



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Automating Declassification and FOIA Requests:

When AI Leads to Increased Government Transparency

cfa

Center for Analytics (M/SS/CFA)

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- 1 The current processes of reviewing classified material for declassification and for responding to FOIA requests are manually-intensive
- 2 We are at a “break-even” point of declassification and FOIA review each year. But those processes are expensive in terms of time, money, and resources. And it will get much harder soon.
- 3 We created a supervised classification process to teach an AI the difference between a cable that can be declassified and one that must remain exempt from declassification

- 4 We introduced a non-binary classification using different threshold values for “confidently declassify” and “confidently exempt.” This allowed us to flag less confident decisions for human review. It also allowed us to account for an imbalance in model confidence between the two decisions a review must make
- 5 Automating FOIA review of documents is a highly specialized task, but three other aspects of FOIA requests can be adapted and made more efficient with simple AI

- 6 During the live review of 1998 cables done in 2023, we performed two rounds of QC with reviewers. The initial model (trained on decisions made on 1005-1997 cables) generated 60% confident decisions without any manual review. QC check of just 2.5% of those decisions allowed us to retrain the model, resulting in over 91% confident decisions.
- 7 Reviewers ultimately checked all exemption decisions, unsure decisions, and a random sample of confident declassifications. The live review saved over 80% of the time reviewers would have spent reviewing every cable

- 8 Confident decisions and quicker review cycle means that the team can focus on proactive release of declassified documents. Personal correspondence in cables is rare so redaction is too.
- 9 FOIA aims to continue expediting responses to requestors and reducing duplication of responses.

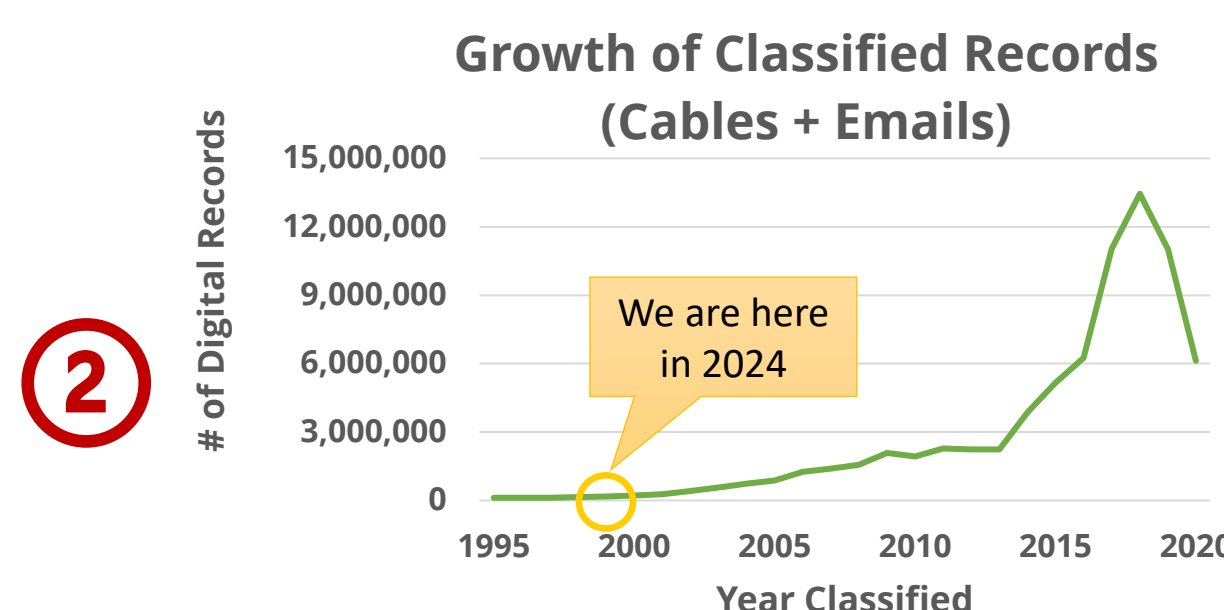
The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release
December 29, 2023

Executive Order 13526- Classified
National Security Information

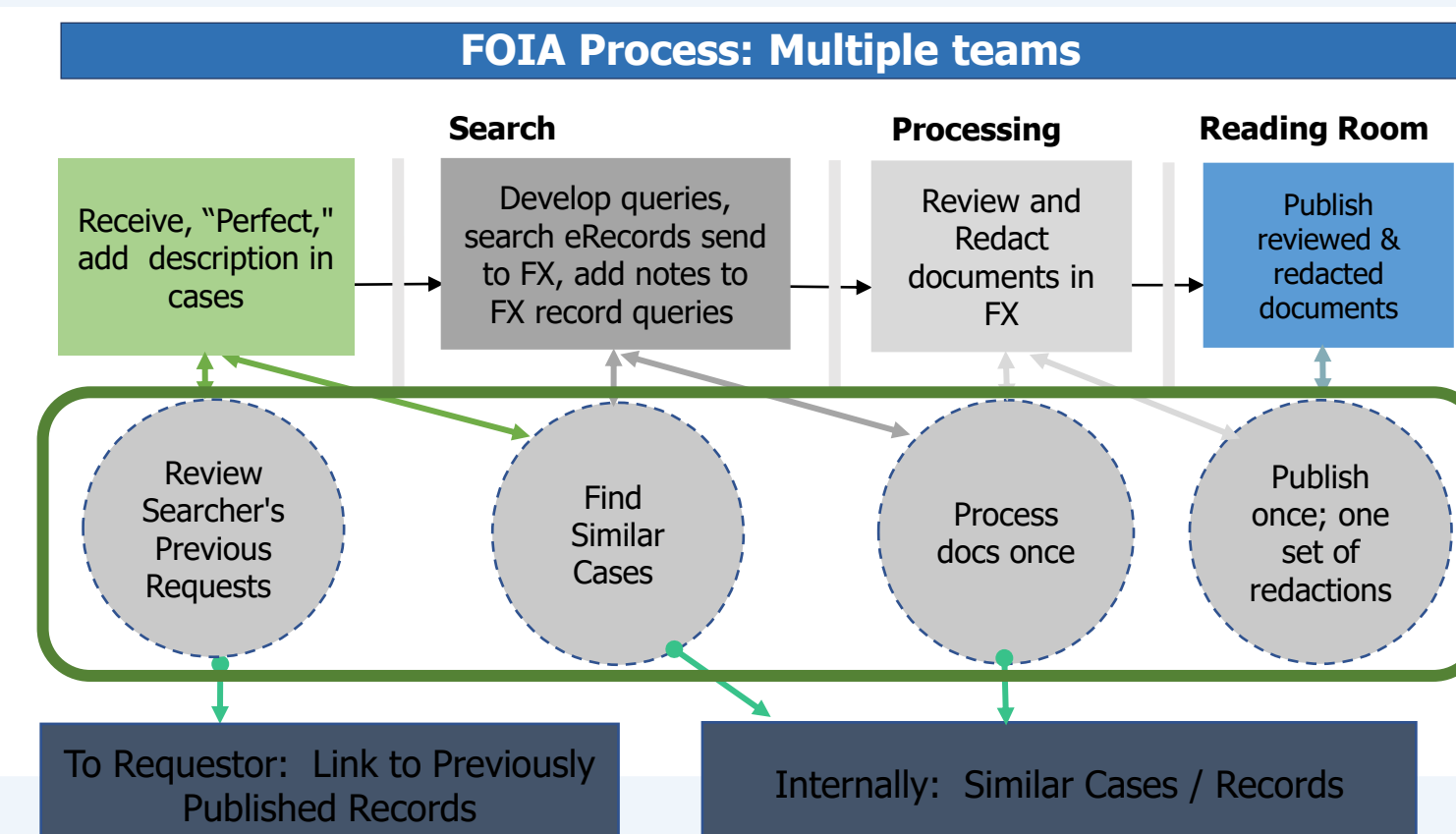
This order prescribes a uniform system for classifying, safeguarding, and

Classified records are automatically declassified after 25 years, unless review determines an exemption

State Department FOIA Snapshot	
\$65.2 million in annual processing costs (FY23)	268 FTE FOIA staff
23,864 pending FOIA cases (Q1-FY24)	15,713 new requests received (FY23)
12,576 requests processed (FY23)	



- Significant labor required currently
- Inability to review cables by a year end poses a **national security risk** to the Department
- Volume of cables for review is increasing, rendering **manual review unsustainable**
- Transfer of records from State to NARA takes additional time which delays **public access**.



	Declassified for DOS Equities 98%	Exempted 2%
Decided by human reviewers	18%	2%
Accepted AI predictions	80% 95% confidence of accuracy is 99% +/- 1%	0%

- Areas of FOIA Focus**
- Customer Experience
 - Search adequacy
 - Minimize redundancy

Executive Order 13526
Freedom of Information Act

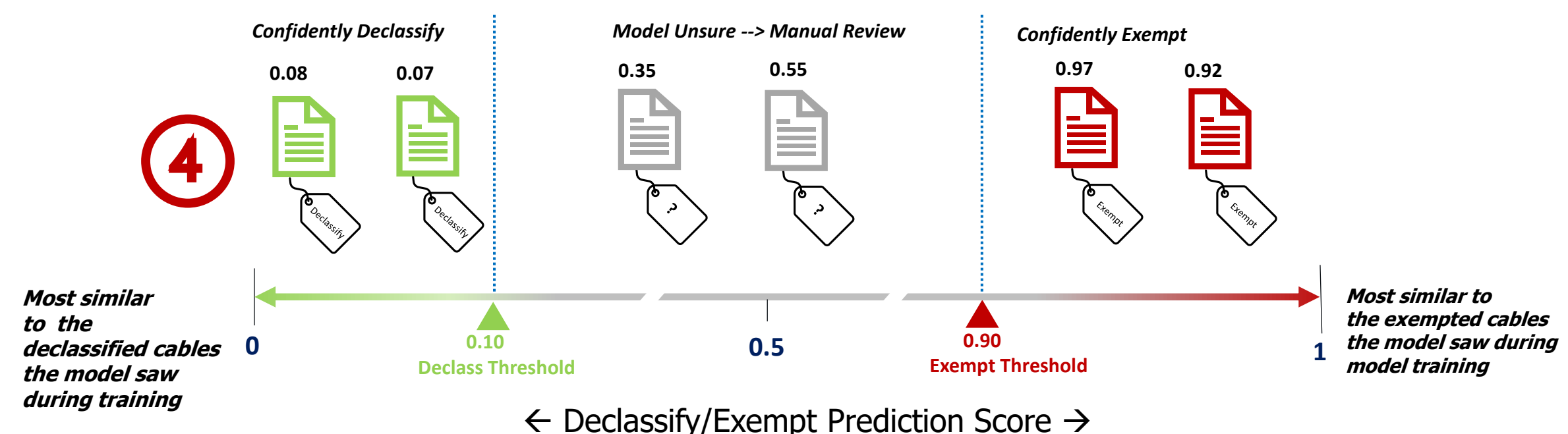
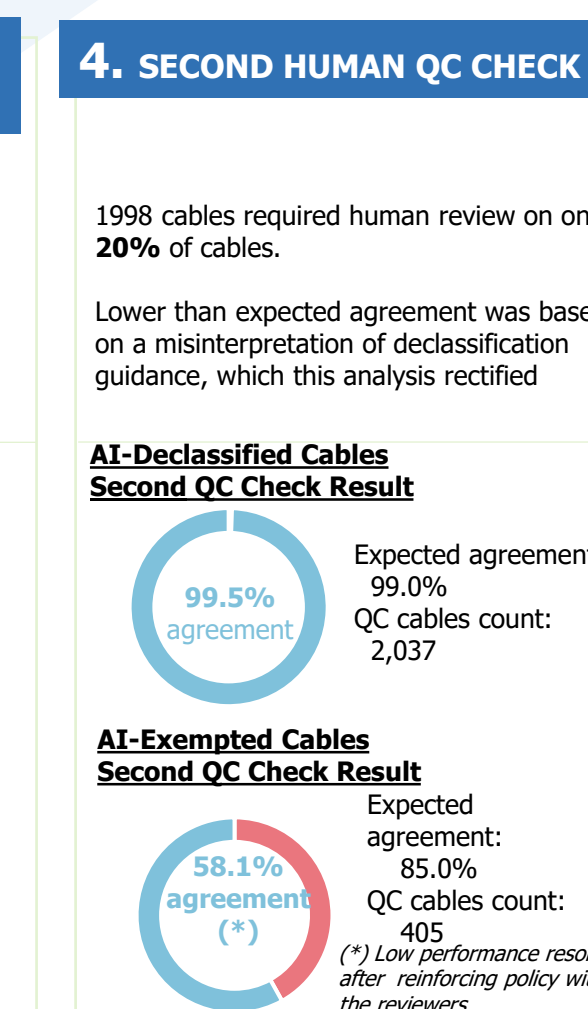
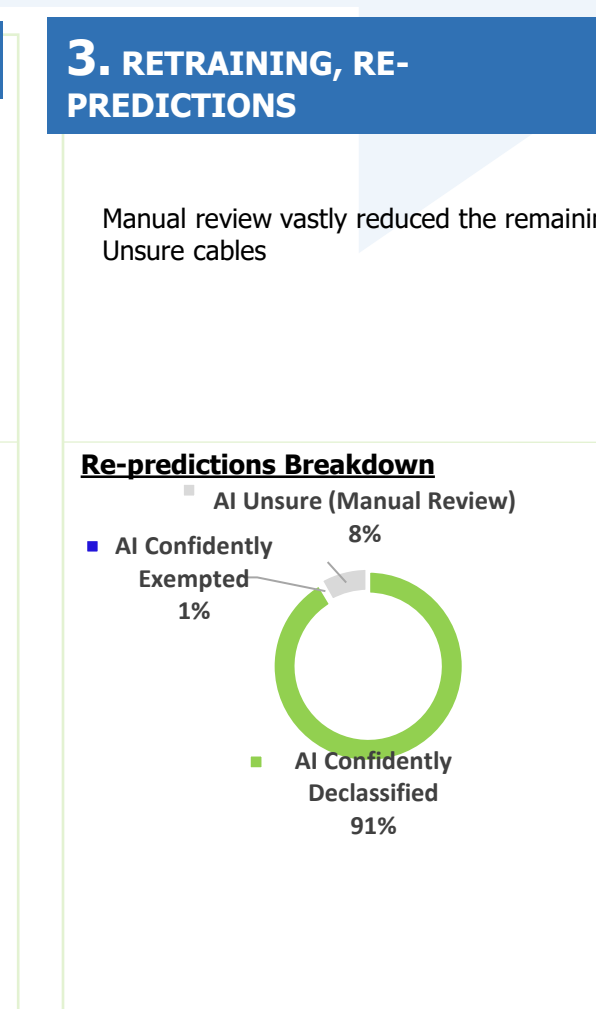
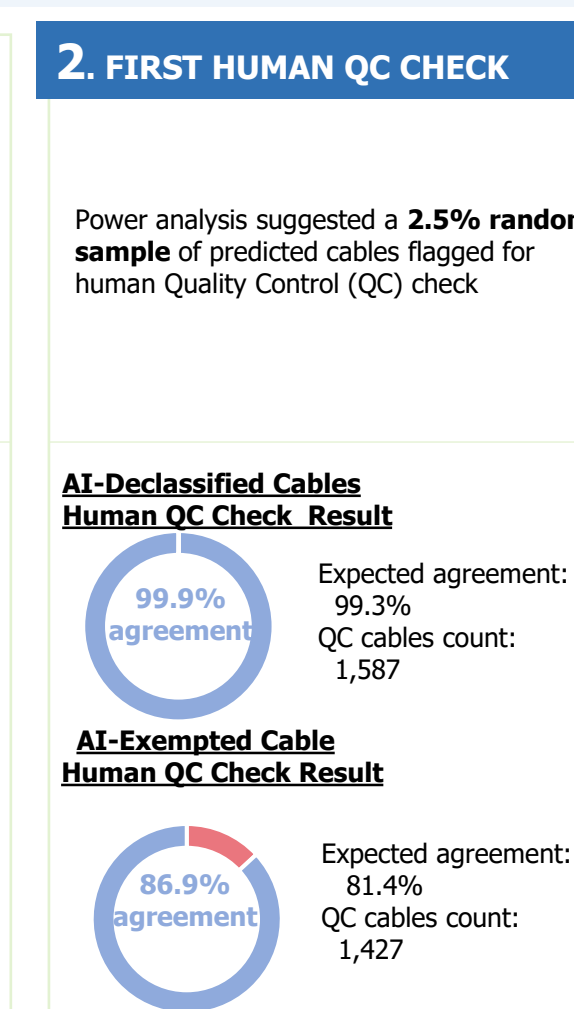
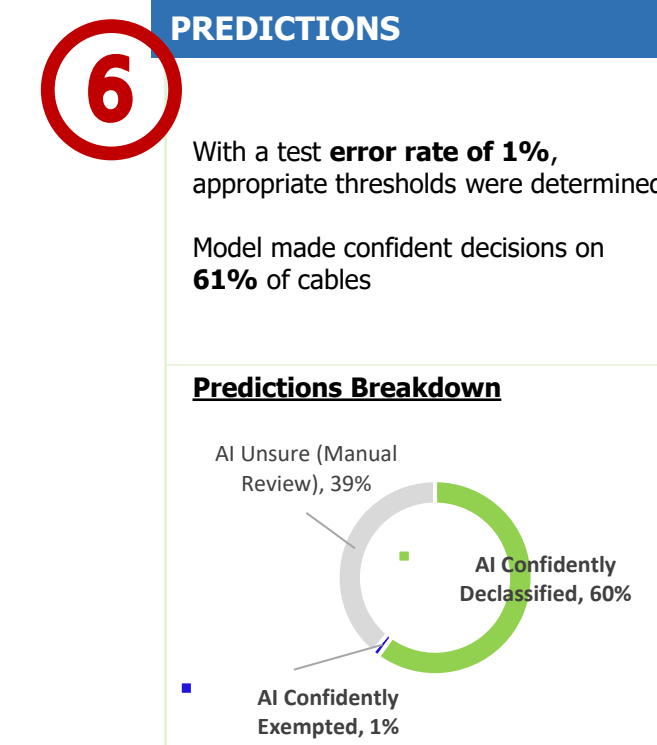
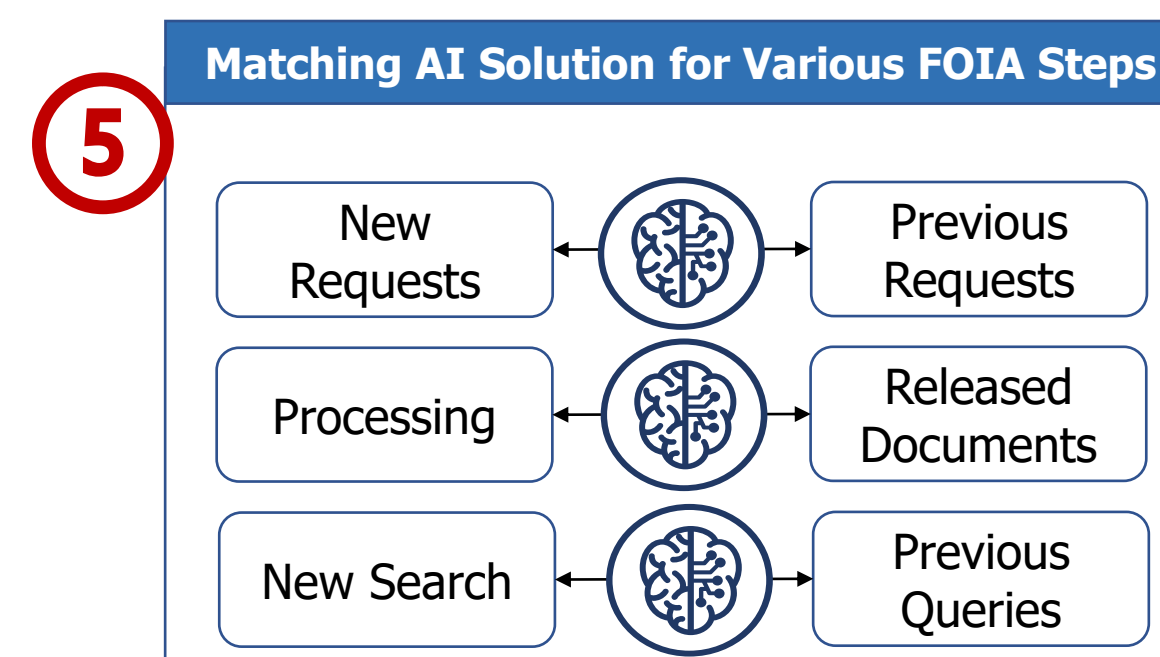
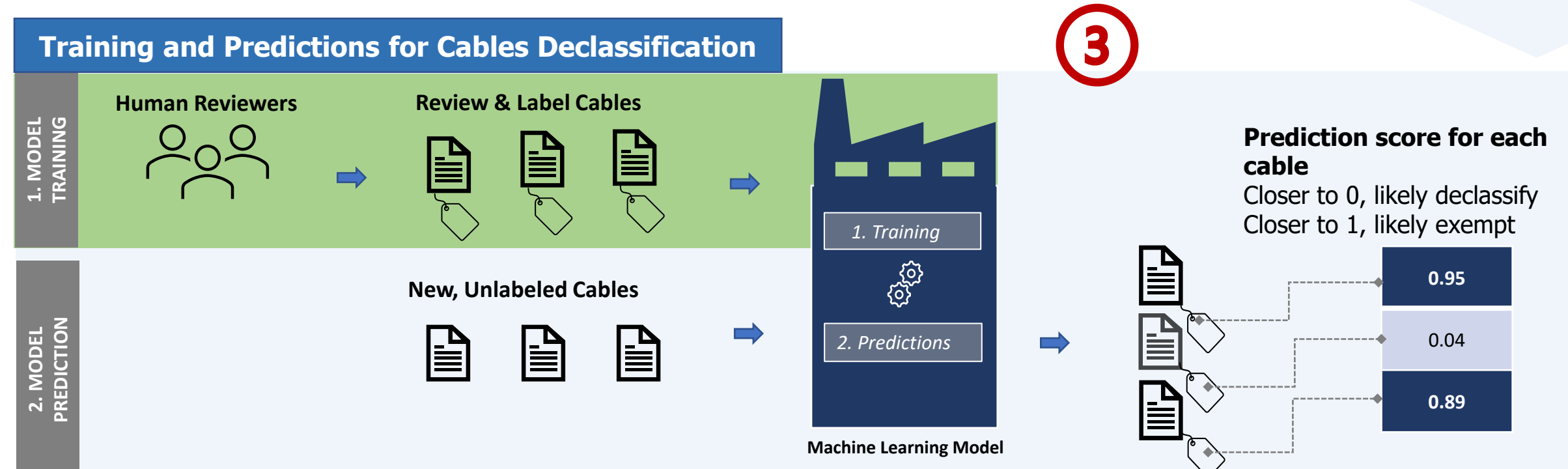
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Manual Review

Refer
Redact

8

Release



Cables review labor saving – reduced by 80%

Shorter annual review cycle - 20 weeks

More consistent declassification review

Scalable process to handle upcoming records growth

Adaptable solution to handle other record types e.g. files, emails

Better compliance with E.O. 13526, lower national security risk of accidental declassification

