

State of the Federal Web Report

December 16, 2011

Produced by the [.gov Reform Task Force](#)

Executive Summary & Key Findings

Introduction

This report presents a summary of data and findings about the state of Federal websites, collected as part of the .gov Reform Initiative. The report is intended to highlight—for the first time—the size and scope of websites in the Federal Executive Branch, how agencies are managing them, and opportunities for improvement. Though not a comprehensive assessment of every Federal Executive Branch website, this data provides a high-level overview and is the first step to more effectively collecting data to make better decisions about our Federal web operations. The .gov Reform Task Force and its partners will use this data to develop a Federal Web Strategy and create tools, best practices, and other resources that will make Federal websites more efficient and useful for citizens.

This report includes data that was collected between August and October, 2011:

- **.gov Web Inventory:** Agencies completed a baseline inventory to determine the number and status of domains and websites in the Federal Executive Branch.
- **Web Governance Survey:** Major agencies provided baseline data about the state of web governance across their organizations and identified opportunities to improve the customer experience and more efficiently manage web operations.
- **Web Improvement Plans:** Agencies posted their initial web improvement plans to help identify where they can streamline web operations and improve customer service. Agencies will be required to update these plans in Spring 2012 after release of the Federal Web Strategy.
- **National Dialogue on Improving Federal Websites:** Many experts, innovators, citizens, and federal employees held an online conversation, where they submitted and voted on ideas to improve how the government delivers online services and information.

Background

The .gov Reform Initiative is part of the President Obama's [Campaign to Cut Waste](#) and Executive Order 13571, [Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service](#), which call for agencies to improve customer service and manage their web operations more efficiently. You can read more about the .gov Reform Initiative at <http://usa.gov/webreform>.

Scope and Methodology

This is the most comprehensive data collection to date of web operations in the Federal Executive Branch. Every cabinet department and several major independent agencies participated in the data collection effort. Agencies were asked to complete three related data surveys. The total number of agency respondents varies somewhat from survey to survey because the scope of each survey was a bit different. For example, the .gov inventory cast a broad net, so the data there comes from 56 different agencies. The Web Governance survey and Web Improvement Plans focused more narrowly on "major agencies," which includes the cabinet departments and major independent agencies. The appendix specifies which agencies completed each survey.

"Domain" vs. "Website": This report refers to both domains and websites. When we speak of .gov "domains" in the context of this report, we mean the registered .gov name on the Internet (e.g., www.agencyname.gov). Agencies must register and annually renew each .gov domain with the U.S. General Services Administration. This process makes the number of domains easy to track.

It's also important to look at the number of unique websites, in addition to domains. This is because a single domain can contain multiple websites as part of its hierarchy. For example, www.nasa.gov contains www.nasa.gov as well as other multiple, unique websites under the one domain. Identifying unique websites is harder to determine since the definition is somewhat subjective. For the purposes of this report, we've defined "website" to mean the hosted content on a domain, which has a unique homepage and global navigation. The Web Governance Survey asked agencies to estimate the total number of websites they manage. As this was a baseline survey, the total number of estimated Federal Executive Branch websites from the Web Governance Survey is still a general estimate. The .gov Task Force will work with agencies to identify better ways to more accurately collect this information for future reporting.

Key Findings

I. .gov Web Inventory

The .gov Web Inventory self-reported 1,489 domains and an estimated 11,013 websites from 56 agencies.

- There is wide discrepancy in the number of domains and websites (some have one, some have hundreds).
- Five of the major agencies report more than 100 domains.
- Nearly a fifth of domains (19%) are reported as inactive.
- Agencies plan to eliminate or merge 30% of the domains, while maintaining 70%.

II. Federal Web Governance Survey

The data in this section is based on responses from 24 major agencies that reported on the state of web governance across their entire organization.

- About a third of agencies (35%) reported that they have standardized web policies and procedures across their departments/agencies.
- Agencies reported a total of 150 different systems for creating and publishing web content.
- Agencies reported a total of 250 web hosting providers, with an average of 10 providers per agency.
- Many resource decisions occur at the program or bureau level rather than looking strategically across the agency to leverage economies of scale.
- Most agencies reported that there is not a common web design for the entire department or agency, but that there is more consistency within operational units.
- A few agencies (10%) reported using the same performance metrics to consistently evaluate websites across their department/agency.

Many agencies noted that the surveys were the agency's first attempt to identify all the domains and websites in their agency and to develop plans to evaluate and consolidate their web footprint. Agencies asked for assistance in developing integrated web governance plans and migration processes for their domains, and nearly every agency made comments demonstrating their dedication to improving agency-wide web governance.

III. Web Improvement Plans

Data in this section is based on responses from 25 major agencies that were asked to identify their plans to streamline infrastructure and improve web content. Agencies provided honest and candid responses and were quick to expose current gaps and share plans for the future. Due to the open-ended nature of the survey, the findings in this section are mostly qualitative rather than quantitative:

- Fewer than half of agencies report having an agency-wide web strategy.
- Most agencies report a highly decentralized web management structure.
- Most agencies conduct regular reviews to ensure accuracy and accessibility of web content.
- All agencies reported engaging with customers to incorporate direct user feedback into website improvements.

IV. National Dialogue on Improving Federal Websites

During a two-week period, September 19-30, 2011, the .gov Reform Task Force hosted a "[national dialogue](#)" -- an online conversation that brought together experts, innovators, citizens, and Federal employees who regularly rely on Federal information. Nearly 1,000 registered participants submitted 436 ideas, made 1,663 comments, and voted 8,259 times.

The most popular themes were:

- Change to a culture of customer service
- Improve accountability
- Adopt a strategy of continuous improvement
- Write content in plain language and test websites regularly with users
- Make online content more accessible, searchable, and easier to use
- Improve services in other languages

V. Impact and benefits of the data collection

When assessing the benefits of consolidating and eliminating domains, agencies cited:

- cost savings
- streamlined processes
- improved efficiencies and productivity

In many cases, the surveys spurred agencies to dig deeper to find out more about their web presence. Agencies also acknowledged that by having fewer .gov domains, they can:

- improve customer experience
- promote consistency in design
- eliminate duplication and clutter
- improve search results, providing easier access to information

.GOV WEB INVENTORY SURVEY

PURPOSE

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) conducted the .gov Web Inventory, with support from the General Services Administration (GSA) and the .gov Reform Task Force, between August 12 – October 22, 2011. The survey provides a baseline inventory of all public domains in the Federal Executive Branch.

SUMMARY

KEY FACTS:

- **Dates of survey:** August 12 – October 22, 2011
- **Number of responses:** 1,489 domain surveys
- **Data analyzed:** Includes all data for completed surveys, including domains which are currently live, redirected*, inactive/not functioning and inactive/under development. Data was not analyzed for incomplete or partial responses.

NUMBER OF WEB RESOURCES REPORTED:

- **Domains:** 1,489 domains across 56 different agencies
 - **Live websites:** 804 domains 54%
 - **Redirects:** 400 domains 27%
 - **Inactive, not functioning:** 265 domains 18%
 - **Inactive, under development:** 20 domains 1%
- **Status:** Of the 1,489 domains, agencies reported that they would:
 - **Keep / Maintain:** 1,047 domains 70%
 - **Eliminate:** 378 domains 26%
 - **Merge with an existing site:** 64 domains 4%
- **Websites:** An estimated 11,013 websites within the 1,489 domains

*Note: a "redirect" is a web address that has no content, but simply points to another address.

DETAILED FINDINGS

The detailed findings will review the key topics from the survey, including:

1. [Number and Status of Domains](#)
2. [Managing Agency and Number of Domains](#)
3. [Action Plans for Domains](#)
4. [Understanding Live Domains & Domains Under Development](#)
 - I. [Most Popular Audiences](#)
 - II. [Most Popular Topic Areas](#)

- III. [Method of Measuring Performance](#)
- IV. [Date of Last Update](#)
- V. [Web Content Management System \(CMS\) & Web Hosting Providers](#)
- VI. [Public Websites](#)
- VII. [Performance Ratings](#)

1. Number and Status of Domains

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Redirects account for about a quarter of all domains:** More than a quarter of the domains (27%) were reported as redirects (N=398).
- **High percentage of inactive domains:** About 20% of the domains were categorized as either 'inactive, not functioning' or 'inactive, under development.'

INVENTORY QUESTION:

- What domain are you completing this survey for?
- What is the status of this domain?

DATA REPORTED:

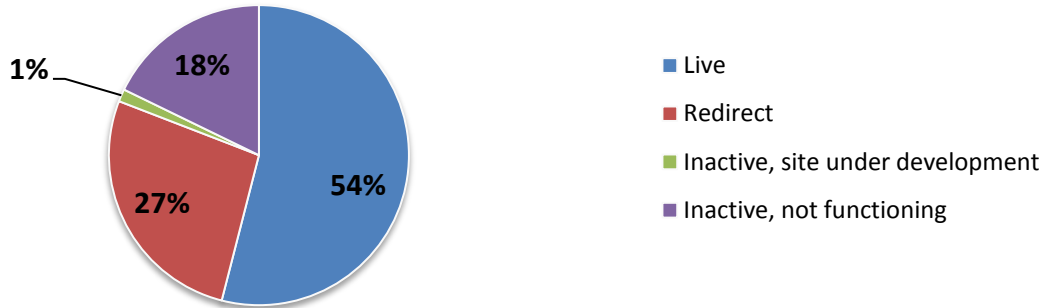
There were a total of **1,489 domain surveys**, including:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----|
| • Live websites: | 804 domains | 54% |
| • Redirects: | 400 domains | 27% |
| • Inactive, not functioning: | 265 domains | 18% |
| • Inactive, under development: | 20 domains | 1% |

The number of domains as self-reported by agencies in the .gov Inventory may differ slightly from the number of domains officially tracked by the U.S. General Services Administration, which manages the .gov domain registry. Some of this is due to the fact that agencies were eliminating and consolidating domains during the course of completing the survey. The [official list of current .gov domains](#) is available at Data.gov

STATUS OF DOMAIN

N=1,489; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



2. Number of Domains by Agency

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Wide discrepancy in number of domains per agency:** While some agencies manage a relatively small number of domains, others manage over a hundred separate domains.

INVENTORY QUESTION:

- What is the name of the Managing Agency? (Use cabinet level or independent agency).

DATA REPORTED:

Of those who responded to the survey:

- **Total # of Domains:** 1,489
- **Average Domains per Agency:** 27

THEMES:

Wide discrepancy in number of domains: While 14 agencies reported only one domain, 16 agencies reported more than 25 domains. Most of the agencies who reported only 1 or 2 domains are independent agencies, boards or commissions who maintain one domain for their primary agency website.

TOTAL: Number of domains reported for the **56 agencies** that responded:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-----|
| • Less than 10: | 32 Agencies | 57% |
| • 11-25: | 9 Agencies | 16% |
| • 26-50: | 5 Agencies | 9% |
| • 51-100: | 5 Agencies | 9% |
| • 100+: | 5 Agencies | 9% |

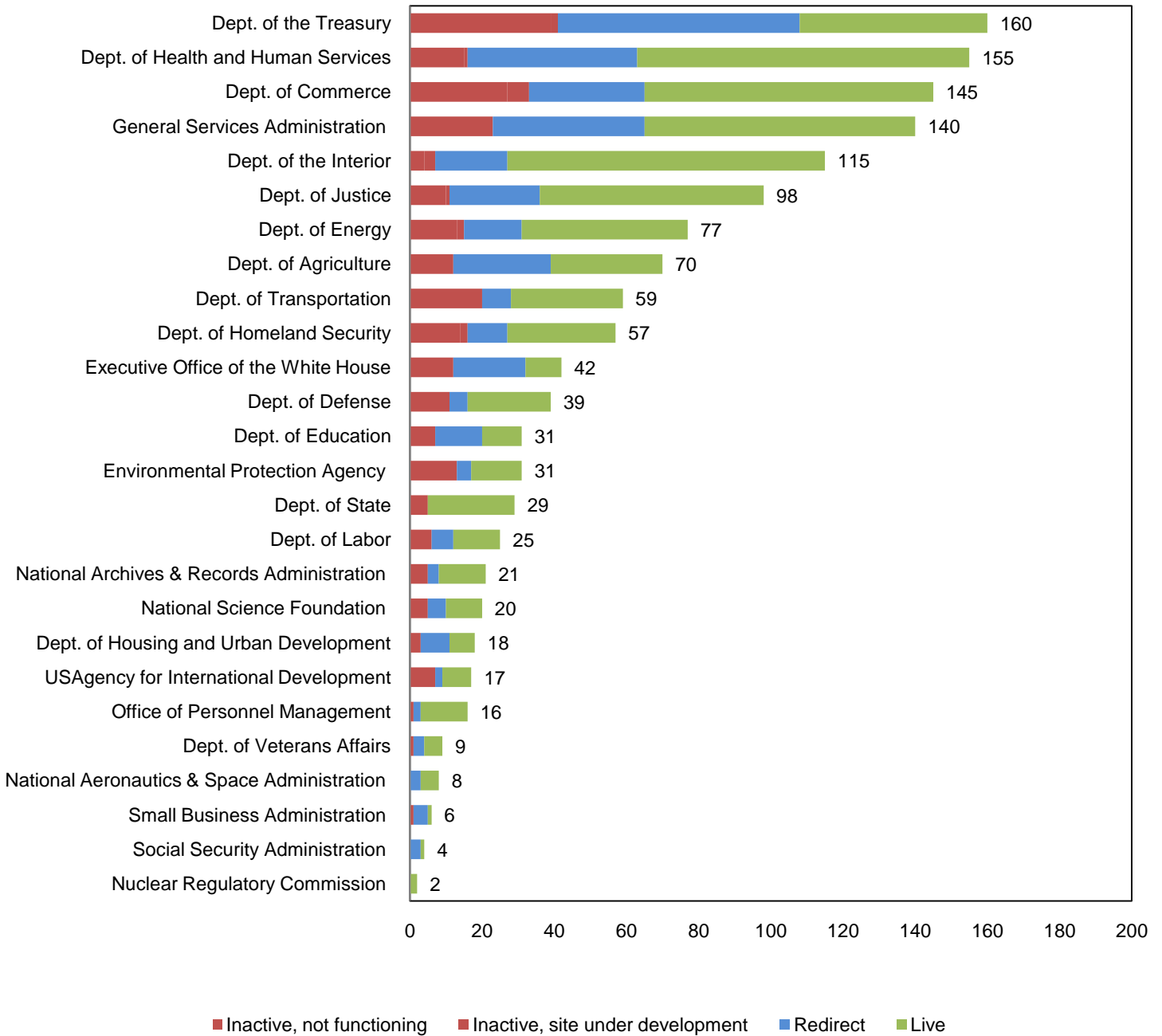
Major agencies account for 91% of all domains: The 25 major agencies reported 1,377 domains, accounting for the vast majority of domains in the Federal Executive Branch. Five agencies reported more than 100 domains, with Department of the Treasury (160), Department of Health and Human Services (155), Department of Commerce (145), and the General Services Administration (140) reporting the highest number.

MAJOR AGENCIES: Number of domains reported by **25 major agencies:**

- **Less than 10:** 5 Agencies 20%
- **11-25:** 5 Agencies 20%
- **26-50:** 5 Agencies 20%
- **51-100:** 5 Agencies 20%
- **100+:** 5 Agencies 20%

Number of Domains by Managing Agency (25 Major Agencies)

N=1,394, Aug. 12, 2011 - Oct. 22, 2011



NOTE: Some agencies have reduced the number of domains since this data was reported in October 2011. Visit Data.gov for the [most current list of domains per agency](#).

TOP 10 AGENCIES BY CATEGORY

Live Domains (Total N=744)

	Number of Domains
1. Dept. of Health and Human Services	92
2. Dept. of the Interior	88
3. Dept. of Commerce	80
4. General Services Administration	75
5. Dept. of Justice	62
6. Dept. of the Treasury	52
7. Dept of Energy	46
8. Dept. of Transportation	31
9. Dept. of Agriculture	31
10. Dept. of Homeland Security	30

Redirects (Total N=377)

	Number of Domains
1. Dept. of the Treasury	67
2. Dept. of Health and Human Services	47
3. General Services Administration	42
4. Dept. of Commerce	32
5. Dept. of Agriculture	27
6. Dept. of Justice	25
7. Dept. of the Interior	20
8. Executive Office of the President	20
9. Dept of Energy	16
10. Dept. of Education	13

Inactive, Not Functioning (Total N=246)

	Number of Domains
1. Dept. of the Treasury	39
2. Dept. of Commerce	27
3. General Services Administration	23
4. Dept. of Transportation	20
5. Dept. of Health and Human Services	15
6. Dept of Homeland Security	14
7. Dept. of Energy	13
8. Environmental Protection Agency	13
9. Executive Office of the President	12
10. Dept. of Agriculture	11

Note: In addition, there were 19 additional domains reported as “inactive, under development.” The five agencies reporting the most domains under development were: Dept. of Commerce (6), Dept. of the Interior (3), Dept. of Energy (2), Dept. of Homeland Security (2), and Dept. of the Treasury (2).

3. Action Plans for Domains

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **About 30% of domains will be eliminated or merged:** Of the 1,489 domains, agencies reported that they plan to eliminate 378 domains and merge an additional 65 domains with an existing website.

INVENTORY QUESTION:

(Live and Inactive, Under Development domains)

- What action do you recommend for this site?
- Approximate date you plan to take this action?

(For Redirects and Inactive, Not Functioning domains)

- What action do you plan to take?
- If eliminating this domain, what is the approximate date you plan to take this action?

DATA REPORTED:

Of the 1,489 domains, agencies reported that they plan to "eliminate" or "merge" 30% of the domains, while maintaining 70%.

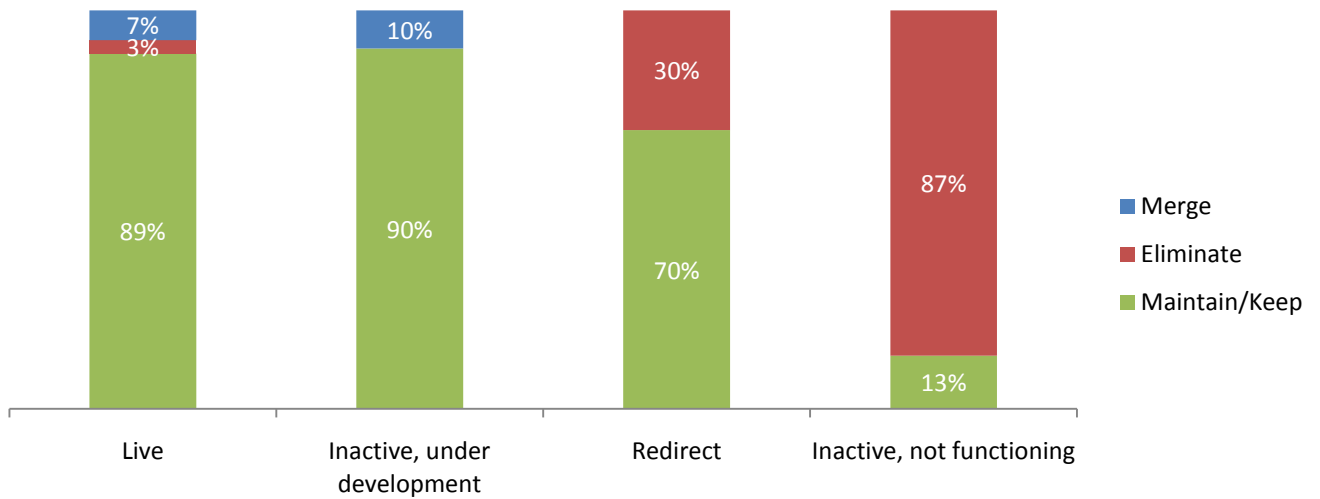
• Keep / Maintain:	1047	70%
• Eliminate:	378	25%
• Merge with an Existing Site:	65	4%

THEMES:

- Agencies reported that they plan to eliminate:
 - 87% of the domains that are not functioning
 - 30% of the redirected domains
 - 3% of the live websites

Plan of Action

N=1,489; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011

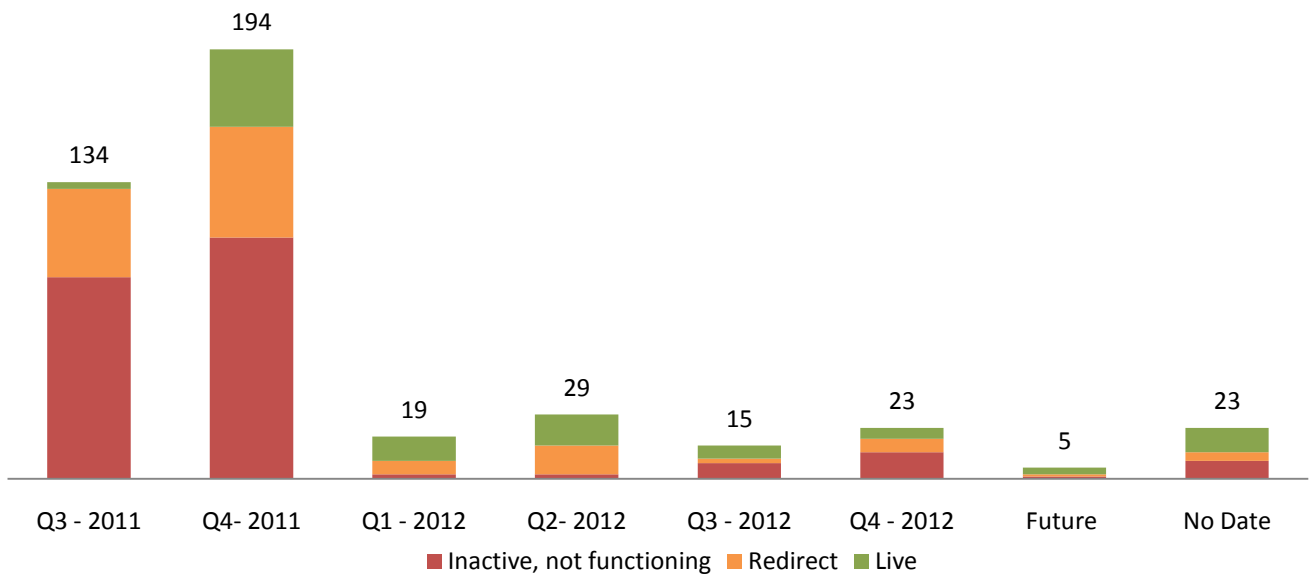


Most domains will be eliminated or merged before the end of 2011: Agencies reported that they have plans to eliminate or merge a total of 442 domains, mostly in FY3 and FY4 of calendar year 2011.

It's not clear why 13% of the inactive/not functioning sites will be maintained. It's possible those are domains that agencies will consider re-activating or moving content to a different domain over time.

Eliminate and/or Merge Date

N=442; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



4. Domain Scope and Operations

The purpose of these questions was to:

- Identify websites that provide high value to the public and can serve as models to be replicated by others.
- Identify opportunities for improving efficiencies in web management and operations within and across agencies (including shared services) and improving the customer experience with Federal online services.

To that end, the survey asked several questions about the purpose of the site, target audiences, and top tasks. In addition, the survey also asked questions about web management, including questions about web content management systems and web hosting providers, as well as questions about web governance and measuring performance.

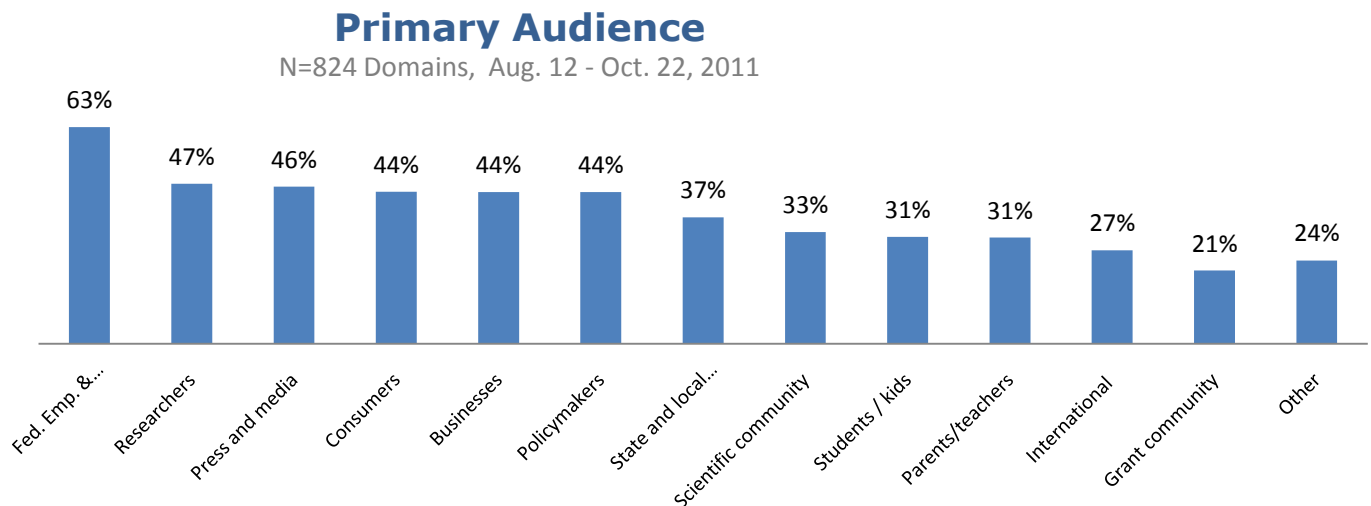
The following sections include data reported for live domains and domains which are inactive, under development—but not for inactive domains.

Primary Audiences

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Most popular audiences:** Of the 824 live and inactive, under development domains, the most popular target audiences included federal employees, researchers, press and media, consumers,

DATA REPORTED:



NOTE: A high number of agencies cited federal employees as a primary audience. This may be because those individuals regularly use their agency’s website as part of their job. This data should not necessarily be interpreted to indicate that agencies believe their content is primarily directed toward government employees.

Primary Topic Areas

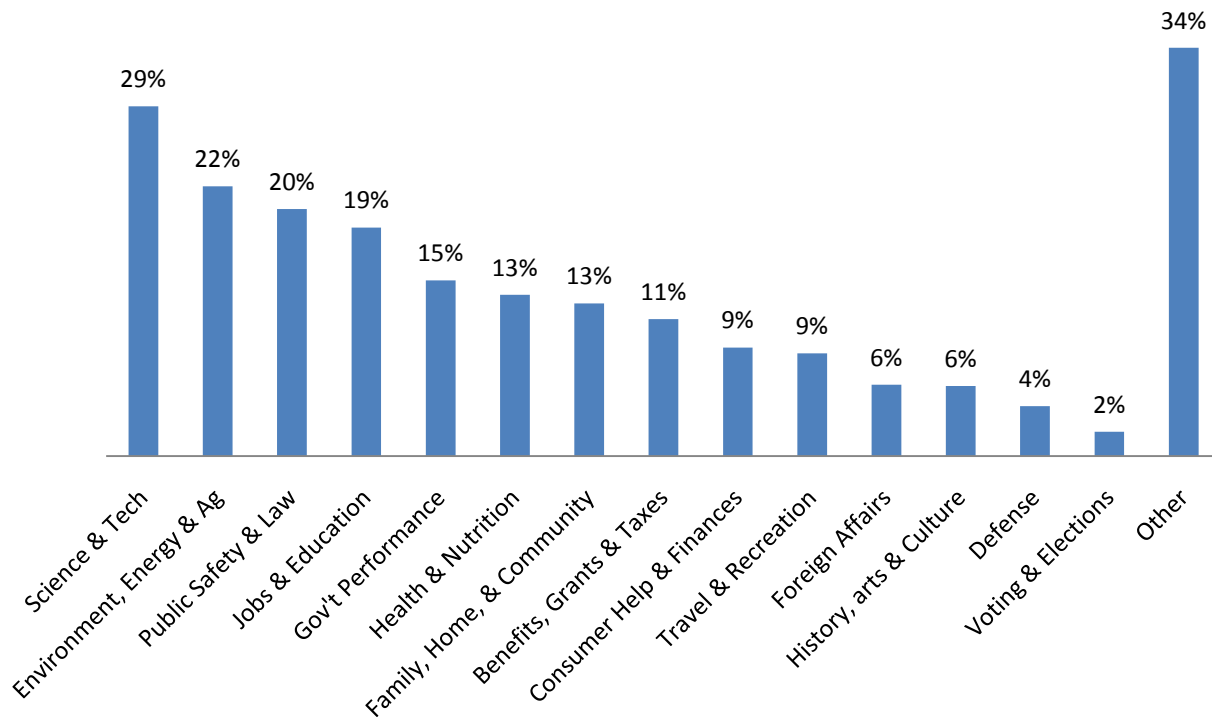
KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Most popular topics:** Agencies were asked to identify primary topic areas for each domain. Of the 824 domains, the most popular topic areas reported were: science and technology (29%); environment, energy and agriculture (22%); public safety and law (20%); jobs and education (19%); and government performance (15%).

DATA REPORTED:

Primary Topic Area

N=824 Domains, Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



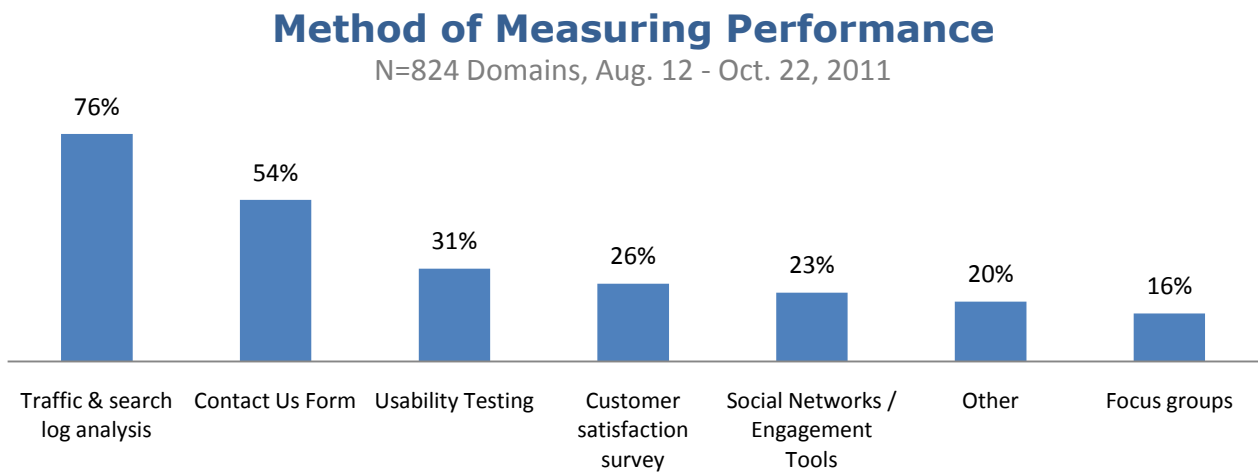
NOTE: "Other" was used by agencies to describe topics specific to their mission, such as training and other employee information, financial and other regulatory information, and content built around a specific campaign or initiative not clearly covered by the categories listed.

I. Method of Measuring Performance

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Top methods for measuring performance:** Of the 824 reporting domains, the most popular methods for measuring performance were: traffic and search log analysis; feedback from contact us forms; usability testing, customer satisfaction surveys; and comments from social networks or other engagement tools.

DATA REPORTED:



II. Frequency of Updating Domains

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Domains updated regularly:** 86% of the live domains and 71% of the domains under development had been updated in the past six months, as of October, 2011, when agencies conducted the inventories.

DATA REPORTED:

LAST TIME SITE WAS UPDATED

N=824 Live Domains; Aug. 12, 2011 - Oct. 22, 2011



III. Web Content Management Systems (CMS) & Web Hosting Providers

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

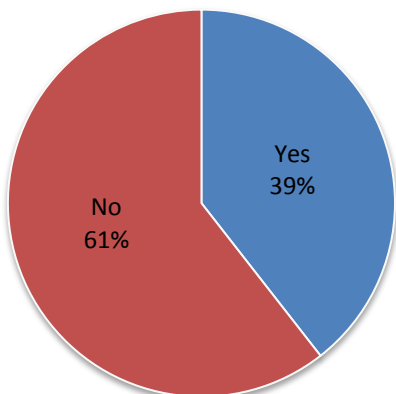
- **Nearly 40% of domains with websites that are live and under development use a CMS:** 39% of live domains use a CMS; 43% of domains under development are being built with a CMS.
- **More than 65% of domains with websites that are live and under development are hosted in-house:** Only 35% of domains are hosted externally.

DATA REPORTED:

Web Content Management System

N=824 Domains

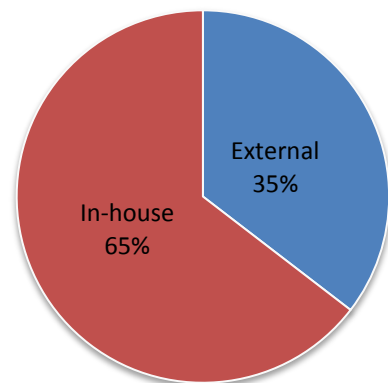
Aug. 12, 2011 - Oct. 22, 2011



Web Hosting Provider

N=824 Domains

Aug. 12, 2011 - Oct. 22, 2011



IV. Public Websites

Purpose of question: It is important to understand how many separate websites an agency is managing, since in some cases, the number of domains does not provide a complete picture.

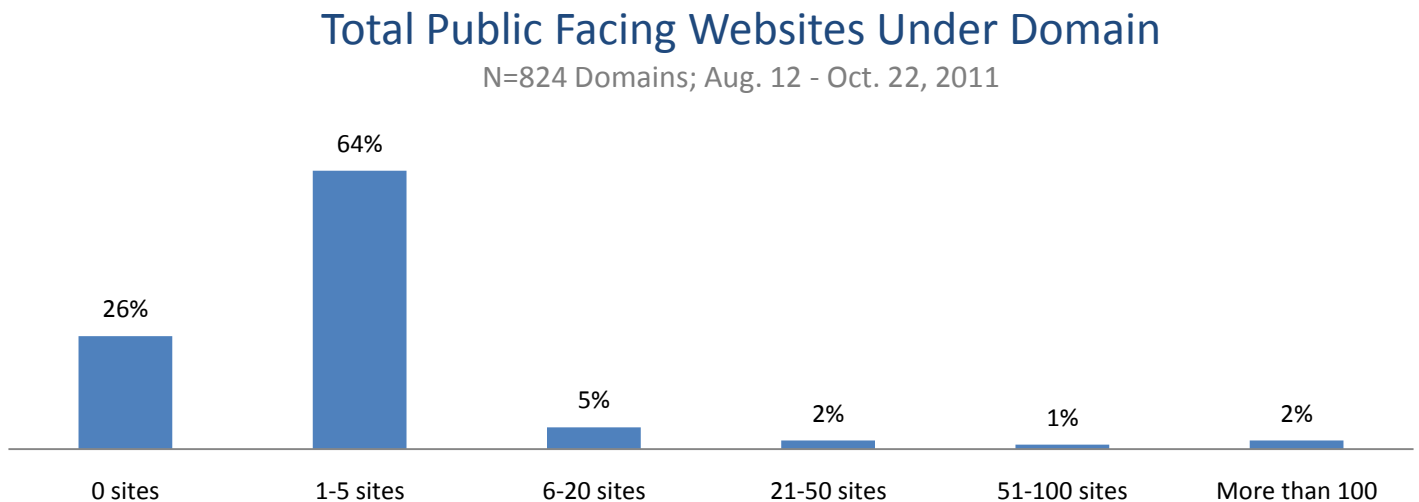
KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Numerous public websites:** There were **11,013 public websites** reported within the 824 domains.
- **Most domains have fewer than five public websites:** 540 of the 824 domains (64%) report fewer than five public websites within each domain.

INVENTORY QUESTION:

How many total public websites are there under this domain?

DATA REPORTED:



V. Rating Overall Performance

KEY TAKEAWAY:

- **Most agencies rated the performance of their websites as 'excellent' or 'good':** On nearly every question related to key performance indicators, approximately 80% of websites were rated by agencies as excellent/good. The highest rated item was "meets Federal web requirements." For this item, 87% of websites were rated as excellent/good.

INVENTORY QUESTION:

How would you rate performance in the following areas?

- Meets Federal web requirements
- Easy to use/navigate
- Reviewed / updated regularly
- Written in plain language
- Easily found by search engines
- Users can easily complete top tasks
- Solicits feedback / makes improvements
- Accessible for people with disabilities
- Content for limited English proficiency

DATA REPORTED:

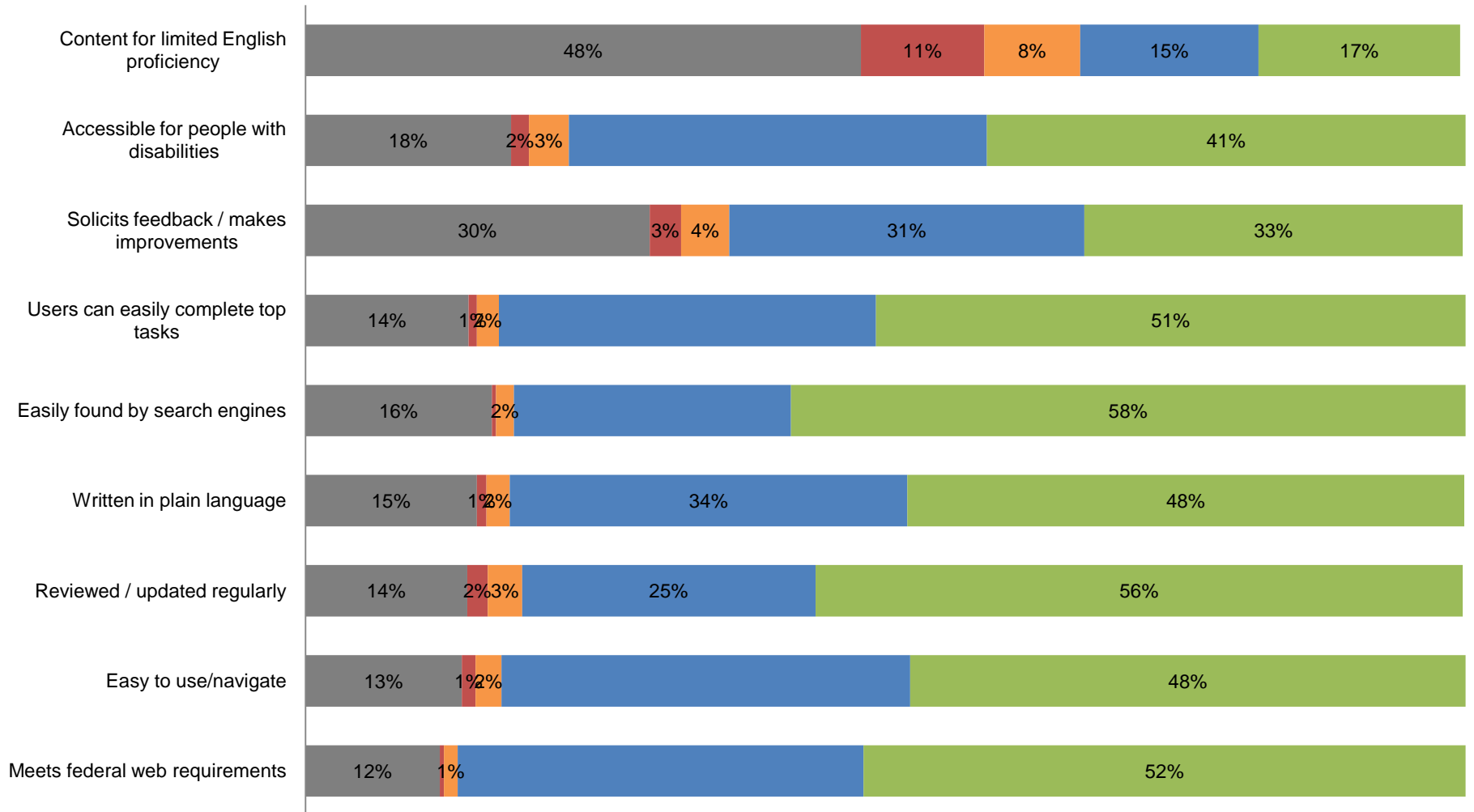
Agencies scored their domains highest for the following five items:

Performance Ratings	Scores rated as "Excellent"
1. Easily found by search engines	58%
2. Reviewed / updated regularly	56%
3. Meets Federal web requirements	52%
4. Users can easily complete top tasks	51%
5. Written in plain language	48%
6. Easy to use/navigate	48%

Performance Rating

N=846; Aug. 12, 2011 - Oct. 22, 2011

■ N/A ■ Poor ■ Fair ■ Good ■ Excellent



FEDERAL WEB GOVERNANCE SURVEY OF MAJOR AGENCIES

PURPOSE

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) conducted the Web Governance Survey, with support from the General Services Administration (GSA) and the .gov Task Force, between August 12 – October 22, 2011. The purpose was to:

- Gather baseline data about the state of web governance in the Federal Government, focusing on major agencies.
- Identify opportunities to improve the customer experience with Federal websites and more efficiently manage web operations.

Although the Federal Web Managers Council has conducted informal web governance surveys in the past, this was the first time the Federal Government has conducted a formal, comprehensive assessment of agencies' web governance and web operations.

RESPONSES

This section reflects responses from 24 major agencies that were required to complete the survey. OMB also received 11 additional responses from agencies that were not required to complete it; that data is not included so as not to skew results of the larger agencies.

SUMMARY

KEY FACTS:

- **Dates of survey:** August 12 – October 22, 2011
- **Number of responses:** 35
- **Data analyzed:** Responses from 24 Major Agencies (11 Non-Major Agencies not included)

NUMBER OF WEB RESOURCES REPORTED (OF MAJOR AGENCIES):

- **Domains:** 1,353
- **Public websites:** 5,696
- **Web content management systems:** 150; **Web hosting providers:** 287

KEY TOPICS:

- **Governance:** 30% reported having consistent governance structures, policies and procedures across their department.
- **Common Design Templates:** Only 8% reported that their websites follow a common design template across their organization; there is greater consistency of design within programs and bureaus.
- **Consistent Performance Measurement:** Only 17% reported that they have a consistent method for measuring performance across the agency.
- **Websites Outside .gov Domain:** Most agencies don't have a process in place to address websites outside the .gov domain (for example .com, .org, etc.)

TAKEAWAYS

Several key takeaways from the data collected in the web governance survey include:

- **Inconsistency across agencies:** The amount of data varied greatly across agencies. Some agencies were able to provide more complete data, while other agencies struggled to develop a clear picture of their web footprint because of decentralized operating units.
- **Incomplete data:** Several agencies did not know the answers to all of the questions, and many noted that this inventory is the first of its kind in their agency.
- **Decentralization:** Nearly all of the agencies alluded to the fact that much of the decision-making with regard to specific domains/websites happens within operating units and not at an agency level.
- **Varying levels of maturity:** Some agencies have clearly set web policies, while many agencies are still working to develop more formal web guidance and governance policies.
- **Need for more Federal guidance:** Many agencies asked for additional guidance and assistance in developing integrated web governance plans and migration processes for their domains.
- **Dedication to improvement:** Nearly all of the agencies made comments to illustrate their dedication to improving web governance and communications at their agency.
- **Benefits may come at a cost:** A few agencies noted that the benefits of integration are extremely important but that integration may come at a cost.

“ Historically, we have had a **decentralized approach** to web management across the department. Our 12 Operating Administrations (OAs) each develop, update, and maintain their own **unique web presence**. The effects of this decentralized approach include:

- widely varying designs and templates
- disorganized and out-of-date content
- a lack of tracking and reporting of web addresses
- a disconnected web infrastructure
- inconsistent web resources”

· Department of Transportation

DETAILED FINDINGS

Detailed findings will review the key findings and will address several topics, including:

1. [.gov Domains](#)
2. [Public Websites](#)
3. [Governance Structure and Policies](#)
4. [Web Content Management Systems \(WCMS\)](#)
5. [Web Hosting Providers](#)
6. [Common Design Templates](#)
7. [Measuring Performance](#)
8. [Websites Outside the .gov Domain](#)
9. [Benefits of Eliminating and Consolidating Domains](#)
10. [Improvements to the Customer Experience](#)

1. .gov Domains

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Plans are being developed to reduce/eliminate domains:** Many agencies noted that this was their first attempt to inventory all domains in their agency and to develop plans to evaluate/consolidate their web footprint.

SURVEY QUESTION:

How many .gov domains does your agency manage?

DATA REPORTED:

There were **1,353 domains** reported by 24 major agencies that completed the Web Governance Survey. Note that this number is lower than the number of domains reported in the .gov Inventory because only the major agencies (not all agencies) were asked to complete the Web Governance Survey.

THEMES:

First inventory: At least two agencies commented that this was the first web inventory for their department.

“ When the Secretary required a data-call on our public website footprint, we conducted an inventory with our operational and headquarters components and did our **first-of-its-kind inventory** of domains. ”

· Department of Homeland Security

Taking steps to eliminate domains: Most agencies commented that they had taken steps to eliminate or merge domains. A few agencies said they discovered new domains they weren't aware of, as a result of this survey.

Wide discrepancy in number of domains: As reported in the larger-scale .gov Inventory, while some agencies have a high number of domains, others maintain relatively few:

Number of domains in each of the 24 major agencies:

Less than 10:	5 Agencies	21%
11-25:	7 Agencies	29%
26-50:	2 Agencies	8%
51-100:	4 Agencies	17%
100+:	6 Agencies	25%

2. Public Websites

Purpose of question: It's important to understand how many separate websites an agency is managing, since in some cases, the number of domains does not provide a complete picture. A domain (i.e. NASA.gov) may have many separate websites (e.g. jpl.nasa.gov, etc.) that have their own design and infrastructure.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Most agencies have at least 50 public websites:** 63% of agencies reported more than 50 public websites.
- **A few agencies had an extremely high number of public websites:** Five agencies reported more than 500 public websites across their organization.
- **The exact number of public websites is unknown:** Several agencies commented that the number of public websites was simply an estimate and that the true number of public sites is not known.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Within these domains, how many total public websites (defined as a site with a unique homepage) does your agency manage? Include subsites and microsities, such as ers.usda.gov, niaid.nih.gov, etc.

DATA REPORTED:

There were **5,696 public websites** reported by 24 major agencies that completed the web governance survey. (Average: 237 public websites per agency; Median: 76).

Note: Several agencies reported that these counts were an estimate and that the true number of public websites in their agency is not known.

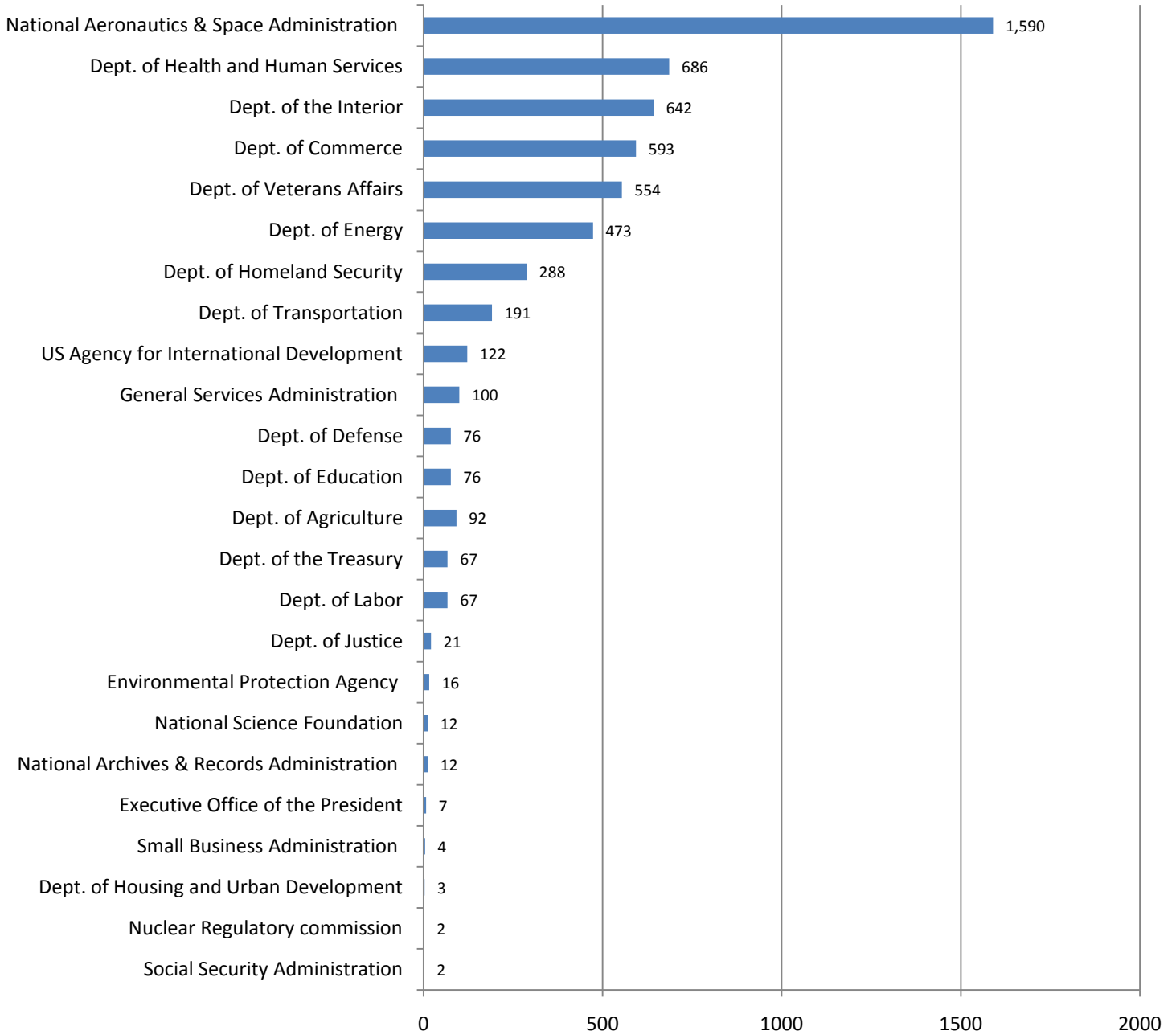
THEMES:

High ratio of public websites to domains: The 24 major agencies reported 5,696 public websites. Some agencies, such as NASA, have a relatively small number of domains compared to other agencies, yet NASA reported the highest number of public websites, with 1,590. The next largest was Department of Homeland Security, with 686 public websites. This indicates that while these agencies are succeeding in keeping the number of domains relatively small, they are still managing a high number of separate websites within those domains. Number of public websites in each of the 24 major agencies:

Less than 10	5 agencies	21%
11-25	4 Agencies	16%
26-50	0 Agencies	0%
51-100:	6 Agencies	25%
101-500:	4 Agencies	17%
501-1000:	4 Agencies	17%
1000+:	1 Agency	4%

Number of Public Facing Websites Reported (Major Agencies)

N=5,674; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



3. Governance Structure and Policies

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Most agencies don't have a consistent governance structure or policies and procedures across the agency:** Most of the 24 major agencies (67%) reported not having standardized web policies and governance across their departments.
- **Four types of governance structures:** Based on the descriptions in the open-ended comments provided by the 24 major agencies, four types of structures were identified:
 - Centralized Governance, with Centralized Oversight
 - Centralized Policies, with Decentralized Implementation
 - Decentralized Governance, Due to Large Organizations
 - No Centralized Governance, Plans to Develop Standard Processes

SURVEY QUESTION:

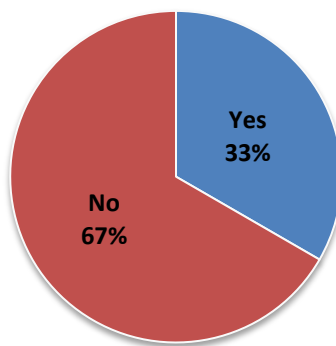
Are all your domains and websites managed under the same governance structure, policies and procedures?

DATA REPORTED:

Agencies reported that about a third of their domains and websites are managed under the same governance structure, policies and procedures; two-thirds are not.

Same governance structure, policies and procedures

N=24 Major Agencies, Aug. 12-Oct. 22, 2011



Note: Not all agencies answered this question consistently. Some agencies that have high-level polices for the entire agency (but allow operating units to have their own guidelines), answered "yes" to this question, while other agencies with a similar structure answered "no."

THEMES:

While there wasn't complete consistency in the way agencies answered this question, four types of governance structure were identified based on comments from the open-ended descriptions.

Centralized governance, with centralized oversight: Four of the major agencies (17%) appeared to have centralized governance. Two of these agencies provided comments that illustrated a centralized governance structure that includes centralized oversight and reporting. Two additional agencies stated that they had centralized governance and simply provided links to their policies, so it's difficult to determine whether the governance also included oversight.

“ Department of Justice... establishes policy... relating to accessibility, navigability, privacy, social media, FOIA, and security. The department requires all component CIOs to **certify quarterly** that their websites **meet these requirements** and that their content that is available to the public meets high standards for information quality. ”

· Department of Justice

“ Commerce has a wide diversity of missions and **agency-wide Web standards are challenging to orchestrate...**

The Commerce Web Advisory Council (WAC) **provides recommendations to improve** the management and use of the DOC Web presence... The WAC reviews and periodically updates existing DOC Web policies, developing new policies when necessary; reviews and recommends decisions on requests for new top-level domains to the DOC CIO; develops skills, knowledge, best practices, ideas, and solutions for Web developers and content managers; **ensures that DOC Web sites are in compliance with Web policies set forth by the DOC** and the OMB; and supports FISMA compliance reporting. ”

· Department of Commerce

Centralized policies, with decentralized implementation: Five of the major agencies (21%) reported that they have centralized policies in place. These policies tend to be general or high-level governance and are enforced by the operating units. Most of these agencies also commented that the operating units are empowered to develop more specific guidance for their websites.

“ All Internet domains... and websites operated by the DoD are managed under the same top-level DoD policies. Implementation of these policies and the **authority to impose** additional policies is **delegated to the DoD Components.**”

· Department of Defense

“ The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has **Web governance that sets principles of operation and Web practices.** HHS is a very large, federated Department... In general, **each OPDiv Web operation is run as a separate entity.**”

· Department of Health and Human Services

“ DOI maintains a **governance procedure for all websites** under agency control. Web requirements are provided in the DOI Web Standards Handbook. However, the **bureaus/offices may have additional governance structure, policies and procedures** for their domains and websites.”

· Department of the Interior

Decentralized governance, due to large organizations: Eleven of the major agencies (45%) alluded to decentralized processes due to large organizations and managing websites with outside partners. Two agencies stated that the only standard policies in place are the Federal policies that are required of each agency. At least three other organizations alluded to governance at a decentralized level (i.e. within operating units, for a domain or a specific website).

“ One of the major goals ... is to establish web governance. While **some Operating Administrations (OAs) have governance bodies,** ranging from small and informal to large and complex, DOT **does not have a department-wide style guide, maintenance schedule, or review process** in place for offices, divisions and administrations.”

· Department of Transportation

“ Each Bureau... is **empowered to manage its own web program**. All Bureaus... are expected to follow Executive Branch applicable web policies, guidance, and best practices. Currently there is **no formal written and published policy** that augments or further clarifies the OMB policies, guidance, and best practices described at Howto.gov. ”

· Department of Treasury

No centralized governance, but plans to develop standard processes: Four of the major agencies (or 17%) reported that they did not have a centralized governance structure in place, but stated that they are in the process of developing standardize guidance and policies for their web properties.

“ We moved to **initiate a more comprehensive and thoughtful governance** structure at DHS. With representation from all operational components and headquarters components, the web governance teams have a roadmap that includes **creating more uniform policies and procedures** including harmonizing our editorial guidelines. ”

· Department of Homeland Security

4. Web Content Management Systems (CMS)

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Almost all have a CMS, but use many different systems:** All but one agency reported using a CMS; many different systems are used across the 24 major agencies. Agencies referred to 150 separate implementations of 42 different systems.
- **Custom-built systems:** Twelve agencies reported some sort of custom-built or in- house CMS.
- **Exact number of CMS is unknown:** Some agencies commented that the true number of CMS in use across the agency is unknown.

SURVEY QUESTION:

How many different Web Content Management Systems do you use across your cabinet department / agency?

DATA REPORTED:

The 24 major agencies that completed the survey reported a total of 150 web content management systems. In reviewing the open-ended comments, agencies identified 42 unique web content management systems. Note that these numbers are slightly lower than the number of CMS reported in the .gov Inventory, since the Web Governance Survey was only completed by the Major Agencies.

Note: Several of the major agencies provided the names of the web content management systems in use. Since agencies were not specifically asked to name providers, this information is meant to give a sense of the range of web content management systems in use, not be a comprehensive report of all of the different types of systems in place.

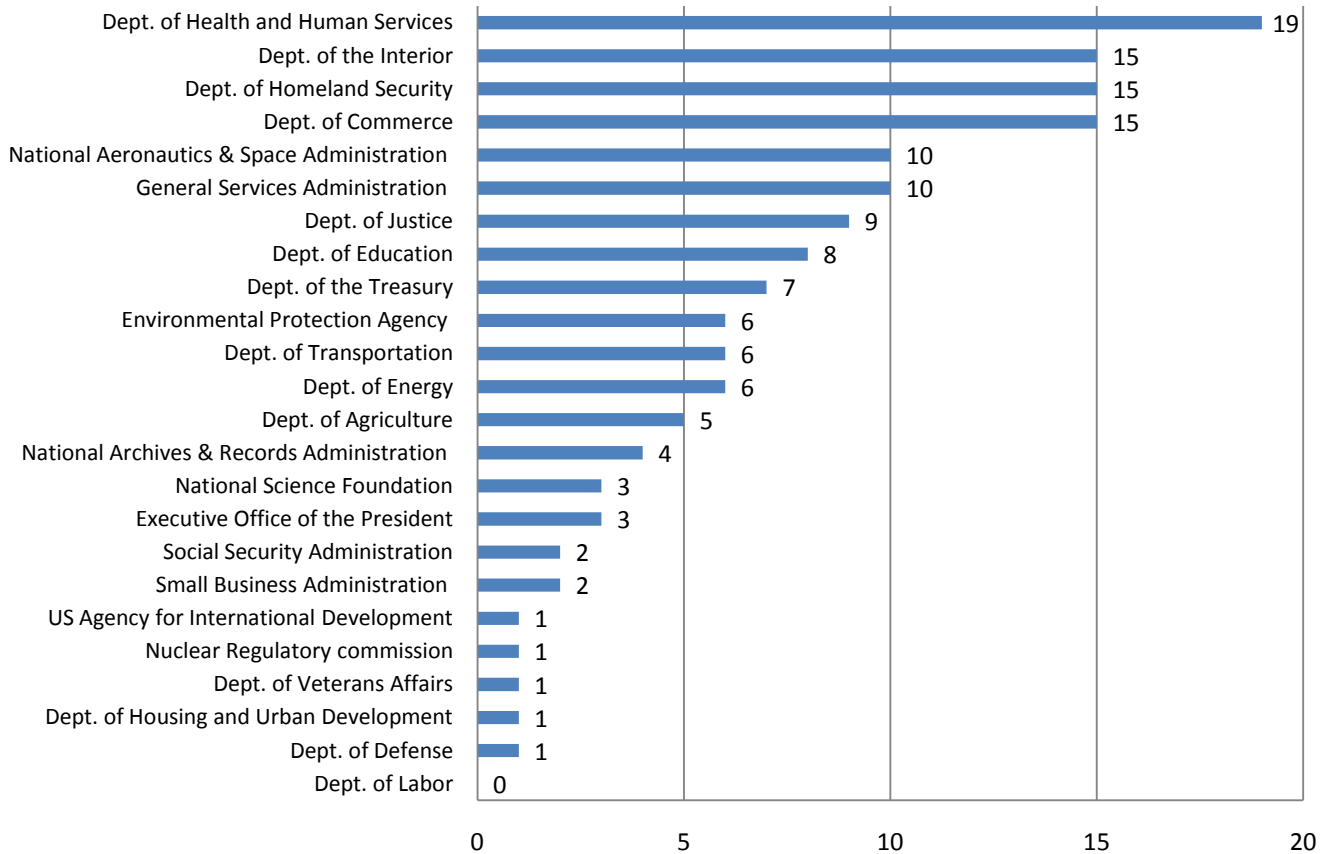
THEMES:

Many different web content management systems in each agency: Of the agencies that reported, only one agency reported not using a CMS. All of the other agencies reported multiple systems. One agency reported as many as 19 different systems. Number of content management systems reported in 24 major agencies:

0-1:	6 Agencies	25%
2-9:	12 Agencies	50%
10-14:	2 Agencies	8%
15+:	4 Agencies	17%

Number of CMS Reported In Use

N=139; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



True number of systems unknown: Several agencies admitted that it was not clear how many CMS are in use:

“ We have **never addressed web domains governance and management from an enterprise-wide level.** Thus, we have not systematically collected this information. ”

General Services Administration

“ This **number is a guess.** No one at NASA knows the number with certainty. ”

NASA

Future plans to implement a CMS: A few agencies commented about their future plans for an enterprise-wide system:

“ We’re **working to implement an enterprise Content Management System (CMS)** to help standardize content delivery and the skill sets required to deploy content. By centralizing the technologies, DOT will be able to achieve economies of scale and a more consistent environment. ”

· Department of Transportation

“ Digital reform efforts at the Energy Department are catalyzing headquarters offices to move their public-facing websites to... a **one CMS solution.** ”

· Department of Energy

5. Web Hosting Providers

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Multiple web hosting providers in each agency:** Most agencies reported using multiple hosting providers, with an average of 12 providers per agency.
- **In-house hosting:** Thirteen out of 24 major agencies (or 54%) reported that at least some websites are hosted internally.
- **Growth anticipated due to cloud computing:** Two of the major agencies (or 8%) expect additional growth in external web hosting providers due to the rise of cloud computing.
- **Exact number of web hosting providers is unknown:** Six out of 24 agencies (or 25%) stated that the true number of web hosting providers in use across the agency is unknown.

SURVEY QUESTION:

How many web hosting providers do you use across your cabinet department / agency?

DATA REPORTED:

There were **250 web hosting providers** reported by 24 major agencies. Note that these numbers are slightly lower than the number of hosting providers reported in the .gov Inventory, since the Web Governance Survey was only completed by the major agencies.

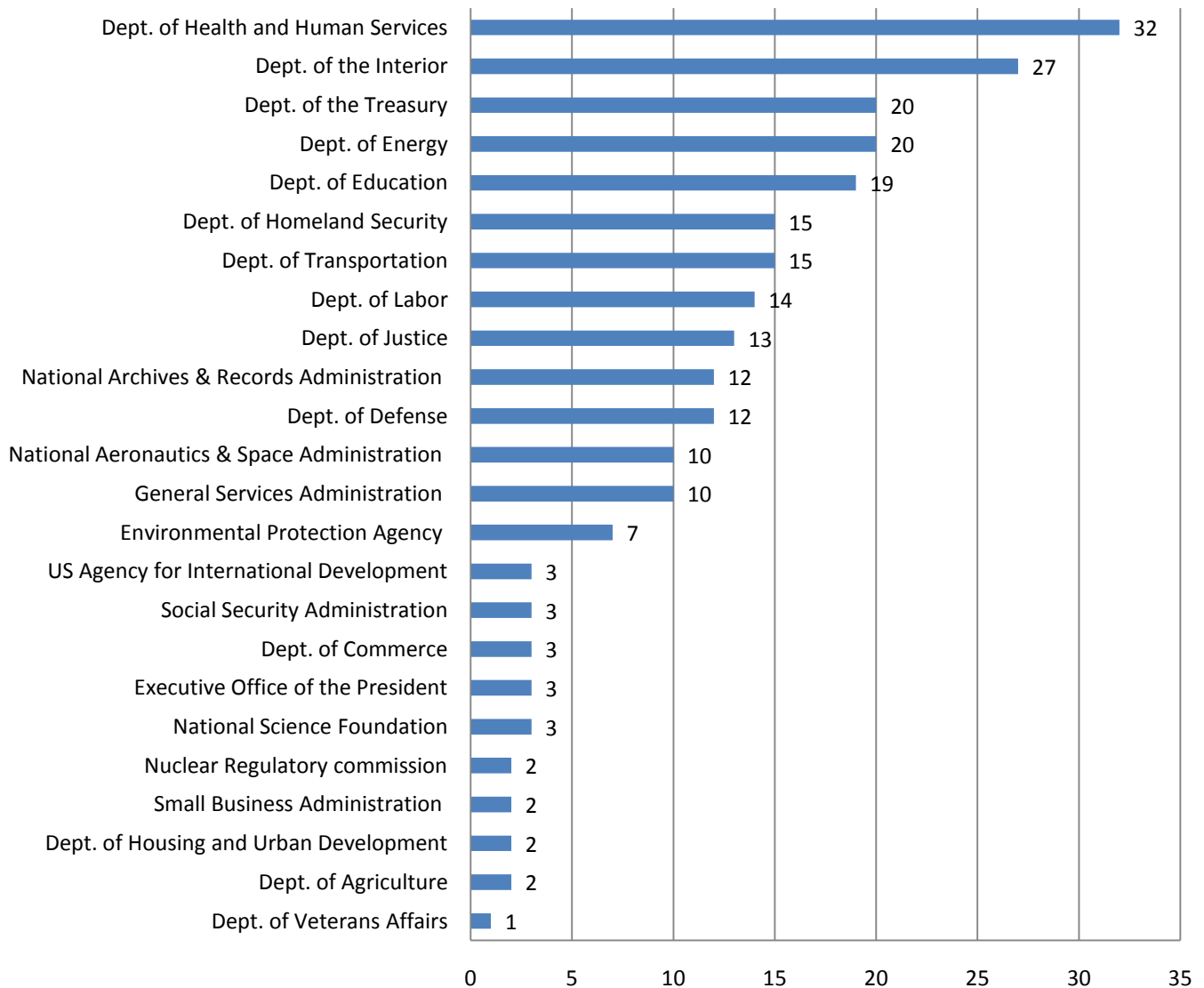
THEMES:

Many different hosting providers in each agency: Agencies reported multiple providers. One agency reported as many as 66 different providers.

0-1:	1 Agencies	4%
2-9:	10 Agencies	42%
10-14:	6 Agencies	25%
15+:	7 Agencies	29%

Number of Web Hosting Providers Reported

N=250; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



True number of providers unknown: Several agencies reported that it was not clear how many hosting providers are in use:

“ The **lack of centralized Web governance**, however, makes it extremely difficult to determine how many Web hosting providers are being used across the Department. Some OPDivs acknowledged they **did not know how many external Web hosting providers** were being used by parts of their organizations. ”

Department of Health & Human Services

Hosting as an additional service: Two agencies mentioned that web hosting is sometimes a result of a larger web redesign project where the vendor offers hosting as an additional service.

6. Common Web Design

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Little consistency at agency level:** Most agencies reported that there is not a common web design for the entire department or agency.
- **More consistency within operational units:** Several agencies commented that there is more consistency at the operational unit-level than at the agency level.
- **Consolidation in process:** Several agencies commented that there are plans either at the agency or within operational units to redesign sites to have a common design template.

SURVEY QUESTION:

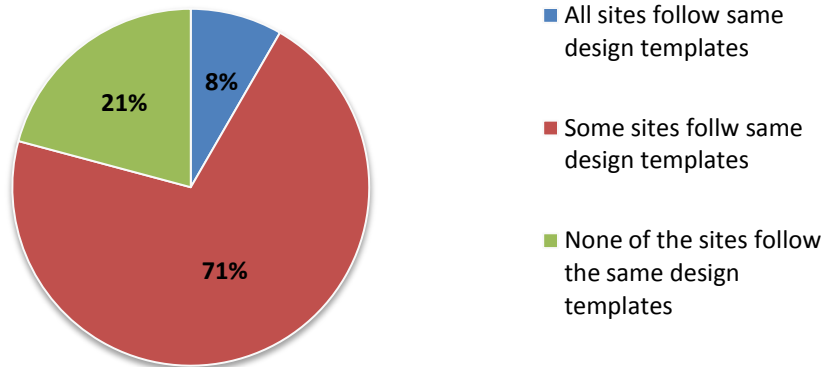
Describe the extent to which your domains and websites have a common "look and feel."

DATA REPORTED:

Of 24 major agencies, two agencies (8%) stated that "all of their websites follow the same templates"; 17 agencies (71%) stated that "some of their websites follow the same design templates;" and five agencies (21%) stated that "none of their websites follow the same design templates."

Common Design Templates

N=24 Major Agencies; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



THEMES:

Little design consistency within agencies: Almost all agencies (92%) reported that none or only some of their websites follow a common design template.

Several agencies noted that there is consistency within some of their operating units.

“ Some of the divisions have a consistent look and feel across their web sites, particularly the ones that operate a smaller number of web sites. There is **no common look and feel across the entire Department**, however, and **most of the larger divisions have inconsistency amongst the web site designs**. ”

· Department of Health and Human Services

“ Several operating units within Commerce have **developed their own Web design** templates and maintain a common look and feel across their corresponding sites. USPTO and Census are good examples of this practice. ”

· Department of Commerce

“ Each **Bureau is empowered to manage its own web program**... websites that are managed by Treasury Headquarters or a single Bureau **sometimes utilizes the same design templates**. ”

· Department of the Treasury

In process of developing design templates: Four of the 24 major agencies commented that they're in the process of developing a consistent user interface or redesign project that will provide a common look and feel.

“ With the current redesign of Energy.gov, we are **in the process of migrating** all the Headquarters websites into the Energy.gov infrastructure, including look and feel. ”

· Department of Energy

“ HUD is working to ensure that all HUD websites **deliver a consistent and uniformed look and feel.** ”

· Department of Housing and Urban Development

7. Measuring Performance

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Lack of consistent performance metrics:** Nineteen of the major agencies (79%) reported that they did not use the same performance metrics to consistently evaluate agency websites across the agency; each site uses its own combination of methods.
- **Metrics not standardized:** Several agencies commented that even though the same tools are used, the metrics from those tools are not consistently gathered, implemented and applied.
- **Web analytics is the most commonly used method:** Most agencies (10 out of 24) referred to using web analytics tools to measure performance.

SURVEY QUESTION:

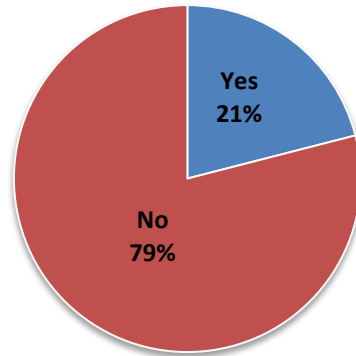
Do all these domains and websites have a consistent method for measuring performance?

DATA REPORTED:

Nineteen agencies (79%) reported that they did not have a consistent method for measuring web performance across the agency. Two agencies, Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Executive Office of the President, stated that they did have a consistent method.

Consistent Method for Measuring Performance

N=24 Major Agencies; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



THEMES:

Lack of consistently used metrics, tools and performance standards: Agencies reported a lack of consistency in how they collect and analyze metrics and measure performance. Some agencies indicated that different organizations used the same tools in different ways.

“ All the GSA.gov domains appear to measure performance but there are **many methods and tools** used to do so. ”

· *General Services Administration*

“ All of the DOL agency websites can obtain metrics from the **same Web metrics platform**, but other sites, such as partnered websites, have **different statistics packages** that they use. There is **no central set of website performance measures**. ”

· *Department of Labor*

“ We recently deployed multiple analytics tools on the main DOT.gov website. These analytics will provide insight into how best to meet our users’ needs. This type of **measurement and reporting is inconsistent across the department**. ”

· *Department of Transportation*

“ Many of the web sites hosted by HHS divisions directly use Google Analytics, Web Trends or the American Customer Service Index to measure performance and use. There is no Department-wide policy for performance measurement of web sites, however, thus **even the web sites that use the same tools do not necessarily use them the same way or utilize the same metrics.**”

· Department of Transportation

Web analytics is most commonly used method: Ten of the 24 agencies explicitly mentioned web analytics tools. Only four agencies mentioned other types of customer feedback, such as customer surveys and the American Customer Satisfaction Index. However, this data is most likely not accurate since agencies were not specifically asked to provide a list of evaluation methods.

8. Websites Outside the .gov Domain

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Most agencies commented that they have websites outside the .gov domain:** Most agencies cited two main reasons for websites outside the .gov domain, including partnerships with external organizations and websites funded from grants.
- **Exact number of non-.gov websites is unknown:** At least six of the major agencies (25%) stated that they are in the process of conducting an inventory / review of non-.gov websites.
- **Plans for addressing non-.gov domains varied greatly:** Some agencies had policies and processes in place for integrating or migrating these websites into .gov domains; other agencies commented that they do not have any formal processes in place and stated that there is a need for additional Federal guidance.

SURVEY QUESTION:

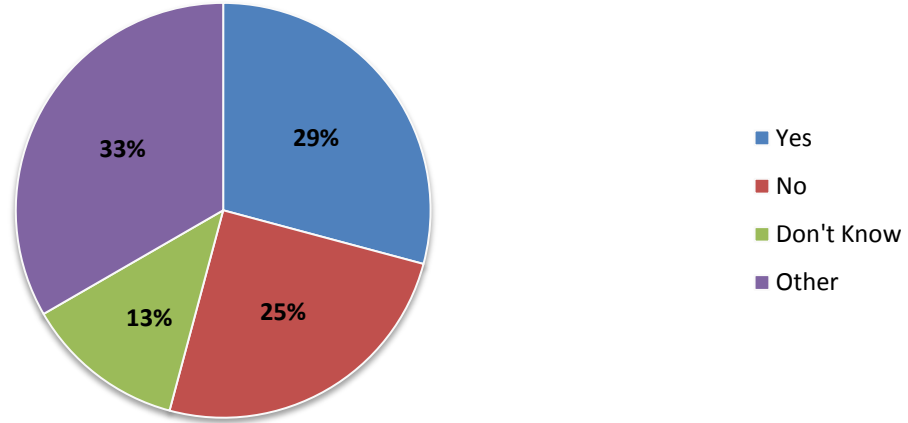
- If you maintain sites outside the .gov domain: What are your plans to bring those sites into compliance with Federal policy, which requires agencies to maintain sites in the .gov domain?
- If you maintain sites outside the .gov domain: Do you have a documented waiver process for allowing sites outside the .gov domain?

DATA REPORTED:

Nearly all of the 24 major agencies reported maintaining sites outside the .gov domain. Six agencies said they were in the process of conducting an inventory and review of these sites.

Waiver Process for Allowing Sites Outside the .gov Domain

N=24 Major Agencies; Aug. 12 - Oct. 22, 2011



THEMES:

Mixed response for plans to integrate: Agencies had a mixed response to questions about migrating their non .gov websites to the .gov domain, to be in compliance with Federal policy. Several agencies provided various reasons for having websites outside the Federal domain.

“ ED maintains several sites outside the .gov domain because **they do not meet the criteria for an agency public website**. For example, they provide technical assistance to grantees (not the general public) or perform independent research. Because the content on these sites does not represent the positions or policies of the Department, they should not have .gov domains. When the **funding for such a site is renewed, it is reviewed to make sure the function hasn't changed to one that must be on a .gov domain**.

In addition, ED is **conducting a review to ensure that any website maintained outside the .gov domain does meet the exception criteria** and if not, will take action to migrate them to a .gov domain upon discovery or when funding for such a site is renewed. ”

· Department of Education

Other agencies provided reasons why a .gov domain is not feasible or desirable.

“ Websites using non-.GOV domains will be assessed for compliance with Federal and DOE policies. There are **situations where the use of a .GOV domain is not politically expedient.** ”

.....
· Department of Energy

“ The sites with a .com or .org address are collaborative between the Department and private industry/non-profit... many of the industry/non-profit leaders and representatives involved are more comfortable sharing their expertise with law enforcement on a collaborative website rather than just receiving a mention on a .gov website. **Moving the domain to a .gov would likely stifle industry/non-profit participation.** ”

.....
· Department of Justice

Integration plans mixed: In reviewing the open-ended comments, it was clear there were varying levels of plans to address agency-managed websites outside of the .gov domain. Twelve agencies said they have not yet developed plans to bring these domains into a .gov domain, to be in compliance with Federal policy. Seven agencies referred to existing plans or plans which are in the process of being developed. The rest of the agencies didn't comment on their plans.

Some agencies had very formal plans, procedures, and policies for migrating the sites to the .gov domain, while other agencies commented that they were just beginning to evaluate external websites and to develop plans for migration.

Need for Federal policy: At least two of the agencies asked for additional guidance on migrating relevant external websites to .gov domains.

“ A variety of .org and .net sites exist across HHS. **Domain policy has not been specific related to these and very much needs to be developed further...**

“ It would be very helpful to have a **cross-government uniform policy** on .org and .net domains and a waiver process established for exceptions only. ”

.....
· Department of Health and Human Services

Costs associated with migration: One agency commented on the costs associated with migration and stated that costs of migration may exceed the cost savings.

“ Many of the domains listed are the **result of partnerships with state, local governments, tribes**, etc. which are not subject to the same Federal requirements.

In these cases, many of these domains... are **often built on external platforms that would carry significant costs to duplicate**, and are linked to by other websites. Therefore, **moving them would be challenging**. We have **not established any formal plans** to bring these sites into epa.gov or our other .gov domains at this time. As a result of this current exercise and the principles of the .gov reform initiative, we would **welcome best practices and guidance** on how we might bring the appropriate sites into the .gov domains we have. ”

· Environment Protection Agency

9. Benefits of Eliminating and Consolidating Domains

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Many positive benefits:** Agencies cited outcomes such as cost savings, streamlined processes and improved efficiencies and productivity.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Describe the expected benefits of your plans to eliminate and consolidate your domains over the next year.

THEMES:

Positive outcomes: Agencies cited various benefits that they believe will be associated with eliminating and consolidating domains.

The **top 10 benefits** include:

- Improved efficiencies and productivity.
- Decreased costs for software, hosting, training, procurement, and tools.
- Increased ease of website maintenance.
- Streamlined online presence with improved customer service to citizens and businesses by focusing on top tasks while clearly advancing the mission of each agency.
- Strengthened websites that include uniform web presence, a common look and feel, and improved site layout and structure.

- Reductions in out-of-date, inaccurate and duplicative content, and improvements to ensure that content is written in plain language.
- Opportunities to foster greater accountability and increased trust.
- Improved ability to gather customer feedback.
- Enhanced visibility and reputation.
- Increased findability by reducing the number of .gov domains.

Positive benefits may come at a cost: While the majority of major agencies cited positive improvements, a few agencies commented that the process of web consolidation may come at a cost and will not be achieved overnight. In some cases, it may actually cost agencies more at the outset to consolidate multiple websites before real savings are realized.

“ Some **expected benefits are purely financial** in that the cost of maintaining the domain registry entries and, in some cases, the separate web servers, will be avoided.

The return on investment for these benefits has a long term for payback, however. One OPDiv estimates that retiring 8 of its domains will avoid \$1080 annually for maintaining the domain names. The **labor costs to migrate the data from the retired domains to domains that would continue to operate was significantly higher than the annual cost avoidance**, so barring any other cost avoidance such as reduction in hardware to host the retired domains, it **will take several years to recoup the costs of the migration.** ”

10. Improvements to Customer Experience

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Many positive improvements:** Agencies cited improvements to customer experience, consistency in design, elimination of duplication and clutter, and easier access to information (search) from having fewer .gov domains.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Describe improvements to the customer experience that you anticipate from eliminating and consolidating your domains and websites.

THEMES:

Outcomes: Agencies cited various improvements to the customer experience by eliminating and/or consolidating domains, including, but not limited to:

- Clear, consistent and reliable information and services wherever and whenever users want them.
- Easier access to content from consolidated web content on fewer domains.
- Improved navigation, usability, search, and user understanding which will enable the public to complete their tasks efficiently and effectively.
- Improved search results and increased access to information across agency websites.
- Consistency in design templates.
- Elimination of duplication and clutter as a result of migration of content.
- Elimination and/or consolidation of domains and websites will lessen redundancy and provide the customer with a more efficient, less confusing web experience.
- Reduction in outdated and poorly maintained content which will lessen user confusion.

WEB IMPROVEMENT PLANS FOR MAJOR AGENCIES

PURPOSE

On August 12, 2011, agency CIOs were asked to work with their agency Web Manager and Office of Public Affairs to submit a report on their efforts to streamline agency-managed .gov domains and to develop an agency-wide Web Improvement Plan.

*"By October 11, Agencies shall develop a Web Improvement Plan that communicates their **strategy for managing web resources more efficiently, improving online content, and enhancing the customer experience of agency websites.**"*

The purpose of the plans was to identify the strategy, actions, measurements, and timelines that each major agency is using to streamline website infrastructure, improve web content, and enhance the customer experience with Executive Branch websites. Only major agencies in the Executive Branch were required to submit Web Improvement Plans, and they will continue to be developed iteratively.

RESPONSES

Each major agency was required to submit an initial draft plan between October 4 – 11, 2011. A total of 25 major agencies and 11 non-major agencies responded. All [Agency Web Improvement Plans](#) are available on USA.gov/webreform.

SUMMARY

KEY FACTS:

- **Dates for submission:** October 4 – 11, 2011
- **Number of responses:** 36 agencies (25 major agencies; 11 non-major agencies)
- **Data analyzed:** Responses from 25 major agencies

KEY TOPICS:

- **Agency-wide Strategies:** Less than half of the major agencies report having an agency-wide web strategy.
- **Governance:** Most agencies report a decentralized website management structure.
- **Reviews and Monitoring:** Most agencies conduct regular reviews or monitor websites to ensure accuracy and accessibility of web content.
- **Direct User Feedback:** All agencies engage with their audiences to incorporate direct user feedback into website improvements.

TAKEAWAYS

There are several key takeaways about the data:

- **Honest and transparent responses:** Agencies provided honest and candid responses to the initial draft plan survey. The writers are quick to expose their agency's current gaps and mindful to provide information about the agency's plans and direction for the future, which helps build transparency and accountability.
- **Variation across agencies:** There is significant variation among responses as the survey consisted primarily of open-ended questions.
- **Prioritization needed:** The open-ended nature of the comments made it difficult to assess how agencies are prioritizing their planned improvements.
- **Decentralization:** Most agencies report that much of the decision-making with regard to websites happens within operating units and not at an agency level, making it difficult to develop an agency-wide plan.

DETAILED FINDINGS

The detailed findings will review the key results on a broad range of topics, including:

1. [Web Strategies](#)
2. [Efficient Management of Web Resources](#)
3. [Accessible, Updated, Accurate and Improved Web Content](#)
4. [Meeting User Expectations](#)

NOTE:

The Web Improvement Plan questionnaire consisted of all open-ended questions, so findings are generally qualitative rather than quantitative. We've attempted to provide some quantitative analysis, but the percentages are estimates and are most likely incomplete, as some agencies' open-ended responses may not fully describe all their web improvement activities. Additionally, some similarities as well as discrepancies exist between data reported in this survey and that which was reported for the Federal Web Governance Survey.

1. Web Strategies

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Agency-wide strategies:** Fewer than half of the 25 major agencies indicated that they currently have an agency-wide web strategy. Many commented that web strategies in their department tend to be decentralized at the operational unit.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN QUESTION:

Does your agency currently have an agency-wide web strategy?

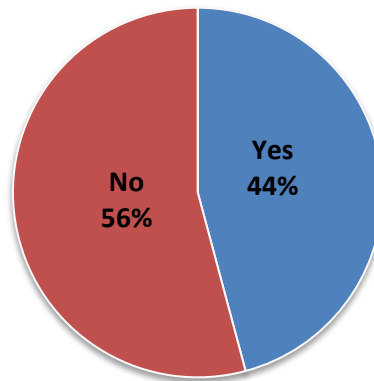
DATA REPORTED:

Of the 25 major agencies who completed the web improvement plan survey:

- 44% have an agency-wide web strategy 11 Agencies
- 56% do not have an agency-wide web strategy 14 Agencies

Current Agency-wide Web Strategies

N=24 Major Agencies; Oct. 4 - 11, 2011



THEMES:

Decentralized web strategies: Fewer than half of major agencies (44%) report having an agency-wide web strategy. Although 56% don't have an agency-wide strategy, most do have structures or policies in place at the operating unit, bureau or center level.

“ There is **no uniform agency-wide process** for ensuring content on the other NASA sites is accessible, updated, accurate or routinely improved. Individual programs and projects at the Centers and offices at NASA Headquarters **manage their own content** and are responsible for accuracy and accessibility. ”

· National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

“ HHS is federated and the responsibility for the management of Web content is **handled independently by the OPDivs.** ”

· Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

2. Efficient Management of Web Resources

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Governance:** Most agencies report following a decentralized approach to website management.
- **Independent operations:** Departments, bureaus or centers within agencies often operate independently of one another.
- **Review process:** More than half of the 25 major agencies have processes in place to ensure their websites are in compliance with multiple policies.
- **Technology, infrastructure and hosting:** Some of the major agencies report that they are moving towards centralizing technology services.
- **Documentation and guidance:** Some major agencies provide guidance for their web staff through documentation and policies. These documents often inform website management and use of resources throughout operational units.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN QUESTION:

How does your agency currently ensure that agency-wide web resources are managed efficiently (e.g. governance, technology/infrastructure, hosting, staffing, operations, etc.)?

THEMES:

Agency-wide management and governance: Based on the comments from the 24 major agencies, there seems to be little consistency in the overall structure of governance at the major agencies. This inconsistency was also reported in the Federal Web Governance Survey.

Each agency describes different components of their governance structures. Three key governance structures emerged from the data:

- Centralized structures
- 2 types of decentralized structures:
 - sharing of resources among operating units
 - independent operations within the agency

Few centralized structures: Less than a third of the major agencies (29%) report having a centralized structure, which may include a central web team. The staffing and management of these teams varies widely from general web teams to Offices of Public Affairs to Chief Information Officers (CIOs). These teams develop agency-wide policies that affect operations within the operational units.

“ The **Web team centrally manages** SBA.gov templates, community, top-level content, new tools and hosting. ”

· *Small Business Administration (SBA)*

“ To efficiently manage the resources that power the White House's online program, the **Office of Digital Strategy collaborates with the Office of Administration, specifically the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)**. The OCIO's tasks include providing a stable environment capable of hosting WhiteHouse.gov and related content, overseeing the development of new tools and infrastructure, and providing expertise and insight into technical questions. ”

· *Executive Office of the President*

Decentralized governance: The vast majority of agencies (71%) report using a decentralized structure that empowers operating units to develop and maintain their own governance policies. From the agencies' reports, it appears that there are two types of decentralized governance: those with shared resources among operational units and those with independent operations within operating units (i.e. where the bureau/Center has websites that are managed centrally).

Decentralized governance with shared resources among operational units: Even though agencies have decentralized governance structures, several of the operating units share knowledge across their agency's other departments, bureaus, or centers. Some of these operating units also share access to resources made available agency-wide such as code libraries and shared best practice guides. However, there seems to be no consistency in the type of resources available to operating units across agencies.

Decentralized governance with independent operations within operational units: Other agencies have decentralized operating units, bureaus, or centers that operate independently, without access to common knowledge or resources from other units within the agency. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has operating divisions that are responsible for their own department's web operations (NIH, CDC etc). These divisions work closely in conjunction with their own teams, but do not often communicate or share knowledge with other operating divisions.

“ Given the organizational structure outlined above, there is **no centralized control or even knowledge** of cross-department Web resource management. OPDivs are responsible for aligning resources, but tracking of resources – and evaluation of outcomes – is often limited or non-existent. Each OPDiv's Web operation is organized and funded separately, and that can also be splintered. ”

· Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

“ Historically, we have had a **decentralized approach to web management** across the department. Our 12 Operating Administrations (OAs) or "modes" each develop, update, and maintain their own unique web presence. ”

· Department of Transportation

Documentation and guidance: Some agencies (29%) report that they maintain agency-wide web documentation and guidance for their departments. These documents often provide guidelines and best practices for managing the agencies' websites and resources. However, the breadth, depth, and use of these guidelines are not clear or consistent across agencies' responses.

“ The Department currently has a Departmental Web Manager's Handbook that provides **guidelines for bureaus and offices to manage web sites.** ”

· Department of the Interior

“ EPA has a policy and set of procedures, standards, guidance, and **best practices for the governance and management of the EPA website.** These policy documents provide a framework for clear infrastructure and content management responsibilities, identifying and allocating necessary resources, promoting agency-wide standards for best Web practices, and recognition and support for the agency's Web community. ”

· Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

“ ... We adhere strictly to Management Directive 3.14, "U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Public Web Site," which **governs consistent design and efficient management** of the www.nrc.gov and other NRC-sponsored (non-nrc.gov) web domains. ”

· Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)

Development of best practices and review of websites for compliance: Most of the agencies (54%) report having a well-defined review process in place within their organization for addressing matters such as accessibility and security or the creation of new websites. It is not always clear how these policies are used throughout the organization. It appears that in many cases, operational units are empowered to implement the policies within their own divisions. For example, NASA has "no agency-wide coordination of management of web resources" but does have a defined process for policy compliance review.

“ There is **no agency-wide direct coordination** or management of web resources... Most Centers have a **defined process... to review for policy compliance** (IT Security, Accessibility Guidelines, applicable NASA policies and requirements, NASA Privacy Policy, Section 508 information, COPPA, export control, etc.). ”

· National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

Technology, infrastructure and hosting: Most agencies still have a decentralized approach to the management of technology resources. For example, at the General Services Administration, technology hosting is currently managed at the domain or website level, as infrastructure and hosting solutions have not yet been addressed agency-wide.

“ Although there is a strong focus on operational efficiency of GSA.gov and USA.gov, **GSA has not yet systematically addressed the issues of technology and infrastructure, hosting, staffing and operations** across all the GSA .gov domains. ”

· General Services Administration (GSA)

Eight agencies (33%) report using or moving towards a centralized approach to technology and hosting.

“ Our strategy has been to move various EOP components to **a single web platform** powered by a common content management system, with the **goal of sharing resources across the enterprise.** ”

· Executive Office of the President

Future work: While many agencies report having inconsistent structures currently in place, there is a move towards mending the gaps. Agencies are creating baseline reports and establishing agency-wide governance. Many are bringing stakeholders together from across their agency to talk for the first time about creating an agency-wide approach to web governance. Others are implementing cross-agency content management systems or quickly adopting cloud computing.

“ The action directive has had a positive impact at DHS. It resulted in a **first-of-its-kind data-call and benchmarking report** to evaluate the state of the Web at DHS, completed in April 2011. ”

· *Department of Homeland Security*

“ The **Agency-wide Web Governance and associated Web Improvement Plan currently under development** will address both the alignment of Web resources to Agency priorities, work within the EPLC (Enterprise Project Life Cycle) process, and an increased use of shared services and resources. ”

· *Department of Health & Human Services (HHS)*

“ One of the most important aspects of this reform plan is **moving toward cloud-based systems**, such as cloud-based online meeting resources and the private cloud hosting platform administered by the General Services Administration. ”

· *Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)*

“ By **centralizing the technologies surrounding the Web**, DOT will be able to achieve economies of scale and a more consistent environment. ”

· *Department of Transportation (DOT)*

3. Accessible, Updated, Accurate and Improved Web Content

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Reviews and monitoring:** Most agencies perform regular reviews and monitoring of website content at the operating unit level.
- **Policy:** Many agencies report that they have department- or agency-wide policies in place to guide web staff in best practices.
- **Tools:** Some agencies use specific tools to help automate the content review and updating process.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN QUESTION:

How does your agency currently ensure that website content is readily accessible, updated, accurate, and routinely improved?

THEMES:

Reviews and monitoring: Almost every agency (92%) reported conducting regular reviews or regular monitoring of content on their websites. These reviews occur mostly at the operating unit-level. However, these processes may not be standardized across all of an agency's departments, bureaus or centers.

The top five most common types of reviews reported are:

1. Content
2. Accessibility
3. User feedback
4. Link validation and performance testing
5. Security and privacy

“ **Most Centers have a review process for compliance ... Most Centers have a defined process**, through Application Control or Change Control Boards for changes to websites in production. ”

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

Policy: In addition to using reviews, a majority (79%) of agencies report having policy to ensure their websites are routinely updated, accurate, and accessible. Many of the agencies (58%) follow internal policies or standards. These vary from general web best practices to the Department of Commerce's "Searchable Web Page" or "Evaluation of Information before Publication" policies. Some agencies report not having a uniform policy.

“ There is **no agency-wide process** for reporting the results of these center processes or establishing any of them as best practices. ”

· National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

“ The **Evaluation of Information before Publication policy** requires DOC organizations to make a two-step evaluation before publishing any information to the Web to evaluate the information for content appropriateness; and to evaluate the information to determine the appropriate level of access, e.g., Internet, Intranet. ”

· Department of Commerce

Tools: Some agencies (42%) report the use of tools to help ensure the accuracy and accessibility of information. All mention the use of Content Management Systems (CMS). Others report using user feedback, web metrics, and link validation to ensure their websites are accurate. While all agencies reported having a CMS, most reported using multiple systems instead of centralized sharing of resources, as mentioned in the Federal Web Governance Survey findings.

“ USAID has, for the past few years, been migrating websites to Web Content Management Systems (CMS). In particular, the agency has been migrating publically-accessible websites to the Drupal CMS. The main advantage to a CMS is that it **allows web developers to create a website with templates that can be easily updated and maintained** by content providers without requiring any knowledge of web coding. ”

· Agency for International Development (USAID)

“ The VA Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) ... provides automated support of business processes such as **content review and approval, change control for tracking and managing updates, such as versioning and rollback, and compliance verification** for specific VA standards and requirements. ”

· Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

4. Meeting User Expectations

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Direct user feedback:** All agencies report using direct user feedback methods such as surveys and usability testing to understand and help meet user expectations.
- **Indirect user feedback:** Some of the agencies report monitoring web metrics and search statistics.
- **Other methods:** A few agencies provide proactive communications to users and training in best practices to staff members.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN QUESTION:

How does your agency currently ensure that websites are meeting user expectations and needs and that the customer experience with websites is continually enhanced?

THEMES:

User feedback: All agencies report that they currently engage in a direct dialogue with their users through a variety of methods, including, but not limited to surveys, usability tests and focus groups.

Some agencies also rely on indirect user feedback (web analytics) or providing proactive communications. Although these agencies use these methods, results from the Federal Governance Survey indicate that these metrics may not be consistently used across all of an agency's websites.

A few agencies mention the implementation of training for those staff members responsible for updating the websites. These training sessions typically address general best practices for improving websites.

Direct user feedback: All agencies report using some form of direct user feedback to help guide or monitor their web design or content decisions. By far, the most popular feedback method is a web-based user survey followed by the use of in-person user feedback or testing.

Top Methods and Tools for Direct Feedback Reported by Agencies

- User feedback surveys
- In-person feedback or testing
 - Usability tests
 - Focus groups
 - Social media comments
 - Email or contact us forms

“ GSA.gov, USA.gov and GobiernoUSA.gov are **designed according to usability best practices**, and are **routinely tested** to learn how people use our sites and specific steps that we can take to improve user experience. These domains and their sites have a **continuous website improvement cycle** where functional /design enhancements are released every 6 weeks. ”

· General Services Administration (GSA)

“ Visitor suggestions flow into a database and feedback loop that generates **ongoing incremental site improvement**, based on evidence-based conclusions from **User Centered Design processes, methodological usability and focus group testing**. ”

· Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

“ We monitor the comments to our **wall posts on Facebook and replies to our tweets on Twitter** and established a Twitter hashtag for feedback on our website's technology and overall user experience (#WHWeb) , which gives us insight into what people are responding to, want more of or dislike. ”

· Executive Office of the President

“ SSA uses the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) surveys to **measure customer/users satisfaction, and to predict future behaviors and trends**... The data is analyzed and used to help drive decisions on how to improve SSA's online services. ”

· Social Security Administration (SSA)

Indirect user feedback: Some agencies (42%) report using some form of indirect customer feedback to help guide or monitor their web design or content decisions. These methods include monitoring site traffic and page views as well as reviewing search logs for items that may need more prominence on the website.

“ The Office of Public Affairs web team, who are responsible for the website, **continually monitor statistics, site usage**, and user feedback via email. ”

· Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

“ The major sites, such as www.ed.gov, studentaid.ed.gov, and ies.ed.gov, use standard web analytics such as Google Analytics, Web Trends, or Urchin to **provide information on usage and inform decisions on site improvements.** ”

· Department of Education

Other ways to ensure user expectations are met: One of the more notable, but less mentioned, methods for ensuring user needs and expectations are met is collaborating with call centers or using chat logs to determine issues locating content on their websites.

“ Our Web team has also begun to **collaborate more closely with our telephony team to determine top requests...** Closer collaboration between the web and telephony groups will help us present high-value information on our website in a user-friendly way. ”

· Department of Transportation (DOT)

“ We also monitor popular FAQs and popular questions that come in to our contact center **through phone calls, emails and chat** to understand what information the public is currently seeking. ”

· General Services Administration (GSA)

Proactive communications: Some agencies (21%) report using various types of messaging and communications to inform their users. This type of messaging includes enabling users to opt out of sharing or receiving information as well as providing users the option to receive updates once content has been updated on a particular website.

“ This policy mandates that the privacy policies posted on Commerce Web sites must include how to **opt out of the Web measurement and/or customization technology;** and provide alternative access if the user elects to opt out of the technology. ”

· Department of Commerce

“ GovDelivery, for example, is a subscription-based service that allows users to register on the website and **receive alerts when we update content.** This kind of proactive users engagement can save our users time and ensure they receive the information they need. ”

· Department of Transportation

Training, workshops and leadership: A few major agencies (16%) reported engaging their staff in additional training to strengthen knowledge of web best practices and share lessons learned with other agencies. Two agencies mention participating in government-sponsored training classes, while another agency mentions sponsoring training within its own organization.

For example, the General Services Administration provides education for employees at other government agencies.

“ GSA is also **taking a lead in testing usability of web sites** not only in GSA but also for other agencies, through the First Friday Product Testing Program. The program **trains web teams to test their websites** with real users, identify the top usability problems, and identify quick fixes to improve the user experience. This affordable, practical program has been underway for just over a year, but has already helped GSA and over a dozen agencies to make incremental improvements to their websites. ”

General Services Administration (GSA)

“ The DOL.gov website was **tested during a First Fridays Usability Testing session** sponsored by the General Services Administration. ”

Department of Labor

National Dialogue on Improving Federal Websites

The [National Dialogue on Improving Federal Websites](#) was an online discussion conducted between September 19 and October 4, 2011. Using an idea generation tool, the dialogue brought together experts, innovators, and citizens who rely on Federal information every day. Nearly 1,000 registered participants submitted 436 ideas, made 1,663 comments and voted 8,259 times.

This direct feedback from the customers who use Federal websites to access government information and services is a powerful tool in driving .gov reform efforts.

Ideas were submitted in the following topic areas:

1. Developing **practices, policies, and principles** that should guide the Federal web in the next 5 years
2. Creating better **user experience**, navigation, and design
3. Improving **content** to make it more readable, engaging, and useful
4. Improving how **services and transactions** are delivered
5. Providing **universal access** to government content online, regardless of device or technology
6. Optimizing the way the public is able to **search** for Federal content
7. Ensuring content on Federal websites is integrated with **social media** and other third-party websites
8. Improve how Federal websites **protect privacy and security**
9. Reaching global audiences and **people with limited English proficiency**
10. Optimizing **government IT and infrastructure** to more efficiently manage government websites
11. Improving access to government information and services **beyond websites** (mobile, broadband, etc.)
12. Using **data, apps, APIs** and similar technology to improve delivery of information and services

Among the key themes from the dialogue:

Change to a culture of customer service

[Use plain language on government websites](#) – 225 votes, 62 comments

[Create content around topics/customers, not agencies](#) – 160 votes, 33 comments

[Optimize user paths](#) – 77 votes, 9 comments

Improve accountability

[Create a Federal web content strategy](#) – 65 votes, 15 comments

[Require an integrated, official web & new media team per agency](#) – 13 votes, 1 comment

[Require a content review process](#) – 21 votes, 2 comments

Adopt a strategy of continuous improvement

[Commit to best practices](#) – 92 votes, 32 comments

[Ensure web analytics for all .gov websites](#) – 53 votes, 12 comments

[Allow more access to citizens for usability testing/feedback](#) – 43 votes, 10 comments

Make it easier for customers to use services or content

[Make usability testing and 508 testing required PRIOR to launch](#) – 139 votes

[Make all online forms fillable](#) – 32 votes, 4 comments

[Encourage use of popular open source platforms](#) – 13 votes, 5 comments

Make it easier for customers to find services and content

[Make government website mobile accessible](#) – 121 votes, 13 comments

[Differentiate between ephemeral and evergreen content](#) – 64 votes, 11 comments

[SEO as standard practice](#) – 56 votes, 9 comments

Change how government employees interact with customers

[Develop social media as a customer service channel](#) – 39 votes, 17 comments

[Use real-time chat to help customers solve problems](#) – 28 votes, 12 comments

[Make it okay for workers to interact with citizens](#) – 26 votes, 5 comments

Improve services in other languages

[Test multilingual content and design with representative users](#) – 30 votes, 6 comments

[Ensure high quality translation of website content](#) – 9 votes, 9 comments

[Reduce costs - only create highly relevant multilingual content](#) – 7 votes, 1 comment

These themes and the ideas supporting them will help the government as it works to develop the Federal Web Strategy and update Federal web policies in the coming months.

The dialogue is available online at <http://www.usa.gov/webreform/dialogue.shtml>, which includes a fuller summary of findings and lessons learned. You can also follow the #dotgov hashtag on Twitter to see additional conversation related to the dialogue.

Appendix: Major agencies that completed the .gov surveys

	Agency	.gov Inventory*	Governance Survey	Web Improvement Plan
1	Department of Agriculture	X	X	X
2	Department of Commerce	X	X	X
3	Department of Defense	X	X	
4	Department of Education	X	X	X
5	Department of Energy	X	X	X
6	Department of Health & Human Services	X	X	X
7	Department of Homeland Security	X	X	X
8	Department of Housing & Urban Development	X	X	X
9	Department of the Interior	X	X	X
10	Department of Justice	X	X	X
11	Department of Labor	X	X	X
12	Department of State	X	X**	X
13	Department of Transportation	X	X	X
14	Department of the Treasury	X	X	X
15	Department of Veterans Affairs	X	X	X
16	Environmental Protection Agency	X	X	X
17	National Aeronautics & Space Administration	X	X	X
18	Agency for International Development	X	X	X
19	General Services Administration	X	X	X
20	National Science Foundation	X	X	X
21	Nuclear Regulatory Commission	X	X	X
22	Office of Personnel Management	X		X
23	Small Business Administration	X	X	X
24	Social Security Administration	X	X	X
25	Executive Office of the President	X	X	X
26	National Archives and Records Administration	X	X	X
27	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers			
TOTALS		26	24**	25

For this report, the 27 major agencies are defined as the [24 CFO Act agencies](#), Executive Office of the President, National Archives and Records Administration, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

*Lists major agencies that have completed the .gov inventory. An additional 30 non-major agencies completed the .gov Inventory, for a total of 56. Data for all 56 agencies is included in the .gov domain report section of this report.

**Dept. of State submitted their Web Governance Survey. However, because it was submitted after the reporting deadline, results are not included in this report.

Non-major agencies that completed the .gov Inventory (N=30)

Administrative Conference of the United States	National Capital Planning Commission
AMTRAK (National Railroad Passenger Corp)	National Credit Union Administration
Commodity Futures Trading Commission	National Endowment for the Humanities
Committee for People Who Are Blind/Severely Disabled	National Mediation Board
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau	National Transportation Safety Board
Corporation for National & Community Service	Occupational Safety & Health Review Commission
Director of National Intelligence	Overseas Private Investment Corporation
Export-Import Bank of the United States	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation
Farm Credit Administration	Postal Regulatory Commission
Federal Communications Commission	Railroad Retirement Board
Federal Housing Finance Agency	Selective Service System
Federal Mediation & Conciliation Service	Tennessee Valley Authority
Federal Trade Commission	U.S. International Trade Commission
Institute of Museum & Library Services	United States Office of Government Ethics
Millennium Challenge Corporation	US Council on Homelessness

Agencies that completed the governance survey (but were not required) (N=11)

Commodity Futures Trading Commission	Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Federal Communications Commission	Railroad Retirement Board
Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service	Selective Service System
Institute of Museum and Library Services	U.S. Agency for International Development
National Capital Planning Commission	U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
National Transportation Safety Board	

Agencies that completed the initial draft WIP (but were not required) (N=11)

Federal Communications Commission	National Transportation Safety Board
Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service	Overseas Private Investment Corps
Marine Mammal Commission	Railroad Retirement Board
Merit Systems Protection Board	U.S. Office of Special Counsel
National Endowment for the Arts	U.S. Peace Corps
National Labor Relations Board	