

Intake Process Suggestions for the Department of Safety and Professional Services

Statement of Problem: The Intake Process for Client Queries is Severely Backlogged.

The creation of the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), merging the former Department of Regulation and Licensing (DRL) and parts of the former Department of Commerce (Comm), has created logistical problems for the staff and the clients we serve. Clients on the phone and in e-mails frequently complain about being transferred to voice mail and waiting weeks or even months for a response to their queries. Obviously hiring more staff would take care of this backlog of requests, but just as obviously, the hiring of new staff is not feasible at this time due to budgetary constraints. Therefore, streamlining the client intake process to make it more efficient is the ideal.

Suggested Solutions:

1. Recreating the DSPS website from scratch to reflect the merging of the two former departments and to provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available.
2. Investigating the phone intake system to accurately handle incoming queries.
3. Clearly defining the responsibilities of staff into “who processes what professions and renewals” and communicating this information to front desk staff.
4. Hiring two dedicated full-time front desk staff to initiate the intake process and to offer feedback to refine and continuously improve the intake process.

First and Foremost: the Website

Many DSPS clients will look to the website first for information. We should concentrate our resources on updating this immediately, and because the website is easy and inexpensive to update, the anticipated changes to the DSPS organizational chart can be posted as they occur. An “Updated on” with month and year at the bottom of each page can alert end users to the most recent updates.

I recommend recreating the website, rather than a simple merging of the existing sites, to make use of the best of the DRL and Comm sites. For example: the former DRL site has a wonderful online calendar to announce its board meetings that includes links to meeting agendas and other materials, which the former Comm site does not utilize. However, the Comm site has a direct link to the Administrative Code utilized by the department that the former DRL site lacks. Plus, DRL utilized the term “boards” while Comm utilized the term “councils” to define similar groups; however, some are statutorily mandated, while others are not; thus a need for differing terminology that also must be communicated to our clients and those who serve on these boards and councils.

See attachments for my proposed DSPS website.

Phone Intake System

I made one phone call to the departmental Integrated Voice Response (IVR) system, and as I feared, it is “answering system hell” – if you’ll pardon the expression. Plus, the IVR invites the client to “press 0 for an operator.” Because so many clients wish to speak with a “live person”, 0 frequently is pressed before going through the options on the IVR. Please see my recommendations under “**The Case for Two Front-Desk Staff**” as a means to alleviate “answering system hell,” and possibly eliminate the need for the IVR.

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Who Processes What Professions and Renewals?

Although front desk staff has a list of who processes the various former DRL professions, the staff has received feedback that this information is not the most up-to-date, nor does it deal with some of the more common queries and requests such as:

1. How do I change my name on my license?
2. With which states does Wisconsin have reciprocity for this license?
3. Where do I find information on a new license mandated by Statutes and/or Administrative Code (e. g. radiography)?
4. Has my license (or renewal) been processed? Do you need more information from me to expedite this process?
5. How long does it take to process my license/renewal?
6. How do I obtain a copy of my license?
7. Where can I find an application for a license?
8. Which application do I need to use to apply for a license?
9. Where do I verify a license?
10. The website is not working; how do I... (see questions above)?

Of course, many of these questions can be answered via an updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page on the website (see attachment); however, some people still will call with these questions, and front desk staff needs to have the latest information to expedite the intake process. Training for the front desk staff, as well as for division heads, needs to be done to effectively communicate changes in staffing of the various licenses and credentials. I recommend adding this important information to the DSPS Intranet Site, so that it is easily searchable and updatable by front desk staff.

The Case for Two Front-Desk Staff

Having volunteered to staff the front desk every morning for two weeks, I learned what this job entails and why two persons are needed.

1. The phone rings constantly, and it has multiple lines. To prevent a client from being transferred to voice-mail automatically and allow the client to speak to a “live person”, two people are needed.
2. Despite the improved intake system and two staff at the front desk, voice mail messages still will occur and will need to be handled. Answering voice-mail is nearly impossible with a constantly ringing phone and dealing with walk-in clients. Thus, a second person could deal with voice-mails while the first person deals with incoming calls and walk-in clients.
3. The second person also could handle the review and transfer of e-mails to general e-mail inboxes.
4. Two dedicated front desk people available would allow for more time to talk with clients (either on the phone or as walk-ins) and respond to their queries, possibly without having to transfer the clients to other staff. For example: many of the FAQs (above and on the attachment) can be answered by front desk staff if they had the time to respond (i. e. the second staffmember can handle the phone while the first person is taking the time to respond to the client).

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5. As changes to the intranet are needed (who processes what license), the division manager can e-mail that information to the front desk staff, who could make said changes quickly, knowing it directly affects their work processes.
6. The two person system would allow for automatic back-up for breaks, time-off, and emergencies.

Of course, all this would be dependent on formal training for the staff in intake processes. Training would need to include:

1. An introduction to the DSPS website and its various pages.
2. How best to direct calls and walk-in clients.
3. The most common questions asked and how to answer them.
4. Access to the most accurate and up-to-date information about the department.
5. Information about what is not handled by DSPS, and where to transfer those queries (e. g. concealed carry permit queries go to the Department of Justice at 608/266-1221).

Thank you for taking the time to consider my proposals. Please remember that these are suggestions, and therefore I know that not all of them – if any – will be implemented. However, I do have the best interests of the department in mind and heart, and I have experience not only with working the “front lines” of this department, but over eighteen years of state civil service as well.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachment: DSPS website proposal