Resource Brief:

Ombudsman Program Data Management Systems

Prepared by the National Association of State Units on Aging

National Long-Term Care
Ombudsman Resource Center

Acknowledgements

About the Author

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Introduction

This brief presents data describing ombudsman program data management systems. As used in this paper, **"data management system" refers to the software that an ombudsman program uses to collect, report, and analyze data**.[1]

The National Association of State Ombudsman Programs (NASOP) and the Administration on Aging are currently involved in efforts to improve the integrity of program complaint data that states are required to submit to the Administration on Aging via the National Ombudsman Reporting System (NORS). Specifically, the NASOP Data Committee is examining ways to improve the reliability of the complaint data reported by state ombudsman programs and how it can be used in a disaggregate form that permits a more detailed analysis and comparisons at the national level. This work stems from recommendations to improve ombudsman data management, which were developed during a retreat of state ombudsman program representatives in 2002.[2] One of the recommendations contained in the final report of the retreat's proceedings specified that:

> *NASOP should work together with the National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center and the National Association of State Units on Aging in identifying resources for state ombudsmen to develop or purchase state-of -the-art computer systems and software that assist them in improving services and provide ease of data entry and data analysis.*[3]

Task

As part of its work under the National Ombudsman Resource Center (NORC), the National Association of State Units on Aging (NASUA) sought to identify information regarding:

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[1] Data from this resource brief was presented to the National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (NASOP) Data Committee in January 2004, and the NASOP Workgroup to Improve NORS Consistency (WINC) in February 2004.

[2] The retreat, sponsored by the Helen Bader Foundation, was held in Peachtree City, Georgia in 2002 and included state ombudsmen and other entities that support or interact with the ombudsman program.

[3] Proceedings and Recommendations from the NASOP Retreat: Rethinking and Retooling for the Future. NASOP, April 2003, p 33, recommendation 4.4.

1. Current data management (software) systems being used by state ombudsman programs to collect and report program activities, and

2. Resources being used by ombudsman programs to establish, maintain or upgrade those systems.

This effort updates information previously collected from state long-term care ombudsmen in 1999, and reported in June 2000, by the NORC regarding the computer software systems then being used by state long-term care ombudsman programs. Data on forty-four (44) states was included in the report, *State Long Term Care Ombudsman Program Computer Utilization*. The general categories of information used to collect data in 1999 were adopted by NASUA as a starting point for development of this resource brief.

NASUA convened a conference call, in September 2003, with members of the NASOP Data Committee to discuss the specific types of information to collect. Comments from the committee were incorporated into the questions to be asked of state ombudsmen. The Data Committee also reviewed the final set of questions before they were emailed to state ombudsmen.

Based on review of the 1999 Center survey and input from the NASOP Data Committee it was decided to focus on the following areas of ombudsman program data management:

➢ capabilities of data management systems being used;
➢ local ombudsman programs' use of data management systems; and
➢ resources for maintenance, upgrade and expansion.

In October 2003, an email survey was sent to all state long-term care ombudsman programs. (See Appendix A for a list of survey questions.)

Findings

Responses to the survey were received from 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico during October and November 2003. The findings indicate that states are continuing to develop their data management systems, and the capabilities of those systems are increasingly similar across states when compared to information obtained by the Resource Center in 1999[4]. Significant findings include:

➢ 41 (79%) programs have a relational database, compared to 31 in 1999;

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[4] Forty-four (44) states responded to the 1999 Center survey on computer utilization.

➢ 39 (75%) programs have data systems that produce a report with all the NORS-required quantitative data, compared to 32 in 1999; and

➢ 19 (36%) programs are using the same software system (OmbudsManager) for data management, compared to 39 programs using 20 different systems in 1999.

Findings presented in this section paint a more complete picture of the current data management capabilities of state ombudsman programs than was previously available. This information is intended to serve as a resource for state ombudsman programs and state units on aging in considering options for electronic data management of ombudsman data and as a base line for the NASOP Data Committee to use in their efforts to improve the consistency and reliability of ombudsman data.

Data management systems and capabilities

Data management systems used by state ombudsman programs (based on 51 responses)[5]

OmbudsManager = 19 (36%)
(AK, CA, CO, DC, HI, ID, IA, MD, MN, MT, NJ, PA, RI, SD, TN, VT, VA, WA, WI)

System developed by in-house staff = 9 (17%)
(CT, DE, MO, NH, NY, ND, OH, TX, WV)

Ombud 2.0/3.0 = 5 (9%)
(KS, MA, MO, SC, UT)

Microsoft Access = 4 (7%)
(AZ, ME, NM, NV)

OmTrak = 3 (5%)
(HI, KY, OR)

Other (includes systems custom designed by outside vendors) = 11 (21%)
(AL, AR, FL, GA, IL, IN, LA, MI, NC, PR, UT)

Manual (no electronic system) = 3 (5%)
(NE, OK, WY)

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[5] Note: Hawaii, Missouri and Utah reported using two systems.

The graph below depicts the number and types of data management systems in use by state ombudsman programs as of November 2003. The most significant change from 1999 when similar data was collected by the NORC is that OmbudsManager (Synergy) is used by more programs (19 of the 51 respondents) than any other data management system. This vendor-developed program has only been available during the last two and one-half years, and no program reported using it in the 1999 survey. A chart of the data management system each state ombudsman program is using, and some of its capabilities, can be found in Appendix B.

Ombudsman Data Management Systems
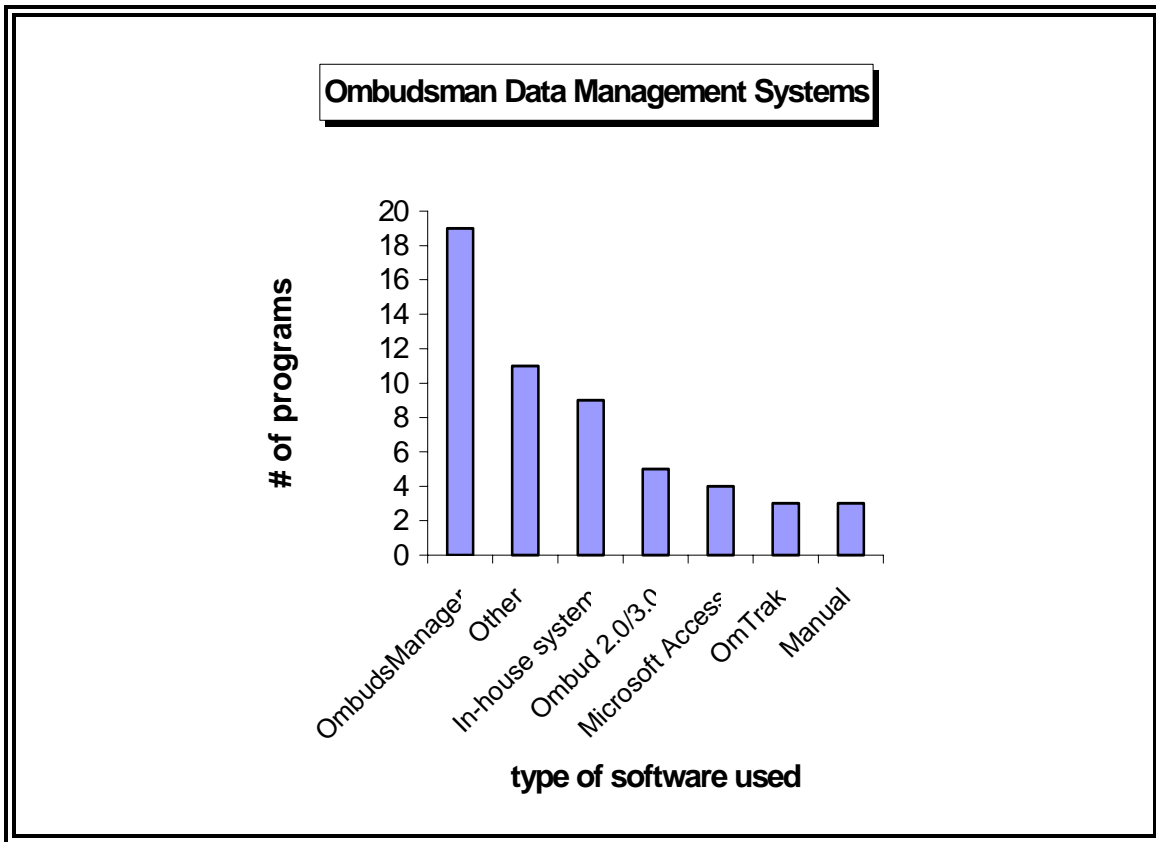
State ombudsmen were asked about two key aspects of their data management systems --- technical support for the system and system capabilities.

Customer service and technical support

Of 45 responses:

➢ 24 of 27 programs that use a data system that was purchased from a vendor, reported that customer service was available and satisfactory. Three programs (KY which uses OmTrak, and MA and SC which use Ombud) reported that customer service was not available and/or not satisfactory.

➢ 17 of 18 programs that use a data system developed in-house, reported that they have access to the technical support needed to operate their data management systems and make system modifications as needed. One program (IL which uses Cobalt) reported they do not have access to technical support.

Data management system capabilities

As noted earlier:

➢ Thirty-nine (39) programs have data management systems that produce a report with all the NORS-required quantifiable data, compared to 32 in 1999.

➢ Forty-one (41) programs have a data management system with a relational database, compared to 31 reporting that capability in 1999.

The graph below highlights the differences in these two areas of data management system capabilities between 1999 and 2003.
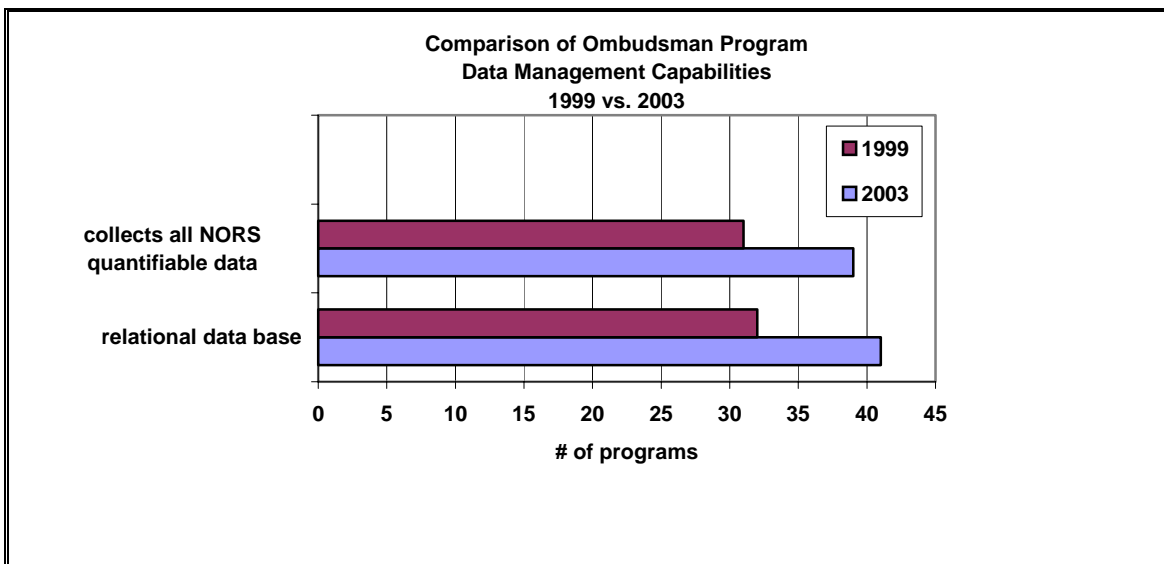
Six (6) programs (AL, GA, MI, NV, SC, TX) reported that the ombudsman program's data is linked to another data collection system (i.e., state unit on aging, or umbrella organization housing the program). Confidentiality of ombudsman data in these

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six states is protected; only approved ombudsman staff can access program data that includes complainants' and residents' names or other identifying information.

Data management systems used by local ombudsman programs[6]

Thirty-nine (39) programs with local ombudsman programs have a statewide, uniform data collection and reporting system. Of those 39 programs:

➢ 26 programs (AL, AR, CO, CT, DC, ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, ME, MD, MI, MN, MO, MT, NC, NV[7], ND, PA, PR, SC, TX, WA, WV, WI) enter data at both the local and state levels.

➢ 11 programs (CA, FL, GA, KY, MA, NM, OH, SD, TN, VA, VT) enter data only at the local level.

➢ 2 programs (AZ, OR) enter data from local programs at the state level.

In 17 states (AL, AR, CT, FL, GA, ME, MT, OH, NV, PR, SD, TN, TX, VA, VT, WA, WI), local programs enter complaint data into a central database that is immediately available to the state ombudsman. This real-time reporting capability offers a distinct advantage for program management, quality control and advocacy efforts. It allows the state ombudsman to conduct random desk monitoring of local program performance (e.g., handling or closing complaints according to program policies, monitoring resolution rates, tracking status of complaints, etc.). It also allows the state ombudsman to quickly identify complaint trends that can be used for systems advocacy.

Resources for maintenance, upgrade and expansion

Ombudsman programs were asked to identify financial and other resources (e.g., in-kind, training, etc.) used to obtain or enhance their hardware and software systems and help staff to use them effectively. The responses received are summarized below and are grouped by funding source. Information about training and budgets relating to data management systems is also presented.

Software Funding Sources

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[6] Eight states (Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Nevada, Rhode Island) do not have designated local ombudsman programs.

[7] Nevada is a single planning and service area (no area agencies on aging). The Ombudsman Program is housed in the state unit on aging in Carson City, with satellite offices in Las Vegas and Reno. While it does not have any officially designated local ombudsman programs, state employees serve as Ombudsman Program representatives in the regions covered by the Las Vegas and Reno offices and enter complaint data from those locations.

A total of 20 programs provided information about software funding sources. The most common source of funding, reported by 17 programs (AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, GA, IN, MN, MO, MT, NM, ND, OH, RI, WA, WI), is state and/or federal funds (including Older Americans Act Title III and Title VII funds). The Maryland Ombudsman Program receives State Information Technology (IT) funds, the New Jersey Ombudsman Program received special state funding designated for new technology for health initiatives[8] and the D.C. Ombudsman Program has used financial donations that were made directly to the program.

Hardware Funding Sources

A total of 13 programs provided information about hardware funding sources. The most common source of funding, reported by 12 programs (AK, AR, CA, CT, DE, GA, KY, MO, NM, ND, OH, WI), is state and/or federal funds (including Older Americans Act Title III, Title IV and Title VII funds). The D.C. Ombudsman Program has used financial donations that were made directly to the program.

In-Kind Resources

A total of 15 programs provided information about in-kind resources. The most common in-kind resource, reported by 13 programs (CO, DC, IL, IA, KY, MN, MT, NH, NY, NJ, OH, TX, WA), is Information Technology (IT) assistance from the SUA or other entity that houses the ombudsman program. Two programs (NH, NC) reported receiving computer upgrades as part of the SUA's routine maintenance schedule.

Training

Of 43 responses, forty-one (41) programs reported that training is provided to state and/or local staff on data collection and understanding and utilizing reports, either by the state ombudsman or by the data management system's vendor. The frequency of training varies widely by program (e.g., annually, as needed, when new ombudsmen are hired, etc).

Two programs (HI, IA) have not provided formal training. Hawaii has recently begun using OmbudsManager, which will provide training on use of the system. Iowa has three staff at the state level who enter all ombudsman data, so new data management information is shared informally.

Specified funds budgeted for data management

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[8] This state program has since expired.

Nine (9) programs (CA, FL, GA, ME, MD, ND, OH, OR, WI) reported that the ombudsman program, or the entity housing the program, has a specific line item in the budget to cover the costs of purchasing, operating or enhancing the ombudsman program's data management system.

Local ombudsman program resources

Some states provided information about resources their local ombudsman programs have used to develop and/or maintain their computer hardware systems.

Local ombudsman programs in seven (7) states (CA, CO, IN, MO, NY, NC, WA) procure their own computer hardware. This is accomplished in a variety of ways. In California for instance, some local ombudsman programs have received donations of computer hardware. In Missouri and North Carolina, local ombudsman programs housed in AAAs use program funds, including Older Americans Act Title III funds, to purchase computer hardware.

Summary

This Resource Brief provides a snapshot of ombudsman programs' data management systems, basic capabilities of those systems, and the resources used to maintain and upgrade those systems. This information was collected in the fall of 2003. Overall, ombudsman programs are moving toward greater data management capabilitiy and parity across programs. Of the 52 ombudsman programs nationwide, only three did not have an electronic data management system in 2003.

Ensuring all local ombudsman programs have access to adequate hardware and common software continues to be a challenge to state ombudsman programs working to establish an automated statewide reporting system. Capabilities among local programs within a state can vary. In some states, local ombudsman programs supply their own hardware. In Arizona, four local ombudsman programs do not have access to a computer. By comparison, local ombudsman programs in 17 states enter complaint data into a central data system which provides the state ombudsman with real-time information on complaints handled by the program throughout the state. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of programs now have systems with relational data bases and 75% of programs can produce a report meeting all the NORS requirements for quantifiable data.

Currently, the primary resource for maintaining and upgrading ombudsman data management systems comes from state and/or federal funds (particularly Older American Act Titles III, IV and VII). Most in-kind support for these systems is provided by the state unit on aging or other entity housing the ombudsman program in the form of Information Technology (IT) support.

The baseline data presented in this resource brief is a stepping-stone for further examination of data management. Potential issues for further study include identifying additional resources to support data systems development and using real-time reporting to monitor data consistency, and to identify complaint trends for systems advocacy.

Appendix A

Survey Questions:
State Ombudsman Programs'
Data Management Systems

Ombudsman Program Data Management Systems

1.a.   What software (data management) system is the program using to collect and analyze data? (✔ all that apply)

    ____   OmbudsManager (developed by Synergy)

    ____   OmTrak

    ____   Ombud 2.0/3.0 or other Ombud

    ____   RASCAL

    ____   system developed by in-house staff

    ____   Microsoft Access

    ____   other (specify)_____

    _____

    ____   no electronic data management system in use at this time **[you do not need to complete the remaining questions]**

  b.   If the system was purchased from a vendor, is customer service and technical support available and satisfactory?

    ____   Yes   ____   No   ____   Not Applicable

  c.   If the system was developed in-house, does the ombudsman program have access to the technical support needed to operate the data management system and make system modifications as needed?

    ____   Yes   ____   No   ____   Not Applicable

2.   Does the software system produce a report with all the required NORS quantifiable data?

    ____   Yes   ____   No

3.   Is the software a relational data system (e.g., ability to determine # and type of complaints by facility, run special reports on different variables, etc.)?

    ____   Yes   ____   No

4.a.   Is the ombudsman program's data linked to any other data collection system (e.g., state unit on aging, umbrella organization in which the ombudsman program is housed, etc.)?

    ____   Yes   ____   No

  b.   If yes, is the ombudsman data secure and confidential (e.g., only ombudsman staff have access to program data that contains complainants' and residents' names and/or other identifying information)?

    ____   Yes   ____   No   ____   Not Applicable

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Data Management Systems

Data Management Systems used by Local Ombudsman Programs

5.a.   Does the ombudsman program have a statewide, uniform data collection and reporting system?
_____   Yes   _____   No

  b.   If yes, data is entered at:
_____   the local level
_____   the state level
_____   both the local and state level

10.   c.   Are local programs electronically linked to a central ombudsman data base that allows them to do real-time reporting?
_____   Yes   _____   No

Resources for Maintenance, Upgrade and Expansion

The Ombudsman Resource Center wants to identify financial and other resources to assist ombudsman programs in obtaining and enhancing their hardware and software systems. So, in your responses please note any resources that would be helpful to your colleagues.

  6.   **Software**. What financial or other resources have been identified or used to upgrade the ombudsman program's data management system?

  7.   **Hardware**. What financial or other resources have been identified or used to provide access to state of the art computers by state and local ombudsman programs?

8.a.   **Training**.   Is training provided to state and local ombudsman staff regarding data collection and understanding and utilizing reports?
_____   Yes   _____   No

  b.   If yes, how often?

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9. **Budget**. Is there a specific line item in the ombudsman program's budget or the budget of the entity housing the ombudsman program to cover the costs of purchasing, operating or enhancing the program's data management system?
    ____ Yes   ____ No

10. What, if any, **in-kind resources** does the program have available to support its data system and computer hardware (e.g., computer technicians who volunteer their time to the program, corporations that have donated computer hardware equipment, etc.)?

11. Please provide any additional or qualifying comments.

Appendix B

Characteristics of State Ombudsman Programs' Data Management Systems

Characteristics of State Ombudsman Programs'
Data Management Systems

State	System	Produces a report with all NORS quantifiable data	Has a relational data base	Level at which data is entered: (local, state, both) in programs with a statewide, uniform data system	Real-time reporting
Alabama	Other	Yes	No	Both	Yes
Alaska	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	No local programs	N/A
Arkansas	Other	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
Arizona	Microsoft Access	Yes	Yes	State	No
California	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Local	No
Colorado	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Connecticut	In-house	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
District of Columbia	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Delaware	In-house	Yes	Yes	No local programs	N/A
Florida	Other	Yes	Yes	Local	Yes
Georgia	Other	Yes	Yes	Local	Yes
Hawaii	OmbudsManager OmTrak	Yes	Yes	No local programs	N/A
Iowa	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	No local programs	N/A
Idaho	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Illinois	Other	No	No	Both	No
Indiana	Other	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Kansas	Ombud 2.0/3.0	No	No	Both	No
Kentucky	OmTrak	No	Yes	Local	No
Louisiana	Other	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Massachusetts	Ombud 2.0/3.0	No	No	Local	No
Maryland	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Maine	Microsoft Access	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
Michigan	Other	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Minnesota	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Missouri	Ombud 2.0/3.0 In-house	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Mississippi					
Montana	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
North Carolina	Other	No	Yes	Both	No
North Dakota	In-house	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Nebraska	Manual	---	---	---	---
New Hampshire	In-house	No	Yes	No local programs	N/A
New Jersey	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	No local programs	N/A
New Mexico	Microsoft Access	Yes	No	Local	No
Nevada	Microsoft Access	Yes	Yes	Both*	Yes
New York	In-house	Yes	Yes	N/A	No

State	System	Produces a report with all NORS quantifiable data	Has a relational data base	Level at which data is entered: (local, state, both) in programs with a	Real-time reporting

Data Management Systems

				statewide, uniform data system	
Ohio	In-house	Yes	Yes	Local	Yes
Oklahoma	Manual*	---	---	---	---
Oregon	OmTrak	Yes	Yes	State	No
Pennsylvania	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Puerto Rico	Other*	No	No	Both	Yes
Rhode Island	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	No local programs	N/A
South Carolina	Ombud 2.0/3.0	Yes	Yes	Both	No
South Dakota	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Local	Yes
Tennessee	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Local	Yes
Texas	In-house	No	Yes	Both	Yes
Utah	Ombud 2.0/3.0 Other	No	No	N/A	No
Virginia	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Local	Yes
Vermont	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Local	Yes
Washington	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
Wisconsin	OmbudsManager	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
West Virginia	In-house	Yes	Yes	Both	No
Wyoming	Manual	---	---	---	---

*Oklahoma - looking at OmbudsManager.
*Hawaii, Missouri, Utah - each report using two systems.
∗Nevada - is a single planning and service area (no area agencies on aging). The Ombudsman Program is housed in the state unit on aging in Carson City, with satellite offices in Las Vegas and Reno. While it does not have any officially designated local ombudsman programs, state employees serve as Ombudsman Program representatives in the regions covered by the Las Vegas and Reno offices and enter complaint data from those locations.

*Other:
>Alabama – AIMS (which is also used by the state unit on aging).
>Florida – web-based documentation system utilizing oracle.
>Georgia – current system initially developed under contract with an outside vendor.
>Illinois – Cobalt.
>Indiana – developed under contract by an outside vender.
>Louisiana – Budzilla, a customized created to program specifications.
>Michigan – web-based system developed under contract.
>North Carolina – system developed State Division of Information Resource Management under a contract with the state unit on aging.
>Puerto Rico - currently piloting a demo system developed by an outside contractor.
>Utah – most local programs using an Excel worksheet.