

How Streamlining Records Requests helped The OCSO Manage the Death Investigation of Bob Saget

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Located in the heart of the Sunshine State, also known as Florida, is the Orange County Sheriff's Office, which serves a jurisdiction of 1.4 million residents and includes the notorious amusement attraction, Walt Disney World. Rooted in a strong commitment to transparency, the OCSO recognized the importance of complying with Florida Public Records Law, or Sunshine Laws. The OCSO enlisted NextRequest to implement a public-facing records request portal that allows the Sheriff's Office to field public records requests in a cataloged and timely manner.

Serving Orange County

The Sheriff's Office implemented NextRequest to help better manage the 35,000 public records requests it receives annually-, roughly 77 per day. Request types ranged from 911 calls and body camera footage to employer background checks. But no public records request is too small or inquisitive for the agency's commitment to transparency, led by Sheriff John Mina.

"I think it is a challenge, but it is just what we do," said Undersheriff Mark Canty. "Being able to tell our residents and visitors what we're doing and letting them see what we're doing without looking like we're trying to hide something, is very important to the Sheriff's office."

The records request process is simple. A resident or media member can visit <https://ocso-fl.nextrequest.com/>, type in the required information, and their request is fed immediately through the portal to the Sheriff's Office staff. Because the OCSO is committed to a timely response to public records requests, the ease associated with the NextRequest system is crucial.

"The portal is user-friendly and intuitive, not only for us internally, but for anyone submitting a records request," explained Corporal Sergio Uribe of the OCSO Strategic Communications Unit. "Whether it is documents, 911 calls, or body-worn camera footage, we can get those records to them fairly easily and in a timely manner."



Ready for Anything

On January 9th, 2022, Bob Saget, who gained notoriety for playing Danny Tanner on the sitcom "Full House," passed away in his hotel room at the Ritz Carlton Orlando. As news organizations began receiving word of Saget's death, the OCSO, the lead investigative agency, in this case, received numerous public records requests through NextRequest. Requesters were searching for information related to the death investigation and hailed from national media outlets including CNN, TMZ, and more. Thankfully, with the help of the public records request portal, the OCSO was able to promptly respond to 58 records requests on the subject of Mr. Saget.

"To this day, we have received numerous requests through the NextRequest system referencing Mr. Saget," explained Corporal Uribe. "We have the filter feature, as part of the Document Workflow, where we can search specific names and keywords, allowing us to see all tasks assigned to us. Who made those requests, what information we've already provided, and documents, reports, body-worn camera footage, and photos if appropriate."

While the attention the OCSO received throughout the investigation of Saget's death may have been more significant, the department's record request protocols remained intact.

"It's important for our agency to provide records in a timely manner and comply with Florida law," said Uribe. "And in this case, I think we did as appropriate and what we were able to release in compliance with Florida law."

In some cases, the agency receives duplicate records requests, but the NextRequest Centralized Document Hub allows OCSO staff to quickly locate records that have already been made public and re-assign the same records to an open request. The feature proved helpful in response to the influx of records requests regarding Bob Saget.

"Each request is unique," stated Uribe. "However, some of the information that they're asking for is the same, and if it's already been uploaded, and we've already redacted, reviewed, and released it, then it's easy for us to attach that to the new request and provide a response exponentially faster to the requester. It reduces the burden on us as an agency, and we can respond quickly to records requests."





NextRequest Features That Help The OCSO

When dealing with requests that need to be passed through numerous commands, tracking who handles which responsibility can prove challenging. Due to the size of the OCSO, this was precisely the case for the agency, as multiple staff members worked each request. But with the NextRequest Audit Trail, all activities are recorded, and transparency can remain intact.

"The audit trail and timeline feature is extremely helpful from when a request is opened and a task is assigned," said Uribe. "We see those tasks, as well as who has been added, who has been removed, and what tasks were completed. And I think in that audit trail, that entire timeline, we can see from start to finish what steps we've taken, what has been removed or added, released, and all that is important for us internally and externally as we fulfill public records requests."

NextRequest also assigns tasks, and organizes them on a portal page until they are fulfilled. The status of each request indicates what needs to be completed by date and user, allowing the workflow to operate without a hitch.

"For us in media relations, when we go to all tasks and select tasks assigned to us, we can see that there are a number of requests that are due or about to be due or still open and active tasks assigned to us," said Uribe. "So I think that's our best feature to see us as a section, what we need to do, and what we need to accomplish. And we can also see what other tasks are assigned to other sec-

tions within the agency. So we know if we need to nudge someone, we can gently remind them of their task."

The OCSO can handle the number of records requests it receives while keeping the county safe because of its commitment to the NextRequest public records request workflow. When a newsworthy event occurs, such as Bob Saget's passing, the OCSO can easily handle the influx of requests within its NextRequest portal.

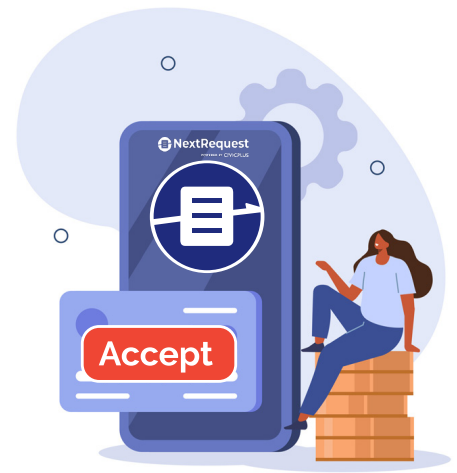
"If we didn't have one specific system that could receive all of our records requests, I think it would be extremely cumbersome to track every request, whether it be a phone call, an email, an in-person or online request," explained Uribe. "I think that would be difficult for any entity to handle those requests. So having NextRequest, having that online facing portal, having one specific place that an individual can go to so that we as an agency can provide those records is helpful."

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