

## Office of General Services Government Transparency Plan

The New York State Office of General Services (OGS) embraces proactive transparency in an effort to engage with the public and help New Yorkers understand what OGS does and how it affects them. Because OGS's primary mission is to provide services to other State agencies, we have fewer public-facing programs than most State agencies. Nevertheless, OGS recognizes that the proactive sharing of information and data helps the public become more educated about their government and can potentially reduce the number of requests for information under the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). Proactively sharing information with the public can also help State government broadly as other agencies and the Legislature can find information and answers to questions without time-consuming searches or telephone or email inquiries.

There are three categories in which OGS has plans to improve government transparency:

1. Making Information Available on the OGS Website and Social Media; Expanding Language Access
2. Improving Response Time on FOIL Requests and Proactively Posting Frequently Requested Information
3. Complying with Executive Order 95 Regarding Open Data NY

### **1. Making Information Available on the OGS Website and Social Media; Expanding Language Access**

#### Current Transparency Efforts

OGS currently leverages our website to disseminate information to the public, agency, and local government customers, contractors, and vendors in several key areas:

**Centralized contracts**—OGS is responsible for establishing and administering the nearly 1,500 contracts for goods, services, and technology that can be used by all State and local government agencies. To assist the public, vendors, and our government agency customers, OGS posts solicitations, contract awards, bid opening results, announcements, information for vendors, buyer resources, and training opportunities.

**Contracts for design & construction**—OGS awards 515 contracts for the design and construction of State buildings and administers over 525 construction projects each year for OGS and other State agencies. OGS posts solicitations, bid results, and contract awards for both construction and consultants.

**Real property & facilities management**—OGS manages 50 State office buildings and major related facilities, and we post extensive information to help the public locate and navigate our State office buildings, including dining options and parking facilities. In addition, for the projects we undertake at these buildings, we post project descriptions, bid results, and contract awards.

**Auctions of surplus property**—OGS posts announcements of auctions of both surplus real property and surplus personal property, including surplus vehicles.

**State lands**—OGS provides information for the public on our website regarding State lands, including lands underwater, research aids for surveyors, title searchers, and other real estate

professionals, and information about how to request maps of State lands. In addition, we post some of the more interesting historical maps in the OGS map collection.

**Contracting opportunities for MWBEs and SDVOBs**—OGS assists Minority- and Women-owned, and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses by posting upcoming contracting opportunities, bid results, and contract awards, information on outreach events, and frequently asked questions.

**Green purchasing**—OGS posts a multitude of information regarding environmentally sustainable operations and green procurement programs underway at OGS and across State government, including 57 procurement specifications for green products that have been finally approved by the GreenNY Interagency Committee created under Executive Order No. 4 (2008) and continued by Governor Hochul's Executive Order No. 6. Tentatively approved specifications are posted for public comment on these webpages, as well as an archive of video recordings of prior meetings of the GreenNY Interagency Committee.

**Special events**—OGS advertises and promotes public events at our facilities, including the farmers markets, free concerts, our annual Fourth of July and holiday tree-lighting events, fireworks displays, exhibits, and tours of the Capitol, Empire State Plaza, and Empire State Plaza Art Collection.

**Mandated reports**—OGS posts on our website the reports we are required to prepare and submit in accordance with statute or executive order, including:

- The Green Procurement and Agency Sustainability Progress Report
- The Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses annual report
- The Design/Build Project Report
- The Food Products Procured by Agencies Report
- The list of Non-Responsible Entities
- The list of Non-Responsive Entities under the Iran Divestment Act
- The list of Companies Engaging in Boycott, Divestment, or Sanctions Targeting Israel

#### Future Transparency Plan

To promote even greater transparency going forward, in the next 6 to 12 months, OGS will be enhancing its website and increasing its social media presence to further highlight contracting and other opportunities by:

- Issuing a weekly news release to highlight those opportunities and awards to the press and public
- Consolidating contracting information in a section on the OGS website to make it easier for users to access all OGS contracting information in one spot rather than requiring the user to search for each business unit by section.
- Highlighting a link to the OGS datasets hosted on Open Data NY
- Maintaining a contemporaneous, consolidated list of authorized centralized contract users to facilitate all communications
- Posting to the website the Taxpayer Guide to Public Procurement and Competition Document
- Increasing the use of social media for providing information to centralized contract authorized users, vendors, and taxpayers

- Finalizing the OGS database consolidation project to provide searchable data across all contracts on our website and to collect additional data that could be shared
- Promoting special events, concerts, tours, farmers markets, auctions, etc. on the website and social media
- Evaluating opportunities to facilitate language access, with our priority on public programs such as virtual visits, tours, event advertisements, and exhibits
- Identifying and assessing other opportunities to facilitate language access on our website

## **2. Improving Response Time on FOIL Requests and Proactively Posting Frequently Requested Information**

### Current Transparency Efforts

As an ex officio member of the Committee on Open Government, OGS takes its responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Law very seriously. OGS has implemented and is currently using the FOIL Workflow system, developed by ITS, to process all FOIL requests and administer the program in the most efficient manner possible. The system allows us to track all requests and provides cues for various response times within the process, as well as email prompts upon assignment of requests from one individual to another. The system also provides the convenience of having a single electronic depository for all correspondence, processing activity, and responsive records.

OGS actively monitors all requests to identify frequently requested records that should be considered for posting on the website. When we receive a request for information that is already posted on our website, we provide the requester with a link to the records rather than providing copies. To reduce response time, we send responses to requests via email whenever possible. Responsive records are most often sent in pdf form attached to an email unless the records are too large to email, in which case we may mail electronic records on a flash drive.

### Future Transparency Plan

With the advent of the Open FOIL NY website, which allows requesters to submit the same request to up to three agencies simultaneously, OGS has received significantly more requests—many of which are for records not maintained by OGS. We suspect many of these misdirected requests are attributable to the agency having “general” in its name. In an effort to eliminate the burden that misdirected requests impose on the program, we are currently exploring the elimination of one or two layers of approvals for such “no responsive records” requests, which should free up staff time to devote to other requests.

## **3. Complying with Executive Order 95 Regarding Open Data NY**

### Current Transparency Efforts

Open Data was designed for government transparency. OGS is currently in compliance with Executive Order 95, continued by Governor Hochul’s EO 6. OGS has procedures in place to ensure having timely, accurate, and complete updates to its datasets published on Open Data NY. ITS staff has assured OGS that all OGS datasets have been refreshed according to their posting frequencies. OGS routinely canvasses its business units to identify additional publishable, complete, high-value datasets.

## Future Transparency Plan

OGS is examining the feasibility of adding other publishable datasets to Open Data NY within the next 6 to 12 months, including surplus real estate transactions, non-responsible entities list, vehicle and other surplus property auction results, energy procured and provided to other NYS agencies and authorities, employee telecommuting percentages, and NYS fleet information.

Over the longer term, OGS is working to complete a searchable dataset of all New York State-owned real property and capital assets. Once it has been completed and tested, OGS will publish that dataset to Open Data NY.

## **Other Transparency Categories**

Although OGS is not able to identify opportunities to improve in every category of government transparency, we thought it useful to provide an overview of our current transparency efforts in these other areas:

### *Ensuring Use of Project Sunlight Database*

OGS, as the agency tasked with overseeing the Project Sunlight program (in coordination with ITS for the technical aspects of the database), continues to promote the reporting of appearances to Project Sunlight internally and offer training to any agency or individual seeking advice or assistance. To this end, OGS maintains the inboxes for [help@projectsunlight.ny.gov](mailto:help@projectsunlight.ny.gov) and [contact@projectsunlight.ny.gov](mailto:contact@projectsunlight.ny.gov). Additionally, our Project Sunlight coordinator was recently in contact with ITS to be granted administrative rights in order to ensure that new users have the proper entitlements to Project Sunlight under their NYSDS accounts so that they can access the system quickly and easily without going through the main help desk at ITS.

### *Posting Documents in Advance of Open Meetings*

OGS chairs or co-chairs two public bodies—the GreenNY Interagency Committee and the NYS Procurement Council—that regularly hold public meetings subject to the Open Meetings Law. All agendas and supporting documents that are to be discussed at the meetings are distributed to the members of these two public bodies as far in advance as practicable and posted on the OGS website along with notice of the meetings in compliance with the Open Meetings Law. The meetings are live-streamed on the internet, whether the meeting is in-person or virtual. The GreenNY Interagency Committee has a public comment period on each meeting agenda.

### *Updating Records Retention Policies and Ensuring the Timely Transfer of Records to State Archives*

The OGS Records Management Officer is responsible for the organization and proper storage of paper files (approximately 8,000 boxes) and electronic files on computer tapes, discs, microfilm, and microfiche (38 boxes) in accordance with the NYS Archives General Retention Schedules. OGS is in constant communication with NYS Archives to ensure that records are properly processed. In the case of unique historical records, we ensure that such records are transferred to the NYS Museum. OGS personnel are trained to properly identify and either retain internally or transfer records to the NYS Archives for transparency critical in potential litigation matters, FOIL requests, and State audits. An emerging issue is the changing landscape of records management, including the storage and transfer of digital/electronic records.