

2027 Legislative Concepts for the PRAC Subcommittee

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8/5/2026

1) Public Records Capacity Grant Program

Concept:

Establish a recurring, dedicated fund to support staffing, training, and system improvements for public records compliance — prioritizing small, under-resourced and backlogged jurisdictions.

Key Elements:

- Administered by the Public Records Advocate (or DOJ-equivalent office)
- Simple biennial reporting showing:
 - Reduced litigation
 - Faster response times
 - Backlog reduction
- Main funding: General Fund appropriation as part of core function of democracy
 - Potentially also a small fee (“transparency surcharge”) at the point of creation of certain records, such as court filings, building permits, vehicle registration, etc.
 - Potentially a subscription service such as participation in the Technology Collaborative (see concept #3 below)

Eligible uses:

- Hiring or contracting temporary public records coordinators during surge events or to eliminate a backlog
- Technology upgrades (tracking, redaction, retention tools)
- Other backlog reduction projects

Priority criteria:

- Demonstrated backlog or request volume surge
- First-time applicants or historically under-resourced entities
- Evidence of strong public-interest fee waiver practices

- (Potentially: Participation in the Technology Collaborative – see concept #3)
- Regional or shared applications (such as cities + county jointly) allowed

Evidence of need:

[Survey feedback](#) showed that compliance failures are often capacity failures — not bad faith.

2) Public Records Mutual Aid & Surge Support Program

Concept:

Similar to the way the Public Records Advocate offers legal support, establish a technical aid program such as a formal “mutual aid” system or “surge response” roster for high-volume or high-profile requests.

Structure Options:

- Housed within the Public Records Advocate’s Office
- Maintains a ‘strike team’ roster of:
 - Trained temporary staff on various modalities (GovQA, ORMS, etc.)
 - Contracted subject-matter experts (legal review, redaction, digital forensics)
- Deployable upon request or when certain public interest thresholds are met

Triggers for Use:

- Use of the “safety valve” provision in public records law allowing for extended delivery time if staff are not available [ORS 192.329 \(6-8\)](#)
- Sudden spike in requests (e.g., major incident, media attention)
- Requests of exceptional complexity or size
- Demonstrated backlog beyond statutory timelines

Mutual Aid Agreement Template:

- Create a model intergovernmental agreement (MOU) for:
 - Staff sharing
 - Cost reimbursement
 - Temporary reassignment

Funding Model:

- State covers baseline program costs
- Optional cost-sharing between governments for extended deployments

Evidence of need:

[Survey feedback](#) and PRAC public comment often highlights “flashpoint” events that overwhelm small agencies.

3) Statewide Public Records Technology Collaborative

Concept:

Create a collaborative software licensing program or state-run IT solution for records management, while adding shared tools and services that support the full public records lifecycle — intake, tracking, review, redaction, and disclosure. Leverage state contracting purchasing power to modernize records management.

Core Components of software collaborative project:

- **Build or provide** group licenses for public records request tracking
 - Redaction tools compatible with common public records formats
 - Provide public-facing request portals
- Develop AI-assisted tools that help agencies identify both potential exemptions and opportunities for disclosure, ensuring consistent, transparent, and narrowly tailored redactions. Such a tool would be designed to promote maximum lawful disclosure and include human oversight and auditability.
- Search tools that can ingest/export from **state and locally-managed** records
- Email/text archiving tools that feed into **existing** retention structures
- Transparency by design
 - Standardized metadata fields to improve searchability across agencies
 - Model “public records tags” (e.g., frequently requested categories)
 - A statewide data dictionary for commonly requested record types

Cost savings:

State-negotiated contracts for records management systems, facilitating cost savings from sharing licensing spots and extra operability for smaller jurisdictions.

Implementation Approach:

- Start as opt-in, with incentives (grant eligibility tied to participation? See #1 above)
- State provides technical and training assistance for onboarding.

Evidence of need:

[Survey feedback](#) and public comment shows fragmented, outdated, or nonexistent systems — especially in small jurisdictions.