

Highlights of [GAO-20-59](#), a report to the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The *Federal Records Act*, a subsequent directive, and NARA regulations establish requirements for agencies to ensure the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of federal records, including those in electronic form. In addition, NARA plays an important role in overseeing and assisting agencies' records management efforts.

GAO was asked to evaluate federal agencies' implementation of the aforementioned requirements related to electronic records. The objectives were to determine the extent to which (1) selected agencies' policies and procedures address the electronic recordkeeping requirements in the *Managing Government Records Directive* and the *Presidential and FRA Amendments of 2014* and (2) NARA assisted selected agencies in managing their electronic records. To do so, GAO selected 17 agencies and reviewed their records management policies and procedures. GAO also reviewed laws and requirements pertaining to NARA's roles and responsibilities for assisting agencies in managing their electronic records. Further, GAO analyzed NARA guidance and other documents that discussed NARA's efforts in carrying out these responsibilities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 40 recommendations to 14 of the 17 selected agencies to improve their management of electronic records. GAO is also recommending that NARA (1) require high-risk smaller agencies to create improvement plans and (2) monitor progress on a regular basis. Six agencies, including NARA, agreed with the recommendations, while 11 did not state whether they agreed or disagreed, or had no comments.

View [GAO-20-59](#). For more information, contact Nick Marinos at (202) 512-9342 or marinosn@gao.gov.

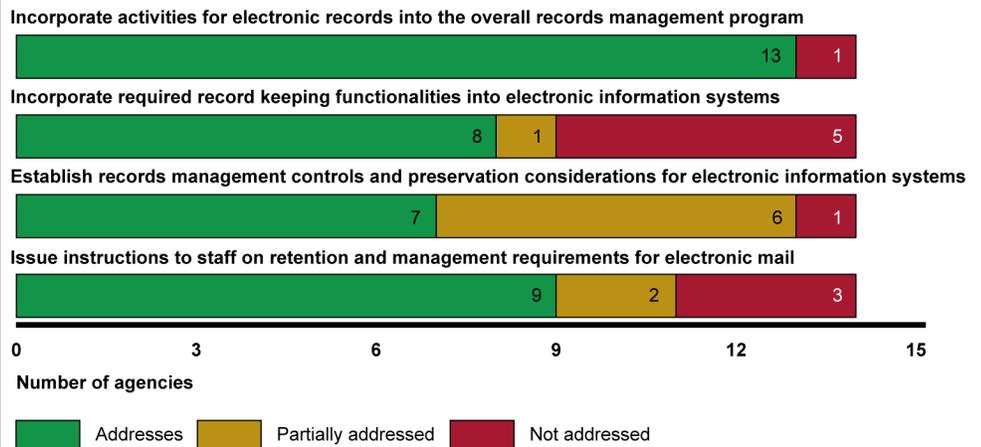
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Selected Agencies Need to Fully Address Federal Electronic Recordkeeping Requirements

What GAO Found

Seventeen agencies GAO selected for review varied in the extent to which their policies and procedures addressed the electronic recordkeeping requirements in the *Managing Government Records Directive* and the *Federal Records Act (FRA)* and its amendments. More specifically, 14 of the 17 agencies established records management programs, while three agencies did not. Of those 14 agencies with established records management programs, almost all addressed requirements related to incorporating electronic records into their existing programs, but many did not have policies and procedures to fully incorporate recordkeeping functionalities into electronic systems, establish controls and preservation considerations for systems, and issue instructions on email requirements (see table).

Assessment of Selected Agencies' Policies and Procedures Addressing Key Electronic Records Requirements



Source: GAO analysis of agency data. | GAO-20-59

NARA provided guidance and assistance to the selected agencies, including guidance on electronic records management and training. All of the agencies stated that the assistance was generally helpful and that they relied on it to some extent for implementing the key requirements discussed in this report. Further, NARA oversaw the selected agencies' implementation of federal records management regulations through their self-assessment program. However, NARA had not ensured that the selected small or micro agencies that self-assessed to be at high risk of improper records management in calendar year 2017 were taking appropriate actions to make improvements to their records management programs. NARA officials stated they conduct follow-up with the agencies that report poor scores, but they do not proactively require the agencies to address their weaknesses. Until NARA requires these agencies to develop plans to make necessary improvements, these agencies will likely miss important opportunities to improve their record management practices.