Government Business Council

Industry Insights

Protecting the Past & Leaving Room for the Future:
Challenges Facing Federal Records Management

A Candid Survey of Federal Managers

Underwritten by:

IRON MOUNTAIN®

About

The Research Intelligence Division

Of Government Executive Media Group

Dedicated to Advancing the Business of Government

Through analysis, insight and analytical independence

Extension of GEMG's 40 Years of Editorial Standards & Ethical Values

GBC studies influential decision-makers to produce intelligence-based analysis

Purpose

Amid Various Directives, Executive Orders and a Changing Market Landscape, Records Management Comes to the Forefront of Agency Priorities

The Presidential Directive on Records Management outlines a clear future path for the proper storage, destruction and maintenance of paper and electronic agency records. Federal managers have found that accurate and complete recordkeeping is essential to compliance with other initiatives as well, including sequestration, the "Freeze the Footprint" Real Estate Mandate, the Executive Order on Open Data, continued progress on the Federal Data Center Consolidation Initiative (FDCCI) and a new focus on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Given the wide reach of these initiatives, records management has become a high priority for federal agencies.

In partnership with Iron Mountain, the Government Business Council launched a study in June 2013 to see how federal agency managers across different functional areas are coping amid this changing landscape.

Methodology

To assess the perception, attitudes, and experiences of federal executives regarding their records management processes, the Government Business Council deployed a survey to a random sample of *Government Executive* online and print subscribers from June 18-28, 2013.

The pool of 300 respondents includes those of GS-11 through 15 grade levels in defense and civilian agencies. At least 31 agencies are represented in this analysis. The most represented agencies include:

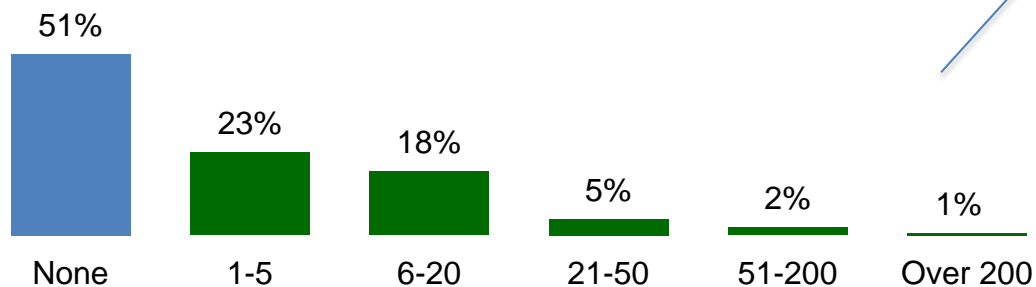*Seals indicate the most represented agencies in order of frequency*

Respondent Profile
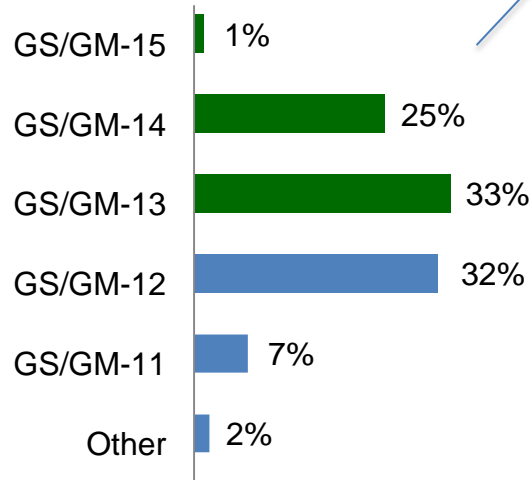
Respondent Profile

- Fifty-nine percent of respondents are at the GS/GM-13 grade level or above.

- Forty-nine percent of respondents oversee at least one direct report, indicating that the sample represents the opinions of senior leaders within the federal government.

Job Grade / Rank

GS/GM-15	1%
GS/GM-14	25%
GS/GM-13	33%
GS/GM-12	32%
GS/GM-11	7%
Other	2%

59%
of respondents are GS/GM-13 or above

Number of Direct Reports

None	1-5	6-20	21-50	51-200	Over 200
51%	23%	18%	5%	2%	1%

49%
of respondents oversee at least one report

Percentage of respondents, n=300

Respondent Profile

Job Function

- Respondents include executives from various functional areas of responsibility.

- Twenty-seven percent of managers surveyed work in operations, a category that includes program and project managers. Program managers have primary responsibility for ensuring that complete and accurate records are created in their offices.

Job Function	Percentage
Operations	27%
Human capital	13%
Engineering	10%
Finance	9%
Acquisitions and procurement	7%
Facilities, fleet and real estate management	4%
Legal	3%
Cybersecurity	2%
Information technology	2%
Legislative	2%
Records management	2%
Communications and telecommunications	1%
Other	18%

27% of respondents work in operations
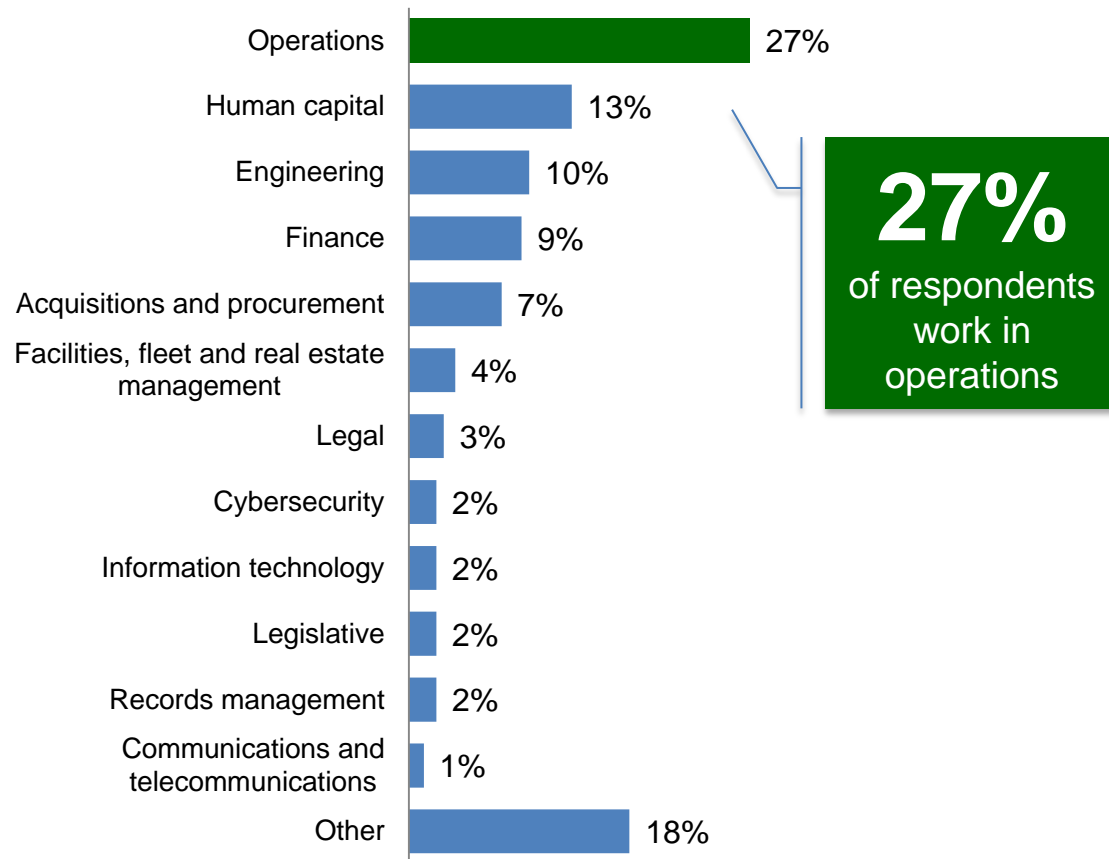
Percentage of respondents, n=324

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Definition of Federal Record Is Complex, Misunderstood

The definition of a federal record, as provided by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), is complex and widely misunderstood by federal managers. Though the majority of respondents feel they have been adequately trained on what constitutes a record, many fail to identify some of the most common forms of records. Mislabeling records could eventually cause issues for the agency.

Storage Is the Top Challenge to Records Management

Even more than inadequate budgets, the continued exponential growth of records challenges federal managers. More than half (53 percent) of respondents indicate that storage space is a challenge to managing access to agency records.

Paper Filing Still Leads All Formats of Records Storage

More than electronic methods, agencies use paper for record storage. Seventy-seven percent of respondents indicate that their agencies use paper storage for records, while 68 percent use an electronic content management system (CMS).

Proper Training Can Lead to Optimal Records Management Program

More than half of respondents want more training on when to destroy records and 45 percent seek training on how to destroy non-essential records. Managers request additional training to streamline the records management process and save agencies both time and money.

Research Findings

What Is a Record?

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Defines Federal Records As…

" All books, papers, maps, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics…
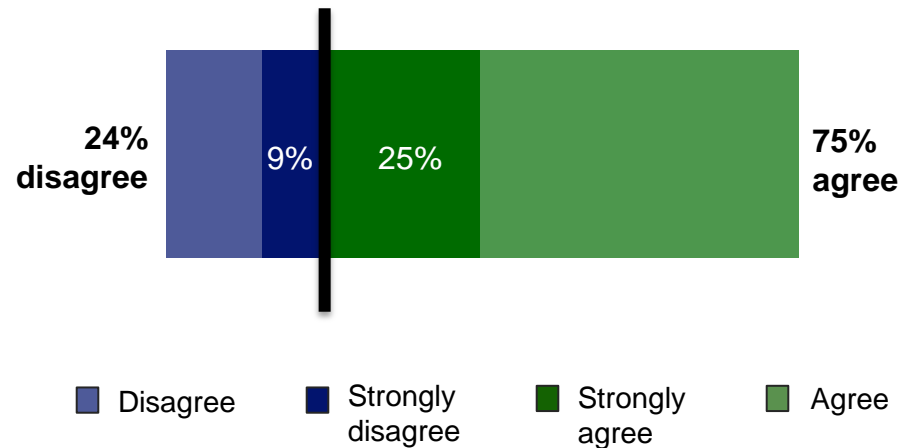
…made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business…

…and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them. "

44 United States Code 3301

Managers Think They Have Been Adequately Trained on Record Definition

- Three-fourths of managers indicate that they have been adequately trained on what constitutes a record. Twenty-five percent of respondents strongly agree that they have been adequately trained.

I have been adequately trained on what constitutes a record.

24% disagree   9%   25%   **75% agree**

◼ Disagree   ◼ Strongly disagree   ◼ Strongly agree   ◼ Agree

Percentage of respondents, n=350

But Managers Have Divergent Opinions on What Constitutes a Record

- Regardless of type or format, any documentary materials "made or received by an agency of the U.S. Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business" are considered records by NARA. Despite this broad definition, managers have divergent opinions about what is defined as a record.
- Nearly all respondents believe that paper and electronic documents are records, but other formats of records receive very low recognition from respondents, including film (52 percent), maps (41 percent), social media activity (32 percent) and books (27 percent).

Percentage of respondents, n=327

Web 2.0, Social Media Platforms Can Create Records

- Just 32 percent of mangers believe that social media activity counts as a record, yet social media and web 2.0 platforms can create records. Video and photo sharing websites, wikis, and blogs are all examples of web 2.0 platforms in which users interact with the webpage and can create records.

- NARA recommends asking basic questions (at right) to determine if a department/agency is creating web 2.0 records.

Is Your Web 2.0 Activity Creating Records?

- Is the information unique and not available anywhere else?

- Does it contain evidence of an agency's policies, business, mission, etc.?

- Is this tool being used in relation to the agency's work?

- Is use of the tool authorized by the agency?

- Is there a business need for the information?

If the answers to any of the above questions are yes, then the content is likely to be a Federal record.

National Archives and Records Administration, NARA Bulletin 2011-02

More Training on Records Is Needed

- More than one third of managers (38 percent) fail to identify contractor timecards as records, while mistakenly classifying other materials as records. Thirty-seven percent of respondents wrongly indicate that library materials are federal records. Stocks of agency publications and acquired business cards are misidentified by 27 percent and 13 percent of respondents, respectively.

- There is an opportunity for training to improve the understanding of what constitutes a federal record.

Items Mistakenly Identified As Records:

38%

of respondents fail to identify contractor time cards as records

37% **Library materials possessed by the agency**

27% **Stocks of agency publications**

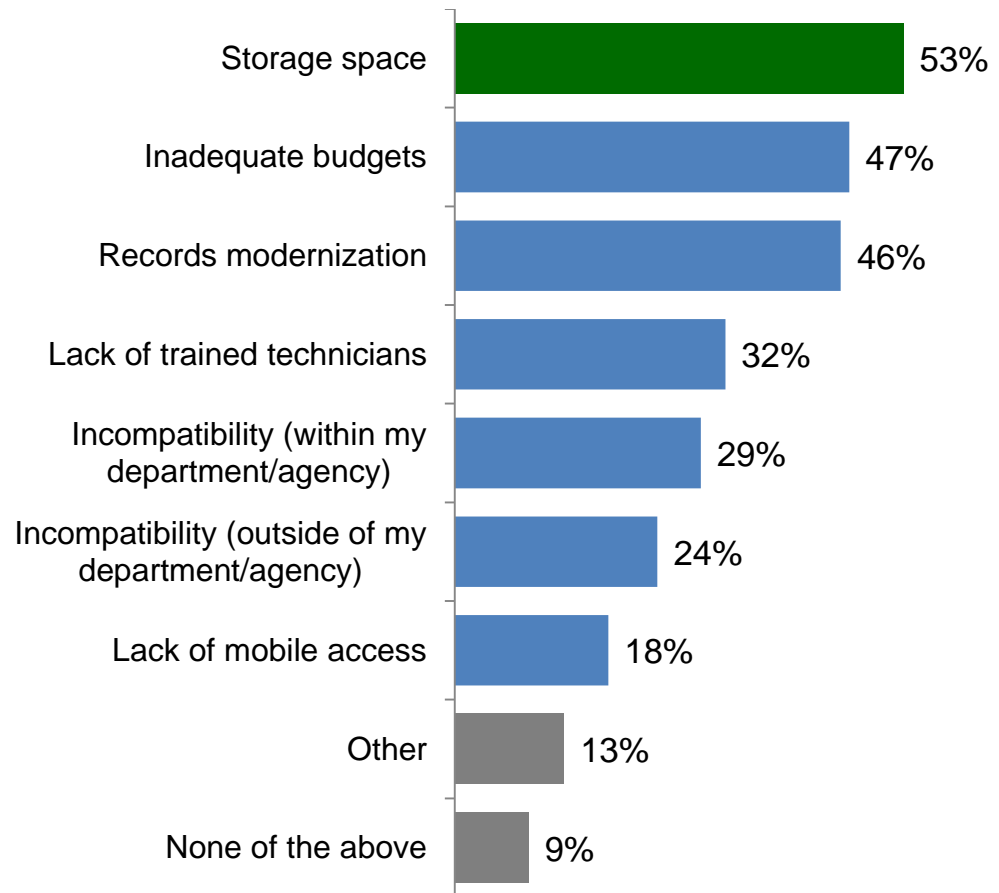**13%** **Acquired business cards**

Percentage of respondents, n=327

Challenges to Records Management

Storage Space Is The Top Records Management Challenge

- When it comes to managing access to an agency's records, storage space is the largest obstacle. More than half (53 percent) of respondents indicate that storage space is a challenge faced in managing access to records.

- Storage space is an even bigger challenge for managers than inadequate budgets, which 47 percent of respondents indicate is a challenge.

- Records modernization, the process of converting paper records to electronic formats, challenges almost half of respondents (46 percent).

Percentage of respondents, n=310

Challenges Faced in Managing Access to Records

Challenge	Percentage
Storage space	53%
Inadequate budgets	47%
Records modernization	46%
Lack of trained technicians	32%
Incompatibility (within my department/agency)	29%
Incompatibility (outside of my department/agency)	24%
Lack of mobile access	18%
Other	13%
None of the above	9%

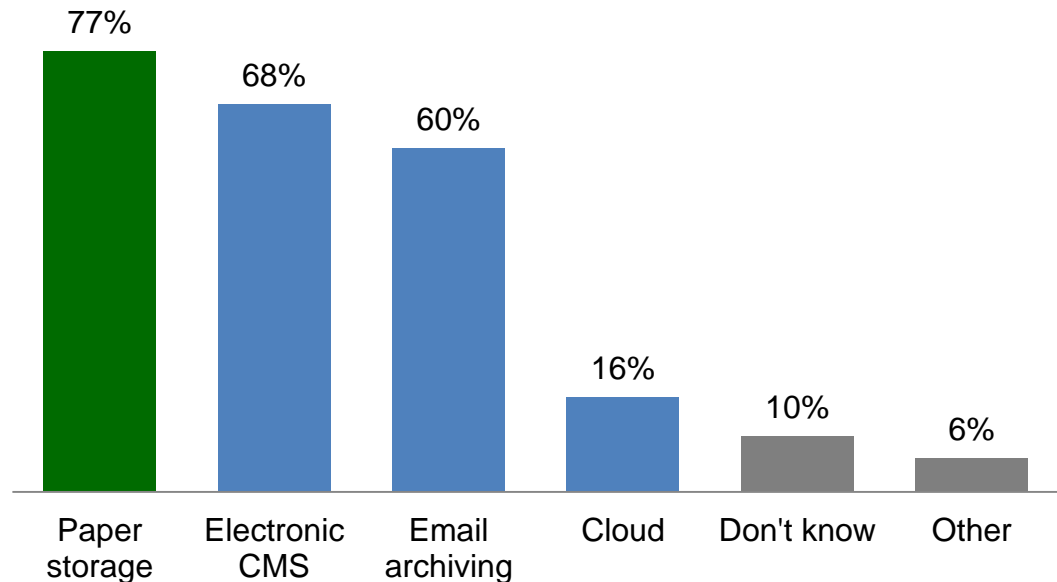## Filing of Paper Records Is Likely Contributing to Storage Shortage

- Agencies use various storage methods for records, but paper storage is the most common. Seventy-seven percent of respondents indicate that their agencies use paper storage for records.

- Of the digital storage systems, electronic content management systems (CMS) are the most popular. Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicate that their agencies utilize an electronic CMS.

Percentage of respondents, n=311

Storage Methods Used for Records

Bar chart showing:
- Paper storage: 77%
- Electronic CMS: 68%
- Email archiving: 60%
- Cloud: 16%
- Don't know: 10%
- Other: 6%

Records Modernization Can Create Efficiencies

- One third (33 percent) of respondents indicate that records management is an essential or high priority for their agencies, but not all organizations have realized the efficiencies that can come with modernization. Twenty-nine percent of respondents feel that records management is a low or nonexistent agency priority.

- As agencies approach Directive deadlines, such as the requirement to move records management to the cloud by the end of 2013, the priority given to records modernization will likely rise.
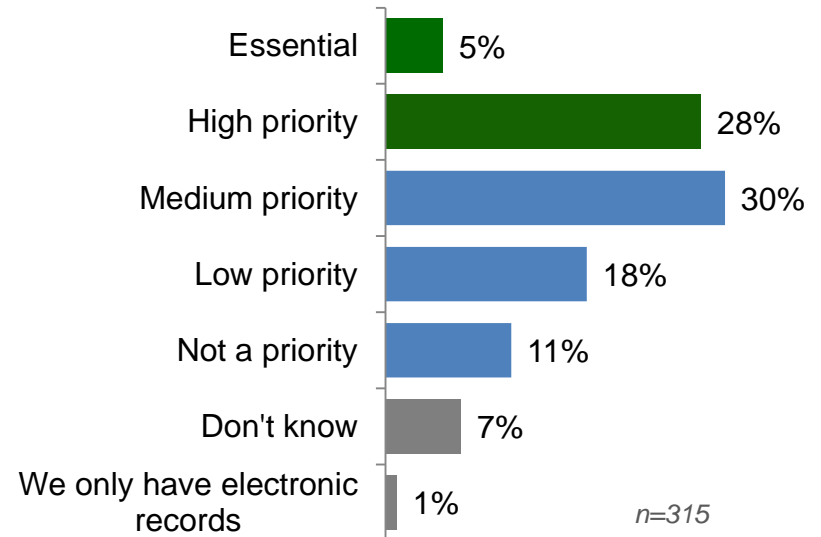
46%

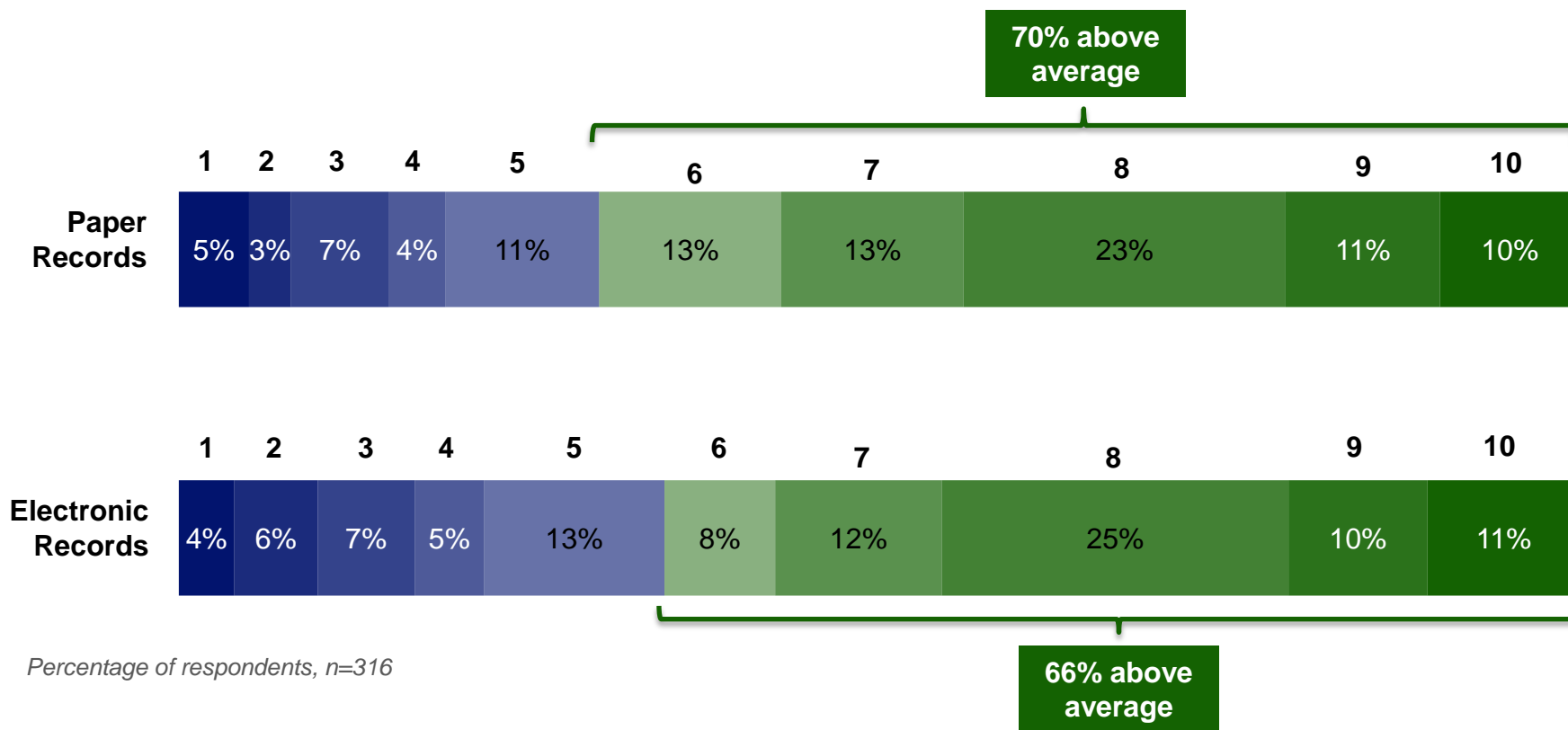**of respondents indicate that records modernization is a challenge faced by their agencies**

n=310

Percentage of respondents

Priority Given to Records Modernization

Category	Percentage
Essential	5%
High priority	28%
Medium priority	30%
Low priority	18%
Not a priority	11%
Don't know	7%
We only have electronic records	1%

n=315

# Accessibility of Stored Records Can Be Improved

- GBC asked respondents to assess the accessibility of their paper and electronic records on a scale from 1 to 10.
- Paper records are slightly more accessible than electronic records, according to respondents. Seventy percent of respondents rate their access to paper records as above average, while two-thirds of respondents similarly classify their electronic records access.

70% above average

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Paper Records	5%	3%	7%	4%	11%	13%	13%	23%	11%	10%

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Electronic Records	4%	6%	7%	5%	13%	8%	12%	25%	10%	11%

66% above average

Percentage of respondents, n=316

Unnecessary Storage Is Widespread

- Fifty-nine percent of respondents believe that their agencies store records whose retention is not required. This category of records could include duplicate copies, outdated drafts of documents and any records whose retention periods have expired.

My department/agency stores records whose retention is not required (e.g., duplicate copies, outdated drafts of documents, etc.).

41% disagree   10%   20%   **59% agree**

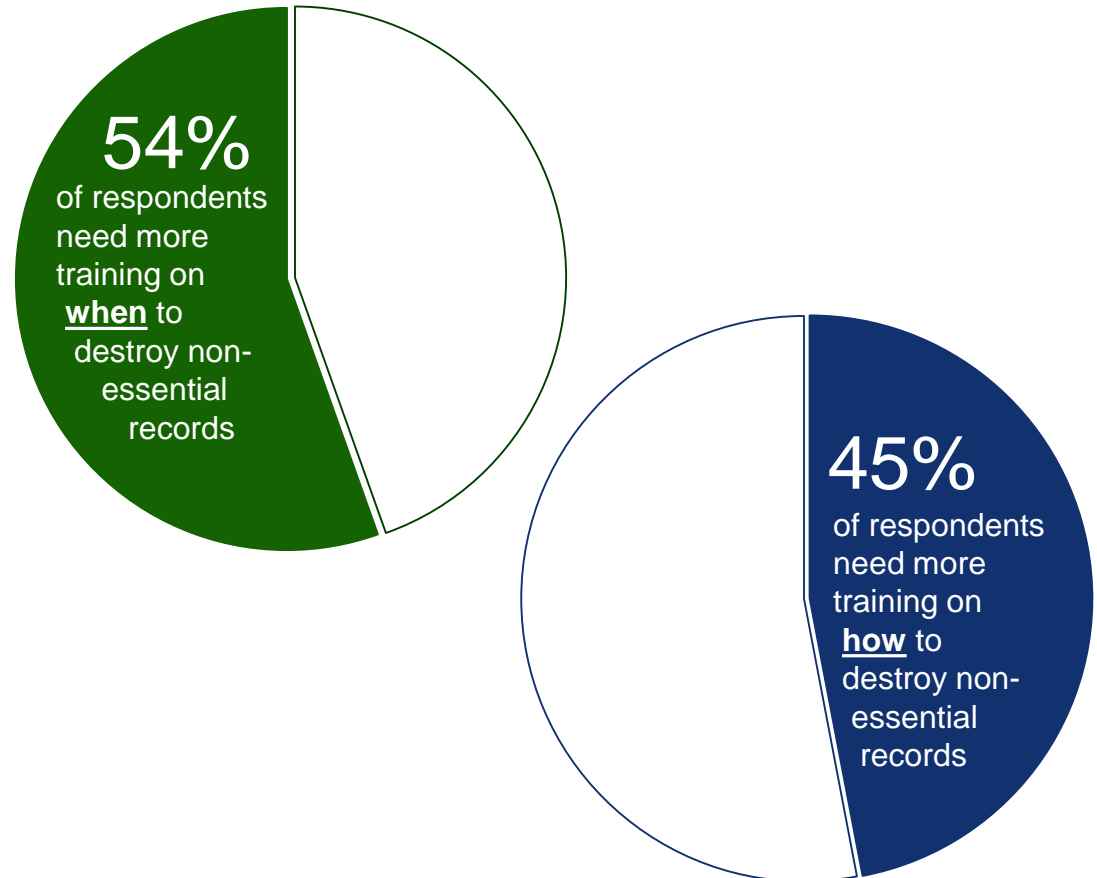☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree
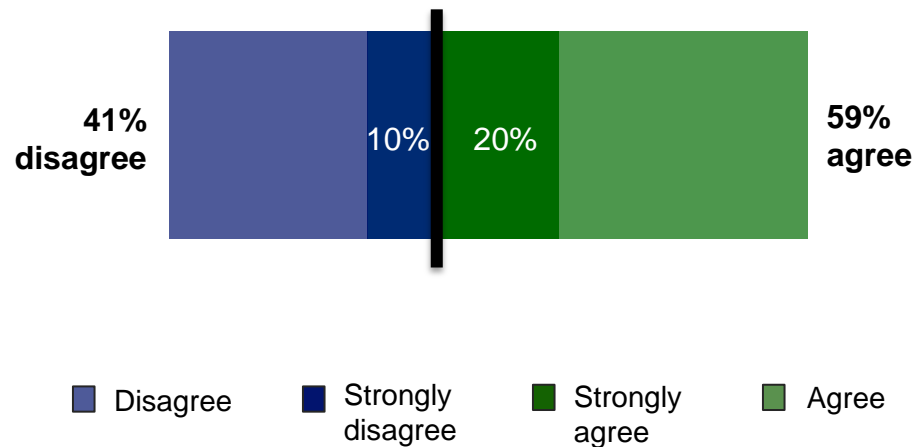
Percentage of respondents, n=350

Destruction Is an Important Part of Records Lifecycle

- The destruction of non-essential records is an important part of the records lifecycle and one managers want to know more about.

- When it comes to training, learning when to destroy records may be more important than how to destroy them.

Type of Records Destruction Training Needed

54% of respondents need more training on **when** to destroy non-essential records

45% of respondents need more training on **how** to destroy non-essential records

Percentage of respondents, n=306

Final Considerations

Final Considerations

- **Classification of material as a record depends on content, not format.** Provide guidance or training for all employees on the definition of federal record and non-record materials.

- **Remember that contractors create records, too.** Ensure vendor contracts identify which contractor content are federal records and specify delivery method to simplify organization.

- **Focus on smarter storage.** Storage is the top challenge for federal managers and they would like more training on when and how to destroy different types of records. Identifying records correctly through training and consulting can save time, money and space.

- **Records modernization can save agencies money and meet Directive deadlines.** As agencies continue to transition to digital formats, records management systems should take a holistic approach to the organization of records. For paper records and those existing in other formats, agencies need clear identification procedures and well-defined plans for storage and digitization.

Underwritten by:

About Iron Mountain

Iron Mountain Government Services provides information management services that help government agencies lower the costs, risks and inefficiencies of managing their data.

We manage billions of information assets including back-up and archival data, electronic records, document imaging, physical records, asset disposition and more.

Your experience working with us would include full lifecycle information management expertise, actionable advice, and industry-leading processes.

Visit www.ironmountain.com/federal.

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