PIA Technology Solutions: Maryland Insurance Administration's PIA Web-Portal

November 20, 2018

*The Ombudsman's Office has heard from various Maryland agencies that are interested in implementing technology to better manage PIA requests. These agencies state that they are committed to transparency and to identifying potential systems that can improve their PIA response. The Ombudsman's Office is in the process of interviewing agencies that have already implemented such systems, and will be reporting its findings in a special series of Open Matters blog posts called **"PIA Technology Solutions"**. Below is part II of the series. NOTE: The Public Access Ombudsman does not endorse any specific vendor referenced in this series.*

The Maryland Insurance Administration (MIA) receives a high volume of Public Information Act (PIA) requests annually. In 2014, the agency contracted with an outside vendor, GovQA, to better manage its response to these requests. The vendor created a tailored web-based PIA response system that utilizes automated technology and creates a streamlined process for both the requester and the MIA. The system's functionalities include:

- o Automated PIA submission interface
- o Case Management
- o Fee estimation
- o Document Production
- o Archiving

GovQA's platform streamlines the entire PIA process—from receiving requests to managing the response—through a combination of custom workflow technology and case management operations. The platform captures and reports all service interactions to give administrators and users a complete profile of any request at any time. The cost to develop, implement, and maintain the online portal included a one-time $3,500 implementation fee, and has a yearly administrative fee of $7000.

According to MIA, the impact of the GovQA system has been remarkable and well worth the cost. Prior to implementing the system, the MIA tracked PIA requests manually in an Excel spreadsheet, and the main agency custodian had to check the spreadsheet and remind MIA administrators about the status of and deadlines for particular requests. Now, those requests are tracked automatically and the system generates automated "tickler" email notices when action is required. The system has similarly streamlined document production. Prior to implementing GovQA, productions containing large PDF files had to be broken into smaller files in order to be sent via e-mail. Now, PDFs containing thousands of pages can be uploaded to the system and easily accessed by both the custodian and the requestor.

The MIA has actively recommended GovQA to other jurisdictions, most recently to the Maryland State Police. According to Joseph Sviatko, MIA's Public Affairs Officer, "We have had nothing but positive experiences switching to an online PIA management system. Streamlining the entire process has virtually eliminated the need to produce hard copies, and a vast majority of requests

can be filled within our two hour, no-fee window. We now rarely invoice a requester for time or material. I don't like to think about our PIA process prior to the arrival of GovQA."