



Doing More with Less:
**How Networking
and Training Create**

Records Program Success

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A study of government records managers shows networking affords opportunities to provide training, increase RIM awareness, and overcome resource shortfalls

Records management in government faces constraints that are unlike those in the corporate world. Those constraints are primarily in continuity of funding for personnel and severe limits on funding for records management, content management, and document management products to manage electronic records, content, and documents. Even when an information technology system can be purchased and installed, continuous funding for personnel to run the system may not be possible.

According to a study conducted by this author under the auspices of Human Subjects Committee of Indiana University, networking and training are the key ways local government records managers compensate for these constraints and experience program success. Local government records managers ensure everyone is trained in the policies of records management, as well as the further re-

strictions placed on government employees regarding the Freedom of Information Act and privacy laws regarding citizens' personally identifiable information.

This government study was a follow-up to a 2005-2006 National Historical Publications and Records Commission Electronic Records Research Fellows study published in the *Information Management Journal* in 2008. That study examined reporting relationships of records managers in large publicly traded and privately held corporations headquartered in the United States to determine whether where a records manager reported had an impact on how electronic records were being managed. This study used a similar survey instrument to examine reporting relationships in government.

Comparisons of the results of the two studies are interesting both in describing what is done and what can be

accomplished in a records management program given the constraints and possibilities of business versus government.

Study Demographics

The survey used for this study is similar to that used in the 2006 corporate study with changes to reflect the way government does business, as well as issues in government.

In the summer of 2007, the survey was e-mailed to members of ARMA International who identified themselves as being in government. Of the 124 people answering survey questions, 53% were from local government, 25% were from state government, 14% were from federal government, and the remaining respondents were from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Some of the respondents worked for contractors that perform specialized work for the federal government. The study became a *de facto*

study of records management in local government.

More than 50% of participants have been in records management for more than 10 years and report being at their current employer for more than five years. More than 60% report being in their current job four years or longer, with 20% reporting being in their current position for more than nine years.

Seventy-five percent do not have a CRM designation, but those who do have had it for an average of 11 years.

Training in records management includes on-the-job training for nearly 90%, but 75% report getting training at either an ARMA International chapter or ARMA International's Annual Conference. Twenty-five percent of records managers report receiving training at a university or through a private provider, and 12% through the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators.

At least 25% of records managers report having a degree in public policy and 20% in library and information science. Nearly 60% of respondents have a bachelor's or master's degree, and nearly 30% report having some college education.

Seventy-two percent are female, 42% are between the ages of 46 and 55, and 25% are between the ages of 36 and 45.

**Comparison of Studies:
Training, Experience**

The results for the earlier corporate study and this government study are comparable in training and experience.

The earlier corporate study showed 83% had a college degree or higher compared to 67% for this government study. One-third of the corporate respondents had a CRM compared to 25% for the government study.

Training for jobs is roughly comparable with 81% of the corporate respondents getting on-the-job training as compared to 84% of the government respondents. Sixty-four percent of the corporate respondents took advantage

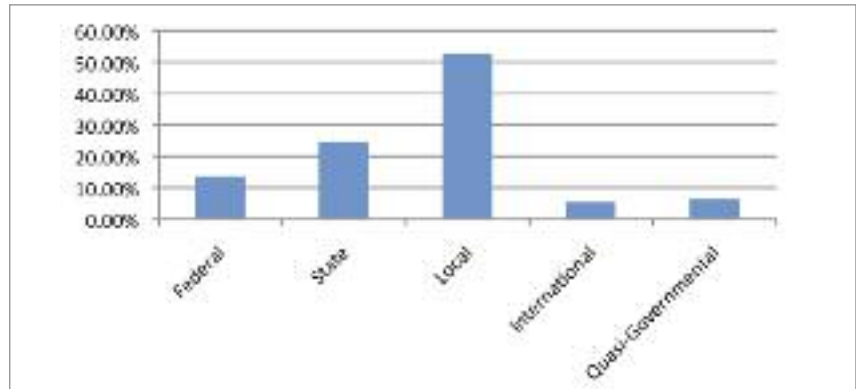


Figure 1: Type of Organization

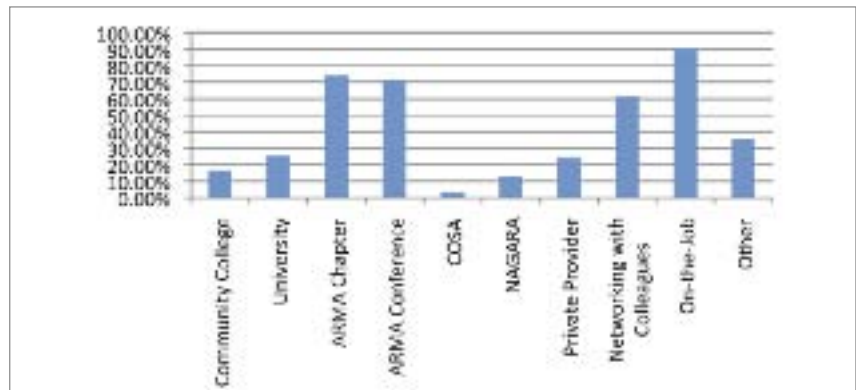


Figure 2: Where Training Is Received

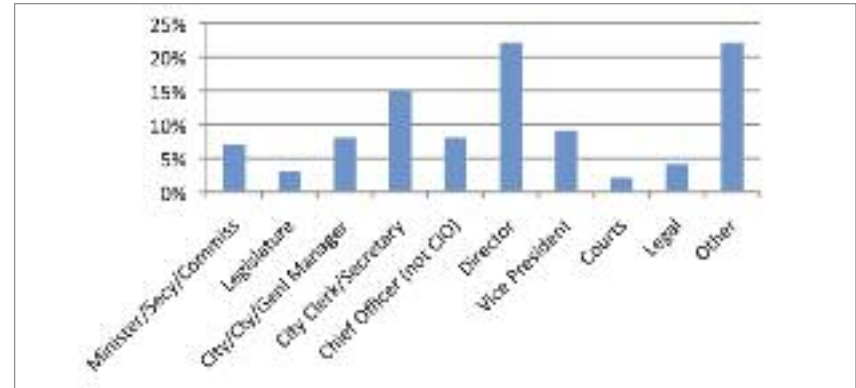


Figure 3: Title of Direct Report

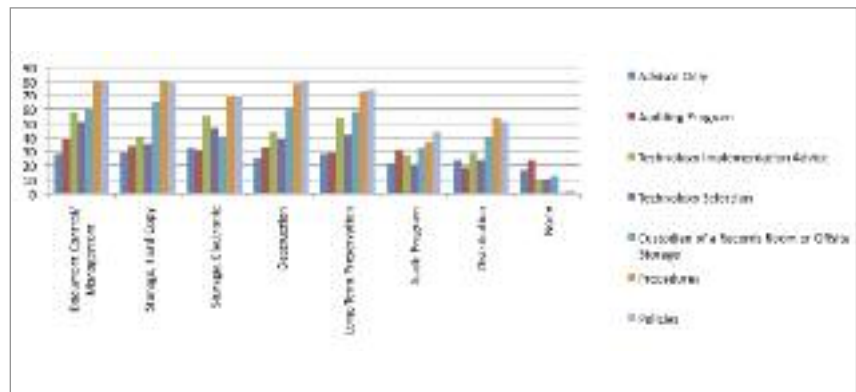


Figure 4: Parts of the Records Life Cycle for Which Participant Is Responsible

Nearly 80% of the government study respondents report they write procedures and are the custodians of records of all media for most of the records life cycle. Seventy-two percent of respondents report having responsibility for long-term preservation and 70% for storage of electronic documents.

of seminars and workshops as compared to 52% of the government respondents.

Seventy-six percent of the corporate study respondents had more than six years in records management as compared to 80% of the government study respondents, and 66% of corporate respondents had been at their current job more than six years as compared to 56% of government respondents.

The corporate respondents may have had a little more education and experience generally, especially in records management, but the differences are not great enough to draw any firm conclusions.

Where They Report

In this government study, records managers most often report to management and administrative services (39%), with the next highest percentage reporting to IT or a city clerk/secretary (11% each).

Directly above records management, direct reporting ranges from elected officials and top appointed posts to being part of the bureaucratic organization or – for NGOs and government service providers – being part of a corporate structure. Most participants report they are about three reports from the top.

Comparison of Studies: Where They Report

This study contrasts sharply with the change in placement of records management from the 2002 *Records*

and Information Management: A Benchmarking Study of Large U.S. Industrial Companies conducted by William Saffady, where the largest number of respondents (33%) reported to business services, to the 2006 corporate study, where the largest number of respondents (more than 45%) said they reported to legal.

This difference is most likely due to the large number of respondents to the government study who are from local government (53%). Local government has been making a quiet change from being run by a mayor/town council with the records manager reporting to the town clerk, who is not an elected official, to a town manager/town council with the records manager reporting through the town manager. This trend is also evident in the 11% of the respondents who report through information technology and an equal number who report through the clerk's office.

What They Do

Nearly 80% of the government study respondents report they write procedures and are the custodians of records of all media for most of the records life cycle. Seventy-two percent of respondents report having responsibility for long-term preservation and 70% for storage of electronic documents. This is comparable to the corporate study respondents. Neither the government nor the corporate records managers report significant control over distribution and audit of records.

Government records managers, like corporate records managers, reported writing policies and procedures as one of their major activities. One interesting difference is government records managers are being called upon to give advice on many different types of media and formats nearly as often as they create policies and procedures. This result may reflect that a majority of the respondents work in local government, which is normally smaller than state or federal government and permits easier networking. This appears to be borne out by the large number of respondents reporting they also give technology advice.

More than 50% of participants report there is no other records manager within their organization, but they network with others in a similar position and seek out knowledge concerning electronic records from employees in IT departments (78%) and legal counsel (80%) within their place of employment. As with non-governmental records managers, 80% report line-of-business directors seek them out for advice.

In line with their broad lifecycle responsibilities and with their responsibility for a wide variety of media and formats, government respondents appear to be leading their organizations' efforts in electronic records. Most are creating the groundwork for a successful program through education and fact finding, insisting that retention schedules be revised and implemented on all formats, creating policies and procedures for their organizations, and partnering with IT and upper-level executives. Government and quasi-governmental records managers are leading their organizations through the process of managing digital documents and records.

How and What Records Are Managed

Nearly 56% of the government study respondents' organizations do not consider e-mail management and

records management the same. Many participants are continuing to educate their organizations that e-mail can be a public record, and it must be managed like other records.

A little more than half of the government participants reported that document management and records management are united initiatives within their organizations. Many indicated the reason the two are united is because the life cycle is better managed when performed together. Forty-two percent of participants who reported document and records management initiatives are integrated said the programs are somewhat integrated, more than 30% indicated the initiatives are very integrated or are the same program. Barriers to success include lack of budget, lack of knowledge, lack of employee cooperation in categorizing documents, lack of partnership, and lack of change management.

The reasons given for increased awareness of records management within the government study participants' organizations are similar to private industry, with litigation (35%) being the leading reason. Compliance (12%), space and lost documents (10%), public records requests (9%), and privacy or data protection (5%) are all distant followers. Nearly 90% of participants reported some type of training from ad hoc to online and compulsory training for all employees.

Discussion

Records managers in local government are succeeding, but in a very different way from private industry records managers. Local government records managers may not report great success in obtaining hardware and software to manage electronic records, but the awareness they create for the need for complete lifecycle management through policies, procedures, and training are more important than information technology.

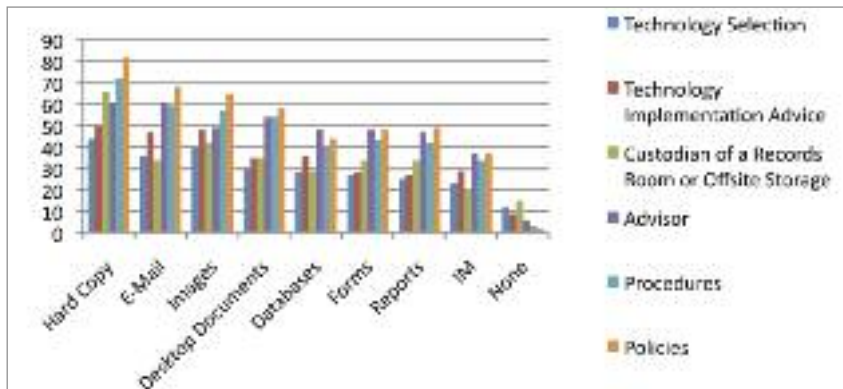


Figure 5: Participant Responsibilities for Different Types of Documents

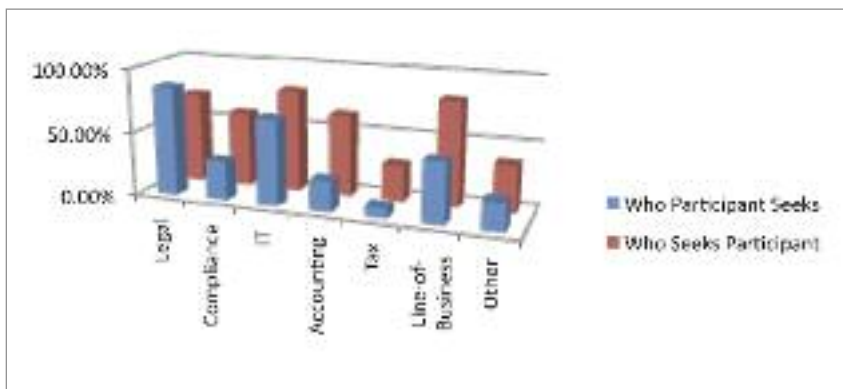


Figure 6: Who Participants Seek and Who Seeks Participant for Advice

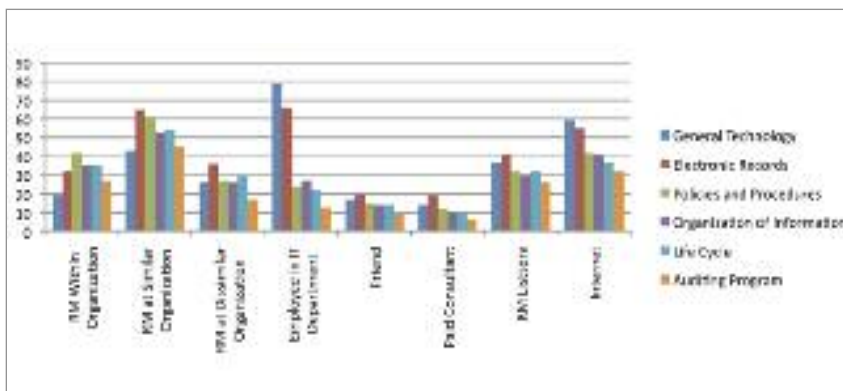


Figure 7: Topic and Person from Whom Advice Is Sought

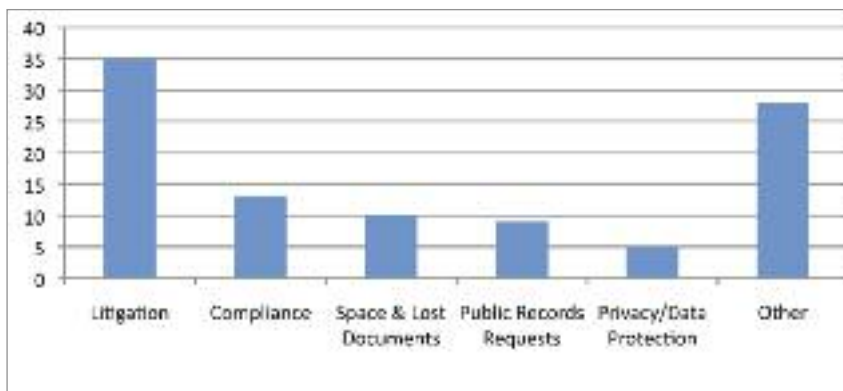


Figure 8: Reason for Increased Awareness About Records Management

Government records managers, like their private counterparts, are also networked within their organizations, both seeking and getting advice from key partners, including legal counsel, information technology, line-of-business managers, and advisers. They are advising on more than just hard copy records and participate in discussions concerning the entire life cycle, whether electronic or hard copy.

On the whole, they also report to an important enough position within the hierarchy, as well as to an appropriate position, including town manager or city clerk or secretary, to have a positive impact on local government.

Both the earlier corporate study and this government study demonstrate that records managers are well-integrated into the social network of their organizations. As numerous ar-

ticles have demonstrated, including the *Harvard Business Review's* March 2005 article "A Practical Guide to Social Networks," a great deal of organizational knowledge is created and shared through social networks.

This means the image of the records manager rises from the box ghetto of the basement to the level of key offices that make things happen. Records managers are not just shouting vainly to their microfilm readers, they are sought out by key members of their organizations to solve organization-level problems, not just department-level access issues.

Government records managers translate that close networking into an opportunity for educating their constituencies, the government officials and employees, about the need to manage electronic records and how to manage them with or without specialized hardware and software. They

are also working hard to make their constituencies aware that e-mail can contain records as identified by the laws of the jurisdiction under which they work.

Conclusion

Any records manager could learn a lesson from local government records managers. Networking within organizations should include education, awareness, and training of records management issues, whether the records management program has money or not. Presented formally, training employees can make them partners in records management rather than just cats to be herded – and presents records managers in a positive professional light. **END**

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