

# SRC, Newark and OPRA

## solution overview

### Improving compliance with the Open Public Records Act

The City of Newark, New Jersey, was burdened with a tremendous number of paper-based processes and inefficient workflows. Compounding this was the vast number of documents stored in file cabinets throughout the city.

Among the most time-consuming, paper-intensive processes were applications for the Open Public Records Act (OPRA). The clerks in Newark's OPRA office process about 20 requests a day.

OPRA states that government records must be readily accessible for inspection, copying or examination by citizens of New Jersey. Exceptions to this accessibility include documents containing an individual's personal information and instances which may not properly serve the public interest.

In plain language, a government record is a physical record that has a government purpose and that is held by a public agency. Under OPRA, the "physical record" includes any paper, written or printed book, document, drawing, map, plan, photograph, microfilm, data-processed or image-processed document, and information stored or maintained electronically or by sound recording.

To access government records, a requester must determine which

records he or she wishes to see or copy, and then determine which public agency holds them. OPRA applies to requests for records, not requests for isolated facts. The requester should ask the custodian of records for help in identifying what public record is likely to contain the information or facts being sought.

In order to be considered a valid request under OPRA, the request must identify the specific records desired, the request must be

submitted to the records custodian of the public agency that has the record, and that agency's records request form must be used to ask for the record. Failure to deliver within the

seven day window left the city open to potential lawsuits.

Because there was no structure or defined process in place, city employees were often racing to meet the seven day deadline and generating needless extra paper for the purposes of carbon copying other departments.

Another problem with the paper-based system was that clerks had to manually track a request's progress and did not have a dashboard-type view of status reports or what requests remained opened.

#### OPRA Issues:

- **At least 20 requests daily**
- **Multiple copies required**
- **Files easily lost or misplaced**
- **Difficulty tracking status**
- **Heavy reliance on inter-office mail**



## Xerox DocuShare®



### The Solution Centerpiece

In an effort to better serve constituents and streamline internal work practices, the City of Newark began moving daily business processes to an online system in which Xerox DocuShare software served as the primary platform.

The system, dubbed Newark Document Express (NDEX), went online in the fall of 2005, with the initial roll-outs taking place in the Law Department and the Office of Management and Budget. All city departments were actively using NDEX by the spring of 2006.

Residents now complete OPRA request forms, submit them to a clerk. The documents are immediately scanned back to the clerk, attached to an internal cover sheet which allows users to select multiple agencies at once, and submitted to the OPRA queue. What was once done through several sets of copies and inter-office mail and often took days is now accomplished instantly.

"Everything is being tracked, no one is losing copies, requests are always in the system where you can find them," Sherronda Carroll, MIS Specialist, said. "Anyone who deals with OPRA in the Clerk's office can access the queue."

Joyce Lanier, Manager of the OPRA Office, said as staff members are becoming more used to the new system, efficiency is increasing.

"There is no longer a need to duplicate copies. This has cut down on the workload," Ms. Lanier said.

Another benefit of the DocuShare-based NDEX system is the ability to generate reports on what requests are made and shows what requests are open

or pending, and even allow clerks to send a reminder to the responding agency.

In its young life, the digital OPRA solution has already helped Newark cut costs and improve the city's customer service efforts. In addition to helping the residents of the city, the solution is now deployed among all 23 city departments, ensuring efficient compliance and timely responses.

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SRC Solutions, Inc

