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WashCOG ranks agencies on how quickly they complete records requests

The Washington Coalition for Open Government has released “Winners & Sinners,” its list of state and local agencies ranked according to the average time they take to complete public records requests over a five-year period.

The North City Water District, a public utility in Shoreline, posted the quickest response time. On average, the utility completed its records requests in 0.4 days between 2018 and 2022.

The Evergreen State College, a public university near Olympia, took the longest time to fulfill records requests. Its five-year average was 114.8 days.

The average for all reporting agencies over five years was 19.6 days.

WashCOG based its list on self-reported agency data gathered by the state Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee. For its Winners & Sinners lists, WashCOG ranked agencies that reported data for three or more years. Averages based on three to five years are more indicative of agencies’ sustained performances.

WashCOG in February published a comprehensive report on the alarming condition of Washington state’s Public Records Act. The report concluded the people’s right to know is eroding in our state. This trend must be stopped and reversed. The report is available online at washcog.org.

On the Winners list, the second-best agency for fulfilling public records requests was the Clover Park School District south of Tacoma, with an average completion time of 0.6 days. NORCOM 911, an emergency dispatch center serving 20 public safety agencies in northeast King County, was third. It fulfilled records requests in an average of 0.9 days.

Nine of the 10 best agencies for completing records requests were local agencies. The single outlier was the state Department of Licensing, which posted an average of 2.9 days, the best of any state agency.

By comparison, six of the 10 performers on the Sinners list were state agencies. In addition to The Evergreen State College, the 10 sinners included the state departments of Children, Youth and Families;

Fish and Wildlife; and Health. Washington State University and the state Senate were also among the bottom 10 performers.

The Bellevue School District posted the second-longest average wait time for completing records requests, at 100.4 days. Four of the 10 worst performers were educational agencies.

At first glance, the data suggest no clear connection between an agency's performance and the volume of its records requests. One of the best performers, NORCOM 911, completed 2,939 records requests in 2022, while the worst performer, The Evergreen State College, completed 146.

Likewise, a top performer, the Clover Park School District, completed 133 records requests in 2022. The second-worst performer, the Bellevue School District, completed 135 requests that year. More analysis is needed.

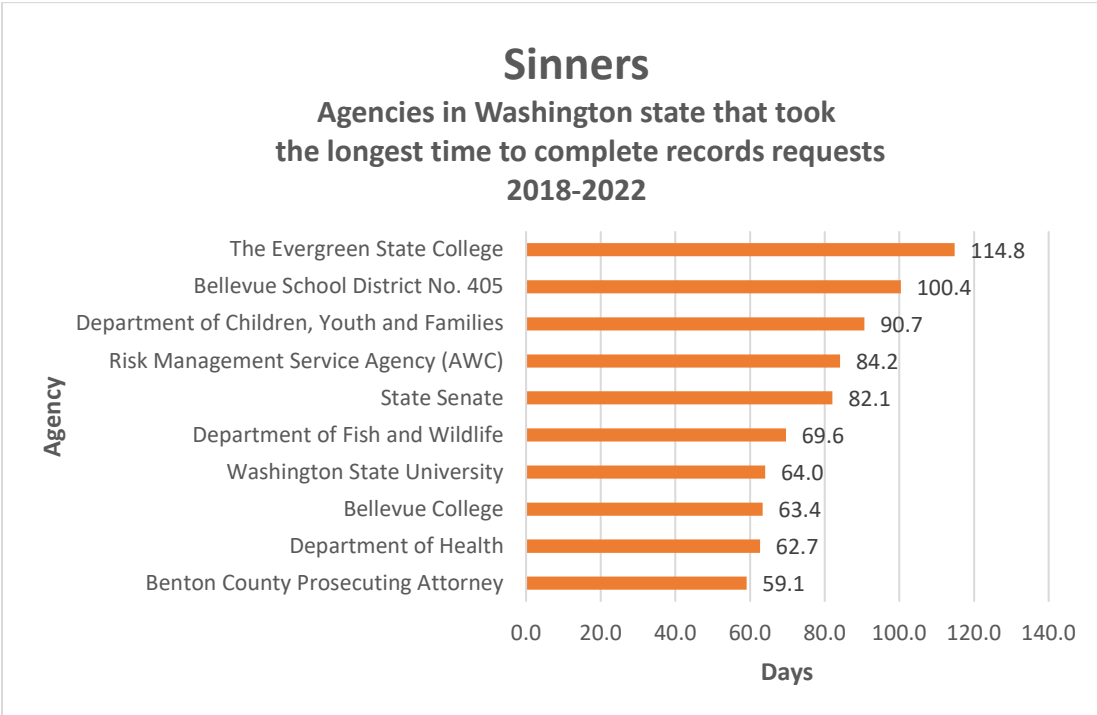
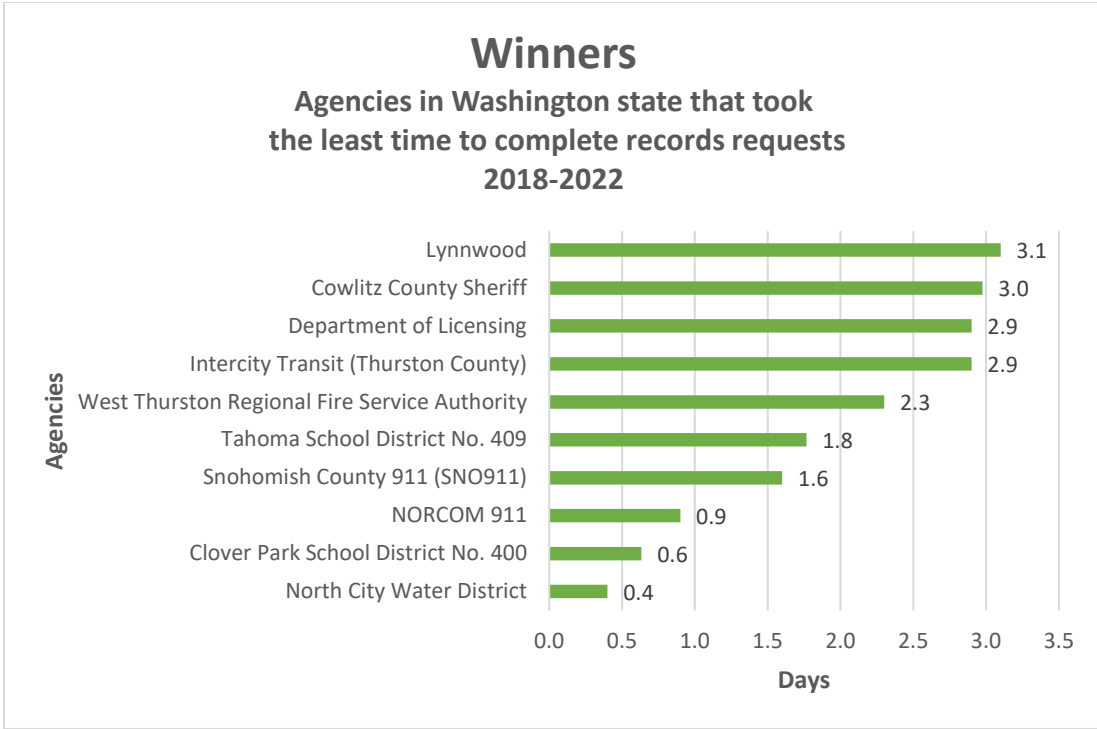
Methodology

WashCOG mined the state Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee's public records reports for the years 2018 through 2022. Agencies that spend more than \$100,000 a year on records requests are required to submit their data to the committee; all other agencies may report voluntarily. The committee has compiled complete-year reports on more than a dozen records metrics for calendar years 2018 through 2022. Response rates vary considerably, with the Legislature, counties and higher education the most likely to submit reports for 2022. Public schools and special purpose districts were the least likely to file reports that year.

We compiled five years of committee data on one of its metrics, average days to final disposition of public records requests. We then combined and sorted the data, omitting agencies that failed to report or entered zero, which appear to be data-entry errors. For our Winners & Sinners lists, we ranked agencies that reported three or more years, which is more indicative of their sustained performances.

WashCOG is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded in 2002. We are an independent, broad-based advocate for public records, open meetings and informed citizens.

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Average days to final disposition of records requests for agencies that reported for three or more years between 2018 and 2022.

Sources: Washington state Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee data. Analysis by the Washington Coalition for Open Government