GRANICUS

2025

Public Record Complexity Benchmark Report



Table of Contents

Introduction 3

QUANTIFYING COMPLEXITY IN PUBLIC RECORDS 4

HISTORICAL TREND 5

TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS COMPLEXITY 6

Metrics Definitions 7

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF COMPLEXITY 7

REQUEST VOLUME 9

Records Markers 10

QUANTITY OF RESPONSE DOCUMENTS 10

FILE SIZE OF RESPONSE DOCUMENTS 11

VIDEO FILES 12

OCR PROCESSED IMAGES & PDFS 13

Activities Markers 14

AVERAGE USER INTERACTIONS 14

CLARIFICATION EMAILS GENERATED 15

TOTAL TIME SPENT 16

Conclusion 17

Introduction

Public records have become a frontline issue in 2025. Once considered a routine administrative task, they now sit at the intersection of transparency, technology, and evolving public expectations. This year's Public Records Complexity Benchmark reveals a dramatic surge in both the volume and complexity of public records requests — with **request volume up 161%** and the **overall complexity index rising 72%** since 2018.

This increase is not just quantitative — it may also reflect broader societal and institutional shifts. Rising civic engagement, increased media and commercial interest in government data, and the growing use of digital communication platforms have all contributed to a more complex public records environment. Additionally, new public sector initiatives aimed at improving government efficiency and data accessibility have introduced new types of records and processes, prompting a wave of inquiries that are more nuanced and technically demanding.

The establishment in 2025 of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has further complicated the landscape, triggering a wave of FOIA inquiries, lawsuits, and watchdog investigations at all levels of government. These inquiries are not only increasing in volume but also in complexity, as agencies grapple with sensitive data, privacy protections, and evolving legal interpretations.

The Public Records Complexity Benchmark tracks eight key metrics — grouped into **records markers and activity markers** — that quantify the operational impact of these changes. Notable increases include a **438% rise in file sizes, 173% growth in video files, and a 31% increase in clarification emails.** These trends reflect the expanding scope of public records, the proliferation of multimedia content, and possibly the growing influence of AI-powered requests and automation.

Beyond the numbers, the report captures a shift in public behavior. Requesters are more informed, more engaged, and increasingly view public records as a tool for transparency and accountability. Agencies are responding to a wider range of inquiries from residents, journalists, businesses, attorneys, and other governments, often involving sensitive data and complex legal considerations.

This is more than a report. It's a call to action. Agencies still relying on manual processes must invest in smarter tools, streamlined workflows, and proactive strategies to meet the demands of today — and prepare for tomorrow. The complexity is real, but so is the opportunity to modernize and lead with transparency, efficiency, and trust.

QUANTIFYING COMPLEXITY IN PUBLIC RECORDS

As the leading provider of cloud-based workflow automation for government agencies, Granicus is uniquely positioned to deliver actionable insights into the public records landscape — much like how NASDAQ tracks market trends or the ADP Jobs Report monitors employment shifts.

Traditionally, the public records industry has relied heavily on annual request volume to gauge workload. But volume alone doesn't tell the full story. Not all requests are created equal. Simple requests — like those for arrest records — often arrive alongside more complex ones involving large volumes of responsive documents or oversized files such as video footage.

Some requests require clarification to narrow their scope, triggering multiple rounds of communication and review. These interactions add layers of complexity and extend the time needed to fulfill each request.

This report captures those nuances. It reflects the operational realities faced by records managers today — from handling diverse file types to managing multi-step workflows across departments.

> "The landscape of public records has shifted dramatically. What used to be a manageable stream of requests has evolved into a complex web of formats, platforms, and expectations. From video files and emails to AI-generated content, records managers are navigating unprecedented challenges. Without automation and smart workflows, the risk of burnout and non-compliance grows exponentially."
>
> **— Megan Asikainen, Director Product Management, Granicus**

To build the Public Records Complexity Index, Granicus analyzed anonymized data from approximately 240 representative agencies — spanning state, county, and city governments — selected for their high variability across key metrics. This data is volume-adjusted and tracked quarterly to reveal meaningful trends.

The Complexity Index offers a statistically grounded view of how public records operations are evolving. It helps agencies understand the mechanics of request processing, assess the impact of major events, forecast future demands, and justify investments in technology and staffing.

Network of 900+ public records clients

30+ years of experience in the government space

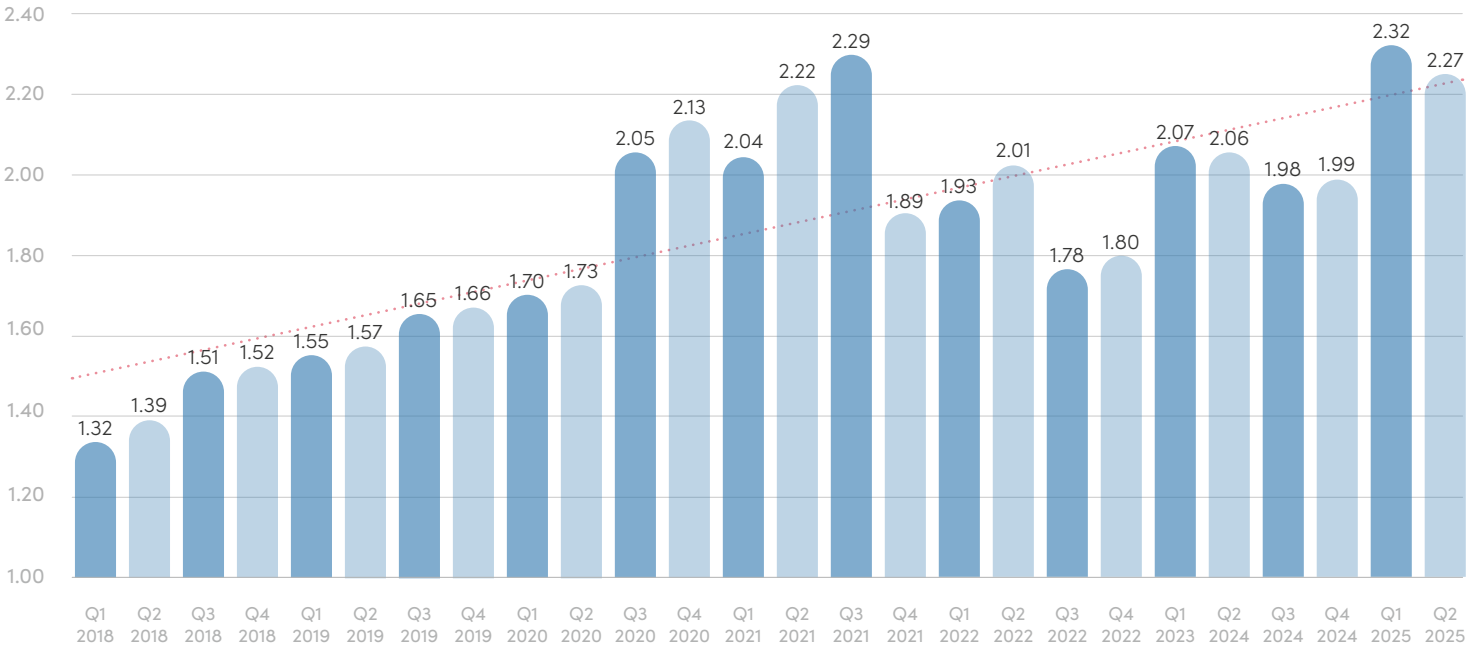
Serving 6,000+ federal, state & local governments around the world

Assists 500K employees across all 50 states (500+ state departments), as well as **400+ federal cabinet-level government agencies** (58 defense partners)

HISTORICAL TREND

The Public Records Complexity Report — Public Records Complexity Quantified

The Public Records Complexity Index



The Public Records Complexity Index - Up 72% since 2018

TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS COMPLEXITY

Since 2018, the complexity of public records management has undergone a profound transformation. What began as a gradual shift has accelerated into a full-scale operational challenge for agencies nationwide. **The Public Records Complexity Index, now up 72%,** reflects this steady climb — driven by expanding data formats, rising request volumes, and increasingly intricate workflows.

Granicus has developed a robust methodology to quantify this evolution. By analyzing anonymized data from nearly 500 public records customers and narrowing the focus to 240 agencies with high variability across key metrics, we've created a representative snapshot of the most common experiences in the field.

These agencies — comprising 25% state, 20% county, and 55% city organizations — provide a statistically significant foundation for understanding how complexity is growing. The data is adjusted for volume and tracked quarterly, offering a dynamic view of how operational burdens shift over time.

By examining the dimensions of complexity through both records markers and activity markers, the report reveals how agencies are adapting — or struggling — in the face of mounting demands. These insights are designed to support strategic decisions around staffing, budgeting, and technology investments.



Metrics Definitions

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF COMPLEXITY

At its core, complexity refers to the degree of intricacy or interconnectedness within a system. In the context of public records, complexity arises from three primary dimensions:



Scale
The volume of elements involved in processing requests.



Diversity
The range of formats and types of records.



Connectivity
The number of interactions and dependencies required to complete a request.

These dimensions are shaped by a variety of external and internal forces:

- **Legislative Shifts:** New laws and mandates introduce updated release schedules, exemptions, and reporting requirements. They also expand the definition of responsive records — including police personnel files, bodycam footage, and legislative communications.
- **Technological Advancements:** The transition from paper to digital formats has added complexity. Agencies now manage emails, text messages, social media posts, AI-generated content, chatbot interactions, drone footage, and self-destructing messages.
- **Societal and Environmental Factors:** Events like government and police reform movements, the shift to remote work, public sector staffing changes, cyberattacks, extreme weather, and election-related uncertainty all contribute to rising complexity.

To capture the operational impact of these drivers, Granicus tracks eight key metrics — grouped into two categories:

RECORDS MARKERS

These indicators reflect the complexity of the records themselves:

Quantity of Response Documents: Measures the number of individual documents provided to requesters. More documents mean more steps — from uploading and reviewing to redacting and releasing.

File Size of Response Documents: Assesses the total size (in megabytes) of all files sent. Larger files often contain multimedia elements that require more time and effort to process.

Video Files: Tracks the number of video files (.mp4, .avi, .mov) involved in requests. These files are large, time-consuming to redact, and often require specialized tools.

OCR Processed Images & PDFs: Counts scanned documents and PDFs that require optical character recognition (OCR) to become searchable. These files often originate from paper records and add complexity to digital workflows.

ACTIVITY MARKERS

These metrics measure the human effort required to fulfill requests:

Average User Interactions: Indicates how many staff members are involved in processing a request. More touchpoints mean more coordination and complexity.

Clarification Emails Generated: Reflects the number of back-and-forth communications needed to clarify vague or broad requests. These interactions extend processing time and increase workload.

Total Time Spent: Captures the cumulative hours required to complete requests. This metric is influenced by all other factors — from file volume and format to staffing and workflow efficiency.

Together, these benchmarks form the foundation of the Public Records Complexity Index, offering agencies a data-driven lens to evaluate performance, anticipate future demands, and guide strategic investments.

REQUEST VOLUME

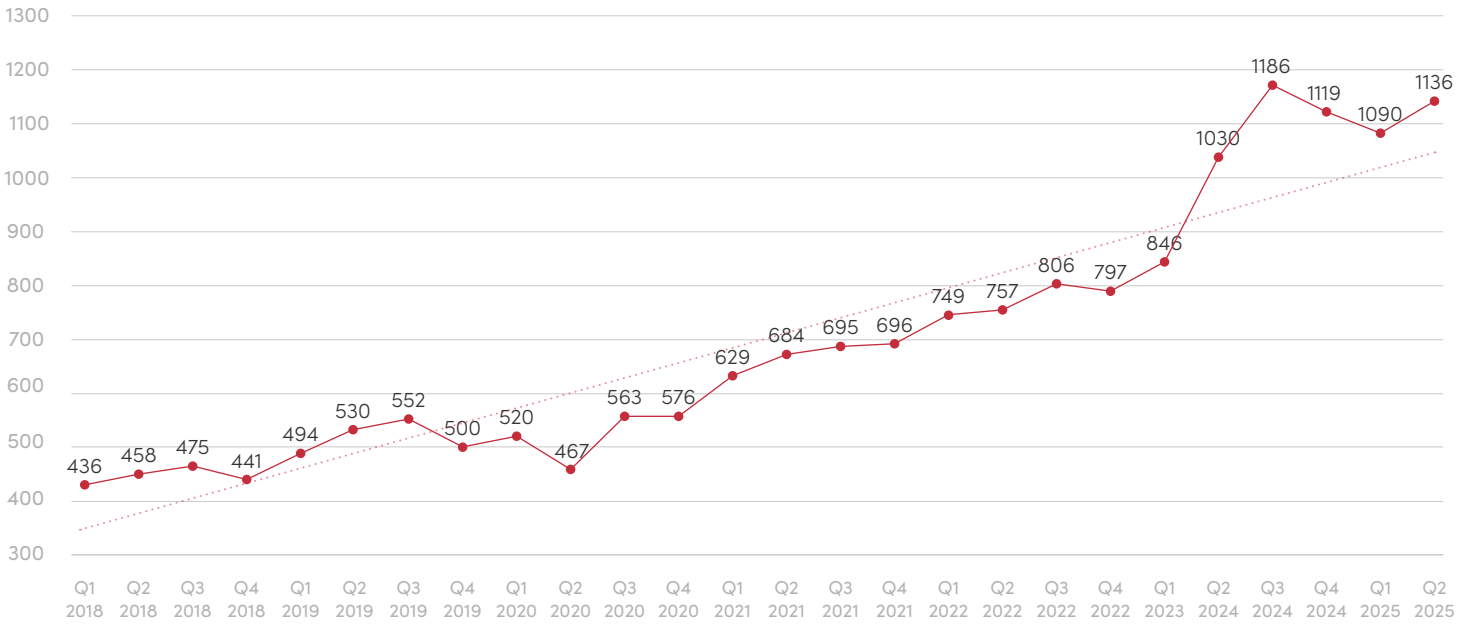
Request volume remains one of the most widely used indicators of public records workload — typically tracked by the number of requests received monthly or annually. In this report, we define **Request Volume** as the total number of requests submitted to member agencies.

While volume varies significantly across jurisdictions, the trend is unmistakable: requests are increasing. Large agencies — such as populous state, county, or city governments — may receive anywhere from 4,000 to 15,000 requests per year. Smaller municipalities might see fewer than 100 annually. But regardless of size, agencies are experiencing a steady rise in demand.

High-profile events — including officer-involved incidents, election controversies, or major policy shifts — often trigger surges in public records activity. These spikes can persist for months as journalists, citizens, advocacy groups, and other agencies seek clarity and accountability.

The **161% increase in request volume since 2018** reflects more than just heightened public interest. It signals a broader shift in how the public engages with government data — using records not just for information, but as a tool for oversight, transparency, and civic participation.

Request Volume - Average Per Quarter



Request Volume - Up 161% since 2018

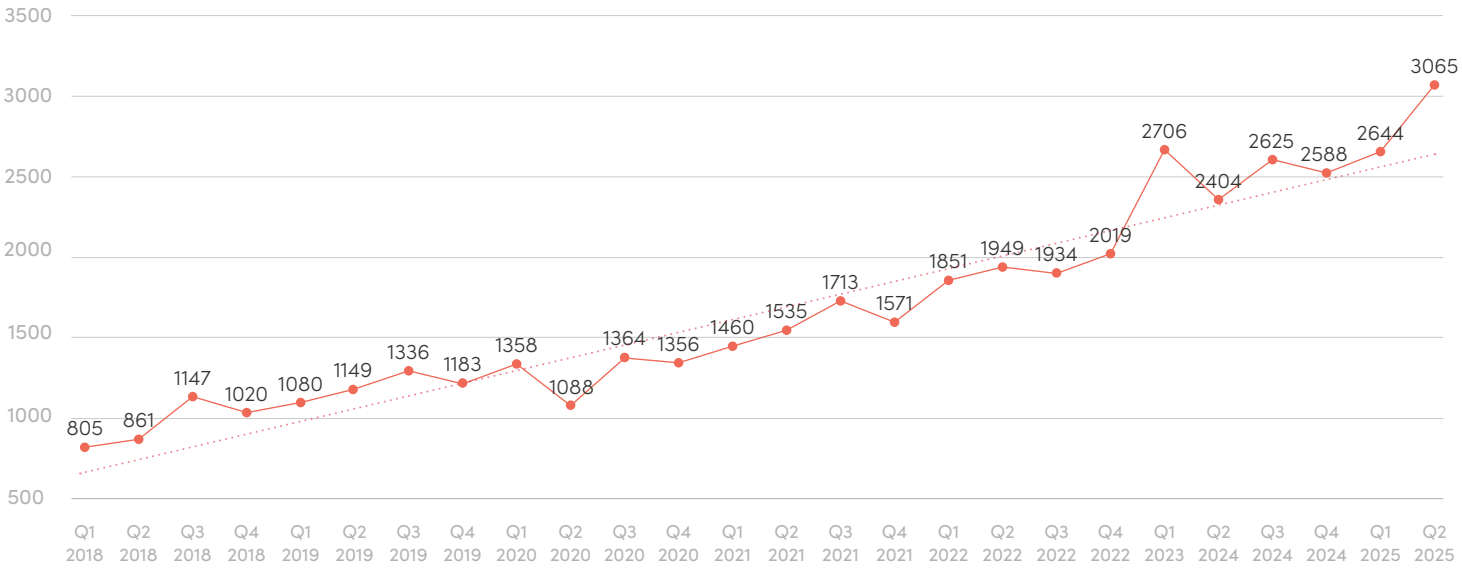
Records Markers

The Records Markers category focuses on the characteristics of the records themselves — offering insight into how the nature of public records contributes to operational complexity. These markers help quantify the scale, diversity, and technical demands of the files agencies must process.

QUANTITY OF RESPONSE DOCUMENTS (COUNT) The quantity of response documents metric is a count of individual documents provided to requesters, averaged by volume.

This metric captures the average number of individual documents provided in response to public records requests. Each additional document adds to the workload — requiring upload, review, potential redaction, and final release. The more documents involved, the more intricate the processing becomes.

Quantity of Response Documents

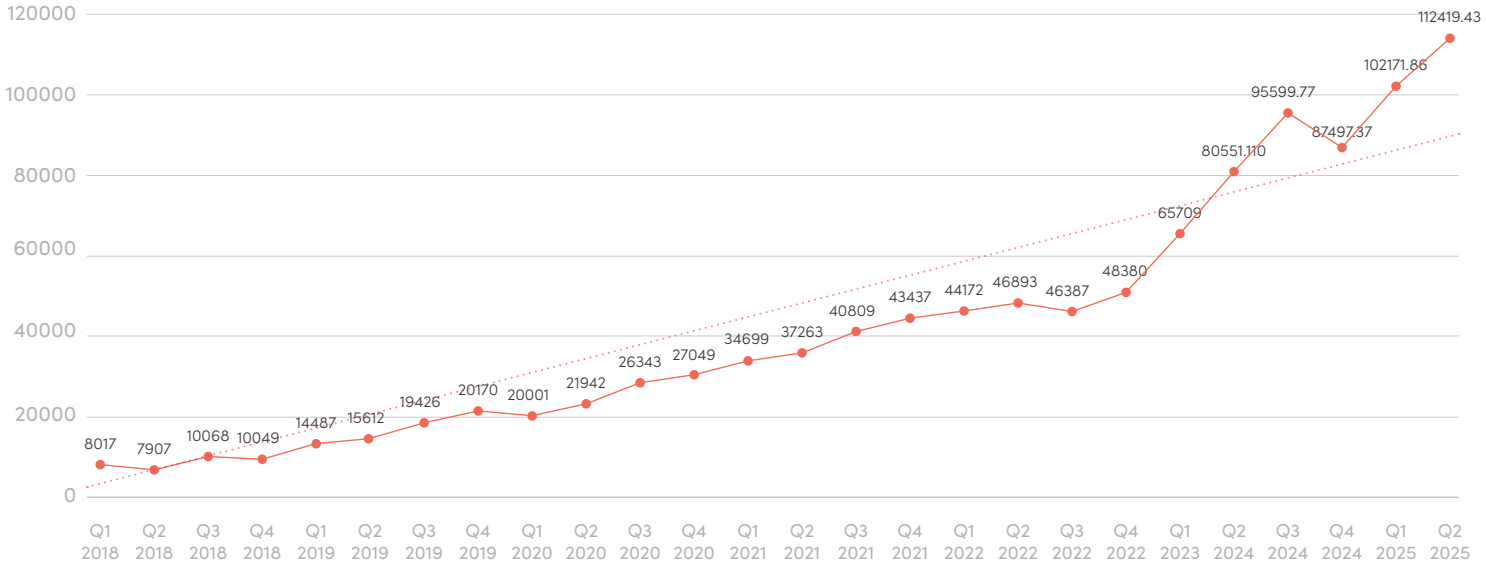


Quantity of Response Documents (count) - Up 46% since 2018

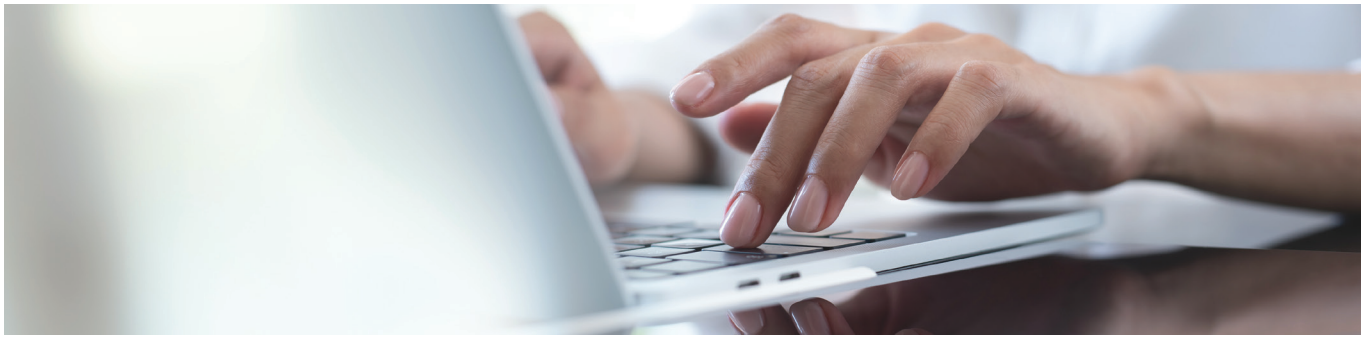
FILE SIZE OF RESPONSE DOCUMENTS (MB) Measures the scale of complexity as the total size — in megabytes — of all documents sent to requesters.

Measured in megabytes, this metric reflects the total size of all response files. Larger files often contain multimedia elements — such as images, audio, or video — that require more time and effort to review and redact. File size is a key indicator of processing intensity.

File Size of Response Documents



File Size of Response Documents (MB) - Up 438% since 2018

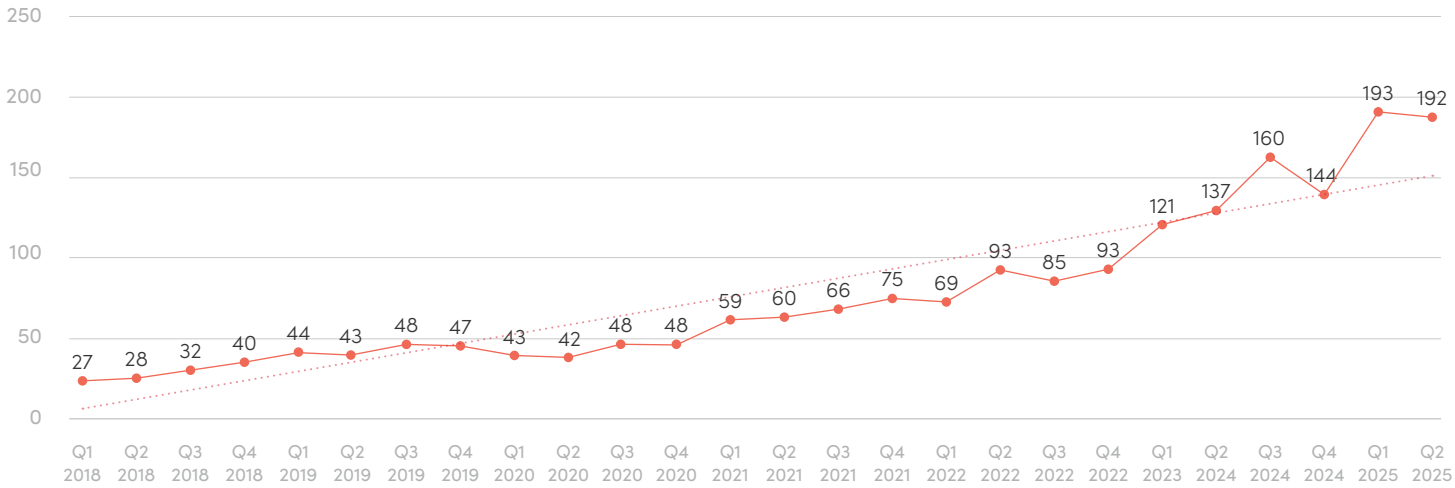


FILE TYPE GROUP: VIDEO FILES (COUNT) Measures both the complexity scale and diversity as the count of all video files inside the public records request management system (identified by file extension such as .mp4, .avi, and .mov).

This marker tracks the number of video files (.mp4, .avi, .mov) included in public records requests. Video files are among the most complex to manage — due to their size, upload/download times, and the specialized redaction required to obscure sensitive visuals (like faces, license plates, laptops) and corresponding audio.

Using AI-enabled software to automatically identify these elements in the video/audio timeline is a new way to reduce some of the complexity in video/audio redaction. However, whether using sophisticated AI tools — such as those available from Granicus in partnership with Veritone (VERI) — or manual methods of redaction, complexity increases the more video files an agency must process for public records requests.

Video Files in Responses

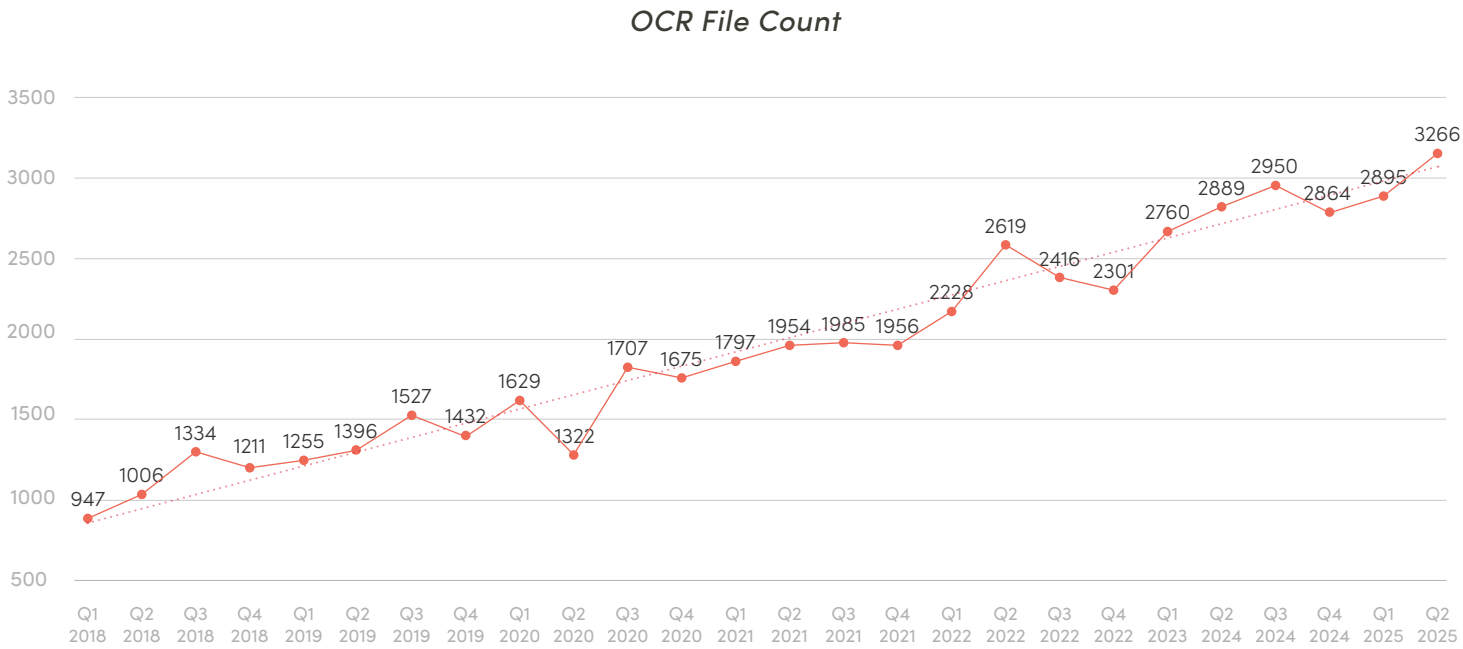


Video Files (count) - Up 173% since 2018

FILE TYPE GROUP: OCR PROCESSED IMAGES & PDFs (COUNT)

Measures both the complexity scale and diversity as the count of all OCR scanned documents and PDFs processed by the Granicus OCR robot.

This metric counts scanned documents and PDFs that require Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to become searchable. These files often originate from paper records and must be converted to machine-readable formats before review and release — adding another layer of technical effort.



OCR Processed Images & PDFs (count) - Up 32% since 2018

Learn more about OCR here: https://granicus.com/wp-content/uploads/Infographic-OCR-Explained-GovQA.pdf

Activities Markers

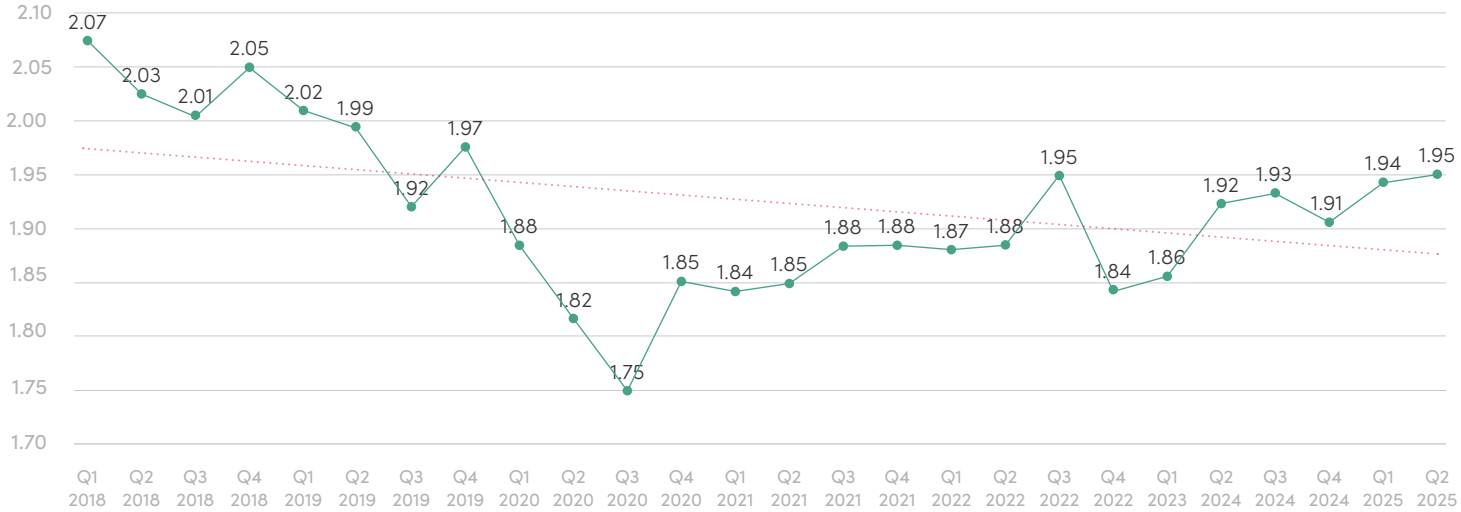
AVERAGE USER INTERACTIONS (COUNT) Measures connectivity-induced complexity as the average number of staff involved in a request.

This metric reflects the number of staff members involved in fulfilling a request, measured by unique user IDs. A request handled by a single person is relatively straightforward. But when multiple individuals — including records managers, legal teams, and reviewers — are involved, the complexity increases significantly.

Each additional touchpoint introduces coordination challenges, review cycles, and potential delays. Requests can range from solo efforts to multi-department collaborations involving eight or more people.

(Note: While interactions declined overall, recent trends suggest a rebound — possibly due to broader, multi-departmental requests.)

Average User Interactions



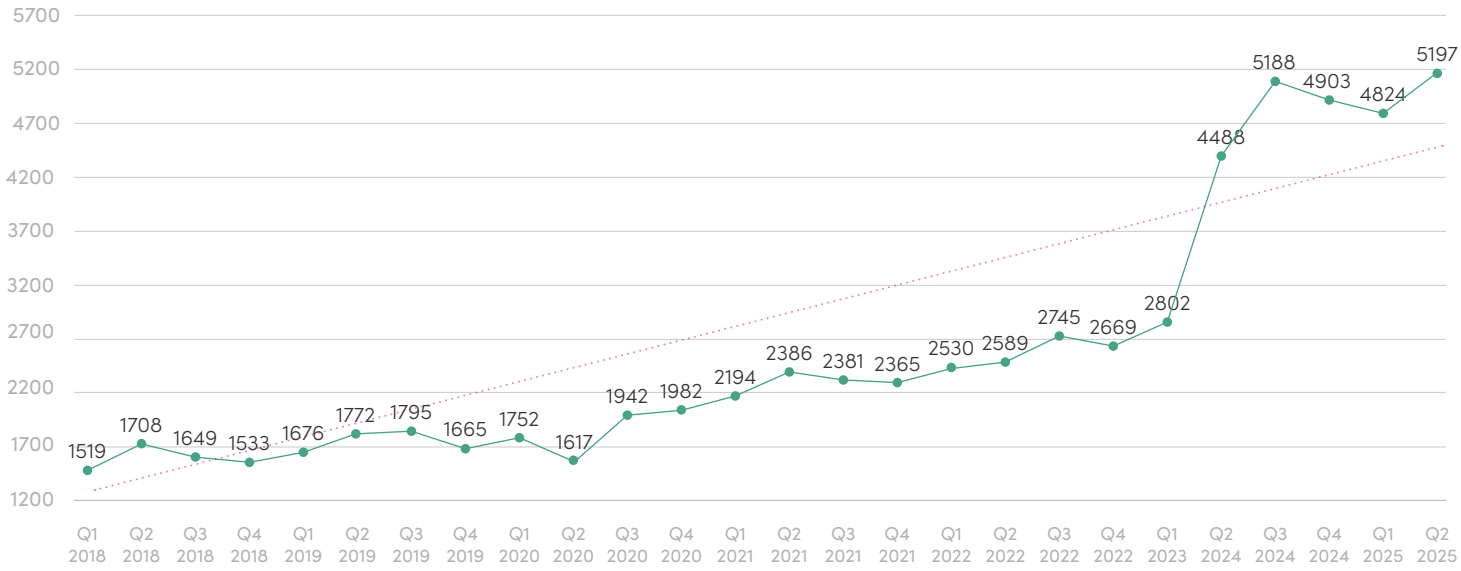
Average User Interactions (count) - Down 64% since 2018

CLARIFICATION EMAILS GENERATED (COUNT) Measures complexity as connectivity by counting the number of clarification emails generated between requesters and those managing requests.

This metric tracks the number of clarification emails exchanged between requesters and agency staff. As public awareness of records access grows, more first-time requesters are entering the system — often with vague or overly broad inquiries.

Clarification emails help narrow the scope, but they also add time and complexity. Even with automated templates and merge tags, each exchange represents an additional step in the fulfillment process.

Clarification Emails



Clarification Emails (count) - Up 31% since 2018

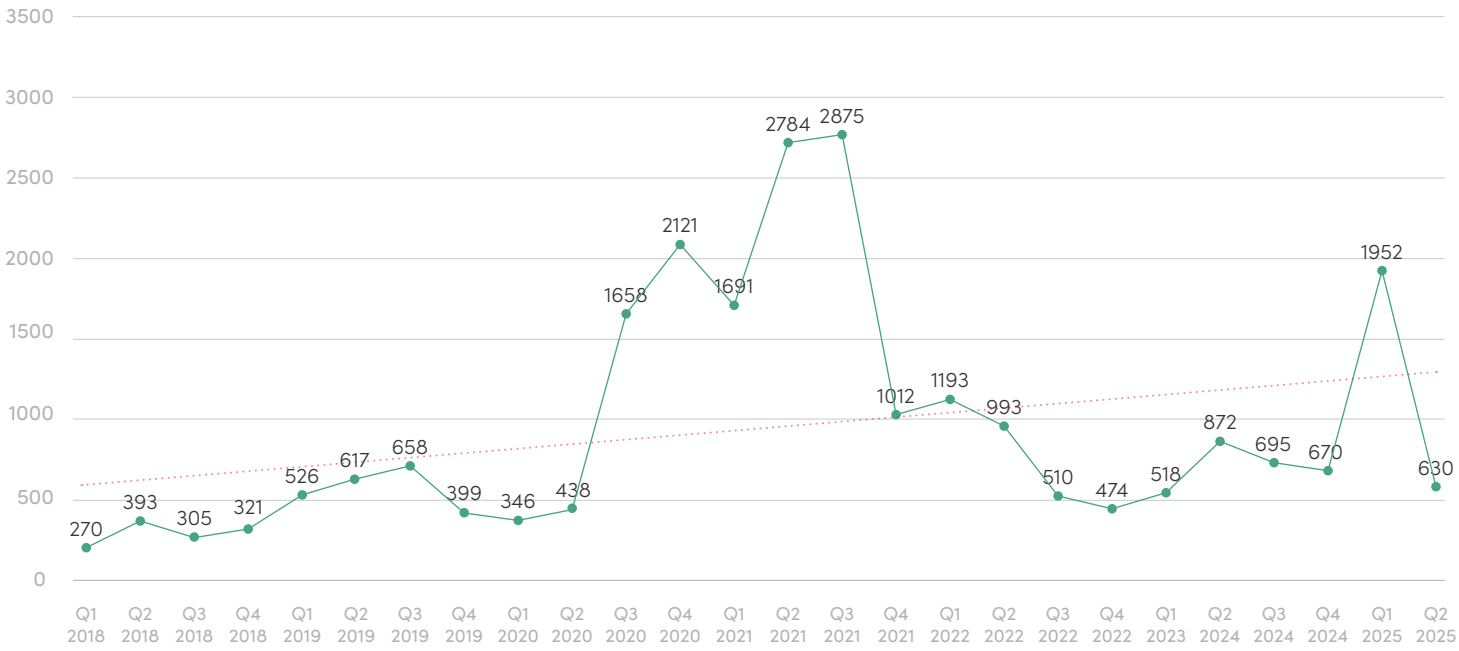
TOTAL TIME SPENT (HOURS) Measures the scale of complexity as the number of hours spent processing requests.

This benchmark measures the cumulative hours required to complete requests. It's influenced by every other factor — from the number and size of files to the format (e.g., video, OCR) and the number of people involved.

Requests that require clarification, involve multimedia content, or span multiple departments take longer to process. Even with automation, the time commitment remains a key indicator of operational strain.

Together, these activity markers reveal the behind-the-scenes effort required to meet rising public expectations. They underscore the need for smarter workflows, better collaboration tools, and automation to reduce staff burden and improve responsiveness.

Total Time in Hours



Total Time Spent (hours) - Down 10% since 2018

Conclusion

MODERN GOVERNMENT CAN TURN COMPLEXITY INTO OPPORTUNITY

The rising complexity of public records isn't just a challenge — it's a catalyst for transformation. Agencies that embrace modern technology and streamlined processes can shift from reactive to proactive, unlocking new efficiencies and improving service delivery.

Granicus offers a suite of solutions designed to meet this moment:

- **Predictive Deflection Tools:** Empower requesters to self-serve, reducing staff workload and request volume.
- **Smart Intake & Response Templates:** Minimize back-and-forth communication and accelerate fulfillment.
- **AI-Powered Video Redaction:** Cut processing time by up to 90%, reducing risk and freeing up staff resources.
- **Bulk Actions & Automation:** Handle large volumes of documents with ease, eliminating repetitive tasks.
- **Centralized Workflows:** Improve collaboration across departments and reduce total time spent.
- **Email Request Automation:** Convert massive .pst files into clean, searchable, and redactable formats.
- **Large File Optimization:** Enable staff to continue working while files are processed in the background.

Public records are more than a compliance obligation — they're a powerful tool for civic engagement. When agencies modernize their approach, they not only meet legal requirements but also build trust, transparency, and public confidence.

ABOUT PUBLIC RECORDS

Every U.S. state has its own open records law, modeled in part on the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). While the names and specific provisions vary, the core principle remains consistent: governments must make public records accessible to citizens, journalists, and other agencies within a defined timeframe.

These laws also include exemptions — protecting sensitive information such as personal identifiers (e.g., Social Security numbers), medical data, and other privacy-related content. Agencies are required to redact this information before releasing records, adding another layer of complexity to the process.

Public records laws are designed to promote transparency, accountability, and civic engagement. They empower individuals to understand how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how public institutions operate. But as the volume and variety of records grow — and as public expectations evolve — agencies must modernize their approach to stay compliant and responsive.

ABOUT GRANICUS

Granicus is the leading provider of cloud-based public records automated workflow software for state, county, and city governments. Our customers use our software to more easily process and manage public records requests from residents, the media, attorneys, businesses, and other government offices, ensuring secure intake, control, and timely release of responsive records in compliance with the law. One hundred percent government focused for more than 30 years, Granicus has the largest public records customer base in the industry — with 110+ of the top 300 U.S. cities; 45% of top U.S. counties; and 80+ state agencies.

Granicus is here to help

Our public records experts are available to walk you through these metrics and trends one-on-one. Discover how complexity may be impacting your agency — and explore actionable strategies to improve responsiveness, reduce risk, and lead with best-in-government automation.

Get in Touch