

## Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT): Improve delivery of crash data

### Summary

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), faced with an 8.5 month backlog of crash report data, streamlined and standardized the work flow to reduce handoffs and eliminate the backlog. The average number of reports processed daily rose from 236 to 541. These improvements made it unnecessary to add four additional staff to handle the backlog, which avoided \$287,000 in costs. In addition, four existing positions (\$383,500 per year) were repurposed to other parts of WSDOT to fill other resource gaps.

### Background

Each year WSDOT receives more than 100,000 collision reports from statewide law enforcement agencies. Many data customers, including law enforcement, the media, attorneys, analysts, the Legislature and researchers, use this information to investigate roadway safety performance. Most of these requests require that the data be provided in different formats and with different levels of detail.

The past decade has seen significant changes in the technology to input and manage crash data, and has also been affected by new legislation, staffing changes and reductions, and changes in data content and business rules. By June 2012, these changes had resulted in an 8.5 month backlog of data waiting to be entered into the system, meaning that it was 8.5 months from when the collision record was supplied to WSDOT until it was fully analyzed and available to data customers. WSDOT projected that the processing delay would hit 11 months by the end of 2012. The backlog was preventing other state agencies that use the data to perform their business functions from meeting their statutory requirements.

### Outcomes achieved

- **For the public:** Crash data is now available an average of 17 days from the time of the crash. This meets all customers' statutory requirements for receiving the data.
- **For employees:** Employees no longer feel the stress of a backlog and through Lean have streamlined their processes, standardized coding methodologies and created a process to deal with issues in a timely and consistent way.
- **For the agency/agencies:** WSDOT and local jurisdictions can now address crash locations and the crash contributing circumstances more efficiently and increase collections of third party damages. Department of Licensing can update driver records and process driver responsibility cases within their statutory guidelines. The Heath Care Authority has reported an increase in cost recovery before insurance cases are settled.

### Optimized resources

WSDOT was considering requesting four additional FTEs (\$287,000 per year) to handle the growing backlog, but because of the Lean project, these positions were not needed resulting in

a cost avoidance. In addition, four current FTEs (\$383,500 per year) were repurposed to other parts of WSDOT to fill other resource gaps.

### **Next steps**

WSDOT is applying Lean methodologies to its data reporting section. This work identified the need for standardized data extracts and improved data query tools to assist data customers in acquiring crash data.

**Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)**

Improve delivery of crash data

*Project Timeframe: June 2012 – June 2014*

Benefits/Value to:			State Agency Impact:	
The Public	Employees	State Agency	Annual \$ Impact	Next Steps
<p>Increased crash data's availability to customers from an average wait time of 8.5 months to an average of 17 days</p> <p>Department of Licensing is now able to update driver records within the required 90 days</p>	<p>Streamlined the work flow process from a 3 step to a 1 step process</p>	<p>Increased the timeliness of crash reports from an average of 255 days to 17 days (from the time of the crash)</p> <p>Decreased the average unit cost to process a collision report from \$8.22 to \$2.74</p> <p>Avoided the need to hire four (4) new staff to handle increased workload</p>	<p>Savings: \$383,500</p> <p>Cost avoidance: \$287,000</p>	<p>Additional opportunities include standardizing data extracts and improving data query tools to assist data customers in acquiring crash data</p>

## **Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT): Improve public disclosure request response process**

### **Summary**

The public disclosure team at Washington State Department of Transportation headquarters reduced by 58 percent the time it takes to provide records to customers. These improvements reduced the average turnaround time for a records request from 24 days to 10. These changes eliminated the need for four additional positions, at \$274,000 a year, which the department had requested to handle the growing workload.

### **Background**

WSDOT's business of statewide transportation systems and projects is extremely visible to the public. This nature of work creates complicated public disclosure requests for records and the projects themselves are complex. In addition, WSDOT has multiple high profile mega projects at a time (such as the Alaskan Way Viaduct and the SR 520 Floating Bridge) and the largest ferry system in the country. Being transparent with the media and the public through the public disclosure process requires a great deal of coordination to identify, collect, review, disseminate and redact the agency's public records as necessary. Understanding the changing legal exemptions and potential legal challenges applied to these public records add to the complexity of responding to the agency's public disclosure requests.

From 2006 to 2013, the volume of public disclosure requests more than doubled from less than 900 requests to nearly 2,300. In addition, the number of complex requests grew almost six times since 2006. Exemptions to the law also continue to grow more complex and require increasing expertise to interpret.

The increased volume, size and complexity of these requests have led to growing staff frustration, stress and high turnover in the last several years. In July 2013, five people on the seven-member public disclosure team, as well as another staff member trained to do public disclosure, left WSDOT to pursue new positions created at other agencies due to increased public disclosures workload statewide.

The team incorporated the Lean principle of "flow" and began processing their work in smaller batches; this was more efficient, and helped the team provide records to their customers more quickly. The team mapped their process during a Lean workshop, and focused on identifying the root cause for the waste that they found. During the workshop, the team discovered that they could provide much better internal customer service to enable the holders of records to gather them up more quickly, which allows the team to process and provide the records to external customers more quickly. The team created and adopted standard operating procedures including customer service standards to reduce internal confusion and increase consistency to their customers. The team created a tool to guide them through the myriad of laws related to public disclosure exemptions. To manage their work more efficiently on a daily basis, the team incorporated visual management of their process and daily huddles to go over workload and to share information to remove any barriers to their work.

## Outcomes achieved

- **For the public:** The team reduced the time it takes to provide records to customers by 58%, from an average of 24 days to a 10-day turnaround. There is now an ongoing customer survey through which the public can provide feedback regarding the public disclosure process. WSDOT also eliminated a secondary acknowledgement letter that would go out to 50-100 external customers annually.
- **For employees:** This improvement led to substantially less stress and more engagement of staff. Moving from paper to electronic records and correspondence eliminated 25 steps from the process. Training developed for record holders helps them gather records more efficiently, effectively and faster.
- **For the agency:** Annual savings on supplies due to process changes are \$1,000.

## Optimized resources

WSDOT had requested four additional FTEs (\$274,000 per year) to handle the growing workload, and because of the Lean project, these positions were not needed resulting in a cost avoidance.

## Next steps

WSDOT's public disclosure team is actively managing this process for ways to continuously improve and incorporate customer feedback received from a recently implemented survey process.

