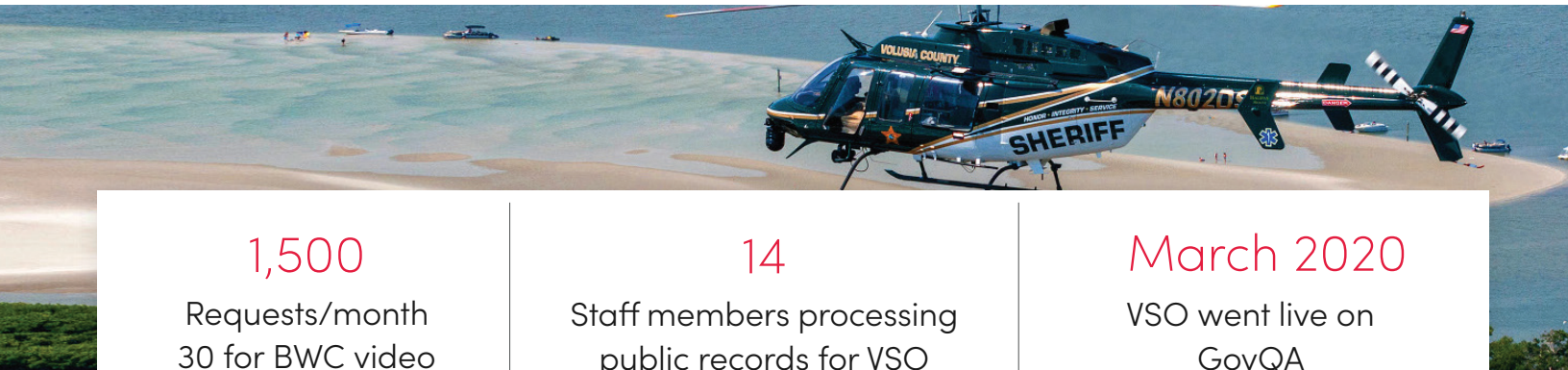




Volusia Sheriff's Office (VSO)

Serves community (and saves taxpayer money)
with 21st century public records processing



1,500

Requests/month
30 for BWC video

14

Staff members processing
public records for VSO

March 2020

VSO went live on
GovQA

In March 2020, just as the Covid-19 pandemic caused government lobbies to close for public health and safety, the Volusia Sheriff's Office (VSO) launched a 21st century digital public records center with GovQA. Moving this vital government service online at that time was advantageous, for sure. But the Sheriff's Office continues to see many benefits above and beyond crisis response.

GovQA spoke with Lisa Linden, Volusia Sheriff's Office Records Supervisor, about the benefits of automating public records processing with GovQA software. A recap of that conversation is outlined on the right.

Like most essential public safety staff, the Sheriff's office employees continued to work in the office during the pandemic; even though their lobby was closed to outsiders (and then later reopened with limited hours). Anyone wanting a record after mid-March had to get it online. This definitely helped with adoption of the new digital government service. "It was easy for people to just go online and order what they needed," explains Lisa Linden, Volusia Sheriff's Office Records Supervisor. "In a sense, the pandemic made it easier for us to get everybody on board." But even those customers who aren't online are still better served by the GovQA public portal. "Every now and then you get someone that doesn't have access to a computer. So then we just put their request in the system for them and ask if they want to wait while we process it or we offer to email it to them." This way, the VSO can manage all requests efficiently in the system and deliver records faster. "It's just so much more streamlined."

Cost Savings

- Recouped \$1,500 in unpaid invoices;
- Eliminated DVD material costs for BWC (Body Worn Camera) video request fulfillment

Time Efficiencies

- 6X faster processing of BWC video requests and no DVD handling
- No wait intake
- No more pay log spreadsheets – invoicing module takes care of cost recoupment
- Accountability with request status – nothing falling through the cracks
- Faster redaction with versioning
- Request volume reduction – Requests from the media bypass VSO
- Duplicate request processing
- Email tracking and search – proactively checks validity of email addresses
- Date stamped "open" receipts eliminate response delivery uncertainties



The Process: Before and After GovQA

Intake

Before: “There were many times people didn’t really know what they’re looking for. So we did a search with them on the phone...it could take 20 minutes. We were spending a lot of time on the phone; and during that time we couldn’t take care of other tasks.”

After: “With GovQA, the customer writes it all out. And if we don’t have enough information, we can just respond back to them that ‘We don’t have enough information.’ And then we can continue to work on other things while we’re waiting for confirmation or more information”. And the customer doesn’t have to wait the 20 minutes for the VSO to search either – they can submit their request and move onto other things too!

There are two more intake efficiencies that VSO takes advantage of in GovQA. The first is the **configurable request workflow** which routes tasks to the right person or department directly. VSO has the system configured with the checkbox that allows any media requests to bypass the Sheriff’s Office and go right to their media department.

Second, the **email tracking and search** feature streamlines intake...and release. By testing and then highlighting email addresses entered into the system, users can see invalid emails at a glance and get the information corrected before delivery becomes an issue. “Once you put an email in GovQA, you can see that the email isn’t valid and you can call the person, then go in there and fix it. We like that.”

Vet/Payment Upfront

Before: The VSO used to use spreadsheets to track payments. “So many spreadsheets! I can’t tell you how much money we never collected. It just doesn’t work on the honor system. When someone would ask ‘What’s the update on that?’ we would have to say: ‘Well did you check the spreadsheet?’ And if somebody forgot to put it on the spreadsheet, then, really, it was lost.

“Payment for BWC video processing requires payment up front. Before, we had to send them an invoice by mail, wait for a check, and then get working on it.”

After: “Invoicing is awesome. I’m so happy to NOT have those spreadsheets! Now BWC video requests are pretty quick. As soon as we send them an invoice, they know it’s there. The process used to take 6 weeks. Now they receive the invoice within a day or two. The amount of time it takes for them to receive the BWC video depends on when they pay the invoice, which can now be paid online, so we don’t have to wait for a check. Once it’s paid we are able to get the video to them, typically within a couple of days, if not the same day!” **That’s a 6x increase in BWC video record release times!**



Gather/Track

Before: Florida is one of a handful of states where [there are no response deadlines](#) specified in the law*. "So if a crash report wasn't ready yet when you were trying to finish the request, you had to remember to go back and look at your list all the time. You're not going to keep calling people."

After: "Gathering documents is easier with GovQA because collaboration is centralized. Users can connect with the owners of records inside GovQA and then see at a glance whether the work is done. Reminders and notifications keep everyone on task. "It's much more manageable with GovQA."



Review/Redact

Before (non-video requests): "We were using another system that we got through the county that was called OnBase. We would have to take the PDF from our records management system and import it as a PDF creator, like a tiff, and then get it into OnBase to redact it, save it, and send it to get approved - which itself was a pain. But then, if something needed to be unredacted, you couldn't just unredact it. It was horrible to be honest with you."

After (non-video requests): "When we got GovQA and all we had to do was click on it to unredact. It was great!" The Sheriff's Office started processing body worn camera video themselves a few years ago (after initially sending them out for processing when the BWC program first began in 2017). And even though they are now processing these themselves, the steps are simplified.

Before (BWC video requests): Of the approximately 1500 requests VSO gets each month, about 30 are for body worn camera video. Some of the videos are 5+ hours long - very large files that wouldn't fit on one DVD...they required 4-5 DVDs for release to the customer. "We use Evidence.com with Adobe Premiere for redactions. Before, we had to take the video off of Evidence.com, put it into Adobe, redact it, then download it to a disk. The customer had to come in and pay for it; or we'd have to mail it to them."

After (BWC video requests): While VSO continues to use Adobe Premiere to redact video and audio, they can now provide those files in the cloud through GovQA. "Everything just flows so much better because all we have to do is share the link to the completed redacted version on the portal. Now there are no DVDs. No trying to fit long videos on a DVD. It's so convenient."



Release

Before: Without centralized document release, it was difficult to prove the work had been completed when contested by customers. This left the Sheriff's office open to conflict in the absence of concrete evidence.

After: "I love the audit log - the history tab is my favorite. When a customer says 'I ordered this and I never got it', I can look it up right there and let them know I can see the date they opened it. So then I can say 'Make sure you download it this time.'"



Report

Before: "When we logged our records, it would be per crash report or CAD (Computer-Aided Design) call list report. So if someone asked us for 10 CAD calls, we would put that in the log 10 times."

After: Today, the VSO lets GovQA create reports. "Now, we're just going by request. We have weekly meetings where we share how many requests we've processed and this system makes records stats easily obtainable."

Change Management Tips

"We worked out of the system for a month before we actually went live. I created a customer profile where I would start sending my people requests through GovQA. So we knew how to work the system before we went live. We were getting faxes, letters. I would just scan them in and act like I was the customer (even though it wasn't live) and we would disperse them the way we normally would until people got used to the system – knew how to redact in the system and other functions. So, by the time we went live, we were good. We are very happy with the system."

“ I would recommend GovQA to anybody. If they're still doing things the old fashioned way like we were doing them, they're wasting a lot of time and money.”

- Lisa Linden, Records Supervisor, Volusia Sheriff's Office, FL

GovQA Efficiencies and Cost Recoupment - A System That Pays For Itself

"We wanted a way to improve what we were doing. We had all these spreadsheets and pay logs. We saw the redaction tool within GovQA and the invoicing and knew this was it. We were looking for a better way to do things...we needed to step up into the 21st century.

"The accountability across the board is awesome. I love the fact that if several people order the same request, I can just search GovQA, copy it from that request to the new request and I'm done. The turnaround time is awesome. Most of our requests are done within a day."

GovQA Finds Money to Help Offset the Costs of Public Records Processing

"I love that I can see if somebody is overdue on their payments. We've got it set up so that if their balance gets too high, they can't submit another request. So they contact me and we take care of payment then. As soon as someone puts in a request we can see that this person has an outstanding balance.

"When we implemented the invoicing system, I was able to go back to my spreadsheets and recover about \$1500 past due. And now, we're never behind." And VSO customers, particularly agencies that make a lot of criminal history background requests, appreciate it too. "Every time they make a request, they get an invoice – so they have a copy and we have a copy.

"We were losing some serious money before. There was no accountability. If they didn't pay it, we just kept giving them the work. So if their agents weren't turning their papers in, they had no idea what was and wasn't getting done. So that's one less thing I have to worry about."

And let's not forget the costs of those DVDs. Delivering vital government services digitally with GovQA can eliminate most, if not all, materials costs – like DVDs and shipping costs.



Public Records Portal Launched In 2020: [View their portal here](#)

GovQA has spent a lot of time thinking about the cost justification of public records software.

[Learn more here: The Cost Justification for Investing in GovQA](#)

Ready to learn more about automated public records processing workflow for government compliance?

See it Live!

* Florida has a very high enforcement of presumptive public disclosure. Even though there are no specific timeframes mentioned in Florida public records law, the assumption is that responses will be "prompt". And, when responses are not prompt (or when the requester feels they are not); the only recourse is a lawsuit.