Subcommittee of the
RIGHT TO KNOW ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Technology and Burdensome FOAA Requests Subcommittee

Friday, November 6, 2026
1:00 pm

Location: Cross State Office Building, Room 214 (Hybrid Meeting)
Public access also available through the Maine Legislature's livestream:
https://legislature.maine.gov/Audio/#214

1. Introductions

2. Discussion regarding best practices and guidelines related to FOAA requests

3. Informal vote on recommendations of the Subcommittee regarding best practices and guidelines related to FOAA requests

4. Confirm future meeting date

5. Adjourn

J. CHRISTOPHER PARR
LEWISTON, MAINE 04240

October 20, 2026

Right to Know Advisory Committee
c/o Office of Policy & Legal Analysis
13 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0013

RE: TWO SUGGESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE'S CONSIDERATION

Dear Chair Carney and Members of the Committee:

Although I am an employee of the State of Maine, I send this correspondence to the Committee solely in my personal capacity as a resident of Maine, to share a perspective of a member of the public.

The purpose of this letter is to share two suggestions regarding the the Freedom of Access Act ("FOAA"; "Act") for the Right to Know Advisory Committee ("RTKAC"; "Committee") to perhaps consider.

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The first suggestion is that the Committee strengthen the penalty provisions for intentional violations of the Act. This might include raising the fine amounts specified in 1 M.R.S. § 410 that can be imposed on government agencies and entities that intentionally violate the law, as well as enacting criminal and civil infractions with which public officials and employees could be personally charged or cited for purposely withholding records that should be disclosed or made publicly accessible pursuant to the law.

Alternatively (or in addition), the Committee might consider amending 1 M.R.S. § 452 as follows (*see* underlined text):

> **§ 452. Removal, secretion, mutilation of or refusal to return state documents; intentional nondisclosure of public records**
>
> Whoever intentionally removes any book, record, document or instrument belonging to or kept in any state office, except books and documents kept and deposited in the State Library, intentionally secretes, alters, mutilates, defaces or destroys any such book, record, document or instrument or, having possession or control of any such book, record, document or instrument, intentionally fails or refuses to return the same to that state office or to deliver the same to the person in lawful charge of the office where the same was kept or deposited is guilty of a Class D crime.
>
> A person who intentionally does not disclose or otherwise provide access to a public record pursuant to this chapter that the person knows is publicly disclosable or publicly accessible commits a Class D crime.

Amending the Act in one or both ways would serve to emphasize that State and local government agencies and officials have a duty to act faithfully to further the FOAA's purpose of ensuring government transparency.

The second suggestion is that the Committee take concrete, proactive steps to educate the general public about the FOAA, as well as about best practices to follow when making public record requests. One benefit of doing so would be that some measure of relief might possibly be brought to agencies currently facing burdensome FOAA requests.

Given the breadth of the Committee's statutory charge (as set forth in 1 M.R.S. § 411, sub-§ 1), any of the following steps ostensibly could be taken by the RTKAC without the need for legislation:

- The RTKAC could post on its website tips on how to write effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests that members of the public could reference when composing their own public records requests;
- The Committee could post on its website examples of effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests that agencies have actually received that members of the public could reference when composing their own public records requests;
- The RTKAC could produce and post a video on its website that walks viewers through the FOAA request and response process so that they can learn how the process works and what to expect during the process. (An example of such a video is one that was produced by the Better Government Association about how to file a FOAA request in the State of Illinois. *See generally* https://www.bettergov.org/2022/12/05/how-to-file-a-foia-request-in-illinois/.) Such a video could include tips on how to compose effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests;
- The RTKAC could compose and post on its website a model form that members of the public could use to submit effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests. *See, e.g.*, https://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/Page-Attachments/FOIAPAC/Sample%20FOIA%20request%20form%20v1%20(2).pdf ;
- The Committee could suggest to State and local government agencies that they post on their respective websites examples of effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests that the agencies have actually received that can serve as models for members of the public to reference when writing their own public records requests;
- The RTKAC could suggest to press and news broadcasting organizations that they post on their respective websites examples of effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests that the organizations have submitted to agencies, for members of the public to reference when writing their own public records requests. Alternatively (or in addition), the Committee might suggest that such organizations post on their respective websites tips on how to write effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests that members of the public could reference when composing their own public record requests;
- The Committee could suggest to Maine-based government-transparency advocacy organizations that they post on their respective websites examples of effective,

reasonably framed FOAA requests for members of the public to reference when writing their own public records requests. Alternatively (or in addition), the Committee might suggest that such organizations post on their respective websites tips on how to write effective, reasonably framed FOAA requests that members of the public could reference when composing their own public record requests;

- Members of the RTKAC could host, e.g., biannual or quarterly online "town hall"-like meetings that members of the public could virtually attend to ask general questions to the Members about the Freedom of Access Act;
- A general Committee email address could be created and posted on the RTKAC website through which general questions or suggestions about the FOAA could be submitted by members of the public, to which Committee members could then respond when appropriate.

***

Thank you considering this letter. Please feel welcome to contact me via the email address given below if you have any questions about the thoughts I have shared.

Respectfully,



J. Christopher Parr
jchristopherparr@yahoo.com

Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) Request Form
with optional checklist for search process

Maine Office of Information Technology
FOAA and Litigation Support Coordinator Eric.Stout@maine.gov, cell (207) 446-2438
Updated November 3, 2023

The purpose of this form/ checklist is to help better define what is needed in response to Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) requests. State of Maine agency staff can handle this on their own, or optionally reach out to the Maine Office of Information Technology (OIT) FOAA and Litigation Support Coordinator for consultation and assistance on searching.

Agency/ office receiving FOAA request: _____

Dates:

- Date of request: _____
- Date received agency: _____
- Date of initial response to acknowledge request (within 5 days): _____
- Date(s) of follow-up responses for time and cost estimate (or revisions): _____
- Date requestor agreed to pay FOAA fee of $25 an hour after first 2 hours free: _____
- Date results provided: _____

Requestor contact information (to be able to send response or ask for clarification):

- Name of individual or entity (if known): _____
- Email address (if known): _____
- Phone (if known): _____
- Mailing address (if known): _____

Description of records being requested (language from requestor):

_____

Timeframe requested (if known): _____

Time and cost estimates ($25 an hour after first 2 hours free):

- Initial estimates:
  - $ _____
  - _____ days
- Revised estimates (if search scope is revised):
  - $ _____
  - _____ days
- Time to produce: _____ days
- Amount charged and paid: $_____

See page 2 for optional checklist for search process.

Optional checklist for search process:

Agency key people who would likely have relevant records, emails, or documents:

- _____
- _____

Search terms suggested by requestor (if any) or recommended by agency subject-matter experts in line with the description above:

- _____
- _____

Advanced search options for Microsoft-based email or files:

Search "filters" (optionally to use between search terms to fine-tune results):

- **OR** between search terms will give either/ or results
- **AND** between search terms will give only results that include BOTH
- **NOT** will exclude those terms
- **NEAR** (a Microsoft only filter) is a "proximity" filter that will give results when terms are near each other. For example:
    - NEAR defaults to within 8 words of each term
    - NEAR(100) = within 100 words of each term (can change value to any number for fine-tuning the search results based on proximity of terms)

TECHNICAL NOTES: check with your IT support people or see Microsoft website at: https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/purview/ediscovery-keyword-queries-and-search-conditions?view=o365-worldwide#search-operators:

- The **NEAR** search filter shown below is a "proximity" filter, to narrow the search results to any of the first set of terms (**OR, OR, OR**) to be within proximity to any of the second set of terms. In Microsoft the **NEAR** filter defaults to within 8 words of each other. This filter can be customized to tighten or broaden the proximity to any number of words, such as **NEAR(5), NEAR(50), NEAR(100)**, or any number. Other filters can be used, such as the NOT filter, which would exclude unwanted results.
- **The * is a "wildcard" to pick up any variation on that "root word."**
- Microsoft search is not "case sensitive" meaning that it ignores capitalization of words. This is good because whether a word is capitalized or not, the search will find it. But it's bad because you can't specify a capitalized-only version of a word, like an acronym. The Microsoft search will find both capitalized and non-capitalized versions and not distinguish them.

See slides below for some examples of using the search filters described above.

3.0

Topic 3: In-Depth Search Skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

The Goal of your searches?

"Fishing is **NOT** fun for me..."



"Fishing is FUN!"

To "fish out" what you're looking for!

https://www.wvlogcabins.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/AndreaLarkoDianeLarkoHarmansRainbowTrout-700x933.jpg

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

What?

- You can search for a single word, multiple words, or phrases (in quotes) – all in a single pass.
- Fine-tune your searches to "catch the fish" you want.

How?

- These same techniques work with any Microsoft software product (for email, documents, any files).
- "Fish in your favorite trout steam" (folder) or widen search.

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

OR – either term will give results

AND – both terms must co-exist, or no results will be found

- This option is very limiting so be careful using it

NEAR – "proximity" filter works only in cloud-based sources (Outlook, OneDrive), but not on local or network drives

- one term near another (8 words by default)
- NEAR(5) = 5 words, NEAR(50) = 50 words, or any number

NOT – exclude a term similar to another, but you don't want

- Example: Trout NOT "Tom Trout" NOT "Thomas Trout"

For a "deep dive" on search filters, see Microsoft's website:
https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/compliance/keyword-queries-and-search-conditions?view=o365-worldwide#search-operators

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

Caution Tip:



- When searching Outlook email, Microsoft tends to give you only partial results (but quickly). Be sure to slide down to the bottom of the list of results. If you see this, then click More to get possibly more results.
- It's a poor design (at the very bottom of the results list), but something to be aware of so you don't miss any results.

When searching Outlook, it will find these terms in either the email itself or inside file attachments

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

Example #1: using OR filter

Looking for: emails and reports about population of trout in Maine streams for the past 3 years.

You might search for this:

trout OR population received:>=11/1/2018

Which would find: All mentions of EITHER trout OR population for dates since (>=) Nov. 1, 2018

255 characters is the maximum limit for a single search. In this example the search string totals 41 characters, including spaces. You can load up to 255 characters in a single search (**10,000 for a "cloud-search"** discussed later).

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

Example #2: using AND filter

Looking for: emails and reports about population of trout in Maine streams for the past 3 years.

You might search for this:

trout AND population received:>=11/1/2018

Which would find: All mentions of BOTH trout AND population for dates since (>=) Nov. 1, 2018

This is a more narrowed search where BOTH words have to co-exist. It doesn't find all instances of trout, but only in the context of trout population.

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

Example #3: using AND in combination with OR

Looking for: emails and reports about health or population of all fresh-water fish in Maine from 2018 – 2020.

You might search for this:

fish AND (health OR population) received: >=1/1/2018 AND received: <=12/31/2020

Which would find: All mentions of fish, but then narrowed to ALSO mention either the word health OR population for dates shown.

Like a mathematical formula, the parentheses must be in the right place to work right.
In this case you want to find fish but then (health OR population) as a sub-set filter.

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

Example #4: using phrases (in quotes)

Looking for: emails and reports about health or population of all fresh - water fish in Maine.

You might search for this:

"fish health" OR "health of fish" OR "fish population" OR "population of fish" [or any other likely exact phrases that might have been used]

Which would find: Results from any of these exact phrases – use as many combinations as you can think of if using exact phrases.
Or use the AND, OR filters as shown in the previous examples.

CAUTION: The danger is missing other ways of phrasing those topics

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Topic 3: In-depth search skills

(OR, AND, NEAR, NOT filters)

Example #5: using the NEAR filter

Looking for: emails and reports about health or population of all fresh - water fish in Maine.

You might search for this:

fish NEAR (health OR population)

Which would find: Results for "fish" if NEAR "health" OR "population" – like in the same sentence.

Or use the AND, OR filters as shown in the previous examples.

NOTE: NEAR searches within 8 words. NEAR(50) would be within 50 words. You can add any number to finetune the proximity search.

Maine School Management Association Survey Responses

Respondent	Detail the technology currently used by the school district to retain records and/or respond to FOAA requests. Please include the technologies, referencing specific software/platforms/applications (e.g., Microsoft 365, Google Vault, etc.) used for: 1) record retention; 2) searching for records; 3) reviewing records; and 4) distributing records.
1	We retain both paper and digital records. We use Google Vault for all employee & student accounts. Powerschool retains all records for student accounts & staff, as well.
2	We currently use Google Vault for pulling emails. We do not use anything else specific for FOCC. Information may be pulled from file cabinets or directly from everyday software/files used such as NEO, Microsoft Office, PowerSchool, Fund Accounting, etc.
3	Tyler School ERP Pro (financials), transitioning to Google Vault for other records but not yet.
4	The district uses Google Vault to review emails for FOAA requests. Records are retained through the district email and data servers
5	ProFund, Tyler Technologies. Excel for all listed above.
6	Google Vault, and Backupify used for retaining and searching records. Google Vault used for reviewing and distributing records Thunderbird email client used for reviewing and distributing records. Preview is used for reviewing, redacting and distributing.
7	Google Vault, Munis, PowerSchool
8	Google Drive and hard copy files
9	Our district utilizes Google Workspace and our emails, etc. are archived with Google Vault.
10	1-3. School ARP, Google Vault 4. Google docs/sheets
11	Microsoft 365, Google Workplace Account
12	Tyler Technologies - ProFund
13	Google Vault, Mozilla Thunderbird
14	Google Vault, Adobe Acrobat Reader, SysTools Mac MBOX Converter, DocHub, email, district website
15	Infinite Visions, PowerSchool: Used for Purchasing History and Student Data. Google Email: Staff and Student Communications Microsoft Office: Spreadsheets and letters
16	The [district] uses Google Vault for record retention and searching for records. We export search results and import them into Microsoft Outlook for review. Records are typically distributed as printable PDF files.
17	Google Vault. If we had a records request we would use vault to collect records. Based off what I have heard as suggestions from others we would import those messages into a mailbox software to review contents for anything that may need to be redacted. If something did need to be redacted, at this time, I am not sure how I would be able to electronically redact while maintaining the file digitally as a collection. We might have to separate one document out from the "folder/group" or deliver that one file separately.
18	Google platform, google vault, platforms for HR and finance
19	We use Google Vault and DocumentLOK for student-related records, and PowerSchool SIS for student academic and demographic information.
20	most of our records requests involve vendors and finances, so our financial software and reports are the big factor. In terms of other records, google suites would be the other.
21	Most of our FOAA requests are for vendor records which can be found in Tyler ADS ProFund.
22	We do not have specific software for this purpose. We use Google Workspace.
23	[District] uses Google Workspace for education. Google vault is included in the licensing. 1) We archive inactive users. Information remains available for searching. 2) Using Vault, a matter is created and a query is constructed to pull the relevant information from the entire domain. 3)The data is extracted as a Outlook .pst file and usually printed as a pdf. Those records are reviewed by a district FOAA person and unrelated information or PII is redacted and removed. 4)The reviewed information is given to the requestor and additionally a copy of the request and information is posted on a FOAA requests page on the district website.
24	Google Applications for Education, Google Vault
25	Google Workspace (Vault); Reach My Teach messages. We don't have any tools available to assist in searching, reviewing or distributing records aside from what is available in Google and ReachMyTeach

26	All requested information is pulled from ProFund and exported into excel. These are reviewed and some info Is removed when pertaining to employees.
27	Google Vault primary
28	Google technologies, business office platforms
29	Microsoft 365, cloud storage, excel,
30	Record retention: ADS Profund for financial records; Microsoft 365 and district electronic files for correspondence and documents. Searching for records: Manual searches performed within ADS Profund and district electronic files based on the scope of the request. Reviewing records: Records are reviewed manually by the Superintendent or designee. Distributing records: Records are typically provided electronically via email as PDF files or other electronic documents.
31	We use Google Vault for all listed. The retention is set to max for all areas. Email is all time.
32	Google Apps, InCode/Tyler Technologies, Microsoft
33	Google Workspace for Education - Google Vault & Google Investigation Tool
34	We do not use a specific technology to create these records.
35	Microsoft and our finance package
36	Google Vault.

Respondent	Who determines the technology used in the school district? What factors contribute to the decision-making process?
1	Superintendent, directors of teaching & learning, Tech Director, Education Technology Lead
2	Superintendent of Schools, Technology Director, and Special Education Director. Does the data reporting give us the detail we need.
3	Technology Director provides options for administration to use that satisfy both the need and the safety requirements necessary to protect all information.
4	The Director of Technology consults with the Superintendent on technology purchases for the district. Several factors are used to make a decision to include, cost, ease of use, and the ability of the software to interact with other software used in the district.
5	Finance and superintendent staff. We base it on what the programs provide and how complicated or easy they are to use.
6	Technology director with input from teachers, and administrators based on need and cost.
7	The decision was made years ago and we have continued with the system annually.
8	Technology Director consults and individual use is not consistent.
9	Decisions regarding technology use for the school district are a decision that would be made by superintendent along with appropriate district administrators. We would lens the use of technology as it relates to students from an instructional standpoint and appropriate use developmentally, etc. and as it supports strategic initiatives, student needs, and fits with best practice regarding meaningful engagement and in compliance with policy. As it relates to decisions regarding technology in other areas of operation for the schools, again, it would be with input of appropriate users, IT, administrators etc. and how it supports our operational and strategic needs. If policy is required then policy committee would review any recommendations and ultimately board approval.
10	Superintendent
11	The teachers, technology specialists, principal, and the school committee are adopting policies.
12	Superintendent and Business Manager
13	Technology Director, Network Administrator. Cost and efficiency are the main factors
14	Technology director, database manager, superintendent. Factors are ease of use, efficiency.
15	Technology Director and myself.
16	Google Vault was in place when I arrived. We are working toward getting Backupify configured to archive all of our Gmail and Google Drive files. We will switch over to Backupify for these tasks once it is properly configured. Factors that contribute to the decision-making process include product featurs and cost.
17	It's a collaborative approach and depends on what the technology is and who it will impact. For items like infrastructure and backups that is the technology director. For items used in single classrooms that is the classroom teacher in collaboration with the technology director. For school wide educational programs that is educators, superintendents/curriculum coordinator and technology director.
18	Technology director, administrators, and school board
19	1. Leadership - Super, Asst. Super, Dir of Technology (sets the priorities & makes sure technology is compatible, safe, and secure). 2. Curriculum & Instruction Teams- Principals and teacher leaders (ensure support for instructional goals, learning standards, and classroom usability) 3. Principals & Teachers - (Provide important classroom-level input, participate in pilot program). Factors in decision-making: Educational alignment, budget and funding, data privacy & security, & Infrastructure compatibility)
20	the need.
21	Recommendations come from the Directory of Technology or are previously used systems.
22	Administrative Team (Superintendent, Business Manager/DOF, Technology Coordinator)
23	Technology Director, District Leadership Team, Superintendent. Factors include functionality, ability to work seamlessly with existing technology and cost.
24	The administrative team, including the Curriculum Coordinator, vets all software requests to assure that the tools (hardware and software) are being used to "enhance instruction." We also consider whether software is consistent with the adopted curriculum.

25	Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Building Administrators, IT Director. Ease of use, cost.
26	Technology is determined/researched by the tech director and team. Presented to Admin for discussion.
27	Technology Director / Superintendent
28	Tech Director-Superintendent- Ed Policy Committee-School Board
29	Superintendent, director of technology, administration, school board and individual needs
30	Technology decisions are made collaboratively by district administration and our technology provider based on district needs, cost, security, functionality, and available resources. Because we are a small district, purchasing specialized software solely for FOAA requests has not been a priority.
31	Collaboration amongst the technology director, school administration, teachers, and support staff via the budget process. Technology plan, student and employee needs, and cost considerations.
32	Technology committee comprised of teachers, administrators, a board member, a community member, student representatives. Administrative Team to include Tech Integrator. Board of Directors
33	Technology Director & Superintendent
34	
35	technology Committee for hardware and indivdual depatments for software needs
36	The Technology Director, in conjunction with the superintendent. The budget always drives decision-making.

Respondent	How much does this technology cost?
1	Varies by tech used
2	Microsoft Office $5,000 approximately every three years. Fund Accounting $3,300.
3	Not sure as we are still exploring.
4	
5	$27,000.
6	$5,500 for Backupify. Other 3 are free.
7	Over 100,000 all systems combined. I can pull exact numbers if needed.
8	To the best of my knowledge, there is not a cost associated with it.
9	I am new to the district - do not have that information at this time.
10	$35,000/year for ARP
11	$10000 year
12	$11,000
13	$0
14	MBOX $199/year, DocHub $230/year
15	Most of the technology costs is provided by the MDOE so we estimate the total cost to be around $2000 each year.
16	Google Vault is provided as part of our Google Workspace for Education domain. We have the Basic Workspace account; we do not pay anything for this. Backupify costs $10,000/year for our district. This is the first fiscal year that we will be using this service.
17	This is too vague of a question to accurately answer. My best guess at what you are going for: We are on the free tier of Google workspace for education. Our curriculum tech subscriptions are around $2,000 a year. Our Employee absence/timesheets and accounting software is around $12,000. We do not currently pay for anything that helps with FOAA requests but likely would need a specialized software if we got a large request.
18	Minimum costs for education google platform
19	Google Vault is free to educational institutions; DocumentLOK hosted secure server for retention and retrieval $6K yearly; PowerSchool SIS $8K
20	150,000, including staffing, hardware, software
21	K-12 and Office: 15K
22	N/A
23	Vault is included in our Workspace licensing. It is not a separate cost. The real cost is the time needed to review and redact unrelated information or PII.
24	Our software for the FY27 year is slated at $68,000, but this includes software that supports our technology infrastructure.
25	We pay for Google for Education licenses and also ReachMyTeach. I don't know what other tools are available to assist, or the cost.
26	We have multiple forms of technology but ProFund through Tyler Technologies is our accounting and operations software. This costs us $26,000 per year.
27	500,000+
28	Varies depending on users
29	$135,397 - tech support on site one day per week This does not include the financial software. Which is another $30,000

30	The district does not purchase technology specifically for responding to FOAA requests. Existing district software systems (ADS Profund, etc.) are used as part of normal operations, so there is no separate cost attributable to FOAA compliance.
31	We currently use the free version of Google Workspace for Education, but the budget for next year has Education Plus in it and runs about $6/user.
32	Well over $20,000 but is in place for more than just FOAA request fulfillment.
33	We pay for Google for Education Plus - $1,800 yearly
34	
35	The upgrade of our financial and personnel sofware for the AOS is 130,000 -schedule for next year - payable in four installments
36	I am unsure.

Respondent	Describe the ways in which the school district uses that technology to fulfill FOAA requests. Elaborate on the technology used, when it is used, and who uses the technology (i.e., is this person trained in the FOAA process?). If technology is not used to fulfill FOAA requests, describe the factors that contributed to the decision not to use technology for fulfilling FOAA requests and how FOAA requests are currently fulfilled.
1	
2	All FOAA information is pulled at the request of Superintendent. The Technology Director is the only person with access to Google Vault, which is only access at the request of the Superintendent.
3	Right now the biggest requests that we get are in regards to purchases. We use our financial system to gather the information. This is timely depending on the number of years of the request.
4	FOAA requests are first reviewed by the Superintendent who is responsible for communicating with the requester and meeting timelines as required by Maine law. Materials requested are assigned by the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent to staff members that have access to the materials that are being requested. Emails are pulled using Google Vault. All other materials are pulled through the software where the materials are stored. The Superintendent and the Assistant superintendent review all final materials. The Superintendent communicates and provides the final materials to the requester.
5	Reports are run, based on request, from the software and exported to excel or pdf.
6	For large requests with multiple email accounts accessed, technology is used. Many requests are for PO and contract data. These are reviewed by the finance director, but all requests are responded to by the technology director. To review emails, a search is conducted in vault, results are exported to Thunderbird as .mbox and then converted to pdf and reviews and redacted in Preview.
7	I work with our Technology team and business team to search for requests. Our HR Director assists also.
8	I am not sure. I am new in this position.
9	I am new to the district, In checking with our Director for Information Technology, he Indicated it has been a number of years since he was asked to support a FOAA request Indicating that has not been an overwhelming issue for the district at least as it relates to technology. He indicated more requests that impact the need to search for items or archive are related to employment matters, then FERPA rather than necessarily FOAA.
10	The superintendent creates the letter that outlines what the FOAA request is for. That letter is shared with the operations manager in the business office. 98% of our requestions have been around vendors that we use. They search ARP for the vendor(s) and dates to fulfill the request. Then they review the document to ensure that anything that wasn't supposed to be shared didn't show up on the document. The business manager reviews it and then it is sent to the company.
11	The Google Workplace technology and a trained superintendent
12	Reports are run in the ProFund system to fulfill FOAA requests.
13	Search Google Vault, export the found messages to MBOX, open in Thunderbird on a RDP account on a server that is accessible to the administrator who needs to respond to the request.
14	Technology listed above is used by the data base manager, for pulling email records, and superintendent for reviewing. Financial software is used by Business manager to pull financial data. One FOAA request involved searching a box of physical records but we allowed the person to conduct their own search in the presence of staff in that case.
15	I handle all FOAA requests and utilize the different technologies listed in #5 to fulfill the requests.
16	FOAA requests are fulfilled by searching archived Gmail and Google Drive files that are stored in Google Vault. The Director of Technology conducts these searches and has received basic training In fulfilling FOAA requests. Further training would be greatly appreciated. FOAA requests typically originate from our district office. The Director of Technology is forwarded the request via Gmail.
17	Historlcally, 2 people have responded to FOAA requests. They are both trained by reading the FAQ on the Maine website. One request we referred the requester to the schools website. The other we did not digitally maintain the records requested.
18	Most FOAA requests have been looking for vendors lately. We also have requests for personnel. So searches for vendors in our billing platform and searching for people in our district financial, personnel platform

19	If technology is used, it is done by an IT professional. We run the parameters, download the data, and provide It to the executive secretary at the Superintendent's Office. All FOAA requests go through the executive office, and if information requires using the vault, they will contact the IT department to confidentially research, retrieve, and download needed FOAA requests. Many FOAA requests do not require the vault, such as financial requests or policies; this is all compiled at the superintendent's office they request from the appropriate personnel.
20	the biggest challenge is that the requests do not typicaly match the format of the records that are kept, so someone has to invest time in building the results.
21	FOAA requests are completed by the Superintendent. Enrollment data from PowerSchool, vendors from ProFund.
22	We are in survival mode with these requests, and we are finding it difficult to keep up.
23	1)As earlier described. We use Vault to construct queries to pull the information requested. We use Outlook to to provide the data in a universally compatible format that can be easily reviewed and disseminated. 2)We use it when we have a FOAA request that pertains to Google services, email, drive classroom, etc. 3)It is used by the district technology department when FOAA requests that require that data is requested.
24	The FOAA officer (Business Administrator in our case) and I provide the technology team with key words to identify email titles, content, and fields that correspond with the requested material. The Business Administrator would also comb through the payroll/purchasing software to identify relevant information.
25	If we get a FOAA request, the Superintendent typically asks the IT Director (me) to look for certain names or initials or email addresses in Vault and/or Reach My Teach if necessary. I have not been trained in the FOAA process. I extract the MBOX files from Vault and send those to the attorney. If I had to go through and print each email, it would take an eternity. For Reach My Teach, we're able to extract messages into a CSV file.
26	The finance director who has been trained through DWD responds to all requests for FOAA. All reports are generated from ProFund.
27	Google Vault primary, ADA and Aptafund secondary.
28	We run searches as requested for any and all material that can be found when records were kept electronically. Have not had time or resources to develop an alternative plan. Our FOAA person works with the Director of Tech and Director of Finance to find all requested records.
29	Apta Fund is the financial software. **[The district]** generates the reports requested. Sometimes this has to be imported or created in an Excel Spreadsheet. This creates a hardship in a small office.
30	The district fulfills FOAA requests primarily through manual processes. The Superintendent searches relevant systems, Including ADS Profund for financial records and electronic files for correspondence and documents. Responsive records are revlewed manually to determine whether confidential Information must be redacted before release. The district does not currently use dedicated FOAA management software or automated search tools. Due to the district's small size and (previously) low volume of FOAA requests, existing systems have been sufficient, although the process has been time-consuming.
31	We use Vault to search for Google related docs and emails.
32	We use technology to fulfill FOAA requests such as searches of email communications, Board minutes, procurement records, etc.
33	**[The superintendent]** does the FOAA requests using Google Vault and Google Investigation tool - exports the mbox files and passes those along to our lawyers for redaction of PII and any other non relevant Information to the FOAA request
34	
35	Central Office personnel, not trained- completed through our own files along with financials from our financial package, Personnel programns are not financially availble to us as a small rural district
36	The Technology Director and the superintendent will use the Google Vault for searches, and yes, both are trained.

Respondent	Detail any challenges, potential or realized, with using technology to respond to FOAA requests. Does technology impede or help the response times and/or burden on the school district to respond to FOAA requests? Please explain how the use of technology increases or reduces burden on the school district.
1	
2	The technology does help in the response time as we can pull specific data needed quickly and organize it.
3	Converting all of our physical documents to digital ones is our biggest challenge right now. Once they are converted it will make it easier to fulfill FOAA requests.
4	Technology is a help in pulling material and in determining the number of records that may possibly exist. Technology has helped to speed up the process.
5	The time the request takes to process, depending on what is being asked for, as it ties up our computers and basically leaves us unable to do our regular duties.
6	For us, technology has helped. We only limit our searches to what is specifically requested. I can't imagine waiting for every individual involved in a request to get the information back to a centralized location.
7	Results are often large files that we have to sort through and at times involve legal for review. We receive many requests. Some groups like Databranch submit multiple requests daily at times. People often as for a broad scope. Examples include: Requesting all emails from Person A that includes Person B for all of time. Most of the information requested is from what seems like data mining and is a misuse of time. We are considering alternative approaches such as posting all our vendor information on our web page so we can redirect requests.
8	I am not sure. I am new in this position.
9	New to the district
10	Technology helps in our case because of the type of FOAA requests we are receiving. It definitely reduces the burden on the school district personnel.
11	Receiving many commercial FOAA requests regarding other products
12	There do not seem to be an challenges with the requests other than the simple fact that they are cumbersome and occur often, taking up time that most of us do not like to spend on what seems like pointless requests.
13	Searching email is a "needle in a haystack" problem, and there is absolutely no way to know for sure that all relevant messages have been found.
14	Without the technology, it would not be possible to conduct these searches. It speeds it up. But this district has received over 100 FOAA requests in the past four years. We now publish them all on our website.
15	No issues so far as the use of technology allows us to process the requests a lot quicker.
16	One challenge in fulfilling FOAA requests is ensuring that proper search terms are utilized. If there are too few terms or if appropriate terms are left out of the search parameters, some things may be missed. But if there are too many terms, this leads to many more results being returned, which significantly increases the time necessary to review results for relevancy and confidential information that needs to be redacted. Without using this technology, staff would have to manually search through any Google accounts that are mentioned in the FOAA request, which would significantly increase the time needed to fulfill the request. The technology helps response times, though the potential is there to also increase response times.
17	Technology likely increases due to the vast amount of small records and the need to then redact while trying to maintain digitally. Again, If we were to get a large FOAA request we would likely need to purchase software to assist with this process.
18	FOAA requests are time consuming because we receive so many. Regardless of the platform, I am responding with a standard letter, returning a response after stating how many hours, and also what costs are associated. It is still a time consuming task.

19	It usually brings up a lot of repeated information, especially when using Vault to review email, text, or Google Drive data. Sometimes it is an incredible amount of information that has to be put in a format that can be used by the central staff. IT professionals have to convert the information into a widely recognized format that is familiar to the end user.
20	Of course we need to use our software and systems to pull together the information. But even so, the requests do not match the records retained.
21	Typing the response information in first draft format and asking AI to read with a FOAA filter creates a second draft that then needs review for accuracy.
22	We could use some tips and tricks for dealing with these requests. We're drowning.
23	It certainly helps in finding the information, but it doesn't do anything to assist with the time it takes to review the data once it is found to redact confidential information.
24	While our software does help us narrow the parameters with respect to emails, there Is still a lot of manual labor necessary to further refine the search to assure that the keywords are in the appropriate context to match the request.
25	I haven't had to do a ton of FOAA requests, but I can see how technology could both impede and help. It is hard to narrow down searches to get exactly what you're looking for. It is also hard getting people to understand that all of their information is FOAA-able.
26	The problem is frequent requests and the time it takes our system to process such requests. This ties up our computers for extended periods of time which reduces the actual work we get done for out actual jobs.
27	The burden is that even with the tech tools, one needs to review all of the items the tools return, and this falls on the superintendent in most cases. These requests are becoming overwhelming 1-2 a week, and they are from anonymous sources tool Legal says we need to comply and have.
28	Not all reports are the same and so every request takes time either to ask for the specific info or to write code and from people already busy on district work.
29	Technology helps but man power is an issue. It is just something else that times away from our primary focus of educating children. We have one person that requests our financials every 6 months. This person is out of state and requests from 100s of businesses, probably even 1000s.
30	Existing technology allows records to be located and shared electronically, but it does not signlflcantly reduce the administrative burden of responding to FOAA requests. The most time-consuming aspects remain identifying responsive records, reviewing them for confidential information, and preparing them for release. For a small district with limited administrative staff, FOAA requests require a substantial amount of time even when the necessary records are available electronically.
31	Technology helps us find the data faster. Parsing that data for is very time consuming. Generally, FOAA fees do not cover the employee costs to respond to a request.
32	The FOAA requests we get pertaining to purchases and contracts is largely supported by the accounting software available from lnCode/Tyler Technologies. If it weren't for their reporting features, the burden to produce these public records would be much greater.
33	Tech helps, as it can pull all the documents by search criteria. It's still hard because we still have to read through everything to look for confldential info such as personnel or student information.
34	
35	Our lack of technology burden the district in time and staff- as a small district we have one secretary and one accts payable and payroll person
36	We have had a recent influx of FOAA requests that are all related to contracts, staffing, professional development, and union membership. The Google Vault is helpful, but these requests are burdensome, nontheless.

Respondent	Describe how the school district uses artificial intelligence (AI) to help fulfill FOAA requests, specifically referring the application used (e.g., Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, MagicSchool, etc.). If AI is used in any capacity in the school district, please consider sharing the school district's AI policy and any benefits and challenges with the use of AI thus far.
1	We do not use AI for FOAA requests
2	AI is not used for this purpose.
3	We do not use AI at the moment to fulfill these.
4	The district does not use artificial intelligence for FOAA requests
5	Have not used AI
6	We use AI to draft email responses to requests.
7	We use search tools within the software/data base.
8	I am not sure. I am new in this position.
9	New to the district
10	AI is not used.
11	The Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, MagicSchool. **[District]** AI Policy 1. Purpose This policy outlines guidelines and procedures for the evaluation, development, **[School]**. The policy aims to maximize the benefits of AI while minimizing risks and ensuring alignment with the school's educational mission, ethical standards, and legal obligations. 2. Scope This policy applies to all current and prospective uses and applications of AI technologies at **[School]**, including but not limited to: Software, platforms, and automated systems used for teaching, grading, assessment, and student support. Data analytics and algorithms are used to model student performance and behaviors. AI assistants, chatbots, or embodied agents act as tutors or virtual peers. Surveillance, monitoring, or access control systems. Other existing or emergent AI technologies. 3. General Principles **[School]** will evaluate and adopt AI systems based on alignment with the following principles: Student welfare and rights: Systems do not infringe on privacy, autonomy, dignity, or educational rights. Pedagogical effectiveness: AI enhances, but does not replace, critical educational processes and qualified staff. Transparency and explainability: Stakeholders understand an AI system's processes, capabilities, and limitations. Fairness and inclusion: Systems mitigate potential biases and impact disparities. Accountability: Mechanisms ensure responsible deployment and monitoring of systems. Data privacy and security: Student data handling adheres to best practices and regulations.4. Responsibilities Teachers and staff will receive appropriate training before system deployment. Other stakeholders may be consulted depending on the AI system under consideration. 5. Assessment Guidelines Before acquisition or development, AI systems will undergo robust evaluation across educational, ethical, legal, and technical criteria. Key questions include: What core educational tasks will the AI perform and what outcomes will improve? What could decline or remain unchanged? Does the AI adhere to student welfare, privacy, and fairness considerations? How interpretable and transparent will its functioning be to students, parents, and teachers? What biases could AI introduce or exacerbate? Does use of the AI cohere with legal requirements like COPPA and FERPA in the school context? What risks could arise from the AI and how will they be monitored and mitigated? 6. Other Procedures Additional procedures, such as those for procurement, community feedback, continuous monitoring of fielded systems, external audits, and remedies in case of problems, shall be developed as needed alongside leadership and responsible parties.
12	No AI used.
13	We do not use AI for this purpose because we do not want to send sensitive emails to LLMs that may then use that information for model training.
14	We haven't use AI for FOAA requests.
15	We currently do not use AI to complete these requests.
16	The **[District]** does not utilize any AI in its current process of fulfilling FOAA requests.
17	We have not used AI in fulfilling FOAA requests.
18	AI is not used

19	We do not currently use AI for FOAA requests and information retrieval (we have never needed to). We do not have an overwhelming number of FOAA requests that require internal documents such as chats or emails. Currently, we have an AI policy that needs to go to the Board for Approval. Right now, we include AI as a copyright issue and consider it used incorrectly as cheating. The guidelines of use appear in teachers' syllabi for their classes currently.
20	we do not use AI to fulfill requests.
21	As an editor with oversight.
22	N/A
23	At this time, we do NOT use AI to assist with FOAA requests.
24	We don't currently.
25	I have not used AI to help fulfill FOAA requests
26	Have not used any of these at this point.
27	IF we had our own internal AI then I would use it. Since we have to rely on external AI, that has a "memory" this is not prudent for the school to use such tools.
28	Does not
29	NA
30	The district does not currently use artificial intelligence to search for, review, redact, or produce records in response to FOAA requests. AI tools may be used by staff for general productivity or drafting purposes, but not as part of the FOAA response process. The district is continuing to evaluate appropriate uses of AI while considering privacy, confidentiality, and legal compliance.
31	We have never used AI to fulfill these requests.
32	We do not.
33	We do use Gemini to search folders for contracts with certain companies, in case files weren't labeled correctly In Drive.
34	
35	We do not
36	I have never used AI- would love to know more.

Respondent	Would a list of best practices would be helpful for your school district to determine more efficient ways to fulfill FOAA requests, including through the use of technology?	
1	Yes	
2		
3	Yes	
4	Yes	
5	Yes	
6	Yes	
7	Yes	
8	Yes	
9	Yes	
10	Yes	
11	Yes	
12	Yes	
13	Yes	
14	Yes	
15	Yes	
16	Yes	
17	Yes	
18	Yes	
19	Yes	
20	Yes	
21	Yes	
22	Yes	
23		No
24	Yes	
25	Yes	
26	Yes	
27	Yes	
28	Yes	
29	Yes	
30	Yes	
31	Yes	
32	Yes	
33	Yes	
34	Yes	
35		No
36	Yes	

Respondent	What would you want included in a potential list of best practices?
1	
2	
3	
4	Working with the public on narrowing down the scope of requests.
5	Specific reports along with the criteria for each report so that there is minimal editing needed.
6	List of processes and refinements, as well as best tools to use at each step.
7	Form letters, time and cost comparisons by type of request, and strategies for making the information available to be able to redirect the request.
8	Cost associated with them.
9	Yes, I always appreciate information regarding best practice or other helpful Items for review and consideration.
10	[Legal counsel] put together a document about what can be shared as public information and the office staff said that was very useful.
11	Legal templates to answer many commercial FOAA requests
12	I would be open to any and all information provided.
13	
14	Not sure. We have a very tight system now but it is 100% managed by the superintendent. We have tried to pull in other staff to review records but it hasn't been successful.
15	Yes please.
16	Information on developing good search parameters and terms. Suggestions for how results may be quickly narrowed down to ignore irrelevant results. Options for technologies and systems that could help us with FOAA requests.
17	I would love to also have recommendations for software that are tested by other schools. If we got a request knowing a software that works well and at a reasonable price would be extremely helpful.
18	what we should and should not share, lists of documents we do not need to share, hours people are billing for
19	Applicable FERPA and HIPAA Laws included in the correspondence.
20	I am feeling that I am missing the underlying concern about this survey. The use of technology does not get in the way of record requests. But a list of best practices would be helpful separate from technology.
21	Yes.
22	Specific Examples
23	It wouldn't be helpful.
24	A step-by-step process, including a range of software options, would allow us to apply any useful tips appropriately.
25	I don't honestly know, since I haven't done many and also I don't know all that could be involved. I'm not sure that we're doing it right.
26	Open to anything that would streamline the process.
27	
28	Rewrite the law to restrict business and people from making ridiculous requests.
29	But not all financial software has the capability to generate the reports that are requested.
30	Best practices for small school districts with limited administrative staff. Recommended workflows for managing FOAA requests efficiently. Guidance on technology that is cost-effective for small districts. Best practices for searching email and electronic records. Guidance on redaction tools and protecting confidential student and personnel information. Appropriate uses and limitations of AI in responding to FOAA requests. Sample procedures, templates, and timelines for responding to requests.
31	How to use AI for FOAA requests and its benefits and challenges.
32	Communication templates, timeline guidance documents, reasonability of requests and the time estimates it should take to produce a response.
33	

34	
35	????
36	How do do FOAA requests efficiently. We are all busy, and these requests can add significant work to already busy plates. We can and do charge for detailed requests, but it is still another thing.

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To: Elena Roig, Legislative Analyst and Right to Know Advisory Committee Members

From: Rebecca Lambert, Municipal Issues Specialist

Date: July 31, 2026

Re: Use of Technology When Responding to FOAA Requests - Survey Results

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Thank you for the opportunity to share a summary of the responses to the Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) and Technology Survey conducted among Maine municipalities. The survey was designed at the request of the Right to Know Advisory Committee to help them better understand how municipalities currently process FOAA requests, the technologies they use to locate and manage public records, the challenges they encounter, and their perspectives on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI).

Thirty-nine municipalities representing a range of community sizes and geographic regions participated in the survey. Most respondents were town or city managers, administrators, clerks, and other municipal officials responsible for overseeing public records requests and FOAA compliance.

The survey demonstrates that municipalities have incorporated technology into many aspects of records management, but FOAA administration remains largely dependent on manual review and staff expertise. Most communities use a combination of electronic and paper records, requiring staff to search multiple systems, coordinate with departments, review records for confidentiality, apply redactions where necessary, and ensure compliance with legal requirements before records are released.

While many respondents reported using technology to assist with FOAA requests, few municipalities use specialized FOAA management software. Instead, they rely primarily on existing systems such as email, shared network drives, financial and records management software, websites, and paper archives. Cost, ease of use, and staff time were consistently identified as the most important factors when considering technology investments.

The survey also highlights several challenges. Municipal officials reported that responding to broad or complex requests is often time-consuming and labor-intensive, particularly when historical paper records must be located or when information is

maintained across multiple departments and platforms. For local governments, one of the most significant responsibilities associated with FOAA compliance is ensuring the completeness of responses while protecting confidential information.

AI is not a tool routinely used for FOAA administration among municipalities. Nearly all survey respondents indicated that they either do not use AI or have limited familiarity with its application as it relates to FOAA fulfillment. Those who commented generally viewed AI as a tool that may assist with document organization or searching but continued to emphasize that legal review, confidentiality determinations, and final disclosure decisions must be made by knowledgeable municipal staff.

According to survey results, there were several opportunities identified for state assistance. Common recommendations included additional training, model policies, practical guidance on AI and records management, grants to support digitization of paper records, software recommendations, and consideration of legislative changes addressing increasingly burdensome or AI-generated public records requests.

Following a summary of the survey results, please find a memo addressed to the Right to Know Advisory Committee's Technology Subcommittee dated October 27, 2025. The memo is in response to questions posed at the subcommittee's October 14, 2025, meeting regarding the use of technology among municipalities when responding to FOAA requests and may be helpful when considering the current survey results.

MMA is happy to provide this information to assist the Right to Know Advisory Committee accomplish their work in 2026. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or further information requests.

Freedom of Access Act and Technology Survey Results

1. Participating Municipalities

Alfred	Lincolnville
Arrowsic	Monmouth
Arundel	Monroe
Bethel	New Gloucester
Bowdoinham	North Berwick
Bridgton	Norway
Caribou	Orrington
Carmel	Paris
Casco	Parsonsfield
Castine	Phillips
China	Pittston
Deer Isle	Scarborough
Edgecomb	St. Albans
Falmouth	Thomaston
Fort Fairfield	Turner
Frenchville	Washington
Gardiner	Waterville
Harmon	Wells
Kennebunkport (2)	West Paris

2. Participant Position

	#	%
Town/City Manager/Administrator	24	62%
Town/City Clerk	7	18%
Selectboard Chair	3	8%
Police Chief/Captain	2	5%
FOAA Administrator	2	5%
Executive Assistacne	1	3%

3. Use Technology to Respond to FOAA Requests

	#	%
Yes	26	67%
No	13	33%

4. Tools Used to Store Public Records

	#	%
Electronic & Paper Files	32	82%
Other	3	8%
Electronic Files Only	2	5%
Paper Files Only	2	5%

5. Other Storage Tools

- IMC Police Records Management System
- Video Cassette/ Tape Recordings
- Microfilm

6. Methods Used to Search for Records

Most respondents use a combination of electronic systems (TRIO, email, servers, websites, and Google Vault) and manual searches of paper records. The search method depends largely on the nature, age, format, and location of the requested records, often requiring coordination between departments and occasional IT support.

- **Electronic Searches.** TRIO software (financial records, tax commitments, purchase orders, police reports, accounting records); computer servers and shared drives; email search functions (Outlook, Exchange, Google Vault); computer search bars and keyword searches; local records tracking systems; website document repositories; and archives and electronic filing systems.

- **Paper File Searches.** Filing cabinets; archived records; historical documents; map and lot files; town Meeting records; hard-copy departmental files; and secure records storage.

- **Hybrid Search Approach.** (1) Search electronically first; (2) if records are not found electronically, review paper files and archives; and (3) gather records from multiple departments as needed.

- **Departmental Coordination.** (1) public Information Officer receives and routes requests; (2) access Officer determines whether records exist and where they are located; (3) departments search their own records and provide responsive documents; (4) information is compiled into a single response package.

- **IT Assistance.** Email searches; Google Vault searches; data retrieval from servers; and technical support for locating electronic records.

- **Website Resources.** Town reports; agendas and minutes; audits; tax commitment books; ordinances; maps; and financial reports.

- **Typical Search Process.** (1) Acknowledge receipt of the request; (2) determine whether responsive records exist; (3) identify where records are maintained (e.g., electronic, paper or both); search electronic sources first (e.g., TRIO, email systems; servers; shared drives, etc.); (4) search paper files and archives, if necessary; (5) collect records from relevant departments; (6) review records for responsiveness and confidentiality; and (7) provide records to the requestor.

7. Methods Used to Review for Records

Most municipalities use a multi-step review process focused on accuracy, completeness, confidentiality, and legal compliance. Final review is commonly conducted by a FOAA Officer, Access Officer, or Town Manager, with legal counsel consulted for sensitive or potentially exempt records, and redactions applied when necessary, before release.

- **Initial Review for Accuracy and Completeness.** Respondents indicated that records are reviewed to ensure: (1) the records provided match what was requested;

(2) the response is complete and accurate; (3) relevant documents have been included; and (4) irrelevant documents

- **Confidentiality and Legal Compliance Review.** Respondents indicated that the primary purpose of the review process is to ensure that confidential, exempt, or protected information is not disclosed. Common activities include: (1) reviewing records for confidential information; (2) determining whether records are public under FOAA; (3) identifying information exempt from disclosure; (4) redacting protected information before release; and (5) ensuring compliance with applicable statutes.

- **Role of FOAA Officers.** Many municipalities designate a FOAA Officer, Access Officer, Town Manager, or Public Information Officer to oversee review and release, responsibilities often include: (1) reviewing responsive records; (2) ensuring compliance with FOAA; (3) making final disclosure decisions; (4) coordinating redactions; and (5) approving records before release.

- **Department-Level Review.** Several respondents indicated that departments first review records under their control before forwarding them for final approval. The process requires departments to locate, review records for responsiveness, forward records to the FOAA officer or town/city manager and conduct a final review before the information is released.

- **Legal Counsel Review.** When confidentiality or legal questions arise, municipalities frequently consult attorneys. Legal review may involve: (1) determining whether records are public; (2) reviewing potentially exempt information; (3) advising on required redactions; and (4) ensuring compliance with FOAA and other laws.

- **Multi-Level Review Process.** Some municipalities described a layered review process involving multiple individuals.

- **Redaction Process.** Many respondents noted that records may require redaction before release. Redactions are used to remove: (1) confidential information; (2) personnel information; (3) protected personal information; (4) attorney-client privileged materials; and (5) other legally exempt records.

- **Limited or Informal Review Processes.** A small number of respondents reported that there wasn't a form review process in place.

- **Typical Review Workflow.** (1) Locate responsive records; (2) review records for accuracy, completeness, and relevance; (3) determine whether records are public; (4) identify confidential or exempt information; (5) complete necessary redactions;

(6) consult legal counsel when questions arise; (7) obtain FOAA officer/town manager approval; and (8) release records to the requester.

8. Methods for Sharing Records

	#	%
Email & Mail	13	34%
Email, Mail & Other	9	23%
Email Only	4	10%
Email & File Sharing Link	4	10%
Email, Mail & File Sharing Link	4	10%
Email & Other	3	8%
Other	2	5%

9. Other Methods for Sharing Records

- Requestor collects records at the municipal office (10)
- USB (2)
- Requestor preference (2)
- Text message (1)

10. Who Decides Use of Technology

	#	%
Appointed Official	22	56%
Elected & Appointed Officials	6	15%
Elected & Appointed Officials & Budget	4	10%
Other	3	8%
Elected Official	2	5%
Appointed Official & Budget	1	3%
Budget	1	3%

11. Other Deciding Factors

- IT hardware and program recommendations.
- Use the technology that makes sense for the request. (2)

12. What Matters Most When Selecting Tools to Manage FOAA Requests

	#	%
Cost, Ease of Use & Staff Time	25	64%
Staff Time & Ease of Use	3	8%
Cost & Staff Time	2	5%
Other	2	5%
Staff Time	2	5%
Ease of Use	2	5%
Cost, Ease of Use & Other	1	3%
Staff Time, Cost, Ease of Use & Other	1	3%
Cost	1	3%

13. Other Considerations Used to Select Tools

- Efficiency and getting it right.
- Legalities.
- Maintaining confidentiality of redacted portions of records.
- Do not use technology.

14. How Requests Are Fulfilled without Technology

- FOAA requests are typically received via email or mail.
- Requests are reviewed and acknowledged by a FOAA officer or designated staff member, often through a return email.
- Requests are logged and tracked, including: (1) date received; (2) requestor information; (3) records requested; (4) date acknowledged; and (5) date closed
- In police departments, FOAA requests may be documented as a Call for Service and retained in permanent police files.
- Records are located through a combination of electronic and manual (paper) file searches.
- Staff manually review records and may contact relevant departments, individuals, or organizations to gather responsive information.
- Responsive records are copied and provided electronically (typically as PDFs) or as hard copies.
- Many municipalities rely on email, digital document storage, and photocopying rather than dedicated FOAA management software.
- Technology capabilities are often limited to existing electronic records; paper files must be retrieved and reviewed manually when records are not digitized.
- Most respondents reported no specialized FOAA software or formal records management system and rely on manual processes for records searches and request fulfillment.
- Digital documents are used where available, but FOAA administration remains largely labor-intensive and manual.

15. Why Doesn't Your Community Use Technology

	#	%
Other	8	32%
Cost	8	32%
Staff Time	4	16%
Ease of Use	3	12%
Training Access	2	8%

16. Other Reasons for Not Using Technology

- Most municipalities do not use a dedicated FOAA records management system.
- Existing processes and technologies, particularly within police departments, are generally viewed as adequate for current request volumes.
- Several respondents indicated they receive too few requests to justify investing in specialized software or systems.
- Many records are still maintained in paper format, limiting the effectiveness of electronic solutions.
- Some municipalities are uncertain about available technology options that could reduce staff workload while remaining user-friendly.
- Limited staff time has prevented some municipalities from researching or implementing alternative solutions.
- Some requests require little or no technology beyond basic office equipment such as a copier.
- Municipalities with lower request volumes continue to rely on manual processes because they remain manageable.
- A lack of information and awareness about available tools and best practices was cited as a barrier to adopting new systems.

17. Challenges Municipalities Face when Using Technology

- Ensuring completeness and accuracy of responses is a major concern, particularly when requests are broad, unclear, or difficult to interpret.
- FOAA requests can be time-consuming, especially those involving multiple records, complex topics, or repeated requests from the same individual.
- Some requests seek information that does not exist in a specific record or report format, requiring staff to determine whether responsive records exist at all.
- Many municipalities continue to rely on paper records, making searches and retrieval more labor-intensive.

- A significant portion of historical records have not been digitized, limiting the usefulness of technology and electronic searches.
- Digitizing records and scanning paper documents remains a major challenge due to capacity and resource constraints.
- Staff often conduct manual searches of both paper and electronic files because specialized FOAA software is not available.
- File naming inconsistencies can make locating electronic records more difficult.
- Broad requests, particularly those requiring extensive financial or multi-year data, can be difficult to fulfill and may involve significant data extraction and review.
- Electronic information often requires filtering, review, and organization before release.
- Records may exist but not in the format requested, requiring staff to compile or consolidate information from multiple sources.
- All responsive records must still be reviewed before disclosure, regardless of format.
- Municipalities experience a wide variation in the complexity and scope of FOAA requests.
- Some communities receive only a small number of requests annually, making it difficult to justify investments in specialized systems.
- Concerns were raised about large-scale, burdensome, or potentially frivolous requests that consume significant staff time.

18. Technology's Impact on Response Time

	#	%
Faster	16	53%
About the Same	12	40%
Slower	2	7%

19. Does Technology Make Responding to FOAA Request Easier

	#	%
Yes	25	83%
No	5	17%

20. Have AI Tools Impacted Ability to Response to FOAA Requests

	#	%
Do Not Use AI	30	88%
Other	3	9%
Easier	1	3%

21. What Other Tools Impact Ability to Responded

- Do not use AI. (2)
- Not aware of how AI works with responding to FOAA requests.

22. Concerns with Using AI

- Accuracy, completeness and legal compliance.
- Limited or no access to paper and historical records.
- Viewed as a helpful tool rather than a replacement for staff.

23. Has Your Municipality Adopted an AI Use Policy

	#	%
No	22	56%
Do Not Use AI	14	36%
Yes	3	8%

24. How Can the State Assist with FOAA Requests

- **Need for training, guidance, and best practices.** Respondents expressed interest in AI training, sample policies, templates, software recommendations, and state-issued guidance on the appropriate use of AI for FOAA compliance, confidentiality, and records management.

- **Concerns about AI-generated and burdensome requests.** Many municipalities reported an increase in AI-generated requests that are lengthy, fragmented, or contain multiple embedded requests, creating significant staff workload. Respondents also cited concerns about nuisance, vindictive, data-mining, and corporate-driven requests.

- **Desire for better tools and technology support.** Municipalities expressed interest in software solutions to track requests, manage records, automate retention schedules, and streamline responses. Several respondents suggested grants or other assistance to digitize paper records.

- **Need for policy and legislative changes.** Suggestions included clearer laws governing AI use in public records requests, reasonable limits on excessive requests,

stronger protections against abuse of the FOAA process, and expanded authority to recover actual staff costs associated with fulfilling requests.

- **Request for greater state support and collaboration**. Respondents asked for more state assistance, particularly for small municipalities, including practical guidance tailored to Maine municipal needs and greater municipal involvement when the state develops new systems or reporting requirements.

- **Interest in centralized solutions.** Some respondents suggested creating a statewide, searchable records repository or standardized system that could improve public access and reduce the administrative burden on individual municipalities.

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To: Right to Know Advisory Committee's Technology Subcommittee
From: Rebecca Lambert, Municipal Specialist
RE: Questions from October 14, 2025 meeting

October 27, 2025

Good morning Right to Know Technology Subcommittee members.

My name is Rebecca Lambert and I'm with the Maine Municipal Association. What I am going to share today is based on general information we've learned from working with our members. To get a more data driven sense of what municipalities use we would need some time to poll our members.

There are many municipalities who have shifted to delivering FOAA request records electronically, since it improves efficiency and reduces copy and print costs. Biddeford is one community who has gone this route, and they publicly post completed FOAA requests to their website.
https://www.biddefordmaine.org/2375/Public-Records-FOAA-Requests

The City of Bangor has implemented a Laserfiche system that has streamlined their response to FOAA requests in that staff in Bangor can now direct people to their website to search for records themselves. There are some records that are not publicly available through that system, like police reports, that need to be retrieved and redacted by staff. https://records.bangormaine.gov/Public/Welcome.aspx?ci=1

Saco also implemented a Laserfiche program and according to their 2011 annual report, they had a goal of scanning all vital records documents issued between 1965 and 2011. The annual report notes that Laserfiche has an Optical Character Recognition component to the scanning process of the program. Use of that technology was not 100% successful due to poor character recognition, resulting in those having to be corrected manually. It doesn't appear on their website that they utilize Laserfiche in the same capacity as Bangor. https://cms1files.revize.com/sacome/Finance/Reports/Annual%20Reports/11annualreport.pdf

As of March 2025, the City of Portland started using NextRequest, which is a software program that will collate FOAA requests, even for police departments, including an option within the program that offers the ability to redact. Some of their responses are published publicly, but that is at their discretion, and they do limit which requests are published. https://cityofportlandme.nextrequest.com/

For the City of Augusta, each building has a public information officer who oversees the requests for that building. They use Microsoft365 which has a tool to find emails based off requested criteria. They then use Adobe Acrobat to convert and index the individual messages, so they are easier to search. Other than those tools, no other software is utilized to fulfill FOAA requests.

I also checked in with the Town of Falmouth who shared that they do not use any software or technology when fulfilling FOAA requests.

It's important to note that the Laserfiche program is very labor and financially intensive, making it an unrealistic goal for many small communities without significant resources. I don't know much about NextRequest but I assume there is a subscription associated with it and likely also out of reach for most small municipalities.

In order for all municipalities to be able to use technology for FOAA requests, there is an assumption that they would all need access to the same resources, such as a reliable internet connection, a website, and staff with the digital literacy to implement a program, which isn't uniformly feasible.

Although more well-resourced communities may have some use of technology, many towns or cities don't have full-time FOAA officers. So, the same person handling public records requests is also the clerk, the treasurer, the code officer—sometimes all three. When a large or complex records request comes in, it can halt regular town business for days or even weeks. There are also have been increased instances where municipalities are inundated with frivolous requests that intend to disrupt operations.

School departments in particular have seen these types of requests. To help ease the burden, like Biddeford, the Gorham school department has a section of their website dedicated to FOAA requests and lists in a table what previous requests were for, and the materials related to the request. This has been very helpful when there are multiple requests for the same information and has streamlined their responses, though I'm not sure what type of technology, if any, is used when compiling the data.
https://www.gorhamschools.org/page/public-foaa-requests

Looking at the training piece of your question, MMA provides FOAA training, but the training does not include how to use technology when fulfilling requests since that looks quite different across the state. It is mentioned in the training that a municipality must provide electronic records in an electronic format if they have them.