your role in the data practices request process? (Select all that apply)

- I manage/oversee requests for my department
- I process requests directly in GovQA
- I assign requests to staff
- I review/approve responses before release
- I provide records/information when assigned
- I mainly upload/attach documents
- I am not involved in the request process
- Other: _____

4. Approximately how many staff in your department use GovQA in any capacity (e.g., log in, attach documents, process requests)?

- 1
- 2–5
- 6–10
- More than 10
- Not sure

5. How are data practices requests typically handled in your department? (Select all that apply)
- Handled primarily by one designated person
 - Shared across multiple staff
 - Assigned to a Public Information Officer (PIO)
 - Assigned to a department admin/procurement/records staff
 - Depends on request type (varies case-by-case)
 - Not sure
6. How often do you personally log into GovQA to check or manage requests, or upload files?
- Multiple times a day
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Less than weekly
 - Almost never
7. How functional is GovQA for your department to use for managing requests overall?
- Very functional
 - Somewhat functional
 - Not very functional
 - Not at all functional
8. Which request format is easier for your department to process?
- One bundled request covering multiple items
 - Multiple smaller, specific requests
 - It depends on the request
 - No preference
 - Not sure
9. Which parts of GovQA are most difficult for your department? (Select all that apply)
- Logging in / account access
 - Finding assigned requests
 - Understanding what is needed to complete a request
 - Uploading or attaching records
 - Tracking deadlines/timeliness
 - Closing out requests / final steps
 - Running reports or pulling metrics

- Nothing is difficult
- Other: _____

10. What would help your department most? (Select all that apply)

- Refresher training on GovQA
- Training for new staff
- Clearer guidance on best practices/workflows
- Clearer request intake (more structured request form)
- A subject/topic-based request intake option (instead of department-based)
- Improved automation/features (notifications, assignment, tracking, templates)
- Better reporting dashboards or request metrics
- None of the above
- Other: _____

Portal Users Survey

INTRODUCTION

Wilder Research is working with the St. Paul City Council’s Audit Committee to understand the user experience with the City’s online data request portal. You have been invited to participate because you have used the online data request portal. The survey should take about 2 - 3 minutes. Your responses will be combined with others and reported in summary form.

What this study is about

The City is reviewing how its data practices request process is working overall. This includes how the City manages requests internally and how the online portal works for residents and other requesters. Findings will help identify what is working well and what improvements could be considered.

Survey Questions

1. How easy is it for you to know which department to submit your data request to?
 - Very easy
 - Somewhat easy
 - Somewhat difficult
 - Very difficult
 - Not sure

2. How easy is it to log in to the portal?
 - Very easy
 - Somewhat easy

- Somewhat difficult
 - Very difficult
 - Not sure
3. How easy or difficult is it to fill out a request in the portal (for example, using categories, keywords, or required fields)?
- Very easy
 - Somewhat easy
 - Somewhat difficult
 - Very difficult
 - Not sure
4. How accessible is the portal in your preferred language?
- Very accessible – I can easily use it in my preferred language
 - Somewhat accessible – I can use it but with difficulty
 - Not accessible – language is a barrier
 - Not sure
5. Which of the following would help make the portal easier to use? (Select all that apply)
- Clearer explanations of departments and their roles
 - Clearer instructions/examples of what to include in a request
 - A simpler request form (fewer steps)
 - Fewer required fields or click boxes when submitting a request
 - Translation options or language assistance
 - Clearer updates about request status and next steps
 - Links in the confirmation email to FAQs and data rights information
 - Links to publicly available data
 - None of the above

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Here for good.



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