



## REVOLUTIONIZING FOI REQUESTS



# HOW GOVERNMENTS ARE SUPERCHARGING EFFICIENCY AND TRANSPARENCY WITH BOOKA AND NUIX

## OVERVIEW



The Freedom of Information Act aims to ensure government-held information is managed as a national resource. Statistics from the OAIC annual report show approximately 34,200 FOI requests were made to agencies and ministers last financial year. This represents a significant and continued increase in FOI requests.

Freedom of Information (FOI) is also known as Data Subject Access Request (DSAR), Right to Information (RTI), Access to Information (ATI), and SO52 around the world. Government departments and agencies around the world are facing an influx of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Most, if not all, are struggling to keep pace with the demand.

FOI requests are incredibly complex, encompassing vast volumes of data. Data can range from historical handwritten records with unique and often illegible text, to more modern digitized records held in various locations. Meaning finding, reviewing, and analyzing the right documents for an FOI request is a time-consuming process. FOI processing times consistently fail to meet the statutory standard, leading to a concerning trend of relying on deadline extension requests; causing chronic delays.

Manual processing of FOI requests is also taxing to the FOI team resources, often leading to high staff turnover. Difficulties of recruiting experienced FOI practitioners, staff training, increased complexity, and volume of FOI request caseloads, all cause processing delays.

Backlogs of FOI requests, that would take existing team members years – and in some cases decades – to clear, risk the quick and fair processing of new FOI requests. Ultimately eroding public confidence and increasing negative sentiment, and negative impacts for those individuals seeking critical personal information about themselves.

**According to The Australia Institute, 97% of all Commonwealth Freedom of Information decisions were more than 90 days late.<sup>2</sup>**

## CHALLENGE

Faced with similar challenges, one government department reached out to Booka Consulting, to seek new, innovative ways of working.

Swamped with FOI requests and a backlog that would take 19 years of effort, for the current team of 17 FOI officers, working full time to clear. The government department wanted a way to increase the speed of completing FOI requests, without adding additional strain on the existing team. Typically complex, an FOI request could contain 20,000 pages of handwritten scanned documents to correlate and process. Additionally, the government department were looking for a solution that could give time back to FOI officers to tackle other critical work, achieving cost and resource savings; and ultimately serving the community better.

**Swamped with FOI requests and a backlog that would take 19 years of effort, for the current team of 17 FOI officers, working full time to clear, one government department turned to Booka Consulting and Nuix.**

### ABOUT BOOKA CONSULTING

Booka Consulting, a Supply Nation registered Indigenous-owned company was founded to stimulate Indigenous entrepreneurship, provide management consulting, solutions services, and recruitment for federal, state, and local government.





# SOLUTION

Nuix, in partnership with Booka Consulting, was able to demonstrate a technology solution that could ingest, sort, categorize and make sense of huge volumes of unstructured data. Supporting the existing FOI team to complete FOI cases; managing them 95% faster than the current manual process.

Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution was deployed to help this government department to get to the answers faster, easier, and smarter. Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution was able to ingest terabytes of unstructured information, analyze, catalogue, search, tag, and with the power of AI; understand where the key information, related to the specific FOI request, was stored. Including identifying what confidential information within that paper, required redaction before the information could be released to the public under the FOI request.

*“Using Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution the FOI officer - within an hour - had a complete understanding of the entities (people and organizations) in the case. They also had an automated table of contents with all record types identified and had applied FOI rules for automatic redactions. In addition, a categorized list of bulk redactions outlining the FOI legislation as to why the data had been redacted was available; then all they required was a review.” – Jason Pepper, CEO, Booka Consulting.*

# FOI FLEXIBILITY

The team at Nuix and Booka Consulting, sat down with three highly experienced FOI officers to train the AI model so it could automate key functions of the FOI response process. Taking only two weeks to build the solution, Booka Consulting and Nuix created 119 reusable AI models to fine tune the solution, specific to the departments record set, to handle FOI requests.

*“The Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution was customized for the FOI process, giving the government department a robust, repeatable and automated workflows. With an intuitive interface Nuix Neo Data Privacy for FOI was not only customized for FOI requests, but instantly useable.” – Fran Corby, Head of Government, Sales, Australia & New Zealand, Nuix*

*“With only half an hour of training, we had experienced FOI officers effectively using the tool, creating models and working on an FOI case from start to finish – having never seen the technology before.” – Jason Pepper, CEO Booka Consulting.*

# MINUTES NOT MONTHS

Dramatically reducing strain on the FOI team, Nuix Neo Data Privacy was deployed to comb through huge volumes of unstructured data. Over 3.5 million documents were ingested by Nuix technology, which simultaneously split files into individual pages; then categorized, reviewed, and analyzed the documents to identify the exact paperwork and key forms related to the FOI request. Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution delivered the essential 5,000 pages and produced a fully hyperlinked table of contents; in minutes not months.

Accurately producing a table of contents is a crucial step in the FOI process, one that typically takes an experience FOI officer working full time weeks to complete. This timesaving alone could bring FOI request responses back into regulatory required timeframes. Ultimately reducing risk, reducing the cost of fines, and saving hundreds of hours of tedious manual work, reviewing psychosocially hazardous material for FOI officers.



**Nuix Neo Data Privacy saved the team between 77 days for a simple FOI request and 420 days for a larger request – having a searchable, clickable, linked table of contents was a real game changer for the FOI team.**

**Vikas Pandit**  
Principle Technology and Security Consultant,  
Booka Consulting

With Nuix Neo Data Privacy an FOI officer can instantly bring up the entire dataset – no longer manually sifting through different files, documents, and records.

## REDUCED REDACTION TIME

Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution was also implemented to assist the process of redaction. As each FOI request is governed by legislation and data privacy laws, there are two forms of redaction required: 'automatic' and 'bulk' redaction. Prior to using Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution both automatic and bulk redactions were processed manually; with an experienced FOI officer assigned to read and redact individual words, names, entities, and phrases as they found them; often taking months for a single FOI case.

This is where the technology could really shine. With a core list of words that must always be redacted, automatic redaction was possible. However, with documents ranging from 40-year-old handwritten forms to digitized records that had been scanned and rescanned over the years, the readability and quality of the data meant that it was assumed to be a task only humans could complete. Experienced FOI officers were astonished at the speed and accuracy that the solution could review, understand and recommend redactions for both handwritten and computer printed text; leveraging Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Optical Character Recognition (OCR).

*"With Nuix, the technology instantly highlights every entity that it thinks requires redaction, includes the rule, and then a human decides what should and shouldn't happen."* – Shane Jansz, Global Head of Customer Solutions, Nuix

While the entire FOI process cannot be automated, true time and resource savings were achieved, freeing up critical FOI staff to better serve the community. Time savings will allow team members to clear the backlog of FOI requests faster, upskill and take on other critical projects.

## NEXT STEPS

Motivated by the impact of Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution for FOI requests, the government department plans to leverage the solution to identify and remove high risk data from their systems, including PII and other sensitive information.

*"Nuix Neo Data Privacy solution helps [the government department] to be the best custodians of information, enabling FOI cases to be processed faster and with greater transparency - ultimately better serving the community."* – Gerard Byrne, Vice President, Sales, Australia & New Zealand, Nuix.

## REFERENCES

1. OAIC Annual Report 2022-23, Published October 2023: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/about-the-OAIC/our-corporate-information/oaic-annual-reports/annual-report-2022-23>
2. The Australia Institute's submission to the Senate inquiry as reported in The Australian Financial Review: Freedom of information delays a 'cancer' on access, Published 1 October 2023: <https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/freedom-of-information-delays-a-cancer-on-access-20231001-p5e8ua>

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[www.nuix.com/contact-us](http://www.nuix.com/contact-us)



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We help customers collect, process and review massive amounts of structured and unstructured data, making it searchable and usable at scale and speed, and with forensic accuracy.

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