The GIPA Act 12 months on

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Records Managers' Forum

The purpose of the GIPA Act

The object of GIPA is to open government information to the public by:

- a proactive release of government information by agencies

- an enforceable right for the public to access government information

- only restricting access when there is an overriding public interest against disclosure.

Formal applications are to be a last resort.

The purpose of the OIC

The Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC) was established as part of the new right to information system:

- – promotes public awareness and understanding of right to information legislation
- – provides information, support, advice, assistance and training to agencies and general public.

May receive complaints about anything covered by the GIPA Act, and conduct external reviews of certain agency decisions.

The aims of the NSW reforms

- Simplify and streamline access

- Promote open discussion and contribute to public debate

- Enhance government accountability

- Inform public about the operations of agencies

- Ensure effective oversight of public funds expenditure

- Reveal or substantiate misconduct or negligent, improper or unlawful conduct.

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Critical success factors

- Effective records management systems and processes

- Appropriate IT capabilities and capacity

- Strong service orientation

- Feedback loop into agency

- Good communication

- All underpinned by a culture of openness

Good systems are vital

Systems that :

- – allow staff to find what information is needed when it is needed (knowledge management and records management)
- – track and report on formal access requests
- – ensure overall compliance with the GIPA Act (for instance, annual reviews of publication guides)

Plus appropriate delegations to ensure the protections of the legislation apply

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Promoting an open culture

- A proactive approach to releasing information about the agency – led from the top

- A plan for updating all communications aimed at the public and for reviewing internal policies for proactive release

- Accessible complaint and feedback loops into the agency

- Change of thinking to 'government information is a public resource'

- Monitoring complaints made to and reviews conducted by oversight body

ICT: access = service

- Accessibility of website

- Ability to easily upload information of interest to the public

- Maintaining up-to-date information

- Reviewing ICT governance

- Information security – ensure this is appropriate and takes into account both access and privacy factors

What the OIC is seeing

Challenge: Cultural change – how to find the right levers

Strategies the OIC is employing:

- **Open**

- **Engaged**

- **Here to help (capacity building, reinforcing benefits, tapping into existing constituencies)**

What are we seeing – the full spectrum of responses: from in denial and defensive through to creative engagement and a focus on clients and stakeholders and being truly citizen centric.

Test your own organisation

Does your agency ask these questions?

- – **Of the public: "We are always interested in hearing from you about what you want to hear from us. Can you please let us know?"**

- – **Of itself: "What useful information or data do we hold that we can make available to the public?"**

OIC statistics and feedback

Since 1 January, demand has continued:

- **2,000 + phone calls and emails**
  - **over 60% from the public**
- **205 requests for assistance**
  - **84% for reviews of agency decisions**
- **submissions to Administrative Decisions Tribunal**
- **focus on increased community engagement**
- **two Guidelines**
- **three major investigations**

Contact details

go to www.oic.nsw.gov.au

email oicinfo@oic.nsw.gov.au

call 1800 INFOCOM (1800 463 626) between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays)

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