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Benchmarking & Legal Information Services Survey 2023

Key takeaways

Now in its seventh year, the Harbor Benchmarking & Legal Information Services Survey has become an essential tool for law firm information leaders. These survey insights are more than just numbers—they are a compass for law firm leadership navigating the dynamic legal information landscape.

These key takeaways from the 2023 survey are intended as a catalyst for sparking meaningful dialogue and action within Research and Information Services departments as AI and advanced technology transform the industry.

What's in a name?

Survey results indicated that 66% of departments have opted to part ways with the term "library" in their names. This is a quiet, but significant step away from the concept of a library as a physical space devoted to printed materials, into a more modern and dynamic era for legal information professionals.

This change does not stop at labels – it signifies a broader transformation in the role of legal information professionals. No longer confined to the stereotypical library setting, respondents are branching out into new territories such as data analysis, technology testing, and AI prompt engineering, which reflects the ever-expanding responsibilities shouldered by these departments.

As these new responsibilities take center stage, and more traditional tasks like managing print collections recede, it becomes evident that the move away from the "library" label is more than just a name change. It is a practical

acknowledgment of the evolving landscape in which legal information professionals find themselves.

In recognition of this transformation, this survey now refers to respondent departments as Research and Information Services (RIS) and personnel as information professionals, researchers, analysts, and resource specialists.

### Departments with 'library' in their name

- LIBRARY
- OTHER

34%

66%
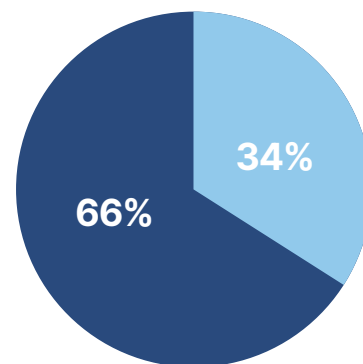
Hot topics and forecasting

Since its launch in 2016, Benchmarking & Legal Information Services Survey respondents have consistently indicated that demonstrating future value, and marketing the capabilities of Research and Information Services firmwide, are top priorities. One of this year's Hot Topics explored the many ways RIS teams provide value to their larger organizations, with the idea that respondents could learn from one another and gain fresh perspectives on initiatives to transform their work.

In addition to questions around assessing and integrating technologies, and marketing and competitive intelligence initiatives, the survey asked Research and Information leaders to rate their firms' perceptions of their departments. Significantly, the sentiment around internal perceptions of Research and Information Services departments is very positive, with an encouraging 79% of all respondents affirming that their department is viewed as integral to the firm. There is a consensus that RIS teams are rising to the occasion and contributing at a very high level.

Nearly all survey respondents reported an increased level of collaboration with other firm departments, providing Research and Information Services leaders with additional opportunities to demonstrate the department's value to a broader audience. Marketing and Business Development remain among those key departments that are heavily supported by Research and Information Services, with 90% of respondents stating that they manage contract subscriptions for those departments; 71% state that they proactively provide alerts/analysis, as well as supporting research and intelligence activities.

79%
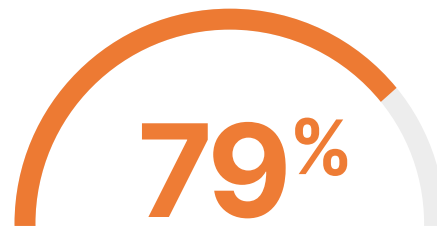
Percentage of respondents that consider their RIS team to be integral to the firm

Opportunities ahead

With many firms now on the brink of adopting Generative AI tools, Research and Information Services teams can capitalize on their expertise to further demonstrate the department's future value. These specialists are well positioned to lead the implementation of, and training on these new tools, while also managing the price increases that accompany them.

While generative AI has considerable implications for legal research and attorney workflows, there are compliance and risk, training, and troubleshooting issues that will arise within each organization. Research and Information specialists possess the knowledge to lead discussions and address concerns within the firm and may find themselves working closely with their firms' IT department and professional responsibility team.

Resource and staff budgets

Collection and staff budgets remain a key focus of the survey. More than half of survey respondents (54%) expect their collection budgets to increase in the coming year. The increases are mostly driven by rising subscription costs for electronic resources, as most respondents have significantly reduced their print collections over the past few years. As a result of these reductions, utilization of savings from print collections to offset rising electronic resource costs will be unlikely to continue.

Collection & staff budget changes expected in 2024
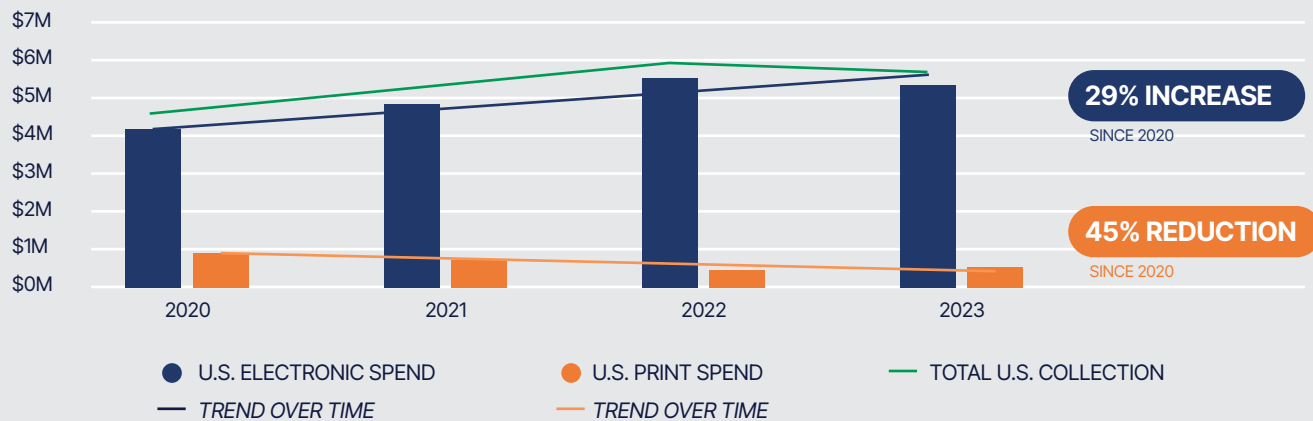% companies

● INCREASE   ● NO CHANGE   ● DECREASE

- 7%
- 38%
- 54%
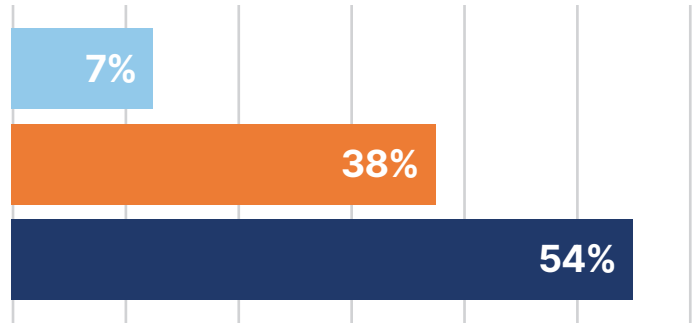
This means that savvy negotiations will be key to reducing or even maintaining costs in the future. The 2023 survey's Hot Topics section, which included questions about respondents' experience and goals around contract negotiations, reinforced the expectation for costs to rise due to unpredictable increases, vendor inflexibility (lack of negotiation), and difficult terms and conditions. Although electronic resource costs have trended significantly higher in recent years, 81% of respondents stated that knowledge of usage, understanding practice group needs, and insight into vendor enhancement roadmaps were the top drivers of success in negotiations. Generative AI will only exacerbate already higher-than-typical pricing increases among vendors seeking to swiftly introduce it into their products and generate new revenue.
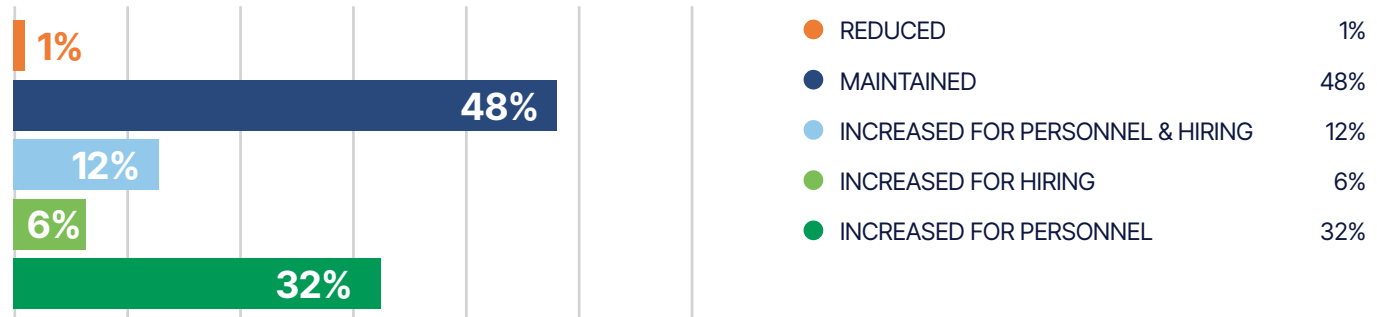
Electronic vs. print spend changes over time in $M

29% INCREASE
SINCE 2020

45% REDUCTION
SINCE 2020

● U.S. ELECTRONIC SPEND   ● U.S. PRINT SPEND   — TOTAL U.S. COLLECTION
— TREND OVER TIME   — TREND OVER TIME

The expectation of higher cost increases with the rollout of generative AI tools will continue to drive the need for balancing cost savings with maximizing content. Given the number of new tools that will be entering the market combined with enhancements to existing resources, navigating next 12 to 24 months will be critical.

Staff budgets increased in 2023, but at a lower rate than in 2022. Budgets increased by 21% YOY from 2021 to 2022, compared to 6% YOY from 2022 to 2023. Nearly half of respondents (48%) expect their staffing budgets to be maintained in the next 12 months and 32% expect their budgets to increase for existing personnel. These results may suggest that expansion of RIS department headcount has cooled as law firms prepare for, and, in some cases, are already experiencing a slowdown in legal work.

In the next 12 months, you anticipate your staffing budgets for the US locations will be:

1%	
48%	
12%	
6%	
32%	

REDUCED	1%
MAINTAINED	48%
INCREASED FOR PERSONNEL & HIRING	12%
INCREASED FOR HIRING	6%
INCREASED FOR PERSONNEL	32%

Strategic Focus

The increases to both collections and staffing budgets will inevitably exert more pressure on Research and Information Services departments. Leaders should proactively evaluate collections and collect both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure the right mix of resources is in place and, more importantly, in use. While difficulties around negotiating with vendors have become a trend across the industry, leadership should arm themselves with data and focus on developing creative solutions that meet the information needs of their firms.

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About the survey

The annual Harbor Benchmarking & Legal Information Services Survey results include enlightening and actionable data that research and information professionals can use to start strategic conversations at their organizations. These conversations can often lead to more questions and increased expectations. Harbor is well-positioned with both the expertise and data to guide and support firms as they seek to maximize the value of their Research and Information Services departments.

To register to participate in the 2024 survey **click here.**

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