RPA'S EXPANDING ROLE IN GOVERNMENT

The need to improve citizen services with limited resources — and give employees tools to concentrate on higher value work — have led to the growing adoption of robotic process automation (RPA) in government.

In a new survey of federal and state government IT officials, we explore how agencies view workflow automation tools, where they're being deployed and the most important measures of success.

PRODUCED BY **FEDSCOOP | STATESCOOP**   UNDERWRITTEN BY **Ui|Path**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Robotic process automation (RPA) offers organizations a commercial off-the-shelf technology that can automate repetitive business and rules based tasks.

Using automation on tasks such as data entry, document processing and compliance reviews can help employees focus on higher-value work and improve customer service.

Because RPA requires little or no coding, and can be deployed with minimal training, it has been applied successfully to all kinds of business processes and online services, including at a growing number of federal and state government agencies.

To gain a clearer picture of how federal and state government agencies view — and are using — RPA, FedScoop and StateScoop conducted a survey of prequalified government IT, business and program managers to identify the key issues driving their adoption of RPA.

We not only wanted to learn where and for what types of work agencies are currently using RPA; but also where federal and state leaders see the greatest opportunities for RPA in the future.

And we wanted to understand how agencies view RPA as tool that not only can help their workforces be more productive, but also serve as a building block for artificial intelligence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | KEY FINDINGS

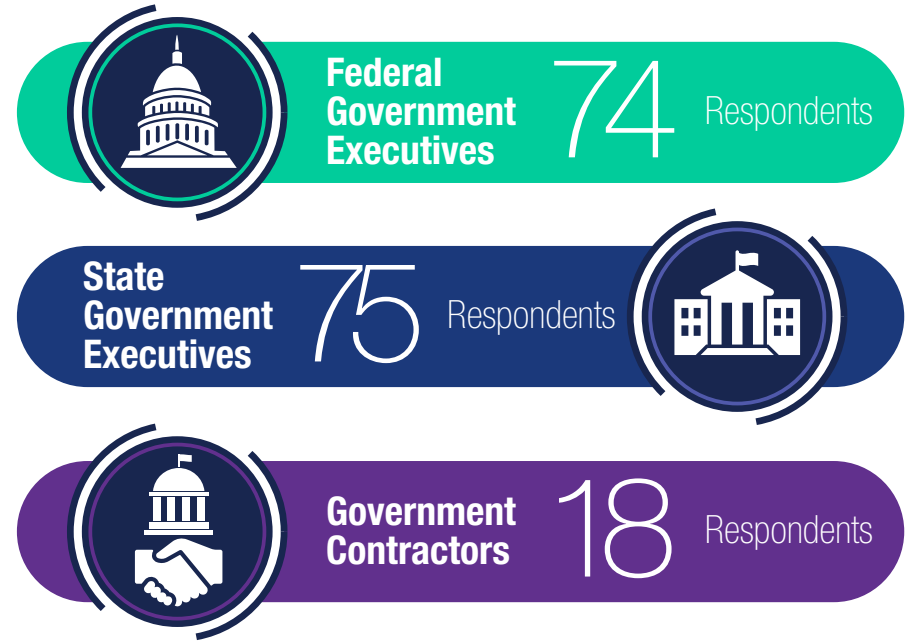Based on our survey of federal and state government IT, business and program executives, we learned:

- More than 6 in 10 federal respondents — and 4 in 10 state respondents — say their agency currently uses RPA tools to facilitate their work.

- Government adoption of RPA is building momentum, with nearly 7 in 10 respondents reporting their agency is piloting or has begun using RPA within the last 12 months.

- 6 in 10 federal respondents — and half of state respondents — view RPA as a building block to harnessing artificial intelligence and machine learning.

- RPA is being put to a wide range of uses such as data collection and processing, document management, identity verification and call center support.

- RPA is also being put to wider use — of respondents familiar with RPA usage at their agency, half reported having deployed more than 50 RPA robots to improve workflow.

- 1 in 3 respondents report that RPA tools have saved 5,000 to 50,000 hours of routine work that could be redeployed to higher-value work.
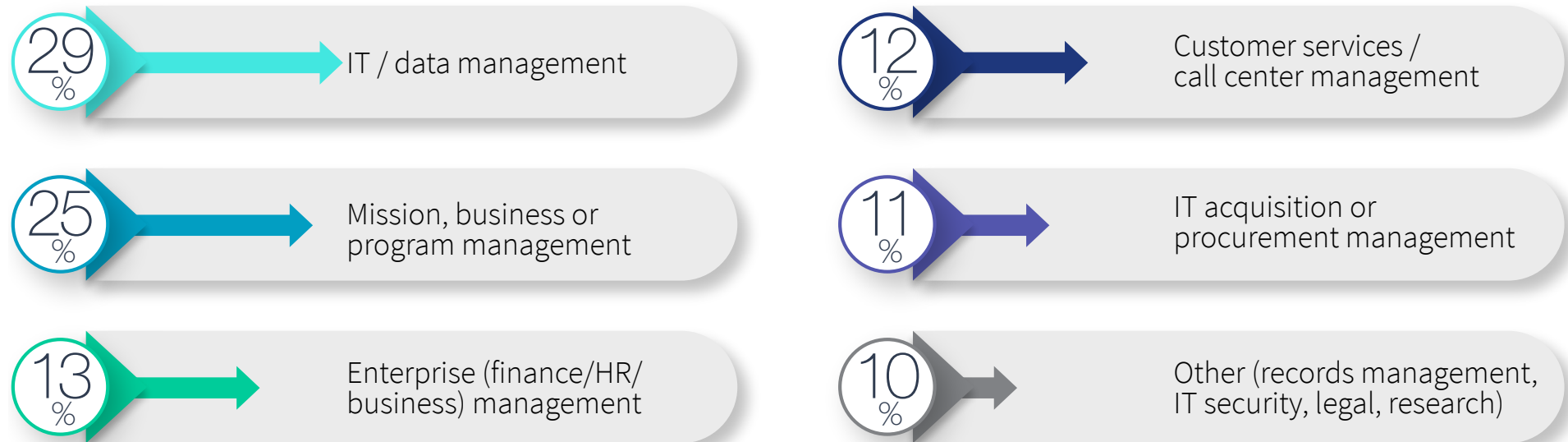
WHO WE SURVEYED

FedScoop and StateScoop invited federal and state government IT, business and program executives to complete an online survey on the adoption of, experience with and perceptions around robotic process automation (RPA) technology.

A total of 167 prequalified government IT decision makers completed the survey, conducted in November/December 2020.

Respondent by SECTOR:

Federal Government Executives 74 Respondents

State Government Executives 75 Respondents

Government Contractors 18 Respondents

Respondent breakout by job TITLE:

29% IT / data management

25% Mission, business or program management

13% Enterprise (finance/HR/business) management

12% Customer services / call center management

11% IT acquisition or procurement management

10% Other (records management, IT security, legal, research)

ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION HAS GAINED WIDE ADOPTION

Two-thirds of federal IT and program decision makers reported their agency currently uses RPA tools to facilitate their work. State agencies are not as far along in RPA adoption, though a substantial portion (41%) of respondents report their agencies are now using RPA tools.

Agencies Currently Using RPA

Federal
- 65%
- 30%
- 5%

Base: 74

State
- 41%
- 53%
- 5%

Base: 75

● Yes   ● No   ● I Don't Know
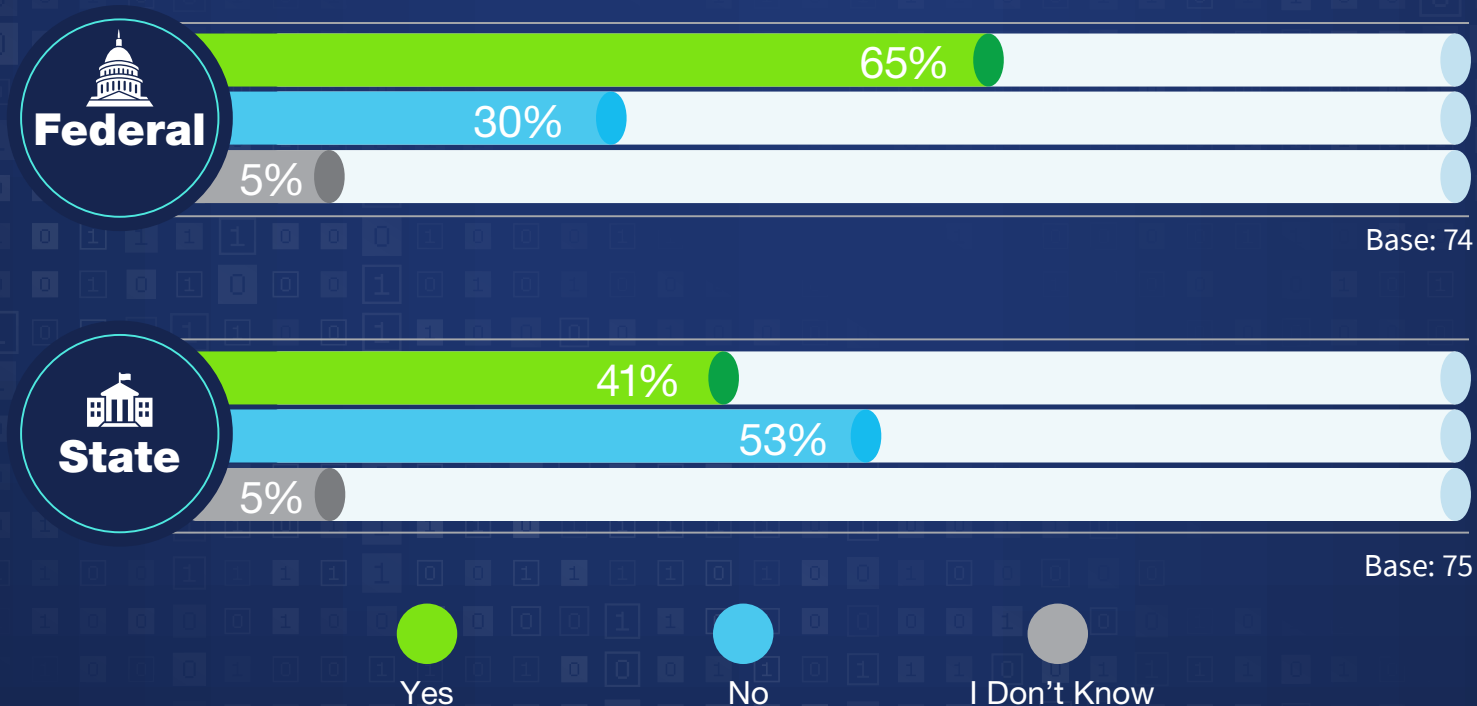
Q: Does your agency line-of-business currently use robotic automation process (RPA) to facilitate an element of your work?

LOOK FOR NEW RPA ADOPTERS IN THE COMING YEAR

Of those respondents who said they are not currently using RPA tools, 19% from federal agencies — and 30% from state agencies — said their agency line-of-business planned to implement RPA tools in the coming year, indicating solid expectations for continued growth in RPA deployments.

Agencies Planning to Use RPA

Federal
- 19%
- 46%
- 35%

Base: 25

State
- 30%
- 48%
- 23%

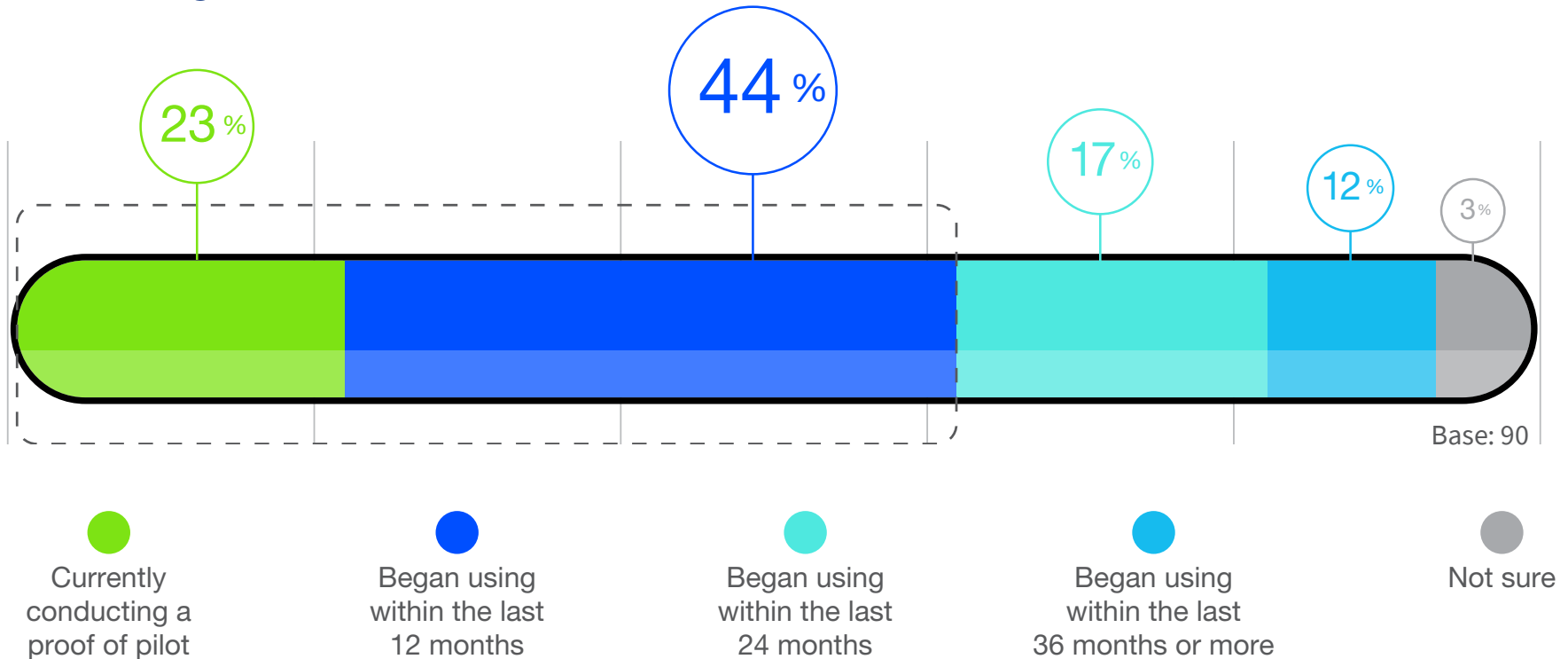Base: 44

● Yes   ● No   ● I Don't Know
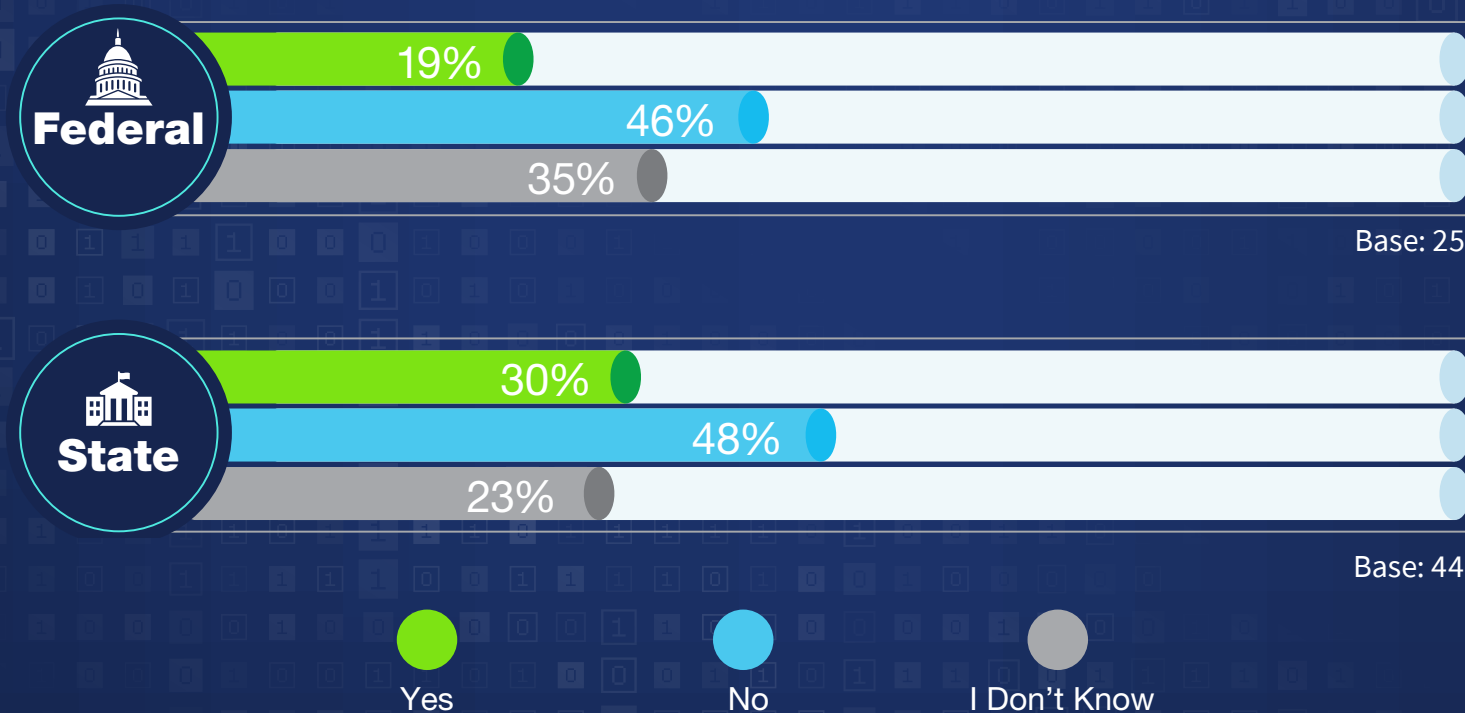
Q: [If, No or Not Sure] Is your agency line-of-business planning to implement any RPA robot in the coming year?

RPA STILL BUILDING MOMENTUM IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Two-thirds of government respondents whose agencies are using RPA reported their agency has either started piloting or begun using RPA tools within the past 12 months. This suggests that many agencies are still just discovering the potential benefits of RPA.

How Long RPA Has Been in Use

23% — Currently conducting a proof of pilot

44% — Began using within the last 12 months

17% — Began using within the last 24 months

12% — Began using within the last 36 months or more

3% — Not sure

Base: 90

Q: How long has your agency line-of-business been using or experimenting with RPA?

CONCERNS HOLDING BACK RPA ADOPTION

Respondents ranked the biggest issues holding back RPA adoption. The primary concerns revolved around security and credentialing (41%), lack of training (37%) and a lack of consensus on what to automate (37%). But worries about workforce displacement, among other concerns, point to a need for education and executive buy-in as part of a wider strategy for RPA adoption.

All Respondents

1 — 41%
Concerns about security/credentialing
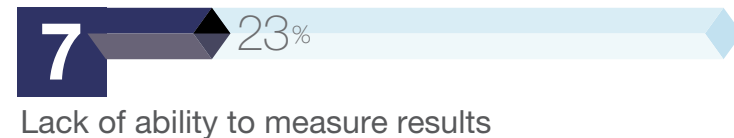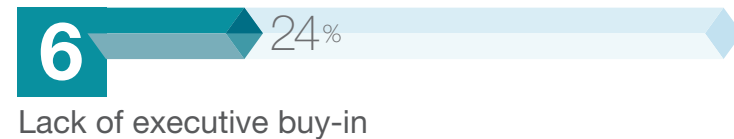
2 — 37%
Lack of training

3 — 34%
Lack of consensus on which processes to automate

* Other: 9%

4 — 26%
Concerns about workforce displacement

5 — 26%
RPA is not in our enterprise IT budget this fiscal year

6 — 24%
Lack of executive buy-in

7 — 23%
Lack of ability to measure results

8 — 14%
Don't see the value of RPA
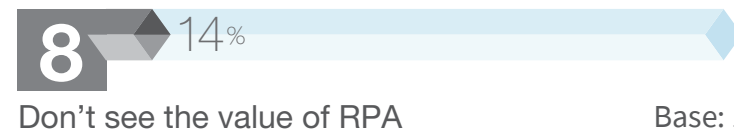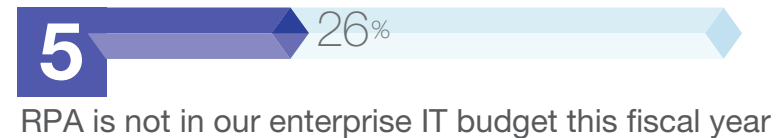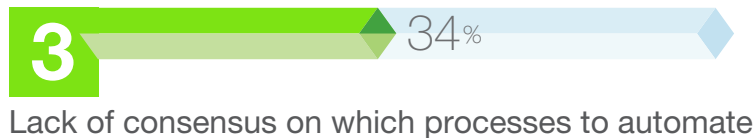
Base: 167

Q: What are the biggest issues holding RPA back at your department/program?

CONCERNS ABOUT RPA ADOPTION — FEDERAL VS. STATE

Among federal agency respondents, half (53%) say "security/credentialing" top their list of issues holding RPA implementation back. For state agencies, "lack of training" (36%) is their leading concern.

But state respondents also ranked "workforce displacement" as a key issue (31%), suggesting the importance of engaging and educating employees at the outset of RPA implementations.

Federal Agencies

1. **53%** Concerns about security/credentialing
2. **39%** Lack of training
3. **38%** Lack of consensus on which processes to automate
4. **28%** Lack of ability to measure results
5. **20%** RPA is not in our enterprise IT budget this fiscal year
6. **20%** Lack of executive buy-in
7. **20%** Concerns about workforce displacement
8. **11%** Don't see the value of RPA

* Other: 12%

Base: 74

State Agencies

1. **36%** Lack of training
2. **31%** Concerns about security/credentialing
3. **31%** Concerns about workforce displacement
4. **27%** RPA is not in our enterprise IT budget this fiscal year
5. **25%** Lack of consensus on which processes to automate
6. **24%** Lack of executive buy-in
7. **19%** Lack of ability to measure results
8. **17%** Don't see the value of RPA

* Other: 5%

Base: 75

Q: What are the biggest issues holding RPA back at your department/program?

MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTION OF RPA

Some debate whether RPA is a technology toolset, to automate work; or an enterprise solution, to improve workforce productivity. Both views are valid. Among federal respondents, 53% said their management views RPA as an automation toolset. State respondents leaned slightly more to the view that RPA is an enterprise solution to improve their workforce.

Management's Perception of RPA

Federal
- 53%
- 34%
- 14%

Base: 74

State
- 35%
- 39%
- 27%

Base: 75

● RPA is primarily a technology toolset to automate work

● RPA is primarily an enterprise solution to improve workforce
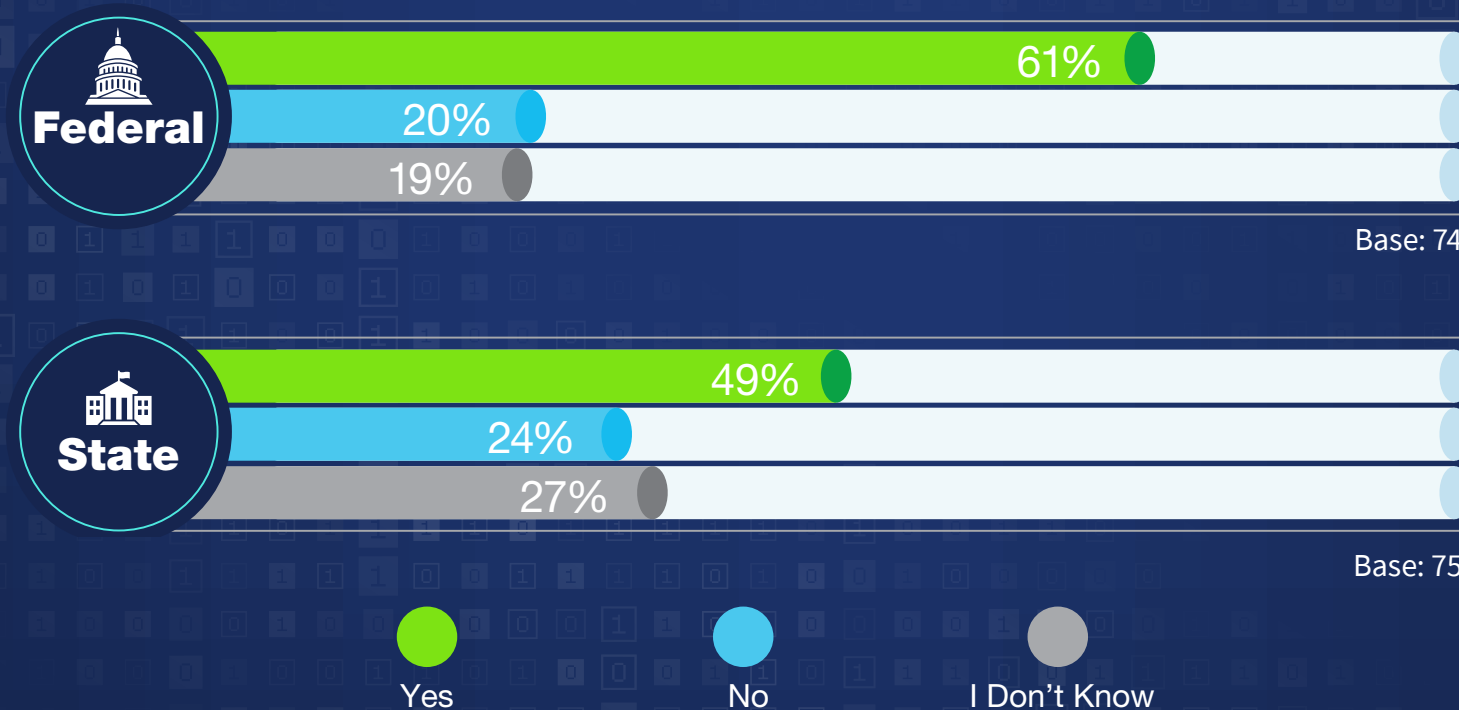
● I Don't Know
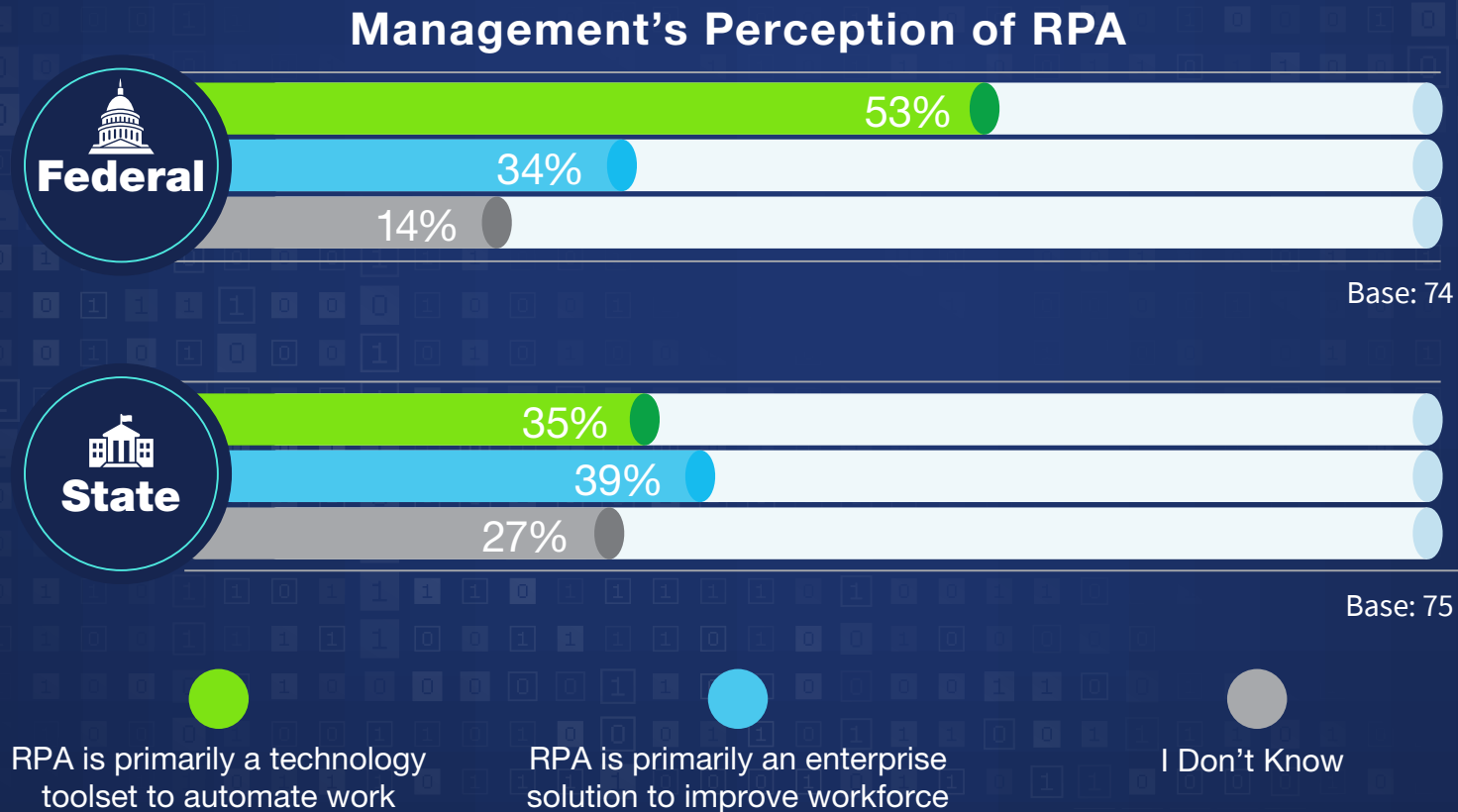
Q: Which best describes your management team's perception of RPA?

HOW RPA CORRELATES TO AI/ML ADOPTION

Over 6 in 10 federal respondents — and half of state respondents — see RPA as a building block to harnessing artificial intelligence and machine learning technology.

RPA Viewed as a Building Block to AI/ML
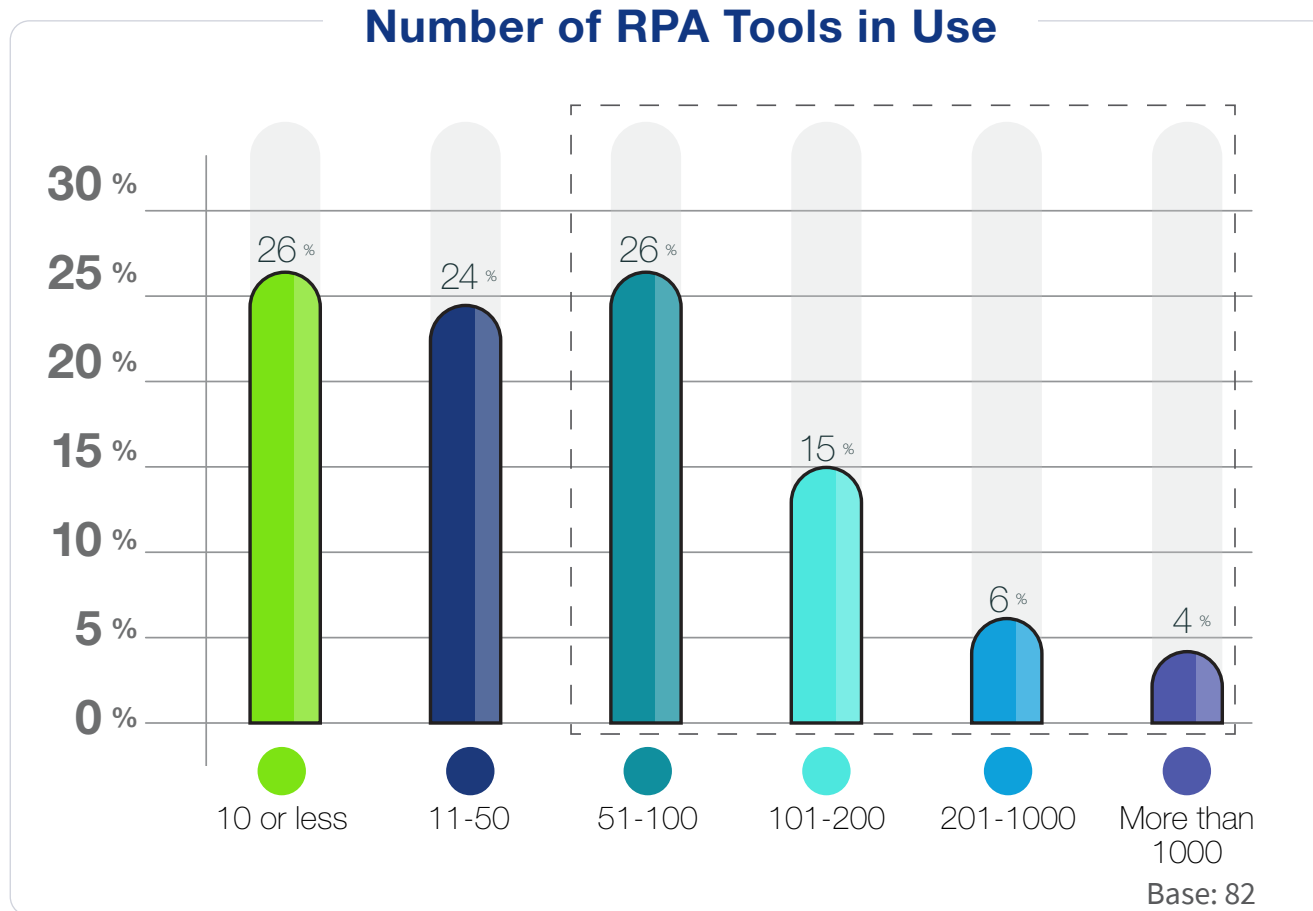
Federal
- 61% (Yes)
- 20% (No)
- 19% (I Don't Know)

Base: 74

State
- 49% (Yes)
- 24% (No)
- 27% (I Don't Know)

Base: 75

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- I Don't Know

Q: Do you see RPA as a building block to harnessing AI/ML?

NUMBER OF RPA ROBOTS DEPLOYED AMONG AGENCIES

RPA robot deployment varies widely across agencies. Among the 49% of respondents familiar with the numbers, half said their agency had developed and/or deployed more than 50 RPA "robots." Another 24% had deployed between 11 to 50. The data suggests that once the benefits are known, agencies will find a wide range of additional opportunities for which to use them.

Number of RPA Tools in Use

Category	Percentage
10 or less	26 %
11-50	24 %
51-100	26 %
101-200	15 %
201-1000	6 %
More than 1000	4 %

Base: 82

Q: Are you aware of approximately how many RPA robots have been developed and/or deployed across your agency line-of-business?
Q: [If, Yes]: How many RPA robots have been developed and/or deployed for use in your agency line-of-business (as of Dec. 1, 2020)?

MOST COMMON USE CASES FOR RPA TOOLS

Among respondents whose agencies are using RPA, the most common applications are for data collection and processing, document management and identity verification.
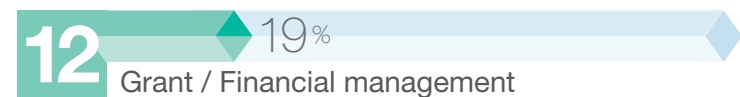
Agencies Currently Using RPA

1 Data collection / recording / processing — 60%

2 Document processing / approvals / management — 39%

3 Identity verification — 39%

4 Multi-system workflow and access — 39%

5 Responding to requests for information from citizens & employees — 34%

6 Enabling automation across legacy platforms — 33%

7 Validate desktop / server configuration and security settings — 27%

8 Pre-populating forms — 27%

9 Extract data from multiple websites or applications — 27%

10 Call center agency support — 23%

* Other: 12%

Base: 90

Q: For which types of use cases is your agency line-of-business using RPA robot? (Select all that apply)

WHERE DOES GOVERNMENT SEE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO STREAMLINE WORK

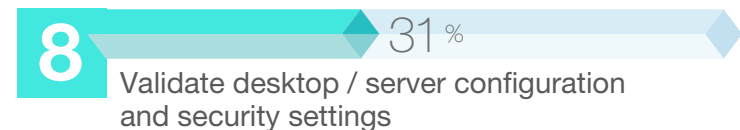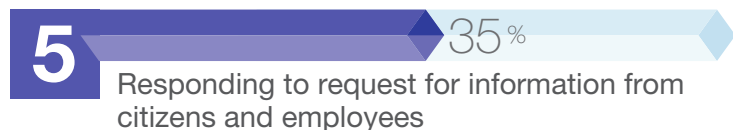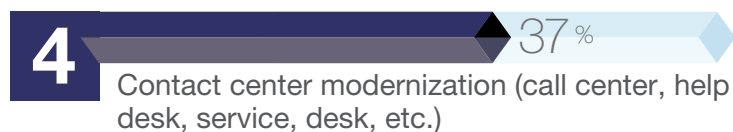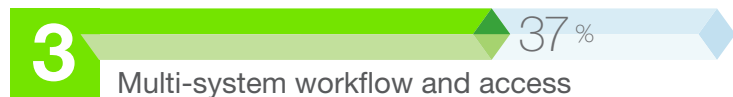Asked where RPA posed the greatest potential to streamline work, or improve mission, respondents cited multiple opportunities — most notably for data collection and processing, document management, multi-system workflow and access, and contact center modernization. The responses suggest RPA is seen as a tool that support a wide range of business and mission processes.

All Respondents

1 — 51% — Data collection / recording / processing

2 — 44% — Document processing / approvals / management

3 — 37% — Multi-system workflow and access

4 — 37% — Contact center modernization (call center, help desk, service, desk, etc.)

5 — 35% — Responding to request for information from citizens and employees

6 — 34% — Extract data from multiple websites or applications

7 — 32% — Enabling automation across legacy platforms

8 — 31% — Validate desktop / server configuration and security settings

9 — 27% — Regulatory compliance

10 — 23% — Workforce management

11 — 22% — Fraud, waste and abuse reduction

12 — 19% — Grant / Financial management

* Other: 3%

Base: 167

Q: Which types of use cases for RPA "robots are likely to have the greatest potential for streamlining work or improving mission value at your agency line-of-business over the next 2 years? (Select all that apply)

THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO STREAMLINE WORK — FEDERAL VS STATE RESPONDENTS

Federal and state respondents tended to see many opportunities for RPA, but to differing degrees.

Federal Agencies

1. Data collection / recording / processing — 45%
2. Document processing / approvals / management — 41%
3. Contact center modernization — 38%
4. Extract data from multiple websites or applications — 34%
5. Validate desktop / server configuration and security settings — 34%
6. Respond to information requests from citizens & employees — 32%
7. Multi-system workflow and access — 31%
8. Regulatory compliance — 30%
9. Enabling automation across legacy platforms — 28%
10. Workforce management — 19%
11. Fraud, waste and abuse reduction — 15%
12. Grant / Financial management — 15%

* Other: 1%

Base: 74

State Agencies

1. Data collection / recording / processing — 51%
2. Document processing / approvals / management — 43%
3. Multi-system workflow and access — 35%
4. Contact center modernization — 32%
5. Respond to information requests from citizens & employees — 32%
6. Extract data from multiple websites or applications — 29%
7. Enabling automation across legacy platforms — 29%
8. Validate desktop / server configuration and security settings — 25%
9. Fraud, waste and abuse reduction — 24%
10. Regulatory compliance — 21%
11. Workforce management — 20%
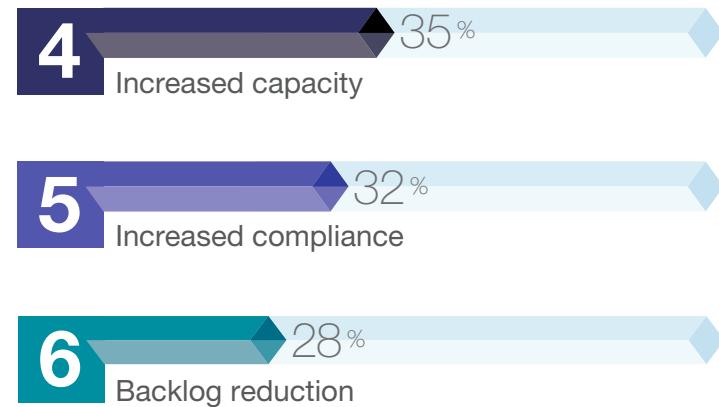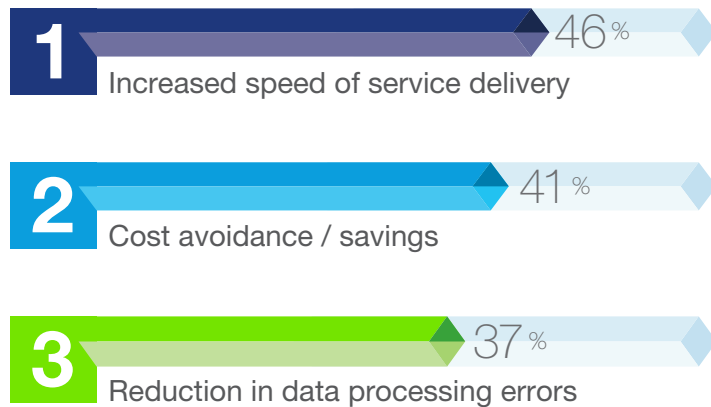12. Grant / Financial management — 16%

* Other: 3%

Base: 75

Q: Which types of use cases for RPA "robots are likely to have the greatest potential for streamlining work or improving mission value at your agency line-of-business over the next 2 years? (Select all that apply)

HOW GOVERNMENT AGENCIES MEASURE RPA'S SUCCESS

Respondents most often cited speed of service delivery (46%) among their most important measures in gauging RPA's success, followed by cost avoidance or savings (41%). But reductions in data processing errors, increases in capacity and improved compliance are also key performance indicators.
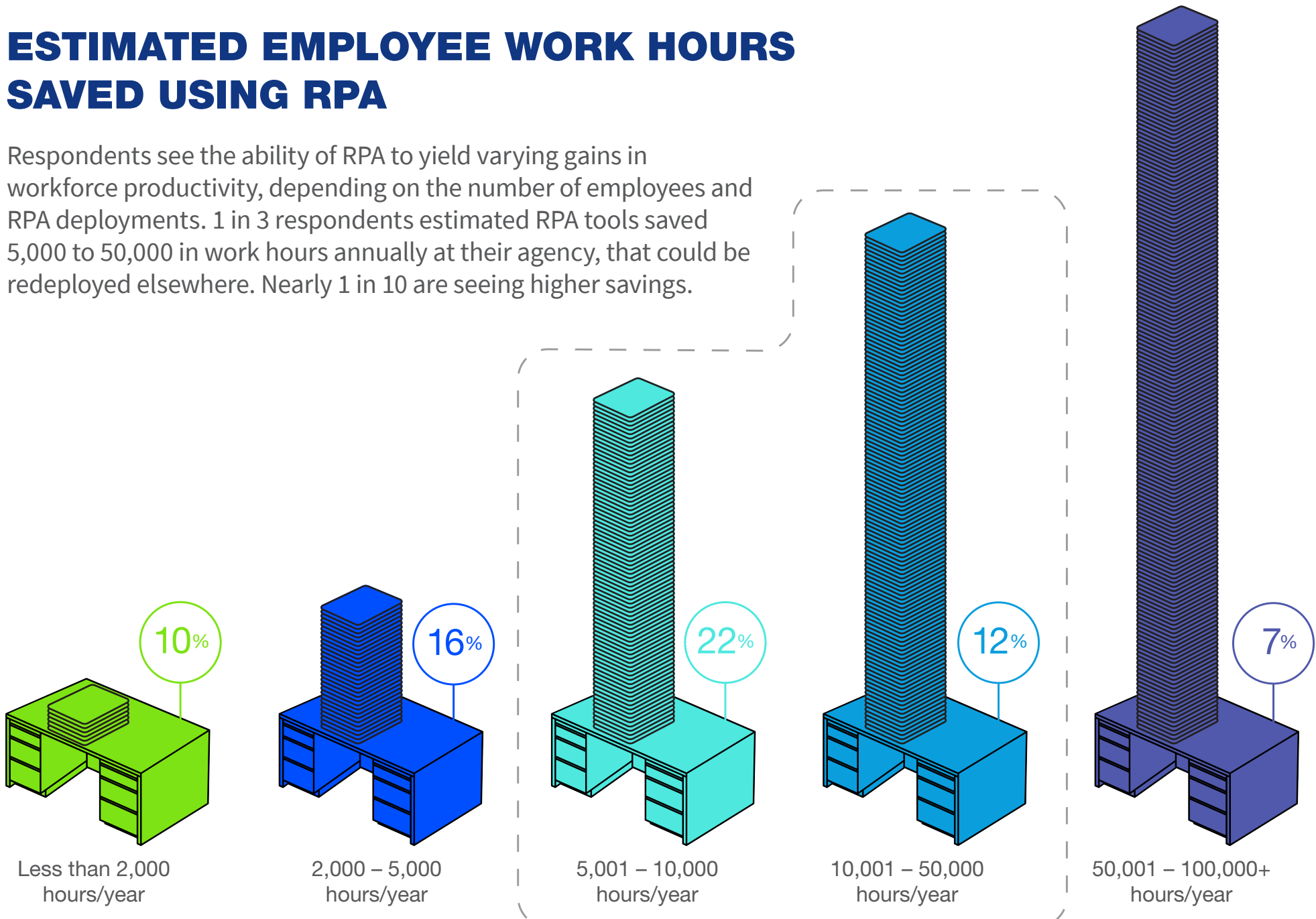
All Respondents

1 46%
Increased speed of service delivery

2 41%
Cost avoidance / savings

3 37%
Reduction in data processing errors

4 35%
Increased capacity

5 32%
Increased compliance

6 28%
Backlog reduction

* Other: 4%

Base: 167

Q: What are the most important measures of RPA's benefit to your department or agency line-of-business? (Select no more than three)

ESTIMATED EMPLOYEE WORK HOURS SAVED USING RPA

Respondents see the ability of RPA to yield varying gains in workforce productivity, depending on the number of employees and RPA deployments. 1 in 3 respondents estimated RPA tools saved 5,000 to 50,000 in work hours annually at their agency, that could be redeployed elsewhere. Nearly 1 in 10 are seeing higher savings.

10% — Less than 2,000 hours/year

16% — 2,000 – 5,000 hours/year

22% — 5,001 – 10,000 hours/year

12% — 10,001 – 50,000 hours/year

7% — 50,001 – 100,000+ hours/year

* I don't know: 32%

Base: 167

Q: If you are using RPA "robots," roughly how many FTE workhours per year do you estimate your agency line-of-business saves because of automation? (Note: 2,000 hours/year is equivalent to 1 full-time employee)

RECOMMENDATIONS

RPA promotes an "automation-first" mindset. As agencies automate processes to tackle one challenge, it opens up consideration for uses elsewhere. That cycle of automation can begin to liberate agency staff from lower-valued (but necessary) work and enable them to focus on higher-valued tasks needed to achieve their mission.

Security is key to realizing RPA benefits. Achieving the benefits of RPA — improved accuracy, increased speed and adherence to compliance rules — depend on implementing and enforcing security controls to build confidence that the robot workforce can securely augment the human workforce.

Seek to democratize RPA's use. The success of RPA also depends on getting ahead of employee concerns — and training them on how to use, develop and capitalize on automation tools. But

the biggest gains will come as agencies begin to democratize RPA — getting the tools into the hands of all workers to leverage outcomes and improve mission delivery.

Use RPA as a capacity builder. Government staffing has decreased over the past 30 years while the public's demand for better, faster and more friction-free service has only grown. RPA gives agencies a strategic, cost effective way to build capacity with existing resources rather than taking resources away.

See RPA as a gateway to AI. Machine learning and AI are becoming foundational to the way government serves the pubic at speed and scale. Robotic process automation gives agencies adaptive building blocks to support AI/ML initiatives while allowing humans to do what they do best.

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