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Authors:

[Ronnie L. Miller](#)

What We Can Learn from the Indiana Professional Licensing Agency's Modernization Efforts

There are 40 regulated professions in Indiana that are governed by 36 appointed boards. The agency responsible for coordinating all of this work is the Indiana Professional Licensing Agency (PLA). Unfortunately, PLA has frequently been underfunded and understaffed despite the fact that it is both a watchdog over licensed professions and a lynchpin for processing licenses efficiently.

PLA's leadership identified a number of service deficiencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, and after analyzing data collected by the agency, it undertook an agency-wide modernization effort. At a stakeholder update in December, PLA provided information about its modernization efforts, as well as continued challenges in its delivery of services.

Overcoming COVID-19 Setbacks

Specifically, PLA identified the following challenges in 2021: applications that were delayed weeks to months, significant numbers of unprocessed documents, the inability to provide reasonable customer support, high staff turnover, staffing shortages and processing errors. These challenges were significant in light of the fact that PLA received 80688 licensing applications/renewals in 2021. This was an increase of 13,289 applications from 2020 and an increase of more than 27,000 applications from 2019. This overall increase in applications also resulted in an increase in the number of applications handled by each individual analyst, going from 1,513 applications per analyst in 2019 to 1,894 applications per analyst in 2020, and ultimately totaling 2,908 applications per analyst in 2021.

Between the workload and other circumstances, PLA experienced a 70% turnover in analysts in 2021 and experienced an average of 31 days between the filing of an application and its processing. While

most professions are over 95% for electronic submission of their licensure applications, several are still dependent on paper applications, which can create delays and increase processing times. Eight of the professions that still lag in electronic application submission are appraisers, auctioneers, behavioral health and human services, health facility administrators, medical, nursing, plumbing and podiatry.

Improving Processes & Retention Rates

After reviewing the data, PLA leadership implemented a number of process enhancements aimed at improving the processing time and the agency's customer service for all of its stakeholders. A few of these countermeasures included (1) improving technology, (2) developing a better career path for staff, adjusting salaries to boost staff retention, (3) providing an improved training program for employees, (4) making a more relaxed and comfortable work environment, (5) implementing a processing strike force that could help advance applications that had languished, and (6) hiring an external call center to triage initial calls from applicants while allowing more experienced analysts and staff to focus on processing applications.

While no process improvement project is ever truly complete, PLA has experienced significant success from its efforts. Currently, processing time for applications has been trimmed from 31 days in 2021 to four days in 2022. The backlog of applications has been reduced to the point that the oldest new application being processed averages two days, only one renewal application is pending longer than seven days, and the oldest document awaiting action is 34 days—with only 34 documents exceeding seven days of age.

PLA continues to plan for improvements beyond 2023. The agency is anticipating comprehensive review of licensing regulations, along with additional resources and improvements needed for the agency in 2024. It also anticipates continued involvement of stakeholders in its process improvements, including input from associations and individual stakeholders on regulation amendments and other structural changes to the agency.

For more information about Indiana's Professional Licensing Agency or any other Indiana or federal government issue, please contact the author of this article or any member of Frost Brown Todd's [Government Relations](#) team.

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